



BOLTON COLLEGE

HIGHER EDUCATION (HE)
STRATEGY

2014-2016

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1. SECTOR AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The Higher Education (HE) sector is facing unprecedented change and challenge through the introduction of new Government policy agenda, reforms to funding and the introduction of increased tuition fees. Furthermore, the Government commitment to enabling Further Education institutions (FEIs) by removing the student number control, together with the flexible approach in allowing FEIs to compete in the HE market for students, will now enable local FEIs to further engage in HE developments and provision that meets the needs of the local students, economies and demands from employers.

The financial challenges which face the Sector relate to the new funding regime (Browne Review 2010) and uncertainty about student recruitment into Higher Education from September 2012 onwards. However, the reform also presents unprecedented opportunity for HE in FE. FE colleges have more freedom to decide what curriculum is offered than ever before and the freedom to enrol unlimited full and part-time learners has increased the possibilities for devising, flexible, part time and work based higher level learning.

Our strategic priorities have been developed following detailed analysis of current national, regional, and local policy and discussion with key local partners. We aim to continue this level of focussed analysis in determining our HE provision to ensure that it supports learners in achieving higher level skills and employment; and contribute to the improvement of higher level skills profile in the borough. Higher level Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) have been identified as key strategic priorities for Bolton. This higher level curriculum will be developed at the College following the building of the new STEM Centre.

As a Widening Participation College with a diverse student body, Bolton College is a socially inclusive Further Education Institution. We have a long tradition and commitment to access and widening participation. Our student body is diverse and many come to us with non- traditional entry qualifications and from non-traditional entry backgrounds.

Our HE student population consist of mature and 18+ students, studying part time and full time, or within the work place and predominantly live locally and are often the first family member to access Higher Education provision. All our HE provision is vocationally oriented and students have the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills that will prepare them for the world of work.

We aim to provide a rigorous and robust, local higher education curriculum which is employment focussed and leads to improved career outcomes for our students. The HE Strategy will help in realising this aim. The Strategy will identify clear priorities and outcomes to guide our work and strengthen our partnerships. The Strategy will outline how Bolton College will deliver a high-quality, demand-led curriculum, and create a system that will support Bolton Council's vision to ensure that Bolton adults have the opportunity to access excellent educational opportunities to meet their needs and enable progression to the highest levels.

We also support the Government's vision to ensure that every adult has the opportunity to progress in learning and employment and fulfil their potential. The Strategy will also enable us to collectively review priorities, analyse progress and celebrate success.

It is against this Sector and Institutional context that the new HE Strategy has been developed to strengthen and enhance HE provision so that the learning and teaching environment focusses on student success and student engagement.

STEM in Bolton

Bolton has a long history of engagement with STEM based industries, particularly manufacturing which still accounts for 14% of the workforce. Engineering continues to have a strong base, employing 3.9% of the workforce which is above the national average. There has also been strong growth in other STEM related industries such as construction, creative services, ICT digital and logistics, all of which have seen double digit growth.

The College will to create entry points for adults into STEM learning through curriculum like our Access programme to support progression to the many STEM based higher level course which, both we, and our local partners offer. Finally and crucially, we need to provide STEM skills for local employers to support growth in STEM industries. As the rate of technological development advances ever faster, increasingly, local employers will want to design bespoke STEM curriculum which is more focused on meeting industrial capacity than achieving qualifications.

STEM at Bolton College

Construction of the Bolton College STEM Centre is complete and will open in September 2014. It will provide a focus for the development of comprehensive STEM educational choice and pathways for Bolton Borough learners of all ages. Bolton College has now relocated both the Motor Vehicle and Engineering provision from the Horwich site to complete the next phase of its accommodation Strategy, thereby bringing all facilities-specific provision into Bolton town centre with the following strategic aims:

- Delivering a purpose designed building matching the excellence in provision with facilities for STEM provision hitherto unavailable
- Providing state of the art facilities to support high level STEM skills development
- Improving integration of vocational skills teaching with real life business activity alongside the academic curriculum, facilitating greater choice
- Providing a pathway to University Advanced Motor Engineering and Materials Technology provision
- Broadening higher level apprenticeship provision with a STEM focus and increasing STEM add-on provision for mainstream learners
- Further developing links with employers through a STEM focus.

STEM Curriculum at Bolton College

The College already has a substantial STEM based provision including digital media, ICT, motor vehicle, science and health and construction technologies. To assist us in identifying the appropriate curriculum developments needed for Bolton, the College has entered into a relationship with the National Engineering Foundation (NEF) to scope appropriate future needs for the area. The two developmental processes that the College is engaging in with NEF are STEM in Development in through which NEF assist the College in developing a STEM Strategy, and STEM Assured, a process which will support the quality of our developments over the next three years and provide a STEM quality kite mark. Through this process and sustained dialogue with our key partners the College will develop a sustainable higher level STEM curriculum to both support the growth of STEM industries and provide a hub for innovation and enterprise in STEM related industries.

Higher level apprenticeships will increasingly become a progression pathway for Level 3 apprentices and college leavers. This will enable skilled individuals to be retained in the local economy and provide meaningful and aspirational career pathways.

2. THE VISION FOR HE LEARNING AT BOLTON COLLEGE

Our vision is to transform higher level education within the College to allow our students to enjoy learning, achieve their full potential and progress in their chosen career. We will work with our key partners, with a focus on employers, to ensure that our HE provision provides excitement and challenges for our students and leads to improved career outcomes and life chances. We will focus solely on increasing opportunity for vocation and work-based learning. We will engage employers on all aspects of curriculum development delivery and review. We want to enable students to make positive, informed choices from a dynamic, varied, inclusive and accessible curriculum. We want to offer economically relevant, high quality, flexible learning opportunities that will meet the needs of Bolton adults, employers, and community.

Bolton College works with a wide range of public and private sector organisations, including the 'Bolton Family' and the Greater Manchester Colleges Group, to meet the education and training needs of Bolton, its' geographical, cultural, and business communities. We will support social and economic regeneration and contribute to measurable business success and community cohesion through the provision of flexible, innovative, and responsive high quality training opportunities, working in partnerships with employers, local communities, and key agencies and training providers. We will ensure that we meet the need of our student body through regular review and enhancement of our mechanisms for student engagement.

We will create a high quality learning environment which captures outstanding practice including a culture of continuous improvement, by providing inspirational, teaching and learning which is responsive to the needs, interests, and experience of our students and leads to success. The quality of learning, teaching and assessment will be enhanced through sharing of good practice both internally and across GM HE providers. We will widen participation and increase access to lifelong learning opportunities in education and training.

3. BOLTON COLLEGE HE STRATEGY

3.1 Aims

The College aims to:

- 3.1.1** Work in partnership to provide an enhanced HE curriculum to ensure an increase in progression opportunities for Bolton students;
- 3.1.2** Provide employment led curriculum through effective partnership working;
- 3.1.3** Provide a high quality HE learning experience.
- 3.1.4** Provide high quality, flexible, value for money vocational HE programmes and higher apprenticeship pathways in response to identified niche market opportunities in the UK and overseas

3.2 Objectives

The HE Strategy key objectives are:

3.2.1 To work effectively with partners to achieve relevant growth in HE provision by:

- Providing regular opportunities for existing partners to be more engaged in the processes of developing new HE provision;
- Developing opportunities to create new links with potential HE partners for the purpose of growing HE provision and higher apprenticeships;
- Ensuring an action plan is developed for the purpose of identifying, monitoring, and meeting set outcomes as agreed by partners and the college director for HE provision.

3.2.2 Provide a curriculum that is employment focussed through effective partnership working by:

- Strengthening and developing the curriculum that will meet the present and future employment needs through effective engagement with employers;

- Work collaboratively with Sector Skills Councils, industry bodies and relevant PSRBs to ensure that the skills and competencies embedded within the HE curriculum are carefully aligned to the latest industrial practice;

3.2.3 Provide a high quality HE learning experience by:

- Developing a student focussed HE teaching learning and assessment Strategy to support continuous quality improvement ;
- Providing opportunities for students to be engaged in and be able to influence and shape all aspects of the curriculum;
- Engaging students in all aspects of the learning experience including processes to support quality improvement;
- Ensuring that quality and standards are continually improved and annually monitored via the production of an HE quality enhancement Strategy supported by local quality enhancement plans.

3.2.4 To provide high quality, flexible, value for money HE programmes in response to identified niche market opportunities by:

- Ensuring that up to date intelligence regarding niche market programme/ course opportunities are developed in partnership with employers and partners;
- Increasing the opportunities of relevant staff to develop and strengthen relationships with local employers for the purpose of identifying niche course development;
- Working collaboratively with the quality, and learning and teaching department in ensuring consistency in approach and processes to delivering high quality courses.

3.3 Key Outcomes

Key performance indicators:

1. Achieve a 2% growth in students HE curriculum annually;
2. Introduce 2 higher level apprentice pathways to complement HE opportunities by 2014;
3. Maintain HE success rate within the top tenth percentile;
4. Successfully increase the UK HE provision by one new programme annually, from 7 in 2012-13 to 9 in 2014-15;
5. Maintain and enhance the Quality Code(QC) requirements in all aspects of HE quality assurance systems;
6. Fully implement QC expectations for student engagement by September 2015.

4. STRATEGIC THEMES

The HE Strategy has been divided into four themes which have been identified as key priorities of the HE Strategy to provide further clarity and focus. These four Key themes are:

- Partnership working to enhance the curriculum;
- High quality curriculum and programmes that meet market demands;
- High quality learning experience and support that brings student success;
- Continual improvements in quality, standards, and learning enhancement.

4.1 Partnership working to enhance the curriculum

We will work collegiately and co-operatively with all partners to ensure that the HE curriculum is both relevant and fit for purpose for our students. It is crucial that the curriculum serves the objectives of Bolton College's Strategy, the Bolton Vision, and the needs of students.

We will strive to ensure that potential students make positive choices' regarding enrolling on relevant Bolton College programmes; and are also able to progress onto HE programmes that are meaningful to their career or aspirational choices/needs.

4.2 High quality curriculum and programmes that meet market demands

By providing a robust HE teaching learning and assessment Strategy; and robust processes, we will ensure that Bolton College will deliver a high quality curriculum. In order to ensure that the curriculum meets market demands, we will ensure that we engage with existing and potential employers for the purpose of ensuring that we respond to market changes, in addition to ensuring we provide high quality programmes that employers' value.

The Bolton College HE learning, teaching and assessment Strategy will aim to create a learning experience that is transformational through encouraging students to be more active in all aspects of their learning experience and empowering them to have an influence and shape developments and aspects of the student learning experience.

We will develop a partnership of mutuality and respect between students and staff: - we will take deliberate steps to engage students, both individually and collectively as partners to enhance their learning experience. We want to develop a community where students have a sense of belonging.

In developing the opportunities/mechanisms via the HE learning, teaching and assessment Strategy this will serve to create a culture that promotes and supports student engagement, develops students to be active partners in the learning experience (not just passive learners), and provide opportunities for students to influence their learning environment.

We will support our students throughout their study and develop “transition interventions” which aim to support students for achieving success at points across the years of study, when they may feel most vulnerable and may experience a lack of confidence in their academic attainment.

4.3 Continual improvements in quality, standards, and learning enhancement

We will develop a partnership of mutuality and collegiality between all partners, employers, staff, and students, engaged in HE provision. This way of working will enable a robust and rigorous monitoring of the quality, standards, and learning enhancement.

We will ensure that all strategies, policies, and processes are transparent, coherent, and fit for purpose. We will ensure that structures for monitoring are fit for purpose; and there will be continual and annual monitoring of all aspects of quality, standards, and learning enhancement. The processes put in place will ensure that we deliver high quality courses that can be positively benchmarked against comparable courses in the UK.

In line with the Quality Improvement Framework, quality assurance for HE is fully aligned to central quality processes in the college as described in the Quality Improvement Framework Key HE quality processes are fully embedded including self-assessment and improvement planning, monitoring of external examiner reports, quality audits, observation of teaching learning and assessment and the student voice. Our processes are reviewed annually to ensure they are fit for purpose and meet the needs of HE students.

5. REFERENCE POINTS

UK QAA Quality Code for Higher Education;
 Department for Business Innovation and Skills, White paper, Higher Education ‘Students at the Heart of the System (June 2011);
 BIS, ‘New Challenges New Chances’ (November 2011)
 Higher Education Academy Strategic Plan (2012- 2016);
 QAA “Teaching and learning: What students are saying “report (8.03.12);
 BIS Gov.: Student Charter group, Final report Jan 2012;
 Ofsted ‘Local accountability and opportunity in colleges’ March 2013
 DBIS/ DFE Rigour & Responsiveness 2013

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