



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

The University of Bolton

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Silver

Typically, the experience students have at The University of Bolton and the outcomes it leads to are very high quality.

Student experience: Gold

Student experience is typically outstanding.

Outstanding quality features include:

- the provider has embedded outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are tailored to the needs of its students
- course content and delivery inspire and actively engage students to develop to their fullest potential
- sufficient evidence of outstanding provision relating to the provider's learning environment and student support
- the provider engages effectively with students leading to continuous improvements in academic experiences and outcomes.

There are also some very high quality features:

- the provider uses research and employer engagement to contribute to a very high quality experience for its students
- the provider offers very high quality support and professional development opportunities to its staff
- physical and virtual learning resources that are effective for student learning support.

Student outcomes: Bronze

Student outcomes are typically high quality, and there are some very high quality features.

Very high quality features include:

- the provider effectively supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies
- the provider articulates the educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why these are relevant to its students
- the provider evaluates the gains made by its students.

About the assessment

The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is a national scheme run by the Office for Students (OfS) that aims to encourage universities and colleges (providers) to improve and deliver excellent teaching, learning and student outcomes.

The TEF does this by assessing and rating providers for excellence above the high quality baseline that we expect from all providers. It covers undergraduate courses.

Throughout this document, we use the terms ‘outstanding’ and ‘very high quality’, which are defined in terms of the TEF 2023 assessment as follows:

- ‘outstanding’: the quality of the student experience or outcomes are among the very best in the sector, for the mix of students and courses taught by a provider.
- ‘very high quality’: the quality of the student experience or outcomes are materially above the relevant high quality minimum requirements, for the mix of students and courses taught by a provider.

The assessment was carried out in 2022-23 by the TEF Panel, a panel of academics and students who are experts in learning and teaching. This document sets out a summary of the panel’s findings and judgements.

The panel reviewed the following evidence:

- numerical indicators produced by the OfS, using national datasets.
- a submission made by the provider, setting out its own evidence
- a submission made by the provider’s students, setting out students’ views.

The panel applied its expert judgement to:

- identify particular features of the student experience and student outcomes that are excellent (above the high quality baseline requirements)
- decide a rating for the ‘student experience’ and for ‘student outcomes’
- decide an overall rating for the provider.

Throughout the assessment the panel took account of the context of the provider and judged how well it delivers teaching, learning and student outcomes for its mix of students and courses.

In making its decisions the panel took account of the OfS general duties and the public sector equalities duty.

Summary of panel assessment

Information about this provider

The University of Bolton is a 'teaching intensive research informed institution' with a 'distinct emphasis on professional and vocational education'.

It has a growing number of undergraduates, with full-time student numbers increasing from 4,220 in 2017-18 to 7,240 in 2020-21. Part-time student numbers have also grown in the same period, from 550 to 1,370.

A significant majority of full-time students are first degree students, while most of the part-time students study for other undergraduate qualifications. The number of sub-contracted students (students registered with the university but taught by another provider) has increased during the TEF period, from 460 in 2017-18, to 2,190 in 2020-21.

There are a wide range of subjects. Most of the full-time students study business and management or nursing and midwifery, while most of the part-time students study health and social care, engineering or education and teaching. The majority of full time students live in the UK (92.4 per cent).

The assessment considered information about all the provider's undergraduate courses and students on those courses.

Full details about the provider's student demographics used in the TEF 2023 assessment are available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/data-used-in-tef-2023/.

More information about this provider can be found on the OfS Register at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/the-register/the-ofs-register/.

Student experience: Gold

Throughout this section, we refer to indicators. These indicators are based on students' responses to the National Student Survey. The indicators are 'benchmarked' to show how well the provider performs for its particular mix of students and courses.

The panel found the student experience is typically outstanding for the provider's mix of students and courses. Across the student experience aspect, the panel found:

- most features are outstanding
- three features are very high quality
- the outstanding and very high quality features apply to all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

There is compelling statistical evidence that academic support and learning resources for sub-contracted students (students registered with the university but taught by another provider) is not very high quality. The provider identifies some evidence of policies and practices, but there is limited evidence on the reach of this practice to all sub-contracted students. The panel considered this evidence when assessing these two features.

The panel also considered the extent to which there was evidence of excellence that was additional to the features of excellence, and then considered the best overall fit for the aspect rating, based on all the available evidence. It judged that the best fit for student experience was 'Gold'. This was because most features of this aspect are outstanding quality for all groups of students, and those features that were not judged as outstanding were judged to be very high quality.

The panel's assessment of the student experience features is set out below.

Teaching, assessment, and feedback

The panel found this feature to be outstanding.

The indicator for 'teaching on my course' provides very strong evidence of outstanding quality for full-time students, and for part-time students there is probable evidence of either very high quality or outstanding quality.

The indicator for 'assessment and feedback' provides compelling evidence of outstanding quality for full-time students, but strong evidence of not very high quality for part-time students.

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- a model for in-person and online learning, which was evaluated through module questionnaires
- assessment and feedback practice which received positive assessment in a quality assurance review in 2019, and an external examiner report.

The student submission shows evidence of a positive student experience around assessment and feedback through their 2020 Speak Week – an annual campaign run by students. This included the fairness of assessment, feed-forward, and the timeliness of feedback.

The panel found evidence that the provider has embedded outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are tailored to the needs of its students.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

The panel found this feature to be outstanding.

For this feature, the panel also considered the evidence relating to indicators for ‘teaching on my course’ and ‘assessment and feedback’ (see above).

Evidence in provider submission includes:

- how students have developed their learning and confidence through engaging in the provider’s courses
- a student-led conference to encourage innovative thinking
- pro-bono clinics (for free advice) in subjects including law, accountancy, social work, and the Refugee Employment Support clinic, which develop students’ knowledge, skills, confidence and employability
- digital simulation in health areas.

There is evidence in the student submission about the effectiveness of the legal advice clinic and live briefs to stretch and develop student learning.

Overall, the panel found sufficient evidence to conclude that course content and delivery inspire and actively engage students to develop to their fullest potential.

Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

The panel found this feature to be very high quality.

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- awards schemes which provide support for research projects, although there is no data on the impact of the schemes
- the development of research informed practice is in line with professor requirements
- the input from a range of employers into course developments through industrial advisory boards – although the reach of the boards, in terms of courses and how many students their work relates to, is not outlined in the provider submission
- in student feedback, a high proportion (80.6 per cent) say that their courses had relevant research, professional proactive or employer input.

Considering all the evidence, the panel found that the provider uses research and employer engagement to contribute to a very high quality experience for its students.

Staff professional development and academic practice

The panel found this to be a very high quality feature.

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- a mandatory teaching observation scheme, which makes sure that all teachers are observed at least once every two years – these observations are linked to a research informed promotion scheme
- teaching and learning promotion routes to professorship
- high levels (68 per cent) of academics with Higher Education Academy Fellowships, and teacher training for all new staff
- two different funds launched in 2021 to develop practice
- on-going training through webinars and other development events, though there is no evidence about the reach or impact of these schemes.

Overall the panel found evidence to enable it to conclude that the provider offers very high quality support and professional development opportunities to its staff, some of which are embedded in career progression schemes.

Learning environment and academic support

The panel found this feature to be outstanding.

The indicator for academic support provides initial evidence of outstanding quality for full-time students. For part-time students, it provides initial evidence of not very high quality, but the degree of uncertainty for this indicator was too high for the panel to make an overall judgement.

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- during the coronavirus pandemic, students were supported by a social networking platform, to help them make friends and reduce isolation
- survey results showing high levels of student satisfaction with the provider's support for students during the coronavirus pandemic
- a personal tutoring scheme is being developed further by the provider to make it even more effective
- the Success for Life programme to support children from challenging backgrounds to access higher education
- a welcome and induction programme for new students

- a provider survey which found that 79 per cent of students agreed that tutors had helped them to successfully continue with their studies.

There was evidence in the student submission to show that students benefited from skills development on their courses.

The panel found that the provider makes sure that students have access to a supportive learning environment. It considered the extent to which these approaches are tailored to the needs of students and found that most were outstanding, although evidence was not consistently provided on the reach or impact of the provider's policies and actions to support student success.

The panel considered the evidence and, on balance, found sufficient evidence of outstanding provision relating to the provider's learning environment and student support.

Learning resources

The panel found this feature to be very high quality.

The full-time indicator for learning resources provides compelling initial evidence of very high quality.

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- investment in the teaching estate and library resources
- a laptop loan scheme that reached 145 students in 2021-22
- investment to increase the amount of eBooks in the library
- library support for students, including an online chat service that was rated excellent or good by 97 per cent of users
- specialist spaces including a developer's lab for creative technology students.

The student submission noted that not all students have access to good resources, but there are examples of effective support given by the provider to help mitigate this.

The panel found that the provider has physical and virtual learning resources that are effective for student learning support. It found insufficient evidence that resources were effectively tailored to the students' needs, but there was sufficient evidence of positive impact on student experience and outcomes, and so judged this feature to be very high quality rather than outstanding.

Student engagement in improvement

The panel found this feature to be outstanding.

The indicator for 'student voice' provides very strong evidence of outstanding quality for full-time students. For part-time students there is probable evidence of either very high quality or outstanding quality.

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- a student engagement framework that was praised by a quality assurance review in 2019 and has four distinct areas, relating to student representation, student surveys, student unions, and other student feedback
- the low number of formal complaints.

There is evidence in the student submission to show that the number of student representatives has expanded each year and works effectively.

Overall, the panel found evidence that the provider engages effectively with students, leading to continuous improvements in academic experiences and outcomes.

Student outcomes: Bronze

Throughout this section, we refer to indicators. The indicators for continuation, completion and progression rates are based on national data about higher education students. The indicators are 'benchmarked' to show how well the provider performs for its particular mix of students and courses.

The panel considered the available evidence relating to each feature of excellence and the extent to which this applied to all of the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

The panel identified that, for each of the three indicators relating to student outcomes, there are some groups that show initial strong evidence that provision is below very high quality. However, there is no evidence that they are consistently below very high quality. This evidence was considered in the panel's evaluation of all the student outcomes features.

The panel found that:

- three of the features are very high quality
- there is insufficient evidence that a further three of the features are very high quality
- there were no features of concern.

The panel also considered the extent to which there was evidence of excellence that was additional to the features of excellence.

Based on consideration of the available evidence, the panel judged that the best fit for student experience outcomes was 'Bronze'. This was because some features of this aspect are very high quality for most groups of students. The panel did not think that the best fit was 'Silver' because it found that, where very high quality provision was identified, this did not extend to all groups of students.

The panel's assessment of the student outcomes features is set out below.

Approaches to supporting student success

The panel found this feature to be very high quality.

The evidence in the provider submission includes:

- that 58 per cent of students who attended non-curriculum events had signed-up for the Bolton Award (an employability programme) in 2019-20. The scheme gives evidence that it includes underrepresented groups, but there is no further evidence on the reach and impact of the scheme
- that there were 19 student applications for the Ignition Awards Pilot to support enterprise activity
- reference to the Bolton Future Leaders Programme, that extends the Bolton Award, though no evidence is provided on the reach of this scheme
- the Student Engagement Champions scheme, which reached ten students
- how employability development is supported through actions such as: career registration, employability diagnostics, and Prepare for the Fair support. The Virtual Careers Fair had a significant reach with over 9,000 hits.

There is evidence in the student submission that students value the employability support offered by the provider.

The panel considered this to be evidence of very high quality, concluding that the provider effectively supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies.

Continuation and completion rates

The panel found insufficient evidence that this feature was very high quality.

The 'continuation' indicator shows initial evidence of not very high quality for full-time students, but there is compelling evidence of outstanding quality for part-time students.

The 'completion' indicator provides evidence of either very high quality or outstanding quality for part-time students, but the panel found compelling evidence of not very high quality for some full-time students. These varied for different groups and students.

There was evidence in the provider submission that most students who don't complete their studies do so for reasons including health, financial or family issues, rather than academic underperformance or dissatisfaction with their course. This is based on provider analysis of the appeals and reasons for withdrawal reported to HESA (the designated data body).

The panel considered that there was some evidence of very high quality provision relating to some elements of this feature for some groups of students, but that there was insufficient evidence to make continuation and completion rates a very high quality feature.

Progression rates

The panel found that there was insufficient evidence that this feature is very high quality.

The indicator for 'progression' provides initial evidence of below very high quality or very high quality for both full-time and part-time students. This varied for different students and courses.

The panel considered evidence in the provider submission that related to the geographical disparities and the low level of outward mobility of learners.

Overall, the panel concluded that there was insufficient evidence of very high quality provision in relation to progression rates.

Intended educational gains

The provider found this feature to be very high quality.

The provider adopted an educational gains strategy in 2022, which clearly articulates educational gains related to 'academic, personal and work skills and knowledge that a student acquires during their programme' and reflects 'distance travelled'. The strategy shows four courses of action that relate to the development of these gains, and a measurement model.

The panel judged that this was relevant to the provider's mix of courses and students, noting the alignment to the mission and context of the provider. The panel therefore concluded that the provider articulates the educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why these are relevant to its students.

Approaches to supporting educational gains

The panel found insufficient evidence of this feature being very high quality.

It is not clear to what extent the four core actions (components that shape education) outlined in the 2022 strategy for educational gains were in place during the TEF period of assessment.

These actions relate to alignment of the educational gains with an academic action plan, which look further into educational gains and staff development relating to educational gains.

The panel therefore concluded that there was insufficient evidence of a very high quality feature.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

The panel found this feature to be very high quality.

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- a survey which tracks students' progress in developing educational gains, which was used to measure the gains of all final year students in June 2022. The response rate was 11 per cent and a significant majority of the students felt they had made gains supported by the provider's systems
- the provider also uses qualitative evidence to support its evaluation.

There is evidence in the student submission that suggests students value the educational gain support provided.

Overall, the panel found that the provider evaluates the gains made by its students and therefore deemed this feature to be very high quality.

Overall: Silver

The panel judged that the rating for student experience was 'Gold' and the rating for student outcomes was 'Bronze'. The panel found that there was variation in the quality of different features across the two aspects. Some were outstanding and some very high quality, while others showed insufficient evidence of very high quality. Overall, the panel concluded that the best fit overall rating is 'Silver' as it found sufficient evidence that student experiences and outcomes are typically very high quality.