

Stepping up

Approaches to strategic improvement described in submissions to the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

An independent report commissioned by the OfS

Report to the Office for Students

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Executive summary

1. This independent report focuses on higher education providers whose Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) ratings were better in the 2023 TEF assessment than in the previous TEF assessment. Drawing on higher education providers' written submissions to TEF 2023, it analyses ways in which these providers describe and evidence the ways in which they have been strategically planning for, implementing and evaluating improvements to student education. The report should be of interest to all higher education providers that are taking steps to improve and enhance student education, student experience and student outcomes in their own context.
2. The context in which providers produced submissions of up to 25 pages was demanding, as these had to address a wide range of features of both student experience and student outcomes. Providers balanced an overarching account of approaches to strategic improvement with a more detailed analysis of key data points. Overall, provider submissions in the sample achieved this successfully.

Planning for and implementing success

3. Providers helpfully summarised **their strategic plans** in relation to their overall mission and values. The relationship between mission and values on one hand and the strategic steps taken to improve practices on the other is not always fully articulated. However, the importance of the specific context of each provider type is evident.
4. Providers describe a range of **operational frameworks** employed to effect strategic change. These include frameworks for approaches to teaching, curriculum design and student assessments. It is not always made clear how wide the implementation of these frameworks is across undergraduate provision, and how they are evaluated and adjusted accordingly. In the best examples, frameworks helpfully illustrate changes to practice and their impact is evaluated with reference to internal and external data.
5. Some providers have explicitly changed the **scope and content of their educational provision** during the TEF period, whereas for others there appeared to be more continuity. Where changes had been made, providers typically explained the reasons for them in relation to improved impact on students. Evaluation of that impact, where provided, was helpful.
6. Providers all refer to a range of ways in which **staff whose roles relate to student education, student experience and student outcomes are developed**. Advance HE fellowships play an important role in structuring developmental provision, both for early career staff and with respect to continuing professional development. The relationship between developing staff and addressing challenging areas (for example, particular programmes with poor student satisfaction or outcomes, or in thematic areas such as assessment) is sometimes, but not always, made clear. Findings from evaluating staff development are not always indicated, but within 25 pages it is very difficult to include information of this kind. Some providers highlight new or changed staff roles that have made a demonstrable impact on student experience or outcomes.
7. The **development of resources, estate and infrastructures** has been significant for many providers in the sample. The impact of the global Covid pandemic on practice is

frequently noted; the development of digital resources and online infrastructures has been a high priority, resulting in some changes to approaches to teaching and learning. Providers also describe improvements to the built environment, and these accounts of improved learning environments are most effective when their development has been related purposefully to changing modes of teaching and student engagement, and when their impact has been evaluated.

8. Providers give strong accounts of the ways in which they are embedding **working with students as partners** into the life of the organisation. Many providers have moved beyond simply including student representatives on committees, to developing much more comprehensive partnerships with students' representative bodies. Examples of activities include regular student forums, 'students as change agents' initiatives and student ambassador schemes. Most providers also highlight the importance of maintaining and enhancing strong relationships with alumni, who can, for example, act as advisors for programme teams and as mentors for staff or students.
9. The importance of **partnerships** is made clear in many submissions. A range of partnerships is articulated; these may be academic, industry-related or civic. The rationale for the choice of partners is generally clear, and their impact on student experience and outcomes articulated, but more could perhaps be done, even within the page limit, to highlight evaluations of partnerships in relation to impact on students.

Evidencing, rewarding and celebrating success

10. Some providers have changed or enhanced their '**planning and review**' frameworks. Some have adopted Theory of Change principles, which can help to pin down key purposes, actions and approaches to evaluation.
11. Providers highlight **internal data**, both qualitative and quantitative, to illustrate progress made in relation to TEF features. Some providers are very clear about the range of internal data available to them, how it is being gathered, how it has been improved and how key findings have been acted upon. Providers also refer to external datasets, including the published OfS data and other sources of data, for example the International Student Barometer. Providers sometimes helpfully link, compare and analyse data from different sources that relate to similar themes; again, it is difficult to do this at any length within the word limit, but key areas of development can be highlighted briefly.
12. Some providers have the capacity to undertake **research studies** into student education, student experience and student outcomes, which then inform practice. Some also refer briefly to published research from the sector and its relevance to their strategic steps for improvement. Such studies can provide a helpful evidence base for action, and in some cases students become partners in undertaking research, bringing their insights to bear in helpful ways. Smaller providers may benefit from collaborating in this area.
13. Many providers have improved their **promotion and reward frameworks** to improve the status of teaching, innovation and education-focused leadership. These are helpfully outlined, although with varying degrees of clarity with respect to the numbers

of staff impacted and the ways in which this may be impacting student experience and outcomes.

14. Different approaches are taken to **highlighting and promoting successes**. Annual awards for staff, some or all of which are voted for by students, are highlighted as providing valuable opportunities to celebrate success and promote innovations and good practice. Providers also highlight institutional awards and rankings. The extent to which these add to the submission can be variable; context and scope of the impact recognised by the awards or rankings can be difficult to ascertain. However, there are many positive examples of promoting and celebrating excellent provision and improvements among and sometimes beyond the provider's community.

Overall

15. Overall, the TEF submissions provide credible accounts of very high quality and outstanding practices. They are strongest when links are clearly made between the planned steps, the nature and scope of the actions taken, and the evidence of improved student experience or outcomes. The use of Theory of Change principles could be helpful in establishing consistent practices with respect to embedding meaningful evaluation into all identified areas of improvement. These principles, or comparable articulations of logical strategic steps through the planning, action and evaluation process, could both help providers embed evidence-based practice in all areas of development and articulate those approaches even more clearly and succinctly in future TEF submissions.

1 Introduction

16. In 2023, the Office for Students (OfS) ran an assessment exercise for higher education providers in England. The main purpose of this round of Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) assessments was to drive improvement, or enhancement, of higher education provision above the OfS's high quality baseline.¹ 227 providers participated in the exercise, ranging across all provider types, including large multi-disciplinary universities, further education colleges, specialist providers and private providers. This report analyses 31 of the written submissions to the TEF by higher education providers. All of the selected providers had improved their overall TEF rating in 2023 in comparison with their previous rating (see [Annex A](#)).
17. A large panel of academic experts and students² assessed providers' excellence in **two aspects: student experience and student outcomes**. Ratings of Gold, Silver, Bronze or Requires improvement were given to each aspect. An overall rating was then given to each provider, based on the preponderance of evidence.
18. Overall provider ratings are defined as follows (Regulatory advice 22, Annex B, p79-80).
 - An overall **Gold rating** signifies that the student experience and student outcomes are **typically outstanding**.
 - An overall **Silver rating** signifies that the student experience and student outcomes are **typically very high quality**.
 - An overall **Bronze rating** signifies that the student experience and student outcomes are **typically high quality**, and there are **some very high quality features**.
 - Providers deemed to have insufficient evidence of 'very high quality' provision above the OfS's baseline were given a **Requires improvement** rating.
19. TEF assessments were made based on both quantitative and qualitative evidence. Evidence sources included written submissions of up to 25 pages by each provider, together with (optional) written submissions by the providers' student representatives.³ All submissions are publicly available.
20. Providers were given advice on what to include in their submissions in the TEF guidelines,⁴ which suggest that they include the following broad sections (Regulatory advice 22, p 29).

¹ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/the-tef/about-the-tef/>

² <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/blog/introducing-the-tef-panel/>

³ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/tef-student-submission-guide/>

⁴ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-advice-22-guidance-on-the-teaching-excellence-framework-2023/>

Section number	Section name	Content
1	Provider context	Information about the provider’s context, its educational mission and strategic aims, and any further information about the characteristics of its undergraduate students and courses.
2	Student experience	Evidence determined by the provider as relevant to its mix of students and courses, that demonstrates the features related to the student experience.
3	Student outcomes	Evidence determined by the provider as relevant to its mix of students and courses, that demonstrates the features related to student outcomes.
4	References	References to the main sources of evidence the submission has drawn on.

21. The 31 submissions analysed for this report, each of which contributed to an improvement in the provider’s overall TEF rating, differ somewhat in style and scope. This variation is appropriate given not only the wide variety of types of provider but also the encouragement given in the TEF guidance to ‘decide what information and evidence it wishes to present in its submission, as appropriate to its context’ (Regulatory advice 22, p26). However, the providers all address both TEF aspects: student experience and student outcomes. They all discuss and analyse their provision across the TEF ‘features of excellence’ (Regulatory advice 22, p74-78).
22. Providers’ narratives typically include accounts of how strategic changes have been planned over the four-year TEF period (2018-2022), of specific steps that have been taken to effect change, and of evidence of the impact of those actions. The data included in these submissions, which are both qualitative and quantitative, are supplemented by publicly available OfS datasets⁵, referred to as indicators, which provide comparative data taking account of the demographics of the student body within each institution. Advice to the panel about interpreting the submissions in the TEF 2023 guidance was as follows:

When identifying outstanding and very high quality features, panel members should consider how compelling the evidence in a provider submission is and how much weight to place on it. They should consider the extent to which:

- a. The evidence is directly relevant to a provider’s mix of students and courses.

⁵ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard/about-the-data-dashboard/>

- b. Policies and practices are evidence-based, and their impacts are demonstrated.
- c. The evidence overall covers all a provider's student groups and courses within the scope of the TEF assessment.
- d. The evidence is relevant to the features of excellence related to that aspect.

(Regulatory advice 22, p63)

- 23. Taking into account the submissions and the OfS datasets, the TEF panel was able to come to a judgement with respect to ratings for each provider.
- 24. Although the ratings systems changed between the previous TEF and 2023, moving from a single rating to a set of ratings, an overall provider rating was awarded at both assessment points. In 2023, the overall rating had improved from Bronze to Silver for 16 providers, and from Silver to Gold for 14 providers. In addition, one provider had improved from Bronze to Gold. A list of providers in scope for this analysis is in [Annex A](#).
- 25. This report recognises that the ratings from the previous TEF and TEF 2023 are not directly comparable, due to changes in assessment methodology. However, both TEF assessments evaluated both student experience and outcomes, and the report focuses on the submissions of the higher education providers whose overall rating did improve as a purposive sample: the sample comprises a selection of submissions that are likely to indicate approaches to raising the quality of provision related to student experience and outcomes that were persuasive in the judgement of the TEF panel. The narratives typically include accounts of providers' overarching goals, of the strategic steps taken to bring about improvements in students' experiences and student outcomes, and of the ways in which providers have set about evidencing these improvements.

2 Planning for and implementing success

2.1 Planning strategically: values, principles and scope

26. The 31 submissions analysed for this report vary in the extent to which they outline holistic institutional plans, which may include reference to themes beyond student education, the student experience and student outcomes, such as research, knowledge exchange and outreach, or focus explicitly on education strategies. This is not surprising, given the wide variety of types of higher institution represented in this sample; some are wholly focused on student education in their mission, while others have a broader profile. Some offer further education courses alongside higher education programmes. OfS advice given to providers in the suggested template for the provider submissions was to include 'Information about the provider's context, its educational mission and strategic aims, and any further information about the characteristics of its undergraduate students and courses' (Regulatory advice 22, p29).
27. **Missions** and **strategic aims** are outlined in all submissions, and it is very typical for providers of all types to explain these with reference to underpinning **values**. The following illustrations exemplify the range.
28. The University of Leicester emphasises its embeddedness in its city, which it describes as 'super-diverse', explaining, for example, that it trains a significant percentage of local doctors and teachers. Its 'Research-inspired Education Strategy', builds on its original social mission, its 'heritage of kindness'. Its purpose is to 'bring hope to the local community' and push frontiers in both research and education 'to widen the horizons of our students, to empower them with the highest quality education, and to nurture in them a social conscience which positively impacts society' (p1⁶). The provider also highlights the global reach of its educational activities, with its growing partnerships in East and South East Asia, Europe and the Americas. Values-based, geographically framed principles run through almost all submissions, characterising each educational provider with a unique profile drawing on its history and origins, its locality and the scope of its educational reach.
29. The University of Leicester, like other research-intensive universities in the sample such as the University of Liverpool and London School of Economics (LSE), articulates links between its research and its educational provision, emphasising the values-based character of each of these activities. The University of Liverpool, for example, describes the goal of its educational vision as being 'to integrate teaching and research in ways that derive the maximum benefit from our rich environment of intellectual enquiry and challenge, supporting our students to become creative and culturally rich graduates with the capacity to find employment and be agents for change in a connected world' (p1). Its focus is both local and international, with its large number of international students and its partnership with Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) in China.
30. City College Norwich, a mixed economy further and higher education college, describes itself as 'rooted in the local community' (p1). Its mission builds on its foundation in

⁶ All page numbers refer to the page number(s) in the relevant provider's submission to the TEF panel.

1891 as a technical school for Norwich. Its strategic aims include outstanding outcomes for its students and apprentices ‘that add value and enable personal progression’; responding to changing economic needs; and engaging ‘at local, regional, and national levels to build purposeful partnerships which benefit our communities’ (p1).

31. York St John University (p1) provides a graphic giving an overview of its education-focused mission, vision and values, along with an indication of overarching strategic themes (‘what we do’) and pedagogic principles (‘how we do it’).

YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY STRATEGY 2026				
Who we are:	MISSION			
	Driven by our commitment to social justice, we focus our expertise, talents and creativity to advance knowledge, promote understanding, and achieve educational outcomes for the benefit of all.			
	VISION			
	We will extend the transformative power of university education to the communities we serve.			
	VALUES			
	Intellectually generous, curious, and rigorous	Promote fairness and challenge prejudice	Inspire and support each other to succeed	
What we do:	LEARNING, TEACHING AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE STRATEGY			
	Education for transformation	Inclusive education for all	Education for the future	Education enabling success in the wider world
	YSJ SIGNATURE PEDAGOGY (‘THE FOUR CS’)			
How we do it:	Collaboration	Compassion	Curiosity	Community

Figure 1. York St John University Strategy 2026 (Provider submission p1)

32. The provider explains further that it has increased its focus ‘on social-justice-themed, research-led teaching through commitments to embed UN Sustainable Development Goals and decolonise curricula’, and offers sanctuary scholarships, supporting refugees and asylum seekers (p7). Several submissions refer to **UN Sustainable Development Goals** in their submissions, linking their local or regional mission to these globally applicable principles.
33. The London School of Management Education (LSME) emphasises its strategic commitment to **sustainability**: ‘LSME has transformed its teaching and learning by embedding United Nations-supported values of sustainability, responsibility, and ethics’ (p6). The University of Hull emphasises its commitment to ‘the interconnected themes of environmental sustainability and social justice’ (p2). It describes its approach as ‘inclusive, empowering and progressive—the qualities that constitute the University’s values’.
34. We see in the providers’ overarching strategies a **connection between economic, social and personal benefits**. The University of East London, operating on a large scale and in an urban setting, explains its strategic plan in terms of both applying values to action and meeting economic needs.

The University of East London (p1) Our role as an anchor institution connects local people, communities, and industries through our work and partnerships addressing skill needs (for example in healthcare and education) locally and globally. Our mission is transformative. Our shared values centre on embracing diversity, equity and inclusion;

courage by taking ownership of challenges and problems and following through on resolution. We are passionate about putting the student at the centre of everything we do. These values emphasise our efforts to connect, influence and shape the future of our student population in ways that make a difference not just to their own lives but also to the communities in which they, and we, are based.

35. The strategic scope for this large provider is wide, referencing transformations in not only curriculum, pedagogy and partnerships but also research, research impact, partnerships and environmental sustainability (p1).
36. The University of Westminster frames its approach to improving student experience and student outcomes in terms of its wider mission. This provider explains that its interpretation of the Network for Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions (NERUPI) Framework (Hayton and Bengry-Howell 2016) 'ensures students have access to the forms of social and educational capital (employability and social responsibility) they require to succeed, alongside building academic capital (disciplinary expertise)' (p3/4).
37. The University of Salford explains that its corporate strategy reaffirms its commitments as a civic university and sets out 'a vision for the learner journey that is bold, distinctive, and provides accessible life-wide learning experiences, co-created with students and industry, co-delivered on campus, online and in the workplace'. Its aspiration is to prepare students for life through its 'pioneering exceptional industry partnerships' (p1). Explaining that it is 'on a journey of rapid and adaptive change', it reiterates the importance of its Industry Collaboration Strategy for the 'shared benefit' of students and industry (p4).
38. Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) is one of a number of providers that orientate themselves towards social inclusion, emphasising their mission in terms of their contribution to widening participation in higher education.

Anglia Ruskin University (p1) ARU's student body is best characterised by its diversity; we are proud particularly to attract students from groups that are underrepresented in HE [higher education] – students who originally didn't think that university was 'for them'... Our outstanding success at serving our particular mix of students is evidenced by parity of achievement between different demographic groups.

39. The provider is explicitly offering opportunities for students who are economically disadvantaged, explaining that 'education for all is an enabler of positive transformational change for both individuals and wider society' (p1). In a similar vein, the University of Greenwich explains that its Education without Boundaries approach 'is the practical application of the UoG values of inclusivity, collaboration and impact', whereby barriers to students' learning are removed (p1).
40. Solent University foregrounds inclusivity in its Strategy 2025, with its central tenets of 'inclusive, real-world learning, teaching and student success' (p1), explaining that it is 'committed to social justice, equal opportunities and inclusivity, eradicating inequality gaps for students (directly captured in our APP targets) and actively enabling diverse learners to become socially responsible, enterprising citizens and responsible leaders'

(p2). Many providers relate their overarching strategy for student education to their Access and Participation Plan (APP) targets.

41. **Specialist providers** focus on a particular set of disciplines, such as those related to medicine, music or the arts. They typically articulate their mission, strategy and values in terms of the benefits to students, society and the economy of the skills and attributes associated with their particular areas of expertise.
42. St George's, University of London describes its strategic education aims in terms of preparing its students 'to become inclusive healthcare practitioners and scientists learning from the context in which they study to make a positive impact on the lives of others, driving advances in healthcare and scientific knowledge and practice throughout their lives and careers'. The specialist disciplinary focus here means that the strategic aims relate to specific sectors; they are also related to the social good of making 'a positive impact on the lives of others' (p2).
43. The mission of SAE Education Ltd is to 'provide specialist vocational and higher education courses worldwide to inspire and develop graduates, with a stated vision to be the world's leading educator for the creative media industries (p2). The Institute of Contemporary Music (ICMP) articulates its focus on the global commercial music industry. It explains that its governance principles 'bring together the legal obligations of a private company and the statutory and regulatory requirements established by the Office for Students (OfS)' (p3), highlighting the particular requirements for independent private providers as they frame their overall strategy in general, and education strategy in particular. ICMP aligns its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy around four key themes: student engagement; learning culture and community; industry-readiness and employability; and staff development (p5).
44. The vision of the Arts University Plymouth is to be 'a new kind of art school for the 21st century, preparing graduates who are uniquely placed to provide creative solutions to the complex global challenges of our times'.

Arts University Plymouth (AUP) (p1) We champion our people, place and pedagogy at the heart of our mission, delivering sustainable growth and impactful change in terms of creative economies, civic engagement and cultural ambition in Plymouth and the wider region. AUP will become widely regarded as a catalyst for individual, societal and ecological transformation.

45. This articulation connects arts specialisms with both economic and cultural benefits, with a particular focus on the region, along with individual benefits to students.
46. Larger, more comprehensive providers also articulate their strategic plans in terms of connections with their cities or regions, with several noting significant positive changes between the previous TEF assessment and TEF 2023. There is a suggestion in several submissions that **TEF itself, its areas of focus and expectations, has helped to motivate change**. London Metropolitan University, for example, explains that it is 'very different from the London Met of 2017', noting its change of leadership and lessons learned from the pandemic which 'had a significant impact on learning and teaching and our approach to improving student outcomes' (p1). Teesside University notes that it has built on the first TEF exercise and can demonstrate 'significant and sustained

improvements in the identified key metrics' through its Future Facing Learning approach (p1).

47. There is a repeated emphasis on how strategic planning has become **increasingly aligned** across each institution, so that all areas of provision are shaped by strategic values and principles. For comprehensive providers, this is especially important as different types of educational provision and subject disciplines have traditionally had their own characteristics and approaches. Strategic plans provide a framework within which these different areas can, while maintaining their distinctive approaches, ensure that values and markers of quality are consistent across all provision.
48. Sheffield Hallam University, for example, explains that its commitment to transforming lives 'drives all activities' (p1), showing how its Hallam Model has been applied across all areas. The University of Chichester's first strategic aim is 'strengthen the distinctiveness of the Chichester student experience as high-quality, personalised, accessible and aspirational'; the provider explains that this aim is 'not left as an abstract, 'top-level' statement; it is accompanied by a set of actions outlining how we will achieve this which are regularly monitored, reviewed and challenged, with an unrelenting focus on measurable progress so that we know the extent to which we are succeeding' (p1). This alignment with regional and national economic priorities in strategic planning, framed in relation to core values, is echoed across many of the submissions in the sample.
49. Framing their missions with reference to core values, principles and goals, providers set up expectations for TEF panel members, who might reasonably consider questions such as:
 - Is there supporting evidence – in the written submission or in the OfS datasets – to show that its goals, values and principles are aligned to actions undertaken to enhance student experience and student outcomes?
 - Have actions taken led to demonstrable impact on student experience and outcomes?
50. The next section looks at ways in which frameworks have been applied strategically to practice.

2.2 Applying operational frameworks

51. The TEF submissions sampled include many examples of specific frameworks being applied to practice. In the best examples, the applied frameworks are aligned with the provider's stated mission and values. This section illustrates the range, which spans across areas such as curriculum, teaching, student assessment and feedback, developing skills for employment and supporting students' wellbeing.
52. Kingston University, which improved its overall TEF rating from Bronze in 2017 to Gold in 2022, explains its 'systematic approach' to enhancement and the purpose of its frameworks.

Kingston University (p2) Key to our delivery of this are our Academic Framework, Course and Inclusive Curriculum Design Principles, and Graduate Attributes which set out core requirements for teaching, learning, assessment, and support, for all undergraduate courses. These enable us to translate our educational strategy into clear course level expectations to ensure that all students receive a coherent and well-structured academic experience.

53. This importance of a systematic approach is foregrounded in many of the submissions. Frameworks for practice⁷ can improve consistency of quality while allowing for necessary flexibility across subject areas, and embedding excellent educational practices right across the institution or organisation is the focus of all providers.
54. The University of Salford explains that during the TEF period it has developed a range of policies and initiatives all aimed at delivering ‘inclusive, authentic, outward facing curriculum models and pedagogies’ (p7). Teesside University established, during the TEF period, an Academic Enhancement Framework (AEF) aligned with its Future Facing Learning (FFL) principles. This framework includes nine core themes: Future Ready, Research Active, Digitally Empowered, Globally Connected, Socially & Ethically Engaged, Transitions, Student Success, Student Voice, and Wellbeing. The provider explains how it is applied.

Teesside University (p7) A matrix for each theme, designed by key stakeholders across the University and partner institutions, defines characteristic practice for course teams: from very high quality to outstanding. The AEF ensures that all elements of the student experience – from resources and the professional development of teaching staff to course design and content (via course approval and periodic review) and broader enhancement work remains strategically aligned and coherent through the overarching structure provided by FFL. It acts as a consistent enabling mechanism to inject institutional priorities into the student experience.

55. The University of Greenwich has approved a new **curriculum framework** aligned to its 2030 strategy, whereby programmes must be ‘inclusive, personalised, employment-focused, global in outlook and informed by our research’ (p8). The provider explains that the framework’s resources and reflective questions are used by all module leaders to enhance provision. The narrative here, as elsewhere across the sample of provider submissions, is of principles-based alignment and consistency across multiple areas.
56. The University of Liverpool, a research-intensive university that has improved its overall TEF rating from Silver to Gold, gives a clear account of the alignment between its Liverpool Curriculum Framework and its three Liverpool Hallmarks: Research-connected teaching, Active Learning and Authentic Assessment.

⁷ As noted in a previous report on Educational gain in TEF submissions (Fung 2024), many providers with very high quality and outstanding TEF outcomes have designed and applied specific curriculum frameworks to their whole provision.

The University of Liverpool (p5) All programmes are required to link strongly to our research activity within a framework of enquiry-based learning.

57. The practical application of this includes all students taking a capstone research or enquiry-based project, enabling many students to ‘create knowledge in partnership with researchers, with more than 200 students becoming co-authors on published papers between 2018 and 2022’ (p6). Students are assessed ‘using tasks that mirror those they might undertake as professionals or citizens through choice of purpose, format, audience, resources, and collaborative or student-designed elements’, enabling students to develop a range of skills for employment (p7). LSE’s Educate for Global Impact framework adopts similar approaches, including a mandatory interdisciplinary course for all first-year students designed to connect students with its research and undertake interdisciplinary, enquiry-based challenges.
58. Many providers focus on **assessment and feedback**, an area of student education that has been challenging for the whole sector as indicated by National Student Survey (NSS) results across many years. Manchester Metropolitan University, alongside its embedding of the principles of active learning across its programmes, has developed an Assessment Lifecycle Model, which ‘ensures that assessments are clear and unambiguous, and adherence to best practice around marking and feedback’ (p5). It has explicitly made links during the TEF period between the principles of active learning; staff development activities focusing on this pedagogic approach; authentic assessment methods; and investment in the electronic management of assessments. This is an example of a clear alignment of activities to purpose; a framework for change that plausibly connects multiple strategic steps.
59. Another area of provision to which frameworks have been productively applied is **student support and wellbeing**. The University of Salford has created an Academic Progress Review (APR) built around five ‘enablers’: sense of belonging, sense of purpose, self-efficacy, resilience and engagement. These are used by Academic Progress Tutors to frame supportive discussions as part of their Student Support Policy (p6). London School of Management Education also outlines a framework for student support, based on Individual Learning Plans (ILPs). These plans, held on the provider’s virtual learning environment, are reviewed termly and ‘accessible to all lecturers to enable effective follow up and additional support for students to achieve their learning aims’ (p8).
60. London Metropolitan University refers to a framework designed to ensure that each student is, and feels, fully included in the curriculum.

London Metropolitan University (p17) The Framework ensures the curriculum is delivered through a kaleidoscope of emancipatory pedagogic approaches so that the 64% of our student cohort that identify as Black and minoritised ethnic see themselves reflected, and the contributions of wider diasporic communities.

61. The University of Hull, too, exemplifies a commitment to inclusive practices through its Inclusive Education Framework, detailing five areas of activity that contribute to inclusive practice, based on principles of ‘empathic leadership, staff empowerment,

student partnership and clear communication'. It has made its Framework and an associated toolkit publicly available (p7). We see here, and elsewhere, correlations between practice enhancement and a provider's stated mission and values.

62. Many providers have applied frameworks for action not only to student education and students' experiences more broadly but also to **student outcomes**. The University of East London, for example, has implemented 'a robust whole-institution graduate employability framework to ensure meaningful and ongoing improvement in terms of graduate outcomes'. Its submission includes a graphic of its framework which 'sets out clear processes to enhance skills development and embed work-based learning activity and industry engagement into the curriculum' (p17).
63. This framework is aligned with the provider's 'pan-institution commitment to enterprise education', whereby it has embedded enterprise and entrepreneurship into every degree through, for example, embedding live briefs and 'opportunities to identify and solve industry wide problems' (p15).
64. This kind of alignment of activities, supported by qualitative and quantitative evidence of impact, appears to be indicative of effective practices that can then be tested by data. Submissions are more persuasive when links are clearly established between aligned intentions, frameworks for practice and clear strategies for evaluation.

2.3 Shaping provision

65. Explaining their strategic approaches to improving student education and outcomes, providers articulate in their TEF submissions ways in which the types of provision they are offering have been or are being changed.
66. Providers outline **changes and additions to subjects on offer**. The University of East London explains that it is developing its 'real-world curriculum... to address global challenges such as climate change, sustainability, green agenda and Industry 4.0 and 5.0' (p16). Alignment here is between curriculum, research-informed practice and 'value-added' activities, a cross-institutional graduate employability framework and the courses being developed.

The University of East London (p16) This activity presents to our students and staff new opportunities for research, knowledge exchange and careers. For example, we have recently added new degrees in Cyberpsychology and Environmental Psychology, each aiming to exploit growth areas and sectors in the industry 5.0 economy which will be attractive to employers.

67. Many providers explain that they are developing provision that meets the needs of current economic, social and technological challenges and opportunities.
68. Specialist providers have developed provision in response to the immediate needs of their professional fields. St George's, University of London has developed a course in Clinical Pharmacology, responding to 'a recognised shortage of scientists who combine disciplinary knowledge, alongside skills in coding, model analysis, simulation, and data visualisation'. Learning outcomes have resulted from collaboration between industry and academics (p8). The provider is now planning a 'significant area of planned growth'

on professional development courses to meet the needs of lifelong learning for NHS staff. LSE, with its social science focus, has developed new social science courses linked with its research, establishing a Data Science Institute and new joint programmes, for example Politics and Data Science (p7).

69. The Institute of Contemporary Music (ICMP), with its 'mission to shape the future of music', has expanded its portfolio to include live event management, music management and digital marketing (p2). Point Blank Ltd, an independent specialist provider, is innovating through its Audio Software Development programme, which is being developed in collaboration with key music industry software and hardware manufacturers (p3), along with short courses centred on 'industry-relevant' skills.
70. Along with the introduction of new subject areas, some providers explain that they are **introducing or expanding types of provision**, such as foundation programmes and apprenticeships. The University of Westminster has developed a shared-provision **foundation programme**, alongside its existing standalone programmes, which 'provides an entry point to university study for students who lack formal qualifications' (p6). This has afforded opportunities not only for individual students to access higher education, but also to develop new forms of student support and enrichment opportunities. Point Blank Ltd has also introduced a foundation year.
71. Anglia Ruskin University is also developing **flexible modes of provision**, including developing its portfolio of health related undergraduate continuing professional development (CPD) courses (p5). It offers **extended degrees**, for those who do not have qualifications for Level 4 entry (p21), and adopted a 'blocked' timetabling approach, with student contact across two-three days each week, to make provision more accessible for students who undertake paid work and have caring responsibilities (p22). In a similar vein, Arts University Plymouth has designed a **common Level 0 year** for its undergraduate students, which is 'attractive for mature students without standard entry qualifications but with good portfolios and the potential to develop their academic competency through Levels 4 to 6' (p2).
72. The extent to which **degree apprenticeships** form a significant part of a provider's provision varies greatly, depending on provider type. Teesside University explains that in alignment with its mission and 'unswerving commitment to nurturing future ready graduates', it has grown its apprenticeship provision in partnership with employers. It has a community of more than 1,500 higher and degree apprentices across 32 programmes, working with 200 employers (p8). Sheffield Hallam University is among providers that emphasise the importance of work placements as part of its provision. It has invested heavily in work-based courses, with one of the largest portfolios of degree apprenticeships in the sector: more than 2,000 apprentices enrolled across 33 standards in 13 academic departments. Degree apprenticeships do not feature at all for some providers; it could be helpful to have a brief rationale for this.
73. A number of providers explain that their provision is being shaped as a result of **changing or enhanced partnerships, in response to employers' priorities** (see 2.7). South Essex College of Further and Higher Education explains that it now partners with the University of East Anglia, University of Arts London and the Open University, and that it has also developed strong partnerships with local stakeholders, 'including South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), Opportunity South Essex (OSE), local schools, unitary authorities, county council, businesses, and industry specialists, along with

major projects such as the Thames Estuary Production Corridor' (p2). It explains that 'Employers help develop our curriculum so we may be able to meet their needs' (p2).

South Essex College of Further and Higher Education (p3) At the time of writing this submission we are still living through immense changes which include rising unemployment, a cost-of-living crisis and climate emergency. There are significant skills gaps, especially at the higher levels and a digital divide where those with the lowest skills levels are at the highest risk of losing their jobs to automation. On the other hand, there are incredible advances in science and technology providing fantastic opportunities in finding solutions. South Essex College and its University Centre feels optimistic about the future and finding creative solutions, through the design and delivery of high-quality progression pathways to support regional skills needs. We have been extending and developing our partnerships to embed our reputation and improve the economic prosperity of the [region].

74. Luminate Education Group is among other providers that are putting employers at the heart of the process of developing and approving new provision. Programme development teams have to review labour market reports and address sought-after skills such as 'team working, commercial awareness, leadership and influencing' (p16). City College Norwich similarly explains that employers help shape the curriculum, and 'courses are frequently designed with local organisations or sectors to meet their needs, including NHS Trusts, Norfolk County Council and Norfolk Constabulary' (p6). It cites a recent example of local NHS trusts collaborating to revalidate Health Studies and Mental Health Foundation degrees in order to provide appropriate training for their current and future staff needs.
75. Plymouth Marjon University emphasises its local links with employers, explaining its commitment to providing holistic educational experiences for all students, within a 'framework of shared values and co-production'.

Plymouth Marjon University (p1) Key to this [its approach] are our civic responsibilities and symbiotic relationship with the local region. We work closely with local government, industry, and employers to identify human capital and resource requirements and invite partnerships with them and others. These relationships are critical because most of our graduates are employed locally within these industries. Local government priorities for development are focused on medical and healthcare, tourism and leisure, the creative sector, and business services to be delivered through clean and inclusive growth. Our educational portfolio deliberately reflects these and focuses on Education, Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation, Health and Wellbeing, and Arts, Humanities and Social Science.

76. Plymouth Marjon explains that its delivery model reflects the needs of its student body, enabling students to study full-time or part-time on all programmes, through 'a range of distance, hybrid, and blended approaches to enhance flexibility'. It is increasing its breadth of programmes, including health-related provision, and is developing higher apprenticeships.

77. Manchester Metropolitan University, for whom a large proportion (66.5%) of its students go on to work locally, is shaping its provision 'to contribute holistically to the economic, cultural and social fabric of [its] region' (p1). It is developing its interdisciplinary provision and has invested in an Institute of Sport and a School of Digital Arts, which is co-funded by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.
78. Solent University has been developing its 'evolving and contemporary portfolio of courses, regional outreach and partnership activities', continuously reviewing its size and shape 'to ensure [its] academic portfolio delivers the best outcomes for [its] students and region' (p2). This has involved 'fewer, bigger, better' core undergraduate courses and the strengthening of Business and Advisory Boards.
79. It is clear from the provider submissions that provision is being shaped continually in response to local and national economic and social priorities, developments in research and the needs of employers. Provision is becoming more flexible to improve access and participation, and students' experiences and outcomes depend upon not only the evolving range of subjects and content being taught, but also the types of qualifications offered and the structures of programmes of study.

2.4 Developing staff and staff roles

80. Improving student education, students' overall experiences and student outcomes is not only a matter of offering the most appropriate programmes of study. It also requires staff, both academic and professional, whose knowledge and skills are continually developed. The types and scope of staff roles may need to evolve to ensure that changing provision is delivered effectively. Provider submissions to TEF 2023 all discuss the importance of staff development in relation to feature SE4, part of the 'student experience' aspect of the assessment. The definition of 'outstanding' for this feature is as follows:

SE4. There is outstanding support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is embedded across the provider. (Regulatory advice 22, p74).

81. It is evident from submissions in the sample analysed for this report that many providers have been investing strategically in this area.
82. Developing staff involves **structured, accredited programmes** of study for new or probationary staff and more flexible continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for experienced staff. Almost all providers offer developmental provision accredited by Advance HE, leading to Higher Education Academy Fellowships in four categories: Associate, Fellow, Senior Fellow and Principal Fellow. These categories of externally recognised fellowships are aligned to what has been known as the UK Professional Standards Framework⁸, operational since 2006. The Framework was revised in 2011 and again in 2023, when it was renamed the Professional Standards Framework to reflect its international reach. Alignment with this sector framework provides a structure for developmental requirements, opportunities and recognition.

⁸ <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning/psf>

83. As providers typically explain, this **developmental structure of awards** is for staff in any role, who teach, support students' learning or have leadership roles in the domain of student education. Kingston University is one of a number that offer pathways: 'One pathway focuses on the needs of our academic staff and the other pathway develops the practice of professional staff who support students' learning (e.g., learning technologists, librarians, technicians), as well as our doctoral students' (p9).
84. The developmental requirements and opportunities for staff are often provided by educational experts in **centres of teaching and learning**. These are differently configured but are most often a central unit of academic/professional staff who design, teach on and assess the accredited programmes, have advisory roles in educational enhancement across the institution, and may also provide leadership-related developmental opportunities. The University of Salford explains its approach.

University of Salford (UoS) (p6) To support innovation and development in pedagogy, UoS committed to a dedicated Learning Teaching and Enhancement Centre (LTEC) in 2021. LTEC is essential to supporting the ESS [Enabling Student Success programme] Leadership theme goals to develop authentic learning and teaching practitioners, through a broad range of scholarship, awards, and continuing professional development.

85. St George's, University of London explains that the professional development of its academic and clinically based educators is undertaken by its Centre for Innovation and Development of Education and Centre for Technology in Education (p10). It explains that this is supplemented with targeted development for practice-based educators provided by course teams. The University of Westminster notes that its Centre for Education and Teaching Innovation, the Learning Innovation and Digital Engagement team and its Organisational Development team 'support Colleges in ensuring outstanding academic professional development, where good practice is shared, excellence is celebrated, and reward and progression are clearly articulated.' (p13). The University of Hull's Teaching Excellence Academy was 'established in 2019 to celebrate, develop and promote excellent teaching that is scholarship led, technology facilitated and data driven. ... Such pedagogical innovation has impact at an international level and has been included in the University's REF [Research Excellence Framework] submission' (p4). This link between teaching and learning centres and the production of education-focused scholarly research is discussed further below (3.3).
86. The University of Warwick's centre, the Warwick International Higher Education Academy (WIHEA), was launched in 2015 'to enhance the student experience and raise the status of teaching, bringing together a wide community of staff and student leaders of education' (p8). LSE's Eden Centre 'leads on many developmental initiatives and events for staff in partnership with students and LSE SU [Students' Union], underpinning education change with evidence-based approaches in line with our identity as a social science institution' (p8). Its specialist team of Departmental Advisers offer 'bespoke one-to-one and group advice' (p9). There are multiple examples across the submissions of strategic collaboration between teaching and learning centres, academic departments and other functional areas of the institution, whereby shared strategic improvement goals are the focus.

87. For providers without the scale for centres of teaching and learning, key staff roles may be identified. South Essex College of FE and HE, for example, explains that its Advance Practitioners focus on teaching and learning within higher education, helping to identify good practice and support through individualised and group staff development.

South Essex College of FE and HE (p10) Key themes are identified by the Advanced Practitioner and managers are integrated into the faculty's Continuous Professional Development Plan (CPD). Staff development focuses on industry knowledge and skills, evidence-based pedagogy, and academic skills development. Validating partners and other external specialists are often used to help keep staff up to date with emerging technologies, skills, and practices.

88. City College Norwich uses a team of Teaching and Learning Coaches, as expert teaching practitioners, to work directly with lecturers to develop their teaching skills. Developing staff happens in relation to reward, recognition, promotion of good practice and enabling institutions to celebrate success. These themes are explored further below (3.4-3.5).
89. Developmental activities go beyond courses and developmental events. Many providers, especially those that offer further education as well as higher education programmes, run peer observation schemes. London School of Management Education (LSME), for example, explains that its periodic teaching observation scheme 'aligns with its current teaching and learning strategy' (p12).

London School of Management Education (p12) Observation is undertaken by experienced senior staff. Staff also carry out peer and inter-departmental observations and undergo annual appraisals with their immediate line managers. This informs individual practice and establishes a clear connection with the UKPSF [UK Professional Standards Framework] requirement. It also facilitates reflection and further development ... as well as promoting the career development of the staff.

90. Some providers have complementary or alternative approaches to peer observation. For example, York St John University runs an institutional 'Learning & Teaching Partnership' scheme for all teaching staff in place of 'traditional, episodic teaching observations' (p5).

York St John University (p5) Colleagues are paired for the whole academic year and hold a series of discussions, observations, and/or teaching collaborations, ensuring the collaborative exchange of developmental feedback becomes routine.

91. This combination of productive, developmental dialogue and alignment with the strategic educational priorities of the provider can sustain a focus on both developing individuals, and developing the institution and its capacity to move towards its goals.

92. Developing staff also entails providing opportunities for wider role development. Writtle University College⁹ explains its staff are supported to gain both teaching qualifications and Advance HE fellowships. They are also 'actively encouraged to act as external examiners, to sit on internal and external validation panels and to contribute to reviews for Collaborative Awards for Teaching Excellence and QAA subject benchmarking statements' (p10).
93. Some providers explain their support for developing subject knowledge and specialisms among their staff. This is more likely to be so for providers where doctorates are not a prerequisite for employment as they are, typically, for research-intensive universities. Plymouth Marjon University, for example, is strategically evolving its staff profile by increasing the numbers with postgraduate qualifications (p18).

Plymouth Marjon University (p18) In 2015, 42% of our academics held a postgraduate qualification increasing to 88% by 2018/19 and in 2020/21 33% of staff held a PhD. There is support for current staff to study at levels 7 and 8 whilst working, the latter enabled by growing numbers of staff who are eligible to supervise level 8 study. Staff study and conference attendance is supported by the Learning Development Fund which has made 180+ awards since 2019-20.

94. SAE Education Ltd stresses the need to provide 'time and resources for faculty engaging with professional practice in creative and technical roles in their specific field' (p7).

SAE Education Ltd (p7) Having lecturers actively engaged in their professional development as creative media practitioners further embeds current industry practice into curriculum design and development, and helps extend our professional network of industry partners and advisors. Furthermore, many lecturers have been able to offer students and graduates work experience opportunities on their projects; this furthers the professional networks of our students and graduates, which can help to increase their employment opportunities.

95. Considerable investment is being made not only in developing staff capabilities but also in new or newly framed roles. The University of Greenwich, for example, has created 28 new executive senior roles across the University, with a new Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education and Associate Deans for Student Success in every faculty: 'These appointments are already having impact, as evidenced through improvements in our key student-centred KPIs [key performance indicators] (p3). It emphasises that it aims to recruit inclusively: '48% of the senior management team are female and 26% come from a BAME background, compared to sector-averages of 40% and 7.7% respectively' (p3).
96. Developing leaders who will have a positive impact on student experiences and outcomes is a priority for many providers. Kingston University, for example, explains its commitment to course leaders.

⁹ Writtle University College has recently merged with Anglia Ruskin University, and its rating and submission will no longer appear on the TEF results site.

Kingston University (p9) Supporting course leaders and empowering them to make the changes that are needed to improve student outcomes and enhance the student experience is an important aspect of our enhancement strategy... Discussions on the programme led to actions to improve the layout of our course data dashboards to better support Course Leaders in their review of student performance data.

97. London Metropolitan University describes the introduction of its distributed model of educational leadership ‘that empowers staff at all levels to take ownership of change’ (p15).

London Metropolitan University (p15) The rationale for this is that both central and School leadership facilitate and encourage continuous reflection and improvement across functions and roles. [Examples] of this approach are the ESJ [Education for Social Justice] Framework School Leads and Heads of Student Experience and Academic Outcomes. These are based in Schools, who work with School-level leadership and the Senior Leadership team to provide cross-institutional accountability and ensure impact...

98. Submission narratives overall tell of an increasing commitment to varied ways of ensuring that staff have the expertise and approaches needed to deliver very high quality and outstanding features of student experience and outcomes. They describe a combination of embedded practices, such as mandatory teaching qualifications, fellowships aligned to the Advance HE Professional Standards Framework and peer observations schemes, with an increased focus on developing and empowering education-focused specialists and leaders throughout the institution. These strategic steps suggest alignment of culture and structures to strategic educational goals.

2.5 Developing estate, resources and infrastructure

99. Higher education providers have been targeting the development of their built environment in order to improve student experience. This may involve new builds, the development of teaching rooms and student study spaces, areas in which students can collaborate on learning tasks, and specialist facilities. They have also been investing in digital resources, including virtual learning environments, e-books and related services, particularly during and in the wake of the global Covid pandemic. Providers’ submissions indicate ways in which their improvements in estate, resources and infrastructure have been shaped by a commitment to improving the student education, students’ experiences and student outcomes.
100. The University of Salford has transformed its campus infrastructure in collaboration with Salford City Council ‘to develop links with local industry, as well as cultural and residential schemes to create a city district that enhances surrounding communities and helps drive the local and regional economy’ (p1). It has invested more than £116m since 2019 to ‘deliver improvements in students’ learning experience and outcomes’ (p3), developing an IT strategy, including an upgrade of its virtual learning environment from Blackboard to Blackboard Ultra. As for many providers, teaching through the pandemic highlighted the need to invest in virtual as well as face-to-face learning, and

its online developments have 'provided a refreshed interface, new online teaching tools and clearer, more accessible learning environment for students' (p14).

101. LSE has transformed its central London campus over the past 10 years, investing more than £73m in two large new academic buildings, the design and development of which included flexible learning spaces. The provider explains that 'students were engaged at every stage of their design and development processes' and were the major stakeholders in post-occupancy evaluations. 97% of students, for example, agreed that its Marshall Building 'improves learning and teaching' (p12). Alongside this, LSE has invested in its digital infrastructure, including a Digital Skills Lab providing targeted support in specialist tools for research and analysis: 'These courses support our students' development as researchers and can be taken online, via Moodle, at whatever pace is most appropriate' (p12).
102. The University of Liverpool has upgraded its built environment, including a new building for arts and humanities and a School of Law and Social Justice and a £10m learning and teaching hub, along with upgrading its virtual learning environment. The latter, involving the introduction of Canvas, resulted from 'a pedagogically-led exercise to enhance the delivery of our programmes and reflect the evolving needs of our students' (p7). It was developed in partnership with students, some of whom became Canvas Coaches, training both staff and students in the new software. The University of Liverpool's Career Studio, a 'physical and virtual front-of-house for any student or graduate seeking careers support' (p23) has been complemented by a virtual version. This mirroring of physical with virtual spaces and support infrastructures is frequently noted by providers.
103. The University of Westminster's students have informed its multiyear project to create new Student Centres for student support, providing a single point of contact for its students. The provider explains that its Student Centre model has built on the success of its live chat service, which it had developed rapidly at the start of the pandemic. It increased spending between 2019 and 2022 by 20% on e-books, seeing usage by students almost doubling (p19).
104. The University of Greenwich highlights its 'HyFlex facilities' that enabled students to continue to learn and engage through the pandemic. An example of these is the use of their award-winning simulation technologies (p11) that provide authentic learning experiences, and the provider is investing in a virtual trading room with Bloomberg terminals and live trading data, and a multi-platform media room 'where students can analyse real life business case studies, and gain experience of developing marketing campaigns, blogging, designing and social media' (p12).
105. Teesside University describes its strategic concept of Student Life, which has been 'critical to creating our integrated (targeted and whole-population) and seamless academic and pastoral support function' (p11). Its new Student Life building 'draws together all student-facing touchpoints from counselling to careers, in both physical and virtual ways, to drive pro-active interventions that have direct impact on academic success' (p11). By refurbishing teaching rooms to focus on collaborative learning, they have aligned the learning spaces with their Future Facing Learning framework (see 2.2). York St John has also invested in both its built environment and its digital infrastructures, including a 'campus-based Student Support Hub (2023) to offer a joined-up, central point of access for all dimensions of academic, welfare, and

developmental support’ and significantly enhanced digital infrastructure to address the challenges experienced by students working in digital poverty.

106. Luminate Education Group has invested in ‘the creation of specialist teaching spaces to enhance the learner experience and replicate employment environments’ (p6). Its improvements include:

- A Sports Performance Lab - aimed at promoting and inspiring innovative research-practice through which testing and training strategies can be developed and implemented, promoting focus on undergraduate research and providing a hub for elite athletes and teams.
- A range of Chemistry analytical machines and powerful digital microscopes – provides Science students the opportunity to analyse a range of chemical compounds that they were unable to before.
- Robotics equipment for Engineering students (p6).

107. Anglia Ruskin University has complemented its buildings, including a Science Centre, laboratories, theatre and studio, by enhancing its IT and digital infrastructure.

Anglia Ruskin University (p11) Investments in IT infrastructure significantly shaped by the pandemic include: updating audio-visual technologies to modernise teaching spaces (£750k) plus equipment to enable hybrid synchronous teaching and learning (£100k); replacing computers in teaching labs, including to enable students to use specialist software on high-performance devices via remote access (£640k); Adobe Creative Cloud offsite software licencing; and rapid acquisition of specialist laboratory simulation software to support students’ practical learning (£700k).

108. St George’s, University of London highlights its developing resources for practice-based education, as this pedagogic approach ‘depends on our excellent physical and virtual facilities for teaching, learning and practice of hands-on skills in science laboratories, simulation suites and skills facilities, tailored to each of our healthcare and science courses’ (p14).

109. The University of Plymouth highlights its strategic commitment to resources that support experiential learning (p14), explaining that ‘For students to receive the greatest benefit from experiential learning, the resources available must be of the highest quality, be accessible to students and replicate innovation taking place in the workplace’ (p14). Their examples include:

- Remodelled University Marine Station (2015), a facility for shore- and boat-based learning in marine biology, ocean sciences, scientific diving and marine engineering. Resources include a fleet of vessels, industry-standard experimental equipment and autonomous marine vessels.
- LABplus, a flexible learning space that extends and enhances practical experience through self-study learning resources and equipment. Research/industry-standard equipment and software as a core resource. Specific examples include the Coastal, Ocean and Sediment Transport (COAST) laboratory, a world class facility providing students with access to physical model testing.

- A state-of-the-art Simulated Dental Learning Environment enabling learning in all aspects of dental care in a safe, controlled environment.

110. London Metropolitan University has made recent investments in ‘a mock courtroom, purpose-built art, design and recording studios... a £100,000 journalism newsroom and our £30 million Science Centre, which is one of the largest science teaching labs in Europe’ (p8). The University of Hull has remodelled selected locations to improve its students’ learning environment, emphasising the importance of students feeling welcome, whether they want to sit individually or as part of a group.

111. Some providers emphasise alignment between the design of new facilities and new ways of teaching, learning, assessing, supporting and engaging students. The University of Chichester explains clearly that the development of its environments is linked with strategic commitment to promoting ‘community and positive relationships’ that ‘shape who we are and how we understand our purpose and role’ (p1).

The University of Chichester (p14) The University’s physical and virtual learning resources are tailored and used effectively to support outstanding teaching and learning. Since 2017, the University has invested over £50m on new teaching spaces. ... We have also refurbished and re-ordered our Learning Resources Centres on both campuses to include cafés and facilitate opportunities for social learning and group work. Similarly, we have introduced social interaction spaces in other buildings, with the aim of increasing formal and informal learning between students. (p14)

112. Some providers allude to their strategic decision-making processes for allocating resources. Solent University’s strategy ‘is driven and monitored centrally through a business planning process which coordinates the institutional estate masterplan and subject-level investments’ (p15). Bradford College allocates resources through an annual planning cycle ‘where proposals for staff development, capital expenditure and support services are agreed based on quality indicators and student feedback. The impact of the investment is then monitored through quarterly meetings between curriculum leaders and the college’s executive.

113. Links are always implied in the submissions between changes to the built and digital environments and the strategic goals of improving student experiences and outcomes. Sometimes these are made more explicit, for example by explaining the links between different kinds of learning spaces and specific learning activities identified as key to student learning and engagement. In the best examples, a clear connection is made between new and enhanced environments, student activities, and specific evaluation data relating to students’ perspectives on the spaces, resources and learning environments available to them.

2.6 Engaging with students and alumni as partners

114. Each provider outlines ways in which it engages with its students to develop its provision, recognising the importance of student feedback, for example through internal and external student surveys, to produce and analyse quantitative and qualitative evidence of students’ perspectives (see 3.2). There are, however, many examples of providers who are explicitly addressing strategic change in partnership

with students more widely and finding innovative ways to do so. There are also examples of how partnering with alumni is helping to improve the student experience and student outcomes.

115. The most established ways of bringing students into the strategic work of providers is through student representation systems, usually implemented in partnership with students' unions or guilds. Student representatives sit on committees that oversee or contribute to strategic improvement. These can include committees at provider level, at faculty or department level, and panels set up for specific strategic projects. Larger providers in the sample all illustrate the importance of working effectively with unions. Solent University has been taking strategic steps to enhance its partnership.

Solent University (p17) [W]e are actively strengthening our partnerships with students by confirming new longer-term funding and planning arrangements with Solent SU [Students' Union]; ensuring Solent SU and the Vice-Chancellor's Group meet regularly; supporting Solent SU to develop their approaches to student support... We are in the advanced development stages of a Student Partnership Framework with Solent SU.

116. The University of Liverpool notes its 'close partnership' with the Liverpool Guild of Students, seeking 'to ensure our students form a relationship with the University that they will maintain when they join our alumni community of 270,000 across 171 countries, throughout their lives' (p3). This highlights not only a functional relationship between the provider and its students' representative body but also a shared commitment to creating a culture in which relationship with the university is authentic and purposeful, among both students and alumni. The University of East London also identifies the importance of student partnership in relation to both business and ethos.

The University of East London (p7) Our students' voice is central to the University's ethos and operation. It is integral to the creation of a learning community, intrinsic to quality assurance and enhancement processes, course creation, and formally embedded across our committee structure, notably in their representation at Board of Governors, Academic Board and Education & Experience Committee.

117. Sheffield Hallam University describes its Students' Union as central to its plans, making its Annual Student Voice Report, produced over the past 10 years, a key reference point in its improvement cycle (p3). The University of Salford likewise refers to strong collaboration with Salford Students' Union 'in all aspects of improving the student experience and student outcomes' (p3), involving them in quarterly progress meetings. The University of Westminster Students' Union is described in the University's submission as 'a key critical friend' (p21); it works with more than 700 course representatives each year, along with remunerated School Representatives who 'raise student feedback with Heads of School each semester and join Sabbatical Officers on our Student Voice Forum, a university-level committee co-chaired by the DVC Education and the UWSU President' (p21).
118. Beyond formal partnerships and committee processes, students are actively involved in innovative approaches and events designed to give students a voice. These include student panels or forums, consultation groups, focus groups, student-led projects and

student ambassadors. City College Norwich runs a higher education forum, inviting all students to attend to review key themes and topics across all of higher education – including facilities, support and wider student experience (p15). ICMP has run focus groups reflecting in key issues raised by its students’ responses to the National Student Survey; resulting changes include improving noise pollution across studio spaces and new cross-programme networking events (p13). LSE has created a Student Education Panel, comprising a cross-section of students, which meets five times a year to ‘discuss education-related subjects and shape change’ (p12).

119. The University of Hull describes its student-staff partnership scheme, which addresses priorities identified within its ‘student partnership agreement’; the scheme has ‘supported a total of 19 projects, involving student partners across all levels of study and academic and professional service staff partners’ (p14). The University of Westminster refers to its student focus groups, ‘students as co-creators’ projects and Student Experience and Opinion Panel, noting that an independent internal auditor had highlighted the value of its approach which has facilitated associated ‘constructive consultation with students’ and ‘detailed analyses and reporting’ (p20). The University of Warwick also emphasises co-creation, describing it as ‘a central expectation for all educational innovation activity’ (p2), for example in the development of its inclusive education model.

University of Warwick (p2) The principles of partnership and co-creation between students and staff are firmly embedded in everything we do to design, deliver, evaluate, and improve the student learning experience.

120. The University of East London highlights the creation of its Office for Institutional Equity, which has led on projects promoting student success. It explains students’ engagement with these further.

The University of East London (UEL) (p11) Students were ... positioned to co-lead on the delivery of the projects: *The Promoting Student Success in Higher Education Project* which, using an appreciative inquiry approach, explored the lived experiences of students at UEL, by investigating their perceptions of the causes that underpin their performance.

121. London Metropolitan University also refers to co-created projects focused on inclusion, characterising a ‘golden thread running throughout [its] strategic approach’ which ‘is creating democratic and equalising spaces where the student voice can inform policy and practice’ (p9).
122. Other innovative approaches to enhancing student partnership are York St John University’s ‘dialogue days’, Student-Staff Partnership Grants for year-long enhancement projects offered by St George’s, University of London, and the University of Greenwich’s student ambassador scheme.

University of Greenwich (p21) We have the largest Student Ambassador scheme in the country, employing approximately 350 students each year to work in a variety of roles. We ensure that disabled students get the opportunity to work for the University to enhance their employment prospects – currently, 11% of our Student Ambassadors class themselves as disabled and work to enhance accessibility.

123. This is an example of a scheme designed to enhance students' engagement with the culture and outreach of the provider, while also enhancing individual students' opportunities for work experience.

124. The creation of new roles such as Student Experience Officer has been noted by several of the providers. These role-holders typically commit to partnership with students in effecting change. St George's explains its rationale for taking this approach.

St George's, University of London (p17) Our university architecture for supporting student engagement and continuous improvement has advanced considerably over the TEF period, from one part-time Student Experience Officer in 2019 to a team of three in 2022. This has enabled a broadening from a largely course-focused student engagement landscape centred on academic experience to one that supports the shaping of larger-scale change at university level in partnership with students.

125. As well as enhancing partnerships with students, many providers make reference to engaging with alumni to improve students' experiences and outcomes. One way of doing this is through alumni mentoring schemes. The University of Westminster, for example, offers one-to-one support for students via its mentoring programme. Its scheme started by 'matching students from underrepresented backgrounds to industry professionals in a relevant field, in order to enhance their employability' and it creates an environment in which students 'feel comfortable discussing their future aspirations' (p8). Arts University Plymouth also offers alumni and industry mentoring for its final year students (p3).

Arts University Plymouth (p21) Many alumni have become contributors to curriculum events such as Pro Talks and industry symposia, and many now provide work placement and/or mentoring support.

126. The University of Liverpool also emphasises its commitment to maintaining lifelong connections with alumni, 'many of whom support our educational endeavours by acting as advocates, mentors, guest speakers, a source of placements and advisors in programme design' (p25). It explains that almost 8,000 alumni had been involved in university activities, with over 44,000 hours of volunteering dedicated collectively during the TEF period.

127. Many providers describe productive alumni links with respect to their creation of work placements, career opportunities and entrepreneurship. The University of Westminster, for example, explains that its Westminster Enterprise Network connects students with the world of work 'to solve real-world problems and enhance their employability prospects' and its Westminster Working Cultures initiative 'provides

students with access to a global network of alumni and partners' (p2). London Metropolitan University has developed its Careers Education Framework, which is embedded across the student lifecycle, 'through strong partnerships and delivery between teaching teams, Careers and Employability, Work Based Learning, Student Enterprise, alumni and employers' (p20). Solent University's Graduate Outcomes Improvement Plan comprises five pillars of activity, one of which is employer and alumni engagement (p14).

128. How providers may demonstrate evidence of the impact of their approaches to working in partnership with students and alumni will be discussed further below (3.2). Following through with evaluating these activities is not always fully articulated. However, provider submissions give positive accounts of the impact of these developments on students' lived experiences, which contribute broadly to positive internal survey data and improved student experience and student outcomes indicators in the OfS TEF datasets.

2.7 Working strategically with external partners and civic society

129. In the sample of TEF submissions analysed, many providers emphasise the importance to their mission in general, and to students' experiences and student outcomes in particular, of partnering with external bodies, and of civic themes and events. The shared provision delivered by academic partners, where this takes place, is discussed as part of the overall educational provision, but there are multiple explicit references to the impact that other kinds of partners, including employers and civic bodies, have on students, their learning and their outcomes.
130. The University of Plymouth emphasises its very strong relationships with employers, who are included in every programme approval process.

University of Plymouth (p8) We have a very strong network of regional and national employers who are actively engaged from the initial design of a curriculum, inclusion of employer-relevant skills development, providing employer-based experiential learning and mentoring, and supporting our students as they enter the workplace. Employers are included at every programme approval as this is embedded in processes.

131. The University of Plymouth explains that its partnership activity is run by a dedicated section within its Academic Registry. Its partners 'have senior representatives on strategic University committees, including Senate, to ensure they have a voice in strategic policy and portfolio developments' (p18).
132. Sheffield Hallam University builds partnership into its mission, aspiring to be 'a beacon for what a university can do for and with its communities' (p2).

Sheffield Hallam University (p2) We do this through our core activities and our leadership of the Civic University Network, supporting 120 universities across the UK to embed civic aspirations. We recently secured a £3.7m Research England grant for the National Civic Impact Accelerator to generate further engagement, impact and understanding across the sector.

133. Working with more than 1,000 organisations – including Adidas, Airbus, the BBC, Disney, the NHS, Rolls Royce, and Sony – Sheffield Hallam University delivers 24,000 student placements and ‘real-world’ projects each year (p18). The provider cites evidence that its placements benefit student outcomes.

Sheffield Hallam University (p18) Since 2019, 3,145 students have completed a sandwich placement. Our most recent Graduate Outcomes data (2022) shows those who completed a sandwich placement are more likely to achieve Good Honours (97%, vs 82%), to be in Highly Skilled Employment (82%, vs 60%), and to secure a Higher Salary (£24,905 vs £20,000) than those who did not. In addition, completion of a sandwich placement appears to markedly reduce the BAME [Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic] degree awarding gap from 14 percentage points to 3 percentage points (2020/21 completion data). Sandwich placements with an Applied Professional Diploma are an essential component of our employability strategy.

134. The University of Westminster also describes professional practice and employer engagement at the heart of students’ academic experience. It has a University Industry Engagement Board, made up of senior employer partners that ‘reflect [its] course portfolio and graduate employment destinations’ (p14). In particular, the university facilitates learning opportunities with a wide range of organisations in London.

University of Westminster (p18) Student learning is encouraged through engagement with London’s network of organisations, businesses, and communities including TATE Britain, Imperial War Museum, British Library, Bank of England, and the Houses of Parliament. We actively encourage students to examine London through the tools of their chosen disciplines...

135. The provider explains that student assessments relate to and are informed by ‘long established London institutions’, including the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Royal Courts of Justice (p18).

University of Westminster (p12) Partnership infuses our curriculum. For example, Entrepreneurship students have devised a social enterprise that enables Kenyan Women to support themselves economically through fish farming; have buddied young entrepreneurs in Rwanda; and have competed to run successful charity and third sector funding campaigns.

136. The University of Westminster describes its way of working with business and industry as transformative, noting improvements in its employability outcomes. Recognising its particularly diverse student community, with 51% of its entrants first generation in

higher education and 64% from BAME backgrounds, the provider also notes that its very high quality student outcomes indicators ‘demonstrate the impact of this approach’ (p1).

137. The University of East London (UEL) has taken strategic steps to invest in ‘Centres of Excellence’, which ‘provide a network of dedicated venues aligned to distinct industry clusters, including Amazon Web Services, Siemens and Accenture’ (p13).

The University of East London (p13) These spaces bring together employers, resident businesses, investors, students, faculty, alumni and members of the local community through a range of events, training, workshops, careers fairs, hackathons, exhibitions, demonstrations and live projects with a clear and direct focus on shaping and responding to the challenges of Industry 5.0.

138. UEL explains that its Practice Based Centres across three campuses provide students with work experience and guidance from both academic and professionals from industry.

The University of East London (p20) The Centres remove barriers to employment, build social networks whilst providing a safe and supportive environment for students to flourish.

139. It is not only large universities that are actively partnering with industry to bring about improvements to students’ experiences and outcomes; it is also the case for smaller and private providers. SAE Education Ltd explains that it works with industry partners for three main reasons (p5/6):

- to provide the best access possible for its students to the most up-to-date hardware and software tools in the creative industries;
- to engage with industry in shaping and guiding SAE’s curricula and learning and teaching strategies, including through the provision of live industry briefs to be integrated into modules;
- to help generate graduate routes and opportunities for students, as reflected in SAE’s strong progression metrics.

140. The provider has an Industry Advisory Council that meets twice a year ‘to gather thoughts, feedback and guidance from industry representatives on all aspects of SAE’s educational delivery’ (p21). This includes feedback on its educational philosophy, learning and teaching, assessment and curriculum. Luminare Education Group also works actively with partners, working closely, for example, with the Leeds City Region Local Enterprise Partnership and local councils to identify areas for its curriculum and promote the development of skills needed by the region (p1). Writtle University College works with ‘hundreds of external organisations to contribute professional and industry relevance to course design, delivery, assessment, ongoing professional development for our students and progression opportunities for graduates’ (p3).

141. York St John University emphasises the importance of partnerships in its provision, linking its curriculum design to ‘civic needs’ and developing curricula in dialogue with

external partners, industry, and public bodies, including the York and North Yorkshire Chambers Leadership Group. The provider links this with the strong sense of belonging to 'a scholarly and city-wide community' experienced by students, as evidenced by responses to the National Student Survey (p4). Plymouth Marjon University works 'closely with local government, industry, and employers to identify human capital and resource requirements and invite partnerships with them and others' (p1). It explains that these relationships are critical because most of its students will be employed locally after graduation.

142. Anglia Ruskin likewise creates spaces for students to work with external partners, convening Sector Interest Groups as standard practice with employers and external stakeholders 'to advise on sector need, course content and curriculum design' (p5).

Anglia Ruskin University (p5) Employer partners present real-world challenges directly to students and later give feedback on students' submitted work, alongside feedback and formal marking by academic staff.

143. The provider explains that these authentic assessments designed with external partners help to develop the students' social and cultural capital (p5).
144. At Bradford College, it is mandatory for external industry experts to be consulted in programme development and review processes (p6). South Essex College of Further and Higher Education has been developing its partnerships with the dual aim of embedding its reputation and improving the economic prosperity of the local region (p3). Its programmes of study are developed, approved and kept current through engagement with employers, who also act as mentors (p7).
145. The London School of Management Education (LSME) has undertaken a range of initiatives which aim to increase the number of British white students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (IMD Quintile 1), students with disabilities, students from looked after backgrounds and asylum seekers. These include a series of outreach projects in local communities, with several charities, the local council and local schools (p4). The provider is working with seven local secondary schools and has engaged effectively with three charities within the Barking and Dagenham and Redbridge and surrounding Boroughs (p4).
146. There is a clear and strong commitment by providers to benefit regional and wider communities. The University of Salford 'harnesses the skills, imagination, and enthusiasm of its staff and students to work in partnership with large and small enterprises across the public, private and charitable sectors to change people and communities and deliver lasting economic and social benefit' (p1). The University of Greenwich is 'contributing directly to the economic growth and prosperity of Southeast London and the Medway region, through skills provision, employment, research, and innovation' (p3). The University notes a strong correlation between its academic provision and employment sectors in the Medway region through skills provision, employment, research and innovation.

The University of Greenwich (p3) The civic role of the University acts as an exemplar for students in their role as members of their different communities and provides them with opportunities to make a difference through projects we run with partners, such as Charlton Athletic Community Trust in the Royal London Borough of Greenwich.

147. The University of Liverpool has been ‘influential in shaping plans for economic growth sparked by innovation’ (p2), with its research strengths, including Infection Prevention and Control and Artificial Intelligence, relating to the priorities of Liverpool City Region. Students engage with partners in relation to these and other themes through authentic assessment tasks that ‘mirror those they might undertake as professionals or citizens through choice of purpose, format, audience, resources, and collaborative or student-designed elements’ (p7).

The University of Liverpool (p8) This ensures that learning and assessment is responsive to changing market demands, attuned to workforce needs, attractive to a diverse range of applicants and able to deliver excellent outcomes.

148. Solent University describes itself as an ‘anchor institution’ in its region, linking its applied research, knowledge exchange and Civic Charter with its strategic engagement with key partners. It actively works with alumni, local, national and global businesses, regional bodies and professional associations ‘to maximise the value of the education we offer’ (p8).
149. ‘Maximising the value of the education offered’ is a helpful phrase for summarising the positions that providers take with respect to their partnerships. Their engagement with employers and other civic partners is often core to their steps for strategic improvement.

3 Evidencing, rewarding and celebrating success

3.1 Enhancing planning and review frameworks

150. Providers whose overall TEF ratings have improved often refer to ways in which their **internal frameworks for review and planning** have been enhanced, even transformed, during the TEF period. Steps taken to improve planning and review activities reinforced TEF panel members' insights into a provider's commitment to excellence in student education, student experience and student outcomes. Submissions highlight ways in which strategic steps taken, including those outlined in Section 2, are monitored and reviewed.
151. Many providers briefly outline their structure, governance and embedded approaches to quality assurance and enhancement. These include descriptions of **annual review cycles**, the **roles of senior and distributed leaders** such as Deans and heads of department, and the kinds of **reports created and analysed by committees** to ensure that issues are addressed and good practice celebrated and promoted (see 3.5). Strategic decision making is typically undertaken by a senior Education Committee and, above that, by Academic Board, with governance oversight provided by a board or governing body made up of both internal and external members. There are some variations in names and numbers of oversight bodies, as would be the case across a set of providers that vary hugely in size and type but submission narratives indicate appropriate oversight structures.
152. Key performance indicators (KPIs) are typically identified, relating to different sub-sections of the plan(s) associated with the overarching provider strategy or strategies, and tracked by relevant committees, senior leadership teams and governing bodies or boards. Where KPIs are referenced, they relate to both internal and external datasets, including the NSS and the Graduate Outcomes survey. Such cycles of planning and review are well established in the higher education sector and are evident in the submissions of all providers in the sample – those from newer, specialist and independent providers as well as those from large, comprehensive universities.
153. However, some providers show that significant **changes to oversight mechanisms** have been made in recent years to improve student education and student outcomes. Solent University, for example, describes an integrated approach 'built on accountability and transparency' and institutional resources that are 'used to effect impactful interventions and change' (p3). It explains that it undertook a university-wide curriculum review in 2017/18, whereby academics, professional staff and students worked together to design and implement a new curriculum framework. Alongside this, the provider has developed and made regular use of Module Performance Dashboards, targeting specific courses for improvements in its Solent Course Enhancement programme (S-CEP).

Solent University (p6) Originally focused solely on NSS, our current S-CEP iteration is designed to drive improvements in all areas of the student experience and outcomes aligned to institutional KPIs and external metrics. ... Initial analysis of how these courses performed before and after the intervention shows that their total RAG [red, amber, green] weighted scores (an internal measure that reflects performance across key areas) have improved, moving from an average of 3.27 to 2.81 after two years (the lower the figure the better the performance).

154. Solent University is among several providers that have applied Theory of Change principles (see TASO 2024) to their planning and review, relating this to its approach to its Access and Participation Plan (APP)¹⁰.

Solent University (p4) As part of our successful APP approach, based on the expectations set out in the OfS Access and Participation Standards of Evidence guidance, we have developed an Evaluation Checklist which supports the planning and implementation of four stages of impact evaluation:

- 1) about the activity (objectives, links to primary metrics, target population);
- 2) before the activity (existing evidence review, planning outcomes, building a Theory of Change, ethics, choosing an evaluation approach and questions);
- 3) during the activity (evidence gathering and GDPR [General Data Protection Regulation]) and
- 4) after the activity (reporting, reflection and learning).

155. Manchester Metropolitan University also outlines its systematic enhancement of its provision, referencing Theory of Change principles. Its Educational Annual Review process, a 'robust annual monitoring process' in which 'expert opinions on disciplinary knowledge ensure that the curriculum and modes of delivery are up to date, relevant and student-centred' has been enhanced by an Analytics Project. The latter has enabled the University to evolve from using static datasets to live dashboards that all staff can access, so that departmental leaders can 'monitor performance against internal and external benchmarks' (p5).

Manchester Metropolitan University (p20) Over the past 4 years we have embedded the tools, policies and approaches to sustain further improvements (in the form of detailed data dashboards, robust oversight, an integrated range of embedded institutional initiatives, and effective ways to harness the innovative capacity of our staff). Together, these this will enable us to recognise, respond to and deliver further improvements to our students' experiences and outcomes.

¹⁰ The OfS requires Access and Participation Plans of all higher education providers.
<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plans/>

The provider emphasises that these changes have enabled them to achieve stronger alignment of quality across the institution.

156. The University of Plymouth also applies Theory of Change principles, drawing on guidance from the Centre for Transforming Access and Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO). It provides a table showing how these principles are applied, for example, to improving students' educational gains, addressing the following categories of analysis (p20):

- Situation
- Aims
- Inputs
- Activities
- Outputs
- Outcomes
- Impact
- Rationale and assumptions.

The provider's rationale for this approach involves ensuring that all elements in planning for and evaluating change are appropriately supported.

157. Theory of Change principles¹¹ emphasise the importance of being very clear about the reasons for interventions designed to bring about improvements. They outline key questions which include paying attention to resources needed to follow through on change:

- i. What is the intervention's primary intended outcome?
- ii. Why is the primary outcome important and what short and long-term outcomes map to it?
- iii. Who is the intervention for?
- iv. Why is the intervention necessary?
- v. Why will the intervention add value?
- vi. What outputs are needed to deliver the short-term outcomes?
- vii. What will the intervention do?
- viii. What inputs are required? (TASO 2024)

158. Not all providers refer explicitly to Theory of Change, but many submissions refer to comparable ways in which they are refining their approaches: that is, improving their capacity to analyse what needs to change, what steps are being taken by whom, and how the impacts of these steps are being meaningfully evaluated.

159. Some providers explain that they have developed **distinctive approaches to programme and module improvement**. Internal student surveys are typically run both

¹¹ <https://taso.org.uk/evidence/evaluation-guidance-resources/impact-evaluation-with-small-cohorts/getting-started-with-a-small-n-evaluation/theory-of-change/>

at module and programme level, but various local approaches have been developed. Arts University Plymouth, for example, produces Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) and holds three related meetings each year, one related to student induction, the second student retention and achievement and the third student continuation and progression: 'AMRs celebrate the achievements of students and alumni, staff research, CPD and professional achievements and they record course level enhancement activity and industry liaison' (p7). The University of Liverpool's action plans from its Annual and Periodic Reviews include a six-month progress review, while data such as NSS results and classification data are considered as part of an annual pattern of analysis and enhancement planning. There are many variations of these patterns of planning, interim discussion, evaluation and refreshing of plans across the submissions, but they are all clearly focused on both targeting specific areas for improvement and ensuring that key performance indicators overall are addressed.

160. Some providers, typically those which offer further education as well as higher education programmes of study, have an **internal review that leads to ratings**. City College Norwich, for example, explains that 'Outcomes from Quality Reviews are reported to College Leadership in a Teaching, Learning and Assessment review where the strengths and areas for development of provision are agreed and recorded' (p12). The review panel comprises a college governor as well as senior staff responsible for quality. There is a scoring system for provision which ranges from 1 (Inadequate) to 10 (Outstanding).

City College Norwich (p13) This scale is used across the College to rate the quality of teaching and learning and has been used for over 5 years. It has proven to be a reliable indicator of external judgements as demonstrated by the College's 2021 and 2019 Ofsted inspections which provided the same external ratings across curriculum as the internal scoring.

161. Using ratings of this kind is not common across the higher education sector in England, but more common among providers that offer higher education alongside further education courses; in the further education sector, reviews such as those by Ofsted do carry ratings, so a ratings culture may be more easily embedded across the college. There was no evidence in the submissions in the sample that providers are yet mirroring TEF ratings in their internal reviews, but this would be an option once a consistent TEF ratings system becomes embedded in the OfS's external review cycle.
162. Alignment between the planning and review cycle and other priorities, such as developing staff and working in partnership with students, is emphasised by providers. City College Norwich, for example, notes that it has developed **stronger links between quality review and the provision of Continuing Professional Development (CPD)** activities. Anglia Ruskin University is among a number of providers that emphasise that it shares the good practice identified through CPD activities (p13). **Working in partnership with students** as part of the planning and review cycle is highly characteristic of the approaches taken by providers in the sample. This engagement is considered separately above (2.6).
163. New approaches to analysing and evaluating the impact of strategic steps taken to improve provision are also being developed. These are discussed in the next section.

3.2 Producing, analysing and applying internal and external data

164. The TEF assessment requires providers to include evidence in their written submissions of positive impact on student experience and outcomes. All providers refer to benchmarked OfS indicators relating to student experience and student outcomes, where these are available. To differing degrees, providers offer their own analysis of these published datasets and they may compare them to internally produced data; for example, by comparing students' responses to the NSS to their responses to internal surveys.
165. Providers can and do use *improving* indicators, where they indicate very high quality or outstanding provision, as broad evidence of success in relation to the implementation of an overall strategic plan. Referring to the split indicators – where data show comparative strengths between different student demographics and groups – can also suggest success in certain targeted interventions – for example, a new approach to supporting students with disabilities.
166. However, the OfS datasets do not provide all of the evidence needed to demonstrate success with respect to student experience and student outcomes. For some providers, some or most of the OfS data may not be available, for example because of small student numbers. Even where they are available, OfS indicators may need to be supplemented by more nuanced internal data, which can shed a different (or complementary) light on student experience and outcomes across the provider's student body. The TEF guidelines (Part 4) give examples of the many kinds of evidence providers could include in their submissions (Regulatory advice 22, pp32-34). These range widely, and include internal surveys, feedback from employers and professional practitioners, and relevant findings from learner analytics. The success of local strategic plans and related interventions – for example, new ways of working in partnership with students or of developing staff and staff roles – needs to be evidenced through the provider's own evaluations if it is to be persuasive, as indicated in the TEF guidelines.

Evidence should demonstrate the impact and effectiveness of a provider's strategies and approaches to learning and teaching, on the experiences and outcomes of its students. For example, a provider should avoid describing its strategies or approaches without also explaining and evidencing their impact on student experiences and outcomes (Regulatory advice 22, p30).

167. Evidence provided in the submissions and the ways in which this evidence is analysed to demonstrate very high quality or outstanding areas of excellent practice is therefore a central focus of panel members as they reach their holistic judgement of each of the two aspects, student experience and student outcomes, and subsequently reach an overall rating for each provider.
168. **Transforming access to meaningful data** that can be used for evaluation and planning is a common theme across the submissions in this sample. This includes both developing a stronger infrastructure for producing different kinds of data and investing in personnel who can undertake appropriate analyses.

169. Providers typically **track multiple data sources** so that they can be analysed and synthesised to inform decision making and demonstrate success. York St John University, for example, explains that it uses a data-led approach to identifying strengths and weaknesses.

York St John University (p5) Since 2017, school-specific dashboards have provided data drawn from a wide variety of sources, including UCAS, NSS, external student-experience surveys (PRES [Postgraduate Research Experience Survey], Graduate Outcomes), and continuation, completion, and attainment data. These are discussed at School- and directorate-level and reviewed regularly by our Executive Board. These meetings create accountability for student experience and outcomes.

170. Writtle University College explains that wherever possible it uses data-driven approaches to assess the quality of its learning, teaching and student outcomes (p4). It points to the particular importance of internal data for smaller providers, for whom larger external datasets may be inaccessible or misleading.

Writtle University College (WUC) (p4) [D]ue to our small scale, some external datasets do not fairly represent our student outcomes. WUC's annual denominator value for all but one data point in its TEF outcomes is less than 300; in most cases it is less than 200. When split by student characteristics and subjects, the datasets quickly become statistically problematic. To obtain useful performance data at a subject or departmental level, datasets often have to be aggregated across years, which undermines longitudinal tracking. Where annual splits *are* used, the statistical uncertainty remains high and reported performance often shows significant variances. In this submission we present internal datasets which we consider to be a more reliable basis on which to judge performance.

171. It cites its own tracking of full-time completion, for example, using a range of data points, to argue that the year 2 benchmark value applied to its cohort is anomalous and that year 3 and 4 TEF data are more helpful indicators (p17).
172. SAE Education Ltd has drawn on the Jisc Learning Analytics group to introduce a 'more robust' management system to help campus leaders monitor students. It has developed a means of producing and analysing comparative data across campuses (p17/18) relating to
- Attendance at scheduled synchronous learning activities;
 - Engagement with asynchronous learning objects via the virtual learning environment;
 - Attainment, measured via formative (baseline) assessments connected to our holistic assessment strategy.
173. The provider can analyse fortnightly trends to enable early interventions 'when an otherwise highly engaged student has experienced a reduction in attendance and engagement' (p18).

174. Providers highlight the development of key staff posts to maximise the impact of their data analysis. Manchester Metropolitan University explains that it has made significant financial investment in data infrastructure, establishing a 'core student dataset to support integration across systems'; its Power BI dashboards 'provide all staff with the tools needed to use data effectively, and to make better strategic decisions' (p19/20).

Manchester Metropolitan University (p12) [Our Student Engagement Dashboard] provides an early-warning to Student Experience Officers and personal tutors by picking-up on several leading indicators for engagement (such as level of attendance, failure to submit coursework, failing an element of assessment, or reduced VLE [virtual learning environment] activity).

175. Support is targeted at students who are struggling, and the provider notes the contribution of this approach to its outstanding continuation rates for students throughout the TEF cycle.
176. The University of Chichester has invested in a Student Attendance Management system that allows the University to collect, process and analyse student engagement with timetabled sessions, and appointed a Student Retention and Engagement Adviser to engage with academic staff. LSE has invested in new posts in its planning department to help produce 'in-depth statistical analyses of LSE grade awarding gaps and assessment patterns, over 100 student projects and the development of a range of data sources and dashboards' (p10).
177. New kinds of learner analytics are enabling providers to **monitor and track student engagement and students' experiences**. These are explained by providers to show how data are used in real time to effect improvements. Some examples are given from the data as evidence of impact; these vary in range and consistency, but they illustrate active engagement with quality monitoring and enhancement.
178. Teesside University explains that its planning has been enhanced by its learner analytics platform 'which provides personalised dashboards for staff and students to monitor engagement with learning and associated interventions, including records of tutorials, library resources engagement, attendance records and online interactions' (p9). This means that not only can their review and planning cycles be informed by real-time data, but individual students can be better supported. Teesside University's analytics platform, StREAM, 'facilitates seamless referrals and monitoring of individual student cases between Personal Tutors and other support functions, providing a single source of truth for data and subsequent actions' (p9). This has allowed academic and student support functions to come together in a unified approach and 'draw upon multiple points of intelligence gathering' (p9).
179. Kingston University's Continuous Enhancement Programme has likewise been supported by developing their data dashboards, 'enabling [the University] to interrogate student experience and outcomes data at a granular level, and to address any areas of under-performance, while also identifying and promoting good practice across the institution' (p1). Point Blank Ltd notes that its Academic Success Centre tracks multiple data sources relating to student engagement and success, which means that where risks are found, 'personalised risk intervention plans are put in place for the student' (p8). The University of Liverpool's learner data 'dashboard and scorecard at

discipline level’ enables programme and department teams to understand their students in relation to their main characteristics, such as domicile, ethnicity, age and gender, as well as features such as entry qualifications and specific disability types. It explains that ‘Action planning at subject level based on these data then addresses priorities in relation to the performance of our student groups’ (p22).

180. One area in which evidence of data production and analysis is especially evident is in relation to student **employability and careers**. The University of East London, for example, explains that it uses data from its career management platform to create a careers dashboard.

University of East London (p18) An algorithm combining platform logins, event attendance and one-to-one Career Coaching appointments is used to create [students’] engagement score (excellent, good, moderate and low) and advice is given about the appropriate levels of activity required to be successful in preparing for and securing a graduate job... This data is used to create monthly reports which are shared with the Schools, allowing us to track engagement, understand the impact of our work and recalibrate where necessary.

181. St George’s, University of London triangulates its published Graduate Outcome data with other datasets so that it can ‘evidence alignment between in-course, co-curriculum and extra-curricular activity designed to prepare [students] for employment and their anticipated or subsequent employment experience’ (p20). It also analyses qualitative data to gain insights into ‘students’ perspectives on academic experience, personal growth and employability skills’ (p9). St George’s has enhanced its processes for generating and monitoring data since 2017-18, to identify more effectively differences in student experiences and outcomes.

St George’s, University of London (p18) Course teams now receive four years of student lifecycle data split initially by disability, age, ethnicity and socioeconomic background. Subsequent data enhancement has enabled us to monitor the additional protected characteristics religious belief and sexual orientation, as well as identifying differences in attainment when comparing the distance students live from campus. This has established a process of routine monitoring by demographic group at course level and informed scrutiny at university level through the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee.

182. Teesside University has run a Future Ready Survey with a 92% response rate over four years ‘to capture and tailor the transformative effect of a Teesside education on a student’s outcomes and transition post-graduation’ (p16).

Teesside University (p17) Survey data further provides a longitudinal perspective of student growth over time and a real-time snapshot (at the beginning of each level of study) of each student’s sense of progress in their ‘recruit-ability’ and employability journey. This data is analysed to determine insights relative to others or over time at a cohort, subject, School, and institutional level. The survey supplies us with a rich picture of individual students that enables the creation of personalised journeys, the

tailoring of communication and the 'packaging' of opportunities relevant to individuals to increase their distance travelled over the student lifecycle, alongside informing the continuous improvement in course design and delivery.

183. Complex data platforms can inform providers, and students themselves, about trends and variances in categories such as student attendance or use of learning resources – but capturing the **student voice**, or students' voices, in authentic ways that enable providers to understand the nuanced experiences of students is equally important to them. The University of Westminster distinguishes between its longitudinal data tracking and monitoring that accounts for 'process evaluation' and 'impact data collection when engaging student voice directly' (p5).

University of Westminster (p5) In practice this means we collect more student reported data on the knowledge gained and skill application from interventions than insight into the logistics of activity. We have an evaluation culture of using qualitative reflective statements written by students, which has emerged in response to our deep understanding that the lived experience of our students contextualises the ambitions they have and thus the gains they make. This step-change in evaluation is evident in our approved Access and Participation Variation for 2023/24.

184. The University of Salford describes internal mechanisms used to capture 'the student voice', including internal surveys that 'provide students with the opportunity to evaluate their current academic and personal skills and identify areas for improvement or development' (p21) and student representation on Task and Finish and Working Groups, which present directly to the University Council.
185. Along with its comprehensive data collection and dashboards, Sheffield Hallam University has developed more qualitative projects such as 'Listening Rooms', used over the past six years with different student groups: 'We have listened to over 400 students' experiences and worked with over 170 stakeholders to create positive change' (p12). An example given is of Physics staff using Listening Rooms to gather data from their Level 4 students, which led to changes and a continuation indicator materially above benchmark (p12). The University of Warwick has used focus groups and its student representatives have used WhatsApp and social media to gather 'instant insight' from students (p14). Plymouth Marjon University has developed a virtual and anonymous online 'Chatback' function, where feedback is directed to relevant managers (p23).
186. St George's, University of London evidences the impact of an enhancement project led by its Centre for Innovation and Development in 2019, in which paid student curriculum advisors and staff collaborated 'to identify good practice to showcase and surface enhancement needs to address' (p5). This activity had been prompted by an Institutional Quality Audits on feedback and assessment. It cites internal survey results as evidence of its impact.

St George's, University of London (p5) Our SES [Student Experience Survey] of all non-NSS cohorts is more positive across all areas of assessment practice with overall rating for assessment and feedback improving by 6%; transparency of criteria provided in advance of assessment by 9%; timeliness of feedback by 4% and helpful comments on my work by 9% between 2019 and 2022. This may indicate that we are beginning to see improvement, particularly in relation to the use of criteria and rubrics to improve feedback, which was a focus of the enhancement project.

187. St George's notes that further evidence that addressing the recommendations of internal quality audits and undertaking collaborative staff-student work with course teams is having impact is that 'assessment and feedback is much more highly rated in the Student Online Teaching Survey at module level over the same period' (p5).
188. Other providers, for example the University of Westminster, also cite internal audits as providing evidence for action; following an audit in 2019, the University's Retention Task and Finish Group led changes in data use, academic/pastoral support and transitions and processes.

University of Westminster (p5) Actions included: a review of welcome and arrivals communications to ensure that they were clear, inclusive and accessible, the development of a single Welcome to Westminster web page which linked through to all resources and welcome events, a commitment to longitudinal (over the first few weeks) induction set out in the Welcome and Arrivals Policy and the development of a standard template for Course Arrivals Timetables (over the first few weeks); a review (ongoing) of the academic calendar to support continuation.

189. These examples highlight the sequence of evidence gathering, action and more evidence gathering: an audit produces data that leads to actions that lead to the gathering of more data and an evaluation of the impact of those actions. The extent to which this sequence, or cycle, is fully explained, and the timelines and scope of data clarified, varies somewhat across the submissions – but the most persuasive narratives tell a clear tale of sequenced analysis, action and evidence of impact.
190. Internal data from student surveys are frequently used in the submissions to highlight trends and improvements. Bradford College, for example, uses data from its 2022 End of Year Student Experience Survey of all Level 4 and Level 5 students, citing a strong 74% return rate, to show very positive responses.

Bradford College (p5) 91% of students agreed that they had regular tutorials and 94% agreed that their tutors consistently challenged them to do their best. 95% of students agreed that the feedback they received told them what they did well and what they needed to do to improve. ... These responses, when compared against external benchmarks ... placed the college in the upper A quartile and 4% above benchmark.

191. Some providers emphasise the importance of providing internal data for students, not just data about students, and that keeping students better informed about their own levels and engagement and progress can in itself lead to positive impact. Solent

University, for example, has developed an assessment dashboard within its virtual learning environment, which ‘provides each student with an at-a-glance overview of past, present and future assessment briefs, due dates, actual submission dates, grade release dates and direct links to grades and feedback’ (p5). It notes that in its 2018 launch year it saw a significant reduction (41%) in student appeals.

192. As well as data collection and analysis relating to whole cohorts, programmes and specific courses or modules, providers give examples of how **specific activities and interventions** are evaluated. The University of Plymouth, for example, has evaluated the benefits of its students engaged in Knowledge Exchange. It surveyed nearly 2,000 students over two years and reached key findings that showed high percentages of students, for example, who felt that they had become more employable, confident and better communicators as a result of undertaking these activities (p22). The findings led to a suite of online toolkits preparing students and staff for Knowledge Exchange activities.
193. Anglia Ruskin University is among providers that evidence the impact of their work to address student outcomes gaps between different demographic groups.

Anglia Ruskin University (p22) We see clear impact of our work to address student outcomes gaps between different demographic groups. Across all student outcomes measures, female/male, IMD and geography of employment quintiles, and disability reported/not reported categories perform similarly with respect to benchmarks.

194. Point Blank Ltd cites a significant increase in the continuation rates of its Black and Mixed students from 50% in 2016/17 to 75% in 2021/22 following the implementation of its Access and Participation Plan and the establishment of its Widening Participation External Advisory Group. Manchester Metropolitan University uses data to show improvement in continuation for students at risk of lower outcomes who engage with their Academic Study Skills programmes.

Manchester Metropolitan University (p13/14) Students who engaged with the Academic Study Skills programmes had proportionally higher rates of continuation to next level of study than the overall University population (93.4%, +6.6pp, n=1,025). Of the 413 engaged students who graduated in 2021/22, 9.2pp more were awarded good honours than the overall University population (87.4%, n=361).

195. There are also multiple examples of providers taking specific actions as a result of their analysis. Kingston University has responded to its analysis of graduate outcomes data and feedback from staff and students by focusing on the importance of providing targeted support.

Kingston University (p18) Three key priorities were identified for CES [Careers and Employability Service]: improving career preparation and professional experience opportunities for students; enhancing career readiness support through the curriculum; and working with employers to increase the opportunities for students to develop professional experience. We also introduced the Career Registration survey. ... We also established a Graduate Success team to further develop support for

underrepresented demographic groups, and a Personal Development team which co-creates and delivers, with module leaders, skills based Navigate workshops in the curriculum.

196. These examples illustrate ways in which providers link evidence with interventions, both by evaluating actions and showing how data analysis has led to specific actions. It is not always straightforward to do so, given the great number of variables at work with respect to student experience and outcomes, but selecting key activities and showing data that are indicative of impact is helpful, especially as these accumulate through the submission and correlate with overall indicators.
197. Providers engage with, analyse and sometimes challenge external data. They typically discuss in some detail their National Student Survey results, which offer both wide ranging and longitudinal datasets indicative of students' perspectives. These enable providers to benchmark their own successes against the performance of, for example, other providers in their higher education mission group or region. Where NSS results are less strong for particular subject areas or demographic groups, these are noted and some explanations given. In the best examples, providers can demonstrate that interventions in relation to a particular subject area or student group have led to improvements in the data over time.
198. LSE notes a range of evidence for its overall improvements in OfS indicators, especially in the NSS where in the previous TEF assessment its results had been poor.

LSE (p3) The success of our work to shape and drive improvement is reflected in the TEF 2023 indicators which demonstrate a trend of significantly improved performance against benchmark during the TEF assessment period, for all the student experience indicators. LSE has bucked sector trends of declining student experience suggested by decreasing benchmarks and maintained a steady or improving level of student experience during the pandemic years. Our NSS scores for the TEF indicators have moved from being some of the lowest amongst the Russell Group (RG) in 2019, to consistently within the top half or quarter of the RG in 2022.

199. The University of Warwick notes that its NSS indicators are above or materially above benchmark for Teaching, Assessment and Student Voice, and emphasises certain NSS questions that highlight its commitment to research-led education.

University of Warwick (p1) Students rate intellectual stimulation and the opportunity to explore concepts and ideas in depth highly (NSS 2022 Q3 "The course is intellectually stimulating": +4.9% vs benchmark; ranked second in the Russell Group in 2021 and third in 2022. NSS 2022 Q5 "My course has provided me with opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth": +3.3% vs benchmark) (Source: S7.k). In the full-time overall indicator for "The teaching on my course", Warwick is 2.4% above benchmark (Source: TEF Student Experience Indicators).

200. ICMP cites NSS evidence of the impact of its professional development work, explaining that it has 'contributed to an 11-point uplift in our average score for the 'teaching on my course' question set, which has risen from 68% in 2021 to broadly in line with

benchmark in 2022 at 79%' (p8). It also highlights that it is materially above benchmark on all three NSS questions relating to academic support and the positive trends in the responses for particular student groups.

ICMP (p10) The split indicators show positive trends – mature student satisfaction has increased by 19% to 89%, black students by 16% to 89%, mixed ethnicity students by 10% to 85% and IMD 2 students by 7% to 84%. ... The rise in Academic Support ratings also validates recent improvement initiatives.

201. Results of surveys other than the NSS are used as evidence by some providers. York St John University, for example, explains that its academic support indicators stem from their personalised tutor offer, and cites the ISB (International Student Barometer) survey results (100% student satisfaction with personal tutors in the ISB 2021 against a sector average of 94%). It uses these data to demonstrate that it has 'distributed its expertise across the entire range of disciplinary cohorts' (p9).
202. The University of Westminster measures its performance against the 17 United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

University of Westminster (p1) In 2022, we were ranked by Times Higher Education as being among the top 15% of providers globally for impact towards meeting the UN's sustainable development goals, including being in the top 9% in tackling gender inequalities (SDG5) and the top 4% for our commitment to reducing social inequalities (SDG10).

203. Solent University emphasises its commitment to seeking external verification of its approaches, summarising comments by its 127 external examiners and external members of validation panels.

Solent University (p4) Positive comments extend to our industry connections, the standard and consistency of our marking processes, the rigor of our internal moderation process, the quality of feedback (including the use of audio and video feedback) and the use of feedback forms to provide consistent and high-quality feedback for students.

204. It is not easy for TEF panel members to evaluate summaries such as these, to calibrate references like those above to Times Higher rankings or Student Barometer results against other datasets, but a full range of data points illustrate areas of focus and direction of travel.
205. Overall, the multiplicity of approaches to measuring impact is both helpful, in illustrating many kinds of success, and challenging, in that it can be difficult in a 25-page narrative to articulate a very clear account of the relationships between the parts – distinct activities and interventions – and the whole: overall progress towards the goals set in the education strategy. This challenge will be considered further in the Concluding discussion (4).

3.3 Producing and acting upon research into student education

206. As we have seen, all providers produce, analyse and act upon data related to the two TEF aspects, student experience and student outcomes. They also refer to and analyse a range of external datasets. Some providers also refer to, produce and act upon educational research, some of which may form part of their established research output, submissible to the Research Excellence Framework (REF). Educational research can lead to a variety of outputs, including papers published in local, national and international journals. Such research goes beyond analysis of datasets, situating the production and analysis of data within one or more theoretical frameworks, referencing published literature in the field and reaching scholarly findings that are relevant within and beyond the institution(s) undertaking the research. The following are examples of educational research, or ‘scholarship of teaching and learning’ as it is often referred to internationally, undertaken by and applied to the providers in the sample. They include research by scholars and also research taken by students themselves.

207. Kingston University explains in its submission that its pedagogic and educational research ‘has directly improved our students’ academic experience and outcomes’ (p6). Examples of areas of focus for that research include improving its understanding of educational gain for different student groups within its population, and of how students can be better engaged in the process of curriculum design. The university submitted its research to REF 2021 and cites feedback about reach and significance, ‘with some outstanding impact’ (p6). Kingston University also runs a scheme for student researchers, the Student Academic Development Research Associates Scheme, which provides funds for students to participate as co-researchers with academic staff in educational research projects. These include projects aimed at improving student retention, attainment, employability, wellbeing and access to higher education (p6).

Kingston University (p6) Between 2018/19 and 2021/22, we have supported 44 projects (with 155 student co-researchers) exploring issues including the development of ‘soft skills’ across diverse student populations, personal tutoring in online environments, and factors influencing students’ engagement in formative assessment.

208. The University of Westminster’s Centre for Education and Teaching Innovation has created a ‘framework and culture to support pedagogical research and scholarship’ (p15). Since 2019, more than 100 staff have engaged in scholarly investigations.

The University of Westminster (p15) Themes have included virtual reality labs in the School of Life Sciences; mobile learning and gamification, originating in Computer Science and Engineering; the FabLab in Architecture and Cities (an experimental centre for teaching, research and knowledge exchange), and employability and international experience in the Business School. Findings and outcomes of two communities, focusing on inclusive curriculum design and compassionate pedagogy, have been mainstreamed through new curriculum design materials and adaptations to modules across the institution.

209. These studies have not only produced findings that inform practice, they have also created opportunities for staff to 'meet, share and collaborate' through the online Westminster Conversations on Education Research platform. These research studies, their findings and applications are shared through an annual Symposium.
210. Anglia Ruskin University also runs a Centre for Innovation in Higher Education which undertakes pedagogic research that complements its REF and KEF (Knowledge Exchange Framework) activity. Its education-focused research 'captures the student voice, positively informing education, and has received external recognition' (p4). York St John University has a cross-university network of academic and professional staff 'who undertake pedagogic research 'as a form of critical engagement with their practice' (p7). Colleagues present research outcomes at monthly breakfast cafés. The University of Greenwich encourages its staff to participate in pedagogic research to enhance its programmes and student support 'in an evidence-based manner' (p3), noting that its expertise in this area has 'led to external funding for five collaborative pedagogic projects in the past two years' (p3).
211. Sheffield Hallam University highlights its 2021 research into how the foundation year 'prepares students to succeed in their chosen degree pathways' (p8). It conducted interviews with foundation year students, now in levels four and five of their degree, which 'showed that they viewed their foundation year study as a "second chance" to achieve their educational ambitions and develop confidence in their academic ability' (p8).

Sheffield Hallam University (p8) Participants felt that the FY [foundation year] gave them an advantage when entering undergraduate courses compared to their peers (Pickering, 2022). FY students' continuation in the TEF data is materially above benchmark, 91.8% against a benchmark of 83.9%, suggesting our approaches to supporting them, informed by our research above, are of very high quality.

212. Sheffield Hallam also enables student researchers to use institutional data. In one project, student researchers investigated the experiences of students with disabilities.

Sheffield Hallam University (p13) Student researchers used institutional data to understand that students with a declared disability but without a formal learning contract are likely to be less successful and noted the number of students with disabilities was increasing, while the percentage with a learning contract was reducing. Participants praised departmental efforts, but they also identified specific barriers to learning. Students noted that good online teaching provision developed during the pandemic had particularly benefited disabled students and that they wished for online access to be retained. This work has strengthened our commitment to record all teaching sessions.

213. The University of Plymouth has used evidence from a large-scale internal study that 'showed that the student experience during the first hundred days correlates strongly with their later success (progression Level 4 to Level 5 and academic achievement)' (p10).

University of Plymouth (p10) Amongst other findings, this work showed that students with specific learning difficulties and with mental health conditions were particularly prone to fail and withdraw during Level 4, even when compared to other students with declared disabilities or long-term health conditions. Our approach to Welcome revolves around ensuring students feel secure at Plymouth and have information about support flagged to them in a way which is empowering and reassuring.

214. These are helpful examples of how providers link areas of challenge with research, findings and adjustments to practice. These improved practices can then be linked to improvements in published data indicative of impact, whether on student experience or student outcomes.
215. Submissions suggest that engaging students in education-focused research has a range of benefits. Teesside University has ‘funded opportunities for students to explore the experiences of their peers, and co-design solutions and enhancements’ (p15), creating Student Engagement Assistant posts. These student assistants can ‘identify, create and participate in projects intended to improve the student experience’ (p15). Plymouth Marjon University runs a Change Maker scheme for students, with projects focused on a wide range of themes relevant to student education and their wider experiences.

Plymouth Marjon University (p23) [These] are student led empirical research projects with a focus on enhancing the student experience. Projects include developing support resource for mature students, a comprehensive mental health survey and creating a male teacher support network.

216. The LSE Change Makers scheme also funds students to undertake independent academic research focused on education and student experience at LSE.

LSE (p16) Since its introduction in 2018, [the Change Makers scheme] has funded 91 completed projects involving 183 students, 46 with a departmental focus. Projects have generated change within our community. For example, a student Change Maker project on inclusion plans resulted in eight concrete changes LSE-wide, including the introduction of a student narrative of their condition and needs into inclusion plans, and the reviewing of the language used to ensure clarity and where possible links to LSE policies. LSE has developed an enhanced process for monitoring and disseminating Change Makers research and recommendations, through its Student Experience Sub-Committee.

217. There is relatively little said in the submissions about whether and how providers are engaging with the body of research into higher education as it makes decisions about improvements and interventions; where scholars are undertaking new investigative projects, they do draw this wider body of evidence and analysis into consideration, however. The University of East London notes that three of its staff held leadership roles within the British Educational Research Association (BERA) during the TEF period (p12), which they saw as a way of building links between teaching and research. Some providers also highlight internally produced research journals.

218. It could be helpful for all providers to make a clear statement about how they draw upon and, where relevant, produce published research relating to student experience and student outcomes. It could also be helpful for smaller providers, who may not have the capacity for centres for education development or research centres, to collaborate with each other and/or with larger institutions to maximise the potential benefits of synthesising and applying findings from research investigations into relevant aspects of higher education.

3.4 Promoting and rewarding staff

219. Commitment to continuous development and enhancement of provision comes at a cost, both in terms of financial investment and that of human resources. As vital as they are, evaluating success and implementing innovation can be very time-consuming for staff, in both academic and professional roles. Providers describe in their submissions ways in which they have been changing their approaches to promoting and rewarding their staff in recognition of the importance of their contributions to student experience and outcomes.

220. Research-intensive providers in particular have been taking steps to ensure that staff who focus on student education are more fully recognised for their expertise and commitment, in a culture which has traditionally appointed, rewarded and promoted individuals for excellence in research (Fung and Gordon 2016). The University of Warwick, for example, explains that following the implementation of its 2028 Education Strategy, which ‘focused on structural change, investment in professional development support, creating spaces for innovation, and recognising and celebrating excellence’, the status of teaching has been elevated and ‘enjoys parity of esteem with research’ (p8). The provider created its Warwick International Higher Education Academy (WIHEA) in 2015 to improve the quality of student education, raise the status of teaching, and bring together a community of staff and student leaders of education.

University of Warwick (p8) [The Academy’s Fellows] are selected through a competitive process, and a three-year fixed-term fellowship ensures quality and commitment, engendering a sense of prestige in teaching leadership and innovation across the institution.

221. Its Learning Circles have contributed to policy development, including module evaluation, and the Academy model has been introduced to other universities including its Australian partner Monash University.

222. The University of Warwick introduced a new Academic Promotions Framework in 2018/19 ‘to rebalance the esteem for teaching and research’ (p9), drawing on criteria proposed by the WIHEA fellows. In the last three annual promotion rounds it has promoted 185 staff on the teaching-focused pathway under the revised framework, including 19 staff at professorial level (p9). WIHEA Fellows promoted to Professor on the teaching track are ‘celebrated with inaugural lectures, with a dual focus on their disciplinary and educational leadership, which further raises the profile of teaching excellence and contributes to our sustained focus on building parity of esteem for teaching’ (p8). Warwick notes that its levels of student satisfaction with teaching are high ‘(Teaching on my course, Year 4 split indicator, full-time: 83.7% (+3% vs

benchmark), part-time: 93.1% (+6.1% vs benchmark) (Source: TEF Student Experience Indicators) (p8), which shows that students are benefiting from its commitment to staff and staff development.

223. The University of Liverpool gives a similar account of how it has been investing in raising the prestige of education-focused staff and activities in its research-intensive environments. It runs a Learning and Teaching Fellowship Scheme which is 'open to applications from all areas of the University and recognises, celebrates and rewards genuine innovations in learning and teaching practice' (p13).

University of Liverpool (p13) Assessed by a panel of senior academic and professional leaders led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education, 15 Fellowships have been awarded since 2018, recognising innovations including the use of virtual technologies, support for employability, addressing inclusion in education and adaptations in the face of the COVID pandemic to ensure continued student success.

224. The University of Leicester has a 'teaching excellence pathway' within its academic promotion process.

University of Leicester (p12) Our teaching and research pathway emphasises the equal weighting of teaching and research, and refreshed promotion criteria launched in 2022 give additional visibility to roles such as personal tutor and programme leader. There is clear evidence that our well-established teaching excellence career pathway is nurturing a pipeline of talent across the institution to the highest levels.

225. The University of Leicester notes that in the last three promotion rounds, teaching focused staff made up 20% of all successful promotions at Professor level and 29% at Associate Professor level (p12). LSE has also introduced an education-focused academic pathway and has promoted staff to professorial level in recognition of their education excellence and leadership. At all stages of promotion, its academic staff 'are expected to write a comprehensive teaching statement outlining and evidencing their contributions to education at LSE' (p9).

226. Manchester Metropolitan University describes its 'progressive approach to promotion and recognition of staff, with a specific focus on rewarding educational excellence' (p16). In 2018 it introduced two academic career pathways: Research, Education and Citizenship (REC) and Education, Pedagogy and Citizenship (EPC). It appoints staff to one of those tracks and promotions are aligned to the appropriate criteria.

Manchester Metropolitan University (p16) Importantly, education is core to *both* career pathways, signalling that work with students is a key responsibility for everyone. The EPC pathways recognises that education-focused staff build esteem and impact in range of ways – from leadership and policy implementation to progressive practice, scholarship of teaching and learning and income generation. Given its education focus, this pathway has been transformational in encouraging and recognising impact on our students' experience and outcomes. The number of EPC promotions has almost trebled

between 2018 and 2022, from 11 to 30, just under 40% of all academic promotions (and 37% of those to Reader/Professor) are now on the pathway.

227. Teesside University also highlights its demonstration of parity of esteem between a variety of promotional pathways for academic staff.

Teesside University (p6) We are proud that we demonstrate parity of esteem between a variety of promotional pathways for academic staff. Those who choose the learning and teaching route can secure advancement to Associate Professor and Professor (Learning & Teaching) based on appropriate expertise and sector recognition for the design, delivery and impact of innovative learning and teaching. Individuals progressing through this promotional pathway contribute to key institutional initiatives to enhance pedagogic practice, demonstrating an embedded institutional approach to talent management. We awarded our first two Professorships in Learning and Teaching in 2022. Once appointed, Associate Professors and Professors undertake enhancement projects across the institution to deliver pedagogic enhancement at scale.

228. Sheffield Hallam University is keen to support and recognise staff development through its Academic Careers Framework, which translates its strategy into measurable indicators associated with different posts and levels of responsibilities: teaching and learning, external and professional engagement, research and innovation, and academic citizenship and leadership) (p6).
229. Anglia Ruskin University overhauled its Academic Careers Framework in 2019/20 to 'confer education-, research- and practice-focussed academic careers with equal prestige and promotion opportunities' (p10). It notes that in the two promotion cycles since its implementation, 31 staff have been promoted to Associate Professor and to Professor, and progressed between Professorship grades, owing specifically to their contributions toward our education mission (p10). York St John University refreshed its promotions pathway for Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor and Professor in 2020; applicants are required to meet both research and learning and teaching criteria (p7).
230. In recent years there has been a notable change in emphasis in promotions frameworks to recognise more fully education-focused contributions, improvements, innovations and leadership. While it is difficult to claim a direct relationship between these changes and improvements in student education and student outcomes, they do speak specifically to SE4 in the TEF, which emphasises the importance of embedding excellent academic practice across the institution.
231. Committing to promoting and rewarding staff for their education-focused contributions is a clear example of embedding academic practice that contributes to quality education and outcomes.

3.5 Communicating success: awards, accolades and celebrations

232. Providers celebrate and promote success in a range of ways. These include developing annual awards schemes and holding events that promote good practice. They may also include tracking and publicising accolades of various kinds, including recognition through external awards and improved positions in higher education 'league tables'. Along with highlighting successes to the TEF panel in their submissions, providers are arguably contributing to a positive education-focused culture among their own communities by communicating success in these ways.
233. The University of Liverpool has a number of mechanisms for celebrating the successes of staff who support student learning. Its three faculties present Learning, Teaching and Student Experience awards annually, providing 'a powerful forum' for the recognition and sharing of best practice, and run events for disseminating good practice.

The University of Liverpool (p13) We hold various events to support the continuous development of staff to learn about and discuss relevant themes from within the University and the wider sector, including an annual Pedagogic Research Conference and an annual Learning and Teaching Conference... Further opportunities for staff to share and disseminate their best practices in learning and teaching include publication of case studies from staff deemed to be implementing excellent educational practice, aligned to the LCF [Liverpool Curriculum Framework] hallmarks and attributes.

234. The provider notes that its integrated approach to developing teaching and scholarship was recognised when the Academic Development team were named as finalists in the 2021 Global Academic Development Good Practice Awards.
235. Kingston University celebrates excellence through its Provost Award, 'a prestigious award open to all staff who teach and/or support student learning including professional services' (p9). Provost Award winners are supported to continue to develop their effective and innovative pedagogic practice and are considered as institutional nominees for the Advance HE National Teaching Fellowship scheme. The provider also hosts regular celebratory events.

Kingston University (p9) Encouraging staff to share their practice through our Festivals of Learning and our communities of practice is invaluable in capacity-building in our academic staff. We celebrate our learning and teaching practices in three Festivals of Learning events each year which attract between 400 and 500 attendees. Staff share their great practice and pedagogic research, and we invite external experts to ensure the cross-fertilisation of ideas.

236. The University of Warwick celebrates staff 'awards for teaching excellence' as part of its degree ceremonies, noting that seven Warwick staff have been awarded a prestigious National Teaching Fellowship (NTF) through the four-year TEF period and that 18 current staff hold NTF awards (p9). Students at City College Norwich are able to

vote for staff to gain awards in 14 different categories (p17). Writtle University College has also committed to recognising and celebrating staff success through awards.

Writtle University College (p11) Prior to the pandemic, we co-ran student-led teaching awards with the Students' Union to recognise academic staff across eight distinct areas. This has now been incorporated in our annual staff excellence awards and annual staff celebration event. Winners serve as role models for colleagues seeking to improve their own practice, with experiences showcased via our 'Get Ahead' learning and teaching events.

237. The University of Westminster runs Learning and Teaching Excellence Awards that offer winners grants of £3,000 to further their pedagogic innovations; it supports colleagues to gain external awards, achieving four National Teaching Fellowships in the TEF period. It also seconds staff as fellows to 'work with key stakeholders across the University to design, deliver and evaluate interventions aligned to strategic priorities, as well as addressing context-specific needs at School level' (p13). Arts University Plymouth's Students' Union has begun to run annual Above and Beyond Awards, with 'a range of awards for both staff and students sitting equally alongside each other' (p12). Teesside University also collaborates with its Students' Union to run an awards scheme based on student nominations, and student representatives 'play an active role on the judging panel' (p16).

238. Events celebrating and promoting educational success are many and various. Along with events bestowing and celebrating teaching-related awards, they include an annual teaching and learning festival (University of Salford), a peer-to-peer webinar series (SAE Education Ltd), and 'regular forums focused on specific education leadership roles as well as those with a subject-area focus (LSE, p9).

LSE (p9) Forums provide spaces for educators to engage in strategic education priorities and learn from the practice of other educators, reinforcing our commitment to education as a collective responsibility across the institution. All educators also have access to an extensive programme of about 60 educational development events a year advancing good teaching and learning practices at LSE. On an annual basis, an average of 530 staff attend these events which are linked to [Education Strategy] priorities.

239. Bradford College collates areas of outstanding practice noted through staff appraisals, sharing them across departments 'through a vibrant network of communities of practice' (p12). Sheffield Hallam University runs a two-day annual conference.

Sheffield Hallam University (p7) [Our] well-established annual LTA [Learning, Teaching and Assessment] two-day conference enables staff to report findings of funded research projects to enhance teaching, learning and the student experience more widely. External speakers, and especially student keynotes, are key features of the conference.

Since 2020 the conference has incorporated student-nominated inspirational awards to staff for teaching, research supervision, academic advising, and student support, and

their recipients also recognised at our graduation ceremonies: 'In 2021/22 over 2,662 students nominated 915 staff and 49 awards were made' (p7).

240. The University of Leicester runs an annual round of University Distinguished Teaching Fellowships, judged by a staff-student panel.

University of Leicester (p13) Five or six exceptional colleagues are rewarded each year, with final presentation taking place at Graduation. Building upon this internal reward, nine members of our staff body have successfully been awarded Advance HE-recognised National Teaching Fellowships (NTF), the most recent in 2022.

241. The range of approaches includes events and opportunities for everyone – for example, forums and conference and promotions opportunities based on educational excellence – and some highly selective honours.

242. Providers also highlight for the TEF panel, as part of their submission, a very wide range of external awards and indicators of success. These include the following:

- Advance HE Race Equality Charter awards
- Athena Swan award for gender equality
- Chartered Management Institute (CMI) awards
- Green Gown Awards for Research with Impact
- Institute of Fiscal Studies Universities and Social Mobility rankings
- Ofsted ratings
- Pearson HE innovate awards
- People and Planet University league
- Rate my Apprenticeship awards
- Recognition as a University of Sanctuary
- Stand-Alone Pledge Award
- Student Crowd awards
- TARGET jobs National Graduate Recruitment Awards
- The Guardian University Awards
- Times/Sunday Times Good University Guide rankings
- UK Social Mobility Awards.

243. It is very difficult to make comparisons across providers on the basis of rankings and accolades in these categories. It is not clear that all awards gained by a given provider are referenced in its submission, and in certain cases there is little context given or explanation of the award. In addition, TEF panel members may find the relationship between the awards or rankings and the specific criteria for awarding TEF ratings unclear. However, when given the appropriate context for the award or ranking and a clear link between it and the TEF criteria, such accolades can provide a supplementary indication of recognition in a particular area of excellence.

244. Providers that offer a clear narrative of commitment to improving student experience and outcomes often emphasise the importance of a culture that values and celebrates success. Articulating a clear alignment between policies, practices, celebratory events and awards can bring this culture alive for TEF panel members.

4 Concluding discussion

245. It is challenging for higher education providers to write 25-page TEF submissions that capture comprehensively all that is needed to articulate and evidence their excellence in relation to student experience and student outcomes¹². A balance needs to be struck between explaining the significance of a provider's context, mission, values and established practices on the one hand, and describing changes, interventions and evaluations of success on the other. Given these challenges, and the limited timeframe for producing the submissions, providers have produced very rich accounts of their provision.
246. Providers typically identify their own areas of strategic focus and explain how their strategy is being translated into actions. These actions include applying frameworks for practice (for example, in relation to curriculum design or student assessments), introducing innovations, improving the learning environment, developing staff and staff roles, developing stronger partnerships with students and alumni, and relationships with external partners that really make a difference to students. Where submissions can explain how providers' priorities have been translated into concrete steps, *and then* go on to identify evidence that they have had an impact for good on students, they are more persuasive.
247. Some strategic steps have relatively clear links with OfS datasets. For example, inclusive curriculum design and student support frameworks are often alluded to in the selected sample of submissions. TEF panel members are able to test the efficacy of these, both through considering the description of the actions taken to implement them and analysing the 'split indicators' in the TEF datasets for both student experience (based on provider results in the National Student Survey) and student outcomes: continuation, completion and progression (see Part 5 and Annex B of Regulatory advice 22). These split indicators show the relative student responses (in the NSS) and outcomes for different student groups.
248. However, bringing evidence to the TEF table means addressing providers' indicators in the OfS datasets (where these are available) and providing internally produced evidence. Internal evidence such as student surveys can be analysed in similar ways to the OfS datasets, for example by noting comparisons and trends in overall and split metrics. Other kinds of important evidence may be more difficult to convey – for example, external examiners' reports, which benefit from holistic thematic analysis, and student focus groups, the findings from which can be explained through synthesised themes and trends.
249. The best submissions balance a very clear underpinning narrative of mission with a succinct account of how strategic steps relating to student experience and outcomes are overseen and evaluated. They provide both an analysis of broad datasets (external and internal) and give a succinct account of a range of illustrative examples of frameworks, interventions, policy changes (such as improvements to student partnerships and academic promotions criteria) and activities (such as developmental

¹² The prompt questions in [Annex B](#) may help providers work through this challenge.

events). The best narratives make clear the alignment of values and purpose between all of these areas, and the evidence available to judge their success: they provide a persuasive account of actions and impact.

Annex A: Providers in scope for this report

This report analyses the provider submissions from all providers whose overall TEF rating was higher in TEF 2023 than in the previous TEF scheme. These are listed in the table below.

Provider	Previous TEF award	TEF award 2023
Anglia Ruskin University	Silver	Gold
Arts University Plymouth	Bronze	Silver
Bradford College	Bronze	Silver
City College Norwich	Bronze	Silver
Institute of Contemporary Music Performance (ICMP)	Bronze	Silver
Kingston University	Bronze	Gold
London Metropolitan University	Bronze	Silver
London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)	Bronze	Silver
Luminate Education Group	Bronze	Silver
London School of Management Education (LSME)	Bronze	Silver
Manchester Metropolitan University	Silver	Gold
Plymouth Marjon University	Silver	Gold
Point Blank Ltd	Silver	Gold
SAE Education Ltd	Bronze	Silver
Sheffield Hallam University	Silver	Gold
Solent University	Silver	Gold
South Essex College of Further and Higher Education	Bronze	Silver
St George's, University of London	Bronze	Silver
Teesside University	Silver	Gold
University of Chichester	Silver	Gold
University of East London	Bronze	Silver
University of Greenwich	Silver	Gold
University of Hull	Silver	Gold
University of Leicester	Silver	Gold
University of Liverpool	Silver	Gold
University of Plymouth	Silver	Gold
University of Salford	Bronze	Silver
University of Warwick	Silver	Gold
University of Westminster	Bronze	Silver
Writtle University College	Bronze	Silver
York St John University	Bronze	Silver

Annex B: Evidencing strategic improvements in student experience and student outcomes in your context

Prompts for discussion

The following questions are intended to prompt discussion about planning for and evidencing strategic improvements within and beyond your institution or organisation. Neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, the questions are designed to generate engagement among all interested groups, including students, academic and professional staff, alumni, and external partners and stakeholders.

A. Strategic plans

Does your strategic plan make clear the vision and values of the institution, with specific reference to student experience and student outcomes?

Are links made between your strategic planning for student education (experience and outcomes) and for other areas of activity (for example, research, enterprise and public engagement)?

B. Applying operational frameworks

Are operational frameworks (for example, pedagogic approaches or curriculum design frameworks) effectively communicated? Is it clear how these frameworks are operationalised across all relevant areas of provision?

Is it clear to all in your community how such frameworks are reviewed and their impact evaluated?

C. Shaping provision

Is your range of educational provision under periodic review, and the reasons for any changes clear to all in your community?

Are the types of programmes and their modes of delivery (for example, in-person or online; full-time or part-time; block teaching) briefly explained?

D. Developing staff and staff roles

Is your approach to staff development clearly designed, both in relation to initial development (such as postgraduate certificates in higher education and/or Advance HE fellowship awards) and ongoing continuing professional development (CPD)? Is there a clear link between staff development and addressing any areas of weakness in provision?

What does evidence gathered on the impact of developmental activities highlight?

How is the impact of any new or enhanced staff roles upon student experience and outcomes evaluated?

E. Developing resources, estate and infrastructure

Are you consistently identifying strategic connections between the development of resources, estate and/or infrastructure and the needed improvements to provision?

Is it clear how the impact of resources, estate and/or infrastructure upon students is being evaluated?

F. Engaging with students and alumni as partners

Is the extent to which working with students as partners is embedded in all areas of activity made clear to your whole community?

Is your relationship with alumni clearly framed? Are you co-creating activities that benefit both alumni and current students?

G. Engaging with external partners and civic society

Have you identified your key external partners, and established clear approaches to the evaluation and enhancement of shared activities?

Is your strategic relationship with civic society – regionally, nationally and/or internationally – articulated in relation to student experience and outcomes?

H. Enhancing 'planning and review' frameworks

Are your 'planning and review' cycles clearly designed, in relation to how you are consistently addressing improvements to student education, student experience and student outcomes?

Is evaluation built in, by design, to all activities? What are the key findings from your evaluations, and how are you acting upon these?

I. Producing, analysing and applying internal and external data

How are the ways in which you are producing, analysing and applying internal data changing to improve your understanding of student experience and outcomes?

What external data are you prioritising, gathering and analysing to make improvements?

J. Producing and acting upon research into student education

How are you accessing and/or producing research into student education, student experience and student outcomes? How is this impacting your practices and markers of success?

K. Promoting and rewarding staff

To what extent is the promotion and reward of staff who impact student education, experience and outcomes a priority? How are these embedded in both the cycles of activity and in the values of your community?

L. Communicating success: awards, accolades and celebrations

How are strategic successes in relation to teaching excellence promoted, shared and celebrated among your community?

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