



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

University of Sheffield

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Silver

Typically, the experience students have at the University of Sheffield 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:

- embedding of very high quality teaching, feedback and assessment practices
- course content and delivery effectively encourages the provider's students to engage in their learning, and stretch them to develop their knowledge and skills
- research in relevant disciplines and employer engagement
- effective engagement with students, leading to improvements to their experiences and outcomes.

There are also some outstanding quality features including:

- support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice
- physical and virtual learning resources are tailored and used effectively
- a supportive learning environment is ensured, and students have access to outstanding quality academic support.

Student outcomes: Silver

Student outcomes are typically very high quality.

Very high quality features include:

- effective supports for students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies
- rates of progression
- articulation of intended gains for the provider's mix of students
- effective evaluation of these educational gains.

There are also some outstanding quality features including:

- rate of continuation and completion
- effective support for students to achieve the provider's intended 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
- 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 Sheffield sets out its mission as a research-intensive Russell Group university, providing excellent student experiences and outcomes, with a key focus on 'contributing to the local and regional economies through enterprise and innovation'.

It describes the diversity of its student body, with a number of disabled students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds, as well as many students entering with high level qualifications. It states that most of its students attend because 'they want to progress in their careers and study at a leading university'.

It is relatively large, with 18,910 full-time and 130 part-time undergraduate students in 2020-21. The provider also offers offshore transnational education provision alongside degree apprenticeship provision. It is notable that 36 per cent of the total student population are international students from over 140 different countries.

The provider offers a wide range of subject areas, with Engineering and Medicine and Dentistry being the two largest areas.

90.4 per cent of full-time students are under 21 years, and there is a fairly even split of male to female students. Most are white, and there is a relatively high level of qualification on entry, with 28.9 per cent of full-time undergraduates entering on A-Levels of ABB or higher.

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

Full details about the provider's student demographics used in the TEF 2023 assessment are available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/data-used-in-tef-2023/.

More information about this provider can be found on the OfS Register at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/the-register/the-ofs-register/.

Student experience: Silver

Throughout this section, we refer to indicators. These indicators are based on students' responses to the National Student Survey. The indicators are 'benchmarked' to show how well the provider performs for its particular mix of students and courses.

The panel considered and weighed up the evidence across the provider, then considered the extent to which there are very high quality features across the aspect as a whole, and how far these features apply across the provider's student groups and the range of courses and subjects.

It found:

- four features to be very high quality
- three features to be outstanding.

The provider submission demonstrates a clear understanding of its students and describes approaches that exceed the minimum quality requirements.

There is no explanation in the narrative submission of particular instances of under performance against indicators, notably the business subject area, which shows evidence of provision below the level of very high quality for all indicators except 'learning resources'. The panel discussed inconsistencies in quality across the scope of courses and used these to form its decisions on features of very high or outstanding quality.

The panel recommends the 'best fit' rating category for this aspect is 'Silver' because it 'best fits' the description that 'all 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 to be a very high quality feature.

The indicators for 'teaching on my course' and 'assessment and feedback' provide compelling initial evidence of very high quality for full-time students, and that this applies to most groups and courses (with some exceptions).

There is evidence of provision below the level of very high quality for part-time students but because of the limited data and small numbers of students the panel gave limited weight to this.

Some subject groups vary significantly.

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- embedded initiatives that support the aspiration for excellence in teaching and learning are described through a structure that is driven by a 'strategic delivery framework'
- a credible account of an institution-wide approach to delivering and improving teaching, feedback and assessment practices. It describes a strategy that prioritises research-

informed teaching and employability, especially through strong links with industry, and a truly inclusive culture that supports students from a range of backgrounds.

The student submission highlights strengths but also gives a range of examples of inconsistencies in delivery across different programmes.

Overall, the panel judged that the provider has embedded very high quality teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are effective in supporting its students' learning, progression and attainment. It did not find this feature to be outstanding because there are certain subject areas which fall below very high quality in the data indicators and there are also inconsistencies in initiative delivery.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

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

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- enhancements at programme level in areas such as assessment load, and curriculum design and content
- initiatives within some subjects that support a contemporary approach to curriculum, such as sustainability in engineering and decolonisation in the humanities
- its programme level approach to curriculum design helps departments to tailor learning in a way that stretches and challenges students, and in which educational gain is both defined and measurable
- all programmes are 'designed to meet sector and professional body requirements, with clearly articulated learning outcomes'
- references to National Student Survey data that students feel stimulated and challenged, with almost 86 per cent agreeing that their 'course is intellectually stimulating'
- students are stimulated through delivery via 'lectures, seminars, laboratory classes, field trips, flipped lectures, and a mix of synchronous and asynchronous problem based and group learning'.

Overall, the panel judged that the very high quality course content and delivery effectively encourage the provider's students to engage in their learning and stretch students to develop their knowledge and skills.

It found insufficient evidence to suggest an outstanding feature because there was a lack of evidence provided to conclude that the quality of the initiatives inspire the provider's student to commit to their learning and stretch students to develop knowledge and skills to their fullest potential.

Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

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

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- details of initiatives from a range of subject areas that are supported by data that suggests relatively high levels of engagement
- a specialist scheme, SURE, which ‘allows students to experience novel research and to become involved in real-life research projects’
- employers ‘routinely contribute to the development, delivery and review of programmes’
- active work to support business innovation, with a focus on undertaking high quality research and knowledge exchange with local companies
- in the most recent Research Excellence Framework, 92 per cent of the provider’s research was rated in the highest two categories, meaning it was classed as world-leading or internationally excellent.

The panel judged that on the basis of the available evidence provided, the provider uses research in relevant disciplines, and employer engagement to contribute to a very high quality academic experience for its students, and there are opportunities for students to engage with contemporary research and professional practice.

The panel did not consider this to be an outstanding feature because even though it noted that students are immersed in an intensive research environment, there was insufficient evidence relating to the impact of this on student experience, and insufficient evidence in the student submission to understand the student perspective on the quality of this feature to consider this as outstanding.

Staff professional development and academic practice

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- the Academic Career Pathways framework reinforces the importance of teaching practice as a pillar in academic staff promotion and career progression, making sure that teaching is not only valued by all academic staff but also as a path toward career progression
- in the three years to 2021-22, 68 staff were promoted via the teaching pathway, with 2021-22 showing the highest number of teaching specific promotions over the last five years
- more than 75 per cent of teaching staff hold doctorates
- examples of support for staff professional development embedded across the provider is evidenced by teaching practices being an integral part of both the ‘teaching and research’ and ‘teaching specialist’ contracts.

The panel came to the judgement that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that there is outstanding support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is embedded across the provider.

Learning environment and academic support

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The overall indicator for 'academic support' provides compelling evidence of very high quality for full-time students.

For part-time students this varied, but as the student numbers are small, the panel gave limited weight to this evidence.

The provider submission describes a supportive and equitable learning environment for students with tailored academic support put in place to address their needs.

It also points to 'extensive resources available to ensure that barriers to students being able to engage positively with their learning are removed and/or their learning enriched. All taught students have a named personal academic tutor throughout their studies'.

Support is provided by the central academic skills centre, although the student submission does say that not all students are aware of what is offered there.

The panel came to the judgement that there is sufficient evidence to suggest 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.

Learning resources

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The indicator for 'learning resources' provides evidence of outstanding quality for full-time students, but also some evidence of very high quality – suggesting at least very high quality overall.

Part-time student data is not available.

Evidence provided in the student and provider submissions includes:

- a detailed account of its extensive library that occupies four sites across campus, providing access to over one million physical items and around 3,500 study spaces, and a Digital Exhibition Space allows students to 'disseminate their innovations'
- a variety of co-curricular spaces designed to enhance students' learning experiences and to help them to build on skills and knowledge developed within the curriculum
- the virtual learning environment is subject to a policy of ongoing enhancements. The provider describes cutting-edge resources and an approach to digital initiatives that is aligned with curriculum delivery through its 'digital core essentials' initiative.

Considering all the available evidence, the panel concluded that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that physical and virtual learning resources are tailored and used effectively to support outstanding teaching and learning.

Student engagement in improvement

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

The overall indicator for full-time students for 'student engagement' provides strong evidence of very high quality, as well as some evidence of outstanding quality. The panel saw this as compelling initial evidence that 'student engagement' is at least very high quality. This evidence applies to most student groups, although this varies for some groups, and three subjects show evidence of provision that is not very high quality.

The overall indicators for apprenticeship and part-time students provide evidence of outstanding quality.

Evidence in the provider and student submissions includes:

- the provider cites around 1,000 student representatives under a newly devised system developed with the students' union. This is a significant number of around one in 20 students taking on a representative role
- that 'students are involved in every stage of how we design, deliver, review and improve our academic programmes and the wider student experience'
- the student submission echoes a number of positives, but also points out that there is some uncompromising behaviour in certain parts of the provider.

The panel did not consider this to be an outstanding feature. In part this was because the student submission notes that there are inconsistencies in the breadth/reach of initiatives concerning student engagement and voice across the institution. This and other evidence sources led the panel to conclude that student engagement is not embedded in the student experience, which is required to be outstanding for this feature. The panel however did consider that the provider is effectively engaged with students across most subject areas, leading to improvements to the experiences and outcomes of its students.

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 the best fit rating category for this aspect to be 'Silver'.

It discussed how far the very high quality and outstanding features of student outcomes apply to all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups and across the provider's range of courses and subjects. It found that the features apply broadly to all of the provider's groups of students, and across most subject areas.

It found:

- four features to be very high quality
- two features to be outstanding.

After considering all the available evidence, the panel considered its assessment 'best fits' the statement 'all 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

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

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- as part of a programme level approach, the provider has 'strengthened the emphasis on skills development and employability across our curriculum and invested to ensure that this impacts the experience of every student across the whole student lifecycle'
- effective support embedded for students to continue, succeed and progress from its courses
- placements are being developed for those students who are looking to undertake opportunities outside of the curriculum
- there has been a redesign of the first two years of the aerospace curriculum to account for fast moving changes in the sector, ensuring that graduates remain highly employable with the right balance of technical and professional skills
- in 2021-22, 8,000 students had individual or group engagement with alumni from 56 countries. Alumni also supported over 450 alumni-student e-mentoring partnerships.

The panel judged that this was a very high quality feature because the provider effectively supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies. It did not consider this feature to be outstanding as there was not sufficient evidence that the provider tailors its approach to the different starting points of its students or the different demographics of its students.

Continuation and completion rates

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The indicator for 'continuation' provides evidence of outstanding quality, and that this applies to all student groups and courses, except one.

The indicator for 'completion' provides evidence of very high quality, with 100 per cent certainty. This applies to most of the student groups and courses, with a few exceptions.

The panel discussed the courses that were below the typical level of quality, and how the Continuing Professional Development courses mitigate these.

Based on the fact that there was minimal supplementary evidence provided for this feature in the submissions, the panel placed weight on the indicator data values, and found this feature to be outstanding overall.

Progression rates

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

The indicator for 'progression' provides initial evidence of very high quality for full-time students for most groups and courses – but there are some subjects that show outstanding quality, and some that are significantly below the level of very high quality.

No supplementary evidence was provided for this feature in the narrative submissions, so the panel placed weight on the indicator data values, and decided that overall, the feature was very high quality.

Intended educational gains

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

The panel noted that there is a brief but clear outline of educational gain in the provider submission with a detailed graphic representation of its dimensions.

The provider understands educational gain 'in the context of the development of the whole student' and says: 'we support students to focus on, and track, the development of their academic skills, the contribution they make within communities, and the personal attributes they will need for the future'.

It also articulates a recently revised set of graduate attributes, divided into three categories that link to self, learning and impact. The provider does not explain directly why these are relevant to its students.

The panel found that while the provider articulated intended gains for its mix of students, it did not articulate why these are highly relevant to its students and their future ambitions – so it judged this feature to be very high quality, rather than outstanding.

Approaches to supporting educational gains

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- how the provider offers a range of careers development opportunities. The Careers Service is 'sector leading' and 'committed to providing both students and graduates with the careers information, advice and guidance they need for as long as they need it, with no fixed period after graduation when these services are withdrawn'
- that there is support through the MySkills tool for students which 'is a fully interactive portfolio tool'

- that all programmes are required to embed Sheffield Graduate Attributes (SGAs) in discipline appropriate ways, to make sure that students are developing more than just discipline based knowledge
- that all undergraduate students can take a placement year, or a study abroad year, as part of their programme of study.

The student submission details the 'Give it a Go' programme of diverse extracurricular activities running throughout the year, which help with the development of confidence, social capital, caring mentorship and challenging existing ways of thinking supporting progression beyond university.

In addition to this, it is acknowledged in the provider submission that low confidence and imposter syndrome in academic and/or workplace settings are common barriers to entry and progression for underrepresented students, so pre-internship workshops, payment and wrap-around mentorship provided by the Transforming and Activating Places team exemplifies equitability.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel found that this feature was of outstanding quality.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

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

The provider submission explains that the evaluation process of educational gains starts at registration, where 'we measure 'career confidence' for each of our incoming students, and then again annually as part of the re-registration process by asking a series of questions to understand how 'ready' they feel in terms of identifying and pursuing their preferred careers'.

It also explains how the institution is able to track the student journey over the student lifecycle. The panel noted that it is not fully clear how this maps to the full range of educational gains, but appreciated that this is an area still in development.

The panel considered that there appears to be the foundations of an effective system for evaluating educational gains, and therefore concluded that this feature could be judged as a very high quality feature. It did not find it to be outstanding, because there was insufficient evidence provided that demonstrates that the majority of its students are succeeding in achieving their intended gains.

Overall: Silver

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

It weighed the student experience and student outcome 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 overall.

The panel found most student experience features to be of very high quality for all groups of students and courses with some features to be outstanding. Most student outcomes features are of very high quality and there are also some outstanding features.

It judged the overall rating to be 'Silver' because the same 'Silver' ratings applied for both aspects and both are typically very high quality. It also considered there to be compelling evidence that the outstanding and very high quality features apply to most of the provider's groups of students.