



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

University of Southampton

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Silver

Typically, the experience students have at the University of Southampton 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, feedback and assessment practices that support students' learning, progression, and attainment
- course content and delivery that engages and stretches students
- the use of research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement
- very high quality support for staff professional development and the promotion of excellent academic practice
- physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning
- effective engagement with students, leading to improvements to their experiences and outcomes.

There is also an outstanding quality feature:

- a supportive learning environment in which students have access to a wide and readily available range of outstanding quality academic support tailored to their needs.

Student outcomes: Silver

Student outcomes are typically very high quality.

Very high quality features include:

- effective support for students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies
- very high rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses
- the provider's articulation of the educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why these are relevant to its students
- effective support for students to achieve the intended educational gains
- the provider evaluates the educational gains made by its students.

There is also an outstanding quality feature:

- outstanding rates of continuation and completion 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
- 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 Southampton describes its teaching ethos as a 'triple helix', which it defines as the 'strengthening of connections between education, research, knowledge exchange and enterprise'. It states that its values 'revolve around equity, global impact and social responsibility'.

The provider had an average of 15,400 full-time, undergraduate students during each year of the TEF period, plus a small number of part-time undergraduates: 130 in the first year of the period, decreasing to just 30 in the final year. Approximately 23 per cent of undergraduates are studying undergraduate degrees with postgraduate components.

The largest subject area is Engineering (16.4 per cent of undergraduates), then Medicine and Dentistry, followed by Business. Other large subjects include Nursing and Midwifery, and Biosciences.

The significant majority (91 per cent) of undergraduate students are under 21 at the time of entry. The majority of students are white, with Asian being the second-largest ethnicity, followed by mixed ethnic background, then black.

The largest number of students are from the highest (i.e. least deprived) of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation quintiles (IMD), with the number decreasing in each quintile, and 16 per cent of full-time students being in the most deprived two quintiles. There is a higher level of deprivation in the small part-time undergraduate population, with 41 per cent of these being in the two most deprived quintiles, and 41 per cent being local prior to entry, while 6 per cent of all undergraduates are local prior to entry.

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 <https://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 that the student academic experience is typically very high quality for the provider's mix of students and courses. Across the student experience aspect, the panel found:

- six features that are very high quality
- one feature that is outstanding quality
- compelling evidence that the very high quality and outstanding quality features apply to all the provider's groups of students, although there are some subjects for which indicator evidence suggests notable variations (both positive and negative) in quality.

The panel applied the ratings criteria and considered the best fit rating to be 'Silver'. This is because most features are very high quality.

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, but noted that there were some elements which were not very high quality.

The 'teaching on my course' and 'assessment and feedback' indicators for full-time students provided compelling initial evidence of a very high quality feature, with split indicators showing that this is also the case for most student characteristics.

The provider submission highlights that both indicators were stronger in the last two years of the four-year TEF period, which the university says is because of a specific approach aimed at improving quality.

There is some variability at subject level, with weaker quality in eight of the provider's 27 subject areas for 'teaching on my course', and for 10 of the 27 subjects for 'assessment and feedback', albeit with uncertainty in the data in some places.

The provider submission describes engaging students in real-world problems and providing authentic experiences and assessments, with supportive comments from external examiners. It also details a project aimed at improving assessment and feedback in specific subjects. The student submission says there are 'many examples of excellent teaching across the university', but adds that 'teaching can vary between modules' and that 'student feedback on poor teaching is not always taken seriously'.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel judged that the provider has embedded very high quality teaching, assessment and feedback practices that are effective in supporting its students' learning, progression and attainment, although noted some examples which were not very high quality, particularly from the student submission.

The panel considered that there is insufficient evidence to suggest an outstanding feature because the practices are not yet fully embedded across all of the provider's subjects, and instead considered this to be a very high quality feature.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

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

The provider submission describes a range of ways in which both the curriculum and its delivery engages students. Very high quality practices identified by the panel include research-led teaching; access to research facilities; and use of both the Royal Society's Entrepreneur in Residence scheme and the Royal Academy of Engineering's Visiting Professor scheme. It also described field trips and industry visits, as well as interdisciplinary elective modules, including on sustainability.

The panel noted a significant increase in students undertaking integrated masters' programmes over the last 10 years, which the provider presents as evidence of stretch. The provider submission also includes comments from external sources which support its narrative regarding student engagement in learning and stretch.

Overall, the panel concluded that course content and delivery inspire the provider's students to engage in their learning, and stretch students to develop their knowledge and skills, but did not find sufficient evidence that students were actively engaged in their learning across all subjects. On balance, the panel considered this to be a very high quality feature.

Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

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

In its submission, the provider highlights its research-intensive nature, such as its Research Excellence Framework performance, and says that it focuses on research-led education. The panel also noted that all degree programmes offer an individual research project or dissertation, and that the provider offers internal research internships focused on key institutional priorities.

A relatively small number of students go on industrial placements, although others engage in substantial industrial projects within their course. There is also an extra-curricular offer, particularly in the Business School, and a knowledge exchange and entrepreneurial pathway built into programmes, but the panel found limited evidence on it.

The provider submission indicates that there are a number of partnerships with industry, employers and start-ups which support the development of education programmes. There are 39 professional, statutory and regulatory body recognitions across 120 undergraduate programmes, although it is not clear what proportion of the student body this represents.

The panel noted that there was no mention of the use of research in contributing to the academic experience in the student submission.

Overall, the panel considered that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the provider uses research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement to contribute to a very high quality academic experience for its students. As a result, the panel concluded that this was a very high quality feature.

Staff professional development and academic practice

The panel considered this to be a very high quality feature, with some evidence of potentially outstanding quality.

The provider submission details £1.4 million of investment in a Centre for Higher Education Practice during the TEF assessment period, with the staff working alongside the digital education team. Staff on academic probation are required to obtain a PGCert in academic practice, and there is a portfolio route to fellowships. Funds are provided for additional mentoring and support for those aiming at associate fellow status, and there are three types of annual awards celebrating educational excellence, one of which is more than 10 years old. The provider states that it was one of the first in the sector to create an education-focussed career pathway.

The student submission notes a high volume of nominations in the 'most engaging lecturer' category of recent awards run by the student union, which highlights the enthusiasm of academic staff in their teaching practice.

Overall, the panel considered that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that there is at least very high quality support for staff professional development and that excellent academic practice is promoted, with some evidence showing potentially outstanding quality.

Learning environment and academic support

The 'academic support' indicator for full-time students provided compelling initial evidence of a very high quality feature, which is consistent across most student characteristics. It also shows an improvement year-on-year through the TEF period, which the provider states is the result of a new approach.

There is some variability in the indicator at subject level, with 12 of the provider's 27 subjects showing evidence of higher quality than the average, although with different degrees of certainty in the data.

The provider and the student submissions supplement the indicator evidence by providing evidence of outstanding practice, such as the creation of a new student engagement team and student communication team, and investment of £21.3 million in 2021-22 in improving academic support and delivery. Further evidence of tailored support for students includes:

- personalised learning plans for disabled students
- mentorship and a bespoke transitions package for students with experience of care
- a student hub available as a first point of contact for support, which is open in person and digitally, 24/7, 365 days a year
- 26 per cent of all university staff having undertaken training in welfare, mental health or safeguarding in 2021
- a programme, called BeActive, for building resilience and wellbeing.

The panel considered that the indicator provided initial evidence of very high quality academic support. Taking into account the evidence of outstanding quality in the submissions, the panel's

overall conclusion was that the provider ensures a supportive learning environment and its students have access to a wide and readily available range of outstanding quality academic support tailored to their needs. The panel considered this an outstanding feature.

Learning resources

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

For full-time students, the 'learning resources' indicator provided compelling initial evidence of a very high quality feature, which is consistent for most student characteristics. There is some variability in indicators for certain subjects, with Computing particularly low and others, mainly Humanities and Languages subjects, notably higher.

The provider and the student submissions provide further evidence of a very high quality feature, such as use by undergraduate students of the wide range of research equipment available at the provider, as part of project work in particular; as well as investment in physical and digital facilities, including improved provision for virtual learning. The student submission noted that lecture capture is not yet being used consistently across the provider.

The provider submission also notes that it is very mindful of digital poverty and used hardship funds to ensure that students did not experience this during the pandemic. The student submission states that feedback around online learning was mixed, providing some evidence of not very high quality resources, alongside examples of good practice.

The panel considered the learning resources indicator to provide initial evidence of very high quality, and that the submissions provide further such evidence, but did not consider that there was sufficient evidence of outstanding quality.

Overall, the panel concluded that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning. Accordingly, the panel considered this to be a very high quality feature.

Student engagement in improvement

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

The 'student voice' indicator for full-time undergraduates provided compelling initial evidence of a very high quality feature, although unlike other indicators considered by the panel, it has shown a decline over the four year TEF period. There are some courses for which it is lower, and it is also lower for the roughly 3,000 undergraduate students with postgraduate components in their course.

The provider submission explains that the university provides the student union a grant to support its activities, and delivers activities in partnership with the union. There are a number of student panels, and a student representative system which was identified as an area of good practice in a 2020 internal audit of student engagement.

The student submission provides examples of where the student voice has been particularly strong, including the decision to return to in-person exams and the refund of hall residence fees during the pandemic.

The panel considered the indicators to provide initial evidence of very high quality, with the provider and student submissions adding evidence regarding the partnership with students, including students from underrepresented groups.

While the panel did not consider that there was sufficient evidence of outstanding quality, it did conclude that the provider effectively engages with its students, leading to improvements to the experiences and outcomes of its students. On balance, the panel considered this to be 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 judged there to be evidence of typically very high quality student outcomes. The panel considered and weighed up all the evidence, and across the student outcomes aspect found that five of the six features were of very high quality (one of which had some outstanding elements), and one was outstanding.

The panel considered there to be compelling evidence in the indicators, and the provider and student submissions, that the very high quality and outstanding features apply to all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

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

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, with some examples of outstanding quality.

The provider submission details that it has recently launched a project with a focus on continuous improvement in student outcomes, as well as a number of practices which could be considered very high quality, including:

- the creation of a new careers, employability and student enterprise directorate
- a career readiness survey taken by students, to help identify career planning needs
- providing co-curricular opportunities with recognition of their role in developing employability and transferrable skills
- career coaching programmes
- support for up to 500 internships per annum.

In addition, features which the panel considered outstanding include:

- a scholars programme which financially supports marginalised and underrepresented students going into postgraduate study
- an early warning system for student engagement
- e-mentoring to connect students and recent graduates with careers advice and expertise, as part of a specific programme for students from underrepresented groups.

The student submission acknowledges that gaps in progression across the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintiles were narrowing, and that continuation for quintile one was equal to that for students in quintile five.

The panel noted that there was some evidence of outstanding practice, but considering the evidence in the round, judged that this feature is of very high quality and that the provider effectively supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies.

Continuation and completion rates

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The 'continuation' and 'completion' indicators for full-time students both provide initial evidence of outstanding quality, with a high degree of consistency for most students. The provider submission highlights that these indicators are on an upward trajectory over the assessment period.

The panel considered that there is sufficient evidence that there are outstanding rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses and as such, concluded that this was an outstanding quality feature.

Progression rates

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

For full-time students, the 'progression' indicator provides initial evidence of very high quality, with a high degree of consistency across split indicators. The panel also noted that for two of the provider's large subjects – Medicine and Dentistry, and Nursing and Midwifery – the split indicators gave evidence of outstanding quality.

The panel concluded that there is sufficient evidence that there are very high rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses. Overall, the panel considered this to be a very high quality feature.

Intended educational gains

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

Within the provider submission, educational gain is articulated in a 'triple helix' model, with students benefitting from the university community's mix of research, enterprise, and knowledge exchange, and in which people are valued for a range of contributions to excellence.

The provider submission describes a number of activities which encourage students to develop their entrepreneurial skills, although the evidence suggests that these are taken up by a relatively small proportion of students.

The panel considered there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the provider articulates the range of educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why these are relevant to its students. Overall, the panel concluded that this was a very high quality feature.

Approaches to supporting educational gains

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

The provider submission articulates a focus on developing skills which can be directly applied to the workplace. Examples of how this is achieved include placements and internships on accredited programmes, coursework briefs being set by employers in the Business School, and participation in an international trading competition.

The student submission confirms that there are numerous opportunities for students to engage in activities to enhance their personal development.

The panel considered there is sufficient evidence that the provider effectively supports its students to achieve the gains it has articulated and as such considered this to be a very high quality feature.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

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

The provider submission articulates its approach to external validation and accreditation of learning, both within and outside of the curriculum, with several qualitative examples being described. There is also an emphasis on preparing students for a digital future through use of digital tools and the provider's virtual learning environment.

Other practices in the provider submission which the panel judged could be considered very high quality include: multidisciplinary modules on social impact and sustainability; volunteering in a range of different projects; and other opportunities provided through various student groups and societies. The submission also explains that in 2021, the provider began a scheme to measure employability learning gain.

Overall, the panel considered that there is sufficient evidence that the provider evaluates the gains made by its students. It considered this a very high quality rather than outstanding feature as the panel did not find evidence that the provider is demonstrating that its students are successful in achieving the intended gains yet, and also found that the articulation of systematic educational gain was at an earlier stage of development. Accordingly, the panel concluded that this was a very high quality feature.

Overall: Silver

The panel considered the overall 'best fit' rating to be 'Silver'.

The panel noted the guidance, and that it had considered the student experience aspect rating to be 'Silver' and the student outcomes aspect rating to be 'Silver'.

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 an overall rating decision of 'Silver' for the provider.

In reaching this decision, the panel considered there to be compelling evidence that the outstanding and very high quality features apply to all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.