

Office for  
Students



# Regulatory advice 22

Guidance on the Teaching Excellence  
Framework (TEF) 2023

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# About this document

1. This regulatory advice sets out guidance for the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) exercise that the OfS will operate in 2022-23 (referred to as the TEF 2023). It sets out guidance on:
  - the assessment framework, including what is assessed in the TEF and what the possible outcomes are
  - which higher education providers can or must take part in the TEF
  - the timetable for implementation and publishing outcomes
  - the evidence to be submitted by participating providers
  - the TEF indicators produced by the OfS, that will also inform the assessments
  - how the TEF panel should carry out the assessments.
2. Separate guidance is available on submissions that can (optionally) be made by a provider's students.<sup>1</sup>
3. More detailed guidance on how the TEF indicators are constructed is also available.<sup>2</sup>
4. The guidance in this document puts into practice the decisions we have taken about the TEF, following our consultation on proposals for a new TEF.<sup>3</sup>
5. For further information about this guidance, contact [TEF@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:TEF@officeforstudents.org.uk).

## Who should read this document?

We recommend that this document be read in full by:

- any provider that is participating in the TEF 2023, whether voluntarily or on a mandatory basis (see Part 2)
- members of the TEF panel.

While all sections of the document will be relevant to both providers and TEF panel members, Part 4 ('Provider submissions') is aimed primarily at providers, and Part 6 ('Assessment') is aimed primarily at panel members.

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/tef-student-submission-guide/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/tef-student-submission-guide/).

<sup>2</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/).

<sup>3</sup> See 'TEF consultation outcomes', available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-outcomes-and-teaching-excellence-consultations/the-tef/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-outcomes-and-teaching-excellence-consultations/the-tef/).

We have published separate guidance for TEF student contacts involved in preparing a TEF student submission.

# Introduction to the TEF

6. The TEF is a national scheme run by the Office for Students (OfS) that aims to incentivise excellence in teaching, learning and student outcomes. The scheme rates higher education providers for excellence above a set of minimum requirements for quality and standards which they must satisfy if they are registered with the OfS. The TEF aims to incentivise a higher education provider to improve and to deliver excellence above these minimum requirements, for its mix of students and courses.<sup>4</sup>
7. We intend that TEF ratings will create this incentive by putting a spotlight on the quality of providers' courses, influencing providers' reputations and informing student choice.
8. The TEF is part of the OfS's overall approach to regulating quality and standards. Under this approach our conditions of registration are designed to ensure a minimum level of protection for all students and taxpayers. Beyond this minimum, we encourage choice for students and innovation by autonomous higher education providers free to pursue excellence as they see fit. We seek to incentivise providers to pursue excellence in their chosen way. We do this in a number of ways, including through the TEF.
9. Our approach is designed to ensure that our regulation of quality and standards, and of equality of opportunity, are mutually reinforcing for the benefit of students. We intend that the TEF will incentivise providers to deliver excellence above the minimum quality requirements for all their groups of students, including underrepresented groups.

## Summary of how the TEF works

10. TEF assessments are carried out by a panel of experts in learning and teaching, including academic and student members (the 'TEF panel').
11. The assessment covers undergraduate courses and students and is based on:
  - a. Evidence submitted by the provider (see 'Part 4: Provider submissions').
  - b. An optional student submission.<sup>5</sup>
  - c. A set of indicators produced by the OfS (see 'Part 5: TEF Indicators').
12. Each provider taking part will be awarded an overall rating, and a rating for each of the two 'aspects' that are assessed: the student experience and student outcomes. The ratings last for four years, until the next TEF exercise concludes.
13. The following diagram provides a visual summary and indicates where further guidance can be found, on each element of the scheme.

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<sup>4</sup> All references to a provider's mix of students and courses, or more generally to a provider's students, refer to undergraduate students and courses that are within the scope of the TEF exercise. See the section on 'Courses in scope' for further details.

<sup>5</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/tef-student-submission-guide/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/tef-student-submission-guide/).

	Summary of the TEF						Relevant guidance	
Ratings	Overall rating	An overall provider rating						Part 1: The assessment framework  Annexes A and B
	Aspect ratings	Student experience rating			Student outcomes rating			
	Categories	Gold, Silver, Bronze, Requires improvement						
	Duration	Ratings last for four years until the next TEF exercise concludes						
Aspects and criteria	What the aspects cover	Academic experience and assessment	Resources, support and student engagement		Positive outcomes	Educational gains		
	Ratings criteria	The extent to which a provider has very high quality and outstanding quality features across the range of its courses for all its groups of students.						
Participation and scope	England	Participation in TEF is mandatory if condition B6 of the regulatory framework applies to a provider. An eligible provider can participate voluntarily if B6 does not apply to it.						Condition B6 of the regulatory framework  Part 2: Participation and scope
	Devolved nations	Providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland can participate on a voluntary basis.						
	Courses in scope	All a provider's undergraduate courses, and the students on those courses, are in scope of the assessment. Certain courses are in scope optionally.						

Published information	TEF outcomes	OfS publishes the ratings and the panel's reasons for them, the submissions and other information. A provide can display its own rating.			Part 3: Implementation and outcomes
	Annual indicators	OfS publishes TEF indicators annually as official statistics for all registered providers.			
Evidence	Provider submission	A provider submits evidence of excellence in relation to the experience and outcomes of its students (up to 25 pages).			Part 4: Provider submissions
	Student submission	A provider's students can optionally contribute their views on the quality of their experience and outcomes, in a single independent student submission (up to 10 pages).			Guidance on student submissions <sup>6</sup>
	Indicators	OfS produces indicators based on National Student Survey (NSS) responses.		OfS produces Continuation, Completion and Progression indicators.	Part 5: TEF indicators <sup>7</sup>
	Accompanying data	OfS produces data about the size and shape of provision for each provider.			
Assessment	Expert review	A panel of experts, including academic and student members, conducts the assessments and makes decisions about ratings.			Part 6: Assessment

<sup>6</sup> Available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/tef-student-submission-guide/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/tef-student-submission-guide/).

<sup>7</sup> Part 5 summarises some of the content in 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation', which provides full details about the indicators. It is available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/).



# Part 1: The assessment framework

This section sets out:

- what the ratings are and how long they will be awarded for
- the 'aspects' that are assessed in determining the ratings, and the criteria for awarding them.

## TEF ratings

14. Each provider taking part will be awarded an overall rating, and a rating for each of the two 'aspects' that are assessed: the 'student experience' and 'student outcomes'.
15. While there is no rating of individual subjects within a provider, ratings are informed by consideration of the student experience and student outcomes for all groups of a provider's undergraduate students and across the range of its undergraduate courses and subjects.
16. There are three ratings categories signifying increasing degrees of excellence above the OfS's high quality minimum requirements – **Bronze**, **Silver** and **Gold**. Where there is an absence of excellence above the minimum requirements, the outcome will be **Requires improvement**. The definitions of these categories are set out in broad terms in **Table 1**. More detailed criteria for each of the ratings, information about the high quality minimum requirements, and the reasons for a Requires improvement outcome are set out later in this section.

**Table 1: TEF categories**

<b>Gold</b>	The student experience and outcomes are typically outstanding.
<b>Silver</b>	The student experience and outcomes are typically very high quality, and there may be some outstanding features.
<b>Bronze</b>	The student experience and outcomes are typically high quality, and there are some very high-quality features.
<b>Requires improvement</b>	The provider was assessed in TEF and no rating was awarded. Improvement is required for a TEF rating.

## Four-year cycle

17. The TEF is a periodic exercise and we expect the ratings to last four years. We expect the subsequent TEF exercise to be conducted four years after the TEF 2023, but the timetable for this will be decided following the completion of the TEF 2023 and any consultation that is appropriate. This means that outcomes from the TEF 2023 will last for four years from September 2023, or until the subsequent exercise concludes, whichever is later.
18. To retain its rating for this period, a provider will need to remain eligible to retain a TEF rating as set out in Part 2.
19. There will be no TEF assessments in between the four-yearly exercises.

20. The timeframe for the evidence assessed in the TEF aligns with the four-year cycle described above. This is detailed further in the 'Timeframe in scope' section of Part 2.

## Aspects of assessment

21. The TEF assessment is structured to assess excellence in two **aspects**:

- The **student experience** aspect, which focuses on the extent to which teaching, learning, assessment and the educational environment deliver an excellent educational experience for each provider's students.
- The **student outcomes** aspect, which focuses on the extent to which the provider's students succeed in and beyond their studies, and the educational gains delivered for students.

22. The assessment of each aspect is based on a combination of: evidence submitted by a provider, evidence submitted by its students (optionally), and indicators produced by the OfS.

23. The TEF panel will assess the extent to which a provider delivers excellence above the high quality minimum requirements for its mix of student and courses, in relation to each aspect as a whole. It will weigh up all the evidence against the criteria, and award a rating for each aspect.

24. The TEF panel will then decide the overall rating for a provider. If it receives the same rating for each aspect, the overall rating will be the same. If it receives a different rating for each aspect, panel members will make an overall 'best fit' decision, considering all the evidence and weighting the two aspects equally in this judgement.

25. **Table 2** shows how the TEF aspects align broadly with the relevant ongoing conditions of registration for quality, which represent the high quality minimum requirements.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 2: TEF aspects and how they relate to conditions B1, B2, B3 and B4**

TEF aspect	Student experience		Student outcomes	
What the aspect covers	Academic experience and assessment	Resources, support and student engagement	Positive outcomes	Educational gains
Ongoing quality conditions	B1: Academic experience B4: Assessment and awards	B2: Resources, support and student engagement	B3: Student outcomes	

## Scope of the aspects

26. The scope of the aspects relates specifically to the student **educational** experience and the outcomes of that experience, not the higher education experience more widely.

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<sup>8</sup> Information about these requirements is available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/quality-and-standards/how-we-regulate-quality-and-standards/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/quality-and-standards/how-we-regulate-quality-and-standards/).

27. For clarity, educational activities may extend beyond the curriculum or the direct delivery of a course and include, for example, academic support or activities that support career development and employability. Such activities are therefore within the scope of the TEF.
28. We recognise that providers may have their own evidence of how some wider activities contribute to the quality of the educational experience or outcomes. Such activities might include, for example, activities that foster a sense of belonging and community, or support for wellbeing. While we are not seeking to assess the quality of these activities in the TEF, evidence of how such activities contribute to the quality of the educational experience or outcomes may be considered relevant, if included in a submission. For the TEF panel to be able to place weight on such evidence, we would expect a provider to clearly demonstrate that a particular activity makes a clear and direct contribution to the quality of the educational experience or outcomes for its mix of students and courses.
29. We are not seeking to assess other experiences that do not relate to the educational experience within TEF, for example, experiences that are primarily social, or outcomes or gains that arise primarily from social experiences.

### **Educational gains**

The assessment of educational gains in TEF is based on information and evidence that a provider determines itself and includes in its submission. This could also be supplemented by information and evidence in the student submission.

The TEF assessment will consider:<sup>9</sup>

- a provider's own articulation of the gains it intends its students to achieve
- its approach to supporting these educational gains
- any evidence of the gains achieved by the provider's students.

We recognise that there is currently no national measure of educational gain, and that many providers may not have developed their own approach to measuring the educational gains they deliver for their students.<sup>10</sup> The approach to assessing educational gain in the TEF 2023 is intended to enable providers to demonstrate a clear articulation of their ambitions for educational gain, credible approaches for delivering this, and *where possible* evidence that it is delivered in practice. It is intended to allow providers time to establish their practice in measuring and evidencing educational gains, which could then become the focus of assessment in subsequent TEF exercises.

Because of the way we have designed the ratings criteria to look at evidence across the range of features, a provider will not be prevented from being awarded higher TEF ratings solely based on an absence of its own developed measures of educational gains.

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<sup>9</sup> As detailed further in the educational gains 'features of excellence', in Annex A.

<sup>10</sup> Examples of approaches to measurement that were previously trialled can be found at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/learning-gain/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/learning-gain/).

## Features of excellence

30. The panel will generally only consider information and evidence that is relevant to the quality of the student experience or student outcomes. Within each of these aspects, we have defined a set of 'features' – at **Annex A** – that could be identified as excellent. These features have been defined in a broad, principles-based way that is intended to apply to diverse providers and students, and to avoid constraints on innovation.
31. The features are non-prescriptive and are not exhaustive. They indicate to providers and the TEF panel what is meant by 'excellence' above our high quality minimum requirements.
32. The TEF panel will consider the extent to which there is evidence of excellence across each aspect as a whole and will not treat the features as a tick-box exercise.
33. The features are not exhaustive. The panel is likely to place greater weight on evidence that is directly relevant to the features, but will avoid constraining innovation or how a provider might demonstrate excellence. Where submissions include information beyond the features, panel members will consider such information to the extent it is relevant to the quality of the student educational experience or student outcomes.
34. There is no pre-determined weighting of the features within each aspect. A provider can choose to give more or less emphasis to different features, as applicable to its mission and its mix of students and courses.
35. The features place emphasis on positive impact and outcomes, rather than on processes, policies, and practices through which a provider seeks to achieve those impacts and outcomes.

## Ratings criteria

36. The features in **Annex A** are defined at two levels:
  - **Outstanding quality** – signifying features of the student experience or outcomes that are among the very highest quality found in the sector for the mix of students and courses taught by a provider.
  - **Very high quality** – signifying features of the student experience or outcomes that are materially above the relevant minimum quality requirements for the mix of students and courses taught by a provider.
37. These two levels are intended to signify excellence above the high quality minimum requirements set out in conditions B1, B2, B3 and B4, which are also outlined in Annex A.
38. Some of the ways in which the features in Annex A differentiate between outstanding and very high quality include: the extent to which a provider's approaches are tailored to its students; the effectiveness of the provider's approaches; and the extent to which they are embedded across the provider.
39. Panel members will apply their expert judgement when interpreting and weighing up the evidence. They will consider how far there are very high quality or outstanding features within each aspect as a whole, and how far these features apply across all the provider's student groups and the range of its courses and subjects.

40. Panel members will then apply the ratings criteria (set out at **Annex B**), and make 'best-fit' judgements to determine the aspect ratings and the overall rating to award a provider. Guidance on the formation of aspect and overall ratings, including on the way different aspect ratings may be combined to form an overall rating, can be found in Part 6: Assessment.

## **Requires improvement**

41. In reaching both their aspect and overall rating judgements, the TEF panel have the option to not award a rating where there is an absence of excellence above our high quality minimum requirements.
42. Where a rating is not awarded (for an aspect or overall) the published outcome will be 'Requires improvement'.
43. A Requires improvement outcome for a provider registered with the OfS will be considered as part of our general monitoring of quality and standards for that provider. This is because such a judgement and the reasons for it could be relevant to our consideration of a provider's compliance with the B conditions. It could also be the case that the provider satisfies the minimum quality conditions, but does not demonstrate sufficient features of excellence above this necessary for a Bronze rating.
44. A Requires improvement outcome would not automatically trigger further OfS regulatory action. Instead, it would form part of the picture of regulatory intelligence we hold about each provider that we draw on to identify cases that may require investigation.
45. Where the outcome is Requires improvement for a participating provider in a devolved administration, the relevant authority will determine whether investigation of the provider's compliance with its minimum quality requirements is necessary, and decide on any course of action that may follow.

## **TEF and statutory fee limits**

46. The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA) includes provisions that link the fee limit to a provider's quality rating. Fee limits are prescribed by the Secretary of State in regulations made under HERA and the Secretary of State determines what rating or ratings are high level quality ratings for this purpose. The OfS does not set fee limits nor determine the relationship of TEF ratings to those limits.
47. Providers should note that the ability to charge a higher fee amount depends on whether a provider has an approved access and participation plan in force for the relevant academic year. If a provider does not have an approved access and participation plan in force for the relevant year, it may charge fees up to the basic limit.
48. The government has announced the fee limits for 2022-23 (please note that these limits may change from year to year). The fee limits for 2022-23 for providers with and without a TEF rating can be found on the OfS website.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plans/fee-limits/](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plans/fee-limits/).

49. Following the TEF 2023, a provider would not have a TEF rating if:

- a. It does not participate in the TEF 2023.
- b. It is not awarded an overall TEF rating following assessment and receives a Requires improvement outcome.
- c. The OfS decides the provider is ineligible to retain its TEF rating once awarded (see the 'Provider eligibility' section of Part 2).

## Part 2: Participation and scope

This section sets out:

- which providers must participate in TEF, which providers may participate in TEF voluntarily, and what the eligibility requirements are for a provider to participate in the TEF and to retain a rating once awarded
- which courses and students are in scope of a TEF assessment
- the timeframe in scope of a TEF assessment.

The OfS wrote to all registered providers in early October 2022 to tell them whether their participation in the TEF is mandatory or voluntary. If you are unsure about whether your provider must take part in the TEF, contact [TEF@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:TEF@officeforstudents.org.uk).

### Mandatory and voluntary participation

50. Condition B6 of the regulatory framework<sup>12</sup> is an ongoing condition of registration that requires an eligible provider registered with the OfS to participate in the TEF if it has both:
- a. At least 500 undergraduate students.
  - b. At least two TEF indicators based on a denominator of at least 500 students.
51. More information on how we define which providers must take part is contained in the guidance on condition B6 in the regulatory framework.
52. Eligible providers in England can participate in the TEF on a voluntary basis if B6 does not apply to them. There is no minimum set of data or minimum number of students required for an eligible provider to participate and be assessed.
53. Eligible providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland can also participate on a voluntary basis, with the consent of the relevant devolved administration.<sup>13</sup>

### Provider eligibility

54. To be eligible to participate in the TEF, and to retain a rating once awarded, a provider must:
- a. Deliver courses that are in scope of the assessment.

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<sup>12</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/54995e88-2c02-40bd-9fe4-a48d9c920535/condition-b6-teaching-excellence-framework-participation.pdf](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/54995e88-2c02-40bd-9fe4-a48d9c920535/condition-b6-teaching-excellence-framework-participation.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Section 25(1)(b) of HERA enables the OfS to give TEF ratings to providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland where they apply for a rating and with the appropriate consent of the relevant devolved administration. Section 25(2)(a-c) sets out what is meant by appropriate consent.

- b. Satisfy the quality and standards requirements of the relevant higher education funding or regulatory body.

55. These eligibility requirements apply to providers that must participate in the TEF on the basis set out in condition B6 as well as to providers that choose to take part voluntarily.
56. Where a provider (from any nation) chooses to participate voluntarily and the panel has made a provisional decision about the provider's rating, we do not expect to allow the provider to withdraw from the process without a final decision being reached, including in relation to any material to be published. Although any request to withdraw will be considered on its own merits, we expect that providers which have voluntarily participated in the TEF will not usually be permitted to withdraw.

### **Course requirement**

57. To be eligible to participate in the TEF and to retain a rating once awarded, a provider must deliver courses that are in scope for the TEF assessment (see section on 'Courses in scope').
58. We have checked whether a provider is delivering courses in scope by referring to the most recent year of TEF data about the size and shape of provision (see 'Part 5: TEF indicators' section on 'Accompanying data'). This data covers all students on courses within the scope of the TEF and, at the point of opening the TEF submission window in October 2022, shows whether there were any students on courses within scope of the TEF taught or registered at the provider during the 2020-21 academic year. Where a provider does not have any such students in this data, we will engage with it about whether it teaches students on courses in scope for the TEF assessment that may not be included within the data, and therefore whether it is eligible to participate in the TEF.
59. After awarding TEF ratings we will check the courses in scope requirement on an annual basis when we release the annual TEF indicators (see 'Published information'). If we identify a provider with a TEF rating that has no students within the scope of its most recent year of TEF data, we will seek to understand from the provider whether it continues to teach or register students on courses in scope for the TEF assessment and if so whether it remains eligible to retain its TEF rating.

### **Quality and standards requirements for providers in England**

60. All providers registered with the OfS must satisfy conditions of registration relating to quality and standards (the B conditions).<sup>14</sup> A provider registered with the OfS would satisfy the quality and standards requirements to take part in the TEF, and to retain a TEF rating, unless the OfS makes a final decision that there is, or has been, a breach of one or more of the B conditions, as follows:
- a. Where the OfS makes a final decision that there is, or has been, a breach of one or more of the B conditions, we may decide that a provider is ineligible to participate in one or more TEF exercises and/or for a provider to retain an existing TEF rating (if it holds one).

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<sup>14</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/quality-and-standards/how-we-regulate-quality-and-standards/](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/quality-and-standards/how-we-regulate-quality-and-standards/).



- b. A final decision that a provider has breached one or more of the B conditions includes a final decision to refuse to register a provider on the grounds that it has failed to satisfy one or more of the initial B conditions.
- c. Where the OfS has decided that a provider is ineligible to participate in a TEF exercise or retain a TEF rating, this period of ineligibility will, as a minimum, normally last until the next TEF exercise begins. At that point, the OfS would normally expect to consider whether there has been a material change in circumstances which means that a provider should now be permitted to participate in the new exercise.
- d. In reaching a decision on whether a provider is ineligible to participate in one or more TEF exercises or retain an existing rating, we will have regard to the intervention factors set out in paragraph 167 of the regulatory framework. We will consider, in particular, the proportionality of taking this approach. Factors that we are likely to consider relevant include, but are not limited to:
  - i. The extent to which a breach related to courses that are in scope for the TEF assessment.
  - ii. Whether the conduct that led to the finding of a breach is ongoing or the likelihood that such conduct may recur.

## **Quality and standards requirements for providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland**

- 61. For providers in Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) requires a provider to meet the requirements of the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF).<sup>15</sup> The framework's combined elements provide public assurance about the security of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities at Scottish higher education providers. This includes a provider receiving an 'effective' judgement in managing academic standards and the student learning experience in its most recent Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR).
- 62. For providers in Wales, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) requires a provider to be regulated or specifically designated and to have had a successful Quality Enhancement Review or Gateway Quality Review (Wales). A successful Quality Enhancement Review requires outcomes of 'fully met', both for the agreed baseline regulatory requirements and European Standards and Guidelines<sup>16</sup>, within the last six years for a regulated provider and the last four years for a specifically designated provider. A successful Gateway Quality Review requires 'confidence' outcomes for the reliability of academic standards and the quality of the student academic experience.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Further information about the QEF and its individual components can be found at [www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/quality-enhancement-framework](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/quality-enhancement-framework) and [www.sfc.ac.uk/quality/quality-universities/quality-universities.aspx](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/quality/quality-universities/quality-universities.aspx).

<sup>16</sup> See further details of the Quality Enhancement Review at [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/quality-enhancement-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/quality-enhancement-review).

<sup>17</sup> Further details about the Gateway Quality Review (Wales) can be found at [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/gateway-quality-review-wales](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/gateway-quality-review-wales). More information on how HEFCW uses the outcomes of the Gateway Quality Review and the Quality Enhancement Review as part of its Quality Assessment Framework can be found at [www.hefcw.ac.uk/en/regulation/quality/](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/en/regulation/quality/).

63. For providers in Northern Ireland, the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland (DfE(NI)) requires an outcome of at least 'Meets requirements' for standards and quality in the Annual Provider Review<sup>18</sup>, which is the core mechanism in the Quality Assessment Model that is used to assess a provider.
64. The devolved administrations are responsible for giving consent for providers in their nations to take part. Where consent is given, the OfS will decide if a provider in a devolved administration is eligible to participate in the TEF, and to continue to hold a TEF rating once awarded. We will:
- a. Engage with SFC, HEFCW or DfE(NI) to confirm whether they consider that each provider that chooses to participate meets their quality and standards requirements, before making decisions on whether we consider a provider eligible to participate in the TEF.
  - b. Ask HEFCW, SFC and DfE(NI), after TEF ratings have been awarded, to inform us about any changes to their quality and standards requirements, and about any provider in a devolved administration with a TEF rating that subsequently fails to satisfy their quality and standards requirements. In such cases we are likely to decide the provider is ineligible to retain the rating until the provider meets the relevant quality and standards requirements.

### **Considerations for voluntary participation**

Eligible providers that can participate voluntarily can choose whether to take part in the TEF or not. In making this decision, a provider may wish to consider the following:

- TEF ratings last for four years – there will not be an opportunity for a provider to participate in the TEF again or seek to improve its outcome until the next exercise in four years' time (see 'Four-year cycle').
- Taking part does not guarantee a TEF rating – the TEF panel may decide there is an absence of excellence above our high quality minimum requirements, and the outcome would be Requires improvement (see 'Requires improvement').
- Fee implications – if a provider receives a Requires improvement outcome, it will not be able to charge the inflationary fee uplift (see 'TEF and statutory fee limits').
- Where a provider chooses to participate voluntarily and the panel has made a provisional decision about the provider's rating, we do not expect to allow the provider to withdraw from the process without a final decision being reached (see paragraph 566 above).
- We would normally expect to publish TEF outcomes – a provider can choose if or how it displays its TEF rating, but we expect to publish outcomes on the OfS website and on Discover Uni (see 'Published information').

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<sup>18</sup> Further information about the Annual Provider Review process and its role within the Quality Assessment Model can be found at [www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-quality-assurance-higher-education](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-quality-assurance-higher-education).

- The TEF indicators – if a provider has limited indicator data available the TEF panel will need to rely more on evidence in the provider's submission. A provider should consider whether the evidence it has can sufficiently demonstrate excellence in order to receive a TEF rating (see Part 4, including the section on 'Supplementing the TEF indicators').
- How long a provider has been operating – there may be limitations in the evidence for a provider that does not have any graduating cohorts of students. While a provider's data and submission could still demonstrate excellence in relation to the student experience and some student outcomes, until the provider has graduating cohorts it would not be possible to demonstrate excellence across the full range of outcomes. It would therefore be unlikely that such a provider could achieve the highest TEF rating).

## Mergers and providers reapplying for registration

65. A provider may wish, or be required, to make a fresh application for registration, for example, because it wishes to change registration category, or where a merger or acquisition takes place.
66. The OfS will take decisions about when it is or is not appropriate to transfer any TEF rating from a previously registered provider to a provider making a fresh application for registration, according to the following approach:
- a. Where the provider seeking registration is either the same entity, or is a new entity operating the same or substantially the same higher education business as the previous entity, we will transfer the TEF rating of the provider previously registered, taking into account the compliance history of the previously registered provider.
  - b. Where the provider seeking registration is a genuinely new entity that is not operating the same or substantially the same higher education business as the previous entity, we will treat that provider as a new provider for TEF purposes. This would mean that the previous provider's compliance history cannot be transferred to the new entity and the TEF rating is also unlikely to be transferred to the new entity.
67. Where a provider merges with one or more other providers, we will normally transfer to the merged entity the rating that had been held (before the merger) by the provider that does not dissolve in the merger. There may, however, be instances where this is not appropriate and we will consider the TEF ratings held by each of the merging entities, and their compliance histories, to decide which TEF rating, if any, should be transferred to the merged entity. We will take into account the proportion of the merged entity's higher education business that had been transferred to it by each merging entity, and their respective TEF ratings.

## Courses in scope

68. All a provider's undergraduate courses, and the students on those courses, are within the scope of a TEF assessment.
69. The following are **in all cases** within the scope of a TEF assessment, should be addressed by a participating provider's submission, and are included as far as possible within the TEF indicators:

- a. Any higher education course at undergraduate level (whether that course is recognised for OfS funding or not), and with any volume of learning, that leads to a qualification.<sup>19</sup>
- b. Students taught by a provider, as well as students registered by the provider but taught by another provider through a sub-contractual arrangement.
- c. International students taught within the UK.

70. The following additional courses are **optional** for a provider to include in its submission. They will be considered within the scope of the assessment only if a provider chooses to include evidence about them:

- a. Validated-only undergraduate courses, where a provider is responsible for granting the awards to students registered and taught by other providers, whether or not those providers are registered with the OfS.
- b. Transnational education (TNE) courses at undergraduate level, delivered to students outside the UK whether through partnership arrangements or not.
- c. Higher education modules or credit-bearing courses at undergraduate level that do not lead to the award of a qualification.
- d. Apprenticeships at undergraduate level. The TEF indicators will include data on apprenticeships where applicable, but the TEF panel will only consider evidence relating to apprenticeships where it is included in a provider's submission.

71. For the purposes of the TEF, we define undergraduate courses as either 'Other undergraduate', 'First degree' or 'Undergraduate with postgraduate components'. Courses included in each of these categories are:

- **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).
- **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.
- **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.

72. Within these definitions, we include only courses that are 'undergraduate in time'. This means we do not include graduate or postgraduate diplomas, certificates or degrees at Levels 5 and 6, where a Level 5 or 6 qualification is a normal condition for course entry. We consider these

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<sup>19</sup> Except for apprenticeships which are optional, as described in paragraph 70.

courses to be 'postgraduate in time', as students will already have completed an undergraduate qualification, and will engage differently to those without previous higher education experience. (These courses are reported for purposes other than TEF within the 'Other postgraduate' category, or as PGCEs as a separate category.)

73. The TEF indicators include, as far as possible, the students and courses that are in all cases within the scope of a provider's TEF assessment. However, the indicators do not include all these students and courses. Restrictions to the coverage of the indicators are described in 'Part 5: TEF indicators' (section on 'Scope and coverage of the indicators'). Providers will be able to identify which of their courses are included in the TEF indicators, as set out in the 'Instructions for rebuilding OfS datasets' documentation (see section 'Identifying courses in scope for TEF indicators').
74. The range of courses and students that may be in scope of the student submissions will be the same as for provider submissions, but for student submissions it will be optional to include students who are registered at a provider but taught elsewhere (see the 'Guidance on student submissions' for further information).

## **Timeframe in scope**

75. The timeframe for the evidence assessed in the TEF aligns with the four-year cycle, as follows:
- a. The indicators are constructed from the four most recently available years of student data. Due to the timing of data collections, however, the time periods covered by the indicators do not all align with the four most recent academic years. The time periods covered by the indicators are set out in the 'Coverage of the TEF indicators' section of Part 5.
  - b. Provider submissions should:
    - cover the four most recent years at the point of submission
    - provide further contextual information or evidence relating to a provider's indicators, and hence the time periods they cover.
  - c. Student submissions can relate to any of the four most recent years, although we expect evidence to relate primarily to current cohorts of students. (Further information about this is in the Guidance on student submissions.)

## Part 3: Implementation and outcomes

This section sets out:

- when and how the TEF exercise will take place
- what outcomes and other information will be published.

### TEF timetable and process

76. The timings for the TEF 2023 are set out in **Table 3**.

Timing	Launch of the exercise	
30 September 2022	Publication of the TEF indicators for providers in England.	
7 October 2022	Publication of Guidance on the TEF.	
↓		
Timing	Submissions	
7 October 2022 to 24 January 2023	Participating providers prepare their submissions.	Students optionally prepare their submissions.
↓ ↓		
Timing	Assessment	
November 2022	The TEF panel is appointed and membership published.	
February to June 2023	The TEF panel carries out the assessments and reaches provisional decisions about the ratings.	
July to August 2023	Providers receive the panel's provisional ratings and reasoning. Providers can make representations before the final ratings are decided.	
↓		
Timing	Outcomes	
From September 2023	We expect to publish outcomes and submissions. Providers can promote their ratings in accordance with guidelines.	
Future years	Ratings last four years, subject to a provider remaining eligible. We expect to publish TEF indicators for providers in England annually.	

77. In July 2022 the OfS wrote to accountable officers asking for nominations for TEF main contacts and TEF student contacts. These are the individuals the OfS will contact for operational matters relating to participation in the TEF.

78. We will provide updates and hold events for TEF main contacts and student contacts during the submission window. Details will be circulated to them.
79. To participate in the TEF, a provider must make a submission by the deadline of 24 January 2023. We will provide TEF main contacts with details of how to submit.
80. The TEF student submission is optional – the TEF student contact at each provider should decide whether to make a student submission on behalf of the provider’s students. Where the TEF student contact decides to make a student submission, the provider is expected to offer support. Where the TEF student contact decides not to make a student submission, the provider should offer the TEF student contact opportunities to contribute to the provider submission. Guidance on this is in Part 4, and in the ‘Guidance on student submissions’.
81. The TEF panel will carry out the assessments as set out in Part 6.
82. Provisional rating decisions will be communicated to providers and they will have an opportunity to make representations before final decisions are made, as set out in Part 4.
83. We expect to publish the outcomes and other information relating to the TEF, as set out below.
84. Following the conclusion of the TEF 2023 we intend to evaluate the scheme to understand how well it has delivered its intended purpose and consider whether improvements and efficiencies can be made for participating providers, students and the OfS. We would expect to consult on any substantive changes for future TEF exercises.
85. We expect the subsequent TEF exercise to be conducted four years after the TEF 2023, but the timetable for that will be decided following the completion of this exercise and any consultation that is appropriate.

## **Published information**

86. We want TEF ratings to be accessible for prospective students alongside other information, because their influence on student choice will create a powerful incentive for providers. TEF ratings can contribute to the wider student information landscape by giving a clear signal of a provider’s excellence. This will provide helpful context to the range of more detailed information that students will want to consider when deciding what and where to study.
87. In line with our general policy on the publication of information about the TEF, we would normally expect to publish the following information on the OfS Register:<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This is consistent with:

- our general policy on the publication of information set out in regulatory advice 21 ‘Publication of information: Guidance for higher education providers’, available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-advice-21-publication-of-information/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-advice-21-publication-of-information/).
- our approach to publishing TEF information set out in ‘Addendum to TEF Consultation: Publication of Information Decisions’ available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-outcomes-and-teaching-excellence-consultations/the-tef/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-outcomes-and-teaching-excellence-consultations/the-tef/)

- a. The provider's current TEF outcome, including the overall rating and the aspect ratings awarded; or that the provider 'requires improvement' to be awarded a TEF rating.
- b. Whether a provider is eligible to take part in the TEF and whether participation is voluntary.
- c. The date of a provider's TEF outcome.
- d. That a provider is ineligible to retain a TEF rating due to a breach of minimum requirements.

88. We would also normally expect to publish:

- a. TEF outcomes on the Discover Uni website for all providers in England and in the devolved administrations that participate in the TEF. We will work with UCAS on how this information will be communicated to students via its services.
- b. A wider set of related and ancillary information about a provider that participates in the TEF, for transparency, including:
  - i. The written panel statement setting out the panel's reasoning for the outcomes.
  - ii. The provider's submission.
  - iii. The student submission (where available) but that there may be circumstances where, having considered the factors set out in our policy on publishing information, we decide to not publish the student submission wholly or in part.
  - iv. The TEF indicators.

89. The TEF indicators that we would normally expect to publish are described in Part 5 (and in more detail in the document 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation: Definition of measures and methods used to construct and present them').<sup>21</sup>

90. We expect that the TEF indicators will normally be published annually as official statistics for all registered providers in England, whether they are required to (or choose to) participate in the TEF or not.<sup>22</sup>

91. We expect that the TEF indicators will normally only be published for providers in the devolved administrations that choose to participate in the TEF and where the relevant devolved administration has given consent. They would normally be published as soon as is practicable after the submission deadline.<sup>23</sup>

92. The TEF indicators would not normally be published by the OfS on an annual basis for providers in the devolved administrations. Indicators may be made available to them annually, subject to the appropriate consent of the relevant devolved administration.

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<sup>21</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/).

<sup>22</sup> The first annual publication is available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard/data-dashboard/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard/data-dashboard/).

<sup>23</sup> As indicators for providers in the devolved administrations would not be publicly available as official statistics, as they are in England, we would expect providers from the devolved administrations to share their indicators with students involved in preparing the student submission at the earliest opportunity.



93. Where we decide that a TEF rating may be transferred from one provider to another, we would normally expect to update published information alongside the TEF ratings to explain the basis for the original rating, the basis on which it had been transferred, and relevant information held about TEF ratings.
94. We will normally publish TEF outcomes as soon as practicable, and expect to publish ratings for providers that do not make representations in September 2023. At this point we will indicate that an outcome is 'pending' where it is still being considered, following representations made by a provider.
95. When making a publication decision, we will have regard to the factors set out in regulatory advice 21 and in the 'Addendum to TEF Consultation: Publication of Information Decisions'. We will consider these factors in the manner we consider to be appropriate for an individual case.
96. Current and previous TEF eligibility and outcomes will normally be published on the OfS Register, and the ancillary TEF material we would normally publish will remain on the OfS website with a clear explanation of the period to which it relates.

## **Communication of TEF ratings by providers**

97. A provider is not required to publicise its own TEF award. Where a provider chooses to publish its TEF rating on its website or in other materials, it should adhere to guidance that the OfS will provide about the branding and communication of TEF ratings. The guidance will aim to ensure a consistent TEF brand and the accurate communication of TEF ratings to the public. It will be made available before the TEF outcomes are published in 2023.
98. The guidance will include:
- a. The standard logos and ratings descriptions that must be used for each rating, with accompanying branding guidelines.
  - b. A consistent approach to communicating information about the date of award and its duration, alongside the ratings.
  - c. A requirement that aspect ratings or content from the panel statement should not be published separately from the provider's overall rating. If a provider wishes to publish any aspect ratings or content from the panel statement, it must include the overall provider rating. It will be acceptable to publish the overall provider rating without the aspect ratings.
  - d. Guidance that a provider involved in a partnership arrangement should display only its own TEF rating, not those of its partners.
  - e. Guidance to ensure accurate communication, for example, in relation to the scope of the rating (such as not including it in marketing materials for postgraduate courses).
99. The OfS is likely to conduct checks to ensure providers are following the guidance on the communication of TEF ratings.

## Part 4: Provider submissions

This section sets out guidance on the scope, format and content of the provider submission.

To participate in the TEF, a provider must make a submission by 24 January 2023.

100. By making a submission, a participating provider has the opportunity to submit evidence tailored to the specific character of its students and courses, and evidence of how it delivers excellence for all its student groups.
101. The submission will be considered by the TEF panel alongside the other sources of evidence (an independent student submission where available, and TEF indicators generated by the OfS), so that the panel can assess how far a provider delivers excellence for its mix of students and courses.
102. The provider should decide what information and evidence it wishes to present in its submission, as appropriate to its context. To minimise burden, a provider could draw on evidence it already uses to monitor and evaluate the quality of its courses.
103. The TEF panel will generally only consider information and evidence in the submission that is relevant to the TEF aspects and features of assessment, the students and courses in scope for the TEF and the timeframe covered by the TEF.

### Courses in scope of the submission

104. All a provider's undergraduate courses, and the students on those courses, are within the scope of a TEF assessment. Part 2 provides further details.
105. Paragraph 69 sets out the courses and students that are **in all cases** in scope of the assessment. Evidence about these courses and students should be included in the provider submission. In relation to these courses and students:
  - a. The indicators include students on these courses as far as possible. Some of the TEF indicators may not include all a provider's students on these courses, as set out in Part 5 (section on 'Scope and coverage of the indicators'). Where significant student populations are not included in a provider's TEF indicators, the provider should consider how its submission could supplement the indicators, as set out at paragraph 136134.
  - b. Undergraduate students registered by a provider but taught elsewhere are in all cases in scope of the assessment. The registering provider's submission should include evidence of how – through its responsibilities as the registering provider for the quality of these courses – it has contributed to an excellent student experience and outcomes for the students it registers that are taught elsewhere. This could be covered in a distinct section of the submission, with a level of detail that is proportionate to the scale of this provision. We would not expect all the evidence relating to the provider's taught students to be mirrored in relation to its registered-only students. Where there are multiple

teaching partners, it would not normally be necessary to include distinct information in relation to each partner.

106. Paragraph c sets out additional courses that are **optional** for a provider to include within the scope of its TEF assessment. The panel will only consider evidence relating to these courses where it is included in the provider's submission. In relation to these courses and students:
- a. The provider will need to decide whether to include any of these optional courses within its submission. The provider should state clearly what choices it has made and, when including optional courses, include evidence in its submission about them.
  - b. Although it is optional for a provider to include apprenticeships in the scope of its assessment, the TEF indicators for apprenticeships are published alongside indicators for full-time and part-time modes of study. The TEF panel will only consider the indicators relating to apprenticeships if the provider chooses to include apprenticeships in its submission. Where a provider does choose to include apprenticeships in its submission:
    - i. The TEF panel will be guided to weight evidence relating to students on apprenticeships in proportion to their overall numbers.
    - ii. The provider's submission should include evidence of how it has contributed to an excellent student experience and outcomes for its students who are enrolled as apprentices. This could be covered in a distinct section of the submission, with a level of detail that is proportionate to the scale of this provision.

### Timeframe in scope of the submission

107. The timeframe covered by the TEF 2023 is outlined in Part 2 (section on 'Timeframe in scope').
108. The provider submission should:
- a. Cover the four most recent years at the point of submission. Evidence in a submission should cover complete academic years, which will normally be academic years 2018-19 to 2021-22.
  - b. Provide further contextual information or evidence relating to a provider's indicators, and hence the time periods they cover. The student experience indicators based on the NSS also cover the academic years up to 2021-22. The time periods covered by the student outcomes indicators vary, as set out at in Part 5 (section on 'Scope and coverage of the indicators').

### Submission format and length

109. The provider submission should not exceed the **limit of 25 A4 pages**, inclusive of all content including references. There is no obligation to submit this number of pages. For example, where provision is less complex, it may be that the case for excellence can be made in fewer pages.

- 110. It should be provided in PDF format. As it should be accessible to screen reading technology, the PDF should not be a scan of printed documents.
- 111. The provider name and UK Provider Reference Number should be in a header on every page.
- 112. Page numbers should be in the footer.
- 113. Any type of content can be included in the PDF document. It can include, for example, text, diagrams, images, graphs or tables, as long as these are within the 25-page limit.
- 114. As we would normally expect to publish the submission, it should be fully accessible and comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. This means, among other features, it should use structured headings, accessible colours, and alternative text for images. For further guidance see information published by the World Wide Web Consortium.<sup>24</sup>
- 115. No appendices or any other type of information should be included, if not incorporated within the page limit.
- 116. The submission should include all information and evidence that the provider wishes to present to the panel for consideration in its assessment. Any references or hyperlinks to further information will not be accessed or considered by the panel, other than for the purpose of verifying information already contained within the submission (see 'Use of references for verification').

## **Submission template**

- 117. An optional submission template is available online. It is up to a provider whether to use this template.
- 118. The template provides a broad structure for the provider submission, that could help the panel to locate information that is relevant to its understanding of the provider's context and the judgements it will make about the two aspects it will assess. A provider may structure its submission in a different way, but may wish to consider how the panel will locate relevant information.
- 119. The template is also formatted in a way that will be easily readable (with Arial font 11 point, 1.2 line spacing and 2cm page margins). We recommend that the provider submission use this formatting. If a provider uses different formatting, it should ensure that the content remains easy to read.

## **Submission content**

- 120. This guidance on content follows the structure of the optional template. If a provider structures its submission in a different way, it should still include content on each of the following:

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<sup>24</sup> See [www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20-TECHS/pdf](http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20-TECHS/pdf).

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

## Template section 1: Provider context

121. The TEF panel will seek to assess how far a provider delivers excellence for its mix of students and courses. The panel will consider the context of the provider, the characteristics of its students and courses, and judge the extent to which the student experience and outcomes are excellent in this context.
122. This section of the provider submission should aim to help the panel understand the context of the provider and could include:
- Information about its educational mission and strategic aims** – this could, for example, set out the distinctive aims and ambitions of the provider's educational strategy, and how these are relevant to its mix of students and courses.
  - Information about the size and shape of its provision** – the OfS will produce descriptive data about a provider's courses, numbers of students and their characteristics that will be considered by the panel (see the 'Accompanying data' section of Part 5). The provider submission could provide additional information about this, for example, to draw the panel's attention to any important attributes of the data, or to supplement the data. This could, for example, include information about partnerships, subject specialisms, modes of delivery, geographic context and campus locations, or other distinctive characteristics of a providers' structure, students or courses.
  - Other information about the context of the submission** – for example, information about how the provider and its students collaborated on their separate submissions, or how students contributed to the provider submission.
123. A provider should explain in its submission if it has decided to include any 'optional' courses. We suggest this is set out in Section 1 of the template.

## Template sections 2 and 3: Student Experience and Student Outcomes

124. These sections of the submission should provide evidence relevant to:
- a. The **student experience** aspect, which focuses on the extent to which teaching, learning assessment and the educational environment deliver an excellent educational experience for the provider's students.
  - b. The **student outcomes** aspect, which focuses on the extent to which the provider's students succeed in and beyond their studies, and the educational gains delivered for students.
125. See Part 1 and Annex A for more information about what each aspect covers, and the features of excellence relevant to each aspect.
126. The panel will generally only consider information and evidence that is relevant to the quality of the student educational experience or student outcomes. The features within each aspect have been defined in a broad, principles-based way that applies to diverse providers and students, and to avoid constraints on innovation. There is no pre-determined weighting of the features within each aspect. A provider could give more or less emphasis to different features as applicable to its mission and its mix of students and courses.
127. The features are not exhaustive. The panel is likely to place greater weight on evidence that is directly relevant to the features, but will avoid constraining innovation or how a provider might demonstrate excellence. Where a submission includes information beyond the features, panel members will consider it if it is relevant to the quality of the student educational experience or student outcomes.
128. The features of excellence indicate what is meant by excellence above our high quality minimum requirements. Providers may find it helpful to consider the relevant B conditions and associated guidance in the regulatory framework, and use these as a reference point for what their evidence in submissions should seek to demonstrate excellence above.<sup>25</sup>
129. Evidence should demonstrate the impact and effectiveness of a provider's strategies and approaches to learning and teaching, on the experiences and outcomes of its students. For example, a provider should avoid describing its strategies or approaches without also explaining and evidencing their impact on student experiences and outcomes.
130. The submission should set out how the provider delivers excellence for all its groups of students and courses within the scope of the assessment. This could include evidence relating to all such students or courses, as well as evidence relating to particular groups of students or courses (for example, evidence-based interventions to make improvements for particular student groups). The panel will consider how the totality of evidence in the submission and the indicators covers all students and courses in scope of the assessment.

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<sup>25</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/quality-and-standards/how-we-regulate-quality-and-standards/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/quality-and-standards/how-we-regulate-quality-and-standards/).

## Educational gains

Our approach to including educational gains in the TEF 2023 is set out in the 'Aspects of assessment' section of Part 1. We consider that an individual provider is best placed to define and evidence what its students should gain from their educational experience, with reference to the specific character and mission of the provider.

In its submission the provider should articulate the gains it intends its students to achieve, set out its approach to supporting these educational gains, and include any evidence of the gains achieved.

The scope of educational gains articulated in a provider's submission should:

- cover a breadth of educational gains beyond the measures of continuation, completion and progression we use for the TEF indicators
- be relevant to the mix of students and courses at a provider
- ideally take account of students' different starting points and their educational distance travelled.

Providers could include a range of gains, which might include but not be limited to:

- Academic development: such as gains relating to the development of subject knowledge as well as academic skills, for example critical thinking, analytic reasoning, problem solving, academic writing, and research and referencing skills.
- Personal development: such as gains relating to the development of student resilience, motivation and confidence as well as soft skills, for example communication, presentation, time management, and networking and interpersonal skills.
- Work readiness: such as gains relating to the development of employability skills, for example teamworking, commercial awareness, leadership and influencing.

## Types of evidence

131. A provider may have available a wide range of evidence which it could draw on to support its submission. The range and nature of this evidence is likely to vary between providers. There is no limit to the type of evidence that a provider could use and we do not prescribe particular types of evidence that a provider should include in its submission. The provider should determine what evidence is most appropriate given its context. Where relevant, evidence should include student perspectives on their experiences and outcomes.
132. Whatever evidence is used, the provider should consider the principles and guidelines about how the TEF panel will interpret and weigh up the evidence (see Part 6). In summary, evidence in the provider submission is likely to be more compelling, or greater weight placed on it, where:
  - a. It is directly relevant to the provider's mix of students and courses.

- b. It demonstrates the impact the provider's policies and practices have on delivering an excellent student experience or student outcomes.
- c. There is positive evidence of excellence above the high quality minimum requirements.
- d. In total it covers all the provider's groups of students and courses that are in scope of the assessment.
- e. It is directly relevant to the features of excellence.

133. **Table 4** contains a **non-exhaustive** list of examples of types of quantitative and qualitative evidence that may be relevant to these two sections of the submission. A provider may choose to include any of these or any other types of evidence it considers relevant.

**Table 4: Examples of types of evidence**

Student experience
<p>The submission could draw on internal evidence that the provider may have, for example, generated during annual monitoring or periodic reviews, monitoring or evaluation of educational strategies or interventions, analysis of internal data, or student or staff feedback and surveys. It could include, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Relevant findings from monitoring, evaluations or reviews of the impact and effectiveness of approaches to delivering an excellent student experience.</li> <li>b. Positive survey or other feedback from students about their experience, to supplement the TEF student experience indicators based on the NSS.</li> <li>c. Evidence about how employer engagement in course design or delivery contributes to an excellent academic experience.</li> <li>d. Evidence about how student involvement in or exposure to relevant research, scholarship or professional practice contributes to an excellent academic experience.</li> <li>e. Evidence about how the professional development of staff enhances academic practice.</li> <li>f. Staff feedback or other evidence about how recognition and reward schemes are effective in delivering excellent teaching.</li> <li>g. Evidence about how students' usage of, and engagement with, learning resources contributes to excellent teaching and learning.</li> <li>h. Relevant findings from learner analytics, for example about students' active engagement with learning.</li> </ul> <p>The submission could draw on evidence from external sources such as external reviews or reports. It could include, for example:</p>



- a. Relevant feedback from external examiners, for example about excellent assessment and feedback practices, or students' high levels of knowledge and skills.
- b. Relevant findings from reports by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), for example about best practice above their accreditation or other requirements.
- c. Positive judgements or findings from Ofsted reports relating to undergraduate courses (such as any apprenticeships covered by the reports).

The submission could draw on nationally available data. It could include, for example:

- a. Commentary or analysis of the provider's TEF student experience indicators (see 'Supplementing the TEF indicators' below).
- b. Analysis of additional NSS questions or scales not included in the TEF student experience indicators. In this case the submission should demonstrate the relevance of this data to the quality of the educational experience of the provider's students.

## Student outcomes

The submission could draw on internal evidence that the provider may have, for example, generated during annual monitoring or periodic reviews, monitoring or evaluation of educational strategies or interventions, analysis of internal data, or student or staff feedback and surveys. It could include, for example:

- a. Relevant findings from monitoring or evaluation of the effectiveness of approaches to supporting students to successfully transition into, continue through and complete their courses. This could include targeted interventions for particular groups of students.
- b. Approaches to supporting students to successfully achieve the intended educational gains, any evidence or a 'theory of change' that informed the development of these approaches and, if available, evidence of the effectiveness of these approaches in delivering the intended gains.
- c. Positive feedback from graduates or alumni about how their higher education experiences have enhanced their knowledge, skills, personal development or careers.
- d. Evidence about how student involvement in work placements or professional activities enhances their skills and successful progression.

The submission could draw on evidence from external sources such as external reviews or reports. It could include, for example:

- a. Feedback from employers or professional practitioners about graduates' high levels of employability and skills.
- b. Relevant findings from reports by PSRBs, for example to indicate students' achievement of professional competencies above their accreditation or other requirements.

- c. Positive judgements or findings from Ofsted reports relating to outcomes from undergraduate courses (such as any apprenticeships covered by the reports)

The submission could draw on nationally available data. It could include, for example:

- a. Commentary or analysis of the provider's TEF student outcomes indicators (see 'Supplementing the TEF indicators' below)
- b. Analysis of published Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) data, with an explanation of how this demonstrates positive outcomes for the provider's students.
- c. Analysis of additional questions in the Graduate Outcomes survey (not captured in the TEF progression indicator), with an explanation of how this demonstrates positive outcomes for the provider's students.

### **Supplementing the TEF indicators**

134. For each aspect, the indicators will contribute no more than half of the evidence of excellence. The provider submission will need to provide evidence of excellence that is additional to the TEF indicators, for the panel to be able to identify a range of very high quality or outstanding features across each aspect:

- The student experience indicators will be interpreted as providing part of the evidence needed for the panel to identify features SE1, SE2, SE5, SE6 and SE7 as very high quality or outstanding. They would need to be supplemented with further evidence of excellence in the submission.
- The student outcomes indicators relate to SO2 and SO3. While these features could be identified as very high quality or outstanding without necessarily requiring further evidence in the submission, the provider submission will need to provide evidence in relation to other student outcomes features.

135. As well as providing evidence that is additional to the indicators, the submission could contextualise or supplement the provider's TEF indicators, including in the following ways:

- a. Providing additional information where data is not reportable, TEF indicators do not include significant student populations, or there are very small student cohorts and the indicators show a high degree of statistical uncertainty.
- b. Explaining the reasons for a provider's historical performance.

136. Where data is not reportable, significant student populations are not included in TEF indicators, or where there is a high degree of statistical uncertainty in the indicators:

- Panel members would need to place proportionately greater weight on evidence in the submission to identify relevant features as very high quality or outstanding. Panel members will, though, consider the extent to which there is evidence of excellence across the aspect as a whole, and not treat the features as a checklist.

- The onus is on a provider to ensure there is sufficient evidence of excellence in its submission in relation to relevant features. Any type of evidence could be provided in relation to features where there is limited data in the indicators; the provider does not need to replicate 'missing' data from internal or other sources.
- Panel members will consider how far the totality of evidence for the aspect as a whole covers all a provider's student groups and courses within the scope of the assessment. It will place greater weight on evidence that covers all the provider's groups of students and courses that are in scope of the TEF.

137. Where a provider wishes to explain the reasons for its historical performance against an indicator, the submission could include information about any external factors it considers to be outside its control or other relevant factors that may have affected its performance. Examples of such factors could include but are not limited to:

- The impact of the coronavirus pandemic (see text box below).
- Distinctive course or student characteristics that are not fully taken into account by benchmarking.
- Regional or localised issues, such as distinctive employment trends in a local area.
- Particular course or profession attributes such as courses designed to provide access to a particular profession that is not classified as managerial or professional in the way the progression indicator has been constructed. In this case the submission should include other evidence that graduates are succeeding in their desired professions. This could be, for example, evidence about their use of skills developed on their course (for example, by referring to additional data collected in the Graduate Outcomes survey), or evidence about their earnings (for example, by referring to published Longitudinal Education Outcomes data).
- Courses that facilitate progression into particular types of further study that could have had an atypical effect on the progression indicator.<sup>26</sup>

### **The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic**

We recognise the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on higher education providers and students. By the time submissions are due, a provider should have a reasonable understanding of the impact the pandemic has had on its courses and students, and should be in a position to provide evidence in its submission of any actions it has taken.

Some of the data used to produce TEF indicators covers years affected by the pandemic. The provider may wish to reflect on this performance in its submission and may, for example, provide commentary on particular years that were affected. Partly to account for the impact of the pandemic, the student experience indicators and the progression indicator are

<sup>26</sup> For further information see 'Data about the reporting of interim study activities' in our 'Description of student outcome and experience indicators used in OfS regulation' at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/).

benchmarked by year. For details of which years are covered by each of the indicators and the benchmarking factors used, see Part 5.

## Presenting evidence

138. When drawing on evidence, the submission should briefly state the methods by which that evidence was gathered. The submission should clearly indicate how far the evidence that is presented relates to the students, courses and timeframe in scope of the assessment. This could include information about:
- What qualitative and/or quantitative methods and data sources were used.
  - The sample size, response rates, and representativeness of the sample. For example:
    - which categories of students or types of courses are or are not covered
    - for surveys, information on the population that was surveyed and response rates.
  - The approach to analysis used, the categories of students to which the findings refer, and applicability of findings to other categories of students. For example:
    - extracts or summary information drawn from external reports should indicate what range of courses and students the information relates to.
  - Timeframes for the policy or initiative and its impact. For example:
    - when the initiative was implemented and when the evidence was gathered
    - how far the evidence applies to the four years covered by the TEF assessment.
  - Recognition of limitations of the methodology and findings.
139. The above points also apply where presenting evidence from nationally produced data (such as published LEO data or additional Graduate Outcomes survey data). In this case the source of the data should be clearly cited.
140. Quotes should normally illustrate points that are supported by a wider evidence base. Quotes used on their own will not normally be considered strong evidence because the panel may not be able to judge the extent to which the quote applies to a large range of courses or students.
141. The fictional examples below suggest how the guidance on presenting evidence might apply in practice. These examples do not imply that evidence from student surveys or from PSRBs would be any more or less relevant than any other type of evidence. Also, they are not intended to show what might be considered as excellence. The examples are intended purely to illustrate issues relating to the presentation of evidence.

## Examples

Example 1	
<i>'Our annual survey of first year students from 2021 shows that 78% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I was supported well in my transition into university".'</i>	This indicates how and when the evidence was collected, but doesn't provide details of who was surveyed or who responded.
<i>'Our 2021 annual survey of first year students was sent to all 1,850 first year undergraduate students who attend lectures on campus and 54% responded. The highest response was from students on social science courses (64%) and disabled students (61%) and the lowest were part-time (39%) and medical students (42%). Overall 78% of students who responded agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I was supported well in my transition into university".'</i>	This statement also provides information about who was surveyed and some detail about the range of students who responded. However, there is no information about results from other years that are in the scope of the TEF assessment.
Example 2	
<i>'Our courses have received strong external endorsement via PSRB accreditation.'</i>	This is an assertion that is not supported by evidence and therefore would not carry any weight.
<i>'Our courses have received strong external endorsement via PSRB accreditation. For example, in a recent report a PSRB stated, "The department ensures the curriculum is based on the very latest developments in the industry. It utilises innovative and best practice assessment methods. These reflect and test the skills and knowledge most highly valued by the industry, exceeding the standards required for professional registration".'</i>	This provides a quote from an external report as evidence. However, it is unclear which course(s) and what timeframe the quote relates to. It is unclear whether it relates to a significant proportion of the provider's course, or is an isolated example.
<i>'Thirty-five per cent of our students graduate from courses accredited by PSRBs, mainly in accounting, finance and the built environment. These courses have received strong external endorsement via PSRB accreditation. An internal review of PSRB reports from 2019-2022 identified very positive feedback from five out of the eight reports about both the content of the curriculum being at the forefront of professional practice, and about assessment methods that ensure high levels of professional competency above the required standards.'</i>	This provides more detail about the range of courses the information relates to. The example seeks to provide evidence from PSRB reports in general, and presents the quote as an example of this. Some detail is provided about the courses and students that the quote applies to.

<p><i>For example, the ABCD triennial review in 2021 stated, “The department ensures the curriculum is based on the very latest developments in the industry. It utilises innovative and best practice assessment methods. These reflect and test the skills and knowledge most highly valued by the industry, exceeding the standards required for professional registration.” Twenty-nine per cent of our students are located within this department, of which seventy-five per cent graduate from ABCD-accredited courses.’</i></p>	
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## Template section 4: References

142. This section of the submission should provide a list of references to the main sources of evidence that the submission has drawn from. The references are intended to help inform the panel about the nature of the evidence that the submission is based on, and provide a means of verifying information contained in the submission.
143. Sources that are referenced will not be accessed or considered by the panel, other than for the purpose of verifying information already contained within the submission.
144. References count towards the page limit. The provider should include references to sources that it considers most important in making its case for excellence. Some illustrative and non-exhaustive examples of this include sources that:
  - a. Set out the provider’s educational strategy and evidence of how it is succeeding.
  - b. Underpin content in the submission about particular features being above the high quality minimum requirements.
  - c. Demonstrate the impact of policies or practices on the student experience or outcomes.
  - d. Collate or analyse student or alumni perspectives.
145. Sources included in the list of references can be internal or in the public domain. 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 and, if relevant, which parts of the source are relevant to the evidence presented in the submission (such as the relevant page numbers or sections of a document).
146. If a source is available online, the reference should include the URL. For example:
 

*‘Annual review of student attainment’ submitted to the University Learning and Teaching committee, December 2021, pages 4-8. Available at [www.Poppleton.ac.uk/LTC/minutes/December21](http://www.Poppleton.ac.uk/LTC/minutes/December21)*
147. If a source is internal, the reference should indicate where it is held. For example:

## **Use of references for verification**

148. The OfS will carry out verification checks on a random but representative sample of provider submissions. For each selected submission, we will check a random set of references and verify whether the associated statements made in the submission accurately reflect the source material referenced. During this verification exercise, we will contact the provider's TEF contact to request any referenced materials we have selected for verification that are not available through a URL.
149. If, following this initial verification check, the statements made in a submission appear to contain substantive inaccuracies, the OfS will check the remaining references in that submission. Where a provider's submission appears to contain substantive inaccuracies or unverified content, the OfS will inform the panel. The panel will then consider how to take this into account in determining the provider's TEF rating.
150. If we identify widespread concerns during the initial checking of references in the random sample of submissions, we will consider extending the sample to other providers.
151. In addition, during its assessments, the panel will be able to ask the OfS to verify the accuracy of information in a provider's submission. We expect the panel to request verification only where it could have a material impact on a rating. This might occur, for example, where information apparently contradicts another source of evidence, such as the student submission or the indicators. The panel could ask the OfS to request from the provider any relevant referenced material, if not available through a URL.
152. The panel could also request verification of information in the submission not supported by a reference, and the provider may be asked to supply relevant material.
153. Where a provider's submission appears to contain inaccuracies or unverified content following such checks, the panel will consider how to take this into account in determining the provider's TEF rating.
154. If a provider's TEF contact receives any information request as part of a verification check, this is likely to be between February and April 2023. The provider's TEF contact should respond in a timely fashion.
155. If verification checks affect the panel's judgement about a provider's TEF rating, the reason for this will be included in the provisional decision letter sent to the provider (see Part 6, section on 'Provisional decisions').

## **Process for making submissions**

156. The accountable officer for each provider has been asked to nominate a TEF contact, who acts as the main point of contact with the OfS for operational matters relating to the provider's participation in the TEF. We will provide the TEF contact with operational updates, including details of how to make the submission and how outcomes will be received through a secure portal.



157. We encourage any queries about the TEF by staff at the provider to be routed through the TEF contact.
158. The accountable officer is responsible for signing-off a provider's submission and will be informed of the provider's TEF outcomes.
159. We expect to inform the provider of the panel's provisional decision about its TEF ratings, and the reasons for the provisional decision, during July 2023. If the provider's student contact made a submission, we will make it available to the provider at this point.
160. The provider will then have 28 days to make any representations, as described in Part 6 (section on 'Final decisions').
161. We will inform providers of the details of how to make representations, at the point which we share provisional outcomes.

## **Supporting student contacts**

162. Where the TEF student contact decides to make a student submission, the provider is expected to offer support. Where the TEF student contact decides not to make a student submission, the provider should offer them opportunities to contribute to the provider submission.
163. We expect a provider to consider a range of ways in which it can offer support to the TEF student contact. We also encourage collaboration between those working on the provider submission and the student submission. Specific arrangements should be discussed and agreed between students and the provider. Some illustrative and non-exhaustive examples of this might include:
  - ensuring TEF student contacts know who their provider's TEF contact is, how to get in touch, and who is involved in the submission
  - making sure student contacts have access to any data that the provider has that would be useful for their submission
  - sharing any training on or analysis of the TEF indicators that is being made available to people writing the provider submission
  - regular contact between the provider contact and student contact to offer support and resolve queries
  - mutual sharing of drafts, where this has been agreed by both parties
  - coordination of content on areas such as definition of educational gains or which students are being covered within the provider submission
  - help identifying the different courses or students which should or could be covered by the student submission.



164. It will be for the provider and students to agree what arrangements are appropriate and whether this includes financial compensation. It is not the OfS's role to incentivise student involvement through financial compensation.
165. When discussing these arrangements, the provider and students should also agree boundaries to maintain the independence of the student submission.
166. Independence means that the university or college does not try to influence the content of the student submission, and the TEF student contact has the final say over its content.
167. The TEF panel will want to have confidence about the independence of the student submission. The guidance on TEF student submissions asks the TEF student contact to confirm that the provider did not unduly influence the content of the submission.
168. Some illustrative and non-exhaustive examples of what could be considered as undue influence are:
- pressuring students to create or not create a submission – that should be the choice of the student contact, in consultation with students
  - pressuring students into including, excluding or changing any content in the submission
  - making access to resources or support conditional on the student submission being created or evidence being gathered in a particular way
  - pressuring students to share their submission with the university or college.

# Part 5: TEF indicators

## Introduction

The TEF indicators for all providers in England are available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard/).

This section provides an overview of what the TEF indicators are, what they cover, how they have been constructed, how they are structured and how they are presented.

It summarises some of the content in ‘Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation’, which provides full details about the definition, construction and presentation of the indicators.<sup>27</sup>

Guidance on how the TEF panel should interpret the indicators for the purpose of TEF assessments is in Part 6 (section on ‘Interpretation of the indicators’).

169. The TEF indicators are produced by the OfS in the same way for each provider we regulate, using available national datasets and consistent definitions and approaches to data. They provide one part of the evidence that the TEF panel will consider, alongside the evidence in submissions.

170. We have published the following data that will be used in the TEF assessments:

- **TEF indicators:** The TEF data dashboard showing the measures of student experience, and continuation, completion and progression outcomes.<sup>28</sup>
- **Accompanying data:** A data dashboard showing information about the size and shape of each provider’s student population.<sup>29</sup>

## Student experience indicators

171. There are five indicators that are used as part of the evidence for assessing the student experience aspect. They use responses to the National Student Survey (NSS) to report on the views of undergraduate students (most of which are in their final year) about different aspects of their educational experience. Each indicator reports the extent of agreement to a

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<sup>27</sup> ‘Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation’ is available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/). In providing an overview of the indicators, every effort has been made to make this section of the TEF guidance as accurate as possible, but in the event of any difference, the information set out in the full description document will apply. Readers should note that the TEF guidance refers only to ‘indicators’, whereas the full description document refers to ‘measures’. Both terms should be understood as encompassing the ‘overall indicators’ and the ‘split indicators’ described on pages 49-50 of the TEF guidance.

<sup>28</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard/).

<sup>29</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/size-and-shape-of-provision-data-dashboard/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/size-and-shape-of-provision-data-dashboard/).

range of questions related to a particular theme, or scale, of the survey.<sup>30</sup> These are detailed in **Table 5**.

**Table 5: Student experience indicators and NSS questions used to construct them**

Indicator	NSS questions used
The teaching on my course	Q1. Staff are good at explaining things. Q2. Staff have made the subject interesting. Q3. The course is intellectually stimulating. Q4. My course has challenged me to achieve my best work.
Assessment and feedback	Q8. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance. Q9. Marking and assessment has been fair. Q10. Feedback on my work has been timely. Q11. I have received helpful comments on my work.
Academic support	Q12. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to. Q13. I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course. Q14. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices on my course.
Learning resources	Q18. The IT resources and facilities provided have supported my learning well. Q19. The library resources (e.g. books, online services and learning spaces) have supported my learning well. Q20. I have been able to access course-specific resources (e.g. equipment, facilities, software, collections) when I needed to.
Student voice <sup>31</sup>	Q23. I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course. Q24. Staff value students' views and opinions about the course. Q25. It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted on.

172. A provider may wish to include information from other NSS scales or statements within its submission. Guidance on this is in Part 4.

## Student outcomes indicators

173. The following indicators are used as part of the evidence for assessing the student outcomes aspect:

- a. **Continuation indicators** report the proportion of students that were observed to be continuing in the study of a higher education qualification (or that have gained a

<sup>30</sup> The definition of student experience indicators, including how students count towards the survey target list and the indicator calculation, is set out in full in the 'Indicator definitions: Student experience measures' section of the 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation' document.

<sup>31</sup> Question 26 from this NSS scale has been excluded for the purpose of constructing this indicator.

qualification) one year and 15 days after they started their course (two years and 15 days for part-time students).

- b. **Completion indicators** report the proportion of students that were observed to have gained a higher education qualification (or were continuing in the study of a qualification) four years and 15 days after they started their course (six years and 15 days for part-time students).
- c. **Progression indicators** use responses to the Graduate Outcomes (GO) survey to report on qualifiers' labour market and other destinations 15 months after they left higher education. They report the proportion of qualifiers that identify managerial or professional employment, further study, or other positive outcomes among the activities that they were undertaking at the GO survey census date.

174. The **continuation** and **completion** outcomes are measured by identifying a cohort of **entrants** to higher education qualifications at the provider and following them through their course to track how many continue in active study, or qualify, in subsequent years.<sup>32</sup> To count positively in these indicators, a student must have either:

- a. Gained a higher education qualification from the same provider at which they were identified as an entrant, on or before the relevant census date.
- b. Been recorded as actively studying for a higher education qualification at the same provider on the relevant census date.

175. Students who transfer (on or before the relevant census date) to a different provider are treated as a neutral outcome for both the continuation and completion indicators. They are not included in the population of the indicator and are excluded from both the numerator and denominator involved in its calculation.

176. The **progression** indicator counts as positive outcomes those **qualifiers** from higher education who report they were undertaking any of the following activities, during the census week of the GO survey:

- Managerial or professional employment (defined as employment in an occupation which falls within major groups 1 to 3 of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2020).<sup>33</sup> 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 the names and duties of their job (or employer) identifies it as a managerial or professional occupation.
- Further study at any level of study.

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<sup>32</sup> The definition of continuation and completion indicators is set out in full in the 'Indicator definitions: Continuation measures' and 'Indicator definitions: Completion measures' sections of the 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation' document.

<sup>33</sup> SOC 2020 major groups 1 to 3 are described as encompassing managers, directors and senior officials, professional occupations, and associate professional and technical occupations.

- Travelling, caring for someone else or retirement.

177. Unless the student reports their activity with another one that does count as positive, **progression** indicators do not count as positive outcomes students who:

- report that during the census week of the GO survey they were unemployed and looking for work
- are due to start a job or studying
- were 'doing something else'.<sup>34</sup>

## Coverage of the TEF indicators

178. The indicators are constructed based on individualised student data returns submitted by higher education providers on an annual basis, and students' responses to the GO and NSS survey instruments.

179. The coverage of the TEF indicators generally extends to all **undergraduate** students who are:

- a. Reported with a qualification aim for their course which refers to a higher education qualification. This includes all qualifications at Level 4 and above, whether or not they are courses recognised for OfS funding, and whether or not they are studied as part of an apprenticeship.
- b. Studying wholly or mainly in the UK for their whole programme of study, or through UK-based distance learning, including international students where possible and meaningful.

180. The indicators include, as far as possible, students within the scope of TEF assessments as set out in Part 2 ('Courses in scope' section). However, there are restrictions to the coverage of each of the indicators. **Table 6** below sets out some of the key restrictions.<sup>35</sup> Where significant student populations are not included in a provider's TEF indicators, the provider should consider how its submission could supplement the indicators, as set out in Part 5 ('Supplementing the TEF indicators' section).

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<sup>34</sup> The definition of progression indicators is set out in full in the 'Indicator definitions: Progression measures' section of the 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation' document.

<sup>35</sup> The coverage of the indicators, and the students who are included and excluded, are set out in full in the 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation' document.

**Table 6: Coverage restrictions of the indicators**

<b>Categories of students:</b>	<b>Student experience</b>	<b>Continuation and completion</b>	<b>Progression</b>
<b>Students reported with a qualification aim which refers to a module of higher education provision or, in the case of progression measures, gaining awards of higher education credit</b>	Excluded	Excluded	Excluded
<b>Students not primarily studying in the UK, including those studying through transnational education (TNE) arrangements, and incoming visiting and exchange students</b>	Excluded	Excluded	Excluded
<b>Students leaving their programme of study within the 14 days following their commencement date without gaining an award</b>	Excluded	Excluded	Excluded
<b>International (non-UK domiciled) students primarily studying in the UK</b>	Included	Included	Excluded
<b>Students on courses not recognised for OfS funding</b>	Excluded	Included	Excluded
<b>Students on a clinical medical, dentistry, or veterinary science qualification who intercalate<sup>36</sup></b>	Students are not surveyed during the intercalating year	Excluded if intercalating at the same provider	Qualifications from an intercalating year are excluded
<b>Students recorded in ILR datasets as having partially completed, or whose results are recorded as not yet known</b>	Included	Included	Excluded
<b>Students not on the target list for the survey</b>	Students who did not reach the final year of their course are excluded	N/A	Students who did not achieve a qualification, after following a course intended to lead to the award of a qualification, are excluded
<b>Students who did not respond to the survey instrument</b>	Excluded	N/A	Excluded
<b>Students aiming for a qualification of 1 FTE or lower</b>	Excluded	Included	Included
<b>Survey responses suppressed as a result of the process for investigating concerns that students have been inappropriately influenced</b>	Excluded	N/A	N/A

<sup>36</sup> Intercalation involves an additional year of study on top of a medical, dental, or veterinary degree programme and an opportunity to develop knowledge and skills, and gain a standalone qualification, in a new area which may or may not be related to their main degree study.

181. The indicators use the **most recent four years** of available data. The most recent four years of available data correspond to different academic years, depending on the indicator in question. We report the indicators as an aggregate of those years, as well as through a time series of the individual years.

**Table 7: Four-year time series for each indicator**

Measure	Year 1 (least recent)	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4 (most recent)
Continuation: full-time and apprenticeship	2016-17 entrants	2017-18 entrants	2018-19 entrants	2019-20 entrants
Continuation: part-time	2015-16 entrants	2016-17 entrants	2017-18 entrants	2018-19 entrants
Completion: full-time and apprenticeship	2013-14 entrants	2014-15 entrants	2015-16 entrants	2016-17 entrants
Completion: part-time	2011-12 entrants	2012-13 entrants	2013-14 entrants	2014-15 entrants
Progression: full-time, part-time, and apprenticeship	Not available	2017-18 qualifiers	2018-19 qualifiers	2019-20 qualifiers
Student experience: full-time, part-time, and apprenticeship	2019 NSS	2020 NSS	2021 NSS	2022 NSS

## Structure and reporting

182. The TEF indicators are reported separately for each mode of study (full-time, part-time, and apprenticeships).<sup>37</sup>

183. Within each mode of study, the TEF indicators are reported at two levels:

- a. **Overall indicators**, which combine students at all undergraduate levels of study, all four years of available data, and students who are either taught or registered at the provider (or both). They represent overall performance across all types of courses at undergraduate level, subjects, and student groups studying within the given mode of study.
- b. **Split indicators**, which are a further breakdown of student groups within the mode of study to which the overall indicator refers, into:<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Although we report indicators relating to apprenticeships for any provider where we have such data available, this will only be assessed by the TEF panel if the provider chooses to include information about apprenticeships in its submission.

<sup>38</sup> The groupings and definitions used to construct split indicators are set out in full in Annex B of the 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation' document.

- a time series of the four individual years contributing to the overall indicator
- level of undergraduate study:
  - other undergraduate
  - first degree
  - undergraduate with postgraduate components
- student characteristics:
  - age on entry; disability; ethnicity; sex
  - domicile, Associations Between Characteristics of Students (ABCS) quintile (for continuation, completion and progression measures)<sup>39</sup>, index of multiple deprivation (IMD) quintile<sup>40</sup>, eligibility for free school meals (FSM); geography of employment quintile (for progression measures only)<sup>41</sup>
- subject studied
  - subjects based on Level 2 of the common aggregation hierarchy (except that Celtic studies is aggregated with the languages and area studies grouping)<sup>42</sup>
- specific course types:
  - other undergraduate courses at Level 4, and at Level 5+

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<sup>39</sup> ABCS is a set of analyses that seeks a better understanding of how outcomes vary for groups of students with different sets of characteristics (for example, ethnicity, sex and background). We define groups of students by looking at a range of characteristics so that we can determine the effect of not just one characteristic on an outcome, but the effect of multiple characteristics. ABCS quintiles are therefore separately defined for each student outcome we measure. For further information, see [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/associations-between-characteristics-of-students/about-the-abcs-data/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/associations-between-characteristics-of-students/about-the-abcs-data/). The ABCS quintiles use data from the Autumn 2022 ABCS analyses.

<sup>40</sup> The indices of multiple deprivations are official measures of the relative deprivation for small geographical areas. The English IMD is based on seven different facets of deprivation, including: income deprivation; employment deprivation; education, skills and training deprivation; health deprivation and disability; crime; barriers to housing and services; and living environment deprivation. See [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019). IMD measures are available covering the whole of the UK, but they are separately defined with respect to each of the four nations of the UK and direct comparison between the indices is not possible.

<sup>41</sup> The geography of employment analysis groups areas based on measures of local graduate opportunity. It helps contextualise graduate outcomes by capturing some of the labour market differences experienced by graduates living in different parts of the UK. We classify travel to work areas based on Graduate Outcomes responses and the proportion of employed undergraduate qualifiers living in that area who are in professional or managerial occupations. The classification has been developed to organise geographical areas of the UK, in which higher education qualifiers are living, working and studying, into quintiles defined in respect of their activities after graduation. For further information, see [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/a-geography-of-employment/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/a-geography-of-employment/).

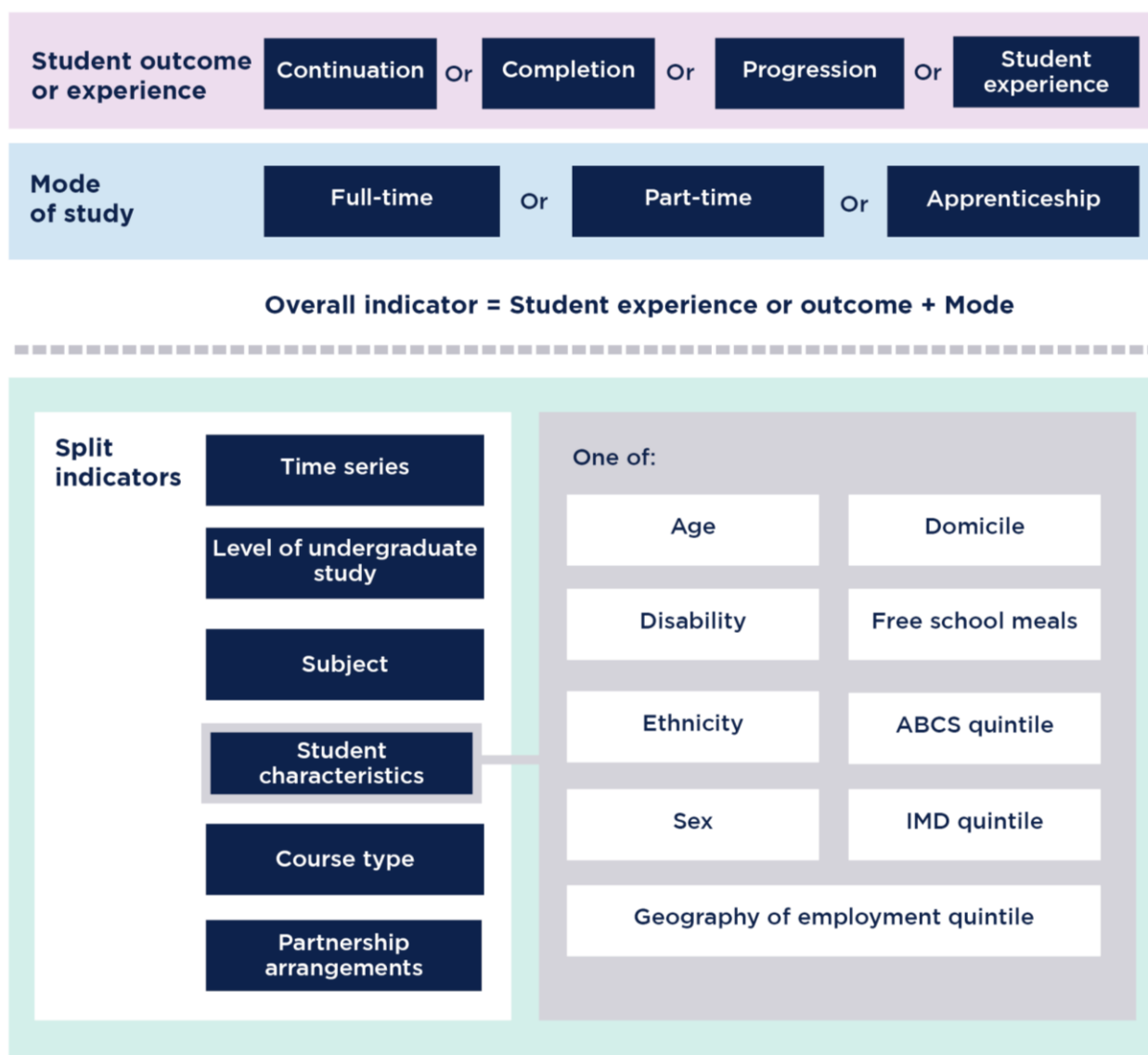
<sup>42</sup> For further information about the common aggregation hierarchy, see [www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos/cah](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos/cah).



- first degree courses with integrated foundation years
- provider partnership arrangements:
  - taught: the provider is teaching the students and may or may not also be registering them
  - registered only: the students are subcontracted out from the provider.

184. These two levels of reporting are summarised in **Figure 1** below.

**Figure 1: Reporting structure**



## Presentation

### Rounding and suppression

185. The data has been rounded as follows:

- a. Denominators or headcounts have been rounded to the nearest 10.

- b. Indicators, percentages, benchmarks, differences and their confidence intervals have been rounded to the nearest 0.1.

186. We do not report an indicator or split indicator in certain circumstances. Any data point that is not reportable will be replaced with a symbol to indicate why, as follows:

- [low]: where there are fewer than 23 students in the denominator
- [N/A]: where the data item is not applicable to that population
- [RR]: where the NSS has a survey response rate below 50 per cent; or the Graduate Outcomes survey has a survey response rate below 30 per cent
- [BK]: where the benchmarks are suppressed because at least 50 per cent of the provider's students have unknown information for one or more of the factors used for that benchmark calculation
- [DP], [DPL] or [DPH]: where data has been suppressed for data protection reasons:
  - The code [DPL] has been used to indicate where the data has been suppressed due to a numerator that is less than or equal to 2, meaning that the indicator will take on a value close to 0 per cent.
  - The code [DPH] has been used to indicate where data has been suppressed due to a numerator that is greater than 2 but is within 2 of the denominator. Where this code is used, the indicator will take on a value close to 100 per cent.

## Data presentation and statistical uncertainty

187. The indicators are presented through interactive data dashboards.<sup>43</sup> The benchmarks shown in the data dashboards indicate how well a provider has performed for its mix of students and courses, compared with performance for similar types of students on similar types of courses in the higher education sector as a whole. The presentation we use in the data dashboards has been designed to enable the TEF panel and other users to interpret this performance, taking account of the concept of statistical uncertainty.

### Statistical uncertainty

The indicators we use in TEF are point estimates, meaning that they provide a factual representation of the actual population of students present at a particular higher education provider at a particular time.

If our interest were solely the observation of past events, then it would be appropriate to rely solely on these values. However, we are seeking to use the indicator values as representations of the most likely underlying performance in respect of the student experience and student outcomes. As the actual students in a provider's observed population are just one possible realisation of many other populations of students who could have

<sup>43</sup> The same information as shown in the data dashboards is also available in a tabular format through the accompanying data files. Currently these make the data available in the form of an Excel workbook and a .CSV file.

attended that provider, or may do so in the future, statistical uncertainty exists because of the potential for random variation in student behaviours and outcomes.

This means that the indicator values may not always be accurate or precise measures of the underlying performance that they aim to represent. Our proposals take account of this uncertainty by using a statistical approach that identifies the range within which each provider's underlying performance measure could confidently be said to lie.

The full details of this approach are set out in the 'Presentation' section of the 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation' document.

188. We show the value of each overall indicator and split indicator and its difference from the provider's benchmark. 'Shaded bars' are used in our presentation of the data to communicate the statistical uncertainty associated with each of those values.

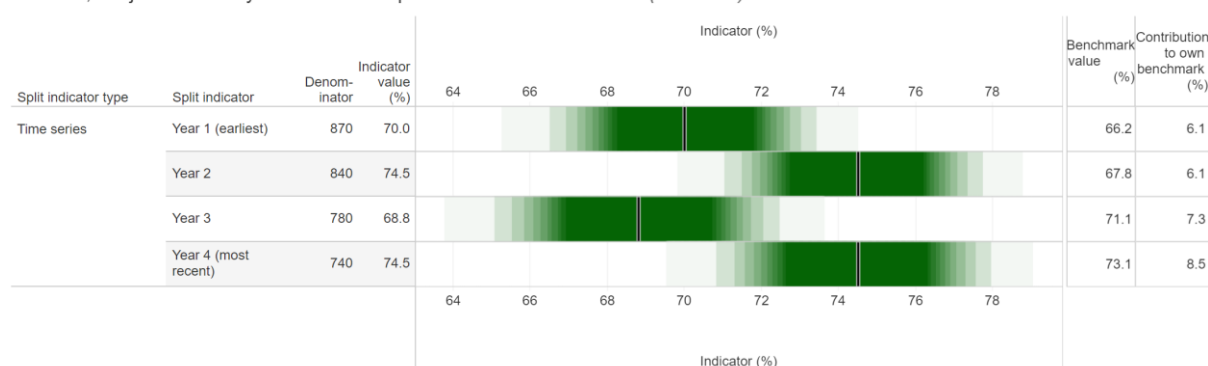
189. For each overall indicator or split indicator, we also show:<sup>44</sup>

- the denominator
- the benchmark value
- the provider's contribution to its own benchmark
- the survey response rate (for the student experience and progression indicators, which are based on survey responses).

190. **Figures 2 and 3** provide an illustration of the shaded bars. These are differentiated by colour and aim to represent the continuous spread (or distribution) of statistical uncertainty around the different values that we have calculated to understand a provider's performance. The green shaded bar shows statistical uncertainty associated with the indicator value. The bar shaded blue shows the difference between indicator and benchmark values.

**Figure 2: Example of green shaded bars showing spread of statistical uncertainty around indicator values**

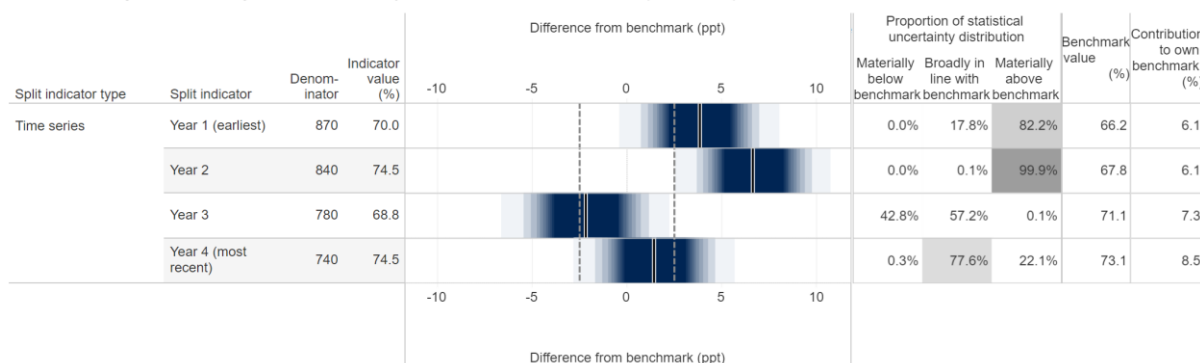
Student, subject and study characteristic split indicators: *Continuation (Part-time)*



<sup>44</sup> The elements included in our presentation of student outcome and experience measures are set out in full in the 'Presentation' section of the 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation' document.

**Figure 3: Example of blue shaded bars showing spread of statistical uncertainty around difference between indicator and benchmark**

Student, subject and study characteristic split indicators: *Continuation (Part-time)*



191. The shading of the bars indicates the changing likelihood that underlying provider performance takes different values. The darkest shading represents the range in which there is the greatest likelihood that true provider performance might lie. As the shading lightens in both directions, it represents a lower likelihood that true underlying performance falls at that point. Wider shaded bars mean we need to consider the potential for the provider's true performance falling within a wider range of values around the value that has been observed.
192. To support consistent and transparent interpretation, Figure 3 shows that we also include summary figures in the table to the right of the blue shaded bars. These describe the proportions of the distribution of statistical uncertainty, represented by the shaded bar, that fall above, below or between a pair of 'guiding lines' which illustrate where the indicator value could be considered as materially above or below the benchmark value.<sup>45</sup> These guiding lines are positioned at +/- 2.5 percentage points difference between the indicator and benchmark values.<sup>46</sup> The summary figures are highlighted where they show that at least 75 per cent of the distribution falls above or below those values, but users can use the shaded bars to make other interpretations of a provider's performance.<sup>47</sup>
193. Where a provider's benchmark for any indicator or split indicator is 95 per cent or higher, these are highlighted to users within the TEF data dashboard.
194. Guidance on how the TEF panel should interpret this information is in Part 6 (section on 'Interpretation of the indicators').

<sup>45</sup> The construction of the shaded bars, and calculation of the proportions of the distribution of statistical uncertainty, is set out in full in Annex C of the 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation' document.

<sup>46</sup> The term 'materially' and the definitions of materially above and below benchmark for the purposes of TEF assessments are not intended to be statistical concepts and do not have particular statistical meanings. The guiding lines are intended to aid consistent interpretation of the indicators, and transparency for providers about how this will be done.

<sup>47</sup> We have deliberately set the value in which these summary figures are shaded to be lower than our lowest interpretation of strength of statistical evidence (around 80 per cent). This is designed to be helpful to the user rather than representing what the term 'around' could mean or as a direct mapping of where the lowest interpretation of strength of statistical evidence falls.

## Benchmarking

195. The TEF is designed to incentivise excellence above our minimum quality requirements for each provider's mix of students and courses. To support this aim, the indicators show a provider's performance in relation to its benchmarks.

### What is benchmarking?

Benchmarking is the method we use to take account of the mix of courses and students at a provider and indicate how well that provider has performed compared with performance for similar types of students on similar types of courses in the higher education sector as a whole.

We calculate benchmarks for each provider's indicators and split indicators based on the characteristics of courses and students that we have selected as benchmarking factors.

The benchmark is calculated as a weighted sector average which represents the outcomes that would have been achieved by the provider if it retained its mix of students and courses, but its outcomes across the benchmarking factors were replaced by the sector-overall rates for those student groups. It represents the performance of similar types of students on similar types of courses to that of the provider. Our approach means that a provider is not being compared with a pre-set group of providers, but rather the outcomes for a provider's students are compared with the outcomes of similar students across the entirety of the higher education sector.<sup>48</sup>

196. We use benchmarking factors that, across the sector as a whole, are most correlated with the outcomes and experiences we are measuring once other factors have been controlled for, where we consider it would not be undesirable to control for those factors. These factors relate to characteristics of courses (such as subjects, and level of study) and students (such as their age or the qualifications they held on entry to higher education).
197. **Table 8** below provides a summary of the factors used in benchmarking for each indicator. More detailed definitions of the benchmarking method (including a worked example), and the benchmarking factors and groupings used (for example, the subject groupings, or groupings of entry qualifications) are available in 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation'.

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<sup>48</sup> To calculate benchmarks for OfS registered providers, the higher education sector within which we are making comparisons is made up of all English higher education providers registered with the OfS at the time that we produce the indicators.

To calculate benchmarks for providers in a devolved administration, the higher education sector within which we are making comparisons is made up of all English higher education providers registered with the OfS together with all providers in the devolved administrations (which have returned HESA student data and are funded or regulated by one of the devolved administrations) at the time that we produce the indicators.

**Table 8: Summary of benchmarking factors used for each indicator**

Benchmarking factor	Continuation	Completion	Progression	Student experience
Year of survey	✗	✗	✓	✓
Level of study	✓	✓	✓	✓
Subject of study	✓	✓	✓	✓
Entry qualifications	✓	✓	✓	✗
Course length	✓ (Part-time only)	✓ (except for apprenticeships)	✗	✗
ABCS quintiles	✓	✓	✓	✗
Geography of employment quintiles	✗	✗	✓	✗
Individual student characteristics	✗	✗	✗	✓ Age Disability Ethnicity Sex (full-time only)

198. Our benchmarking methodology involves consideration of unique combinations of the student and course characteristics that we have selected to act as benchmarking factors: we refer to these unique combinations as benchmarking groups. We calculate the observed rates for the higher education sector as a whole, for each benchmarking group. The benchmark for each provider is then calculated by taking a weighted average of the overall sector outcomes for each benchmarking group, where that weighting reflects the number of students in each benchmarking group at the provider in question.
199. Benchmarking cannot control for all the factors that may affect a provider's performance and providers could, in their submissions, include further information to contextualise or supplement the indicators (see 'Part 4: Provider submissions').
200. When constructing the benchmark for a provider, the students at that provider contribute to the sector averages we calculate. Where the characteristics of students at the provider do not frequently occur in the wider sector, these sector averages may be heavily influenced by that provider. This is referred to as the risk of 'self-benchmarking'. In such a scenario, the provider's own students would be making a substantial contribution to the calculation of its benchmark, making the calculation less robust and the resulting benchmark value less meaningful. The benchmark value will become more similar to the indicator value as the provider's contribution increases.

201. Our selection of benchmarking factors has sought to minimise the occasions on which we might encounter self-benchmarking, by selecting and grouping factors in such a way as to ensure as far as possible that reasonable numbers of students from multiple providers are contributing to each sector average that we calculate. However, we are aware that the diversity of the higher education sector means that we cannot mitigate this risk entirely and our benchmarking factors tolerate a risk of self-benchmarking on a small scale. To facilitate an understanding of where this situation may occur, and where the resulting benchmark value may be of more limited use, the data dashboards show the provider's own contribution to its benchmark.
202. For the split indicators, instead of creating a benchmark for the provider using data from the sector overall, we create a benchmark for each split indicator using a subset of both the provider and the sector, related to the split indicator in question. For example, to benchmark the 'Male' split indicator we subset the provider and the sector to only male students, so that we can compare the student outcomes for male students at the provider to a benchmark created from male students across the sector. We then separately benchmark the 'Female' split indicator by sub-setting the provider and the sector to only female students. This indicates how well a provider performs for each of its student groups, compared to similar students across the sector.

## Accompanying data

203. We produce a separate dashboard containing data about the size and shape of provision for each provider.<sup>49</sup> Its purpose is to help TEF panel members understand a provider's context, including:
- a. A provider's size in terms of student numbers.
  - b. The type of courses it offers and its mix of subjects.
  - c. The characteristics of its students, including their personal characteristics and backgrounds prior to starting higher education study.
  - d. Information on the numbers of students in each type of teaching partnership arrangement.
204. Where a provider has courses within the scope of its assessment which are not covered by or reported in the indicators, the 'size and shape of provision' data will give the panel an understanding of the volume of students on such courses. For example, students on higher education courses not recognised for OfS funding are not surveyed in the survey instruments that construct student experience or progression indicators. The size and shape of provision data can help users understand the volume of these students at the provider.
205. We include within the TEF indicators dashboard data about the reporting of interim study activities to the GO survey. This should help to understand the potential influence of these interim activities on a provider's performance in relation to the progression indicators. We

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<sup>49</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/size-and-shape-of-provision-data-dashboard/](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/size-and-shape-of-provision-data-dashboard/). The definition of the size and shape of provision data is set out in full in the 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation' document.

report two separate figures, both based on students who counted negatively towards the progression indicator: those who reported in their GO response that they had undertaken **any** interim study since completing their higher education course, and those who reported undertaking **significant** interim study. A provider could refer to this data in its submission as set out in Part 4 (section on 'Supplementing the TEF indicators').



## Part 6: Assessment

This section provides guidance on how the TEF panel should carry out the assessments, interpret and weigh up the evidence, and decide on the ratings to award participating providers.

### The TEF panel

206. The TEF panel is a committee of the OfS, and is responsible for deciding the ratings to award to each participating provider. We expect publish the TEF panel's terms of reference and membership in November 2022, once the appointments have been made.<sup>50</sup>
207. Its members are academics and students with expertise in learning and teaching, appointed through an open recruitment process. Panel members have been recruited with experience of diverse types of providers and from diverse backgrounds. We have sought to ensure there is sufficiently broad expertise within the panel to understand a wide range of educational contexts, and that the panel reflects the diversity of the students whose experience and outcomes it is considering.
208. Panel members should apply their expert judgement, within the framework of principles and guidelines set out in this guidance document.
209. As described in the next section ('Assessment and decision-making process'), panel members will carry out their assessments initially in sub-groups. A 'referral group' of panel members drawn from across all the sub-groups will carry out the final stages of the assessment.
210. The TEF panel chair will be supported by one academic panel member and one student panel member appointed as deputy chairs. The chair, supported by the deputy chairs, will guide the panel to make consistent and rigorous decisions in line with the ratings criteria and assessment guidance.
211. TEF panel members will be prepared for the assessment through:
- Training: the OfS will provide training for panel members to enable them to understand and apply the published guidance, to understand the indicators, and to interpret and weigh up the evidence and form ratings.
  - Calibration: we will carry out a calibration exercise where all panel members consider a small number of providers that have made submissions, and reflect on how to consistently apply the guidance in making judgements, before proceeding with the assessments.

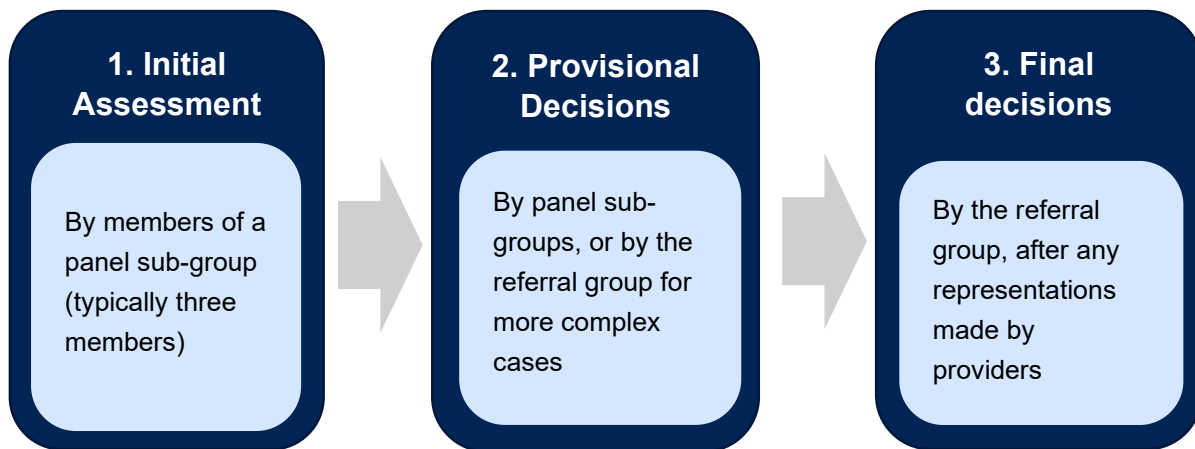
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<sup>50</sup> Available at: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/who-we-are/our-board-and-committees/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/who-we-are/our-board-and-committees/).

## Assessment and decision-making process

212. The assessment and decision-making process is summarised in **Figure 4**.

**Figure 4: The decision-making process**



### 1. Initial assessment

213. We will divide the body of panel members into sub-groups each with a range of expertise, and including academic and student members. We will allocate a range of providers with different characteristics to each panel sub-group.

214. Within each panel sub-group, each provider will initially be considered in detail by a small number of panel members, typically one student and two academic panel members. The process of allocating providers to these panel members for initial assessment will involve:

- a degree of matching the experience of panel members to the providers they are given to assess, to ensure there is appropriate understanding of each provider's context
- also ensuring that panel members assess a range of providers with different characteristics.

215. The small number of panel members will review the evidence in relation to the provider and form a recommendation about the ratings, to make to the panel sub-group.

### 2. Provisional decisions

216. The panel sub-groups will meet to consider the recommendations and make provisional decisions about ratings for most providers. Panel sub-groups will give further consideration as necessary to any of the evidence (all of which will be available) and could make provisional decisions that are different to those recommended.

217. There will be mechanisms to test for consistency in the assessments across the range of providers being assessed by the panel sub-groups. The chair and deputy chairs will support this process, for example, by bringing all members together to review progress, resolving queries and ensuring guidance is interpreted consistently.

218. The panel sub-groups will refer more complex cases to a 'referral group' of panel members. This could be, for example, where the panel sub-group considers a case to be on a borderline between rating categories, there is an absence of excellence, or there is

contradictory evidence. Membership of the 'referral group' will be drawn from across all the panel sub-groups, to support consistency in decision-making. The referral group will make provisional decisions about the more complex cases.

219. The rationales for the provisional decisions about ratings will be recorded in a written panel statement. The OfS will draft provisional decision letters, including the written panel statement containing the rationale for the panel's provisional decisions and any other feedback to the provider (see paragraph 2811 for more information about the panel statement.)
220. The provisional decision letter will be sent to the provider. We will also send a copy of the student submission at this point in the process, to ensure the provider has access to all the evidence considered by the panel.

### **3. Final decisions**

221. Following receipt of the provisional decision letter, a provider will have 28 days to make any representations if it considers that:
- a. The panel's judgement does not appropriately reflect the original evidence that was available to the panel when making its provisional decision.
  - b. There are any factual inaccuracies in the panel statement.
222. Any provider that does not make representations will have its outcomes confirmed by the referral group in a final decision. In line with our general policy approach to publishing information about the TEF, the OfS would then normally expect to publish the outcomes for these providers (see the 'Published information' section of Part 3).
223. The referral group will consider any representations made by a provider. It will consider whether any information given by the provider has an effect on whether the provisional decision remains an appropriate reflection of the originally available evidence, or should be amended.
224. The referral group will also consider any changes requested to the written panel statement and the reasons the provider considers these appropriate.
225. The referral group will then make final decisions, the provider will be informed of those decisions and the outcomes will be published.

### **Conflicts of interest**

226. A conflict of interest is a situation in which personal interests may compromise, or have the appearance of or potential for, compromising professional judgement and integrity.
227. To ensure impartiality in the assessments, panel members with a conflict of interest in relation to a particular provider will not be involved in assessment or decision-making for that provider. A deputy chair will deputise for the TEF panel chair in the event the TEF panel chair has a conflict of interest.

228. After the appointment of panel members, we will collect details of their conflicts of interest. We will publish the policy on conflicts of interest that we will apply, and the list of panel members' declared conflicts of interests.<sup>51</sup>

229. The policy on conflict of interest sets out:

- the circumstances in which we consider a conflict of interest is likely to exist
- a requirement for panel members to declare potential conflicts of interest, as set out in the policy, and to keep these updated throughout their term of appointment
- the action that we intend to take to protect the interests of providers being assessed, and of panel members, where conflicts of interest exist.

## Assessment principles

Panel members should interpret and weigh up evidence to form judgements on ratings by applying their expert judgement, guided by the principles and guidelines set out in this section.

230. Panel members should apply the following broad principles when applying their expert judgement:

- a. The assessment should consider how far a provider delivers excellence for its mix of students and courses.** The panel should consider the context of the provider, the characteristics of its students and courses, and judge the extent to which the student experience and outcomes are excellent in this context.
- b. Positive evidence of excellence above the minimum quality requirements should be sought.** The starting point for assessments is that all courses should be high quality given that participating providers need to satisfy the OfS's minimum requirements for quality as set out in conditions B1, B2, B3 and B4. The panel can therefore use these conditions and guidance in the regulatory framework as a reference point. The panel should seek positive evidence that the student experience and student outcomes are very high quality or outstanding, in order to award a TEF rating.
- c. Assessments should be based on a balanced consideration of the sources of evidence.** Evidence in the submissions and the indicators should be tested against each other, and weighted appropriately when informing overall judgements.
- d. The ratings criteria should be applied holistically to all the available evidence.** Assessments should consider the extent to which there is evidence of excellence across each aspect as a whole and not treat the features as a tick-box exercise. Judgements should be made on a 'best fit' basis against the ratings criteria as a whole.

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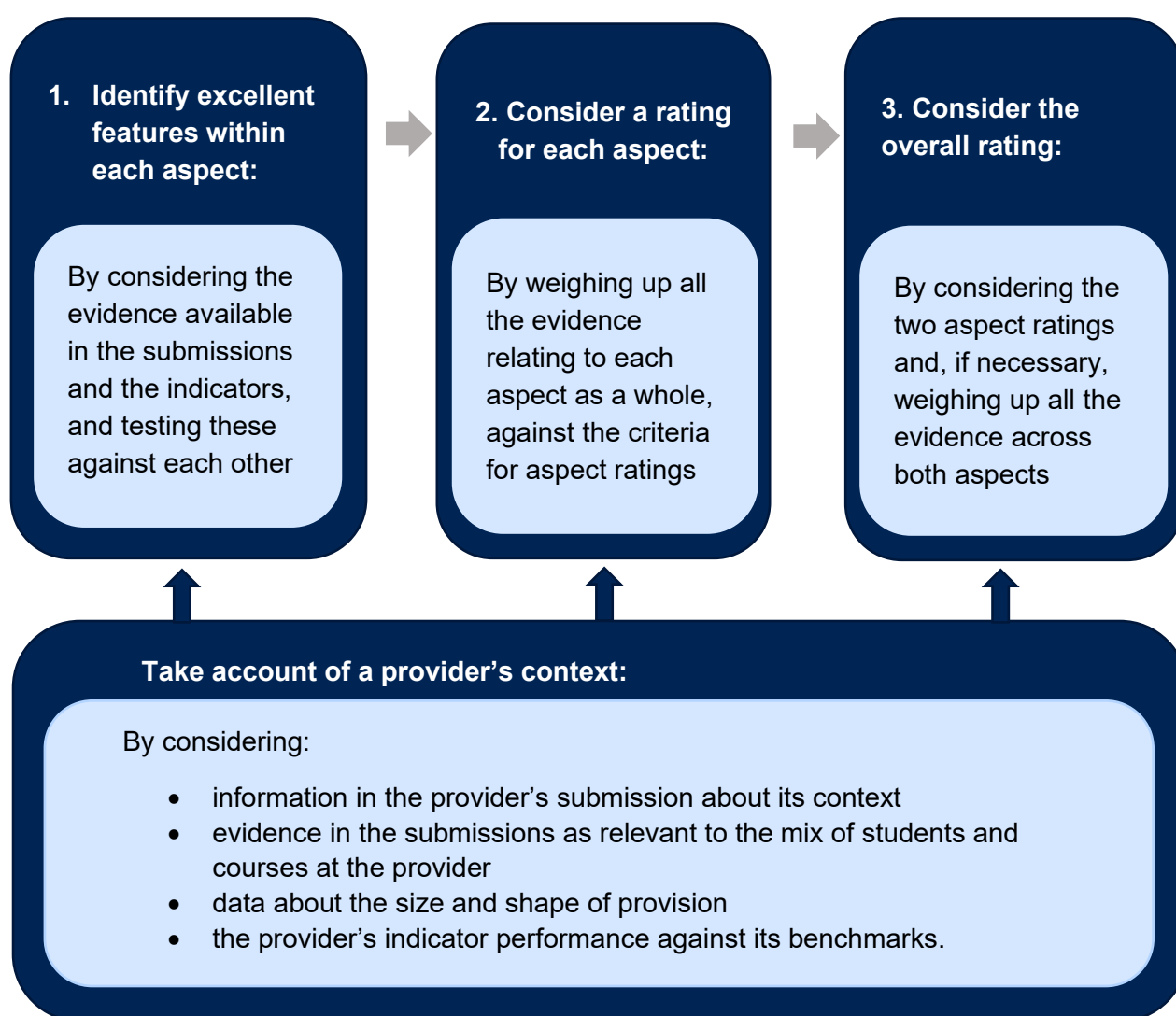
<sup>51</sup> The policy on conflicts of interest and the list of panel members' conflicts of interests will be available at: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/who-we-are/our-board-and-committees/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/who-we-are/our-board-and-committees/).

- e. **Assessments and outcomes should be transparent and coherent.** Assessments should be conducted in accordance with this guidance, and the panel should explain its reasons for ratings decisions. There should be a coherent relationship between the aspect ratings and the overall provider rating.

## Approach to assessment

231. Panel members should follow the approach to assessment that is summarised in **Figure 5**, and explained further in the sections that follow. This approach is based on the above principles.

**Figure 5: Approach to assessment**



232. Panel members may decide the order in which they consider the evidence. We anticipate that panel members will first familiarise themselves with the overall package of evidence for a provider and its context, and then refer iteratively to different pieces of evidence as they work through their assessment. It will be likely that they will consider the 'overall' indicators relating to all a provider's students (in each mode of study) and the submissions at an early stage, before considering in detail the split indicators. In all cases they should make judgements having weighed up all the evidence.

## Scope of the assessment

233. Panel members should generally only consider information and evidence that is relevant to the TEF aspects and features of assessment, the students and courses in scope of a TEF assessment and the timeframe covered by the TEF.
234. Panel members should familiarise themselves with the following guidance about the scope of the assessment:
- a. The section on 'Aspects of assessment' in Part 1.
  - b. The section on 'Courses in scope' in Part 2. Panel members should identify which of the **optional** courses a provider decides to include in its submission. These courses should be considered within the scope of the assessment only if a provider chooses to include evidence about them in its submission.
  - c. The section on 'Timeframe in scope' in Part 2.
235. Panel members should note that student submissions cover the same scope as provider submissions with the following variations:
- The aspects and features of assessment covered by student submissions will be the same as the provider submission, though we recognise that evidence in relation to student outcomes is likely to focus more on how well the provider supports current students to achieve positive outcomes, than on the outcomes achieved by past students.
  - The range of courses and students covered by student submissions will be the same as for provider submissions, but for student submissions it will be optional to include students who are registered at a provider but taught elsewhere.
  - Evidence relating to any of the four most recent years can be covered by student submissions, but we expect evidence to relate primarily to current cohorts.

### 1. Identifying excellent features

236. Having familiarised themselves with the provider's context and identified the courses in scope of the assessment, panel members should consider:
- the available evidence to identify 'very high quality' or 'outstanding quality' features across each aspect (see Annex A), and
  - how far these features apply across all the provider's student groups and the range of its courses and subjects.
237. The features at Annex A have been defined in a broad way and are not intended to be prescriptive or exhaustive. Panel members should consider the features as set out in Part 1 (section on 'Features of excellence').
238. Panel members should consider the evidence in both the submissions and the indicators, testing these sources of evidence against each other and weighing them up to identify 'very high quality' or 'outstanding quality' features.

239. The student submission is optional. Panel members should make no assumptions about the impact of the presence or absence of a student submission. They should consider all the evidence that is available.
240. In considering evidence in the submissions and the indicators, panel members should draw on their expertise to interpret and weigh up whether the evidence suggests that there is:
- a. **Outstanding quality**, where there is sufficient evidence that the quality of the student experience or outcomes are among the very best in the sector, for the mix of students and courses taught by a provider.
  - b. **Very high quality**, where there is sufficient evidence that the quality of the student experience or outcomes are materially above the relevant high quality minimum requirements, for the mix of students and courses taught by a provider.
241. A summary of the relevant high quality minimum requirements is included in **Annex A**, and full details are available on the OfS website.<sup>52</sup>

### Interpretation of evidence in the submissions

242. Panel members should familiarise themselves with the guidance on provider submissions (Part 4) and with the guidance on TEF student submissions.<sup>53</sup>
243. When identifying outstanding and very high quality features, panel members should consider how compelling the evidence in a **provider submission** is and how much weight to place on it. They should consider the extent to which:
- a. **The evidence is directly relevant to a provider's mix of students and courses**  
Evidence should be considered more compelling, and greater weight placed on it, where the submission demonstrates the provider has a clear understanding of its students, tailors its approaches to its mix of students and courses and demonstrates impact on its students.
  - b. **Policies and practices are evidence-based, and their impacts are demonstrated**  
Evidence should be considered more compelling and greater weight placed on it where a provider's policies and practices are informed by robust evidence, data or evaluation, and there is robust evidence of the impact of these policies and practices in terms of delivering an excellent student experience or student outcomes.
  - c. **The evidence overall covers all a provider's student groups and courses within the scope of the TEF assessment**  
Evidence relating to particular groups of students or courses could be important, for example to demonstrate improvement of specific subjects or the impact of interventions targeted at particular groups of students. However, greater weight should be placed on the totality of evidence, where it covers all the provider's groups of students and courses that are in scope of the TEF.

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<sup>52</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/quality-and-standards/how-we-regulate-quality-and-standards/](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/quality-and-standards/how-we-regulate-quality-and-standards/).

<sup>53</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/tef-student-submission-guide/](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/tef-student-submission-guide/).

**d. The evidence is relevant to the features of excellence related to that aspect**

Greater weight should be placed on evidence that is directly relevant to these features, although to ensure the assessment can recognise diverse forms of higher education the features are not intended to be exhaustive. The panel should also consider other evidence presented that is relevant to the quality of the student educational experience and student outcomes.

244. Panel members should consider how compelling the evidence in a **student submission** is and how much weight to place on it. They should consider the extent to which:

**a. The evidence reflects the views of students within the scope of the student submission**

Evidence should be considered more compelling and greater weight placed on it, where it clearly articulates the views of students and is broadly representative of all student groups and courses within the scope of the student submission.

**b. The evidence is relevant to the features of excellence related to that aspect**

Greater weight should be placed on evidence that is directly relevant to the features, recognising that evidence in relation to student outcomes is likely to focus more on how well the provider supports current students to achieve positive outcomes, than on the outcomes achieved by past students. To ensure the assessment can recognise diverse forms of higher education the proposed features are not intended to be exhaustive. The panel should also consider other evidence presented that is relevant to the quality of the student educational experience and student outcomes.

## **Educational gains**

When considering evidence in the provider and student submissions related to educational gains, panel members should take the approach set out within the 'Aspects of assessment' section of Part 1. In summary, panel members should consider information in the provider submission about:

- how the provider articulates the gains it intends its students to achieve
- its approach to supporting these educational gains
- any evidence of the gains achieved by the provider's students, recognising that many providers may not have developed their own approach to measuring the educational gains they deliver for their students.

Panel members should also consider any relevant information in a student submission. For example, the submission might describe:

- students' perspectives on the educational gains the provider has articulated
- any further information about what students seek to gain from their studies
- students' perspectives on how well the provider supports its students to achieve educational gains.



Panel members should not prevent a provider from being awarded higher TEF ratings solely based on an absence of its own developed measures of educational gains.

### Verification of information in submissions

245. Part 4 (section on ‘Use of references for verification’) sets out the process for verifying the accuracy of information in a **provider submission**.
246. Initially, the OfS will carry out verification checks on a sample of provider submissions. Where a provider’s submission appears to contain substantive inaccuracies or unverified content, the OfS will inform the panel. The panel should then consider how to take this into account in determining the provider’s TEF rating.
247. In addition, during its assessments, panel members can ask the OfS to verify the accuracy of information in a provider’s submission. Panel members should request verification only where it could have a material impact on a rating. This might occur, for example, where information apparently contradicts another source of evidence, such as the student submission or the indicators.
248. Panel members could ask the OfS to request from the provider any relevant referenced material, if not available through a URL. Panel members could also request verification of information in the submission not supported by a reference.
249. Where a provider’s submission appears to contain inaccuracies or unverified content following such checks, the panel members should consider how to take this into account in determining the provider’s TEF rating.
250. A **student submission** should describe how the information was gathered and how representative it is. Panel members should consider this description to gauge the strength of the evidence in the student submission, and should only by exception ask the OfS to verify information in a student submission.

### Interpretation of the indicators

251. Panel members will receive training on how to interpret the indicators, on relevant statistical concepts, and on what conclusions can or cannot be drawn from the indicators.
252. When reviewing the indicators, panel members should interpret performance as indicative rather than determinative. Panel should interpret a provider’s indicators as initial evidence, to be tested against evidence in the submissions, of:
- a. Outstanding quality, where the indicator is materially above the provider’s benchmark**  
This should be interpreted as indicating that a provider’s performance may be among the highest quality in the higher education sector, for its mix of students and courses.
  - b. Very high quality, where the indicator is broadly in line with the provider’s benchmark**  
This should be interpreted as indicating that a provider’s performance is in line with

performance for similar students and courses in what is generally a high-performing sector, and should therefore be recognised as very high quality.

**c. Not very high quality, where the indicator is materially below the provider's benchmark**

This should be interpreted as indicating that a provider's performance is not very high quality for its mix of students and courses. However, this should not be taken as definitive evidence that the feature to which the indicator is relevant is not very high quality. Panel members should consider any relevant evidence or further context within the submission that relates to the indicator or relevant feature, before making a judgement.

253. In addition, we recognise that in some cases, a provider's benchmark may be so high that it would be difficult for the provider to materially exceed it. Where a provider's benchmark for any indicator or split indicator is 95 per cent or higher, and the provider is not materially below its benchmark, the panel should interpret this initially as evidence of **outstanding quality**.

254. To support consistent interpretation of the indicators, for the purposes of TEF assessments we define 'materially above' and 'materially below' benchmark as follows:

- a. Performance that is at least 2.5 percentage points above benchmark should be considered as materially above benchmark.
- b. Performance that is at least 2.5 percentage points below benchmark should be considered as materially below benchmark.
- c. Performance that is within 2.5 percentage points of the benchmark in either direction should be considered as broadly in line with the benchmark.

255. In this section of the guidance, the term 'materially' and the above definitions are not intended to be statistical concepts and do not have particular statistical meanings. They are intended to support consistent interpretation of the indicators by panel members, and provide transparency for providers about how this will be done.

### **Statistical uncertainty**

256. When interpreting the indicators, panel members should consider the level of statistical uncertainty in the position of the provider's indicator against its corresponding benchmark. Panel members should do this by considering the position of the 'shaded bar' in relation to the 'guiding lines' that are displayed on the indicator dashboards (these are described in the 'Presentation' section of Part 5). Panel members should recognise that the shaded bar may cross one or both of these guiding lines.

257. Panel members should interpret the strength of the statistical evidence by using the following four indicative categories. These categories are deliberately not discrete, as they describe the strength of statistical evidence, which is on a continuous scale, and are designed to avoid

arbitrary divisions. The four categories are described with reference to statistical confidence,<sup>54</sup> as follows:

- a. Around 99 per cent statistical confidence would provide compelling statistical evidence.
- b. Around 95 per cent or higher statistical confidence would provide very strong statistical evidence.
- c. Around 90 per cent or higher statistical confidence would provide strong statistical evidence.
- d. Around 80 per cent or higher statistical confidence would provide probable statistical evidence.

258. These categories should be used when considering how far a shaded bar is materially above, broadly in line with, or materially below the benchmark. For example:

- If 90 per cent of the distribution represented by a shaded bar is above the guiding line for 'materially above benchmark', this would provide strong statistical evidence that the provider's performance is materially above its benchmark. It would be interpreted as strong initial evidence of an outstanding feature.
- If 95 per cent of the distribution represented by a shaded bar is between the two guiding lines, this would provide very strong statistical evidence that the provider's performance is broadly in line with its benchmark. It would be interpreted as very strong initial evidence of a very high quality feature.

### **Multiple comparisons adjustments**

259. When looking at multiple indicators at once, there is a greater chance of finding one that appears to be materially above or below a benchmark, as a result of random chance alone. Panel members making multiple comparisons (for example, when looking at a series of split indicators) should consider adjusting to a higher level of confidence when interpreting these indicators. This is because of the higher risk of false discovery when using lower levels of statistical confidence. Panel members may wish to be more conservative in their interpretation of statistical uncertainty the more comparisons they are making. Adjusting to higher levels of statistical confidence can mitigate the risk of making a false discovery.

260. Further information is in Annex D of the 'Description of student outcome and experience measures used in OfS regulation' document.<sup>55</sup>

### **Overall and split indicators**

261. Panel members should primarily consider the overall indicators within each mode of study. This is because the TEF rating is intended to represent the overall quality of all the provider's courses and students in scope for the TEF assessment. The indicators for each mode of

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<sup>54</sup> In this context, statistical confidence should be interpreted from the table shown alongside the shaded bars. The table reports three figures, each one showing the proportion of the distribution of statistical uncertainty, represented by the shaded bar, that is materially above, broadly in line with, or materially below benchmark.

<sup>55</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/description-and-definition-of-student-outcome-and-experience-measures/).

study represent overall performance across all types of courses, subjects and student groups, weighted according to the number of students in each category.

262. Secondly, panel members should consider the 'split' indicators within each mode of study in order to:
- a. Consider how far very high quality and outstanding quality features might apply across all a provider's student groups and range of courses and subjects.
  - b. Test the evidence in a provider's submission about its strengths and areas for improvement, including the provider's own analysis and use of the split indicators, alongside any other evidence it determines for itself.
263. When considering student characteristic splits, panel members should not focus on gaps between student groups within a provider. Instead, panel members should use the student characteristic splits to consider how far the provider delivers excellence for all its groups of students, relative to its benchmarks for each group. Panel members should also consider these splits to test evidence in the provider's and student's submission about equality of the student experience and outcomes.
264. Panel members should consider the year splits in combination with evidence in the provider and student submissions, to test evidence about the impact of the pandemic in particular years, or evidence of improvements to the student experience or student outcomes, within the assessment period.
265. Panel members' judgments should reflect the quality of the student experience and student outcomes over the four-year period covered by the assessment as a whole, without weighting the years differentially.

## 2. Aspect ratings

266. Panel members should weigh up all the evidence in the indicators and the submissions relating to each aspect as a whole, and apply the criteria at **Annex B** to make a judgement about the rating for each aspect. In doing so:
- The indicators should contribute no more than half of the evidence of very high quality or outstanding features, for each aspect as a whole. Paragraph 268 provides further guidance on this.
  - Panel members should consider how far the provider delivers excellence for all its groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups, and across the range of its courses and subjects. Paragraph 269 provides further guidance on this.
  - Panel members should consider the extent to which there are very high quality and outstanding quality features across the aspect as a whole, rather than treating the features as a checklist. Paragraph 270 provides further guidance on this.
267. Within these guidelines, panel members should exercise their discretion about how to place weight on the evidence and different contextual factors related to a provider, having regard to the particular facts and issues in any given case.

268. The indicators should contribute no more than half of the evidence of very high quality or outstanding features, for each aspect as a whole:

- a. For the student experience aspect:** We consider the NSS indicators important but not direct measures of the student experience features. Panel members should interpret the NSS indicators as providing part of the evidence they need to identify relevant very high quality or outstanding quality features of the student experience (features SE1, SE2, SE5, SE6 and SE7). These indicators would need to be supplemented with further evidence of excellence in the submissions.
- b. For the student outcomes aspect:** We consider the outcome indicators provide more direct measures of some of the student outcomes (SO2 and SO3) assessed in the TEF. Evidence of excellence in relation to other student outcomes (SO1, SO4, SO5 and SO6) should be sought in the submissions.

Within the student outcomes aspect, features SO2 and SO3 could be identified without necessarily requiring further evidence in the submission. For example, continuation and completion rates that are materially above a provider's benchmarks could be sufficient evidence for the feature 'There are outstanding rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses'. However, where these indicators are below a provider's benchmark, this should not be determinative that the associated feature is 'not very high quality'. Panel members should consider any relevant evidence or further context relating to the indicator within the submission before making a judgement. This partly recognises that the factors we include in calculating benchmarks do not include all possible factors that could have affected a provider's historical performance.

- c. Where data in the indicators is limited:** Where data is not reportable, TEF indicators do not include significant student populations, or where there is a high degree of statistical uncertainty in the indicator, panel members should place proportionately greater weight on evidence in the submissions to identify very high quality or outstanding features. The onus is on a provider to ensure there is sufficient evidence of excellence in its submission in relation to the relevant features. Panel members should consider any type of evidence in relation to those features; the provider does not need to replicate 'missing' data from internal or other sources.

269. Panel members should consider how far the provider delivers excellence for all its groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups, and across the range of its courses and subjects:

- a.** Panel members should consider the totality of evidence in the indicators and evidence in submissions that may relate to:
  - all groups of students and courses within the scope of a provider's assessment
  - particular groups of students, subjects or courses. This could be important, for example, to demonstrate improvement of specific subjects or the impact of interventions targeted at particular groups of students.

Panel members should weight more positively evidence that, as a whole, demonstrates that very high quality or outstanding features apply to all groups of students at a provider.

- b. Where a provider registers students who are taught elsewhere (through a subcontractual arrangement), these are included in the scope of the assessment. Panel members should weight evidence relating to these students in proportion to the registering provider's overall undergraduate provision. (The indicators include 'type of partnership' splits, so that providers and panel members can identify potential differences in performance in relation to its taught and subcontracted out students.)
- c. Where a provider has chosen to include apprenticeships in its submission, panel members should weight evidence relating to students on apprenticeships in proportion to their overall numbers. (The indicators for apprenticeships are reported separately to indicators for full-time and for part-time students.)

270. Panel members should consider the extent to which there are very high quality and outstanding quality features across the aspect as a whole, rather than treating the features as a checklist:

- a. Beyond the indicators, a provider could choose to place more or less emphasis on particular features depending on their relevance to its context. Panel members should not assign any predetermined weight to, or equally weight, each feature. To consider awarding the highest rating the panel should not, for example, require there to be equally strong evidence across all the features, so long as they judge there is evidence of typically outstanding quality across the aspect as a whole.

271. Having considered these issues and weighed up all the evidence, panel members should make a 'best fit' judgement against the criteria for the aspect ratings, at **Annex B**. The criteria are based on the panel's assessment of:

- a. Very high quality and outstanding quality features across the aspect.
- b. How far a provider delivers these for all its groups of students.

272. The criteria for the aspect ratings do not seek to describe how every possible combination of very high quality and outstanding quality features would be associated with a particular rating category. The panel should use the ratings criteria to decide which of the rating categories is a 'best fit', meaning that the criteria for that rating category are, on the whole, more applicable to all the evidence than the criteria for any other rating category.

## **Requires improvement**

273. The panel should not award a rating to an aspect where it judges there is an absence of very high quality or outstanding features across that aspect. In this case, the outcome for the aspect will be 'Requires improvement'.

274. The panel should not award a rating to an aspect where:

- a. It finds no or minimal very high quality or outstanding features in that aspect, or

- b. It finds features of the student experience or outcomes that it considers to be clearly below the level of 'very high quality', or that may be of concern. This may be alongside other features at a provider that the panel considers to be very high quality or outstanding. In such cases, the panel should consider if those features that are clearly below the level of 'very high quality', or that may be of concern, are sufficiently serious or widespread to prevent it from concluding that overall, there is sufficient evidence of excellence to award a rating of Bronze or above.

275. The following non-exhaustive list provides examples that the panel might consider as clearly below the level of 'very high quality' or that may be of concern:

- a. If a provider's continuation or completion rates are materially below its benchmarks, and the information in the provider's submission does not adequately explain why this is the case or set out an effective approach the provider has in place to support its students to succeed in their studies.
- b. If there are split indicators that are materially below benchmark for some groups of students and materially above benchmark for others, and the submission does not adequately explain why this is the case or set out an appropriate approach the provider has in place to deliver very high quality courses for all its groups of students.
- c. If there are split indicators that are materially below benchmark for some subjects and materially above benchmark for others, and the information in the submission does not adequately explain why this is the case or set out an effective approach the provider has in place to deliver high quality courses in those subjects that are below benchmark.
- d. If the provider's submission does not adequately explain how it engages with its students to ensure a very high quality experience; and the student submission provides reasonable evidence that the provider does not meaningfully do so.
- e. If the submission does not adequately articulate what educational gains the provider intends for its students, or how it supports its students to achieve them.

### 3. Overall rating

276. Panel members should consider the rating for each aspect before determining the overall rating for a provider. The overall rating should be determined through the following combination of rules and expert judgement, to ensure the overall rating is coherent with the aspect ratings, and to support consistent decision-making.

277. Where each aspect is awarded the same rating, the overall rating should also be the same.

278. Where each aspect is awarded a different rating, the following two rules should apply:

- a. The overall rating should not be higher than the highest aspect rating.
- b. The overall rating should be no more than one rating higher than the lowest aspect rating.

279. Within these rules panel members should exercise their expert judgment. For example, if a provider has aspects rated Gold and Silver, the rules would not determine whether the

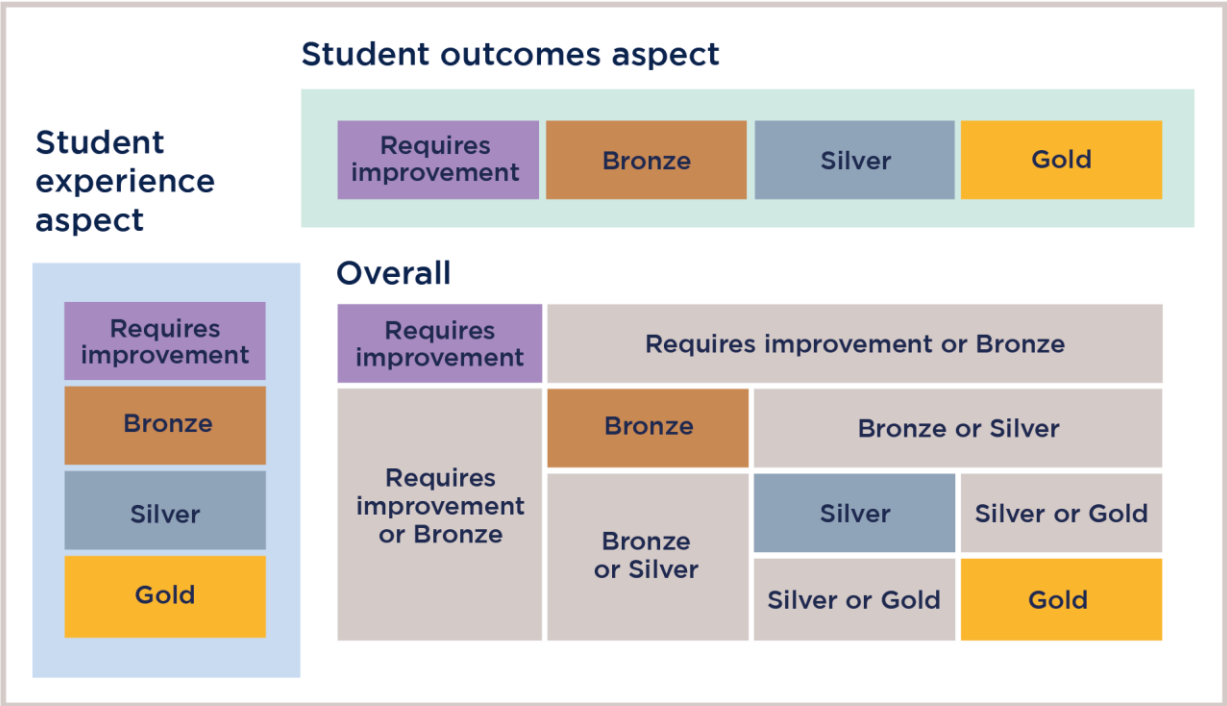


overall rating should be Gold or Silver. Panel members should make an overall ‘best fit’ decision by:

- a. Equally weighting the two aspects.
- b. Considering all the evidence across all features, and across all the provider’s student groups, subjects and courses, to make a ‘best fit’ judgement against the ratings criteria at Annex B. ‘Best fit’ means that the criteria for that rating category are, on the whole, more applicable to all the evidence than the criteria for any other rating category.

280. **Figure 6** shows what the overall rating for a provider could be, depending on the aspect ratings it is awarded. It shows that it is possible for a provider to be awarded Requires improvement for one aspect, and a Bronze overall rating.

**Figure 6: Relationship between the aspect and overall ratings**



**Panel statements**

281. The panel should set out its rationale for its rating decisions in a written panel statement for each participating provider. Typically, the panel statement should include:

- a. The rationale for each aspect rating, including:
  - a summary of those features that the panel found to be very high quality and those it found to be outstanding quality, and the extent to which it found these to apply across the provider’s student groups and types of courses
  - where relevant, the panel’s interpretation of the indicators and evidence in the submissions



- any features the panel found to be clearly below the level of very high quality or of concern, if applicable.

b. The rationale for the overall rating, including:

- how the proposed guidance on the relationship between aspect and overall ratings was applied
- if applicable, how the totality of the evidence was weighed up to decide the overall rating.

## Annex A: Features of excellence

Student experience		
	Academic experience and assessment	Resources, support and student engagement
<b>Outstanding quality features</b>	<p><b>SE1.</b> The provider has embedded outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are highly effective and tailored to supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment.</p> <p><b>SE2.</b> Course content and delivery inspire the provider's students to actively engage in and commit to their learning, and stretch students to develop knowledge and skills to their fullest potential.</p> <p><b>SE3.</b> The provider uses research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement to contribute to an outstanding academic experience for its students.</p>	<p><b>SE4.</b> There is outstanding support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is embedded across the provider.</p> <p><b>SE5.</b> The provider ensures a supportive learning environment, and its students have access to a wide and readily available range of outstanding quality academic support tailored to their needs.</p> <p><b>SE6.</b> Physical and virtual learning resources are tailored and used effectively to support outstanding teaching and learning.</p> <p><b>SE7.</b> The provider embeds engagement with its students, leading to continuous improvement to the experiences and outcomes of its students.</p>
<b>Very high quality features</b>	<p><b>SE1.</b> The provider has embedded very high quality teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are effective in supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment.</p> <p><b>SE2.</b> Course content and delivery effectively encourage the provider's students to engage in their learning, and stretch students to develop their knowledge and skills.</p> <p><b>SE3.</b> The provider uses research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement to contribute to a very high quality academic experience for its students.</p>	<p><b>SE4.</b> There is very high quality support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is promoted.</p> <p><b>SE5.</b> The provider fosters a supportive learning environment, and its students have access to a readily available range of very high quality academic support.</p> <p><b>SE6.</b> Physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning.</p> <p><b>SE7.</b> The provider effectively engages with its students, leading to improvements to the experiences and outcomes of its students.</p>

Student experience		
	Academic experience and assessment	Resources, support and student engagement
Summary of relevant high quality minimum requirements <sup>56</sup>	<p><b>Condition B1:</b></p> <p>The provider must ensure that the students registered on each higher education course receive a high quality academic experience.</p> <p>A high quality academic experience includes but is not limited to ensuring that each higher education course:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. is up-to-date</li> <li>2. provides educational challenge</li> <li>3. is coherent</li> <li>4. is effectively delivered; and</li> <li>5. as appropriate to the subject matter of the course, requires students to develop relevant skills.</li> </ol> <p><b>Condition B4:</b></p> <p>The provider must ensure that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. students are assessed effectively</li> <li>2. each assessment is valid and reliable</li> <li>3. academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible</li> <li>4. academic regulations are designed to ensure effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a way which appropriately reflects the level and content of the course; and</li> </ol>	<p><b>Condition B2:</b></p> <p>The provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. students receive resources and support to ensure: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. a high quality academic experience for those students; and</li> <li>b. those students succeed in and beyond higher education; and</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. effective engagement with each cohort of students to ensure: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. high quality academic experience for those students; and</li> <li>b. those students succeed in and beyond higher education.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

<sup>56</sup> Full details of the conditions of registration are available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/registration-with-the-ofs-a-guide/conditions-of-registration/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/registration-with-the-ofs-a-guide/conditions-of-registration/).

Student experience		
Academic experience and assessment		Resources, support and student engagement
	<p><b>5.</b> relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.</p>	
<b>Explanatory notes</b>	<p><b>SE1 to SE7:</b> These features build directly on relevant elements of our minimum quality requirements set out in conditions of registration B1, B2 and B4. They are defined in ways that represent a higher quality experience for a provider's students than would normally be required to satisfy the associated elements of the B conditions.</p> <p><b>SE1, SE2, SE5, SE6, SE7:</b> The evidence to identify these features will be a combination of NSS-based indicators and evidence in the submissions. An NSS-based indicator that is broadly in line with the provider's benchmark will initially be interpreted as indicating a 'very high quality' feature. An NSS-based indicator that is materially above the provider's benchmark will initially be interpreted as indicating an 'outstanding quality' feature. The NSS indicators will need to be supplemented by evidence of excellence in the submissions, and overall, they will contribute no more than half the evidence of very high quality or outstanding features for the student experience aspect.</p> <p><b>SE3:</b> This feature gives the provider the opportunity through its submission to demonstrate how far the student academic experience is enriched through one or more of the following, as appropriate to the context of the provider and the types of courses it delivers: students' exposure to research in relevant disciplines; innovation in the curriculum or methods of teaching and learning; scholarly activity; involvement of practitioners from relevant professions; or engagement with employers in the design and delivery of courses.</p>	

Student outcomes		
	Positive outcomes	Educational gains
<b>Outstanding quality features</b>	<p><b>SO1.</b> The provider deploys and tailors approaches that are highly effective in ensuring its students succeed in and progress beyond their studies.</p> <p><b>SO2.</b> There are outstanding rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses.</p> <p><b>SO3.</b> There are outstanding rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses.</p>	<p><b>SO4.</b> The provider clearly articulates the range educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why these are highly relevant to its students and their future ambitions.</p> <p><b>SO5.</b> The provider's approaches to supporting its students to achieve these gains are evidence-based, highly effective and tailored to its students and their different starting points.</p> <p><b>SO6.</b> The provider evaluates the gains made by its students, and demonstrates its students are succeeding in achieving the intended gains.</p>
<b>Very high quality features</b>	<p><b>SO1.</b> The provider effectively supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies.</p> <p><b>SO2.</b> There are very high rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses.</p> <p><b>SO3.</b> There are very high rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses.</p>	<p><b>SO4.</b> The provider articulates the educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why these are relevant to its students.</p> <p><b>SO5.</b> The provider effectively supports its students to achieve these gains.</p> <p><b>SO6.</b> The provider evaluates the gains made by its students.</p>

	Student outcomes	
	Positive outcomes	Educational gains
<b>Summary of relevant high-quality minimum requirements<sup>57</sup></b>	<p><b>Condition B3:</b> The provider must deliver positive outcomes for students on its higher education courses, in terms of students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Continuing in their studies.</li> <li>b. Completing their studies.</li> <li>c. Progressing into managerial or professional employment, or further study.</li> <li>d. Any other areas as determined by the OfS.</li> </ul>	
<b>Explanatory notes</b>	<p><b>SO1 to SO6:</b> The evidence to identify these features will be a combination of student outcomes indicators (for SO2 and SO3) and evidence in the submissions. Overall, the indicators will contribute no more than half the evidence of very high quality or outstanding features for the student outcomes aspect.</p> <p><b>SO2 and SO3:</b> These features build on the requirements contained in condition B3, and are defined in ways that focus on how far a provider delivers excellent outcomes for its mix of students and courses. These features will be assessed initially by considering a provider's performance against its benchmarks for continuation and completion (SO2) and progression (SO3). An indicator that is broadly in line with the provider's benchmark will initially be interpreted as indicating a 'very high quality' feature. An indicator that is materially above the provider's benchmark will initially be interpreted as indicating an 'outstanding quality' feature. The progression indicator shows the proportion of students progressing to managerial or professional employment, or further study. We recognise that a provider could in its submission demonstrate other types of positive outcomes for its students, and have therefore expressed <b>SO3</b> more broadly than the outcomes captured by the progression indicator.</p> <p><b>SO4 to SO6:</b> The educational gains features are additional to our minimum quality requirements (that is, they do not build directly on the B conditions), and so are considered to be 'materially above' the B conditions collectively. We recognise that there is currently no national measure of educational gain, and that many providers may not have developed their own approach to measuring the educational gains they deliver for their students. The educational gains features relate to a provider's own articulation of the gains it intends its students to achieve; its approach to supporting these educational gains; and any evidence of the gains achieved by the provider's students. The TEF panel will assess the evidence related to all the student outcomes features and make a holistic judgement about the student outcomes rating, so a provider will not be prevented from being awarded higher TEF ratings solely based on an absence of developed educational gain measures. This approach is intended to allow providers time to establish their practice in measuring and evidencing educational gains, which could then become the focus of assessment in subsequent TEF exercises.</p>	

<sup>57</sup> The full wording of Condition B3 is available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/securing-student-success-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/securing-student-success-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/).

# Annex B: Ratings criteria

## Criteria for each rating category

	Aspect ratings	Overall provider rating
Gold	<p><b>A Gold rating signifies that the aspect is typically outstanding.</b></p> <p>This would be awarded where the panel judges that the available evidence 'best fits' the following description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most features of the aspect are outstanding quality for all groups of students.</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All features of the aspect are outstanding quality for most groups of students.</li> </ul>	<p><b>A Gold rating signifies that the student experience and student outcomes are typically outstanding.</b></p> <p>This would be awarded where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The panel awards a Gold rating to both aspects.</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The panel awards a Gold rating to one aspect and a Silver rating to the other aspect, and it judges that across all the available evidence the student experience and student outcomes are typically of outstanding quality. The Silver-rated aspect therefore needs to include outstanding features.</li> </ul>
Silver	<p><b>A Silver rating signifies that the aspect is typically very high quality.</b></p> <p>This would be awarded where the panel judges that the available evidence 'best fits' the following description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most features of the aspect are very high quality for all groups of students.</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All features of the aspect are very high quality for most groups of students.</li> </ul>	<p><b>A Silver rating signifies that the student experience and student outcomes are typically very high quality.</b></p> <p>This would be awarded where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The panel awards a Silver rating to both aspects.</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The panel awards a Silver rating to one aspect and either a Bronze or Gold rating to the other aspect. It judges that across all the available evidence the student experience and student outcomes are typically of very high quality.</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The panel awards a Gold rating to one aspect and a Bronze rating to the other aspect, and it</li> </ul>

	Aspect ratings	Overall provider rating
		judges that across all the available evidence the student experience and student outcomes are typically a combination of very high and outstanding quality.
<b>Bronze</b>	<p><b>A Bronze rating signifies that the aspect is typically high quality, and there are some very high quality features.</b></p> <p>This would be awarded where the panel judges that the available evidence 'best fits' the following description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some features of the aspect are very high quality for most groups of students.</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most features of the aspect are very high quality for some groups of students.</li> </ul>	<p><b>A Bronze rating signifies that the student experience and student outcomes are typically high quality, and there are some very high quality features.</b></p> <p>This would be awarded where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The panel awards a Bronze rating to both aspects.</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The panel awards a Bronze rating to one aspect and a Silver or Gold rating to the other aspect, and it judges that across all the available evidence there is insufficient evidence that the student experience and student outcomes are typically of very high quality or typically a combination of very high and outstanding quality.</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The panel awards a bronze rating or higher to one aspect but does not award a rating to the other. It judges that overall there are some very high quality or outstanding features of the student experience and student outcomes. There are no features clearly below the level of very high quality, or that may be of concern that it judges to be sufficiently serious or widespread to prevent the award of an overall rating of Bronze.</li> </ul>



## Criteria for not awarding a rating

	For an aspect	For the provider overall
Requires improvement	<p>No rating would be awarded to an aspect where the panel judges that the available evidence 'best fits' the following description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are no or minimal very high-quality features.</li> <li>OR</li> <li>• There are features clearly below the level of very high quality, or that may be of concern, and these are sufficiently serious or widespread to prevent the award of an aspect rating of Bronze or above.</li> </ul>	<p>No rating would be awarded where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The panel does not award a rating to both aspects.</li> <li>OR</li> <li>• The panel awards a bronze rating or higher to one aspect but does not award a rating to the other aspect because there are features clearly below the level of very high quality, or that may be of concern, and it judges these are sufficiently serious or widespread to prevent the award of an overall rating of Bronze or above.</li> </ul>



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