



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

The University of Reading

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Silver

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

Student experience: Silver

The student academic experience is typically very high quality.

Very high quality features include:

- effective teaching, assessment, and feedback practices that support students' learning, progression, and attainment
- support for practical and engaging learning experiences
- support for staff professional development and the promotion of excellent academic practice
- a supportive learning environment in which students have access to a range of very high quality academic support
- effective use of physical and virtual learning resources to support very high quality teaching and learning
- effective engagement with students, leading to improvements in students' experiences and outcomes.

There is also an outstanding quality feature:

- the use of research in relevant disciplines, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement.

Student outcomes: Silver

Student outcomes are typically very high quality.

Very high quality features include:

- typically very high rates of continuation and completion for the majority of students
- typically very high rates of progression
- the explanation of the educational gains the provider intends its students to achieve, and why these are relevant to its students
- effective support for students to achieve the intended educational gains
- a well-developed framework for evaluating the gains made by students.

There is also an outstanding quality feature:

- the use of tailored approaches that are highly effective in ensuring students succeed in and progress beyond their studies.

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 Reading is a medium-sized university with a total of around 20,000 students in 2020-21, including almost 12,000 full-time and around 200 part-time undergraduate students. Most part-time students are on undergraduate or undergraduate with postgraduate degree programmes. There were 270 apprenticeship students on undergraduate courses in 2020-21.

The provider's stated purpose is 'to act together, using our collective skills and diversity, to deliver a better world through the transformational power of quality education and research'.

The largest subject areas for full-time students are business and management, law, and psychology, however there are courses across most subject areas. For part-time students the largest subject areas are business and management, and politics.

The provider submission states that the numbers of full-time undergraduate students that are either not local (93.8 per cent in 2020-21) or are younger than 21 on entry (92.4 per cent) are proportionately much higher than the sector averages. This informs its tailored support for students with a focus on the transition to university and a new home.

The assessment considered information about the provider's undergraduate courses and students on those courses. This includes apprenticeships at undergraduate level.

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: Silver

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 very high quality for the provider's mix of students and courses. Across the student experience aspect, the panel found:

- most features are very high quality
- one outstanding quality feature
- no features that it considered to be below the level of very high quality
- the very high quality and outstanding features apply to most of the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

In its assessment, the panel considered how the provider has improved its student experience indicators over the assessment period.

The panel applied the criteria and considered that the rating with the best fit is 'Silver'. This is because all features are at least very high quality for most groups of students and courses.

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

Teaching, assessment, and feedback

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

For full-time students, the indicators provide initial evidence of:

- very high quality 'teaching on my course'
- very high quality 'assessment and feedback'

little variation between student groups, and some variation between subjects taught by the provider.

Indicators for apprenticeship students provide some initial evidence of at least very high quality 'teaching on my course' and outstanding quality 'assessment and feedback' but the numbers are small and statistically uncertain.

The provider and student submissions give further evidence of a very high quality feature, for example:

- a provider-wide approach to improvement of the student experience underpinned by a review of undergraduate provision, a curriculum framework and infrastructure investment
- examples of targeted improvement areas – e.g. assessment – with recognition of ongoing subject variability and actions for improvement, and evidence of subject-specific improvements

- external recognition for assessment improvement
- co-design with students to improve assessment and feedback, also noted in the student submission.

The student submission illustrates positive student views about teaching quality and improvements being made through assessment and feedback, although there is variability across subject areas.

The panel concluded that the provider has embedded very high quality teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are effective in supporting its students' learning, progression and attainment.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

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

The provider and student submissions include evidence of:

- a provider-wide approach to curriculum design and delivery
- active engagement in learning.

The student submission included evidence suggesting engaging and relevant content.

The provider submission described the range of mechanisms to support practical and engaging learning experiences, including those derived from the extensive campus and special collections. However, the submission generally lacked specific evidence of effectiveness for student engagement in learning and stretch.

On balance, the panel judged the evidence to demonstrate a very high quality feature, concluding that course content and delivery effectively encourage the provider's students to engage in their learning, and stretch students to develop their knowledge and skills.

Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The provider and student submissions include evidence of:

- research-informed teaching and student satisfaction with this
- use of specialist research resources in teaching, with some evidence of external recognition
- the embedding of professional practice and employer engagement across a range of provision, with evidence of external recognition
- positive recognition from students for the use of research and professional content and employer engagement.

The panel concluded that the provider uses research in relevant disciplines, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement to contribute to an outstanding academic experience for its students.

Staff professional development and academic practice

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

Examining the evidence in the provider and student submissions, the panel noted:

- a provider-wide approach to supporting staff professional development and sharing of excellent academic practice across the university. However there is little evidence in the provider submission to show the level of participation or effectiveness in the latter
- an academic career framework which recognises quality and innovation in teaching, giving equal status to different routes of study and opportunity across teaching and research. The external recognition of individuals' successes is supported by initiatives such as the University Teaching Fellowship scheme
- promotion of excellent academic practice, like assessment, through activities such as showcases and conferences.

The panel did not find strong evidence that excellent academic practice is embedded across the institution, although it noted that there is very high quality support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is promoted. Overall, the panel concluded that this is a very high quality feature.

Learning environment and academic support

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

The indicators for full-time students provide initial evidence of very high quality 'academic support', with some variation between student groups and subjects.

The indicators for apprenticeship students also provide some initial evidence of at least very high quality 'academic support', but the numbers are small and statistically uncertain.

The provider and student submissions provide further evidence of a very high quality feature, setting out an approach that is student-centric, focused on understanding the needs of students and delivers targeted activity either at individual or student group level. Some examples of the evidence include:

- a provider-wide strategic approach to improving academic support, including relaunching an academic tutor system
- support for the transition to higher education, e.g. pre-arrival, a student mentoring programme with improvements based on learning from the coronavirus pandemic and with some evidence of student satisfaction
- investment in additional support, e.g. the student welfare team, with evidence of increasing usage by students
- targeted support for underrepresented groups, e.g. disability support, with evidence of impact from degree outcomes data.

The student submission provides quantitative and qualitative evidence that students recognise and benefit from these support activities. For example, students report positive experiences of support from academic tutors, although satisfaction levels vary, and for transition to higher education.

The panel concluded that the provider fosters a supportive learning environment and its students have access to a readily available range of very high quality academic support. However, taken together with the information in the indicators, the panel did not find strong evidence that the provider's approach is consistent across all student groups or courses.

Learning resources

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

The indicators provide initial evidence of not very high quality 'learning resources' for full-time students.

The provider and student submissions provide evidence of a very high quality feature, including:

- provision of specialist facilities designed to give students authentic professional experiences
- investment in facilities in response to student feedback e.g. general study space, lecture capture facilities
- an extensive campus and special collections to further support student learning
- data indicating student satisfaction with the virtual learning resources
- 79 per cent of students responding positively to the NSS question, 'the institution offered activities and resources designed to prepare me for the next step in my career'.

The student submission noted that 87 per cent of those who completed a student survey for the TEF felt their course received adequate resources and also offered positive comments on the provider's investment in facilities in response to student feedback.

The provider submission gives an explanation of how the library refurbishment impacted the 'learning resources' indicator and notes improvement in more recent years.

On balance, the panel concluded that physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning. While the indicators did not support this, they contributed no more than half of the evidence and the panel considered that the evidence overall demonstrated a very high quality feature.

Student engagement in improvement

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

The full-time 'student voice' indicator provides initial evidence of a very high quality feature for most groups of students.

The provider and student submissions provide further evidence of a very high quality feature, including:

- a strategic approach to improving student voice and partnership, including a robust governance structure at different levels of the provider with student representation
- examples of co-design with students, e.g. improving assessment feedback, development of learning resources – with some evidence of effective student partnerships in a ‘teaching and learning’ scheme
- examples of targeting subject areas for improvement
- examples of innovation e.g. inclusion consultants, with evaluation and expansion of this scheme.

The student submission also demonstrates improvement over time in this feature, reflecting the indicator profile over the assessment period. However it also indicates some elements are not yet working effectively, suggesting variation in how well embedded the mechanisms are.

The panel concluded that the provider effectively engages with its students, leading to improvements in the experiences and outcomes of its students. While the panel noted the variability across subject areas, as shown in the indicators and the student submission, it still considered this to be a very high quality feature overall.

Student outcomes: Silver

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 found the student experience is typically very high quality for the provider’s mix of students and courses. Across the student experience aspect, the panel found:

- most features are very high quality (two of which have some outstanding elements)
- one outstanding quality feature
- no features that it considered to be below the level of very high quality
- the very high quality and outstanding features apply to most of the provider’s groups of students and for most courses and subjects.

The panel applied the criteria and considered that the rating with the best fit is ‘Silver’. This is because all features are at least very high quality for most groups of students.

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

Approaches to supporting student success

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The provider and student submissions provide evidence of an outstanding quality feature, including:

- a holistic approach to supporting students to succeed with examples of general (e.g. accommodation guarantee, financial advice and support) and targeted (e.g. support for students with autism) support, underpinned by an aim to remove barriers to success
- effective monitoring of student engagement to target support
- examples of work-like experiences and placements with evidence of student satisfaction in relation to career preparedness, impact on outcomes and external recognition (e.g. well-being support on placement). There was also evidence of additional support provided in this area during the coronavirus pandemic
- targeted schemes e.g. career mentoring and finalists programme, to support career development, externally recognised, with evidence of effectiveness.

The student submission provided examples which support the evidence above, as well as recognition of research and professional content and employer engagement. It also noted examples of support for the four graduate attributes which form educational gains (as set out under 'intended educational gains' below).

The provider submission presented wide-ranging evidence of its approaches to supporting student success and progression and demonstrated the positive impact of these approaches on student outcomes. The student submission supported this.

Considering all the evidence, the panel found that the provider uses and tailors approaches that are highly effective in ensuring its students succeed in and progress beyond their studies, and concluded that this is an outstanding quality feature.

Continuation and completion rates

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

The panel considered the 'continuation' and 'completion' indicators to provide initial evidence of at least very high quality for full-time students, noting the evidence of outstanding quality for some groups of students. For part-time students, the indicators provided initial evidence of at least a very high quality feature. However, the panel noted the small part-time numbers.

The panel considered the apprenticeships continuation indicator to provide initial evidence of at least a very high quality feature. There were no completion rates available for apprenticeship students.

The panel judged overall that there are very high rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses, with outstanding rates for some groups of students. However, outstanding rates were not yet evident among certain underrepresented groups or for some larger subject areas. On balance, the panel concluded that this is a very high quality feature.

Progression rates

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

The panel considered the full-time 'progression' indicator to provide initial evidence of a very high quality feature, with evidence of outstanding rates for some groups of students.

The provider submission notes ten subject areas materially above and five materially below benchmark, although there is limited certainty in the data for several of these. However, the submission acknowledges variability in progression rates across subjects and the action taken to address it, with evidence of an improving trajectory for some.

Progression indicators were not available for part-time or apprenticeship students.

The provider submission included reference to recent data showing that one year after graduation half of its subject areas with reportable data were in the top quartile for median salaries by region.

In summary, the panel considered that the indicators showed outstanding rates of progression in some subject areas or student groups but that this was not widespread nor seen in most underrepresented groups. Therefore the panel concluded overall that there are very high rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses.

Intended educational gains

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

The provider submission articulates educational gains as graduate attributes, as follows:

- mastery of the discipline
- skills in research and enquiry
- personal effectiveness and self-awareness
- global engagement and multi-cultural awareness.

The provider submission makes the case for the four graduate attributes' relevance to its students and context and sets out how they are embedded into programme delivery.

The student submission indicates that awareness of the intended educational gains is not yet widespread. It notes examples of support for the four graduate attributes, however, this is not yet embedded across the provider.

Overall, the panel 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 considered this to be a very high quality feature, noting how the provider maps the graduate attributes described above to several of the student experience and student outcomes features described in its submission.

The student submission noted examples of support for achieving these graduate attributes, including through wider opportunities beyond the curriculum. However, it also noted several of these initiatives were early-stage in their development.

Overall, the panel considered that the provider effectively supports its students to achieve the intended educational gains. However, it did not find strong evidence that these approaches are yet embedded and tailored to its students and their different starting points.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

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

The provider submission sets out its approach to evaluating students' educational gains including:

- learning from earlier work on learning gain
- use of other measurement tools such as the UK Engagement Survey
- how graduate attributes will be assessable within the curriculum.

The panel considered that the provider has a well-developed framework for evaluating the gains made by its students, and has some data to support the evaluation of educational gains. The panel recognises this framework will continue to evolve and that some intended gains are not yet demonstrated. On balance, the panel concluded that the provider evaluates the gains made by its students – demonstrating a very high quality feature.

Overall: Silver

The panel rated the student experience aspect 'Silver' and the student outcomes aspect 'Silver'.

In line with the criteria – as 'Silver' was awarded to both aspects – the overall rating is therefore also 'Silver'.

The panel judged that, on the whole, the student experience and student outcomes are typically very high quality.