



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

The Trafford College Group

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Bronze

Typically, the experience students have at The Trafford College Group 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:

- very high quality teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are effective in supporting students' learning, progression, and attainment
- very high quality support for staff professional development, and the promotion of excellent academic practice.

Student outcomes: Bronze

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

Very high quality features include:

- very high rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses
- very high rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses.

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

The Trafford College Group is a large further education college, with a small higher education provision. The college operates across five campuses and has grown considerably over the last five years, through a few mergers. The provider states that its higher education provision provides helpful and transformational opportunities for the communities that it serves.

Students are evenly split between full and part-time study, and numbers have declined steadily for both full and part-time students over the assessment period – from around 470 in each mode of study in 2017-18 to around 275 in 2020-21.

Many students are drawn from local areas with lower rates of participation in higher education, and 75 per cent of students are mature, with an average age of 27. Students often work and care for families alongside studying.

In 2020-21, just over a quarter (27.4 per cent) of students declared a learning difficulty or disability, which the provider states is significantly above the sector average of 15 per cent. The proportion of males and females is fairly evenly split at 48 and 52 per cent respectively.

The provider submission outlined some recent challenges faced by the college group. The previous history of the college (as Stockport College) prior to 2018 saw quality issues in both further and higher education provision. The provider recognises the previous challenges around the quality of higher education and explained that this means that some of the indicators within the TEF assessment window include data from the period of time highlighted and relate to provision that is no longer offered.

The assessment considered information about 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: 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.

Across the student experience aspect, the panel found:

- two features are very high quality
- there was not enough evidence to judge five features as very high quality
- none of the features were considered to be of concern.

The panel applied the ratings criteria and found the 'best fit' rating to be 'Bronze'. This is because some features of the aspect 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

The panel considered this feature to be very high quality.

The 'teaching on my course' and 'assessment and feedback' indicators provided initial evidence of a very high quality feature overall.

The provider submission noted that '[its] teaching and learning approaches are based on meeting its students' individual needs and adapting appropriate pedagogical strategies' and that 'there is much evidence that acknowledges that non-traditional approaches are often needed when teaching mature students, many of whom have not been in education for many years and require a more holistic approach to their educational needs'. However, there was limited detail about what these pedagogic strategies are, or how the holistic approach is implemented in practice.

The panel noted comments from teaching observations, which include references to highly effective approaches. However, the panel was unable to tell from these how widespread the practices were – for example, across the different programmes of study. With respect to assessment and feedback, the provider noted that its 2021-22 annual survey of all undergraduate students highlighted that 95 per cent strongly agreed that 'feedback on my work has been timely and helps me to improve'.

Overall, the panel considered that the provider has embedded very high quality teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are effective in supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment. The panel considered this feature to be very high quality.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

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

The panel noted that the indicators for 'teaching on my course' described above imply that most students are satisfied with their experiences of being taught. In its submission, the provider does refer to its quality assurance processes and provides some external examiner comments relating

to course design. However, there was insufficient evidence with respect to course content and delivery, and student engagement and stretch for the provider's mix of students and courses.

Due to this lack of evidence, the panel could not judge whether course content and delivery have been effective in encouraging the provider's students to engage in their learning, stretch their understanding and develop their knowledge and skills. The panel therefore concluded that there was insufficient evidence of a very high quality feature.

Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

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

The provider submission included references to the use of research, professional practice and industry expertise and how this impacts the academic experience. Evidence provided includes:

- staff 'where appropriate' spend time in the workplace, with 25 per cent of higher education staff completing a five-day industry engagement
- scholarly practice of staff includes the production of an annual scholarship journal and contributions to peer-reviewed conferences, textbooks, and journals.

The panel considered there was limited evidence of a systematic approach to the delivery of higher education with respect to research, innovation, and/or employer engagement. There was however some evidence that professional practice and scholarship are embedded in the provider's strategic activities.

The panel concluded that, overall, there was insufficient evidence that the provider has used research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement to contribute to a very high quality academic experience for its students.

Staff professional development and academic practice

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The provider submission outlined work undertaken to promote staff to be academic professionals, with many of them holding 'dual professionalism' as they have worked in the industry that they are now teaching. The submission highlighted staff development and the promotion of excellent academic practice in various places, for example:

- annual developmental peer observations and curriculum reviews by an independent review team
- development activities linked to the college staff training and development framework
- adoption of the Association of Colleges national scholarship project, providing a framework for scholarly activity
- a Scholarly Lead supporting staff development; commissioning of scholarship projects; a higher education learning and teaching staff portal and annual staff awards

- all staff achieved or are working towards a teaching qualification within two years of appointment.

Overall, the panel judged that there is very high quality support for staff professional development and that excellent academic practice is promoted, making this a very high quality feature.

Learning environment and academic support

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

The indicator for 'academic support' did not provide initial evidence of a very high quality feature.

The evidence in the provider submission included:

- the provision of tutor support, with five tutorials a year
- a College Success Framework, whereby the higher education support team 'works holistically with curriculum teams', and undertakes 'in-year rigorous assessment of student progress'. There was little detail, however, about how this is implemented to support students.

The panel concluded that, overall, there was insufficient evidence that the provider fosters a supportive learning environment or that all or most of its students have access to a readily available range of very high quality academic support.

Learning resources

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

The 'learning resources' indicator did not provide initial evidence of a very high quality feature, although the panel noted improved performance from year three to year four of the assessment period.

The provider submission outlined a £30m investment in physical and digital learning resources, including an arts factory, library, social spaces, green construction centre and cybersecurity digital. However, there was limited explanation of how this is impacting the higher education student experience.

Overall, the panel concluded that there was insufficient evidence that physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning. As a result, the panel were unable to judge this feature as very high quality.

Student engagement in improvement

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

The full-time 'student voice' indicator did not provide initial evidence of a very high quality feature.

Evidence presented in the provider submission included:

- an internal survey (no uptake reported) shows that 94 per cent of students agreed that staff 'value their views about their course'

- staff and students co-research and undertake community-based projects, although this is not quantified.

There was limited detail about the scope of this work - either internally or externally - or about the extent to which student engagement has led to specific improvements in the experiences and outcomes of the provider's students. Overall, therefore, the panel concluded there was insufficient evidence that this feature is very high quality.

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.

Across the student outcomes aspect the panel found:

- two features are very high quality
- there was not enough evidence to judge four features as very high quality
- none of the features were determined to be of concern.

The panel applied the ratings criteria and considered the best fit rating to be 'Bronze'. This is because some features of the aspect are very high quality for most groups of students. The panel found there was too much variability in terms of the outcomes across different student groups to be able to judge the aspect as typically very high quality.

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

Approaches to supporting student success

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

The provider explained that it has 'a curriculum [which] is careers-focused, co-created and co-delivered with employers and informed by scholarship and industry-updating'. There was, however, little detail about the impact this is having on students' outcomes. The provider referred to 'student tracking and monitoring which supports and enables', but again limited detail was given on how these are used to support students effectively.

The provider submission explained that work-based learning is provided through credit bearing modules for all Foundation Degree students and many Higher National students, although limited information was provided about how much work-based learning students engage in. The provider submission referred to significant investment in this area, for example in a dedicated higher education employability and placement officer, careers advice and guidance support, but the panel noted that there was not yet clear evidence of the impact of this investment.

Overall, the panel concluded that there was insufficient evidence that the provider effectively supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies, and therefore judged there to be insufficient evidence that this is a very high quality feature.

Continuation and completion rates

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The 'continuation' indicators for full-time and part-time students provided evidence of a very high quality feature.

The 'completion' indicator for full-time students did not provide evidence of very high quality, while for part-time students the indicator provided evidence of outstanding quality.

Taken together, given the balance of part-time and full-time student numbers, the panel judged that although this does not apply to all student groups, there was sufficient evidence that this feature is very high quality overall, and that there are typically very high rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses.

Progression rates

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

Taken together the panel considered the 'progression' indicators for full-time and part-time students to provide evidence that there are typically very high rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses, and that overall this is a very high quality feature.

Intended educational gains

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

The provider submission referred to the higher skills strategy, and a 'college-wide approach to ensuring that every student... gains knowledge, skills and attributes needed to navigate through life and work'. Support for placement and careers guidance was not explained in detail with respect to students' different courses and personal goals.

The submission included external examiners' comments referring to diverse skills development, 'projects [that] allow for students to discover who they are as creative practitioners' and 'the development of different skills required at both levels' through the curriculum. These were considered to be useful illustrative references, but the panel was unable to infer the extent to which the comments were representative across all programmes and cohorts.

Overall, the panel considered there was insufficient evidence presented of an articulation of the educational gains the provider intends its students to achieve, and why these are relevant to its students, to conclude that this is a very high quality feature.

Approaches to supporting educational gains; and Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

The panel considered these two features together, and found insufficient evidence that they are very high quality.

The provider submission referred to the tracking of students' educational progress but not in relation to wider skills and gains. The indicators provide evidence of achievement, but the provider submission did not make clear in its submission how it effectively supports its students, including through wider learning opportunities. The submission referred to the provider's inclusion of 'real world experience as part of the course' as part of its future strategy across all higher education programmes.

Overall, the panel concluded there was insufficient evidence to judge that the provider has effectively supported its students to achieve the intended gains, and insufficient evidence that the provider evaluates the gains made by its students.

Overall: Bronze

Applying the guidance, the panel judged the overall best fit rating to be 'Bronze'. This is because the panel awarded a 'Bronze' rating to both the student experience aspect and the student outcomes aspect.

In reaching an overall rating decision of 'Bronze', the panel concluded that the student experience and student outcomes are typically high quality, and there are some very high quality features.