Draft quality assessment guidance for higher education providers and assessors

Draft guidance for consultation

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Contents

Introduction: How to use this guidance ... 3
Purpose ... 3
Audience and scope ... 3
Topics covered in this guidance ... 3
Related guidance and information ... 4

Part 1: Assessment framework ... 5

Part 2: Provider participation ... 10

Part 3: Risk assessment ... 22

Part 4: Data used in assessment ... 26

Part 5: Student experience submissions and additional evidence ... 37
Part 5a: Student experience provider submissions ... 37
Part 5b: Facilitating a student submission for TEF rating assessments ... 44
Part 5c: Enhanced assessments for student experience ... 47

Part 6: Student outcomes submissions ... 52

Part 7: Assessment teams and the Quality Assessment and TEF panel ... 61

Part 8: Assessment approach ... 64

Part 9: Outcomes and publication ... 79

Part 10: Consequences, monitoring and changes to ratings or outcomes ... 84

Annex A: Assessment criteria ... 95
Student experience criteria ... 95
Student outcomes criteria ... 110

Annex B: Provider submission templates ... 113
Provider submission template ... 113

Annex C: Worked examples of provider submissions for the TEF ... 119
Student experience ... 119
Student outcomes ... 123
Approach to assessment: Rule of thumb ... 127

Annex D: Further detail on the data used in assessment ... 128
NSS questions by theme ... 128
Calculation of NSS positivity score ... 129
Definition of positive outcomes for student outcomes indicators ... 129
Indicators data time series ... 131
Benchmarking factors ... 132

Annex E: Glossary ... 137

Introduction: How to use this guidance

Purpose

1. This document provides **draft** guidance based on the proposals set out in the second consultation on the future quality system.[1]

2. It is intended to:

   - provide further detail on some of the proposals.
   - show how the proposals – if taken forward – would be reflected in practical guidance.
   - seek feedback on its clarity and helpfulness, so we can ensure the final guidance is clear, accessible and useful.

3. This document is written in the way that future guidance would be. For example it uses terms such as 'will' or 'must' to describe requirements, but the content is subject to consultation. After the consultation we will revise the draft guidance to reflect decisions we take on the proposals, and to respond to any feedback about the clarity of the guidance.

Audience and scope

4. This guidance sets out how the quality system will operate. This guidance applies to the first cycle of the scheme beginning in 2027-28. We expect to revise this guidance in time for the second cycle, which we expect to start from 2030-31.

5. This guidance must be read by:

   - higher education providers undergoing quality assessment
   - higher education providers applying for Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) ratings
   - assessors and members of the Quality Assessment and TEF panel, who will conduct assessments in accordance with this guidance.

6. Separate guidance about preparing TEF student submissions is available for TEF student contacts. However, TEF student contacts may also read this guidance for further detail.

Topics covered in this guidance

7. This document sets out guidance on the following topics:

   - the assessment framework and criteria
   - how cyclical assessments work
   - how assessments vary according to the level of risk

[1] See OfS, Proposals for a revised approach to assessing and rating quality.

- scope of assessments
- data used in the assessments
- evidence required from providers, including guidance on producing submissions
- additional evidence that may be required, including through site visits
- the assessment process and how decisions are made
- how we and providers will communicate assessment outcomes
- the consequences of outcomes
- how outcomes may be reviewed in between cyclical assessments.

Related guidance and information

The following are available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/reforms-to-quality-regulation/proposals-for-a-revised-approach-to-assessing-and-rating-quality/annexes-and-supporting-documents/:

- Draft guidance for TEF student contacts on developing a student submission.
- The proposed condition of registration B6 that sets out requirements for providers in relation to cyclical quality assessments.
- Technical specifications of the data indicators.
- The risk factors that inform our decisions about the timing and scope of assessments.

The data dashboards in development that inform TEF assessments are available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard/.

8. Question 23 of our consultation 'Proposals for a revised approach to assessing and rating quality' is reproduced below. Comments on the clarity and usefulness of this draft guidance should be made in response to Question 23.

Question 23: Do you agree, partly agree or disagree that this draft guidance document is useful and clear in explaining the quality assessment process and requirements?

Please suggest how the draft guidance could be improved.

Part 1: Assessment framework

1.1 The assessment framework

9. We use a common assessment framework and assessment approach to assess the quality of higher education provided by registered providers.

10. The assessment framework enables us to:

    - assess whether providers meet the minimum quality requirements
    - identify concerns about quality and student outcomes
    - provide clear judgements about quality and student outcomes
    - determine TEF ratings where a provider seeks a TEF rating.

11. We will assess all providers on a cyclical basis. Each year we will select a cohort of providers for assessment.

12. Where sufficient data is available, providers can apply for TEF ratings. If a provider does not want a rating, or does not have sufficient data, it will be assessed only against the minimum requirements and receive a minimum requirements outcome.

13. The assessment framework is based on a common set of assessment criteria.

14. We have designed the criteria to enable us to assess both:

    - whether a provider meets the minimum quality requirements
    - where a provider has applied for a TEF rating, whether it demonstrates levels of quality above the minimum.

15. The assessment criteria reflect the minimum requirements established through conditions B1, B2, B3 and B4 of our regulatory framework.

16. Further information about the assessment criteria is set out in Part 1.4 and Annex A.

1.2 Assessment aspects

17. We assess two broad ‘aspects’: the student experience and student outcomes. In broad terms:

    a. The **student experience** aspect will consider the quality of course content and delivery, assessment, academic support, resources and student engagement. These align with conditions B1, B2 and B4.

    b. The **student outcomes** aspect will consider students’ success in and beyond their studies, in terms of continuation and completion, and measures of further study and employment outcomes. This aligns with condition B3.

Table 1: Minimum requirements

Condition	Minimum requirements	Assessment aspect
B1	Appropriate course content that is effectively delivered	Student experience
B2	Sufficient resources, staffing and academic support to enable students to succeed; and sufficient engagement with students in the development of provision	
B4	Effective and reliable assessment that maintains the credibility of awards over time	
B3	Positive outcomes for students in and beyond their studies	Student outcomes

18. We will assess all providers for both aspects, through either a TEF or a minimum requirements assessment.

19. Providers may apply for TEF ratings for one or both aspects, depending on whether sufficient data is available to support a TEF assessment, as follows:

    a. If the provider has sufficient data for both aspects it can apply for TEF ratings in both aspects. A provider cannot choose to apply for a TEF rating in only one aspect if sufficient data is available for both aspects.

    b. If the provider has sufficient data in only one aspect, it can apply for a TEF rating in that aspect. We will assess the provider for meeting minimum quality requirements in the other aspect.

20. We will seek to schedule providers for assessment when they have sufficient data for a TEF rating in at least one aspect and, as far as possible, in both aspects (see Part 2.2).

1.3 Aspect ratings and outcomes

21. A provider that applies for TEF ratings will receive a TEF rating for an assessed aspect. A provider that does not apply for a TEF rating will receive a minimum requirements outcome.

22. The assessment judgements and their definitions are set out in Table 2.

Table 2: Assessment judgements

TEF rating category	Minimum requirements outcome	Definition: Student experience aspect	Definition: Student outcomes aspect
Gold	Not applicable	Students consistently experience outstanding quality courses, support, resources and opportunities that inspire and stretch them to learn and develop advanced knowledge and skills and reach their full potential.	There are consistently outstanding rates of student success both during and beyond study across the provider, taking account of student and course characteristics.

Silver	Not applicable	Students consistently experience high-quality courses, support, resources and opportunities that encourage and challenge them to develop high levels of knowledge and skills.	There are consistently high rates of student success both during and beyond study across the provider, taking account of student and course characteristics.
Bronze	Satisfactory	Students experience satisfactory quality courses, support, resources and opportunities that enable them to learn and develop appropriate knowledge and skills.	There are satisfactory rates of student success, both during and beyond study, across the provider taking account of student and course characteristics.
Requires improvement	Unsatisfactory	Students experience unsatisfactory quality in one or more significant areas.	There are unsatisfactory rates of student success during or beyond study, in one or more significant areas.

Note: For Bronze TEF ratings, quality may be higher in some areas, but not consistently enough for a higher rating.

23. Receiving TEF ratings would provide access to benefits. The government has already confirmed its intention to link future inflationary fee uplifts to judgements about quality. Providers can also only qualify for degree awarding powers (DAPs) by achieving higher TEF ratings. Providers that receive higher TEF ratings are also subject to less frequent quality assessment.

1.4 Criteria for assessment

24. The assessment of each aspect is based on a set of more detailed criteria, as set out in Annex A.

1.5 Summary of the overall assessment process

25. We will select a cohort of providers for assessment each year. We will notify each provider we select in writing, to confirm the details of the assessment. The provider will normally receive four and a half months' notice of its submission deadline. Part 2 explains how providers are selected and notified. The annual assessment cycle can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Assessment timeline

Activity	Date
We select and notify the cohort of providers for assessment	July
Providers confirm whether they are applying for a TEF rating	August
Deadline for providers having a student experience TEF assessment to nominate TEF student contacts for student submissions	By end of August
Site visits to providers with an enhanced assessment of student experience	October

Deadline for provider submissions	Mid-December
Deadline for TEF student submissions	End of January
We conduct assessments	January to July
We inform providers of: • Silver and Gold TEF ratings • provisional Bronze or Requires improvement ratings • provisional Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory outcomes	End of July
Deadline for representations from providers with provisional ratings or outcomes	End of August
We publish ratings, outcomes and associated material for providers that do not make representations	End of September
We publish ratings, outcomes and associated material for providers that make representations	End of January

26. Before the detailed assessment begins, we will undertake a risk assessment for each provider, to determine whether additional evidence gathering is required, or whether concerns are sufficiently serious that a quality investigation is needed instead of a cyclical quality assessment. Part 3 explains the risk assessment, the enhanced assessment approach and the circumstances in which an investigation may be appropriate.

27. Most providers are expected to proceed through the standard assessment process.

28. A summary of the range of evidence used in the assessments is in Part 2.7.

29. Providers must submit evidence for the aspect or aspects being assessed, in accordance with this guidance and by the deadline we set. More detail on the submission requirements is set out in Parts 5 and 6 of this assessment guidance.

30. An assessment team will consider the evidence against the published criteria for each aspect being assessed. Each team will normally include at least two academic assessors, at least one student assessor and an Office for Students (OfS) staff member.

31. The assessment team will make judgements about individual criteria. It will then consider the pattern of criterion judgements and make a recommendation on which descriptor provides the best fit for the aspect as a whole.

32. For each assessed aspect providers that seek a TEF rating may receive the following ratings:

    - Gold
    - Silver
    - Bronze
    - Requires improvement.

33. Providers that do not seek a TEF rating will receive the following outcomes:

- Satisfactory
- Unsatisfactory.

34. A Quality Assessment and TEF panel will consider the assessment team's recommendations, calibrate outcomes across providers and make decisions.

35. Part 7 explains further who carries out the assessments and makes decisions. Part 8 sets out how evidence is interpreted, how criterion judgements are reached and how aspect ratings or outcomes are determined.

36. Before we publish the outcomes, a provider will have an opportunity to comment on the factual accuracy of the assessment report and to identify information that it considers should not be published.

37. Providers must publish and display their outcomes. For TEF ratings this includes the applicable requirements and branding guidance.

38. Part 9 explains the publication arrangements and Part 10 explains the consequences that may follow from different outcomes.

Part 2: Provider participation

2.1. Provider coverage

39. All higher education providers registered with the OfS will be assessed for quality on a cyclical basis.

40. We will select a cohort of providers for assessment each year. All providers selected for assessment each year will be assessed for meeting the minimum quality requirements as set out in conditions B1, B2, B3 and B4, and providers will normally be able to choose whether to apply for TEF ratings as part of that assessment, depending on whether they have sufficient data available (see Part 2.4).

41. In the first cycle of assessments, starting in 2027-28, all providers with undergraduate students will be assessed for their undergraduate provision.

42. From the second cycle, starting in 2030-31, we will also assess postgraduate taught (PGT) provision. We will also assess providers delivering PGT provision but no undergraduate provision. We will consult on the inclusion of PGT provision in assessments, and then update this guidance, before the second cycle of assessments starts.

2.2 Selecting annual cohorts for assessment

43. Nearly all providers with undergraduate provision will receive their first assessment within the first three years of the new quality system, from 2027-28 to 2029-30.

44. We may defer the assessment of some providers into a fourth year if that would help them to gather sufficient data to apply for a TEF rating. Where sufficient data for TEF ratings in either aspect remains unavailable for an extended period, we will normally assess providers only against the minimum quality requirements for the relevant aspect or aspects. If these providers want to apply for TEF ratings, we will consult on an alternative assessment approach that could enable providers to apply for a TEF student experience rating without sufficient National Student Survey (NSS) data.

45. This broad schedule is set out in Table 4.

Table 4: Schedule for first cycle of assessments

Year	Providers assessed
2027-28	Around 120 providers, made up of all providers with existing (TEF 2023) Bronze or Requires improvement aspect ratings (subject to sufficient data) and some additional providers selected using scheduling factors
2028-29	Around 150 further providers selected using scheduling factors
2029-30	Around 150 further providers selected using scheduling factors
2030-31	A small number of providers whose first assessment was delayed to improve data sufficiency (The second cycle of assessments also begins this year)

46. We will select the cohort of providers to be assessed each year based on a range of scheduling factors, set out in Table 5.

47. The timing of both a provider's first assessment under the new quality system, and subsequent assessments, will be determined using the same set of factors.

48. Where we identify risks to quality, these may affect not only the timing of an assessment but also the assessment approach used (see Part 3).

Table 5: Scheduling factors

Priority	Scheduling factor	Description
Highest priority	TEF rating or minimum requirements outcome held by the provider	**For the first assessments:** We will schedule all providers with an existing (TEF 2023) aspect rating of Bronze or Requires improvement for assessment in the first year, as far as possible. Exceptions may include providers without sufficient data or providers undergoing a merger or structural change. **For subsequent assessments:** Timing will normally be linked to a provider's lowest rating or minimum requirements outcome, as follows: • after five years if the rating is Gold • after four years if the rating is Silver • after three years if the rating or outcome is Bronze or Satisfactory after two years if the rating or outcome is Requires improvement or Unsatisfactory.
Highest priority	Increased risks to quality	We will take account of information from our wider risk-monitoring activity. Evidence of emerging quality risks may lead us to prioritise a provider for its first assessment, bring forward its subsequent assessment or, where appropriate, undertake a quality investigation before proceeding with its scheduled assessment.
Highest priority	Availability of data to support a TEF rating	We will seek to schedule providers when they have sufficient data to apply for at least one TEF aspect rating and ideally both aspect ratings. Where sufficient data is available for one aspect and it is likely that sufficient data for the second aspect will become available within a reasonable timeframe, we may defer assessment so that the provider can apply for TEF ratings in both aspects.

Medium priority, where applicable to an individual provider	Enabling providers to access the benefits of holding a TEF rating	We will invite providers without an existing TEF 2023 rating, but with sufficient data, to indicate whether they would like to be considered for assessment early in the first cycle. We will seek to accommodate such requests where possible. For providers that register with the OfS in future and wish to be assessed shortly after registration, we will consider such requests (subject to availability of data and other factors).
Medium priority, where applicable to an individual provider	Mergers or structural changes at a provider	Where a merger or significant structural change is underway or imminent, we may decide that scheduling the assessment later would better reflect the provider's provision for students.
Medium priority, where applicable to an individual provider	Timing of DAPs assessments	If a provider is due to undergo a quality assessment as part of its DAPs application, we will consider how best to sequence the quality and DAPs assessments to avoid unnecessary duplication and burden. This is likely to only apply to providers that have already applied for DAPs.
Lower priority	Assessing a diverse mix of providers each year (applicable to first cycle of assessments only)	We will seek, where possible, to assess a mix of providers each year, taking into account factors such as indicator performance, provider size and type of provision.
Lower priority	Subcontractual partnership arrangements	There may be circumstances where we consider it appropriate to schedule the lead provider and its main delivery partner or partners for assessment in the same year.
Lower priority	Alignment with timing of access and participation plans	Where possible, assessments will take place before the development or renewal of an access and participation plan, allowing findings to inform a provider's forward-looking access and participation plan.

49. Scheduling decisions will take account of the full range of relevant factors, rather than considering any single factor in isolation. Factors identified as higher priority will normally carry greater weight than lower-priority factors.

50. Examples of how we might balance the relevant factors include:

    a. A provider requests early assessment in the first cycle. We will seek to accommodate this where possible. However, if the number of requests exceeds available capacity, we will apply the wider scheduling factors to determine which providers we assess first.

    b. A provider is rated Silver on both aspects in the first cycle. However, four years later it only has sufficient data for one aspect. We will consider the likelihood of data availability

improving the following year, and any risk indicators and other factors that might apply to the provider, before deciding whether to assess it after four or five years.

51. In respect of the sequencing of assessments and access and participation plans, in practice there is likely to be limited scope to achieve this in the first year of the future system. This is because of the duration of already approved access and participation plans and the priority we will give to assessing providers with existing Bronze or Requires improvement ratings in the first year. There may be more scope to align the two processes for some providers in subsequent years, but the timing of access and participation plans will remain one of several scheduling considerations and will not take precedence over higher-priority factors.

52. Where an assessment identifies areas for improvement that could be secured through variations to a provider's access and participation plans, the Director for Fair Access and Participation may engage with the provider to secure those variations.

2.3 Sufficient data to apply for TEF ratings

53. A provider may apply for TEF ratings for student experience, student outcomes or both, depending on whether it has sufficient data to support the assessment.

54. Where a provider has sufficient data for both aspects, it will have to apply for ratings in both aspects rather than only one.

55. Where a provider has sufficient data for only one aspect, it can apply for a TEF rating in that aspect and we will assess it for meeting minimum quality requirements in the other aspect.

56. When selecting providers for assessment each year, we will prioritise providers that have sufficient data to apply for at least one TEF aspect rating and ideally both aspect ratings.

57. We will determine if a provider has sufficient data by testing, for each aspect, whether there are indicators that:

    a. Cover a substantial proportion of the provider's students.

    b. Provide sufficiently strong statistical evidence to inform a judgement about performance.

58. We will then consider whether there are enough indicators available that meet these tests to support a judgement on the aspect as a whole.

59. Sufficiently strong statistical evidence to inform a judgement means there is at least 80 per cent confidence that performance is either materially above benchmark, in line with benchmark, or materially below benchmark (or spans no more than two of these categories).

60. The data sufficiency tests for each aspect are set out in more detail below.

Student experience

61. A provider will have sufficient data for a TEF student experience rating where, for at least one mode of study:

    - students on courses lasting longer than one year represent at least 25 per cent of the provider's qualifiers

- there are publishable indicators for at least three of the six NSS themes that provide sufficiently strong statistical evidence to inform a judgement about performance.

62. For the indicators to be publishable, the NSS response rate needs to be at least 50 per cent.

63. We will identify the proportion of qualifiers in a mode of study by using the most recent year of data in the OfS Size and shape of provision dashboard. If a provider does not have any size and shape data relating to qualifiers but still has NSS data, we will determine whether they have sufficient data on a case-by-case basis.

Student outcomes

64. A provider will have sufficient data for a TEF student outcomes rating where, for at least one mode of study:

    a. Continuation indicators with sufficiently strong statistical evidence – when the indicators for each level of study within the mode are considered together – represent at least 33 per cent of the provider's students.

    b. Progression indicators and at least one additional post-study measure (use of skills or earnings) represent at least 33 per cent of the provider's students within the scope of the measure and provide sufficiently strong statistical evidence to inform a judgement about performance.

65. For progression and use of skills indicators, the relevant Graduate Outcomes survey response rate must be at least 30 per cent, so that the indicators are publishable.

Extending the NSS to one-year courses

66. To increase the number of providers that can be assessed for student experience, we will extend the NSS to include students on one-year undergraduate courses once in-year student data is available across the sector. During the interim period before universal in-year data is available, further education colleges that provide the necessary in-year data for one-year courses through the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) will be able to opt in to having their one-year courses included in the expanded NSS earlier.

67. Where a further education colleges has opted to include students on one-year courses in the NSS for two years prior to the assessment, we may apply a modified coverage requirement for the student experience aspect. This would not require students to be on courses lasting longer than one year and would instead test only if 25 per cent of students were in the relevant mode.

68. We will review the student experience sufficiency tests as we expand NSS coverage to include one-year courses more widely.

2.4 Assessment notification

69. Each year we will select and notify the annual cohort of providers that we will assess by the end of July, so that we can use the latest student outcomes and NSS data to inform the selection.

70. We will notify the providers we select in writing and set out the practical implications of the options available to them.

71. We will let a provider know:

    - whether it has sufficient data to apply for a TEF rating in one or both aspects
    - whether we will use the standard package of evidence or whether the provider will be subject to an 'enhanced' assessment of the student experience (see Part 3)
    - if applicable, any particular risks to the quality of the student experience that the provider should address in its submission and any additional information we require
    - if applicable, any student outcomes indicators that we will assess for compliance with condition B3 as part of the student outcomes assessment, and that the provider should address in its submission
    - what participation and submission requirements will apply - this will include details of relevant page limits, and requirements relating to the student submission if applying for a student experience TEF rating
    - the deadline for the submission and any other information required.

72. Providers will have two weeks to confirm if they do not want to apply for TEF ratings so that we can plan for assessments in a timely manner.

73. The deadline for providers' submissions will be mid-December, giving providers four and a half months' notice to prepare their submissions.

74. The annual timeline for assessments is set out in more detail in Part 1.5.

75. Once a provider has applied for a TEF rating, it may not withdraw that application and must complete the assessment.

2.5 Requests for submission deadline extensions

76. Providers may request a short extension to their submission deadline, of no more than four weeks, in the following circumstances:

    a. Where the deadline for a small provider coincides with another significant external assessment or inspection, and both activities rely predominantly on the same members of staff.

    b. Where a provider has a visit as part of its assessment of the student experience. (See Part 3.)

77. In respect of circumstance a., we would normally consider a provider with fewer than 500 students to be a small provider. Examples of other external assessments or inspections include:

    - Ofsted inspections

- professional, statutory or regulatory body (PSRB) assessments
- Research Excellence Framework (REF) submissions
- other statutory inspection or assessment activity.

78. We expect a provider requesting an extension under circumstance a. to provide:

- details of the assessment or inspection that coincides with the submission deadline
- the timing of that activity
- brief information demonstrating that both activities rely predominantly on the same individuals
- the length of extension requested.

79. Where we receive an extension request, we will consider the provider's circumstances, the length of deadline requested and the practical requirements of the assessment timetable. Where appropriate, we will then agree a revised submission date.

2.6 Deferral of an assessment

80. Once we have notified a provider that it is scheduled for assessment, it will not normally be able to request deferral of an assessment into a later year. However, we may consider deferral in limited circumstances where proceeding with the assessment would not be in students' interests, for example where:

- a merger or structural change arises after we have made scheduling decisions and proceeding immediately would not be in students' interests
- events arise that seriously affect financial viability, and student protection arrangements are required
- other serious events arise that materially affect the provider's ability to operate normally.

2.7 Provider submission requirements and page limits

81. Each provider's assessment will consider both the student experience and student outcomes aspects. Where a provider has sufficient data to apply for a TEF rating in only one aspect, we will assess the other aspect against minimum requirements.

82. Under condition B6 all providers must submit evidence relevant to their assessment, as required by the OfS. The evidence required will differ depending on whether the provider applies for a TEF rating, whether the provider is receiving an enhanced assessment of the student experience, and whether we identify student outcome indicators of concern.

83. Further guidance on submissions for each aspect is in Part 5 and Part 6. Guidance on enhanced assessments of the student experience is in Part 5c.

Evidence needed

84. The quality assessment system assesses compliance with conditions B1, B2, B3 and B4 for all providers. Providers applying for a TEF rating will need further evidence that could support judgements about quality above the minimum requirements.

85. Table 6 sets out the evidence we will normally require for providers that do not apply for TEF ratings, and for providers that do, for each aspect.

Table 6: Evidence requirements for each aspect based on assessment type

	Not applying for TEF rating	Applying for TEF rating
Student experience	• A provider submission that demonstrates how the provider meets the requirements of conditions B1, B2 and B4 • If selected for an enhanced assessment of the student experience, additional information and a site visit • If NSS data is available, we will also consider it in the assessment	• A provider submission that demonstrates how the provider meets or exceeds the requirements of conditions B1, B2 and B4 • If selected for an enhanced assessment of the student experience, additional information and a site visit • A student submission • Sufficient NSS indicators
Student outcomes	• We will consider if any available student outcome indicators are of concern • Only if we identify indicators of concern, a submission that provides relevant contextual information about these indicators	• Sufficient student outcome indicators (including at least continuation, progression and another post-study indicator) • A submission that provides relevant contextual information, including in relation to any indicators of concern

86. The TEF criteria do not cover every requirement in condition B4. Providers applying for a TEF rating will therefore need to give assessors enough information to judge the parts of condition B4 that the TEF criteria do not cover directly.

87. Where a provider receives a site visit as part of an enhanced assessment, it will be able to respond to the visit observations in an annex to its submission.

Templates

88. There is no mandatory structure for provider submissions, but templates are available at Annex B that are structured around the assessment criteria. We encourage providers, but not require them, to use the relevant templates. The purpose of the templates is to help providers present evidence clearly and ensure they address all criteria. Providers' use of the templates will also be helpful to assessors in their consideration of the evidence relevant to each criterion.

89. We recognise that some evidence might be relevant to multiple criteria. Providers do not need to repeat such evidence under each criterion; they can refer to other parts of the submission and assessors will consider this.

90. If a provider chooses not to use the templates, or adapts the templates, it should ensure that it addresses all relevant criteria within the submission. The submission should make clear to assessors which section of the submission is addressing which criteria.

Page limits

91. The page limits for provider submissions are set out in Table 7.

Table 7: Provider submission page limits

	TEF assessment	Minimum requirements assessment
Context statement	2 pages	2 pages
Student experience submission	20 pages (plus an additional 3 pages to respond to site visit observations as part of an enhanced assessment)	12 pages (plus an additional 3 pages to respond to site visit observations as part of an enhanced assessment)
Student outcomes submission	10 pages, if notified there are indicators of concern. An additional 10 pages for relevant contextual evidence that could support a rating above the level of Bronze.	10 pages, if notified there are indicators of concern.

92. There is no obligation to submit the maximum number of pages. For example:

- where provision covers a limited range of subjects, it may be that less extensive evidence is sufficient.
- if the student outcomes indicators show consistently outstanding rates of student success for a particular measure, the indicators will be sufficient evidence of outstanding outcomes for that particular criterion, without the need for additional contextual evidence in the submission.

93. The page limits refer to A4 size pages and are inclusive of all content, including references. No appendices or any other additional material should be included, if not incorporated within the page limit.

94. The submission should include all information and evidence that the provider wishes to be considered in its assessment. Any references or hyperlinks to further information will **not** be accessed or considered, other than for the purpose of verifying information already included in the submission (see Parts 5a and 6).

95. Where we request information additional to the submission, we will specify the timing, format and any applicable page limits.

Contextual statement

96. All providers should include a brief contextual statement as part of their submission.

97. The purpose of the contextual statement is to provide an overview of the provider. At the start of the assessment, assessors will review it alongside the size and shape data, and may also access the provider's website, to gain a general understanding of the main characteristics of the provider, its courses and student population.

98. The statement could set out the provider's educational mission and strategic aims, the nature of the student population, the range of courses and modes of delivery, or any other key contextual information relevant to assist assessors in understanding the context.

99. The contextual statement is separate to any contextualisation of the NSS or student outcomes indicators, which the provider should include within the student experience and student outcomes submissions respectively.

Provider submission format

100. Providers should present submissions in a clear and accessible format. We recommend using Arial font 11 point, 1.2 line spacing and 2cm page margins.

101. Providers should provide submissions in PDF format. PDFs should not be created by scanning printed documents, as this may affect accessibility for users of screen-reading technology.

102. The provider name and UK Provider Reference Number should appear in the header of every page.

103. Pages should be numbered.

104. The PDF may include text, diagrams, images, graphs and tables, provided these are within the applicable page limits.

105. As submissions will normally be published, they should be fully accessible and comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. This includes using structured headings, accessible colour contrast and alternative text for images. Further guidance is available from the World Wide Web Consortium.[2]

106. We will not consider submissions that are not in the specified format and this may affect the timing of a provider's assessment outcome.

Process for making provider submissions

107. We will ask the accountable officer for each provider to nominate and provide contact details for a suitable member of staff who will act as the main point of contact with the OfS for operational matters relating to the provider's assessment.

[2] See WCAG, Techniques for WCAG 2.0 [PDF].

108. We will provide the nominated contact with operational updates, including details of how to make the submission through a secure portal.

109. We encourage providers to route assessment-related queries to the OfS through their nominated contact.

110. The provider's accountable officer is responsible for approving the provider's submission and ensuring its accuracy.

111. We will notify providers of their submission deadline when confirming their inclusion in a particular year's TEF assessment cohort (see Part 2.4).

2.8 Provision in scope

112. The first cycle of assessments covers undergraduate provision.

113. The provision in scope of an assessment against only the minimum requirements will be the same as for a TEF assessment.

114. We define undergraduate courses as either 'first degree', 'other undergraduate', or 'undergraduate with postgraduate components'. Courses included in each of these categories are:

    - first degree – these courses mostly consist of study for qualifications such as honours or ordinary degrees, including Bachelor of Arts (BA) and Bachelor of Science (BSc) degrees.

    - other undergraduate – these are courses such as foundation degrees, diplomas and certificates of higher education at Levels 4 and 5 (including those accredited by professional or statutory bodies, such as the Association of Accounting Technicians or the Chartered Institute of Building), Higher National Diplomas (HND) and Higher National Certificates (HNC).

    - undergraduate with postgraduate components – examples of these courses include integrated undergraduate-postgraduate taught masters' degrees on the enhanced or extended pattern (such as Meng, Mmath); pre-registration medical degrees regulated by the General Medical Council; and pre-registration dentistry degrees regulated by the General Dental Council.

115. A provider's assessment will cover all the undergraduate courses it has responsibility for. This includes courses taught by the provider and courses taught by other providers in the UK through partnership arrangements, whether through subcontractual arrangements (franchised provision) or through the validation of qualifications.

116. Undergraduate-level apprenticeship provision is also included, with submission and assessment arrangements intended to minimise duplication with Ofsted (see Part 5.6).

117. In the first cycle, we will assess modular provision as part of the 'parent qualification' rather than assessing it distinctly. We still expect providers to secure positive outcomes for modular students and we will monitor risks associated with modular provision. We do not require providers to address modular provision separately in their submissions, but they may do so where relevant.

118. Transnational education (TNE) courses are not included. However, we may conduct a quality investigation into a TNE course if we identify serious concerns through our risk monitoring.,

119. Where we identify serious concerns about taught postgraduate provision during the first cycle, we may conduct a quality investigation.

Scope of indicators and submissions

120. The TEF indicators include, as far as possible, the range of undergraduate courses in scope of the assessments. We discuss the coverage and structure of the TEF indicators in Part 4.

121. A provider's student experience submission should represent the full range of its undergraduate provision.

122. The student outcomes submission could be more targeted in scope. Where we identify indicators of concern, the submission should address these specifically. Providers applying for a TEF rating should use their discretion to identify any other indicators for which they wish to provide contextual information.

123. We discuss the scope of student experience and student outcomes submissions in more detail in Parts 5a and 6.

Treatment of partnership provision

124. Different arrangements apply to the assessment of subcontracted provision and validated-only provision, whether a provider is being assessed for TEF ratings or against minimum requirements only.

125. Information on how partnership provision should be reflected in submissions is set out in Parts 5.2 and 6.1.

126. Subcontracted provision contributes fully to a provider's assessment and TEF ratings. Students studying through subcontracted arrangements are combined with directly taught students in the overall TEF indicators, while separate data views are also provided to support consideration of any differences between directly taught and subcontracted provision. Further information on how partnership data is presented in the indicators is available in Part 4.4.

127. Validated-only provision is assessed separately from taught and subcontracted provision. It is presented as a distinct view in the indicator dashboard and does not contribute directly to a provider's student experience or student outcomes ratings. Instead, assessors will make a separate judgement on whether the quality and outcomes of validated-only provision are satisfactory or unsatisfactory, taking account of available indicators, contextual information and, where relevant, evidence from assessments of validated partners. We will report this judgement separately and may have implications for a provider's validation activity where concerns are identified. We provide further information on how partnership provision is assessed in Part 8.

Part 3: Risk assessment

128. Before starting an assessment, we will undertake an initial risk assessment. This will help us decide how closely to assess the provider, whether we need more evidence and whether concerns about compliance mean that we should carry out a quality investigation.

129. The initial risk assessment will consider a range of information available to us, including:

- notifications
- reportable events
- regulatory intelligence from external organisations and agencies
- NSS indicators
- student outcomes indicators
- previous regulatory findings and compliance activity
- information about the size and shape of provision, including growth, entry tariffs and the distribution of students across validated and subcontracted provision
- other indicators in the OfS quality risk factors document[3]
- any other information we consider relevant.

130. We will look at the risk factors together and use our judgement to decide how closely to examine the provider. We will consider the nature, seriousness and potential impact of the concerns, rather than applying fixed thresholds or criteria.

131. The risk assessment will not in itself show that a provider is failing to meet minimum requirements and will not predetermine the outcome of the provider's assessment.

132. While we will not normally base the risk assessment on a single risk factor or isolated data, in some circumstances a single source of information may indicate concerns that are sufficiently serious to justify a higher-risk categorisation.

3.1 Risk categories

133. The outcome of the risk assessment will categorise a provider in one of five categories, as set out in Table 8.

134. The risk categorisation is not a judgement about quality itself and we will not publish it. Its purpose is to inform our decisions about the most appropriate level of scrutiny.

[3] Available at Annexes and supporting documents.

Table 8: Risk assessment categories

Category	Description
Category 1: No or low risk	No or only minor risks to quality are identified.
Category 2: Low-medium risk	A small number of lower-level risks are identified. These are unlikely, either individually or collectively, to indicate concerns about compliance.
Category 3: Medium risk	A pattern of risks is identified that may merit additional evidence gathering and assessment.
Category 4: Medium-high risk	More substantial risks are identified that may indicate concerns about compliance and require enhanced scrutiny.
Category 5: High risk	The information available to us indicates there may be serious, systemic or widespread concerns about quality, or concerns requiring urgent investigation.

135. In deciding on the risk category, we will consider both the number of identified risks and their significance. A single serious concern from specific intelligence may result in a higher-risk categorisation than several lower-level concerns.

136. A categorisation that a provider is high risk would be more likely where:

- multiple sources of information point towards the same or a similar concern, for example the provider has a high volume of notifications as well as multiple risk factors
- the information available suggests a potentially significant impact on students
- progress to resolve previous serious concerns remain untested.

137. We have included examples of how we will approach the initial risk assessment in the OfS quality risk factors document.

3.2 Determining whether an enhanced assessment or investigation is needed

138. The outcome of the risk assessment will inform the level of scrutiny applied to the quality assessment, or whether a quality investigation is more appropriate:

a. Providers in Category 1 and Category 2 will normally proceed through a quality assessment using the standard package of evidence.

b. Providers in Category 3 may proceed through an enhanced assessment, involving additional evidence gathering.

c. Providers in Category 4 will normally proceed through an enhanced, involving additional evidence gathering.

d. Providers in Category 5 will normally be subject to a quality investigation before proceeding through assessment or becoming eligible to receive a TEF rating.

139. Where the number of providers with identified risks or concerns exceeds our practical capacity in a given year to carry out enhanced assessments or investigations, we will prioritise those with the highest risks and the greatest potential impact on students.

3.3 Enhanced assessments

140. Where we identify risks that we can explore by gathering more evidence, we may undertake an enhanced assessment. This will be more likely if a provider is in risk categories 3 or 4.

141. An enhanced assessment will gather more evidence about the risks that we find to the student experience. It will establish whether those risks can be satisfactorily explained or indicate concerns about compliance.

142. We will prioritise potential concerns that are not directly covered by the NSS and that require additional evidence gathering, such as concerns relating to academic challenge, effective delivery or assessment rigour. For example, if we see a provider recruiting large numbers of students with very low entry qualifications, but continuation and completion rates are very high and post-study measures are poor, we will want to test that the high rates were not achieved as a result of making a course easier for students or providing an inappropriate level of support.

143. An enhanced assessment will not assume that concerns exist. Its purpose is to provide additional assurance.

144. More information on enhanced assessments of the student experience is in Part 5c.

Concerns about student outcomes

145. Where our initial risk assessment identifies student outcome indicators that may be below the minimum B3 requirements, we will inform the provider of these and invite it to submit relevant contextual information about these indicators. We will assess any concerns about compliance with condition B3 in the same way, whether or not the provider applies for TEF ratings.

146. More information on how we will identify student outcomes indicators of concern, and what we will consider relevant contextual information, is in Part 6.

3.4 Quality investigations

147. Some concerns about the quality of the student experience cannot be appropriately addressed through a cyclical quality assessment, even where enhanced evidence gathering is used.

148. We will therefore investigate quality where information available to us suggests that concerns about compliance require more detailed, urgent or targeted examination. This will be more likely if a provider is in risk Category 5.

149. A quality investigation will be more likely where:

- multiple sources of information point towards the same or a similar concern, for example there is a high volume of notifications as well as multiple risk factors
- information suggests serious concerns about compliance with quality conditions

- concerns appear systemic or widespread in nature
- the information available suggests a potentially significant impact on students
- concerns require urgent investigation or resolution
- we do not consider that we could reasonably assess the concerns through a standard assessment
- a minimum requirements or TEF assessment identifies issues that are likely to require regulatory intervention if substantiated
- previous serious concerns remain unresolved.

150. Where we decide that we need to carry out a quality investigation, we will normally do this before the provider proceeds through its cyclical quality assessment and becomes able to apply for a TEF rating.

151. An investigation will look at whether a provider meets the minimum quality requirements, whether the concerns about compliance are supported by evidence and whether we need to take regulatory action. Part 10.5 explains how the findings of a quality investigation could affect quality assessment outcomes.

152. If we start an investigation, in exceptional and very serious cases we could suspend or remove any TEF rating above Bronze until the investigation ends.

Part 4: Data used in assessment

153. In this section we explain the data we use in assessments. We expand on this in Annex D. Our website gives more detailed technical specifications of the measures we use and the methods used to construct and present the data indicators.[4]

154. The **data indicators** we use in assessments reflect the extent to which students have a positive student experience and achieve successful outcomes. They show a provider's performance against its benchmarks. We calculate the benchmarks for each provider to take account of its particular mix of students and courses. The continuation and completion indicator also show performance against absolute thresholds.

155. The assessment considers the indicators alongside contextual information submitted by the provider and, for the student experience aspect, additional evidence from the provider and student submissions and, where relevant any enhanced assessment activity. As part of understanding a provider's specific context, assessors also consider **size and shape of provision data,** which includes a breakdown of the provision offered and the characteristics of the provider's students**.**

156. We publish the data used in assessments in data dashboards on our website, and it is also available as downloadable files.[5] These are updated each year.

4.1 Student experience data indicators

157. We use responses to the NSS to construct the data indicators that contribute to student experience assessments. We group the survey questions into themes to create the indicators. The indicators reflect the extent of agreement with the statements within the theme, to show how positively students at the provider view different areas of their experience.

158. The data indicators cover six themes, which map directly to the assessment criteria set out in Annex A. The mapping is shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Mapping of NSS indicators to assessment criteria

NSS indicator	Assessment criterion
Learning opportunities	Course content
Teaching on my course	Course delivery
Assessment and feedback	Assessment and feedback
Academic support	Student support
Learning resources	Leaning resources
Student voice	Student engagement

[4] We will update the documents currently available at OfS, Documents describing our measures and definitions to reflect decisions taken on indicator construction and presentation following the consultation. The documents currently reflect our consultation proposals.

[5] See TEF data dashboard.

159. We set out in Annex D the survey questions that relate to each theme, the responses to these that are counted as positive, and how we calculate each provider's 'positivity score'.

4.2 Student outcomes data indicators

160. We use data indicators that reflect rates of success during study and rates of positive outcomes after study, to assess the student outcomes aspect.

161. Table 10 shows the indicators that reflect rates of success **during study**.

Table 10: Indicators during study

Indicator	Description
Continuation	This shows the proportion of students who stay in higher education after the first year (or the second year for part-time students).
Completion	This shows the proportion of students who either gained a qualification or were still working towards one, after four years (six years for part-time students).

162. Data for these indicators comes from annual student data returns made by providers.

163. Table 11 shows the indicators that reflect rates of positive outcomes **after study**.

Table 11: Indicators after study

Indicator	Description
Progression	This shows the proportion of graduates who have gone on to further study, professional or managerial employment, or other positive outcomes 15 months after leaving higher education, as reported in their responses to the Graduate Outcomes Survey.
Use of skills	This shows the proportion of graduates who respond positively to the statement in the Graduate Outcomes Survey: 'I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity/study/work.'
Earnings	This shows the proportion of graduates who are working three years after graduation and earning over a specific threshold in any of the three years since graduation. Graduates who are studying for another higher education qualification three years after graduation are also treated as having a positive outcome. The data comes from the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) dataset, which is based on UK tax records.

164. We refer to the indicators in Table 11 collectively as **post-study indicators**.

165. Annex D includes more detail about what is considered a positive outcome and how this is measured for all the student outcomes indicators.

4.3 Students and courses covered by the data

166. The data we use to assess a provider includes the students it teaches, students taught through any subcontracted-out provision, and students on courses that it validates.

167. The data generally includes all undergraduate students studying on a course that leads to a higher education qualification, who are studying in the UK or through UK-based distance learning[6]. This includes those studying as part of an apprenticeship.

168. The data includes international students where possible and meaningful. The post-study indicators include only graduates living in the UK.

169. We use the most recent four years of available data to create the indicators. As the measures reflect different points in the student's journey, some during and others after their course, using the most recent data for each measure means that different indicators reflect the experiences or outcomes of different student cohorts. Tables D2 to D4 in Annex D show the student cohorts covered by the data, for the first cycle of assessments (from 2027-28 to 2029-30).

4.4 Student populations and partnership arrangements

170. The way in which we structure the data supports our assessment approach, which includes consideration of subcontracted students in both the lead and delivery partner's assessments. The main student population we use when assessing a provider is the students it teaches, along with any students who are registered with the provider and taught elsewhere through subcontracting arrangements. We call this the **taught or subcontracted-out** view of the data. Its purpose is to provide an overall picture of provision delivered directly and through subcontracting arrangements.

171. We also produce indicators for subpopulations of the main view:

    - **taught** – students taught directly by the provider only.
    - **subcontracted-out** – students registered with the provider and taught elsewhere through subcontracting arrangements only.

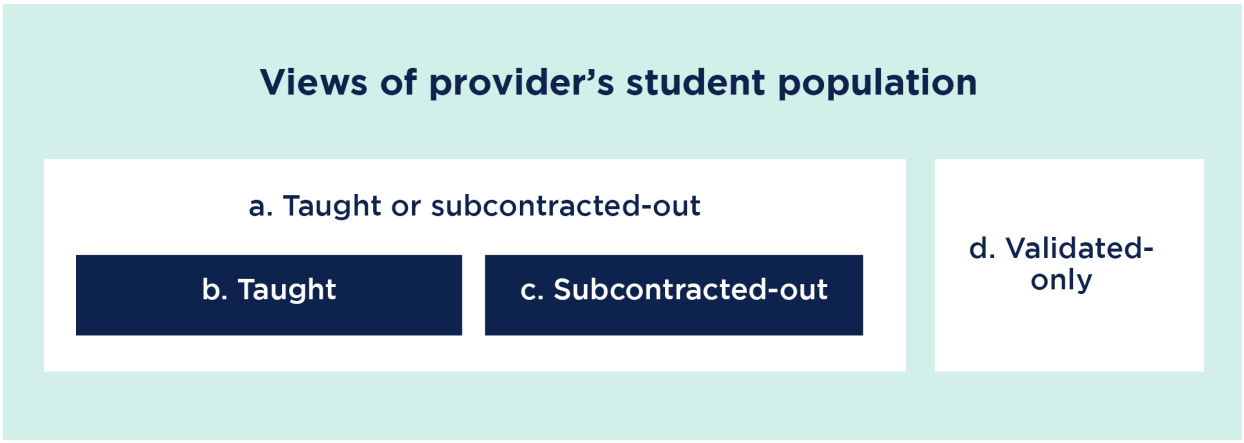
    These views allow assessors to identify any significant differences between these types of provision.

172. To support assessors to reach a separate judgement on validated provision, we produce indicators for one further view of a provider's student population. The **validated-only** view includes students on courses that are validated by the provider, but who are registered with, and taught by, other providers.

173. Not every provider will have indicators for all four views. For example, some providers may not subcontract provision to other organisations or validate provision delivered by others.

[6] 'In the UK' refers to students who study mainly in the UK across their whole programme of study.

Figure 1: Population views



4.5 Overall and split indicators

174. For each population view, we create '**overall**' indicators and '**split**' indicators. Overall indicators cover all students covered by that indicator, and these are then split into more detailed student groups or types of courses.

Overall indicators

175. For the student experience and post-study measures, we show overall indicators for each **mode of study**:

- full-time
- part-time
- apprenticeships.

176. These overall indicators are then divided into 'split' indicators, which show variations in experience or outcomes across student groups or areas of provision.

177. For continuation and completion, we show separate overall indicators for each combination of **mode and level of study**. For example, for full-time students we show separate indicators for:

- full-time first degree
- full-time other undergraduate
- full-time undergraduate with postgraduate components.

178. We use the same approach for part-time students. For apprenticeships, we create a single overall indicator covering all undergraduate apprenticeships, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Indicator structure for continuation and completion measures

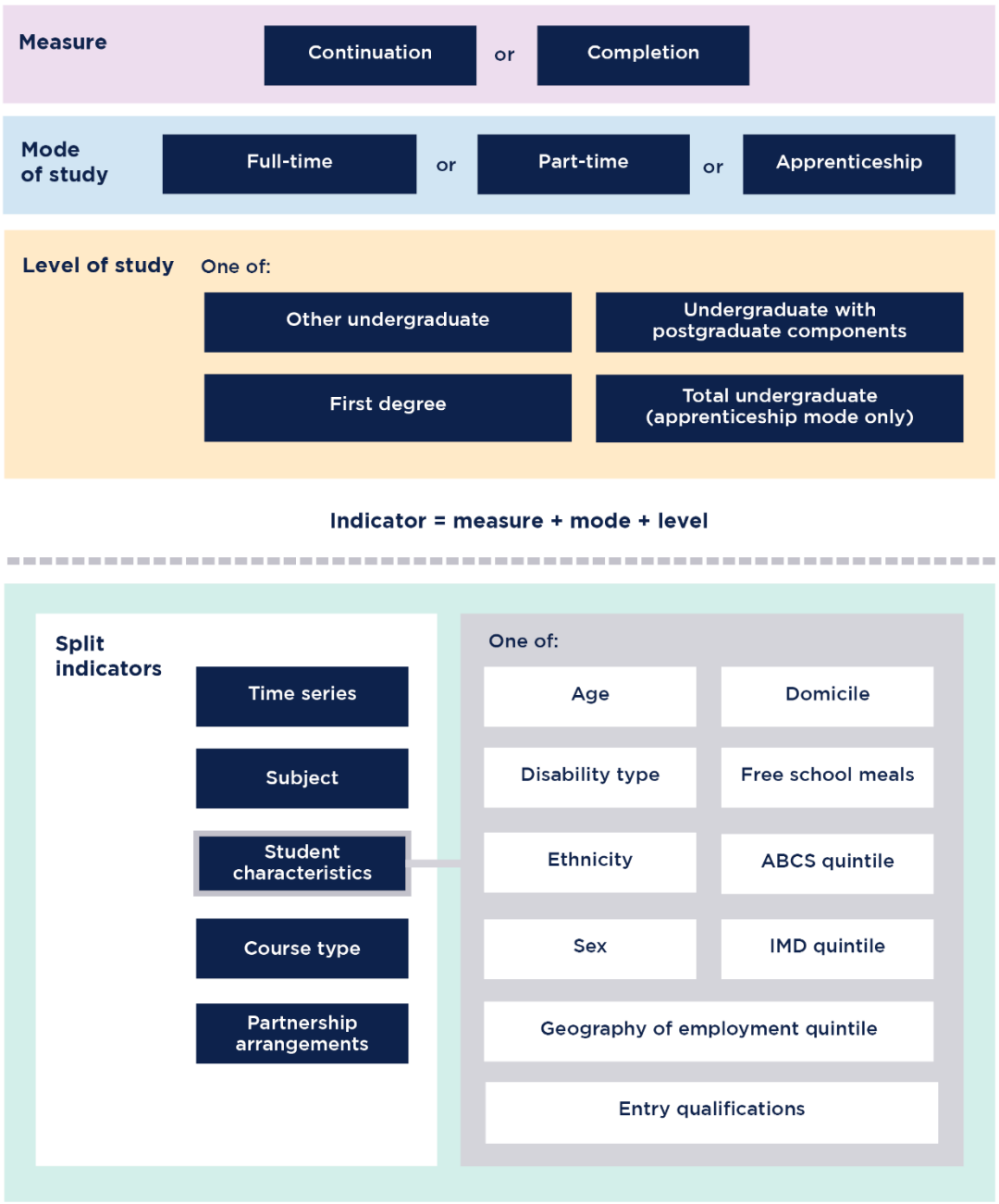
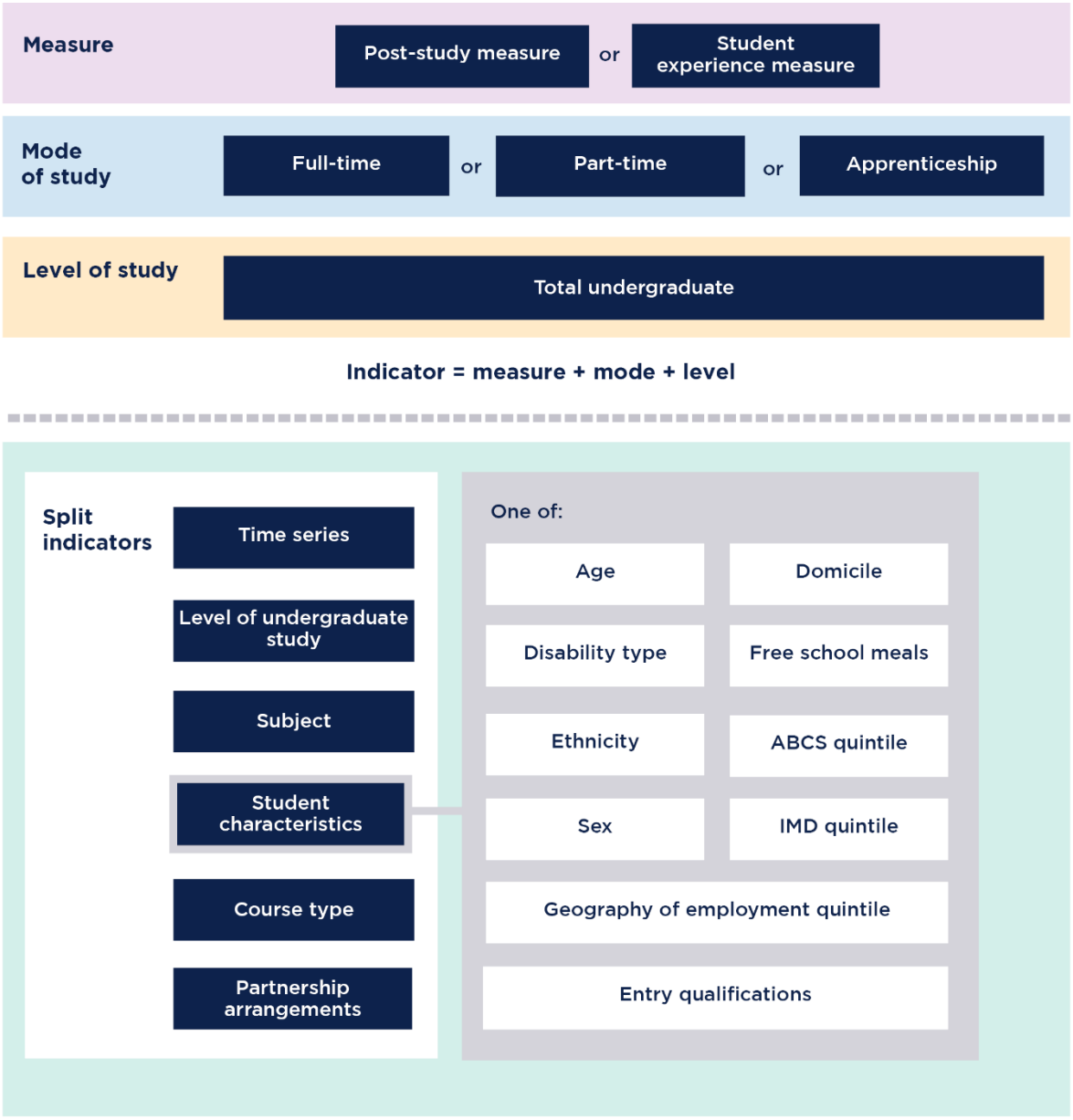


Figure 3: Indicator structure for post-study and student experience measures



Split indicators

179. As explained in paragraph 174, the overall indicators in each of the four views of the data are then split into more detailed student groups or types of courses. This is to allow assessors to identify differences in indicator performance across different areas of provision or student groups.

180. We produce split indicators for:

- a time series of the four individual years of data used in the overall indicator
- level of undergraduate study (for student experience and post-study indicators only)
- subject studied, based on Level 2 of the common aggregation hierarchy

- individual student characteristics, including age on entry, disability, ethnicity and sex
- associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) quintile
- index of multiple deprivation (IMD) quintile
- eligibility for free school meals
- geography of employment quintile (progression only)
- geography of earnings quintile (earnings only)
- domicile
- specific course types.

181. For the subcontracted-out and validated-only views, there is an additional split by individual partner.

182. The student and course characteristics used in the construction of split indicators are detailed in Annex B of the document 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation'.[7]

4.6 Benchmarks and absolute thresholds

183. The data indicators show how a provider performs in relation to its **benchmarks** and, for continuation and completion only, against **absolute thresholds**.

184. Benchmarking allows us to take account of the mix of courses and students at a provider. The benchmark is a weighted average. It represents the outcome a provider would be expected to achieve if it retained its own mix of students and courses, but the outcomes for those groups were equal to the average rates across all providers. We compare the provider's actual performance against the benchmark to see how its performance compares with average performance for similar courses and students.

185. We calculate benchmarks for each indicator and split indicator using selected course and student characteristics and other factors. These are known as **benchmarking factors**. We select benchmarking factors that have the greatest influence on the outcomes or experiences being measured, after taking account of other relevant factors. These factors relate to course characteristics (for example, subject and level of study) and student characteristics (for example, age or qualifications on entry to higher education). For post-study indicators they also relate to regional differences in the economy. The benchmarking factors used differ between indicators, reflecting the varying extents to which different factors affect different measures. A summary of the benchmarking factors we use for each measure is available in Part 4.9, and the detail is in Annex D.

[7] We will update the documents currently available at OfS, Documents describing our measures and definitions to reflect decisions taken on indicator construction and presentation following the consultation. The documents currently reflect our consultation proposals.

186. For continuation and completion, we also consider the provider's rates of continuation and completion in absolute terms, in relation to:

- minimum numerical thresholds that all providers need to meet under Condition B3
- a very high absolute threshold of 95 per cent.

187. Paragraphs 192 to 197 explain how assessors interpret the indicators in terms of their position in relation to both benchmarks and absolute thresholds.

4.7 Presentation and statistical uncertainty

188. For each overall and split indicator, the data dashboard shows:

- the number of students the indicator represents
- the actual percentage of those students who count positively in the measure, for example the percentage who responded positively to relevant NSS questions
- the provider's benchmark for the indicator
- the difference between the provider's performance and the benchmark
- the extent to there is statistical confidence that that the provider is materially below, broadly in line with or materially above its benchmark.

189. We define 'materially above' benchmark as at least 2.5 percentage points above the benchmark, and 'materially below' benchmark as at least 2.5 percentage points below it. Performance within that range is considered 'broadly in line' with benchmark.

190. For continuation and completion indicators, the dashboard also shows the level of statistical confidence that the provider is above each of these absolute thresholds:

- the minimum B3 threshold
- five percentage points above the minimum threshold
- a very high threshold of 95 per cent.

Statistical uncertainty

191. Statistical uncertainty exists in the data because of the potential for random variation in student behaviours and outcomes. It is usually greater when student numbers are small. Our presentation of the data takes account of this uncertainty by using a statistical approach that identifies the range within which each provider's underlying performance could confidently be said to lie. A detailed explanation of statistical uncertainty and our approach to communicating it is available in the technical documentation.[8]

[8] See 'Data modelling to inform proposals for a revised approach to assessing and rating quality', available at Annexes and supporting documents.

4.8 Interpretation of indicators

192. Assessors will interpret indicator performance in relation to provider-specific benchmarks and, for the continuation and completion measures, also against relevant absolute thresholds.

193. Tables 12 and 13 set out how assessors will initially interpret indicator performance against the benchmark and, for continuation and completion, additionally against the thresholds. They will consider the confidence they can have in the initial interpretation based on the strength of the statistical evidence the indicator presents.

Table 12: Initial interpretation of NSS and post-study indicators

Position in relation to benchmark	Initial interpretation
Indicator value substantially below benchmark	Unsatisfactory
Indicator value materially below benchmark (but not substantially below it)	Satisfactory
Indicator value broadly in line with benchmark	High quality or high rates of post-study success
Indicator value materially above benchmark	Outstanding

194. Assessors would normally consider an indicator to be substantially below benchmark if it is at least five percentage points below the benchmark value.

Table 13: Initial interpretation of continuation and completion indicators

Position in relation to thresholds	Position in relation to benchmark	Initial interpretation
Indicator value below the minimum threshold	Materially below benchmark.	Are below the minimum requirements: Unsatisfactory
Indicator value below the minimum threshold	Broadly in line with benchmark or materially above benchmark	Meet the minimum requirements: Satisfactory
Indicator value above the minimum threshold (but less than five percentage points above)	Materially below benchmark	Meet the minimum requirements, but are lower than expected: Satisfactory
Indicator value at least five percentage points above the minimum threshold	Materially below benchmark	Are far above the minimum requirements: High
Indicator value above the minimum threshold	Broadly in line with benchmark	Are as expected: High
Indicator value above the minimum threshold	Materially above benchmark	Are higher than expected: Outstanding
Indicator value above the very high threshold	Broadly in line with benchmark or materially above benchmark	Are very high in absolute terms: Outstanding

195. Assessors will gauge how confident they can be in their interpretation of indicator performance by considering the distribution of the statistical uncertainty associated with it, as shown in the dashboard. They will reach a view of the strength of the statistical evidence presented, and therefore the weight to give the indicator evidence in judgements, using the four indicative categories in Table 14.

Table 14: Strength of statistical evidence

Statistical confidence	Strength of evidence
Around 99% statistical confidence	Compelling statistical evidence
Around 95% or higher statistical confidence	Very strong statistical evidence
Around 90% or higher statistical confidence	Strong statistical evidence
Around 80% or higher statistical confidence	Probable statistical evidence

196. Where the distribution of uncertainty for an indicator crosses values materially above or below benchmark and broadly in line with benchmark, and presents at least probable statistical evidence, the assessors may not reach a single view of performance from it. For example, if 90 per cent of the uncertainty for an NSS indicator is distributed across values materially above benchmark and broadly in line with benchmark, with 40 and 50 per cent respectively in each, this will be considered as providing an initial indication of either outstanding or very high quality.

197. When considering performance against the benchmark, if the uncertainty is distributed so broadly that assessors do not have around 80 per cent or higher statistical confidence that the performance is either materially above, in line with or materially below benchmark (or spans no more than two of these areas), they will not give the indicator weight in reaching their judgements.

4.9 Benchmarking factors

198. In Table 15, we set out a summary of the factors we use to create each provider's benchmarks for each measure. Further detail on the factors is available at Annex D and in 'Data modelling to inform proposals for a revised approach to assessing and rating quality'.[9]

[9] Available at Annexes and supporting documents.

Table 15: Summary of benchmarking factors

Factor	Student experience	Continuation	Completion	Progression	Use of skills	Earnings
Year	x			x	x	x
Level of study	x	x	x	x	x	x
Subject of study	x	x	x	x	x	x
Entry qualifications		x	x	x	x	x
Course length		x part-time only	x not apprenticeships	x	x	x
ABCS quintiles	x	x	x	x	x	x
Geography of employment quintiles				x	x	
Geography of earnings quintiles						**x**

Part 5: Student experience submissions and additional evidence

Part 5a: Student experience provider submissions

5.1 Purpose and scope

199. The provider submission for student experience forms part of the evidence base we will use to enable a robust assessment against the criteria for the student experience aspect. We will consider the submission alongside other relevant evidence available for the assessment, which may include NSS indicators, student submissions, evidence obtained through enhanced assessment activity, and other information available to us.

200. The submission gives the provider an opportunity to present evidence about the quality of students' academic experience and to provide context that may not be available through other sources of evidence. It should enable assessors to understand the experiences of students across the provision within scope of the assessment and to consider evidence relevant to the assessment criteria.

201. The submission should focus on students' academic experience and should be supported by evidence. While providers may refer to policies, processes and initiatives where relevant, the submission should primarily focus on the experiences and outcomes for students, and the impact of any actions taken by the provider.

202. The submission should cover all provision within the scope of the assessment, including any provision delivered through partnership arrangements where the provider is responsible for the quality of students' academic experience, as described in Part 5.2.

203. The evidence and analysis expected in the submission will depend on whether the provider has applied for a TEF rating. Where we are assessing a provider for a TEF rating, the submission should address the requirements set out in Part 5.9. Where the assessment is against the minimum quality requirements only, the submission should address the requirements set out in Part 5.8.

5.2 Provision covered by the submission

Subcontracted provision

204. Providers should integrate evidence about the experience of subcontracted students within their submission, alongside evidence about students they teach directly. Providers should ensure that the range of evidence they present is broadly proportionate to the volume of taught and subcontracted provision, because students in both types of provision contribute to the assessment outcome on the same basis.

205. Providers should address any material variations in quality between their taught provision and subcontracted provision, in the same way as variation in quality between other areas of provision.

Validated-only provision

206. Where NSS indicators for validated provision are materially below benchmark, a provider could include information in its submission to contextualise these indicators and explain how it

assures itself of the quality of this provision. Assessors will consider this alongside the student outcomes data and submission in relation to validated-only provision, when making a single overall judgement about validated-only provision.

5.3 Evidence requirements

207. The provider submission should be evidence-based and should present a clear and reasoned account of the matters it addresses. Providers should support any claims made in the submission with relevant evidence.

208. The submission may draw on a range of evidence sources, including quantitative and qualitative evidence. Providers should use evidence that is proportionate to the points it is making and sufficiently robust to support the conclusions presented in the submission.

209. The submission should focus on evidence about what students experience, rather than descriptions of policies, processes, plans or activities. Providers could discuss the actions they have taken, or the policies and processes they have put in place, but assessors will place greater weight on evidence about students' experiences and the impact of a provider's actions than on descriptions of the actions themselves.

5.4 Suitable evidence

210. During the assessment we will ask providers to submit certain evidence to support their submissions. In addition, we expect providers' submissions to draw on the evidence they already use to monitor and evaluate quality and include the most suitable evidence for their context.

211. Suitable evidence could be a mixture of quantitative and qualitative, and of internal and external, evidence.

212. Below, in Table 16, we have illustrated non-exhaustive examples of the types of evidence that might be suitable to reference in provider submissions.

Table 16: Examples of evidence

	Internal evidence	External evidence
Quantitative	Institutional analysis of NSS data Internal student surveys or pulse surveys Attendance or participation data (used cautiously) Virtual learning environment engagement data Data on usage of, or feedback on, relevant services (e.g. academic support or careers services) Quantitative analysis of the impact of changes to academic regulations Quantitative analysis of internal evaluations of initiatives	Published NSS data and sector comparisons Quantified outcomes from PSRB accreditations

Qualitative	Student representative feedback Student focus groups Student submissions to governing bodies or review processes Teaching observations or learning walks Case studies of student experiences or student partnership projects Academic regulations Qualitative analysis and evaluation of initiatives	PSRB accreditation reports Other external approvals or review outcomes (for example relevant Ofsted reports or Higher Technical Qualification approvals) Validation or revalidation panel reports Feedback from collaborative partners External peer review of programmes or teaching Employer or advisory board feedback (e.g. on curriculum relevance and currency) Independent reviews commissioned by the provider

5.5 Evidence standards

213. The provider submission should set out the provider's view of the quality of the student experience in relation to the criteria, present a range of evidence to support this view, and explain how the evidence supports the conclusions. Providers should present evidence in a transparent and balanced way, and limitations in the evidence should be acknowledged. In Part 5.7 we provide guidance on how providers should reference key sources of evidence in the submission, and how we will verify key claims made in the submission.

214. Table 17 outlines general characteristics of evidence that a provider should consider and gives illustrative examples of what we think is stronger or weaker evidence in relation to those characteristics.

Table 17: Evidence standards

Characteristic	Stronger evidence	Weaker evidence
Relevant	Directly relates to the criterion being assessed and demonstrates aspects of provision that materially affect students' experiences of content, teaching, assessment or feedback.	Indirectly related to the criterion, or focuses primarily on institutional activities, processes or intentions rather than students' experiences.
Robust and reliable	Supported by multiple sources. This may include quantitative evidence, qualitative evidence, student voice, or external evidence that corroborates the findings. External evidence could include evidence from independent sources such as PSRBs, external validation panels or external reviews.	Based on a single source of evidence, isolated examples, anecdotal accounts, or unsupported assertions. Relies solely on evidence produced, selected and interpreted internally by the provider.

Characteristic	Stronger evidence	Weaker evidence
Scale and significance	Quantitative or qualitative evidence, or both, demonstrates the scale, prevalence, consistency or significance of students' experience. Qualitative evidence draws on themes emerging across relevant groups of students rather than isolated views.	Relies largely on narrative description without indicating how widespread an experience is or whether it reflects the experience of most students. Uses isolated examples or anecdotal accounts.
Contextualised	Explains the provider's context, including student characteristics, subject mix, mode of delivery or other relevant factors, and demonstrates how provision is tailored to the context and students' needs.	Provides little explanation of context or uses contextual factors primarily to explain away weaknesses rather than aid understanding of students' experiences.
Impact	Demonstrates the effect of a provider's actions on students' experiences, potentially including evidence of improvement over time. Shows, for example, improvements in NSS themes, reductions in complaints, enhanced student engagement, stronger student perceptions of feedback, or improved satisfaction with aspects of provision.	Focuses on actions undertaken or inputs such as resources invested, or changes introduced without demonstrating their effect on students' experiences.
Representative	Draws on evidence relating to a substantial and relevant proportion of students, courses or modes of study, and considers variation where relevant.	Draws conclusions from a small number of comments, isolated examples or unrepresentative groups.
Critical reflection	Recognises areas for improvement, providing a balanced account of strengths and weaknesses in the student experience.	Presents only positive evidence, omits limitations, or makes claims that are not supported by the evidence presented.

5.6 Ofsted and other apprenticeship quality assessment findings

215. Assessors will also look at Ofsted reports relating to apprenticeship provision and OfS external quality assurance of end-point assessment (EQA) outcomes,[10] alongside other available evidence to support assessments. We would consider the outcomes from any reports in the last four years.

[10] See OfS, 'External quality assurance of apprenticeship end-point assessment for integrated higher and degree apprenticeships'.

216. Ofsted reports provide important evidence about the quality of apprenticeships, particularly in relation to course content and delivery, certain aspects of assessment, support and learning resources. However, the Ofsted inspection judgements do not map directly to the assessment criteria, particularly student engagement. Ofsted reports also encompass apprenticeship provision beyond higher education. Therefore, while assessors will use Ofsted reports as evidence, they will not determine an assessment team's judgements about the quality of apprenticeship provision.

217. A provider should include further evidence in its submission about apprenticeship students' experience, for example to contextualise NSS data where this is available, or supplement these with further evidence that is relevant to the criteria. Providers should address relevant Ofsted or OfS EQA findings that identify concerns or appear inconsistent with other evidence.

5.7 Referencing, verification and further information requests

218. The submission should include references to key sources of evidence that support the key claims made about quality. These could be published or internal sources that:

- set out the provider's educational strategy and evidence of how its effectiveness is evaluated and evidenced
- underpin claims made in the submission about the quality of the student experience
- demonstrate the impact of policies, interventions or practices on the student experience, including evidence of evaluation
- present, collate or analyse student or alumni perspectives.

219. References should include as a minimum:

- a title or description of the source
- the date of creation or publication
- where the source can be accessed
- where relevant, which parts of the source relate to the evidence presented in the submission.

220. References to published sources should include the URL.

221. For internal sources, providers should identify where the evidence is held. Such evidence will need to be made available to us on request.

222. We may undertake risk-based verification checks on references, particularly where evidence is material to a potential outcome.

223. Where a verification check indicates the statements made in a submission appear to contain substantive inaccuracies, we will undertake further verification of the references in that submission.

224. If we identify systemic or widespread concerns during the risk-based verification of references, we may extend the verification activity to other providers.

225. Assessors will give less weight to unsupported claims and may discount claims that the cited evidence does not support.

5.8 Additional requirements for provider submissions for minimum requirements outcomes

226. Where a provider is not applying for a TEF rating, the submission should address the student experience criteria for a 'satisfactory' outcome, as set out in Annex A. It does not need to provide evidence that it is delivering quality above the minimum requirements.

227. The submission should set out the provider's understanding of the quality of students' academic experience and provide evidence to support that view.

228. The submission should explain any material variation in quality across different groups of students, subjects, modes of study or other areas of provision that are relevant to the assessment.

229. Where we have identified concerns through risk assessment, enhanced assessment activity or other evidence, the provider should address those matters directly and provide any relevant contextual information.

230. The submission should cover students' experiences in the most recent academic year prior to submission.

231. Providers do not need to demonstrate quality above the minimum requirements or address whether quality has improved over time, unless this is relevant to issues being considered as part of the assessment.

232. Providers that are not seeking TEF ratings do not need to provide a separate student submission, but should confirm that they have shared their own student experience submission with relevant student representatives and have given those representatives an opportunity to comment on its content.

5.9 Additional requirements for provider submissions for TEF ratings

233. The submission should be self-evaluative and evidence-based. It should set out the provider's understanding of the quality of its students' academic experience and provide evidence to support that understanding.

234. The submission should address three overarching questions for each criterion:

    a. What level of quality do students experience, and what evidence does the provider have to demonstrate this?

    b. How consistently do different groups of students experience that quality across different areas of provision, and what evidence supports this?

    c. Are students experiencing improvements, and what evidence demonstrates this?

235. The submission should cover the full range of provision in scope of the assessment (as we set out in Part 2.8). We set out guidance on how certain types of provision should be covered in Part 5.2.

236. The submission should cover students' experiences in the most recent four academic years prior to the submission. For example, if a provider is making its submission in December 2029, the submission should cover the student experience in the academic years 2025-26 through to 2028-29.

237. The submission should address all the student experience criteria, as set out in Annex A. It could contextualise the NSS indicators, but should also provide a range of relevant evidence that supplements or goes beyond the NSS indicators. In particular, the questions in the NSS do not cover all elements of the criteria, and the submission should ensure that it addresses any elements of the student experience criteria that are not addressed, or are only partially addressed, by NSS indicators.

238. For example, in 'Learning Opportunities', the question 'To what extent have you had the chance to explore ideas and concepts in depth?' is only a partial proxy for the academic challenge that a course offers, and there are no questions about the quality of careers support. Providers should ensure that their evidence covers all the criteria comprehensively.

239. The elements of the criteria that we have identified as particularly requiring additional evidence are academic challenge in courses, assessment, and credibility of awards, careers support, and the impact of student engagement.

240. Elements of the student experience criteria only partially covered by the NSS indicators include those shown in Table 18.

Table 18: Student experience criteria only partly covered by the NSS

TEF criterion	NSS indicator	Elements of criterion only partially addressed or absent
1. Course content	Learning opportunities	• Appropriate challenge • Relevance and coherence of content, including whether content is up to date • Transferable knowledge and skills or professional competencies
2. Course delivery	Teaching on my course	• Balance of delivery methods • Contact with, and qualifications and skills of, staff
3. Assessment and feedback	Assessment and feedback	• Comprehensiveness and relevance • Challenge • Minimisation of opportunities for misconduct, including the misuse of artificial intelligence • Design of academic regulations • Credibility of awards

TEF criterion	NSS indicator	Elements of criterion only partially addressed or absent
4. Student support	Academic support	• Careers support • Support needed by disabled students to support their learning
5. Learning resources	Learning resources	• Identification of resources relevant to the individual provider's students' needs
6. Student engagement	Student voice	• Impact of student engagement

Part 5b: Facilitating a student submission for TEF rating assessments

241. This section only applies where a provider is applying for a TEF rating for the student experience aspect. It explains a provider's responsibilities for nominating a TEF student contact and facilitating the student submission. We set out guidance for students in the TEF student guidance document.[11]

5.10 Purpose, scope and coverage

242. Student submissions will form part of the evidence that assessors will consider during assessments of student experience. Assessors will consider student submissions alongside indicator evidence, provider submissions and other relevant information.

243. They will provide additional insight into students' views on the quality of their academic experience and ensure that the student perspective is reflected throughout the assessment process.

244. A provider only needs to facilitate a student submission if we are assessing it for a TEF rating for the student experience aspect. If students decide not to take part, they can use an opt-out statement to explain the reasons for that decision. Information about this process is set out in Part 5.13.

245. Details on content and coverage of the student submission are included in the TEF student guidance.

5.11 Identifying the TEF student contact

246. Under condition B6, the provider must nominate a suitable student representative to act as the TEF student contact. The nominated student representative should understand the responsibilities associated with the role, and coordinate and submit the student submission on behalf of the student body.

247. We will normally expect the TEF student contact to be a student who has been elected to represent students on educational matters, such as a students' union officer. Where this is

[11] Available at Annexes and supporting documents.

not possible, providers should identify another suitable student representative, or use a student-led nomination or election process.

248. The TEF student contact should seek to ensure that the submission reflects the views of the wider student body. Where their existing role relates to a particular course, subject area or group of students, they should take steps to ensure that they consider a broader range of student views.

249. The TEF student contact should agree the final content of the submission and submit it to us on behalf of the student body. They should also oversee evidence gathering and drafting activities.

250. The TEF student contact may prepare the submission alone or with support from other students. Where a team prepares the submission, students or individuals working on behalf of students should undertake this work rather than the provider. For example, staff working for a students' union, or a recent graduate employed to help with the submission, may support its preparation.

251. Providers may also nominate an alternative TEF student contact. This can help provide continuity if the nominated TEF student contact becomes unavailable or needs to change during the submission process. The alternative contact will not be responsible for the content of the student submission or for submitting it to us.

252. If a TEF student contact no longer wishes to undertake the role, they should inform their provider as soon as possible so that the alternative contact can take on the role, or the provider can arrange to nominate a replacement TEF student contact if an alternative is not already in place.

5.12 Provider support for an independent student submission

253. The provider must consult its student contacts at an early stage to identify what support they might need, and must provide in a timely way all reasonable support sufficient to enable the student contact to make an independent student submission. This will be a requirement under condition B6. The proposed condition B6 has been published alongside this guidance document. Support could include, but is not limited to, providing:

    a. Factual information about the provider and its student population, including information about courses, campuses, modes of study, and student groups, to help students understand the scope of the submission.

    b. Access to relevant data and information held by the provider, institutional analysis of the data and support in understanding it.

    c. Access to a draft of the provider's student experience submission.

    d. Administrative support for evidence gathering activities, such as scheduling meetings, distributing surveys and arranging focus groups.

    e. Providing financial support to cover costs directly related to preparing the submission. Such activities could include printing, online survey tools, transcription services, or room bookings. Providers must not, however, give direct financial incentives to students.

f. Protected time or recognition opportunities for student representatives, where feasible, to enable them to undertake the work required for the submission.

g. A main staff contact who is responsible for ensuring the students' support needs are met, is readily available to answer questions the student contact may have and ensures the student contact understands who else to approach for information.

254. The provider must ensure that responsibility for the content of the submission remains with students. While the provider should provide practical support, under proposed condition B6, its staff must not influence, direct, review, edit, approve or incentivise the content of an independent student submission.

255. Communications from the provider about the submission should be neutral and make clear that positive, negative, and mixed experience are all equally valuable.

256. In particular, staff must not suggest particular themes, viewpoints or wording for inclusion, encourage positive feedback, discourage criticism, or offer incentives linked to participation or the content of submissions.

257. The student contact may choose to share drafts or the final student submission with the provider, but is under no obligation to do so.

258. The provider should make drafts of its own submission available to the student contact if requested, and must make a copy of its final submission available once it has submitted this to us. This is to allow students an opportunity to comment on it in the student submission.

259. We will consider that a provider may not have provided sufficient support if, for example, it does not establish suitable TEF student contacts, students do not opt out but also do not submit, a copy of the provider's final submission is not made available to students once submitted to us, or the student submission indicates that the support provided was inadequate or the provider sought to influence content. We will consider any such information in the submission on its merits.

260. Where providers have not provided adequate support for an independent student submission, we will use this as evidence that student engagement at the provider may not be effective. Assessors will consider this evidence alongside other available evidence of student engagement, including the NSS student voice indicators and the provider submission, when making a judgement in relation to the student engagement criterion. This will also be likely to be a breach of condition B6.

5.13 Non-submission and opting out

261. Students may decide not to submit a student submission. Where this happens, we would normally expect the TEF student contact to submit an opt-out statement on behalf of the student body. The statement should explain the reasons for the decision and who was consulted, including their roles or representative capacities.

262. This helps support transparency about how decisions are made and demonstrates that a decision not to participate reflects the views of the student body, rather than solely the views of the TEF student contact or any individual student.

263. Depending on the reasons given, assessors may treat the decision not to participate neutrally or may use it to inform the assessment of the student engagement criterion. More information on this is set out in Part 8.2.

264. Evidence that providers did not adequately support students or that the independence of the submission was not maintained may also be considered evidence in any judgement about compliance with condition B6.

Part 5b. forms part of Proposal 10. Comment on this should be made in response to Question 10.

We have published a draft of the proposed student guidance alongside this guidance.

Part 5c: Enhanced assessments for student experience

5.14 Purpose of enhanced assessments

265. In Part 3 we explained that before starting an assessment, we will undertake an initial risk assessment to determine whether there are risks to quality that require additional evidence gathering as part of the assessment process. We refer to this as an 'enhanced assessment'.

266. Enhanced assessment forms part of the common assessment framework and may be used in assessments leading to either:

- a minimum requirements outcome
- a TEF rating.

267. We have designed enhanced assessments to provide stronger assurance where we identify risks to the quality of the student experience. An enhanced assessment will provide assessors with additional evidence relating to identified risks to quality and allow them to examine those risks and to determine whether they indicate concerns about the quality of the academic experience, or to rule them out. We do not intend enhanced assessment to replace provider submissions, student submissions, indicators or other evidence used in the assessment.

268. Enhanced assessment may include requests for additional evidence, review of specified materials, access to systems and resources, meetings with staff or students, and assessment visits.

5.15 Timing of enhanced evidence gathering

269. When we notify a provider that we have selected it for assessment in a particular year (see Part 2.4), we will at the same time confirm whether we will conduct an enhanced assessment. We will inform the provider about:

- the risks identified
- the additional evidence required

- whether a visit will form part of the assessment.

270. We will ask the provider to supply the additional evidence, and if applicable the assessment team will carry out the site visit, during the window for the provider submission.

271. The additional evidence we will require will be information already held by the provider, and we will normally give the provider three weeks to provide the evidence.

272. Visits are likely to take place during October for each cohort.

273. The timing will give the provider an opportunity to respond to the assessment team's observations from the visit in its submission. It will also give the assessment team access to all the evidence that will inform its assessment, before beginning its detailed assessment.

5.16 Risk themes

274. Enhanced assessments will normally focus on one or more of the themes set out in Table 19.

Table 19: Themes for enhanced assessments

Academic challenge and assessment rigour
Where risk factors suggest that students may be reporting positive experiences or are continuing and completing their courses, despite a risk that courses are insufficiently challenging or that assessment lacks sufficient rigour. Examples of risk factors, considered in combination, may include: • recruitment of unusually large numbers of students with low or no entry qualifications • unusually high NSS scores • very high continuation or completion rates • weaker post-study outcomes • relevant notifications.
Capacity to deliver quality
Where risk factors suggest that changes in provision may have created risks relating to staffing, learning resources, student support or course delivery. Examples may include: • rapid growth in student numbers • very high or rapidly increasing student-staff ratios • very high or rapidly increasing use of atypical academic staff • large or growing foundation year provision • declining continuation rates • relevant notifications.
Oversight of higher-risk provision
Where risk factors suggest increased quality risks because of particular delivery models, partnership arrangements or other areas of provision requiring stronger oversight. Examples may include: • large or growing portfolios of subcontracted provision • rapid expansion into new areas of provision

- reportable events relating to delivery partners
- concerns about partnership oversight
- relevant notifications.

275. Enhanced assessments will not normally explore more than two themes.

5.17 Additional information requests

276. Once we notify a provider that we have selected it for an enhanced assessment, we will require it to submit specified data and information relating to the student experience criteria. The information requested will depend on the risks we have identified. It could include:

    - timetables of teaching
    - data on student attendance and engagement
    - data about academic withdrawal rates
    - data about academic misconduct
    - student-staff ratios (for providers that are not in the approved fee cap category)
    - access to the virtual learning environment
    - assessment materials
    - samples of assessed student work
    - other information relevant to the identified risks.

277. The assessment team will review this information and identify areas of focus for the visit.

278. The team may request further information, evidence or clarification from the provider following the visit.

5.18 Assessment visits

279. Enhanced assessments will normally include a visit to the provider.

280. The visit will focus on examining and gathering further evidence relevant to the specific risks or issues identified through the initial risk assessment and determining whether additional evidence supports, mitigates or resolves those concerns.

281. The same assessment team will conduct the visit, review all the evidence and make recommendations on the provider's assessment outcomes.

282. Visits will normally last one or two days, although they could vary according to the provider's circumstances, evidence and the issues the assessment team is examining.

283. The visit will follow a common approach and could include:

    - meetings with students

- meetings with academic and other staff
- observation of teaching and learning activities
- review of physical and virtual learning resources and environments
- examination of issues arising from data, indicators or other evidence.

284. Assessment teams may place greater emphasis on particular activities where this is necessary to examine the risks identified through the initial risk assessment. For example, if exploring the theme of academic challenge and assessment rigour, the assessors may place greater emphasis on observing teaching activities and reviewing assessed work and assessment design.

285. Every assessment visit will conclude with a meeting with the provider's leadership team. This will clarify any points of uncertainty or factual accuracy arising during the visit. It is also where the assessment team will raise any additional information it considers necessary for the completion of the assessment.

286. We will require the provider to facilitate and cooperate with the visit, including enabling access to the virtual learning environment. This requirement is set out in condition B6. Failure to cooperate with the visit may constitute a breach of the condition.

5.19 Responding to enhanced assessments

287. The assessment team will prepare a note of the material observations and other information arising from the visit. The team will share the note with the provider at least two weeks prior to the provider's submission deadline. We will invite providers to comment on the factual accuracy of the note, but we will not seek representations on the findings recorded in it.

288. The provider will then submit its student experience provider submission, with an optional additional annex (of up to three pages) addressing the material points raised in the assessment visit note.

289. The evidence gathered through the additional information request and visit will form part of the overall evidence base for the assessment of the student experience aspect. Assessors will consider this evidence alongside all other relevant evidence, including NSS indicators, the provider submissions, and the student submission (where relevant). The purpose of the enhanced assessment evidence is to inform assessors' consideration of the risks identified through the initial risk assessment and any concerns arising from those risks.

290. The assessment team will use the full body of evidence available to reach its criterion judgements and recommendation for the assessment outcome. This will include considering whether the evidence gathered through the enhanced assessment supports, mitigates or resolves the risks identified through the initial risk assessment. The relevant findings from the visit will be incorporated into the assessment report rather than reported separately. The assessment report will set out how the different sources of evidence, including the visit, informed the judgements.

291. If the provider receives a provisional TEF rating of Bronze or Requires improvement, or a minimum requirements outcome of Unsatisfactory, it will be able to make representations, including in relation to the visit (see Part 8.8).

5.20 Enhanced assessment of providers with subcontractual partnerships

292. Where we conduct a visit to a provider that also subcontracts delivery of teaching (the 'lead' provider), we will not normally visit delivery partners as part of a lead provider's visit. This is because it could duplicate assessment activity and will not be proportionate in all cases.

293. Instead, where we identify risks related to a lead partner's subcontracted provision, we are likely to request additional information from the lead provider and take account of evidence from relevant assessments of delivery partners. We may also:

- schedule its main delivery partner or partners for assessment in the same year
- conduct an enhanced assessment and visit the delivery partners as part of its own assessment, if risks are identified at the delivery partners
- provide the lead partner's assessment team with the notes of the visit to the delivery partners to take into account when assessing the lead partner.

294. As subcontractual arrangements can vary considerably in scale and nature, we will normally take this approach only where a partnership covers a significant proportion of a provider's students.

295. Where we identify risks and conduct an enhanced assessment of a subcontractual delivery partner, we will not visit the lead provider as part of this assessment.

296. The approach described above will not apply to validated-only provision, which is assessed differently using only data and provider submissions (see Parts 5.2 and 6.1).

Part 5c forms part of Proposal 11. Comments on this should be made in response to Question 11.

Part 6: Student outcomes submissions

6.1 Purpose, scope and coverage

297. The student outcomes submission forms part of the evidence considered in assessments of the student outcomes aspect. It allows providers to submit **relevant contextual evidence** for assessors to consider alongside the student outcome indicators (set out in Part 4) when assessing student outcomes.

298. A provider that is not applying for a student outcomes TEF rating will normally only need to submit information about student outcomes where we have identified indicators of concern.

299. Where we have told a provider there are student outcome indicators of concern:

- the submission should provide relevant contextual information about the specific indicators we have identified
- the provider will have an allowance of ten pages to submit this information
- this information should be included in a separate section of the submission
- providers do not need to duplicate information across sections of the student outcomes submission and can cross-refer between them.

300. Where a provider applies for a student outcomes TEF rating, it will have an additional ten pages to submit relevant contextual information that it considers could support a rating above Bronze.

301. We recommend that providers use the template in Annex B for their student outcomes submission.

Subcontracted provision

302. Assessors will assess subcontracted provision in the same way as a provider's directly taught provision.

303. A lead provider (i.e. the provider that registers the students) should address outcomes for subcontracted students in the same way as for the provision it delivers directly. This includes considering variation between its taught and subcontracted provision, as well as variations across student groups, subjects, modes or levels of study within subcontracted provision.

304. When determining how much information to include about subcontracted provision within the submission, providers should consider both the proportion of their students studying through subcontractual arrangements and the extent to which outcomes differ from the provider's wider provision or between different subcontractual arrangements.

Validated-only provision

305. For validated-only provision, where the awarding provider does not register or teach students, the provider should set out any contextual information about the outcomes of students on the courses it only validates under a separate heading within the submission. This contextual

information should focus on validated-only provision where outcomes are below minimum thresholds or below benchmark.

306. Assessors will consider this as set out in Part 8.3. Rather than forming part of the evidence used to rate student outcomes, assessors will consider this information alongside any relevant information in the student experience submission when making an overall judgement about validated provision.

Additional guidance for providers applying for a TEF rating

307. A provider should consider contextualising its overall indicators, as well as 'split' indicators that may show variation in student outcomes across different parts of its provision or student groups. In particular, a provider should consider contextualising weaker areas of performance that could have a limiting effect on the judgements (see Parts 8.4). This could include differences by:

- subject
- mode of study
- level of study
- student groups
- partnership arrangements.

308. Providers do not have to submit contextual information for every indicator. Where a provider does not provide additional contextual information in relation to a student outcomes indicator, the assessors will rely on the published indicator and associated benchmark when reaching their judgement.

309. However, if a provider wants assessors to take account of factors that are not apparent from the indicators and benchmarks alone, it should explain those factors and provide relevant supporting evidence.

6.2 Identification of indicators of concern

Notification of indicators in scope

310. When we inform a provider that we have selected it for assessment, we will also notify the provider of any student outcome indicators of concern that could potentially lead to a judgement that the provider is not meeting minimum requirements.

311. This would include post-study indicators, where multiple indicators show outcomes substantially below benchmark.

Identification of indicators of concern

312. We will review the provider's data for any student outcomes indicators that may be of concern, meaning that they are potentially below the minimum requirements set out in condition B3.

313. We will normally identify indicators of concern for continuation and completion using the following hierarchy:

    a. Overall indicators for a mode and level of study (for example, continuation for full-time first degree students) where there is at least 90 per cent statistical certainty that values are below the B3 numerical threshold, according to the most recent OfS published dashboard.

    b. Split indicators where:

        i. the population represents at least **20 per cent** of the provider's overall student population; and

        ii. there is **at least 90 per cent statistical certainty** that values are below the B3 numerical threshold.

    c. Split indicators where:

        i. the population represents less than 20 per cent of the provider's overall student population or statistical certainty is lower; and

        ii. either the indicator relates to a disadvantaged student group, or outcomes are substantially below the B3 numerical threshold to the extent that they indicate a high risk to students.

314. In identifying indicators under the third category in paragraph 312 c, we will take account of:

- the number of students covered by the indicator
- the distance of the indicator value below the relevant numerical threshold
- student characteristics.

315. The intention is to ensure that regulatory activity remains targeted at areas where action is most needed, makes effective use of our resources and minimises regulatory burden for providers.

316. We will then review any indicators of concern against the provider's benchmarking data. Where an indicator value is broadly in line with, or above, the provider's benchmark value, we will treat this as relevant contextual information that justifies outcomes for that indicator. By 'broadly in line with benchmark', we mean that the value is within **2.5 percentage points** of the benchmark with **at least 90 per cent statistical certainty**.

317. Where indicators that we initially find to be of concern are broadly in line with, or above, the benchmark value, we will not consider them to be at risk of not meeting minimum requirements. We will therefore not notify the provider about those indicators and will not expect a provider to submit relevant contextual information as part of any additional submission allowance.

318. We will also consider existing regulatory intelligence and information when determining whether we should treat indicators as indicators of concern. In some circumstances we will

already have information that means we would not need to seek further contextual information from a provider.

319. This may include:

- existing regulatory interventions
- contextual information already held by the OfS
- previous assessments of condition B3
- specific conditions of registration or other ongoing regulatory activity.

320. From time to time, we will review the numerical thresholds we use in the assessment of continuation and completion indicators to ensure they remain fit for purpose. Where we increase a numerical threshold, we recognise that this may result in a provider's performance falling below the revised threshold when it would previously have been above it. In this scenario we will assess contextual information in line with this guidance. However, when considering whether a provider was at risk of a breach of condition B3 we will take account of the effect of any changes we have made to the numerical thresholds.

321. Our approach to determining if there has been a breach of condition B3 will change after the first assessment cycle. During the first cycle, a Requires improvement rating or Unsatisfactory outcome for the student outcomes aspect will normally indicate an increased risk of a future breach of condition B3. From the second cycle onwards, it will normally indicate a breach of condition B3.

6.3 Relevant contextual information

322. Contextual information should relate directly to the indicators and, as a general guide, to those cohorts of students included in the four-year aggregated data used to construct the indicators for each measure.

323. We define relevant contextual information as information that falls into one of the following categories:

- highly distinctive contextual factors not captured by OfS indicators or benchmarking factors
- demonstrable improvements in outcomes not yet fully reflected in published indicators
- exceptional or unforeseen events that have had a material effect on student outcomes.

Highly distinctive contextual factors not captured by the indicators

324. Highly distinctive contextual factors not captured by the indicators include:

- student or course characteristics that are highly distinctive or unusual within the sector, and which are not captured by benchmarking
- evidence that students achieved relevant positive outcomes that are not measured effectively by the indicators.

325. Where a provider submits evidence about highly distinctive student or course characteristics that are not adequately captured in benchmarking, it must:

    - demonstrate the factor is genuinely unusual
    - demonstrate an understanding of the extent to which benchmarking accounts for the factor, and explain clearly what the limitations in benchmarking are in relation to this factor
    - explain how this materially affects the provider's benchmarks, with an estimate or calculation of the size of the effect.

326. For example, a provider specialises in delivering higher education to students with a particular disability type and recruits an unusually large proportion of its students from this group. The provider submits evidence that its students share a distinctive set of characteristics, support needs and patterns of study that differ substantially from those of the wider disabled student population. While disability is used as a benchmarking factor, the provider is able to evidence that its benchmarks do not fully take account of the distinctive nature of its disabled student population.

327. Where a provider submits evidence that students achieved positive outcomes not captured by the indicators, it must:

    - demonstrate an understanding of how positive outcomes are defined and measured within the indicators
    - explain which categories of students achieved positive outcomes that were not captured by the indicator, and why these outcomes should be considered positive
    - provide evidence that the affected students achieved those positive outcomes
    - provide a verifiable calculation of the effect on the indicators.

328. Positive outcomes not captured by our indicators are more likely to be accepted as relevant contextual information if a provider can show that outcomes met the students' intentions or ambitions, and relate directly to the concepts we are measuring (continuation, completion, progression, use of skills or earnings). For example:

    a. A provider has a significant proportion of graduates that progress into occupations that do not count positively within the progression indicator. The provider submits evidence that these graduates enter occupations that align with the intended outcomes of their courses, for example some agricultural or childcare occupations. It calculates that if the outcomes of these graduates are considered positive, the indicator would increase by a specified number of percentage points.

    b. A provider recruits a significant proportion of students onto fully flexible study programmes where students can take breaks in their studies. The provider submits evidence about its students' intentions and about the number of students that return to complete their studies after an extended break, but have been counted negatively using the OfS completion definitions because of inactivity at the defined census point for the indicator. It provides a revised calculation of the completion rate, using a different time frame to that used in the

OfS completion indicators, which shows an increased proportion of students achieving positive completion outcomes.

329. In line with the approach to assessing subcontracted provision, we would not consider delivery through a partner as a relevant contextual factor explaining weaker outcomes. This is because the lead provider has direct responsibility for the quality and outcomes of subcontracted provision.

Demonstrable improvements in outcomes not yet fully reflected in published indicators

330. Providers may submit evidence that student outcomes have improved but that those improvements are not yet fully reflected in the published indicators used for assessment.

331. Evidence submitted in this category should demonstrate measurable improvements in outcomes achieved by students. Evidence of interventions, actions or improvement activity, without evidence that outcomes have improved, will not normally be sufficient to affect assessors' interpretation of the indicators.

332. Evidence that providers could submit in this category includes:

- more recent data showing materially improved outcomes
- evidence that course closures, partnership termination, restructuring or other changes in provision have resulted in improvement that is not yet evident in the published indicators.

333. In demonstrating measurable improvement, providers must use the same definitions and calculations as the OfS's published indicators. A provider's internal measures that use different definitions or different methods of calculation will not normally be given weight in assessments. For example, attendance metrics presented as evidence of future improvement in continuation will not be sufficient.

334. We recognise that improvements may sometimes be evident within particular subjects, courses or groups of students and less visible in published indicators, which do not include year-by-year splits within each category. Providers may therefore submit more granular evidence where this provides a clear, robust and credible indication that outcomes have improved. In considering such evidence, assessors will take account of:

- the proportion of students affected by the improvement
- the scale of the improvement
- the extent to which the improvement is likely to affect future published indicators.

335. Evidence of improvement may be relevant to either assessment outcome. In assessments against the minimum quality requirements, it may help assessors understand whether indicators that give rise to concern continue to reflect the outcomes being achieved by students. In TEF assessments, it may also contribute to assessors' understanding of the quality of outcomes over time.

336. Where a provider can demonstrate that closing a course, ending a partnership arrangement, restructuring provision or making another material change has led to improved outcomes for

students, assessors will consider this as relevant contextual information. In doing so, they will take account of whether there is any ongoing risk to students and whether the provider has addressed the underlying causes of weaker outcomes.

337. In considering evidence of improvement arising from course closures, partnership terminations or other structural changes, assessors may examine the reasons for those changes and whether the provider has subsequentially introduced substantially similar provision. This is to ensure that assessors understand the extent to which any improvement is likely to be sustained.

338. An additional year of student outcomes data will become available after submissions have been made, but before assessments are completed. Where the assessors' initial view points towards a Bronze or Requires improvement rating, or Unsatisfactory outcome, they will take account of the additional year of data to consider if there is evidence of material improvement, before such judgements are made.

Additional considerations for TEF rating assessments

339. Student outcomes ratings will generally reflect outcomes for all students included in the indicators during the assessment period, including students on courses that have subsequently closed. We will not, therefore, normally disregard weaker outcomes solely because a course has since closed in a standard TEF assessment.

Exceptional circumstances

340. We recognise that, on occasion, significant disruptive events occur that have a substantial impact on a provider's ability to deliver its higher education provision for some or all its students or for those students to achieve positive outcomes.

341. Providers can submit evidence about exceptional or unforeseen events that have had a material effect on its student outcomes. Examples of these could include natural disasters, destruction of specialist facilities or significant external disruption affecting delivery or employment opportunities. The event will need to be:

- genuinely exceptional
- not already reflected in benchmarking or indicator construction
- unique to a single provider or small group of providers.

342. Assessors will **not** consider:

- sector-wide events or socioeconomic factors already reflected in overall sector trends
- factors that form part of the normal risks and challenges of delivering higher education, including management of staff and employment union relationships
- events affecting only a very small proportion of students.

343. Providers submitting contextual evidence in this category should explain:

- the nature of the event

- how the event affected outcomes and the extent to which the effect is reflected in indicator data, specifying relevant years
- the student groups or provision that was impacted.

344. Where an event has already been reported to the OfS, for example as a reportable event required under Regulatory advice 16 or through other regulatory engagement with the OfS, providers do not need to duplicate information that has previously been submitted. However, providers should signpost their previous communications with the OfS and include any supplementary information in their submission to enable assessors to correctly identify the event and reach a view on its impact.

6.4 Evidence standards and verification

345. As with the student experience submission, we have defined standards of evidence to support consistency and comparability in the assessment of student outcomes. We have also provided some worked examples in Annex C.

346. Assessors are more likely to give weight to contextual information where a provider submits:

- a clear rationale for instances where a provider considers that OfS indicators or benchmarking factors do not appropriately represent the outcomes achieved by its students
- robust evidence demonstrating the effect on the benchmarks or indicators, including verifiable calculations of the effect.

347. Calculations of these effects must:

- be of equivalent statistical robustness to OfS indicators
- use the same definitions of positive outcomes, or clearly state where the provider has used different definitions of positive outcomes and provide appropriate reasoning
- use the same methods of calculation as published indicators, or clearly state where the provider has used different parameters and provide appropriate reasoning.

348. We will be less likely to consider provider calculations where the methodology is weak or departs from OfS methods without compelling justification.

349. We do not require providers to submit their data files alongside their submission. However, during our assessment we may take steps to assure ourselves of the accuracy of alternative calculations of outcomes. This may include:

- further enquiries to the provider
- consideration of data already held by the OfS
- testing and assurance activity by OfS data analysts.

350. This means that provider submissions must be clear on any deviations from the standard indicator specifications so that, where appropriate, the OfS is able to verify the accuracy of a

provider's calculations. Providers should clearly explain the parameters they have used in any alternative calculations to enable verification by OfS analysts if required. This is likely to include setting out factors such as (but not limited to):

- academic years included in the calculation
- the student population included in, or excluded from, the calculation, including mode and level of study and (where relevant) specified CAH2 subject areas or course codes
- any variations in the census date used to calculate continuation or completion outcomes.

351. For example, a provider may include evidence in its submission that students progress to their intended occupations on completion of their courses, but those occupations are not considered as a positive outcome in the OfS progression indicator specifications. The provider should set out in its submission the relevant Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes that it believes should be considered as positive for its students, alongside its reasoning for including those SOC codes as positive progression outcomes, to enable verification of the provider's evidence.

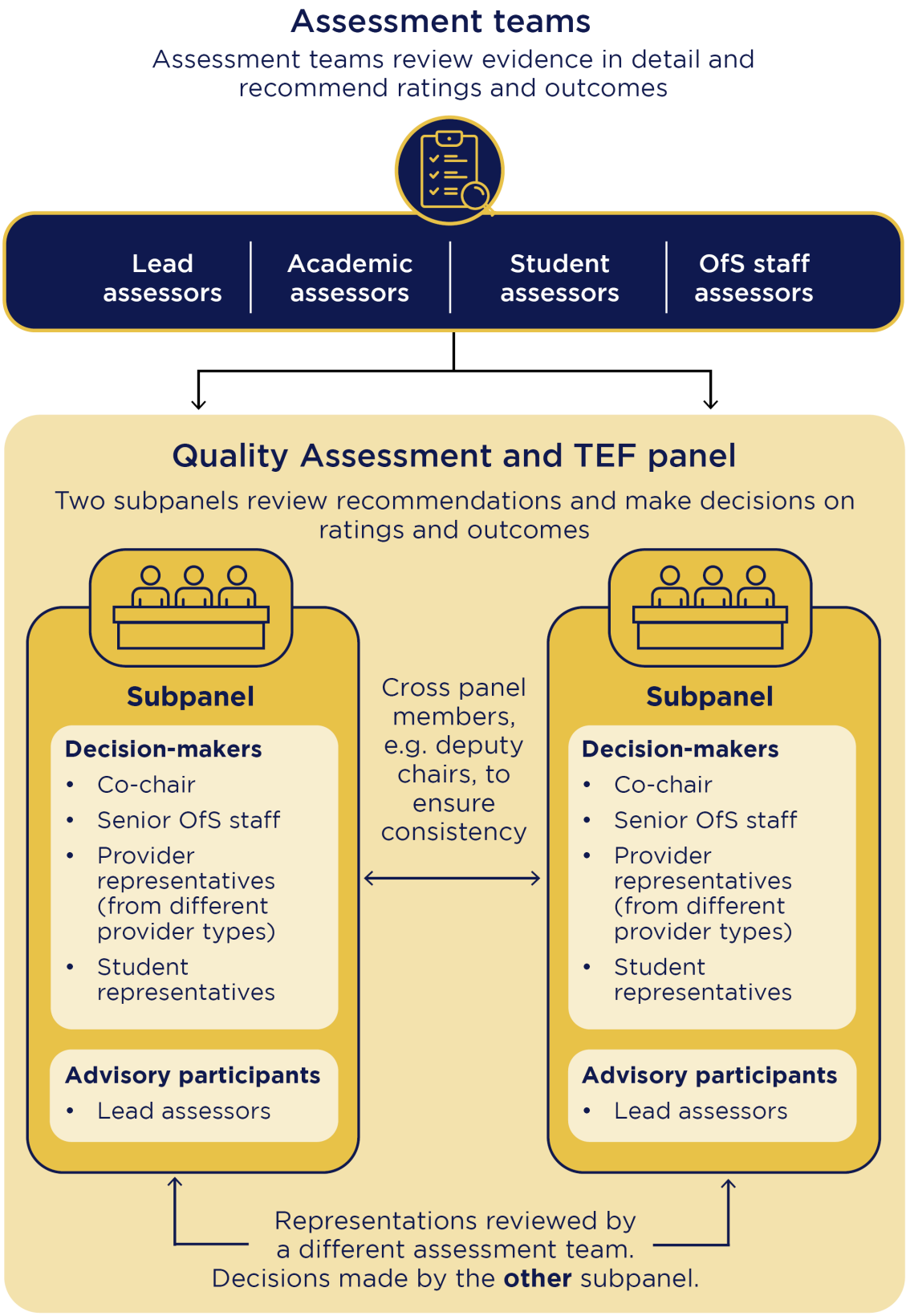
352. We may, by exception, request further information during an assessment where necessary. However, providers should ensure that their submission contains all the evidence needed for assessors to reach a judgement.

353. We will normally seek additional information only where assessors consider that further clarification may materially affect the assessment outcome.

354. Where providers reference or link to externally published information as part of their submission, we will apply the same approach to verification and use of such material as set out in the student experience section.

Part 7: Assessment teams and the Quality Assessment and TEF panel

Figure 4: Assessment structure



7.1 Assessment teams

Assessor pool

355. We intend to maintain an evolving pool of assessors that is sufficiently large and balanced in expertise to support assessments across different provider types, student populations and educational contexts.

356. We expect to appoint assessors and lead assessors for terms of up to three years, to support consistency across assessment cohorts. There will be annual recruitment activity to build capacity, replace departing members and refresh expertise.

Assessment teams

357. A small assessment team will assess each provider. Assessment teams will review the evidence available for the assessment, including indicators, provider and student submissions, and any other evidence available in accordance with this guidance. The team will undertake detailed assessment of that evidence, reach criterion judgements, recommend outcomes or ratings for each aspect and submit recommendations to the panel. Assessment teams will also carry out in-person provider visits to gather additional evidence, where applicable. See Part 5c for details.

358. Each team will comprise at least two external academic assessors, one OfS staff member, and at least one student assessor. Where practicable, we will seek to include two student assessors within assessment teams.

Lead assessors

359. Each assessment team will include a lead assessor. Lead assessors will usually be academic assessors.

360. The lead assessor will lead the assessment process, oversee the team's discussions, ensure recommendations are evidence-based and approve draft assessment reports. Lead assessors will also present the assessment team's recommendations to the panel for decision.

Role of OfS staff

361. The OfS staff member on the assessment team will be a full member of the team and will contribute to all aspects of the assessment alongside academic and student assessors.

362. They will support the consistent interpretation of indicators and advise on the application of the assessment criteria and guidance for the assessments. They will also lead consideration of student outcomes indicators and relevant contextual evidence in relation to minimum requirements. Such evidence will be considered by the assessment team as a whole and overall judgements will be reached collectively.

363. The OfS member will also draft assessment reports on behalf of the team, for approval by the lead assessor.

7.2 The Quality Assessment and TEF panel

364. We will establish the panel as a committee of the OfS. It will consider recommendations from assessment teams and make decisions on assessment outcomes including TEF ratings. Its

role will also be to support calibration and consistency across assessments and is especially important where cases are borderline. The panel will also determine outcomes following representations made by providers. (More detail on representations can be found at Part 8.8.)

365. The OfS expects to appoint panel members for terms of up to three years, to support consistency in decision-making across assessment cohorts. Members of the panel will be appointed separately from the assessors, to reflect their distinct role in determining ratings.

366. The panel will operate as two subpanels, each chaired by a co-chair, who will be a member of the OfS executive. Some members, usually the deputy chairs, will participate in both subpanels to support consistency and calibration of decision-making between the subpanels. The panel will comprise provider representatives, student representatives and senior OfS staff responsible for quality, and any additional coopted members required to ensure appropriate expertise, provider diversity or student representation.

7.3 Assignment, training and conflicts of interest

367. We will seek to ensure that assessment teams collectively possess appropriate expertise and experience relevant to the providers they are assessing. This may include experience of particular provider types, delivery models, subject areas or other relevant characteristics of the provision under assessment.

368. Assessors will receive training and participate in calibration activities to support the consistent application of the assessment criteria and guidance.

369. Assessment teams will have access to advice and support from the OfS throughout the assessment process. Where appropriate, assessors may also draw on specialist analytical support to assist in the interpretation of indicators and relevant contextual evidence.

370. Assessments and rating decisions should be conducted impartially. Assessors, OfS staff and members of the panel will not participate in the assessment of, or decisions relating to, a provider where they have a conflict of interest. The OfS will consider conflicts of interest when assigning assessment teams and making arrangements for panel decision-making.

Part 8: Assessment approach

8.1 Principles and approach to assessment

371. Assessors and panel members should apply the following broad set of principles when carrying out assessments, applying their expert judgement to interpret evidence and forming recommendations or reaching decisions.

372. These principles support the credibility and fairness of the outcomes across a diverse sector, while also maintaining a clear focus on the interest of students. They help ensure that due regard is given to our general duties when determining assessment outcomes, particularly the need to have regard to protect institutional autonomy, promote quality and choice for students, promote equality of opportunity, and the principles of best regulatory practice.

Assessment principles

1. Student centred

Assessments should focus on what providers achieve for their students, not how they achieve it. Assessments should place emphasis on what is experienced by a provider's particular profile of students, and the extent to which students from all backgrounds succeed in and beyond their studies.

2. Contextual

Assessments should consider the provider's individual context, including its mission, student population, portfolio of courses and modes of delivery. Evidence should be evaluated in that context, including consideration of differences in experiences and outcomes between students with different characteristics.

3. Impartial

Assessments should be conducted in accordance with the published guidance and assessment criteria. Judgements should be evidence-based, free from individual bias, and respectful of institutional autonomy, recognising that students benefit from diverse forms of high-quality education being available to them.

4. Consistent

Assessments should take a consistent approach to applying expert judgement. Evidence should be evaluated and weighed in accordance with the published guidance and criteria, while allowing appropriate consideration of provider context and the evidence presented.

5. Transparent

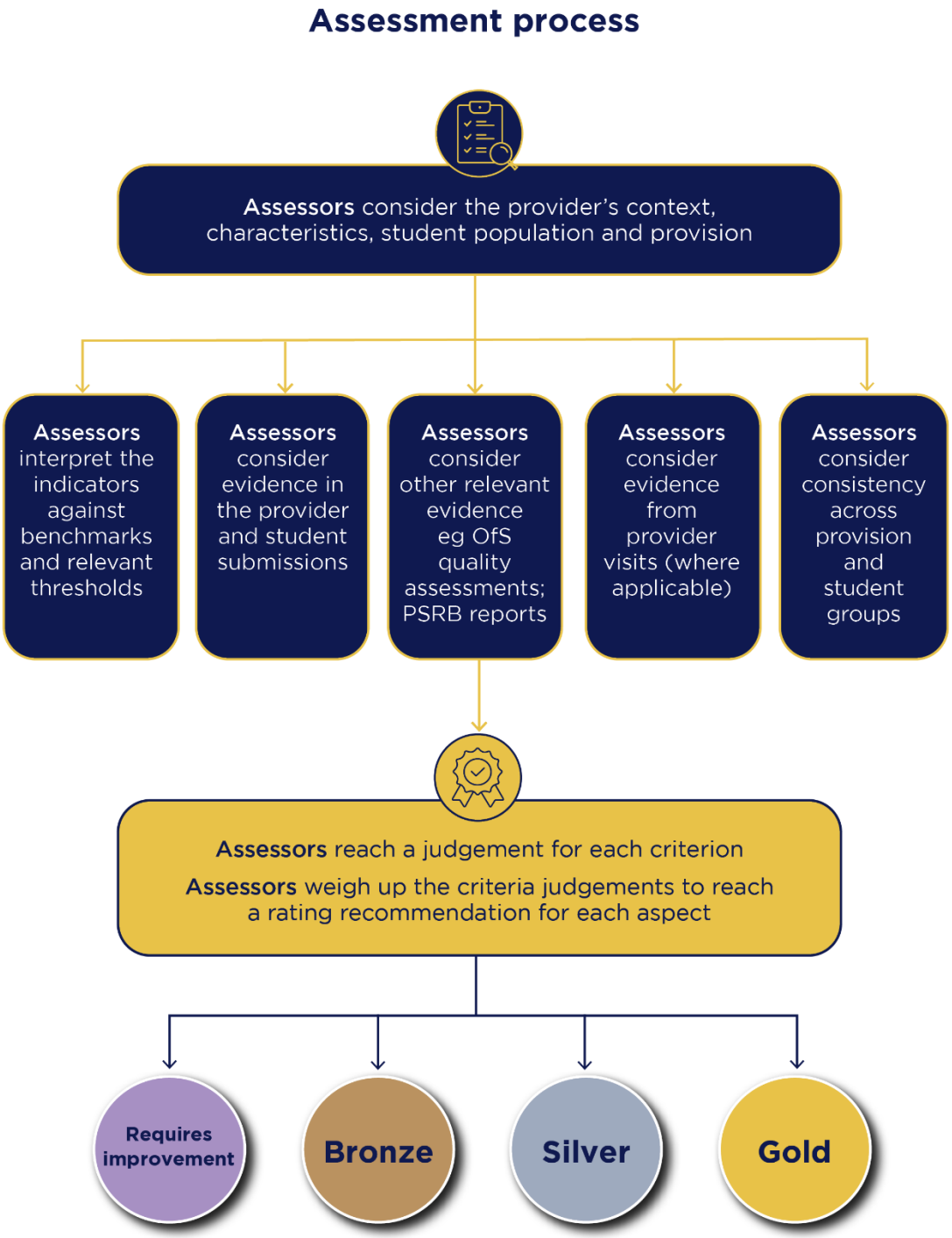
Assessment criteria, guidance, evidence and outcomes will all be published. Assessment reports should clearly explain the rationale for judgements reached. Reports should be accessible to a broad audience, including to inform student choice.

373. Assessors and panel members will apply these principles throughout the assessment process, including by:

    - using student-centred criteria, and focusing on what students experience and the outcomes they achieve
    - considering the experience and outcomes of different groups of students through the use of split indicators
    - taking account of the consistency of student experiences and student outcomes across student groups, recognising that consistently high quality across all groups is required to achieve the highest ratings in TEF assessments
    - evaluating benchmarked indicators alongside contextual evidence provided through provider and student submissions (where available), so that judgements reflect each provider's individual context.

374. Figure 5 details the assessment process for providers that have applied for a TEF rating. Where providers are undergoing a minimum requirements assessment, assessors will not have a student submission to consider and will recommend outcomes for each aspect of 'Satisfactory' or 'Unsatisfactory'.

Figure 5: TEF assessment process



375. Assessments will be conducted in accordance with the assessment principles and published guidance. The assessment team will initially consider the provider's context, including its size and shape, provider context statement and any other relevant contextual information, for example the provider's website.

376. Assessors will review the available evidence for each aspect it is assessing.

377. For the student experience aspect, this will include NSS indicators (where available) and provider submissions. Where a provider has applied for a TEF rating, assessors will also consider the student submission. Where applicable, assessors will also consider evidence

obtained through enhanced assessment activity, and other evidence routinely available to assessors. Other evidence could include findings and outcomes from other OfS quality assessments, regulatory information we already hold, and external information such as PSRB reports. In reviewing such evidence, assessors will take account of any findings that may raise concerns relevant to the assessment. Assessors will not routinely seek out evidence from external reviews that may support a provider's case.

378. For the student outcomes aspect, this will include outcomes indicators and any contextual evidence submitted by the provider.

379. Assessors will interpret indicators against the provider's benchmarks and, for student outcomes, will also consider absolute performance for continuation and completion relevant.

380. In assessing the evidence available for each aspect, assessors should consider:

- the level of quality or positive outcomes being experienced by students
- the consistency of those experiences or outcomes across students and provision
- whether there is improvement, deterioration or sustained performance over time
- the strength of the evidence to support their judgements.

381. Having considered all the relevant evidence, assessors will reach judgements against each criterion and form a recommended assessment outcome for each aspect.

382. The panel will consider the recommendations of the assessment team and determine provisional and final assessment outcomes.

8.2 Consideration of evidence

383. Assessors will consider all the available evidence and will use submissions and other relevant evidence to support, contextualise or challenge the initial interpretation of indicators.

Interpretation of indicators

384. Assessors will interpret the indicators as set out in Part 4.8.

385. Where the assessors' initial view points towards a Bronze or Requires improvement rating, or Unsatisfactory outcome, assessors will review the latest published student outcomes data. This is to consider whether there is evidence of material improvement before such judgements are made.

Evidence within the provider submission

386. For student experience, assessors will consider evidence that contextualises the NSS indicators as well as the provider's own evidence about the quality of the student experience. Assessors will place greater weight on evidence where it:

- demonstrates the impact of policies and practices on student experiences
- reflects an in-depth understanding of the provider's specific mix of students and courses and tailoring of approaches to deliver high quality in that context

- reflects the totality of provision within scope
- addresses specific groups, courses or areas of provision where other evidence suggests targeted improvement, variation in performance or concern
- is directly relevant to the criterion being considered.

387. Where submissions refer to positive findings or outcomes from other quality assessments or reviews, assessors may take these into account where they are relevant to the criteria being assessed.

388. For student outcomes, assessors will consider relevant contextual information as defined in Part 6.3.

389. Assessors will refer to ‘standards of evidence’ in considering how much weight to apply to evidence within the provider submission. See Parts 5.5 and 6.4.

390. Providers may submit evidence of improvement in areas where indicators suggest weaker performance. Assessors will consider whether actions already implemented have led to sustained improvements in quality or outcomes, including where published indicators may not yet fully reflect improvements. In such cases, assessors may place greater weight on more recent evidence and data that provide a more accurate reflection of the current student experience or outcomes.

391. Assessors will not normally place significant weight on planned actions that have not yet been implemented or demonstrated impact. They are likely to give greater weight to actions that are supported by evidence of impact.

392. Where necessary, OfS data analysts will support assessors in evaluating evidence of improvement and understanding trends in performance over time.

Evidence within the student submission for TEF assessments

393. Assessors will consider student submissions alongside other sources of evidence. They are likely to place greater weight on evidence that reflects a broad range of student views and experiences across the students and provision within scope, and evidence that is directly relevant to the criteria. Evidence relating to particular groups of students, courses or areas of provision may also be important where it helps explain areas of strength, concern or variation identified elsewhere in the assessment.

394. Students may decide not to submit a student submission. Where this happens, students will be asked to submit an opt-out statement on behalf of the student body outlining the reasons for the decision. Depending on the reasons given, assessor may treat the decision not to participate neutrally or may use it to inform the assessment of the student engagement criterion.

395. Assessors should consider any evidence that students were unable to participate effectively because the provider had not provided adequate support, access to information, staff capacity, or other assistance that could reasonably have been expected. This may include situations where the provider does not identify a suitable TEF student contact, students do not submit but also do not opt out, or where the submission or opt-out statement indicates

that support was inadequate or that the provider sought to influence the content of the submission.

396. Evidence that providers did not adequately support students or that the independence of the submission was not maintained may indicate weaknesses in the provider's arrangements for student engagement. Assessors should consider such evidence alongside other available evidence when assessing the student engagement criterion. (The OfS may also consider this evidence in any judgement about compliance with condition B6.)

Evidence from enhanced assessments

397. The purpose of an enhanced assessment is to test identified risks or concerns. Assessors will gather evidence as set out in Part 5c. Where evidence gathered through the enhanced assessment substantiates those concerns, assessors may place significant weight on that evidence when reaching their judgements.

398. Where the evidence mitigates or rules out the concerns identified, assessors will continue to apply the assessment criteria and guidance to the full body of evidence available. Assessors will not limit the rating on the basis of the risks that had been identified.

Other available evidence

399. Where assessors consider findings and outcomes from other OfS quality assessments, Ofsted reports, PSRB reports and other available evidence, they will apply their expert judgement in how much weight to apply, based on its relevance to the assessment criteria, how proportionate it is in relation to the provider's mix of students and provision, and the relative strength of the evidence.

400. In relation to apprenticeship provision, assessors will focus on aspects of Ofsted reports that are relevant to the assessment criteria, rather than the broader areas of inspection activity that fall outside the scope of the student experience aspect.

401. The weight assessors will give to Ofsted findings will depend on the extent to which the report reflects the provision being assessed. For example, where apprenticeship provision represents only a modest proportion of a provider's overall provision (less than 20 per cent), assessors will normally place less weight on Ofsted findings than where the report principally relates to the provision within the scope of the assessment.

Requests for further information

402. By exception, assessors may request additional information from a provider where they require clarification of issues raised in a submission or supporting documentation, or additional information to reach a judgement. However, we expect submissions to contain sufficient evidence to preclude the necessity of further enquiries.

8.3 Assessment of partnership provision

403. The presentation of data for different partnership arrangements is set out in Part 4.4.

Subcontractual provision

404. Assessors will give the same weight to students studying through subcontracted arrangements as students taught directly by the provider. This applies to both minimum requirements and TEF assessments.

405. Assessors should first consider the **taught or subcontracted-out** view of the data, to consider overall performance covering both groups. Assessors should then consider consistency across directly taught and subcontracted-out students by considering each of these views of the data and the splits within them, including splits by individual delivery partner.

406. Where they find variations in performance, assessors should apply the approach to considering consistency set out in Part 8.4.

Validated-only provision

407. Assessors should consider validated-only provision separately from directly taught and subcontracted provision. Assessors will make a separate judgement about the quality of a provider's validated-only provision, which will not contribute directly to a provider's TEF ratings. The approach to assessing validated-only provision is as follows:

    a. Assessors will consider all the available student experience and student outcomes indicators for validated-only provision, together with any relevant contextual information submitted by the validating provider.

    b. Assessors will apply relevant assessment principles and guidance when considering validated-only provision.

    c. Assessors will consider whether the evidence is consistent with validated-only provision meeting (or exceeding) the criteria for 'Satisfactory'; or whether there is evidence of unsatisfactory quality or outcomes for one or more of the criteria.

    d. Assessors will then make a single overall judgement about whether the quality and outcomes of validated-only provision are Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory, taking account of the range of criteria.

    e. This judgement will be set out in the assessment report but will not affect the provider's student experience or student outcomes ratings.

    f. Where available, the assessment of validated-only provision will take account of evidence from assessments of validated partners. For example, where one or more validated partners are assessed as Requires improvement in TEF, or Unsatisfactory in minimum requirements assessments, this may be considered relevant to the quality of the validating provider's validated-only provision.

8.4 Considering consistency across provision

408. Assessors will consider the extent to which the quality of the student experience or student outcomes is experienced consistently across the provider's students and provision, including for different student groups, subjects and courses, and subcontracted provision. In doing so, they will consider the overall indicators for each mode of study, for both directly taught and

subcontracted provision, together with relevant split indicators, to assess the extent to which performance varies across different groups of students and areas of provision.

409. When considering these differences, assessors will take account of whether the evidence indicates broad consistency across students and provision, whether there are groups of students experiencing lower levels of quality or outcomes, and whether any such differences are explained or justified by contextual evidence. Assessors will additionally note where they identify areas of high quality to highlight in the assessment report, where providers have applied for a TEF rating.

Rule of thumb and limiting factors

410. When reaching their judgements, assessors will use an initial numerical ‘rule of thumb’ (general principle) in determining whether a particular level of quality is ‘broadly consistent’. The starting point of the ‘rule of thumb’ will be ‘at least 80 per cent of students’ as this reflects a substantial majority of students experiencing a similar level of quality, while recognising that some variation is inherent in a diverse context.

411. Consequently, assessors will pay particular attention to any group of students or area of provision (for example a mode, level, subject, or subcontracted provision) where the data indicates a lower level of quality or outcomes for at least 20 per cent of the provider’s total undergraduate student population. If the provider’s submission does not sufficiently justify this or demonstrate improvement for these students, this will strongly suggest the relevant criterion judgement should reflect the lower level of quality or outcomes. A lower level of quality or outcomes for at least 20 per cent of the provider's students could therefore act as a limiting factor on the relevant criterion judgement.

412. The ‘rule of thumb’ and potential limiting factor will not be applied without consideration of context. Assessors will also consider the scale and nature of any variation, the level of performance concerned and the provider’s explanation.

413. Assessors will consider lower quality or outcomes for disadvantaged student groups who may be fewer than 20 per cent of students. This will include disabled students, students from the lowest Index of Multiple Deprivation quintiles and students entitled to free school meals. Assessors will consider whether lower quality or outcomes for any of these groups should limit the judgement reached.

414. In addition, assessors may also pay attention to smaller areas of provision or student groups where the indicator is substantially below benchmark or the minimum threshold, and may raise a concern about meeting minimum quality requirements.

415. Annex C details worked examples of applying the rule of thumb.

8.5 Reaching criterion judgements

416. The preceding sections explain how assessors will interpret indicators and consider other relevant evidence. This section details how assessors will then combine these to reach judgements against each criterion.

417. After considering all the relevant evidence, assessors will reach a judgement for each criterion. In reaching a criterion judgement, assessors will consider the consistency of the

student experience or student outcomes across the provision. Assessors will consider whether any groups or areas of lower quality may act as a limiting factor on the criterion judgement.

418. For providers applying for TEF ratings, criterion judgements will be one of the following:

- outstanding
- high quality
- satisfactory
- unsatisfactory.

419. For providers undergoing a minimum requirements assessment, criterion judgements will be one of the following:

- satisfactory
- unsatisfactory.

420. Each criterion judgement will be accompanied by a statement that summarises the findings material to the assessment. Where variation across students or provision has materially influenced the judgement reached, the statement will reflect this. The examples in Table 20 illustrate the types of statements that may be used in TEF and minimum requirements assessments.

Table 20: Types of statements

Assessment type	Criterion	Judgement	Example judgement statement
TEF	Course content	Outstanding	Course content is consistently outstanding across the provider's provision.
TEF	Learning resources	Satisfactory	Learning resources are high quality for most students but satisfactory for part-time students, and this difference was judged to be material to the assessment.
Minimum requirements	Student support	Satisfactory	Students experience satisfactory academic support that enables them to succeed in and beyond their studies.
Minimum requirements	Student engagement	Satisfactory	Student engagement is satisfactory overall, although engagement opportunities are weaker for apprenticeship students.
Minimum requirements	Learning resources	Unsatisfactory	Learning resources are unsatisfactory for significant areas of provision.

421. In some cases, assessors may find that they are unable to reach a clear judgement on a criterion, such as where the indicator confidence is very widely distributed and there is not enough evidence in the submissions to for assessors to make a clear judgement. In these scenarios, the assessors may record a mixed judgement, for example, the judgement could be 'student support is either outstanding or high quality'.

422. Where assessors make a mixed judgement, this should not have a predetermined effect on the aspect rating. Instead, assessors will take them into account alongside the full range of criterion judgements and evidence when reaching a best-fit judgement about the aspect rating overall. The extent to which a mixed judgement influences the aspect rating will depend on the overall pattern of evidence, including the judgements reached on the other criteria and the consistency of quality or outcomes across students and provision.

423. The judgement statements will focus on findings that were material to the assessment team's judgement. The criterion judgements and the accompanying statements will be included in the assessment report, which will set out the assessor's rationale, including their assessment of the consistency of the quality of student experience and student outcomes across the provision.

Student experience criteria

424. Assessors will consider and triangulate the available evidence for each of the criteria. Where different sources of evidence appear to conflict, assessors will use their expert judgement to determine which evidence should carry greater weight. In doing so, they will prioritise evidence that is:

- more robust and methodologically sound
- more representative of the provider's student population
- more directly relevant to the criterion being assessed.

425. Assessors will consider those elements of condition B4 that are not directly reflected in the student experience criteria. For all providers, these elements will be assessed only at the level of Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory.

426. Assessors will take these findings into account when reaching a judgement on the assessment and feedback criterion. An Unsatisfactory finding will normally indicate concerns about the quality of assessment practices and will normally be a significant consideration when reaching the criterion judgement. However, assessors will consider these findings alongside all other relevant evidence and will reach a judgement on the criterion based on the evidence as a whole.

Student outcomes criteria

427. In reaching judgements on student outcomes criteria, assessors will first interpret the performance of each of the indicators. Assessors will consider the statistical confidence when interpreting indicator performance, and the extent to which performance is consistent across student groups and courses.

428. For the continuation and completion criteria, assessors will interpret the relevant indicator, consider any relevant contextual evidence, and reach a single judgement for each criterion.

429. To reach a judgement on the post-study criterion, assessors will consider evidence relating to progression, use of skills and earnings. Assessors will consider these measures collectively, taking account of any relevant contextual evidence.

430. Assessors will recognise that positive post-study outcomes may take different forms depending on the nature of the provider's provision and the motivations of its students, and will normally give greater weight to the most positive measure or measures. Assessors will also consider the overall pattern of performance across the progression, use of skills and earnings measures, and relevant contextual information submitted by the provider. As set out in Part 6.3, this could include, for example, evidence that students have achieved positive post-study outcomes that are not captured by the indicators.

431. Assessors will not normally judge the post-study criterion to be unsatisfactory unless progression and at least one other post-study measure are substantially below benchmark and the performance is not justified by context.

8.6 Reaching aspect judgements

Minimum requirement assessment outcomes

432. After reaching criterion judgements, assessors will consider the evidence as a whole and determine whether the provider is delivering satisfactory quality and outcomes. The assessment outcome will be based on a holistic consideration of the evidence available, including the criterion judgements, the consistency of quality and outcomes across students and provision, and any other material evidence relevant to the assessment.

433. The possible assessment outcomes are:

- Satisfactory
- Unsatisfactory.

434. A Satisfactory outcome indicates that assessors consider the provider to be delivering satisfactory quality and outcomes and to be meeting the relevant minimum quality requirements.

435. An Unsatisfactory outcome indicates that the student experience or outcomes are not meeting minimum requirements in one or more significant areas.

436. For the student experience aspect, where one or more criteria are judged to be unsatisfactory, assessors will normally determine that an Unsatisfactory outcome is appropriate. In reaching this judgement, assessors will consider the seriousness, scale and significance of the concerns identified, the extent to which they affect students, and whether the evidence as a whole provides sufficient assurance that minimum quality requirements are being met.

437. There may be cases where a provider has one unsatisfactory criterion judgement, but assessors conclude that the concerns are not sufficiently serious or widespread to support an

Unsatisfactory outcome for the aspect as a whole, when considered alongside the overall pattern of evidence.

Worked example

Assessors judge the student support criterion to be unsatisfactory because evidence indicates that students studying in a particular subject experience unsatisfactory support. The provider demonstrates it has taken action to address this with some early evidence of improvement. The large majority of students experience satisfactory support.

The evidence relating to these students indicates that their experience is satisfactory in other areas, and there are no concerns about quality in any other subjects. Taking account of the overall pattern of evidence, the scale of the issue, the experience of the affected students across the wider criteria and the early evidence of improvement, the assessment team recommends an overall outcome of Satisfactory for student outcomes.

438. For student outcomes, assessors will consider any indicators of concern (see Part 6.2) and whether they are justified by relevant contextual information (including consideration of the most recently available data). If any indicators of concern are not justified, assessors will normally determine that an Unsatisfactory outcome is appropriate.

439. Where no indicators of concern have been identified, or if the indicators of concern are justified, assessors will normally recommend an outcome of satisfactory. However, where the available student outcomes data is very limited for a provider, the assessors may not recommend any outcome. This could be, for example, where a provider has no or very few student outcome indicators where there is at least probable statistical confidence about performance.

TEF ratings

440. After reaching judgements on each criterion, assessors will consider the pattern of criteria judgements across the aspect as a whole to reach a judgement on the appropriate aspect rating. This will be a holistic judgement based on a best-fit assessment of the overall quality of the student experience or the outcomes achieved by students, against the rating descriptors (see Part 1.3).

441. Assessors will recognise that providers may demonstrate different levels of quality across different criteria and will take account of the pattern of criterion judgements, the consistency of quality and outcomes across students and provision, and any other material evidence relevant to the assessment.

442. Where criterion judgements indicate different levels of quality, assessors will apply their expert judgement to determine the rating descriptor that provides the best fit with the overall pattern of criteria judgements. They will take particular account of the consistency of quality across different criteria, student groups and areas of provision.

443. A provider will not normally achieve a Silver or Gold rating unless the evidence demonstrates that high or outstanding quality is experienced consistently by its students and across its

provision. Significant weaknesses in particular subjects, modes of study or groups of students may limit the rating awarded.

444. For the **student experience** rating:

    a. No individual student experience criterion will carry greater weight than another. Assessors will consider all criteria collectively when reaching an overall rating.

    b. Where more than one of the criteria are judged to be unsatisfactory, assessors will normally consider a rating of Requires improvement is appropriate. Where only one of the student experience criteria is judged to be unsatisfactory, the assessors will consider whether a rating of Requires improvement is appropriate. In reaching this judgement, assessors will consider the severity, scale and significance of the concerns identified and their implications for meeting minimum quality requirements. As such, there may be cases where a provider could have one unsatisfactory student experience criterion judgement, but assessors might consider the concerns are not widespread or serious enough for a rating of Requires improvement.

445. For the **student outcomes** rating:

    a. Assessors will consider the pattern of criterion judgements and determine which rating best reflects the overall level of student outcomes. In doing so, they will consider in particular how the judgements about study and post-study outcomes best fit the student outcomes rating descriptors. For example, for a rating of Gold, there will normally need to be at least two criteria judged as ‘outstanding’ with one of these being post-study outcomes.

    b. Where one or more criteria are judged to be unsatisfactory, assessors will normally determine that a rating of Requires improvement is appropriate.

8.7 Assessment reports

446. Assessment teams will prepare an assessment report for each provider. Reports should explain the reasons for the criterion judgements and aspect ratings or outcomes reached.

447. Reports will include a summary of findings followed by an explanation of how the evidence was interpreted and how individual criterion judgements contributed to the aspect rating or outcome. In explaining their conclusions, assessors should make clear how they took into account indicator evidence, provider submissions, student submissions (where available), relevant contextual evidence and any other evidence used in their assessment. For enhanced student experience assessments, the report will include findings from the visit that have been material to the assessment.

448. Where variation in the student experience or student outcomes across student groups or areas of provision has materially influenced the assessment, reports should explain how this informed the judgements reached.

449. The report and summary of findings will also include the assessment team’s judgement of a provider’s validated-only provision, where applicable.

450. Where relevant, the report will explain any student recruitment limits that follow from the assessment outcome.

451. Assessment reports may include recommendations that identify specific areas for improvement in the student experience or student outcomes. Recommendations should not prescribe how the provider should go about making those improvements. Recommendations may be included for providers with any assessment outcome, as a means of supporting continuous improvement across the sector. For providers receiving TEF ratings, recommendations may be less likely to be included where an aspect has received a Gold rating. Assessors should place greater emphasis on recommendations for improvement where an aspect is rated Requires improvement or Unsatisfactory.

452. Following assessment, providers will receive an assessment report, including:

- a summary of findings against the assessment criteria, including a judgement for each criterion
- an explanation of how those judgements were reached and how they contributed to the aspect assessment outcome
- information on how the evidence was considered during the assessment
- any material findings relating to variations in the student experience or student outcomes across student groups or areas of provision
- recommendations on areas for improvement, where applicable
- assessors' judgement of validated-only provision, where applicable
- whether there is a student recruitment limit.

453. The report is intended to provide sufficient information for providers to understand the rationale for the outcome and the factors that contributed to the assessment team's conclusions.

454. The following example illustrates the type of recommendation that may be included in an assessment report.

Recommendation 1 [example]

The provider should address disparities in the academic experience reported by part-time students, particularly in relation to academic support and opportunities to engage with their studies.

8.8 Representations on provisional assessment outcomes

455. Where a provider receives a provisional rating of Bronze or Requires improvement or a provisional outcome of Unsatisfactory for an aspect, it may make representations about that outcome. Providers will normally have 28 days in which to submit representations.

456. Representations should normally relate to:

- a procedural irregularity in the assessment process, including where published guidance has not been followed, material evidence has not been considered, or evidence has not been interpreted or weighted in accordance with the published criteria and guidance
- more recent NSS data published after the provider's submission showing a marked improvement in specific areas judged to be lower quality, that might justify a higher rating (for providers that were assessed for TEF ratings).

457. Providers may submit information that explains the basis of their representation, but they should not normally use representations to introduce additional evidence that was available at the time of the original assessment.

458. Representations will not normally be given weight where they relate solely to disagreement with the exercise of expert judgement, comparisons with other providers or challenges to the overall assessment methodology.

459. When notifying a provider of a provisional assessment outcome, we will also notify the provider of provisional decisions about any associated restrictions linked to the outcome and provisional decisions about publication of the outcomes and other materials. We may invite providers to comment on these matters at the same time as making representations on the assessment outcome.

460. Where a provider submits representations on a provisional assessment outcome, a new assessment team will consider these. The review team will make a recommendation on whether the provisional assessment outcome and, where appropriate, the assessment report should be amended.

461. Assessment teams reviewing representations will consider whether the representation identifies a procedural irregularity, for example, incorrect application of the criteria or not considering material evidence, or whether more recent NSS data may affect the assessment outcome. In reviewing representations, assessors will continue to apply the assessment criteria, guidance and published methodology consistently.

462. The recommendation will be considered by the alternate sub-panel (the sub-panel that was not involved in reaching the original provisional rating decision), which will determine the final outcome.

Part 9: Outcomes and publication

9.1 Publication of assessment outcomes and materials by the OfS

463. Consistent with our general approach to publication and the principle that regulatory decisions should normally be published, the starting position will be that assessment outcomes and related material are published.

464. We will publish assessment outcomes and outputs with the aim of providing clear and accessible information for students about the quality of provision, supporting transparency, incentivising improvement, and contributing to wider sector enhancement.

465. The information we publish will normally include:

- the outcome of the assessment for each aspect
- the assessment report
- provider submissions
- student submissions, where applicable
- links to the indicators used in the assessment
- any supplementary information associated with the outcome.

466. We will publish outcomes through our website and may also publish information through other services, including Discover Uni and UCAS.

467. The OfS Register will include a link to each provider's published assessment outcome and related material.

9.2 Presentation of assessment outcomes

Publication of TEF ratings

468. Where a provider has applied for a TEF rating, we will publish the rating awarded for each assessed aspect.

469. We will normally present TEF ratings using a standardised format that clearly identifies:

- the student experience rating
- the student outcomes rating
- the year of award
- the provision covered by the assessment.

470. If we have not assessed an aspect because there is not sufficient data, we will make this clear in the published presentation of the outcomes.

471. The published assessment reports will include a summary aimed at a student audience, including a 'scorecard' of judgements for each of the criteria, and a more detailed explanation of the findings and the reasons for the ratings awarded.

Publication of minimum requirements outcomes

472. Where a provider has not applied for a TEF rating, we will publish the assessment outcome for each assessed aspect.

473. We will normally present minimum requirements outcomes using a standardised format that clearly identifies:

- whether the outcome for each aspect assessed is Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory
- the year of assessment
- the provision covered by the assessment.

474. If we have not assessed the student outcomes aspect because there is not sufficient data, we will make this clear in the published presentation of the outcomes.

9.3 Assessment reports

475. We will publish an assessment report for each provider which will explain:

- how the evidence was interpreted
- the criterion judgements reached
- how those judgements informed the assessment outcome
- any material variation in quality or outcomes across students or provision
- any recommendations for improvement.

476. Reports may also include:

- any restrictions that apply as a result of a TEF rating or minimum requirements outcome
- summary information designed for a student audience
- findings relating to validated-only provision, where applicable.

477. For providers assessed against minimum requirements only, reports will use the same general structure but criterion judgements and overall outcomes will be limited to Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory quality.

478. Where a provider's rating or outcome changes following a quality investigation (see or other regulatory activity, we will not amend the original assessment report but will publish supplementary information alongside the report to explain the revised outcome.

9.4 Advance review and factual accuracy

479. We will notify all providers, regardless of their assessment outcome, of our intention to publish the assessment outcome and associated material. Before publication we will give providers the assessment report and, where applicable, the provider and student submissions.

480. Before publication, providers will have an opportunity to comment on the factual accuracy of the assessment report and identify information that they do not think we should publish. Providers will normally have 14 calendar days in which to provide comments. Examples of matters that providers may wish to raise include:

- typographical, grammatical or drafting errors
- factual inaccuracies, such as incorrect student numbers, percentages or provider-specific names of campuses, courses or roles
- commercially sensitive information
- information that would allow the identification of an individual without their consent
- material within a student submission that the provider believes contains unsupported claims, defamatory content or significant factual inaccuracies.

481. We will consider any such comments and decide whether factual corrections or redactions are appropriate before publication. We will make final publication decisions considering our legal duties and in accordance with Regulatory advice 21.[12]

482. Where representations on provisional assessment outcomes result in material changes to the assessment report, the provider will have a further opportunity for advance review of the revised material before publication.

9.5 Timing of publication

483. As some assessments are likely to take longer to finalise than others, particularly where providers make representations on provisional assessment outcomes, we will normally publish outcomes in two annual batches, usually in September and January.

484. The first batch, usually published in September, will include providers receiving:

- Gold ratings
- Silver ratings
- Satisfactory outcomes
- final Bronze and Requires improvement ratings where no representations are made
- final Unsatisfactory outcomes where no representations are made.

[12] See OfS, 'Regulatory advice 21: Publication of information'.

485. The second batch will include outcomes for providers that make representations on provisional outcomes, after we complete the representations process, usually to be published in January.

9.6 Publication by providers

486. Providers must publish the assessment outcomes in accordance with condition B6 and its schedule. This is to ensure that students and the public have access to accurate and consistent information about quality.

487. In publishing assessment outcomes, whether a TEF rating, minimum requirements outcome or both, providers **must ensure** that the publication meets the publication requirements set out in the schedule to B6 quality assessment.

488. This includes a requirement for providers to publish their aspect ratings or outcomes on all relevant course webpages within scope of the assessment and that are taught directly by the provider. For the first cycle this will normally be on all pages relevant to undergraduate- level courses that are taught directly by the provider. Providers may also publish the ratings or outcomes on undergraduate landing pages, homepages or pages displaying other regulatory outcomes, rankings or accolades. Although subcontracted out courses are within the scope of the assessments, providers are not required to publish their ratings or outcomes on webpages for courses that they subcontract out. This reflects that students are more likely to be interested in the ratings or outcomes of the provider that teaches a particular course.

489. Similarly, a provider that teaches courses through a subcontractual arrangement (a ‘delivery partner’) is required to display its own rating or outcome, but not that of the ‘lead’ provider that subcontracts out the teaching.

490. Where a rating or outcome is suspended, removed or revised between assessments, the provider must remove publication of the superseded or withdrawn rating or outcome and, where applicable, publish the amended rating(s) or outcome by the date specified.

491. We are likely to conduct checks to ensure providers are complying with the requirements on publication.

Additional publication requirements for TEF ratings

492. We will make standardised TEF logos, and associated technical requirements available before the publication of outcomes from the first TEF assessment cycle.

9.7 Transition from TEF 2023

493. We will continue to publish valid TEF 2023 ratings on our website until we replace them with a rating or outcome under the new scheme. We will clearly identify whether a published rating relates to TEF 2023 or the new scheme to support student understanding.

494. Providers that hold a valid TEF 2023 rating may continue to publish the rating until it receives a rating or outcome under the new scheme. Providers should not imply that TEF 2023 ratings

are directly equivalent to outcomes under the new scheme. The TEF 2023 branding guidelines continue to apply.[13]

495. Valid TEF 2023 ratings will continue to be published on Discover Uni and UCAS websites until they are replaced under the new scheme.

Part 9 forms part of Proposal 18. Comments on this should be made in response to Question 18.

[13] See OfS, 'Publication of TEF outcomes: communications and branding guidelines' [PDF].

Part 10: Consequences, monitoring and changes to ratings or outcomes

10.1 Recruitment limits

496. A recruitment limit determines the maximum number of student entrants that a provider may recruit in an academic year.

497. Providers that receive a Requires improvement rating for one or both assessed aspects will be subject to a recruitment limit through condition B6, requiring a reduction in student recruitment.

498. Providers that receive an Unsatisfactory outcome in one or both assessed aspects will normally be subject to a recruitment limit through a specific condition of registration, requiring a reduction in student recruitment.

499. From the second cycle of assessments (2030-31) or the provider's second assessment under the new scheme (whichever occurs first):

    a. Providers that receive a Bronze rating for both aspects, or where only one aspect is assessed and this is Bronze, will be subject to a recruitment limit through condition B6 that allows them to maintain, but not increase, student recruitment.

    b. Providers that receive a Satisfactory outcome for both aspects, or where only one aspect is assessed and this is Satisfactory, will normally be subject to a recruitment limit through a specific condition of registration that allows them to maintain, but not to increase student recruitment.

500. A provider will not normally be subject to a student recruitment limit where it receives a Bronze rating in one assessed aspect and a Gold or Silver rating in the other assessed aspect.

501. The relationship between TEF ratings and student recruitment limits will apply only to ratings issued under the new scheme. It does not apply to ratings awarded through TEF 2023.

10.2 Calculation and application of limits

Scope of a recruitment limit

502. A student recruitment limit will apply at a provider level to the in-scope student entrant population. During the first assessment cycle, this will normally include:

- undergraduate provision
- domestic and international students, irrespective of whether the student is funded through the Student Loans Company
- students taught by the provider
- students registered by the provider, including those studying through subcontracting or franchise arrangements.

503. Students who are registered and taught by another provider, for example through a validation-only partnership, are not within the scope of a recruitment limit.

Recruitment baseline

504. The recruitment baseline is the provider's in-scope student entrant population in the academic year in which we award the relevant TEF rating or minimum requirements outcome. We calculate the initial reduction in recruitment from the recruitment baseline.

505. We calculate student entrant numbers using the same methodology and academic year dates that underpin the student outcomes and experience measures used for quality assessments.[14] This methodology identifies individual students entering higher education within a defined period and applies a consistent set of coverage rules and exclusions across all providers. For these purposes, an academic year runs from 17 July to 16 July.

506. Where we do not hold sufficient data to determine a recruitment baseline, we may require a provider to submit information about its student entrant population in the form and by the date specified.

507. We will notify a provider of its recruitment baseline in writing.

Commencement and duration of a student recruitment limit

508. We will notify a provider of its student recruitment limit at the same time as the relevant TEF rating or minimum requirements outcome. The recruitment limit will take effect from the following academic year.

509. The outcome of the next quality assessment will determine whether the recruitment limit ceases to apply or whether a new student recruitment limit linked to the rating or outcome of that assessment will apply.

510. Where a provider receives a new recruitment limit, a new recruitment baseline will be established using the provider's in-scope student entrant population in the academic year in which we award the new rating or outcome.

511. Where a new recruitment limit is applied, the existing limit will continue to apply until the new limit takes effect in the following academic year.

Recruitment limits for providers with a Requires improvement rating or Unsatisfactory outcome

512. Providers that receive a Requires improvement rating for one or both assessed aspects must reduce their in-scope student entrant population by 10 per cent in each academic year for which the recruitment limit applies. Providers that receive an Unsatisfactory outcome for one or both assessed aspects will normally be subject to a recruitment limit requiring the same annual reduction.

513. For example, where a provider receives a Requires improvement rating during academic year 2028-29 and has 1,000 student entrants in that year, those entrant numbers would form the

[14] See OfS, 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation' [PDF].

recruitment baseline. The recruitment limit would apply from academic year 2029-30, when the provider would be required to reduce its student entrant population by 10 per cent to 900 entrants. Further reductions of 10 per cent would then apply in each subsequent academic year on a compounded basis, as shown in Table 21 below.

Table 21: Example of recruitment limits

Academic year	Maximum entrants
Baseline year	1,000
Year 1	900
Year 2	810

Recruitment limits for providers with Bronze ratings or Satisfactory outcomes

514. Providers that receive Bronze ratings or Satisfactory outcomes in both assessed aspects, or in the only assessed aspect, will normally be subject to a student recruitment limit.

515. The requirement will apply from:

- the second assessment cycle (2030-31 onwards)
- the provider's second assessment, whichever occurs first.

516. For providers that are registered after implementation of the future quality system and first assessed from 2030-31 onwards, the requirement will apply from that their first assessment.

517. The student recruitment limit will be equal to the provider's recruitment baseline. For example, where a provider's recruitment baseline is 1000 entrants, it may continue to recruit up to 1000 entrants each academic year but it may not recruit more than that amount while the limit remains in force.

518. A recruitment tolerance will normally apply. Where applied, we will not normally take regulatory action where recruitment exceeds the recruitment baseline by no more than 3 per cent, or 15 entrants, whichever is greater.

10.3 Compliance with a student recruitment limit

519. Providers must not recruit more student entrants than their recruitment limit. A recruitment tolerance will not normally apply.

520. Providers that exceed, or reasonably expect to exceed, their student recruitment limit must notify us in writing without delay.

521. We will monitor compliance using routine data submissions and may require a provider to submit information about its current or forecast student numbers.

522. Providers will receive advance notice of a student recruitment limit through provisional and final outcome decisions. Providers should take account of this information when planning recruitment activity and take appropriate steps to ensure compliance from the date the limit takes effect.

523. Where a recruitment limit may affect prospective students, providers should act transparently and fairly and take all reasonable steps to minimise disruption to applicants and students.

524. Failure to comply with a recruitment limit linked to a TEF rating will constitute a breach of condition B6. Failure to comply with a recruitment limit linked to an Unsatisfactory outcome will constitute a breach of the specific condition of registration to which it relates. We will consider any regulatory action in accordance with the regulatory framework and Regulatory advice 15.[15]

Part 10.1 to 10.3 forms part of Proposal 19. Comments on this should be made in response to Question 19.

10.4 Quality monitoring and investigations

Quality monitoring

525. We will continue to monitor risks to quality between scheduled assessments using the quality risk factors, alongside notifications, reportable events, regulatory intelligence, data indicators and other relevant information.

526. Part 3 explains how our risk-monitoring activity informs how we select providers for quality assessment each year, including the level of scrutiny required.

527. Where risks to quality emerge between scheduled quality assessments, we may engage with the provider to understand the concerns and determine the most appropriate response.

528. We may:

- continue monitoring the provider and maintain the existing quality assessment timetable
- bring forward a provider's next quality assessment so that we can assess the risks, including through an enhanced assessment where additional evidence gathering is necessary
- undertake a quality investigation where the concerns appear sufficiently significant or require more immediate or detailed investigation.

Quality investigations

529. In most cases, risks to quality that we identify through ongoing quality monitoring will be considered through cyclical quality assessments, including enhanced assessments where appropriate.

530. In some circumstances, a quality investigation may be more appropriate. This may be the case where bringing forward a provider's next quality assessment would not provide sufficient assurance or protection for students, or where concerns we identify through the provider's

[15] See OfS, 'Regulatory advice 15: Monitoring and intervention'.

latest quality assessment (for example, following a Requires improvement rating) merit more detailed investigation.

531. When deciding whether a quality investigation is appropriate, we will take a risk-based approach. Further information about quality investigations, including the circumstances in which they may be undertaken and the factors we will consider when deciding whether an investigation is appropriate, is set out in Part 3.4.

532. We will ordinarily assess compliance with condition B3 through a provider's cyclical quality assessment. However, we may assess student outcomes as part of a quality investigation where the circumstances of the case make this appropriate.

10.5 Effect of quality investigations on TEF ratings and minimum requirements outcomes

533. The outcome of a quality investigation may affect a provider's TEF rating or minimum requirements outcome.

534. Where we find a breach of condition B1, B2 or B4 between scheduled quality assessments, we will also consider whether the provider's published ratings or outcomes are consistent with those findings. This is so that students have access to a single, coherent indicator of provider quality.

535. Where we decide that a provider's TEF rating or outcome no longer appropriately reflects the quality of the student experience, we may revise the rating or outcome before the provider's next scheduled quality assessment. For example, where an investigation finds a breach of a quality condition of registration, a provider with a Bronze TEF rating may have its rating changed to Requires improvement.

536. When considering whether to revise a TEF rating or outcome, we will take account of the nature, seriousness and scale of the breach, together with the impact on students.

537. We will normally consider:

- a maximum rating of Bronze to be compatible with a breach or breaches that are limited in scope or impact
- a rating of Requires improvement or an outcome of Unsatisfactory to be compatible with more serious and widespread breaches.

538. Where we provisionally decide that a provider has breached condition B1, B2 or B4, we will also consider whether the provider's TEF rating or outcome should be revised. If we provisionally decide that a revision is appropriate, we will notify the provider as part of our provisional breach decision. The provider will have an opportunity to submit representations before we make a final decision on both matters.

539. Where a quality investigation does not identify concerns requiring further action, or identifies concerns that are more limited and that we think are compatible with the provider's existing rating or outcome, we may leave the outcomes unchanged and maintain the existing quality assessment timetable. Where residual risks remain, we may instead prioritise the provider for an earlier quality assessment to consider those risks through the quality assessment process.

540. Where a quality investigation identifies concerns about the accuracy of a provider's student outcomes data (condition B3) and this results in a material amendment to that data, we will normally expect to review the provider's student outcomes rating or outcome to ensure that it reflects the amended data. We may revise a rating or outcome using the same approach as set out for student experience.

541. Where we open a quality investigation, we may decide that it is no longer appropriate for a provider to continue to hold a Gold or Silver TEF rating while the investigation is ongoing. In exceptional cases involving serious quality concerns, we may suspend or remove a TEF rating above Bronze. This is to ensure that students are not presented with a rating that may no longer provide a reliable indicator of quality, and that providers do not continue to access the benefits associated with that rating while we investigate the concerns. The suspension or removal of a rating during an investigation does not indicate that we have reached a view on whether a breach has occurred.

Revised TEF ratings and minimum requirements outcomes

542. A revised TEF rating or minimum requirements outcome will replace the previously published rating or outcome. The provider must update its published information to reflect the revised rating or outcome by the date specified. See Part 9.6 for further information on publication requirements.

543. Where we revise a rating or outcome following a quality investigation, we will not amend the original quality assessment report. Instead, we will normally publish:

- a report setting out the findings of the quality investigation (as set out in Regulatory advice 21)
- supplementary information explaining how those findings affected the provider's TEF rating or outcome.

544. Where a revised rating or outcome results in a restriction, such as a student recruitment limit, the provider must comply with any associated requirements. For example, if we revise a provider's TEF rating to Requires improvement following an investigation, the provider will become subject to the same restrictions as any other provider rated Requires improvement through the TEF.

545. Any benefits linked to the previous rating will normally cease immediately upon the award of the new rating.

546. The timing of the provider's next quality assessment will normally be determined by any revised rating or outcome. For example, where we revise a provider's rating to Bronze, we will normally reassess the provider three years after the revised rating.

10.6 Reassessment following Requires improvement rating or Unsatisfactory outcome

547. We will normally schedule a provider that receives a Requires improvement rating or Unsatisfactory outcome for its next quality assessment after two years. This means, for example, that a provider that submits in December 2027 and receives a provisional rating of

Requires improvement in summer 2028 and its final rating in December 2028 (if it makes representations) will normally need to submit again in December 2029.

548. If a provider is subject to a quality investigation when we would otherwise select it for a scheduled quality assessment, we will normally complete the investigation, and implement any resulting intervention, before scheduling the quality assessment.

549. When we schedule the provider for reassessment, we will carry out an initial risk assessment (described in Part 3), as for any other provider.

550. If the provider applies for a TEF rating, we will conduct a full TEF assessment rather than a targeted reassessment limited to previously identified concerns. This means the reassessment will cover both TEF aspects, if sufficient data is available, and will not be restricted to any single aspect previously rated Requires improvement.

551. As part of its submission, a provider with an aspect rating of Requires improvement or an outcome of Unsatisfactory will normally be expected to demonstrate:

- how it has responded to the concerns identified in the previous assessment
- the actions taken to address those concerns
- the improvements achieved
- how those improvements have been embedded and sustained.

552. The assessment team will consider this information alongside the full range of evidence available through the assessment process in determining the provider's rating or outcome.

553. If the provider improves on its Requires improvement rating(s) or Unsatisfactory outcome at reassessment, it will return to the assessment cycle associated with its new lowest (or only) aspect rating or outcome.

Reassessing providers rated Requires improvement that do not have sufficient data

554. A Requires improvement rating will remain in place until we replace it with either:

- a new TEF rating
- an outcome of Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory following a minimum requirements assessment.

555. A provider selected for assessment may only apply for a TEF rating in an aspect or aspects for which it has sufficient data (see Part 2).

556. At reassessment, where a provider with a Requires improvement rating does not have sufficient data to apply for a TEF rating, we will either undertake a minimum requirements assessment or open a quality investigation, depending on the outcome of our initial risk assessment.

557. In exceptional cases, we may defer an assessment where a provider is expected to have sufficient data to apply for a TEF rating within a reasonable period. We will take decisions on a case-by-case basis and informed by the risks we identify (see Part 2 on scheduling factors).

10.7 Consecutive Requires improvement ratings and Unsatisfactory outcomes

Consecutive Requires improvement TEF ratings or Unsatisfactory outcomes

558. Condition B6 requires a provider with a Requires improvement rating or Unsatisfactory outcome to demonstrate improvement by achieving a higher rating at its next assessment under the quality assessment system.

559. This requirement applies if either:

- we award the Requires improvement rating through a TEF assessment or Unsatisfactory outcome through a minimum requirements assessment
- we revise a rating to Requires improvement or Unsatisfactory following a quality investigation.

560. A provider will not have demonstrated the improvement required by condition B6 if it receives a Requires improvement rating at its next TEF assessment or Unsatisfactory outcome at its next minimum requirements assessment, regardless of whether that rating relates to the same or different aspect from the earlier Requires improvement rating or Unsatisfactory outcome.

Implications of consecutive Requires improvement ratings and Unsatisfactory outcomes

561. Consecutive Requires improvement ratings or Unsatisfactory outcomes indicate that significant concerns about quality persist despite the student recruitment restrictions already in place. In some cases, this may reflect a provider's failure to address issues we have previously identified. In others, the provider may have addressed the original concerns but new concerns of a similar seriousness may have emerged.

562. Where providers receive consecutive Requires improvement ratings or Unsatisfactory outcomes, or a combination of the two, we will normally consider significant regulatory intervention.

563. We will also consider whether the circumstances indicate that the provider has breached one or more other conditions of registration, including but not limited to conditions B1, B2 and B4. Where relevant, we will take account of findings from any quality assessments or investigations.

564. We will determine any regulatory intervention in accordance with the regulatory framework and Regulatory advice 15, taking account of the circumstances of the case, including the seriousness and persistence of the concerns and their impact on students. Regulatory intervention may include:

- imposing a monetary penalty
- suspending aspects of a provider's registration, which could include suspending access to student support funding or OfS public grant funding

- varying or revoking a provider's authorisation for DAPs, or revoking a provider's authorisation to use 'university' in its title

- deregistering a provider.

10.8 Other circumstances where assessment outcomes may change

565. Normally, we will make changes to TEF ratings or minimum requirement outcomes following a quality investigation. However, we may need to revise or remove a rating or outcome outside the normal assessment cycle if it no longer appropriately reflects a provider's current position.

566. Circumstances where we may decide to revise or remove a provider's published rating or outcome include but are not limited to:

- **Breach of a quality condition:** Where a breach of condition B1, B2 or B4 is identified between scheduled assessments, we may revise a TEF rating to either Bronze or Requires improvement or an outcome to Unsatisfactory (see Part 10.5).

- **Significant change in provision:** Where a provider has changed the overall nature of the provision covered by its TEF rating or minimum requirements outcome, such that the rating or outcome is no longer relevant to its current educational offer. For example, a provider that received a TEF rating for undergraduate provision may subsequently cease delivering undergraduate courses and move to deliver only postgraduate provision. In these circumstances, we may remove the undergraduate rating where it could otherwise be misleading to students.

- **Suspension or deregistration:** Where a provider is suspended from, or removed from, the OfS Register. For example, where a provider is deregistered, we will remove its TEF rating or minimum requirements outcome and this must no longer be publicised.

- **Ongoing quality investigations:** In serious cases, where a provider is subject to a quality investigation, we may consider it inappropriate for the provider to continue to benefit from its TEF rating while the investigation is ongoing. In these circumstances, we may remove ratings above Bronze.

- **Merger, acquisition or re-registration following structural or ownership changes:** Where a provider re-registers with the OfS following a change in corporate structure or ownership, or is involved in a merger or acquisition, and we need to consider whether the existing TEF rating or minimum requirements outcome remains applicable to the resulting organisation.

10.9 Mergers, re-registration and structural change

567. Where providers merge, we will consider the circumstances of the merger when deciding whether existing TEF ratings or minimum requirement outcomes should transfer to the merged organisation. We will normally transfer the TEF ratings or minimum requirements outcomes of the provider that remains registered, along with any associated restrictions, to the merged entity.

568. However, this may not always be appropriate. In deciding whether existing TEF ratings or outcomes should apply to the merged entity, we will consider:

- the TEF ratings or outcomes held by each provider before the merger
- the providers' compliance histories
- the proportion of the merged higher education business contributed by each organisation
- the overall effect of the merger on the student experience
- any other information relevant to whether the existing ratings continue to provide meaningful information to students.

569. Where we decide that we should apply a TEF rating or outcome to a merged entity, we will normally update published information to explain the basis for the original rating or outcome and why it has been applied to the merged entity.

570. Where a provider is seeking re-registration (for example, after a change in corporate structure or ownership), we may conclude that it is substantially the same provider for the purpose of transferring a TEF rating or minimum requirements outcome if it is either:

- the same legal entity
- a new entity operating the same or substantially the same higher education business as the previously registered provider.

571. In deciding whether a provider is substantially the same provider, we will consider:

- the provider's regulatory history
- information submitted as part of the registration process
- our assessment of the initial conditions of registration
- what has changed, or not changed, for students.

572. Where we conclude that a provider is substantially the same provider and that students' experience remains substantially the same:

- we will normally apply the existing TEF aspect ratings or assessment outcomes to the provider
- any associated benefits or restrictions linked to those ratings or outcomes, such as student recruitment limit, will also normally apply
- we may consider bringing forward the provider's next scheduled assessment so that students have access to more up-to-date information, recognising that significant changes can occur following re-registration.

573. Where the provider seeking re-registration is genuinely new and is not operating the same or substantially the same higher education business as the previous provider:

- we will normally treat it as a new provider for quality assessment purposes
- TEF ratings or outcomes will not normally transfer.

574. The provider will instead enter the quality assessment system in the same way as any other newly registered provider.

Part 10.4 to 10.9 forms part of Proposal 21. Comments on this should be made in response to Question 21.

10.10 Other incentives or restrictions

575. Where a TEF rating is linked to an incentive or restriction such as funding, tuition fee arrangements or eligibility for DAPs, further information will be provided in the relevant guidance relating to those areas.

Annex A: Assessment criteria

1. The criteria for assessing each aspect are broken down into levels of unsatisfactory quality, satisfactory quality, high quality and outstanding quality.

Student experience criteria

2. There are six criteria for assessing the quality of student experience:
    - course content
    - course delivery
    - assessment and feedback
    - student support
    - learning resources
    - student engagement.

    These map to the relevant B conditions of registration, as set out in Tables A1 to A6 below.

The student experience criteria below form part of Proposal 7. Comments on this should be made in response to Question 7.

Course content

As a minimum, students should experience course or module content that is current, well structured, appropriately challenging and has clear learning outcomes designed to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for success in further study and employment.

The relevant requirements of the B conditions are B1.3.a., b., c. and e.

Table A1: Criteria for course content

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
Course content is likely to be judged as unsatisfactory when the criteria for satisfactory are not met. This may include when one or more of the following applies:	Course content is likely to be judged as satisfactory when the following apply. In some areas quality may be higher, but not consistently enough to be judged at a higher level:	Course content is likely to be judged as high quality when the satisfactory criteria are exceeded and the following apply:	Course content is likely to be judged as outstanding quality when the high quality criteria are exceeded and the following apply:
Some students engage with course content that is: • outdated • lacks coherence or does not support effective progression of learning • insufficiently challenging • not appropriately informed by subject, research, industrial and/or professional developments. Some students do not develop the knowledge and skills relevant to the subject, including transferable skills	Students engage with course content that is: • regularly reviewed and updated by subject experts • structured coherently • appropriately challenging • appropriately informed and improved through evidence from students, employers, staff, professional bodies and developments within the subject. Students develop knowledge and skills relevant to the subject, including transferable skills and professional competencies to prepare them for	Students consistently engage with course content that is: • up to date and regularly updated and improved in response to evidence and feedback • structured coherently and well designed to encourage high levels of learning • highly challenging with students regularly challenged to critically analyse, apply and evaluate knowledge and skills • enhanced by recent subject, research, industrial and/or professional developments.	Students consistently engage with course content that: • is up to date, forward looking, and continuously improved, through evidence, innovation and partnership with stakeholders • is highly coherent and carefully designed to attune to different learning needs and maximise learning and development • offers outstanding challenge with students stretched throughout their studies to achieve their full potential. Courses enable students to exercise significant independence, judgement and critical thinking

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
and professional competencies. Some students are not adequately prepared for future study, employment or professional practice.	future study, employment or professional practice.	Students develop highly relevant knowledge and skills, including transferable skills and professional competencies, that support high levels of success in future study, employment or professional practice.	• exposes them to emerging or cutting-edge research, subject knowledge, industrial and/or professional developments. Students develop advanced knowledge and skills, including transferable skills that equip them to achieve their full potential and succeed in future study, employment or professional practice.

Course delivery

As a minimum, students should experience teaching and learning activities that are effective and enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes of their course. Teaching should be delivered by sufficient numbers of appropriately qualified and skilled staff and through a balance of methods that are appropriate to the subject, level and students being taught.

The relevant requirements of the B conditions are B1.3.d. and B2.2.a.

Table A2: Criteria for course delivery

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
Course delivery is likely to be judged as unsatisfactory when the criteria for satisfactory have not been met. This may include when one or more of the following applies:	Course delivery is likely to be judged as satisfactory when the following criteria are met. In some areas quality may be higher, but not consistently enough to be judged at a higher level:	Course delivery is likely to be judged as high quality when the satisfactory criteria are exceeded and the following apply:	Course delivery is likely to be rated as outstanding when the high quality criteria are exceeded and the following criteria are met. Students consistently experience outstanding teaching and learning activities that are:
Some students experience teaching and learning activities that are: • poorly organised • ineffective in supporting the achievement of the intended learning outcomes for the course • not sufficiently challenging. There is not an appropriate balance of delivery methods	Students experience teaching and learning activities that are: • well organised • effective in supporting achievement of the intended learning outcomes for their course • appropriately challenging. Teaching and learning activities are delivered through an appropriate balance of delivery methods and mix of directed and independent study.	Students consistently experience high-quality teaching and learning activities that are: • well organised and delivered effectively • engaging and effective in supporting and enhancing learning and development • highly challenging and enhances their learning. Teaching and learning activities are delivered through an effective mix of delivery methods and balance between directed and	• exceptionally well organised and continually enhanced • highly engaging, inspirational and effective in supporting advanced learning and development • intellectually stretching, practically or professionally demanding, enables them to thrive and inspires them to achieve their full potential • are continuously evaluated and improved. Teaching and learning approaches are delivered through a highly effective mix of methods and balance between directed

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
.and mix of directed and independent study. There are not a sufficient number of appropriately qualified or skilled teaching staff. There is limited contact time and support from academic staff, or academic staff provide inappropriate levels of support.	Students are taught and supported by sufficient numbers of appropriately qualified and skilled staff. Students receive sufficient contact time with academic staff, receiving the teaching, guidance and support they need to develop the knowledge and skills required for success in their studies and future employment or professional practice.	independent study that supports active engagement with learning. Students experience teaching and support from well qualified staff whose expertise and availability consistently support their learning and development. Students receive good contact and availability from teaching staff, that enhances their learning, development and success.	and independent study that promotes advanced learning and development. Students experience teaching and support from staff with outstanding expertise whose guidance inspires and encourages deep engagement with learning and inspires and challenges them to reach their full potential. Students receive excellent contact and availability from teaching staff that enriches their learning, development and success.

Assessment and feedback

As a minimum, assessment should be effective in enabling students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes by appropriately testing relevant knowledge and skills. It should be rigorous, appropriately challenging and support learning and development through effective feedback. To be effective, assessment must be valid, reliable and designed to protect academic integrity and minimise academic misconduct, including design to be resilient against the misuse of artificial intelligence.

Academic regulations must be designed to ensure that awards are credible and that there is appropriate assessment of the English language. Awards must reflect the knowledge and skills of students to be credible and should be credible at the point they are granted and when compared to awards granted previously.

The relevant requirements of the B conditions are B4.2.a., B4.2.b., B4.2.c., B.4.2.d. and B4.2.e.

Criteria relating to B4.2.c.: Academic regulations are designed to ensure that awards are credible; B4.2.d.: Academic regulations ensure the assessment of technical proficiency of the English language; and B4.2.e.: Awards are credible are only assessed against minimum requirements.

Table A3: Criteria for assessment and feedback

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
Assessment and feedback is likely to be judged as unsatisfactory when the criteria for satisfactory are not met. This may include when one or more of the following applies:	Assessment and feedback is likely to be judged as satisfactory when the following apply. In some areas quality may be higher, but not consistently enough for a higher rating:	Assessment and feedback is likely to be judged as high quality when the criteria for satisfactory are exceeded and the following apply:	Assessment and feedback is likely to be judged as outstanding when the criteria for high quality are exceeded and the following apply:
Some students experience assessment and feedback that is not: • effective in enabling them to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes	Students experience assessment and feedback that is: • effective in enabling them to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes • appropriately challenging • comprehensive in testing relevant knowledge and skills.	Students consistently experience assessment and feedback that is: • effective in enabling them to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes • highly challenging • comprehensive in testing relevant knowledge and skills.	Students consistently experience assessment and feedback that is: • highly effective in enabling them to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes • carefully designed to stretch, test and enhance their learning, enabling them to achieve their full potential

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
• challenging enough for the level of course • comprehensive in testing relevant knowledge and skills. Assessment tasks are not sufficiently clear or aligned to learning outcomes. Assessment methods are not appropriate to the course and level of study. Assessment is not designed and conducted to minimise opportunities for academic misconduct, including the use of AI in assessment and does not support academic integrity. Feedback is delayed, poor quality or inappropriately excessive.	Assessment tasks are clear and aligned to learning outcomes, using assessment methods that are appropriate to the course and level of study. Assessment is designed and conducted to minimise opportunities for academic misconduct, including the use of AI in assessment and support academic integrity. Feedback is appropriate, timely and supports students to improve their learning and performance.	Assessment is well designed, aligned with learning outcomes and uses methods that are well suited to the course and encourage students to demonstrate and apply their knowledge and skills effectively. Assessment is designed to support progression and professional readiness. Assessment is designed and conducted effectively with minimal opportunities for academic misconduct, including the use of AI in assessment, and promotes academic integrity. Students consistently receive clear, timely and constructive feedback that supports learning, development and improvement.	• comprehensive in testing relevant knowledge and skills in ways that promote deep learning and development. Assessment methods are authentic and innovative where appropriate, encouraging students to apply and extend their knowledge and skills in the subject and real-world contexts. Assessment promotes exceptional intellectual growth, practical skills or professional development. Assessment is designed and conducted in ways that are highly effective in minimising opportunities for academic misconduct, including the use of AI in assessment, and actively promotes academic integrity. Students consistently receive regular, clear, timely and constructive feedback, tailored to their progress and effective in advancing learning, development and achievement.
The design of academic regulations to ensure awards are credible is likely to be judged as unsatisfactory when the criteria for satisfactory are not met. This could include	The design of academic regulations is likely to be judged as satisfactory when the following apply: Academic regulations provide clear and coherent requirements for assessment, progression, award and classification that ensure that awards made		

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
when one or more of the following applies: Academic regulations contain weaknesses that undermine the integrity of awards because they are overly permissive or generous. Academic regulations contain steps in algorithms such as discounting credit with the lowest marks or awarding a student the best result from multiple algorithms without evidence that the final classification is an appropriate reflection of the knowledge and skills of students. Changes to academic regulations have resulted in increases in module marks or the classification of degrees based on the same student achievement.	appropriately reflect the knowledge and skills of students. Academic regulations support the maintenance of academic standards and the integrity of awards. Requirements relating to assessment, academic misconduct, compensation, condonement, progression and award classification are appropriately designed and are applied consistently. Governance and oversight arrangements ensure that the impact of changes to academic regulations are subject to appropriate scrutiny and consideration of their impact on academic standards. Increases in classifications awarded can be explained or there is evidence through assessed student work over the course of their study that increases are based on increases in student achievement.		

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
The design of academic regulations to ensure effective assessment of the English language is likely to be judged as unsatisfactory when one or more of the following applies: Academic regulations do not require the assessment of English language where this is relevant to the level and subject matter of the course.	The design of academic regulations to ensure effective assessment of the English language is likely to be judged as satisfactory when the following apply: Academic regulations require students to demonstrate an appropriate level of technical proficiency in English. Approaches to assessing English language proficiency are appropriate to the level, content and intended outcomes of the course.		
The credibility of awards is likely to be judged as unsatisfactory when one or more of the following applies: Patterns in classifications or award outcomes raise concerns because of high levels of unexplained attainment which are not supported by evidence from assessed student work. Moderation by internal and external examiners samples assessments at a module level (or equivalent) but does not consider the aggregate achievement of individual students.	The credibility of awards is likely to be judged as satisfactory when the following apply: Awards appropriately reflect students' knowledge, understanding and skills. Patterns in awarded classifications and outcomes are consistent with evidence regarding student achievement with limited unexplained attainment. The provider can evidence that significant changes in award outcomes over time reflect increases in student achievement.		

Student support

As a minimum, students should receive appropriate and effective academic and careers support that supports them to succeed in their studies and prepares them for future employment or further study. This includes the support needed by disabled students to support their learning.

The relevant requirements of the B conditions are B2.2.a. and B2.3.

Table A4: Criteria for student support

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
Student support is likely to be judged as unsatisfactory when the criteria for satisfactory are not met. This may include when one or more of the following applies:	Student support is likely to be judged as satisfactory when the following criteria are met. In some areas quality may be higher, but not consistently enough to be judged at a higher level:	Student support is likely to be judged as high quality when the criteria for satisfactory are exceeded and the following apply:	Student support is likely to be judged as outstanding when the criteria for high quality are exceeded and the following apply:
Some students do not have access to academic and careers support that are: • appropriate to their needs • sufficient to support their learning, achievement and work readiness • accessible when needed. Some students may be disadvantaged because academic and careers support is not available or is ineffective. Some students do not receive academic or careers support when they need it.	Students have access to academic and careers support that are: • appropriate to their needs • sufficient to support their learning, achievement and work readiness • accessible when needed. Support enables students to succeed in their studies and prepare for further study, future employment or professional practice.	Students receive academic and careers support that are: • responsive to their needs • effective in supporting success in and beyond their studies • readily available and well aligned to learning and development. Support is proactive and consistently enables students to develop, achieve and prepare for further study, future employment or professional practice.	Students receive academic and careers support and learning resources that are: • highly responsive and attuned to their needs • highly effective in supporting success in and beyond their studies • readily available and enable them to achieve their full potential. Support is embedded across the provider and is proactive, wide-ranging, tailored where appropriate and highly effective in enabling students to develop, achieve and

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
			excel in further study, future employment or professional practice.

Learning resources

As a minimum students should have access to the staff, physical and digital learning resources, facilities and environments necessary for successful learning and achievement.

The relevant requirements of the B conditions are B2.2.a. and B2.3.

Table A5: Criteria for learning resources

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
Learning resources is likely to be rated as unsatisfactory when the satisfactory criteria have not been met. This may include when one or more of the following applies:	Learning resources is likely to be judged as satisfactory when the following criteria are met. In some areas quality may be higher, but not consistently enough to be judged at a higher level:	Learning resources is likely to be judged as high quality when the criteria for satisfactory are exceeded and the following apply:	Learning resources is likely to be judged as outstanding when the criteria for high quality are exceeded and the following apply:
Some students do not have access to the physical and digital learning resources, facilities and learning environments that are: • sufficient to support learning and achievement • reliable and available when needed • relevant to their studies and learning needs. Some students may be prevented from studying effectively because of a lack of, or the quality of physical and digital resources or spaces.	Students have access to physical and digital learning resources, facilities and learning environments that are: • sufficient to support learning and achievement • reliable and available when needed • relevant to their studies and learning needs. Resources, facilities and learning environments support students to succeed in and beyond their studies.	Students experience physical and digital learning resources, facilities and learning environments that are: • effective in supporting learning and achievement • readily accessible and appropriate to the subject and mode of study • responsive to student needs. Resources, facilities and learning environments consistently enhance learning, engagement and achievement and support students to succeed in and beyond their studies.	Students experience physical and digital learning resources, facilities and learning environments that are: • highly effective in supporting learning and achievement • readily accessible and relevant the subject and mode of study • highly responsive to student needs • continually enhanced. Resources, facilities and learning environments significantly enrich teaching and learning and maximise engagement and achievement and enable students to achieve their full potential in and beyond their studies.

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
Resources are not sufficient for the number of students or to support learning. Facilities and learning spaces are not fit for purpose. Some students cannot access resources or facilities when they need to.			

Student engagement

As a minimum students should have meaningful opportunities to provide feedback and influence decisions affecting their academic experience and contribute to improvement.

The relevant requirement of the B conditions is B2.2.b.

Table A6: Criteria for student engagement

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
Student engagement is likely to be rated as unsatisfactory when the satisfactory criteria are not met. This may include when one or more of the following applies:	Student engagement is likely to be judged as satisfactory when the following criteria are met. In some areas quality may be higher, but not consistently enough to be judged at a higher level:	Student engagement is likely to be judged as high quality when the criteria for satisfactory are exceeded and the following apply:	Student engagement is likely to be judged as outstanding when the criteria for high quality are exceeded and the following apply:
There are limited opportunities for students to provide feedback on their course and the way it is delivered. There is limited evidence that feedback informs decisions in an appropriate way. There is poor communication from the provider about responses to student feedback. There are low levels of student confidence in engagement processes. Some students may report that their views are not routinely sought or valued.	Students have meaningful opportunities to provide feedback on their course and the way it is delivered, contributing to the development of the academic experience. Students are able to engage through appropriate representation and feedback mechanisms. Student feedback contributes to improvements in the academic experience and providers communicate with students about actions taken in response to feedback. Students are able to influence aspects of their academic	Students routinely have meaningful opportunities to provide feedback on their academic experience and contribute to its improvement. Student engagement is embedded across the provider through effective and well understood engagement mechanisms . Student feedback consistently informs improvements to the academic experience and providers communicate clearly how student views have influenced decisions. Students can identify improvements resulting from their feedback and recognise that their views help shape the academic experience.	Students consistently have substantial and meaningful influence on their academic experience and continuous improvement. Student engagement is embedded throughout the provider and engagement mechanisms are highly effective, responsive and trusted by students. Student feedback plays a significant role in shaping improvements to the academic experience and students can clearly see the impact of their contribution. Students are active partners in the enhancement of their academic experience and have high

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
Changes are made in response to student feedback that undermine academic rigour.	experience and understand how their views are considered.		confidence that their views are valued and acted upon appropriately.

Student outcomes criteria

The student outcomes criteria below form part of Proposal 13. Comments on this should be made in response to Question 13.

For the purposes of this draft guidance, the statement linking post-study outcomes and condition B3 reflects our proposed changes to condition B3.

There are three criteria for assessing the quality of student outcomes:

- Continuation
- Completion
- Post-study outcomes.

These map to condition of registration B3, as set out in Tables A7, A8 and A9 below.

Continuation

This shows the proportion of students who stay in higher education after the first year (or the second year for part-time students).

The relevant requirement of the B conditions is B3.4.

Table A7: Criteria for continuation

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
In one or more substantive areas of provision, continuation rates are below the minimum thresholds and are not justified by context.	Across all substantive areas of provision, continuation rates at least: • meet the minimum thresholds, or	Taking account of context, continuation rates are consistently either: • substantially above the minimum thresholds, or • broadly in line with the provider's benchmarks.	Taking account of context, continuation rates are consistently either: • very high in absolute terms, or • materially above the provider's benchmarks.

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
	• are below the minimum thresholds and are justified by context. Continuation rates may be higher in some areas, but not consistently enough for a higher judgement.		

Completion

This shows the proportion of students who either gained a qualification or were still working towards one, after four years (six years for part-time students).

The relevant requirement of the B conditions is B3.4.

Table A8: Criteria for completion

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
In one or more substantive areas of provision, completion rates are below the minimum thresholds and are not justified by context.	Across all substantive areas of provision, completion rates at least: • meet the minimum thresholds, or • are below the minimum thresholds and are justified by context. Completion rates may be higher in some areas, but not consistently enough for a higher judgement.	Taking account of context, completion rates are consistently either: • substantially above the minimum thresholds, or • broadly in line with the provider's benchmarks.	Taking account of context, completion rates are consistently either: • very high in absolute terms, or • materially above the provider's benchmarks.

Post-study outcomes

This includes three post-study measures:

- **Progression:** This shows the proportion of graduates who have gone on to further study, professional or managerial employment, or other positive outcomes 15 months after leaving higher education, as reported in their responses to the Graduate Outcomes Survey.
- **Use of skills:** This shows the proportion of graduates who respond positively to the statement in the Graduate Outcomes Survey: 'I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity/study/work'.
- **Earnings:** This shows the proportion of graduates who are working three years after graduation and earning over a specific threshold in any of the three years since graduation. Graduates who are studying for another higher education qualification three years after graduation are also treated as a positive outcome. The data comes from the LEO dataset, which is based on UK tax records.

The relevant requirement of the B conditions would be set out in the updated condition B3.

Table A9: Criteria for post-study outcomes

Unsatisfactory quality	Satisfactory quality	High quality	Outstanding quality
In one or more substantive areas of provision, multiple post-study measures are substantially below the provider's benchmarks and are not justified by context.	Taking account of context, and placing more weight on the more positive post-study measure or measures, outcomes are generally somewhat below the provider's benchmarks, or are broadly in line with them in some areas of provision. The more positive measures are not consistently high enough across provision for a higher judgement. Post-study outcomes for some measures or areas of provision may be substantially below benchmark, but not to an extent that an unsatisfactory judgement would be appropriate.	Taking account of context, and placing more weight on the more positive post-study measure or measures, outcomes are broadly in line with the provider's benchmarks. The more positive measure or measures are consistent across provision. Post-study outcomes for some measures or areas of provision may be lower, but not to an extent that that a lower judgement would be appropriate.	Taking account of context, and placing more weight on the more positive post-study measure or measures, outcomes are materially above the provider's benchmarks. The more positive measure or measures are consistent across provision. Post-study outcomes for some measures or areas of provision may be lower, but not to an extent that that a lower judgement would be appropriate.

Annex B: Provider submission templates

Provider submission template

Based on responses to the stage one consultation and previous feedback on the TEF 2023 provider submission template, we have developed a more detailed set of prompts based around the criteria. We propose to include these prompts in the template. We are seeking views on the usefulness of these prompts or any additional prompts that respondents believe will assist providers in preparing their submissions.

Provider context statement template

Providers should submit a brief statement about their context.

Table B1: Context statement

Section 1: Provider context statement
Maximum length: two pages Provide concise information about: • educational mission and strategic aims • student population • modes and locations of delivery • significant partnership arrangements • any material contextual information that will assist assessors in understanding the provider and its provision. This section should provide background context only. It should **not** be used to explain indicator performance or provide evidence against the assessment criteria.

Student experience provider submission template

Providers assessed only against minimum requirements should focus on demonstrating that students experience satisfactory quality and that they have met the minimum quality requirements. The page limit is 12 pages.

Providers applying for TEF ratings should additionally explain the extent to which quality exceeds the minimum requirements, the consistency of quality across students and provision, and improvements achieved over time. The page limit is 20 pages.

For providers undergoing an enhanced assessment, there will be an allowance of an additional 3 pages to respond to site visit observations.

Table B2: Student experience provider submission template

Section 1: Student experience criteria
For each criterion provide: **Evaluation and evidence of quality** Provide your assessment and supporting evidence of the quality experienced by students. For providers assessed only against minimum requirements: Explain how students experience satisfactory quality.

For providers applying for a TEF rating: Explain whether students experience satisfactory, high quality or outstanding quality.

Consistency across provision

Explain:

- whether quality is experienced consistently across students and provision
- any material variation by subject, mode of study, student group or partnership arrangement
- any lower-performing areas in NSS data or other evidence
- how the provider understands and monitors any variation.

Improvement over time (TEF assessments only)

Explain:

- improvements made during the assessment period
- evidence of the impact of those improvements
- how improvements have been sustained and embedded.

Criterion 1: Course content

For minimum requirements, provide evidence that:

- how students experience content that is current and up to date
- how students experience courses that are coherent, with skills taught in an appropriate order, building on each other throughout the course
- how students engage with content that is appropriately challenging
- students engage with courses that are appropriately informed and improved through evidence from students, employers, staff, professional bodies and developments within the subject
- how students develop relevant knowledge and skills and competencies needed for future success

For TEF assessments, provide additional evidence of:

- how students experience content that is distinctive or innovative
- the extent to which students benefit from opportunities to engage with content relevant to current research, industry practice, professional developments and innovations
- the extent to which course design goes beyond minimum requirements and seeks to maximise student learning and development
- how improvements to course content have led to demonstrable improvements to the student experience or student learning
- how students experience particularly high levels of challenge, engagement or intellectual development
- the impact of curriculum design and enhancement on student engagement, achievement and progression
- how internal and external evidence demonstrates the effectiveness of course content.

Criterion 2: Course delivery

For minimum requirements, provide evidence that students experience:

- teaching and learning activities that are well organised
- teaching and learning activities that enable them to achieve course objectives
- a balance of teaching methods and learning activities that are appropriate to the subject and level of study

- appropriate contact time and academic support from academic staff
- staff who are suitably qualified and skilled
- teaching that is delivered effectively across the provider's provision.

For TEF assessments, provide additional evidence of:

- what students experience through teaching and learning activities and how these support their learning
- how students benefit from particularly effective or innovative approaches to learning and teaching
- the levels of student engagement with learning and the impact of teaching approaches on engagement, learning, confidence and achievement
- how contact time and staff availability are structured to support and enhance student learning
- how students experience an effective balance of directed and independent study that supports progression, engagement, challenge and independent learning
- the level of staff expertise and how this makes a distinctive contribution to the student experience
- how teaching enhancements have demonstrably improved student experiences and outcomes
- how particularly strong practice is embedded consistently across provision
- how different groups of students experience teaching that meets their needs and circumstances.

Criterion 3: Assessment and feedback

For minimum requirements, provide evidence of:

- how assessment enables students to demonstrate their learning, knowledge and skills
- assessment methods that are reliable, valid and appropriately challenging
- how students receive feedback to improve
- how students are educated and supported to understand and uphold academic integrity
- assessment design and arrangements that support academic integrity including to avoid the misuse of artificial intelligence.

For TEF assessments, provide additional evidence that:

- students experience assessment methods that are appropriate to the course and level of study aligned with the learning outcomes, provide high levels of challenge and are effective, clear and consistent
- assessment and feedback make a particularly strong contribution to learning and development and preparation for future study or employment
- students receive effective feedback which supports their learning and development
- assessment and feedback arrangements are especially innovative or effective
- changes to assessment practice have demonstrably improved student experiences or outcomes, without affecting academic rigour
- students consistently report particularly positive experiences of assessment and feedback
- assessment practice contributes to outstanding educational outcomes
- assessment arrangements promote academic integrity and high levels of academic rigour, including assessment designed to avoid the misuse of artificial intelligence.

Additional minimum requirements evidence (all providers)

Provide evidence of:

Academic regulations and award credibility

- how academic regulations support the credibility of awards
- how regulations relating to progression, compensation, condonement and classification maintain academic standards
- how the provider scrutinises the impact of changes to academic regulations
- how the provider assures itself that awards appropriately reflect student achievement
- evidence relating to trends in classifications and award outcomes.

Assessment of English language proficiency

- how students are required to demonstrate technical proficiency in English
- how English language proficiency is assessed
- how arrangements are appropriate to the subject and level of study.

Credibility of awards over time

- how the provider assures itself that awards remain credible over time
- evidence used to test the credibility of awards.

Criterion 4: Student support

For minimum requirements, provide evidence of:

- the academic support students available to students
- the personal and wellbeing support available to students
- the careers and employability support available to students
- how the support meets the needs of different student groups
- the support for disabled students and effectiveness of this
- support that contributes to student success and progression

For TEF assessments, provide additional evidence that:

- students derive exceptional benefit from support services
- support arrangements contribute to particularly strong continuation, completion or progression outcomes
- support is proactive, highly responsive and tailored to student needs
- targeted interventions have demonstrably improved outcomes for students
- students consistently report particularly positive experiences of support
- support arrangements contribute to outstanding student experiences or outcomes.

Criterion 5: Learning resources

For minimum requirements, provide evidence that:

- students have access to appropriate physical and digital resources
- resources support learning effectively
- resources are sufficient for the student population
- resources remain appropriate to the needs of students
- the provider identifies and responds to resource needs.

For TEF assessments, provide additional evidence that:

- learning resources make a distinctive contribution to student learning

- students benefit from particularly effective or innovative resources
- investment in learning resources has demonstrably improved student experiences or outcomes
- resources support exceptional levels of student engagement or achievement
- students consistently report particularly positive experiences of learning resources.

Criterion 6: Student engagement

For minimum requirements, provide evidence about how:

- students can provide feedback
- student views inform decisions about the student experience
- student representatives are able to engage effectively with the provider
- students are informed about actions taken in response to their feedback
- engagement arrangements operate effectively across the provider's provision

For TEF assessments, provide additional evidence that:

- student engagement makes a substantial and demonstrable contribution to enhancement
- students act as genuine partners in shaping their educational experiences
- engagement activity leads to significant improvements for students
- student engagement is embedded consistently across the provider
- students consistently report particularly positive experiences of engagement and partnership working.

Section 2: Validated-only provision (if applicable)

Where NSS indicators for validated-only provision are materially below benchmark, provide:

- context
- supporting evidence

  explanation of quality assurance arrangements.

Section 3: References

Reference the evidence used to support key claims.

Table B2: Student outcomes provider submission template

Maximum length: 10 pages
Your selection letter includes notification of any student outcome indicators of concern. You should include relevant contextual information for these indicators in this section. You do not need to complete this section if the OfS has not notified you of any indicators of concern.

Section 2: Contextual information
Maximum length: 10 pages

You do not need to repeat contextual evidence included in section 1. Where context remains relevant, you can refer back.

For each indicator or area of material variation you wish to contextualise, provide:

- the indicator(s) affected
- the contextual information you consider relevant
- the category of contextual information it falls within*
- evidence supporting the explanation

*Provide contextual information that falls within one of the following categories, together with supporting evidence see Part 6.3 for definitions and evidence requirements associated with each category):

- Highly distinctive contextual factors: Explain why OfS indicators or benchmarking do not adequately capture the factor
- Demonstrable improvements: Evidence of activity alone is unlikely to be sufficient
- Exceptional circumstances: Sector-wide events are unlikely to be considered.

Please do not submit data files in place of or alongside your submission. Please use the submission to present any data or calculations in a way that demonstrates robustness and can be tested and assured by OfS data teams.

Section 3: Validated-only provision (if applicable)

Provide contextual information to explain why the outcomes for any validated-only provision are below minimum thresholds or below benchmark.

Refer to section 2

Section 4: References

Reference the evidence used to support key claims.

Annex C: Worked examples of provider submissions for the TEF

In this annex, following responses to the stage one consultation, we present worked examples to support providers with understanding what strong evidence might look like in the provider submission for a TEF assessment. We propose to include similar examples in our guidance. Therefore, we are seeking views on the usefulness of these examples and on whether respondents believe that any additional examples will assist providers in preparing their submissions.

Student experience

Examples of stronger evidence

Example 1: Provider and student submissions explaining variation in NSS results

What the data shows

- The NSS indicator for Academic support is materially above benchmark overall.
- Academic support is below benchmark for international students. These students represent 30 per cent of the provider's undergraduate students.

Provider submission evidence

- Acknowledges the weaker performance among international students.
- Provides internal survey and service-usage data showing lower engagement with support services among these students.
- Demonstrates understanding of why they accessed support less frequently, and engagement with international students on how to change services to increase engagement.
- Sets out changes recently made to support arrangements.
- Provides evidence showing increased engagement with support services among international students, and an improvement in the most recent year of NSS data.

Student submission evidence

- Confirms that international students have experienced difficulties accessing support.
- Includes evidence gathered from an international student focus group.
- Reports that students have noticed improvements in the most recent year.
- Notes that challenges remain in some departments.

Strengths of the evidence

- Provider and student evidence point in the same direction.
- The submission is self-critical.
- Evidence explains both strengths and weaknesses.
- Multiple sources are used.
- The scale of the issue is clearly identified.
- More recent evidence is provided.

What this illustrates

- Triangulation.
- Consistency across provision.
- Self-critical evaluation.
- Use of recent evidence.

Example 2: NSS is below benchmark but supported by evidence of improvement

What the data shows

- The NSS indicator for Assessment and feedback is below benchmark.
- This is evident across most subjects and student groups.

Provider submission evidence

- Explains that assessment processes were redesigned recently.
- More recent internal surveys show improved student perceptions.
- Recent external examiner reports describe assessment practice positively.
- Internal audits show more consistent feedback practices across courses.

Student submission evidence

- Reports widespread improvements in feedback quality.
- Includes examples from students across multiple courses.
- Confirms that newer cohorts report a better experience than previous cohorts.

Strengths of the evidence

- Focuses on impact on the student experience rather than activity.

- Draws on multiple evidence sources.
- Includes independent evidence.
- Covers a large proportion of provision.
- Provider and student evidence are consistent.

What this illustrates

- Demonstrable improvement.
- Self-critical evaluation.
- Complementary provider and student evidence.

Example 3: Small specialist provider using qualitative evidence

What the data shows

- NSS indicators are partly in line with and partly above benchmark, with wide confidence intervals because of small student numbers.
- There is little indication of material variation between student groups, but the published data alone provides only a limited evidence base.

Provider submission evidence

- External examiner reports.
- Key findings from annual course review reports.
- Evidence from student-staff forums.
- Feedback from industry professionals.
- Case studies showing the impact of changes made in response to student feedback.

Student submission evidence

- Draws on focus groups involving students from all year groups.
- Identifies close staff-student relationships as a consistent strength.
- Provides examples of students directly influencing curriculum design.

Strengths of the evidence

- Multiple independent sources.
- Strong student voice.
- Appropriate to the provider’s scale.

- Consistent findings across several years.
- Evidence is directly relevant to students' experiences.

What this illustrates

- Strong qualitative evidence.
- Appropriate evidence for small providers.
- Triangulation without extensive quantitative datasets.

Examples of weaker evidence

Example 4: Extensive description of activity

What the data shows

- NSS indicators for Student engagement are below benchmark overall, and across most student groups.

Provider submission evidence

- Describes how students are represented in governance structures.
- Lists meetings, committees and consultation exercises where students made an input.
- Explains how representatives are selected.

Student submission evidence

- States that many students are unaware of engagement processes.
- States that feedback is collected but outcomes are not communicated.

Limitations of the evidence

- No evidence that activity has resulted in improvements.
- Provider evidence focuses on inputs not the impact on students' experiences.

What this illustrates

- Difference between describing activity and evidencing quality.
- Importance of impact-focused evidence.

Student outcomes

Examples of stronger evidence

Example 5: Demonstrable improvement

What the data shows

- Continuation rates are lower than expected for one mode of study, representing around 35 per cent of students.

Provider submission evidence

- Shows understanding of the cause of weaker continuation.
- Specifies closure of several courses with particularly poor performance.
- Shows how more recent data demonstrates sustained improvement.
- Aligns internal calculations with OfS indicators.

Strengths of the evidence

- Demonstrates measurable improvement.
- Clear link between problem, action and outcome.
- Evidence relates directly to the indicators.
- Covers a material proportion of students.

What this illustrates

- Demonstrable improvement.
- Outcome-focused evidence.

Example 6: Distinctive provision not fully captured by measures

What the data shows

- Progression outcomes appear lower than expected. The pattern affects a substantial proportion of graduates.

Provider submission evidence

- Provides evidence that a high proportion of graduates enter their intended vocation, and explains that these are not classified as professional or managerial.
- Provides data to show the effect on the progression indicator and that the pattern is consistent over multiple years.

Strengths of the evidence

- Directly relevant to the indicators.
- Demonstrates scale and materiality.
- Focused on outcomes.
- Supported by verifiable evidence.

What this illustrates

- Highly distinctive student pathways.
- How this affects the measures.

Example 7: Exceptional circumstances outside the provider's control

What the data shows

- Continuation and completion outcomes are lower than expected for students on a group of courses representing a substantial proportion of the provider's student population.

Provider submission evidence

- Explains that a major incident beyond the provider's control resulted in the loss of specialist facilities required to deliver the affected courses.
- Identifies the specific student cohorts and courses impacted.
- Provides evidence showing disruption to delivery and assessment during the relevant period, as well as evidence of student protection measures implemented by the provider.
- Demonstrates that weaker outcomes are concentrated in the affected cohorts and align with the timing of the event.
- Shows that outcomes returned to expected levels once alternative arrangements were established.

Strengths of the evidence

- Clear link between the event and the indicators.
- Demonstrates that the event was exceptional and outside the provider's control.
- Shows a direct and material effect on a substantial group of students.
- Supported by objective and verifiable evidence.

What this illustrates

- Exceptional circumstances outside the provider's control.
- Direct impact on student outcomes.

- Robust evidence of materiality.

Examples of weaker evidence

Example 8: Factors already reflected in benchmarking

What the data shows

- Completion rates are lower than expected.

Provider submission evidence

- Explains that many students are mature and many come from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Provides data showing the extent and that the pattern is consistent over multiple years.

Limitations of the evidence

- These factors are already reflected in benchmarking.
- No evidence that circumstances are so distinctive that benchmarking does not account for them.
- No evidence of demonstrable improvement.

What this illustrates

- Difference between context and contextual evidence.

Example 9: Improvement efforts undertaken

What the data shows

- Continuation rates are broadly as expected and have remained so across the four years covered by the published indicators.

Provider submission evidence

- Explains extensive work to understand and improve continuation outcomes, including:
  - establishing a student success taskforce
  - commissioning internal research into withdrawal patterns
  - introducing new attendance monitoring processes
  - appointing additional student success advisers
  - revising induction arrangements
  - developing new continuation action plans at department level.

- Activities are described in detail, with a strong belief they should lead to improved outcomes.

Limitations of the evidence

- Focuses on activities rather than outcomes.
- No demonstration that the actions have yet had a measurable effect.
- No evidence that continuation has improved.

What this illustrates

- The distinction between descriptions of activity and evidence of improvement.

Example 10: Exceptional circumstances outside the provider's control

What the data shows

- Completion outcomes are lower than expected across a substantial proportion of the provider's provision.

Provider submission evidence

- Explains that industrial action affected teaching and assessment during the assessment period.
- Describes disruption experienced by students and steps taken to mitigate the impact.
- Provides evidence of the duration and scale of the disruption.

Limitations of the evidence

- Industrial action forms part of the normal risks and challenges of delivering higher education, and are not fully outside of the control of the provider.
- Does not represent an exceptional circumstance outside the provider's control for the purposes of this category.
- The submission relies primarily on the existence of disruption rather than demonstrating a relevant exceptional event outside the provider's control.

What this illustrates

- The distinction between exceptional provider-specific events and normal operational challenges.

Approach to assessment: Rule of thumb

Example 11

NSS data initially indicates that students at Provider A receive 'outstanding' course delivery, as the overall indicators for Teaching on my course for full-time and part-time students are materially above benchmark. The assessors consider the extent to which this is consistent across different student groups, subjects, courses and provision. They identify that the Teaching on my course indicator for students studying full-time through subcontracted provision, who represent 30 per cent of Provider A's students, is broadly in line with benchmark. The assessors review Provider A's submission and find that the lower level of quality for subcontracted provision is not sufficiently justified and there is no evidence of the impact of actions taken to improve in this area. As this student group represents at least 20 per cent of Provider A's undergraduate students, the lower level of quality of course delivery acts as a limiting factor for this judgement in the absence of any evidence in the submissions that would outweigh the indicator evidence. Consequently, the assessment team reaches a judgement of 'high quality' for the course delivery criterion.

Example 12

The overall continuation indicators show that rates for students at Provider B are as expected, as they are above the minimum threshold and broadly in line with benchmark, reflecting high levels of positive student outcomes for this measure. The assessors consider the extent to which the rates of continuation are consistent across different student groups, subjects, courses and provision. They identify that continuation rates are lower for students who had free school meals, who represent 15 per cent of Provider B's students. Although this group of students do not represent more than 20 per cent of Provider B's undergraduate population, the assessment team pays particular attention to this group because of the specific risks experienced by students with this characteristic. The assessment team reviews the provider's submission and find that Provider B provides sufficient evidence of the impact of actions taken to improve the quality of student support for students who had free school meals, with marked improvements in more recent years of data. As a result, the assessment team does not treat the lower level of continuation for this group as a limiting factor and the assessors reach a judgement of 'high quality' for the continuation criterion.

Annex D: Further detail on the data used in assessment

NSS questions by theme

1. As explained in Part 4.1, we use NSS indicators for six themes to assess student experience. Table D1 shows the individual questions that contribute to each theme.

Table D1: NSS questions by theme

Theme	NSS questions used
Teaching on my course	Q1. How good are teaching staff at explaining things? Q2. How often do teaching staff make the subject engaging? Q3. How often is the course intellectually stimulating? Q4. How often does your course challenge you to achieve your best work?
Learning opportunities	Q5. To what extent have you had the chance to explore ideas and concepts in depth? Q6. How well does your course introduce subjects and skills in a way that builds on what you have already learned? Q7. To what extent have you had the chance to bring together information and ideas from different topics? Q8. To what extent does your course have the right balance of directed and independent study? Q9. How well has your course developed your knowledge and skills that you think you will need for your future?
Assessment and feedback	Q10. How well has your course developed your knowledge and skills that you think you will need for your future? Q11. How fair has the marking and assessment been on your course? Q12. How well have assessments allowed you to demonstrate what you have learned? Q13. How often have you received assessment feedback on time? Q14. How often does feedback help you to improve your work?
Academic support	Q15. How easy was it to contact teaching staff when you needed to? Q16. How well have teaching staff supported your learning?
Learning resources	Q19. How well have the IT resources and facilities supported your learning? Q20. How well have the library resources (e.g., books, online services and learning spaces) supported your learning? Q21. How easy is it to access subject specific resources (e.g., equipment, facilities, software) when you need them?
Student voice	Q22. To what extent do you get the right opportunities to give feedback on your course? Q23. To what extent are students' opinions about the course valued by staff?

	Q24. How clear is it that students' feedback on the course is acted on? Q25. How well does the students' union (association or guild) represent students' academic interests?

Calculation of NSS positivity score

2. NSS questions have four possible valid responses, two of which are positive and two negative. Respondents can also answer 'This does not apply to me'. The wording of response options varies by question but, in each case, we consider the first two response options as positive.

3. We calculate the 'positivity score' for the theme for each provider as follows:

   a. For each respondent, we take the percentage of their responses that are positive across the questions in the theme. For example, if there are four questions in the theme and they responded positively to two, this would be 50 per cent. We ignore questions with an answer of 'This does not apply to me', or that were not answered.

   b. We then calculate an overall positivity score by adding together the percentages for each respondent and dividing by the number of respondents.

Definition of positive outcomes for student outcomes indicators

4. We set out in this section how we define positive outcomes for the student outcomes indicators. Full details, including how we define the populations for the indicators, are available in the 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation' document.[16]

Continuation and completion

5. Students count positively in the continuation indicators if they are reported as continuing to study for a higher education qualification, or have gained the qualification:

   - one year and 15 days after they started their course, if studying full-time
   - two years and 15 days after they started their course, if studying part-time.

6. Students count positively in the completion indicators if they are reported as having gained a qualification (or continuing to study for a qualification):

   - four years and 15 days after they started their course, if studying full-time
   - six years and 15 days after they started their course, if studying part-time.

[16] We will update the documents currently available at OfS, Documents describing our measures and definitions to reflect decisions taken on indicator construction and presentation following the consultation. The documents currently reflect our consultation proposals.

7. Students who transfer to a different provider on or before the relevant census date are treated as a neutral outcome for both the continuation and completion indicators. They are not included in the population of the indicator, so count neither negatively nor positively.

Progression

8. Graduates count positively in the progression indicators if they report they were undertaking any of the following activities in the census week of the Graduate Outcomes survey:

    - managerial or professional employment
    - further study at any level
    - travelling, caring for someone else or retirement.

9. We define managerial or professional employment as employment in an occupation that falls within major groups 1 to 3 of the Office for National Statistics Standard Occupational Classification. This can include working in self-employment, freelancing, developing a creative, artistic or professional portfolio, or voluntary or unpaid roles, if the information that students provide in their survey response about their job identifies it as a managerial or professional occupation.

10. Graduates do not count positively in the progression indicators if they report they were doing one or more of the following, and none of the activities we treat as positive:

    - they were unemployed and looking for work
    - they are due to start a job or start studying
    - they were ‘doing something else’.

11. We include only graduates living in the UK in the progression indicators.

Use of skills

12. Graduates count positively in the use of skills indicators if they respond ‘Agree’ or ‘Strongly agree’ to the Graduate Outcomes survey question ‘I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity/study/work.’ Agreement to this question counts positively regardless of the activity the graduate reports undertaking.

13. We include only graduates living in the UK in the use of skills indicators.

Earnings

14. Students count positively in the earnings indicators if they:

    - earn above a threshold based on average UK earnings for 25- to 29-year-olds (including graduates and non-graduates) in any of the first three tax years after graduation
    - are studying for a higher education qualification, three years after graduation.

15. We only include graduates who appear in the LEO data as in sustained employment or further study three years after graduation when creating the earnings indicators.

Indicators data time series

16. We use the most recent four years of available data to create the indicators. As the measures have different census points, both during and after study, the most recent four years of available data relate to different student cohorts. In Tables D2 to D4, we set out the time series for each of the measures, in terms of the students who are included, for assessments beginning between 2027-28 and 2029-30.

Table D2: Four-year time series for indicators used in assessments (2027-28)

Measure	Year 1 (least recent)	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4 (most recent)
Continuation: full-time and apprenticeship	2021-22 entrants	2022-23 entrants	2023-24 entrants	2024-25 entrants
Continuation: part-time	2020-21 entrants	2021-22 entrants	2022-23 entrants	2023-24 entrants
Completion: full-time and apprenticeship	2018-19 entrants	2019-20 entrants	2020-21 entrants	2021-22 entrants
Completion: part-time	2016-17 entrants	2017-18 entrants	2018-19 entrants	2019-20 entrants
Progression and use of skills: full-time, part-time and apprenticeship	2021-22 qualifiers	2022-23 qualifiers	2023-24 qualifiers	2024-25 qualifiers
Earnings	2017-18 qualifiers	2018-19 qualifiers	2019-20 qualifiers	2020-21 qualifiers
Student experience: full-time, part-time and apprenticeship	2024 NSS	2025 NSS	2026 NSS	2027 NSS

Table D3: Four-year time series for indicators used in assessments (2028-29)

Measure	Year 1 (least recent)	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4 (most recent)
Continuation: full-time and apprenticeship	2022-23 entrants	2023-24 entrants	2024-25 entrants	2025-26 entrants
Continuation: part-time	2021-22 entrants	2022-23 entrants	2023-24 entrants	2024-25 entrants
Completion: full-time and apprenticeship	2019-20 entrants	2020-21 entrants	2021-22 entrants	2022-23 entrants
Completion: part-time	2017-18 entrants	2018-19 entrants	2019-20 entrants	2020-21 entrants
Progression and use of skills: full-time, part-time and apprenticeship	2022-23 qualifiers	2023-24 qualifiers	2024-25 qualifiers	2025-26 qualifiers

Measure	Year 1 (least recent)	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4 (most recent)
Earnings	2018-19 qualifiers	2019-20 qualifiers	2020-21 qualifiers	2021-22 qualifiers
Student experience: full-time, part-time and apprenticeship	2025 NSS	2026 NSS	2027 NSS	2028 NSS

Table D4: Four-year time series for indicators used in assessments (2029-30)

Measure	Year 1 (least recent)	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4 (most recent)
Continuation: full-time and apprenticeship	2023-24 entrants	2024-25 entrants	2025-26 entrants	2026-27 entrants
Continuation: part-time	2022-23 entrants	2023-24 entrants	2024-25 entrants	2025-26 entrants
Completion: full-time and apprenticeship	2020-21 entrants	2021-22 entrants	2022-23 entrants	2023-24 entrants
Completion: part-time	2018-19 entrants	2019-20 entrants	2020-21 entrants	2021-22 entrants
Progression and use of skills: full-time, part-time and apprenticeship	2023-24 qualifiers	2024-25 qualifiers	2025-26 qualifiers	2026-27 qualifiers
Earnings	2019-20 qualifiers	2020-21 qualifiers	2021-22 qualifiers	2022-23 qualifiers
Student experience: full-time, part-time and apprenticeship	2026 NSS	2027 NSS	2028 NSS	2029 NSS

Benchmarking factors

17. In Tables D5 to D10, we set out the benchmarking factors we use for each measure. Our selection and application of benchmarking factors is guided by the principles for benchmarking factors.[17] The factors we use vary by mode of study, as our analysis shows that the effect of factors can differ, for example between part-time and full-time provision. Full details about the factors and the categories they are broken down into, including any related groupings, are available in the document 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation'.[18]

[17] See OfS, 'Guiding principles for benchmarking factors'.

[18] We will update the documents currently available at OfS, Documents describing our measures and definitions to reflect decisions taken on indicator construction and presentation following the consultation. The documents currently reflect our consultation proposals.

Table D5: Benchmarking factors for NSS indicators

Benchmarking factor	Student experience: full-time	Student experience: part-time	Student experience: apprenticeship
Year of survey	✓	✓	✓
Level of study (first degree, other undergraduate, undergraduate with postgraduate components)	✓	✓	✓
Subject of study	✓ (CAH - the Common Aggregation Hierarchy - Level 2 groups)	✓ (Broad subject groups)	✓ (Broad subject groups)
NSS ABCS (NSS ABCS quintiles 1 to 5 for the relevant mode of study; non-UK domiciled)	✓	✓	✓

Table D6: Benchmarking factors for continuation indicators

Benchmarking factor	Continuation: full-time	Continuation: part-time	Continuation: apprenticeship
Level of study (first degree, other undergraduate, undergraduate with postgraduate components)	✓ (Other undergraduate separated into those at Level 4 and those at Level 5+)	✓	✓
Subject of study (CAH level 1 groups)	✓	✓	✓
Entry qualifications	✓ (11 groupings)	✓ (5 groupings)	✓ (5 groupings)
Expected course length (expected course length of less than a year, or otherwise)	x	✓	x
ABCS quintile (Continuation ABCS quintiles 1 to 5 (including unmatched))	✓	✓	✓

Table D7: Benchmarking factors for the completion indicators

Benchmarking factor	Completion: full-time	Completion: part-time	Completion: apprenticeship
Level of study (first degree, other undergraduate, undergraduate with postgraduate components)	✓ (Other undergraduate separated into those at Level 4 and those at Level 5+)	✓	✓
Subject of study (CAH level 1 groups)	✓	✓	✓
Entry qualifications	✓ (11 groupings)	✓ (5 groupings)	✓ (5 groupings)
Expected course length (expected course length of less than a year, or otherwise)	✓ (Expected course length of less than two years, two years, or at least three years)	✓ (Expected course length of less than a year, or otherwise)	x
ABCS quintile (completion ABCS quintiles 1 to 5 (including unmatched))	✓	✓	✓

Table D8: Benchmarking factors for the progression indicators

Benchmarking factor	Progression: full-time	Progression: part-time	Progression: apprenticeship
Year qualification obtained	✓	✓	✓
Level of study (first degree, other undergraduate, undergraduate with postgraduate components)	✓	✓	✓
Subject of study	✓ (CAH level 2 groups for first degree level of study; Broadly defined subject groups otherwise)	✓ (Broadly defined subject groups)	✓ (Broadly defined subject groups)
Entry qualifications	✓ (5 groupings for other undergraduate level of	✓ (3 groupings)	✓ (3 groupings)

	study; 11 groupings otherwise)		
Expected course length (expected course length of less than a year, or otherwise)	✓ (Expected course length of less than two years, two years, or at least three years)	✓ (Expected course length of less than a year, or otherwise)	x
ABCS quintile (progression ABCS quintiles 1 to 5 (including unmatched))	✓	✓	✓

Table D9: Benchmarking factors for the use of skills indicators

Benchmarking factor	Use of skills: full-time	Use of skills: part-time	Use of skills: apprenticeship
Year qualification obtained	✓	✓	✓
Level of study (first degree, other undergraduate, undergraduate with postgraduate components)	✓	✓	✓
Subject of study	✓ (CAH level 2 groups)	✓ (Broadly defined subject groups)	✓ (Broadly defined subject groups)
Entry qualifications	✓ (10 grouping otherwise)	✓ (5 groupings)	✓ (5 groupings)
Geography of employment quintile (quintile 1, quintiles 2 and 3, quintiles 4 and 5 and unknown)	✓	✓	✓
ABCS progression quintile (quintile 1, quintiles 2 and 3, quintiles 4 and 5)	✓	✓	✓

Table D10: Benchmarking factors for the earnings indicators

Benchmarking factor	Earnings: full-time	Earning: part-time	Earnings: apprenticeship
Year qualification obtained	✓	✓	✓
Level of study (first degree, other undergraduate, undergraduate with postgraduate components)	✓	✓	✓
Subject of study (CAH level 2)	✓	✓	✓
Entry qualifications	✓ (10 grouping otherwise)	✓ (3 groupings)	✓ (3 groupings)
Geography of earnings quintile (quintiles 1 to 5)	✓	✓ (3 groupings)	✓ (3 groupings)
ABCS progression quintile (quintile 1, quintiles 2 and 3, quintiles 4 and 5 ; unknown)	✓	✓	✓

Annex E: Glossary

Absolute threshold. A minimum level of performance that we expect a higher education provider to meet, regardless of the characteristics of its student population.

Aspect rating. For a provider undertaking a TEF assessment, this is the rating we award for an assessment aspect after considering all relevant evidence and information.

Assessment aspect. One of two specific areas of quality that we assess as part of the assessment framework: student experience or student outcomes.

Assessment outcome. The overall result of a minimum requirements assessment, setting out our judgement about whether a provider meets the minimum requirements (Satisfactory) or not (Unsatisfactory).

Benchmark. A statistical comparison point that takes account of factors outside a provider's control, enabling fair comparison of performance across providers.

Benchmarking factor. A characteristic or variable we use when calculating a benchmark to reflect differences in student populations, subjects or other relevant circumstances.

Contextual evidence. Evidence that helps explain or provide context for a provider's performance, characteristics, circumstances or approach.

Criterion judgement. The judgement assessors reach against an individual assessment criterion, based on the evidence available to them.

Data sufficiency. The extent to which we consider available data adequate and reliable for use in assessment and decision-making.

Enhanced assessment. A more detailed assessment process we apply where we consider that additional scrutiny is required to reach a robust judgement.

External quality assurance of end point assessment. The OfS process that checks whether providers are assessing apprentices consistently and accurately against the knowledge, skills and behaviours required by an apprenticeship standard.

Quality Assessment and TEF panel. The panel we appoint to consider assessment evidence and make recommendations or judgements relating to minimum quality requirement assessments and the Teaching Excellence Framework.

Quality investigation. A regulatory process we undertake to investigate concerns about whether a provider is meeting the quality requirements of its conditions of registration.

Risk assessment. The process we use to identify, evaluate and prioritise potential risks to quality and standards, and to determine whether further regulatory action may be required.

Statistical uncertainty. The degree of uncertainty associated with a statistical measure because it is based on observed data rather than the outcomes of an entire population.

Student experience. The quality of students' experiences during their studies, including teaching, learning opportunities, academic support, assessment, resources and wider aspects of their course.

Student outcomes. The outcomes students achieve during and after their studies, including measures of continuation, completion, progression, use of skills and earnings.

Subcontracted provision. Educational provision one organisation delivers on behalf of another provider, which remains responsible for the students and the quality of the provision.

Validated-only provision. Provision where the awarding body validates the course but does not deliver the teaching or register the students.

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