



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

## **Summary TEF 2023 panel statement**

**University of Sunderland**

# Summary of outcomes

## Overall: Silver

Typically, the experience students have at University of Sunderland 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:

- engaging course content and delivery
- physical and virtual learning resources that are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning.

There are also some outstanding quality features (though these do not apply to all student groups) including:

- outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment practice, which are highly effective and tailored
- the use of research, professional practice and employer engagement
- support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice embedded across the provider
- a supportive learning environment, with access to a wide and readily available range of outstanding quality academic support tailored to student needs
- engagement with students is embedded across the institution leading to continuous improvements to students' experiences and outcomes.

### Student outcomes: Silver

Student outcomes are typically very high quality.

Very high quality features include:

- very high rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses
- very high rates of progression for the provider's students and courses
- the educational gains that the provider intends its students to achieve are clear, and relevant to its students' ambitions
- effective support of students to achieve the intended educational gains.

There is also an outstanding quality feature:

- highly effective approaches around student success and progression beyond studies, which are tailored to student needs.

## 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

Each year, the University of Sunderland has around 12,000 undergraduates, of which around 800 are part-time, and 600 are apprentices. 6,000 undergraduate students study off campus, mostly on franchised programmes, with some on a Hong Kong campus. 4,000 students also study on a London campus.

The provider's stated emphasis is on 'student focussed, profession facing and society shaping' provision, aiming to contribute to the growth of the North East region of England. The provider describes a diverse demographic of students with a large proportion of local, commuting students.

The majority of students study at undergraduate level, with 75 per cent studying full-time and 12 per cent studying part-time. Approximately a third of full-time students study business and management. Health is another main subject area, including health and social care, nursing and midwifery and allied health. The remainder of students study a mix of subjects including computing, engineering, creative arts and design, law, and psychology.

The assessment considered information about the provider's undergraduate courses and students on those courses. Although some data was available for apprenticeships, the provider submission did not include specific evidence about them, so they were not considered in the scope of the assessment. Overseas provision, including the Hong Kong Campus, while extensive, was also not included in the provider submission and was therefore also excluded from the panel's 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: 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 the student experience is typically very high quality for the provider's mix of students and courses. Across the student experience aspect, the panel found:

- that the majority of features are outstanding quality, though not all student groups experienced consistently outstanding quality provision
- two very high quality features
- the very high quality and outstanding features applied to different demographic groups of students, including those from underrepresented groups.

The panel applied the criteria and considered that the rating with the best fit is 'Silver', deciding that its assessment of the aspect best fits the description: 'all features of the aspect are very high quality for most groups of students'.

The panel did not think that 'Gold' was the best fit, because it did not find that 'all features of the aspect are outstanding quality for most groups of students'. This is because, while two features were very high quality and overall, several features were below the level of very high quality for certain groups of students at subject level.

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.

For full-time students, the indicators provide initial evidence of very high quality 'teaching on my course' and 'assessment and feedback', with no variation between student groups, but some variation between subjects. The panel considered the numbers of those studying subjects with evidence of provision below the level of very high quality to be significant.

The panel noted evidence in the provider submission, for example:

- an induction programme which has improved retention rates for participants
- a high level of student engagement and benefit from a writing assistance tool
- an emphasis on practice-based teaching and learning following student feedback
- a focus on employing practice-experienced academics.

The evidence outlined above indicates outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment practice, which is highly effective and tailored through the Universal Design for Learning approach to ensure the support of student learning, progression and attainment. The panel found that the quality of

evidence within the provider submission relating to this feature was compelling and directly relevant to the mix of students and courses.

This positive picture on teaching, assessment and feedback is reinforced in the student submission, however, this didn't include specific evidence for subject areas.

Overall, therefore, the panel concluded that the provider has embedded outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are highly effective in supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment. However, the panel did not conclude that this applies to all students.

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

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

The provider submission includes details of how it has introduced instructional design for the design and delivery of courses to ensure methods are appropriate for the diverse student.

The provider and student submissions included evidence of: positive feedback from the student induction programme to demonstrate effective early engagement; the use of analytics to monitor student attendance and engagement via personal tutors; and how students are stretched and challenged according to a small survey.

The panel did consider whether this feature could be outstanding but found there was insufficient evidence to indicate that students are fully committed to their learning and stretched to their fullest potential. Therefore, the panel concluded that the course content and delivery effectively encourage the provider's students to engage in their learning, and stretch students to develop their knowledge and skills, and is very high quality.

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

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The provider submission includes the following evidence:

- a formal 'Research Active Curriculum Policy' which embeds research into the curriculum. However, limited weight was given to the evidence as case studies do not include sufficient evidence of impact
- professional practice engagement, with one third of programmes covering 55 per cent of students, professional, being statutory or regulatory body accredited
- clear strategic intent around employer engagement including extensive relationships with healthcare bodies and those in the legal and computer science sector. Evidence of impact within case studies was strongly weighted.

While the panel noted that there is very limited evidence in the student submission, it concluded that there is sufficient evidence to indicate an outstanding quality feature. Overall, the panel found that the provider uses research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice/employer engagement to contribute to an outstanding academic experience for its students.

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

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The provider submission includes the following as evidence:

- a formal approach to teaching qualifications and staff continued professional development, including an accredited PGCert qualification for new teachers, with evidence that this qualification influences future practice of participants
- 56 per cent of academics hold a teaching qualification, with academics encouraged to pursue higher level higher education fellowships and there is good evidence of uptake
- a peer observation scheme, with 100 staff participating and some evidence of impact.

The student submission includes some evidence relating to this feature with evidence of student feedback influencing professional development for staff.

The panel concluded that the evidence is sufficient to indicate that outstanding support is provided for staff professional development and that there is sufficient evidence of excellent academic practice embedded across the provider.

## **Learning environment and academic support**

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The indicators for full-time students provide initial evidence of either very high quality or outstanding quality 'academic support'. There is no variation among student groups, including students from underrepresented groups, but some variation across subject area.

The provider submission includes the following as evidence of an outstanding quality feature:

- a clear understanding of the student demographic, particularly students from underrepresented groups, and a formal strategy and programme to deliver student success
- positive student feedback and evidence of impact around induction programmes
- positive feedback on an enhanced approach to personal tutoring
- bursaries and tailored support for specific student groups
- bespoke support for disabled students and for learning skills through the library.

The student submission also includes evidence of the learning environment being improved through student feedback, although the breadth of feedback collated for the student submission meant the panel applied a small amount of weight to it. There is limited evidence included in the student submission relating to academic support.

Overall, taking the submissions and indicators into account, the panel concluded 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 a very high quality feature.

The indicators provide initial evidence of very high quality 'learning resources' for full-time students. While there is no variation among student groups, including students from underrepresented groups, there is some evidence of provision below the level of very high quality for some subject areas, including some with large numbers of students, which the panel considered in reaching its judgement.

The provider submission describes a coherent approach to developing physical and digital resources with clear investment in teaching facilities including specialist requirements. The provider has increased spend on digital resources and made improvements to library services which have high levels of engagement.

The student submission includes evidence of positive feedback on library resources through a small survey.

The panel considered whether this would be an outstanding quality feature. However, there was not enough evidence relating to the tailoring of learning resources. The panel also noted that there is not enough evidence of very high quality provision for some subject areas. Overall, therefore, the panel concluded that physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning.

## **Student engagement in improvement**

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The indicators for full-time students provide initial evidence of either very high quality or outstanding quality 'student voice'. This initial evidence does not cover all groups of students at subject level – there is a mix of not very high, very high and outstanding quality across the subject areas.

Both submissions describe a strong relationship between the provider and the students' union.

The submissions include the following evidence of an outstanding quality feature:

- a paid student voice representative scheme jointly delivered between the students' union and the provider, enhancing feedback loops and consulting on various issues
- student presence on relevant committees, with evidence of examples where the student voice has influenced change via this mechanism
- some positive evidence in the student submission around student voice and impact on change, which the panel placed some weight on, although overall the provider submission evidence was weighted more strongly as it included more sources of evidence.

Overall, the panel concluded that the provider embeds engagement with its students, leading to continuous improvements to the experiences and outcomes of its students. The panel considered this is sufficient evidence of outstanding quality.



## **Student outcomes: Silver**

Throughout this section, we refer to indicators. The indicators for continuation, completion and progression rates are based on national data about higher education students. The indicators are 'benchmarked' to show how well the provider performs for its particular mix of students and courses.

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

- most features are very high quality
- one outstanding quality feature
- very high quality provision across all demographic groups of students
- mixed indicator performance for subject areas, but with overall evidence of very high quality provision.

The panel considered the provider's diverse demographic of students and its location in a socioeconomically deprived region of the UK to be highly relevant during their assessment of student outcomes.

The panel applied the criteria and considered that the rating with the best fit is 'Silver' as 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 an outstanding quality feature.

The provider submission describes a clear strategic focus on supporting student success and progression, with an emphasis on employability and preparation for careers. It combines teaching methods with relevant and timely student support mechanisms.

The panel noted how the student induction programme enables students to make a more effective transition into higher education. The provider submission demonstrates the positive impact of this on continuation. Attendance and engagement data are tracked, and staff use this to identify students and programmes that need intervention.

The provider submission includes the following as evidence of an outstanding quality feature:

- high levels of external recognition for programmes, demonstrating a commitment to professional qualifications likely to lead to positive progression for students
- career development workshops delivered by a central team
- one-to-one careers support with evidence of engagement and impact
- specific support for the diverse student body, tailored to student needs in some cases.

There is limited evidence within the student submission around support and progression, however the provider submission does include some outcome and impact related evidence.

The panel considered all the evidence and concluded that the provider deploys and tailors approaches that are highly effective in ensuring its students succeed in and progress beyond their studies.

### **Continuation and completion rates**

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

The 'continuation' and 'completion' indicators for full-time students provide initial evidence of a very high quality feature.

The provider submission demonstrates a clear support approach for continuation and completion through its programme supporting student success. Initiatives such as peer mentoring are used on a targeted basis to support programmes showing lower rates.

The panel noted that subjects with lower rates are being addressed specifically and that the coronavirus pandemic is cited as a reason for performance.

In summary, considering the evidence in the round, the panel concluded that there are very high rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses, supported by evidence in the provider submission.

### **Progression rates**

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

The 'progression' full-time indicator provides strong initial evidence of a very high quality feature.

The provider submission describes extensive relevant careers support with evidence of strong engagement across the student body, and says that most graduates choose to work locally post-graduation.

There are some subject areas with not very high quality progression rates and these are explained through a variety of contextual factors, which the panel considered to be relevant. The provider shows evidence of how these are improving, with the coherent approach to employability and careers supporting this.

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

### **Intended educational gains**

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

While the provider does not specifically describe its approach to educational gain within its submission, the approach to identifying relevant gain is articulated through a range of approaches to curricular design and delivery, with a strong focus on intended learning outcomes, professional practice and career ready graduates.

There is limited evidence in the student submission relating to educational gains. The student submission does contain commentary about related areas such as employability skills, and some weight was placed on this when considering this feature.

In summary, the panel considered that the evidence suggests the provider is articulating the educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why these are relevant to its students.

### **Approaches to supporting educational gains**

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

The provider describes how an approach designed to ensure effective support for its diverse group of students is formally embedded and that support is given to new students transition to higher education through the provider's induction programme. The panel considered that educational gain is also supported through instructional design principles.

Support of careers-related educational gain is also embedded, with strong evidence of uptake and engagement with the provider's careers programme.

Overall, the panel concluded that the provider effectively supports its students to achieve these gains. This suggests sufficient evidence of a very high quality feature.

### **Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains**

The provider and student submissions do not include any evidence relating to evaluation or demonstration of educational gain. The panel concluded there was not sufficient evidence to suggest what quality level is appropriate for this feature, but this did not impact on the ratings overall.

## **Overall: Silver**

The panel rated the student experience aspect 'Silver' and the student outcomes aspect 'Silver'.

Noting the guidance, a 'Silver' overall rating should be awarded when both the student outcomes and student experience aspects are rated 'Silver' by the panel.

The panel found all student experience features to be at least very high quality for most groups of students and courses. The panel also found some outstanding quality student experience features, but the best fit rating was found to be 'Silver', because of the lack of evidence relating to some subject areas described within the student experience section.

The panel found most student outcomes features to be very high quality for all groups of students and courses. A single feature was identified as of outstanding quality, but overall the best fit rating was judged to be 'Silver'.