



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

ICON College of Technology and Management Ltd

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Bronze

Typically, the experience students have at ICON College of Technology and Management Ltd and the outcomes it leads to are high quality, and there are some very high quality features.

Student experience: Bronze

The student academic experience is typically high quality, and there are some very high quality features.

Very high quality features include:

- effective teaching, assessment, and feedback practices, which support students' learning, progression, and attainment, embedded across the provider
- course content and delivery which effectively encourages students to engage in learning, and which stretches them to develop their knowledge and skills.

Student outcomes: Silver

Student outcomes are typically very high quality.

Very high quality features include:

- the provider effectively supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies
- very high rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses
- very high rates of successful progression for the majority of the provider's students and courses
- articulation of both the educational gains the provider intends its students to achieve, and why these are relevant to 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

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

ICON College of Technology and Management is an independent higher education provider established in 2003, based in East London.

Its mission is to provide 'accessible higher education aligned to socio-economic requirements, equipping students with marketable skills for effective and rewarding careers' through 'an educational experience that maximises student support to reach their full potential'.

The provider initially offered Pearson higher national diploma (HND) programmes, but introduced honours degree programmes in 2020-21, in partnership with Falmouth University. There had been no graduating cohorts at the time of the panel's assessment.

It had around 1,750 full-time students in 2020-21, with around 20 per cent enrolled on first degree programmes. The largest degree course, accounting for 87 per cent of students, is Business and Management, with 9 per cent studying Computing and 5 per cent studying Health and Social Care.

The vast majority of students are mature, 58 per cent are female, 99 per cent have no reported disability and over 90 per cent are white, with the next largest ethnic group being Asian.

About three-quarters of students enter with no or unknown qualifications, and around 10 per cent with Access qualifications. Most (over 80 per cent) are local prior to entry, and the majority are from areas of high deprivation.

The assessment considered information about the provider's undergraduate courses and students on those courses. Although data was available for apprenticeships, the provider submission did not include specific information about them, so they were not considered in scope of the assessment.

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: Bronze

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 quality of the student academic experience is typically high quality, and there are some very high quality features, for ICON's mix of students and courses.

Across the student experience aspect, the panel found:

- two features that are very high quality for almost all groups of students
- five features with insufficient evidence of being very high quality
- no features that it considered to be clearly below the level of 'very high quality' or that it considered may be of concern.

Considering the features holistically, the panel judged there to be evidence of typically high quality provision across most of the aspect, with some very high quality features. The panel weighted more positively the evidence that demonstrates that the very high quality features apply to all groups of students.

Applying the guidance, the panel considered the best fit rating to be 'Bronze', because some features are very high quality for most groups of students.

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

Teaching, assessment, and feedback, and Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

The panel concluded that these are very high quality features.

The 'teaching on my course' and 'assessment and feedback' indicators for full-time students both provide compelling initial evidence of a very high quality feature.

In both cases, this applies across the provider's groups of students, including those from underrepresented groups, with the potential exception of students studying Computing. However, the low number of students on this course meant that the panel placed less weight on this evidence.

The provider submission includes evidence that teaching feedback and assessment practices are effective in supporting students' learning, progression and attainment and which encourage students to engage in their learning. This includes:

- a learning and teaching strategy which encourages the adoption of inclusive approaches, varied teaching methods, teaching materials shared in a virtual learning environment, and space for collaboration and student interaction
- quick adaptation to the coronavirus pandemic, with the provider developing online teaching from scratch

- the provider says that a dip in satisfaction rates for Computing students was the result of the pandemic, which impeded practical sessions, and added that this is no longer an issue
- the provider describes open and equal access to fair assessment for all students, and that a group of students reviews draft assessment briefs to ensure clarity.

However, the panel noted that the submission often described the provider 'encouraging' particular approaches or activities, rather than how they are consistently applied across the institution. It also noted that some of the evidence referred to HND courses rather than degree programmes.

The panel considered the indicators to provide initial evidence of very high quality teaching, assessment and feedback for students, with the submission providing additional evidence which applies to the provider's mix of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

Overall, the panel concluded that effective teaching, assessment, and feedback practices, which support students' learning, progression, and attainment, are embedded across the provider. It also concluded 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 there is insufficient evidence that this is a very high quality feature.

The panel found the provider submission to contain limited evidence for this feature. Evidence in the submission includes an assertion that the provider is embedding 'employer-led, challenge-based teaching and learning, through partnerships and collaborative activity with employers, alumni, industry and community organisations'. However, there are no examples provided, or evidence of the impact of those activities.

The submission also notes the establishment of an employer forum to identify placement and employment opportunities, but there is limited information on outcomes. It states that academic staff are 'encouraged to engage in research or scholarly activities'. However, there was insufficient evidence evidencing how this contributes to a very high quality academic experience.

The panel considered that the provider submission describes its approaches towards research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement, but that there is limited evidence of the effectiveness of those approaches in contributing to a very high quality academic experience for students. The panel therefore considered there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate a very high quality feature.

Staff professional development and academic practice

The panel considered there is insufficient evidence of a very high quality.

The panel noted that the provider submission did not contain much evidence for this feature, but did note details of how the provider encourages the sharing of good practice among staff through various means. It also describes the allocation of time for scholarly activities to ensure teaching is both evidence-based and employs up-to-date learning tools and technologies. However, there is limited information or evidence of outcomes to demonstrate impact on the student experience. There is also limited information regarding support for staff new to teaching.

The panel considered that the provider submission describes its approaches towards this feature, which are typically high quality, but that there is limited evidence of the effectiveness of measures or approaches which contribute to a very high quality academic experience for its students, or of how excellent academic practice is promoted.

Therefore, the panel considered that there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate a very high quality feature.

Learning environment and academic support

The panel concluded that there is insufficient evidence that this is a very high quality feature.

The overall 'academic support' indicator for full-time students provided initial evidence of performance below the level of very high quality. The results are lower for male students, and for those from deprived backgrounds, who make up around 60 per cent of the student population.

The provider submission describes its approaches towards fostering a supportive learning environment and providing academic support. This includes:

- action taken to improve on the previous TEF rating with new measures to support academic writing skills. However, limited information is provided about how many students are supported by these new interventions, or how these approaches are being reviewed
- the submission states that the 'academic support' indicator was discussed at staff-student liaison panel, although the outcome of this was unclear to the panel
- the recent appointment of an academic administrative support officer to be the immediate point of contact with students, and a conduit between staff and students, and some evidence of the early impact of this role is provided
- a reference to student ambassador and mentor roles, although it is unclear how many roles there are, or their impact
- a reference to student attendance being monitored, but limited information is given about how this is used by the provider to identify students at risk, and support them to succeed.

The panel considered that the provider submission describes its approach to this feature, but found limited evidence of the effectiveness of its approaches; or of how they are tailored to its students; the range of students supported; or the effectiveness of the approaches to promote very high quality academic support. It is also not clear what specific action is being taken to address areas where there is lower quality.

Overall, the panel concluded there is not enough evidence to demonstrate that the provider fosters a supportive learning environment and that students have access to a range of very high quality academic support. The panel therefore considered that there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate a very high quality feature.

Learning resources

The panel concluded that there is insufficient evidence that this is a very high quality

The 'learning resources' indicator provides initial evidence of a very high quality feature. However, it provides evidence of performance below the level of very high quality for the fourth year of the TEF period, and the panel placed more weight on this more recent evidence.

The provider submission describes some approaches around physical and virtual resources, including:

- an acknowledgement that student satisfaction has fallen, although with little interrogation of the reasons for this and steps identified for future improvement
- details of improved student satisfaction for certain student groups through academic administrative support, although no evidence was provided to support this
- references to the availability of books and journals in their physical and online libraries, but with limited detail as to how resourcing decisions are taken, or how monitoring leads to ensuring the effectiveness of learning resources
- evidence from a Pearson annual monitoring report commending the effective use of learning resources through regular monitoring, but with limited detail provided.

Overall, the panel concluded there is insufficient evidence that the provider uses physical and virtual learning resources effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning, and therefore considered that there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate a very high quality feature.

Student engagement in improvement

The panel concluded that there is insufficient evidence that this is a very high quality feature.

The 'student' voice indicator for full-time students provides initial evidence of very high quality, although there is some evidence of lower quality for male students; students studying Computing, and for the fourth year of the TEF period.

The provider submission sets out an approach to student engagement which encourages student representation as part of developing social capital, with evidence of 50 student representatives who are provided with training. It details several avenues for student engagement but includes limited evidence of improvements made as a result.

The submission also cites a 2022 internal student survey which suggests that students 'feel part of the academic community and their opinion is valued', although the panel notes that the survey completion rate is not stated.

The panel considered that, although the provider submission describes its approaches to engaging with students, there is limited evidence of specific improvements made to demonstrate the effectiveness of the approaches at a level above high quality.

Overall, the panel concluded there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that the provider engages effectively with its students, leading to improvements to the experiences and outcomes of its students. Therefore, the panel considered there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate a very high quality feature.

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 quality of the student outcomes is typically very high quality for ICON's mix of students and courses. Across the student outcomes aspect, the panel found:

- four features that are very high quality
- one feature with insufficient evidence of being very high quality
- one feature with insufficient evidence for the panel to make a judgment of quality.

The submission describes approaches that are adopted across the institution and some interventions targeted at specific student groups, including students from underrepresented groups, which comprise a high proportion of the provider's students.

Considering the features holistically, the panel judged there to be evidence of typically very high quality student outcomes across the aspect as a whole.

Applying the guidance, the panel considered the best fit rating to be 'Silver', because most features are 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 a very high quality feature.

The provider submission describes a range of measures to improve non-continuation and low completion rates, and its approach to supporting its students to progress beyond their studies. This includes:

- tutoring, extra monitoring and extra classes for those that need it
- the creation of an academic administrative support officer role, to act as a conduit between tutors and students
- a significant increase in completion statistics from 46 per cent to 73 per cent since new initiatives were implemented in recent years.
- the appointment of a strategic lead for careers and employability, and the recruitment of academic careers and employability networking managers
- the establishment of an employer forum and a Centre for Research and Enterprise, although there is insufficient detail of the role they perform, or information about the number of students who have engaged.

The panel considered the characteristics of the student body, including the high proportion of students from underrepresented groups, and judged that the provider supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies. This demonstrates a very high quality feature.

Continuation and completion rates

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

The overall 'continuation' indicator for full-time students provides initial evidence of outstanding quality and shows continuous improvement throughout the TEF period.

The overall 'completion' indicator provides some initial evidence of outstanding quality, though there is limited certainty in the data. The panel also found evidence of performance below the level of very high quality for students aged under 21, and for Asian students.

The provider states in its submission that it observes that Asian students, who account for around 5 per cent of its population, have 'far higher levels of family commitment and pressures'. However, it does not cite evidence for this observation or detail what action it proposes to take in light of this.

The provider also demonstrates an understanding of its student population through analysing different groups, across subjects and from deprived areas, showing strong completion results for those from the most deprived areas and for male students. Completion rates for Asian students are identified as the greatest concern, but the panel did not find evidence of action taken to address this.

The panel considered that there are outstanding rates of completion for most of the provider's students and courses, though taking the evidence in the round, the panel concluded that the evidence demonstrates a very high quality feature.

Progression rates

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

The overall 'progression' indicator for full-time students provides initial evidence of very high quality.

However for Computing students the 'progression' indicator provides initial evidence performance below the level of very high quality, although the number of students is small and so the panel placed less weight on this evidence. It was not clear from the submission if steps were being taken to improve in this area. The provider notes that most of these students are already working and suggests that these statistics 'may not be relevant to their aspirations'.

The provider submission includes evidence to explain the underlying issues affecting progression to highly skilled employment for some students within an area of high economic deprivation. It notes that the most recent year shows an increase in quality for this indicator, and states that the relationship with Falmouth University has had a positive impact.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel considered the evidence provided through the indicator and provider submission show very high rates of progression for the majority of the provider's students and courses.

Intended educational gains

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

The provider submission articulates the educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why they are seen as relevant in its context. The provider discusses three learning gains:

- enhancing opportunities through second-chance study locally, and rebuilding confidence
- students taking responsibility for their own learning to become autonomous learners
- students leaving with confidence and ready for employment.

The panel considered these are relevant to the provider's students as they gain confidence in themselves to learn and that this reflects its mission to 'provide accessible higher education for students aligned to socio-economic requirements and employability'.

Overall therefore, the panel considered that the provider has articulated the educational gains it intends its students to achieve throughout the student journey and why these are relevant to its students in this providers' context.

Approaches to supporting educational gains

The panel concluded there is insufficient evidence of very high quality for this feature.

The submission's limited information about effectively supporting students to achieve educational gains included:

- a description of the induction period as central in changing student preconceptions of the learning experience
- approaches to learning and assessment focussing on both theory and practical applications geared towards autonomous learning and employability
- a diverse range of external speakers and visits to develop the skills and motivation to progress to employment.

The panel considered that, although the articulated educational gains are relevant to the provider's students, the submission does not provide sufficient detail of how the students' personal development is developed or scaffolded throughout the student journey to effectively support the achievement of these gains. Therefore it concluded that there is insufficient evidence of very high quality for this feature.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

The provider submission does not include any evidence of how the gains have been or will be evaluated.

The panel therefore concluded that there is insufficient evidence to reach a view on the quality of this feature.

Overall: Bronze

The panel considered the student experience aspect rating to be 'Bronze' and the student outcomes aspect rating to be 'Silver'.

It noted the guidance that the overall rating should not be higher than the highest aspect rating and should be no more than one rating higher than the lowest aspect rating.

The panel weighted these two aspects equally and considered all the evidence across all features and across all the provider's student groups, subjects and courses to come to a 'best fit' decision regarding the overall rating for the provider.

When determining whether the overall rating should be 'Bronze' or 'Silver', the panel considered all the evidence across all the features of both aspects. The panel judged the evidence to show, on the whole, that there is insufficient evidence that the student experience and student outcomes are typically of very high quality provision for all groups of students.

Applying the guidance and the panel members' expert judgment, the panel considered the overall 'best fit' rating to be 'Bronze'.