



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

Writtle University College

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Silver

Typically, the experience students have at Writtle University College 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:

- course content and delivery effectively encourage students to engage in learning
- use of research in relevant disciplines, innovation, professional practice and employer engagement to contribute to academic experience
- support for staff professional development
- readily available academic support
- physical and virtual learning resources support teaching and learning.

There are also some outstanding quality features including:

- teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are tailored to supporting learning, progression, and attainment
- student engagement leading to continuous improvement in experiences and outcomes of students.

Student outcomes: Silver

Student outcomes are typically very high quality.

Very high quality features include:

- supporting students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies
- 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.

There are also some outstanding quality features including:

- the range of educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why these are highly relevant to its students and their future ambitions
- approaches to supporting its students to achieve gains are evidence-based, highly effective and tailored to its students and their different starting points.

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

Writtle University College is a specialist provider of applied science courses for the land-based sector. Located at a rural campus in Essex, the provider seeks to meet the needs of local and regional economies, specifically the green economy.

As one of the smallest higher education institutions in the country, it offers further education and higher education courses and further education level apprenticeship programmes and notes its size as intrinsic to its learning environment and community.

The provider's strategic approach to learning and teaching is driven by the industries it serves and its students. It is underpinned by three principles:

- applied practice
- responsive learning
- personal development.

It draws a large proportion of its students from within 25 miles of the campus which is comprised of a large 170 hectare estate with extensive teaching facilities. In 2020-21, the provider had almost 700 higher education undergraduate students, mainly full-time (660 full-time, 20 part-time), primarily on first degree programmes (410, another 180 undergraduate with postgraduate components, and 70 Level 4 or 5).

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: Silver

Throughout this section, we refer to indicators. These indicators are based on students' responses to the National Student Survey.

The panel found the student experience is typically very high quality for the provider's student groups and the range of its courses and subjects. The panel found:

- most features are very high quality
- two are outstanding quality features
- 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 criteria and considered that the rating with the best fit is 'Silver'. This is because most features are very high quality for all groups of students and courses.

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

Teaching, assessment, and feedback

The panel considered this an outstanding quality feature.

The provider and student submissions provide strong evidence of:

- designing learning and teaching activities involving industry experts and students
- the use of teaching facilities and external locations to contextualise and apply learning
- evidence from external examiners of the quality of teaching and the provider's commitment to effective assessment
- tailored assessment and involvement of industry practitioners in assessment and student support for assessment
- a 'near-peer led teaching' scheme to support students' learning and 'assessment confidence'.

There is also evidence in the student submission of excellent teaching facilities and the tailored support provided for their learning and assessment.

The panel considered that the indicators provide evidence of very high quality teaching for students. The overall indicators are above benchmark but the split indicators for Sport and Exercise Sciences are both materially below benchmark. However, the provider submission acknowledges this and notes the actions taken to address this.

Overall, the panel found evidence from the submissions that the provider has embedded outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are highly effective and tailored to supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

The panel considered the provider and student submissions and considered this a very high quality feature, noting:

- students can tailor assessment to their own learning needs and co-create assessment criteria in partnership with academic staff
- examples of applied practice design
- external professional engagement opportunities for students
- student engagement in learning.

The student submission also confirmed the value of the above examples in engaging them in their learning. Both submissions provide strong evidence of the range of mechanisms to support practical and engaging learning experiences, including those derived from the extensive campus and specialist facilities. However, there was not enough evidence to indicate that students are stretched to develop knowledge and skills to their fullest potential.

Overall, the panel found this to be a very high quality feature as the course content and delivery effectively encourages the provider's students to engage in their learning, and stretch students to develop their knowledge and skills.

Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

The panel found this is a very high quality feature, displaying evidence in the submission that the provider actively uses research in relevant disciplines, professional practice and employer engagement in the delivery of its courses:

- external professional engagement opportunities for students across the range of provision
- synergy between research and knowledge exchange activities, course design and opportunities for students
- more than half of teaching staff are qualified practitioners in their specialist fields and 57 per cent of staff are members of professional bodies or societies
- half of students are enrolled on courses accredited by professional accreditation, professional statutory and regulatory bodies.

The student submission recognised the value of these opportunities in supporting their learning and giving them relevant industry exposure and insight. There was less evidence presented as to how the approaches noted above represented an outstanding quality academic experience across its provision.

Overall, the panel found this to be a very high quality feature and 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.

Staff professional development and academic practice

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

Examples in the provider submission include:

- infrastructure to support staff professional development including external engagement and recognition
- a career pathway for staff which has resulted in internal promotion to senior leadership roles in the institution
- evidence of a provider-wide approach to supporting the staff professional development and sharing of excellent academic practice
- support for professional internships with relevant business and other organisations, for example specialist equine facilities at Newmarket
- staff excellence awards which promote the sharing of excellent practice.

The provider submission shows that it offers very high quality support for staff professional development and academic practice is promoted through these mechanisms. However, there was less evidence of how embedded approaches are, or how effective they are in impacting positively the student experience.

Overall, the panel judged that there is very high quality support for staff professional development and the promotion of excellent academic practice.

Learning environment and academic support

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

The indicators for full-time students provide initial evidence of very high quality 'academic support'.

The provider and student submissions supplement the indicator evidence by providing further evidence including support mechanisms to provide a multi-layered tutorial process tracking academic, professional and personal development goals.

The student submission also contains many positive references to the learning support provided indicating coverage across different student needs, disciplines and stages of study – including particular mention of support for those reporting a disability.

Overall, the panel has found the provider fosters a supportive learning environment, and its students have access to a readily available range of very high quality academic support.

Learning resources

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

The panel interpreted the full-time 'learning resources' indicator to be give evidence of a very high quality feature for most students. Some split indicators give evidence of provision below the level of very high quality, but the provider explains how this has been resolved.

The provider and student submissions supplement the indicator evidence by providing further evidence of:

- specialist technology and equipment used by industry partners, enabling students to be involved in their professional application
- a dedicated higher education hub with a co-located study skills team, developed in response to student feedback
- library facilities that incorporate an active support service.

The student submission also provides evidence of the course-specific resources available to support their learning.

Overall, the panel considered that the provider's physical and virtual learning resources effectively are used to support very high quality teaching and learning.

Student engagement in improvement

The panel considered this to be an outstanding feature.

The indicators provide very strong evidence that the 'student voice' is outstanding for full-time students.

The provider and student submissions supplement the indicator evidence by providing further evidence including:

- data showed that student feedback is acted upon
- over-subscription for student representative positions, showing student motivation to be involved in the provider's community and to contribute to continuous improvement of provision
- an approach of using data-based evidence to inform change.

The student submission also included 16 student videos with students drawn from across the range of study areas and stages of study. There were multiple references to a sense of belonging to the provider's community. The students also conducted a survey, which showed that students felt they belonged to the provider's community.

Overall, the panel judged that the provider embeds engagement with its students, leading to continuous improvement in 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 found that 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
- two features are outstanding features
- the outstanding and very high quality features apply to all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

The panel applied the criteria and considered that the rating with the best fit is 'Silver'. This is because most features are of very high quality for all groups of students and courses, including students from underrepresented groups.

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

Approaches to supporting student success

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

The provider and student submission describes how many of the approaches it employs to ensure students succeed and progress are embedded into the curriculum and found:

- a framework for supporting positive student outcomes which underpins its design and delivery
- an 'Empowering Success' tutorial programme embedded into the curriculum, recognising that not all students will opt-in to support such as the open-door policy
- support that addresses barriers to success faced by particular students/student groups through targeted programmes
- data-informed design and delivery of support for continuation and completion
- support for student wellbeing and general assistance
- careers, employability and enterprise services, which are externally benchmarked and receive positive feedback from students and through impact polls
- access to additional professional qualifications within their course.

The student submission is positive about support for student success and there is further evidence in induction surveys and other internal data. Support for student wellbeing and general assistance, and the careers, employability and enterprise services are also noted positively in the student submission.

Overall, the panel found the provider effectively supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies.

Continuation and completion rates

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The continuation indicators for full-time students give evidence of a very high quality feature.

The completion indicators for full-time students give evidence that the provider's performance is either below the level of very high quality, or of very high quality, without certainty as to which applies. The panel also found sufficient explanation in the provider's submission for below benchmark performance identified in split indicators.

The part-time indicators provide limited statistical evidence, so the panel did not weight this considerably in its assessment.

Overall, the panel interpreted the indicators as evidence that there are very high rates of continuation and completion for the most of the provider's students and courses.

Progression rates

The panel examined the evidence in the provider submission and in the indicators and considered this to be a very high quality feature.

The panel noted that this provider is below benchmark for progression rates for full-time students and part-time indicators are not available owing to small numbers. However, the provider submission explains a statistical miscoding issue to account for being below benchmark.

The provider submission states that many students progress to roles in small and medium enterprises, with 20 per cent choosing to run their own business. The provider states this is intrinsic to the industry and regional characteristics served by their graduates.

The provider presents further evidence from the Graduate Outcomes Survey to indicate that high proportions of students find their post-graduation activity to be meaningful and aligned with their future plans in the sector.

The panel concluded that there are very high rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses.

Intended educational gains

The panel considered this an outstanding quality feature.

The provider clearly articulates educational gains throughout the submission as 'the sum of academic, professional and personal development achieved by the provider's student between enrolment and graduation' in order to translate subject interest into meaningful work or further study and develop into a well-rounded professional.

These gains go beyond what is measured by the student outcomes indicators, for example in aiming to develop attributes such as resilience, employability and entrepreneurship skills, and supporting wellbeing approaches and the development of professional networks.

The provider also notes the lower socioeconomic profile of its students compared to other providers in land-based provision and therefore the additional distance students need to travel to achieve success in the relevant industries. This includes supporting a student intake with a large proportion of vocational qualifications to succeed in academic outcomes and seeking to develop graduates who can thrive in changing industries.

Overall, the provider clearly explains the employability and career-focused educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and how these gains are highly relevant to its students' ambitions.

Approaches to supporting educational gains

The panel considered this to be an outstanding feature.

Evidence showed:

- a focus throughout students' studies on auditing their skills and instilling reflective practice
- personalised support targeted to specific needs
- embedded client-facing work to develop professional skills
- wide-ranging examples of engagement with industry
- collaborative and cross-disciplinary teaching to support broader understanding of chosen subject areas.

The student submission positively acknowledged the opportunities for engagement with industry, the development of broader professional skills and the focus on wellbeing and mental health.

Overall, the panel judged that the provider's approaches to supporting its students to achieve its educational gains are evidence-based, highly effective and tailored to its students and their different starting points.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

The provider explained how it intends to evaluate educational gains by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches through a framework that students will use to support their studies.

The panel considered there was limited evidence to judge this feature as the submission did not contain detail on how the provider currently measures or would plan to measure the specific educational gains that it wants students to receive. However, this does not prevent the provider from being awarded a higher rating.

Overall: Silver

The panel rated the student experience aspect 'Silver' and the student outcomes aspect '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 a 'best fit' overall rating for the provider.

The overall rating is therefore 'Silver' because this is the rating awarded to both the aspects of student experience and student outcomes.