



# **Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023**

## **Summary TEF 2023 panel statement**

**Middlesborough College**

# Summary of outcomes

## Overall: Silver

Typically, the experience students have at Middlesbrough College and the outcomes it leads to are very high quality.

### Student experience: Gold

The student academic experience is typically outstanding.

Outstanding quality features include:

- outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment practices which are highly effective and tailored to support students' learning, progression and attainment
- course content and delivery that inspires students to actively engage in and commit to their learning and stretches students to develop knowledge and skills to their fullest potential
- a supportive learning environment in which students have access to a wide range of outstanding quality academic support tailored to their needs
- physical resources are tailored and used effectively to support outstanding teaching and learning
- embedded student engagement which leads to continuous improvement to the experiences and outcomes of students.

### Student outcomes: Bronze

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

Very high quality features include:

- effective support for students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies
- very high rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses
- the provider's approach to supporting its students to achieve educational gains.

# 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

Middlesbrough College is a general further education college based in the Tees Valley. It focuses on 'improving the future of the region and its students, through the design and delivery of vocational higher education programmes that support students to progress into sectors that they aspire to work in or to achieve career progression where they are already employed'.

In 2020-21 there were 540 full-time higher education students, 180 part-time higher education students and 110 students studying higher apprenticeships.

Courses are offered in a wide range of subjects, but the majority of full-time enrolments are to Business and Management, Engineering, Education and Training, and Allied Health.

The provider's vocationally focused higher education portfolio comprises mostly of one and two year foundation degrees awarded by the Open University and Higher National qualifications awarded by Pearson, along with one year top up programmes. There is also an evolving suite of higher apprenticeships aligned with these higher education qualifications. The provider submission describes how this higher education portfolio has been created to meet the social and economic needs of the Tees Valley.

The majority of students are enrolled from the local area and the qualifications of students on entry are almost entirely below a CDD A level or equivalent.

The students are predominantly white and many are from disadvantaged backgrounds. A relatively high number of full-time students have a disability or impairment to learning. A significant proportion of students are over 21.

The provider submission describes how this combination of student characteristics results in a high proportion of students with caring responsibilities and who need to work alongside their studies, needing flexibility of education to support employment, personal, economic or health related demands. To address this, the provider has implemented the foundation year and top up model as described above.

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 make direct reference to this data and 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](http://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/](http://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 that the student experience is typically outstanding for the provider's mix of students and courses. Across the student experience aspect, the panel found:

- five features are outstanding
- two features where there was not enough evidence to reach a judgement
- no features clearly below the level of 'very high quality' or that may be of concern
- evidence that the provider embeds effective approaches and tailors its approaches to its students
- that the outstanding quality features apply to all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups, and courses.

The panel noted the outstanding features of the student experience in the context of the socio-economic characteristics of the region in which the provider operates and of the student body that it serves.

The panel applied the ratings criteria and considered the best fit rating to be 'Gold'. This is because most features are outstanding for all 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 an outstanding quality feature.

The 'teaching on my course' and 'assessment and feedback' indicators provided initial evidence of outstanding quality, albeit with less certainty in the data for part-time students because of small numbers.

The provider submission gave further evidence of outstanding quality, including:

- higher education programmes are structured to meet the needs and characteristics of the student body, such as a recognition that active research per se is not a focus for academic staff or for students
- how a high level of support for teaching and learning was maintained during the coronavirus pandemic
- comments from students describing the quality of teaching and learning as 'fantastic teaching, interesting, fun and enjoyable sessions and a mix of theory and practical activities'

- student comments regarding supportive and critical feedback that enables them to improve the level of their work and the development of academic skills through tutorials, workshops and feedback from tutors.

The panel concluded that the indicators and provider submission provide substantive evidence that the provider has embedded outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment practices which are highly effective and tailored to support students' learning, progression and attainment.

### **Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch**

The panel considered this to be an outstanding feature.

The panel drew on evidence provided for the teaching, assessment and feedback feature when making its assessment, alongside further evidence from the provider submission, including:

- student comments which illustrate the extent to which they have engaged in their studies and have developed academic and vocational knowledge and competence
- external examiner endorsements of the high standards set in student work and in grading and feedback by tutors; for example modules and assessment tasks are presented in a clear, logical fashion.

The panel found there to be less substantive direct evidence with regard to course content and delivery, student engagement in learning, and stretch and challenge. However, when considered in the round with the evidence regarding teaching, assessment and feedback the panel concluded that there was sufficient evidence of an outstanding quality feature, and that course content and delivery inspires students to actively engage in and commit to their learning, and stretches students to develop knowledge and skills to their fullest potential.

### **Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement**

The panel considered that there was not enough evidence to judge the quality of this feature.

The panel acknowledged that the provider focuses on teaching, learning and assessment rather than academic research, although the provider submission does refer to engagement with, and meeting the needs of, employers. The panel therefore concluded that there was insufficient evidence to determine the degree to which research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement contribute to the academic experience of students.

### **Staff professional development and academic practice**

The panel considered that there was not enough evidence to judge the quality of this feature.

The panel noted that the provider submission did not offer evidence of staff professional development or academic practice. The panel considered that the student experience indicators could provide some evidence of a consistent approach to excellent academic practice, but that there was not supplemental evidence in the submission to confirm this, nor to indicate how staff professional development is supported by the provider.

## **Learning environment and academic support**

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The 'academic support' indicator provided initial evidence that this feature is outstanding for both full-time and part-time students.

Further evidence of outstanding quality in the provider submission included:

- consistently high levels of support during the coronavirus pandemic as endorsed by external examiners
- academic support sessions timetabled to ensure staff availability, which focus on academic matters but with scope to respond to pastoral matters and sign-post students to appropriate additional support
- student comments valuing the support that they receive, such as 'tutors support me in my learning and skills improvement for the assignment'.

Overall, the panel concluded that the indicator and the submission provided evidence that the provider ensures a supportive learning environment and that its students have access to a wide range of readily available outstanding quality academic support tailored to their needs.

## **Learning resources**

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The 'learning resources' indicator provided initial evidence of outstanding quality, albeit with less certainty in the data for part-time students because of small numbers.

The panel noted further evidence of outstanding quality in the provider submission, including:

- targeted investment to support students to gain role specific additional qualifications, built into programme design
- free access for all students to any specialist software and e-resources required for their course, made available to students remotely where possible
- free loan laptop for all students at the point of enrolment.

Whilst the panel noted that the submission did not include any direct reference to a virtual learning environment, it concluded that the learning resources indicator and submission provide evidence that the provider deploys physical resources which are tailored and used effectively to support outstanding teaching and learning.

## **Student engagement in improvement**

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The 'student voice' indicator provided evidence of outstanding quality for both full-time and part-time students.

The provider acknowledges that given the characteristics of its student body - for example the relatively high proportions of commuting, part-time and mature students - students are less likely to engage in typical student engagement activities. In response to this, the provider has established a range of key platforms to support and encourage student engagement in feedback, such as questionnaires and cross-college student council meetings.

The provider submission describes the effectiveness of informal channels of student engagement, such as informal academic support sessions, interaction with programme teams and a general 'open door' approach to student engagement.

The submission also references positive comments from students such as 'The College engages with students via, student evaluations and feedback, and I feel if I have any concerns, they are listened to and where possible resolved'.

Taking all of the evidence into consideration, the panel concluded the indicators and the submission provide evidence that the provider embeds engagement with its students leading to continuous improvement to the experiences and outcomes of its students, and that this is therefore an outstanding quality feature.

## **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 found that student outcomes are typically high quality for the provider's mix of students and courses, and there are some very high quality features. Across the student outcomes aspect, the panel found:

- three features that are very high quality
- three features where there is not enough evidence of very high quality.

The panel applied the ratings criteria and considered the best fit rating to be 'Bronze'. This is because the evidence best fits the description: 'some features of the aspect 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, and Continuation and completion rates**

The panel considered these two features to be very high quality.

The indicators provided initial evidence of:

- very high quality 'continuation' for full-time students
- either very high quality, or not very high quality 'continuation' for part-time students – with limited certainty in the data
- outstanding quality 'completion' for full-time students

- very high quality 'completion' for part-time students.

Overall, the panel considered the indicators to provide initial evidence of very high quality.

The panel noted that the provider submission does not specifically describe its approaches to supporting student success but instead sets out how it is addressing the indicator evidence, and describes the data in the socio-economic context and the characteristics of its student body.

For example, the submission describes how students are typically part-time and employed and may experience a change of employer or redundancy, particularly due to coronavirus, and therefore may not be able to continue with their studies. It also references how two franchised courses were closed by the awarding body which impacted continuation rates for first degree students.

The panel judged the indicators provide initial evidence of very high quality. Whilst the panel noted that the submission provided limited further evidence with regard to these two features, it considered that the evidence of the provider's outstanding quality 'learning environment and academic support' feature, as described above, included the approaches adopted to support student success, for example the academic and pastoral support provided to students, and positive student feedback about mentors, tutors and programme leaders. The panel therefore concluded overall that there is sufficient evidence the provider effectively supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies, alongside evidence of very high rates of continuation and completion.

## **Progression rates**

The panel did not find enough evidence of a very high quality feature.

The 'progression' indicator provided initial evidence of not very high quality for full-time and part-time students.

The provider submission explained the indicator evidence in the socio-economic context of the provider and against the characteristics of its student body, for example by showing how key socio-economic factors that shape the region result in there being a low proportion of employment opportunities.

The provider reiterates its strategy to provide vocational higher education programmes of study that support students to progress into sectors or industries that they aspire to work in, or that they already work in, but are seeking career progression and which meet the needs of local employers. It says it defines successful progression in these terms and commissioned a 'graduate destinations' survey of 2021 graduates, collated 15 months after graduation with a 67 per cent response rate, that recorded employment as a positive outcome. The survey showed that 94.5 per cent of engineering graduates were in employment or further study in the sector, which the provider cites as significant as this cohort accounts for 25 per cent of all enrolments in any given year, reflecting the importance to the region of this sector. The survey also showed that 92 per cent of business and management graduates were in employment.

The submission states that the survey data reflects other provider records and suggests that the transferability of the skills gained from the range of engineering courses available to students leads to them gaining employment across a range of sectors.

The submission points to the disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic to many sectors, and the impact of this on progression rates. It also refers to many students working internationally or being self-employed, or in job roles which are not recognised in the indicators.

In summary, the progression indicator did not provide initial evidence that this feature is of very high quality. While the submission extensively explores and seeks to mitigate the progression indicator, the panel considered that it does not provide substantive further evidence that the provider has very high rates of successful progression for its students and courses.

Overall, the panel concluded that there is insufficient, substantive evidence of a very high quality feature with regard to progression.

### **Intended educational gains, Approaches to supporting educational gains, Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains**

The panel considered there was not enough evidence of very high quality 'intended educational gains' or 'evaluation and demonstration of educational gains'. However, it considered the approaches to supporting educational gains to be of very high quality.

The provider describes that its educational gains are to meet the needs of students, employers and Tees Valley residents; to increase participation in higher education in the Tees Valley; and to provide high quality vocational higher education for students.

The submission describes how these are delivered through a higher education portfolio of one or two year courses that support students to access and continue in higher education regardless of socio-economic circumstances.

The panel noted that the provider evidences the educational gains made by its students through their progress to employment or further study within the sector of choice and the extent to which regional skills needs are met. Examples include:

- the provider's higher education destinations report 2021 which showed that 95.6 per cent of graduates progressed to employment or further study
- the value of health and public sector qualifications for graduates who are typically able to progress into non-competency-based jobs in the health sector and junior manager roles in the public sector
- graduates who are able to move into employment in a range of teaching and teaching support roles
- performing arts courses which prepare students for the nature and type of work in this industry, which is primarily contract based.

In summary, although there is some evidence of intended educational gains and the submission describes how the provider determines whether it achieves this, overall the panel concluded that there was not enough evidence of very high quality in relation to these two features.

However, the panel considered the evidence of an outstanding quality learning environment to be relevant to the provider's approaches to supporting students to achieve these gains. The panel

concluded therefore that the 'approaches to supporting educational gains' feature is very high quality.

## **Overall: Silver**

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

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

When deciding whether the overall rating should be 'Bronze' or 'Silver', the panel considered all the evidence across all the features and judged the evidence to show, on the whole, there to be typically a combination of very high and outstanding quality provision for all groups of students and courses.