

University of Bolton

Higher education institution

Inspection dates		25-28 February 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- From very low starting points students make good and sometimes excellent progress.
- Students thoroughly enjoy the Access course and receive good support which helps promote their well-being. They quickly gain in confidence and self-esteem and develop good skills, including the ability for independent study and high-quality research.
- Teaching and learning are good. Assessment practice is constructive and gives a clear indication of how students might improve their work and the grades achieved.
- Standards of work are high for the majority of students. Students receive detailed feedback to help them improve the quality of their written work.
- Resources are very good and students benefit greatly from working among undergraduates and in a university environment, which helps raise their aspirations.
- Senior managers and governors provide a very clear strategic direction, are knowledgeable and are committed to providing the best opportunities so that all students can succeed.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Although retention rates have improved in the current year, too many students leave before they have completed their course.
- In a minority of cases, teachers do not check learning for all students and do not use the information about students' abilities to inform teaching and learning.
- Target grades for improvement do not take sufficient account of what students are capable of.
- Data analysis is insufficiently detailed to inform management decisions at operational level.
- University systems to monitor the quality of teaching and learning do not sufficiently identify key strengths and areas for development.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve retention rates by:
 - implementing interview and enrolment procedures at course level for each subject
 - improving the guidance, including the printed information, so that all potential Access students are aware of the wider support available within the university
 - piloting a short bridging course to support students not yet ready for the full Access programme, especially those who have been out of education for some time and those for whom English is an additional language.
- Augment quality assurance arrangements by ensuring that data are analysed more systematically, especially at course level, to inform management decisions and improve student performance.
- Develop the performance review process linked to peer observation, teaching skills and research so that it is easier to identify strengths and areas for improvement more accurately.
- Develop teachers' confidence to challenge all students to achieve high grades and exceed the grades expected of them, through additional activities, variations in grouping and pairing of students during lessons, and setting and recording targets in tutorials related to the achievement of high grades.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outcomes for students require improvement. Overall, around two-thirds of students enrolled on the Access to Higher Education (Access) courses stay to the end of their programme. Of those students that remain, the vast majority achieve full or partial completion of their qualification and make good or excellent progress, usually from very low starting points. ▪ On the newly introduced sports studies course, results are excellent in 2012/13. An increasing proportion of students on the business management programme achieve well. Outcomes for the smaller number of students enrolled on the psychology and community studies course were low in 2012/13. Students' performance in psychology and health studies improved in 2012/13 but outcomes still require improvement. ▪ The university's core value of widening participation is exemplified extremely well through its Access provision because of the way it changes peoples' lives for the better. Students accepted on to the course come from a range of backgrounds; many have very low levels of self-esteem, and often a negative prior experience of education. The transformation into confident, articulate and ambitious students is inspiring. Students speak eloquently of the life-changing effect of their Access course. ▪ Managers are very aware of where performance needs to improve. Actions, including a more robust enrolment procedure on a few courses, are beginning to have a positive impact and are leading to improvements in achievement and retention in the current year. However, it remains a fact that a small but significant number of students, often with complex personal lives, leave the course, despite the best efforts of the university staff to prevent this. ▪ Managers review data for different groups of students, but the analysis of the data is sometimes insufficiently detailed and does not always lead to actions for improvement. The data scrutinised during inspection showed differences in the performance of males and females and between different minority ethnic groups, although there was no discernible pattern to these differences across the range of programmes. 	

- Teachers and tutors keep up-to-date attendance registers and senior managers monitor trends in students' absence effectively. Attendance rates are good for significant numbers of students. However, for many others, who face significant difficulties in their personal lives, attendance is more sporadic and this hinders their progress. Students' punctuality is sometimes poor but teachers tackle this promptly, especially when this has the potential to disrupt the rest of the students in the class.
- The standard of students' work is mostly good or excellent. For example, in sociology, students wrote perceptively relating the enlightenment period to Marx, Durkheim and Weber. Teachers' expectations of their students are high and most students rise to the challenge. However, for a few students, the level of work on a few modules, especially at the beginning of the course, is too hard or difficult to understand and puts them off.
- The provision for students to develop their English skills is good for those who receive it, but too few students, especially those for whom English is an additional language, attend the classes. Students use anti-plagiarism software confidently and this helps their understanding of the need for academic rigour in their written work. Students' use of the Harvard Referencing system is well established in all assignments. Mathematical skills' development is very good in business management but insufficiently integrated in other subjects.
- Progression to university, employment or training is good. A large proportion of students who complete their studies progress to higher education to pursue a first degree. Many Access students go on to achieve first-class honours. The number of students who started on the University of Bolton's Access course and are now studying for their master's degree or doctorate is impressive.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers are enthusiastic and committed to their students' success, inspiring most students to take a keen interest and to participate enthusiastically in their lessons. As a result, students are making at least good progress and more are staying to complete their studies. Students develop thorough subject knowledge as well as good skills in research and academic writing.
- Teachers introduce new material and resources that are current and capture students' interest. For example in a psychology lesson, students identified a memorable meal as a prelude to identifying and distinguishing between sensation and perception. Students benefit from the virtual learning environment to help further develop their knowledge and understanding between lessons.
- Teachers use a variety of activities to engage students' interests ranging from lectures and presentations to paired, group and individual exercises. This makes the learning interesting. In a few lessons a minority of students fail to take notes, answer questions or join in discussions and in these it is difficult for teachers to assess accurately the extent of learning that has taken place during a session.
- Many teachers have higher degrees and several are working towards doctoral awards. Teachers use both their extensive industrial experience and their academic backgrounds very effectively to enhance students' employability skills. External speakers complement courses and recently featured a visiting professor who developed special effects for the blockbuster films 'Gravity' and 'Inception'. Liberal pinches of praise motivate students to achieve and staff give this freely, along with considerable support in their own time.
- Students' written work is good and in a few cases very good. From early on in their programme students are confident to reference work correctly. They use a wide and varied range of resources, in particular primary sources, to develop knowledge and understanding of complex theories such as intellectual property and the consequences of unfair means.
- Staff give detailed feedback on assessed work. Teachers correct spelling and punctuation carefully and give supportive explanations where necessary. Students report that it helps them

to improve their knowledge and understanding, is challenging and motivates them to be aspirational and aim high.

- Students benefit from very good support to improve their English. Students rightly value the support they receive and they feel comfortable in openly requesting it. They report that the additional lessons are accessible and frequent, daily if necessary, and that it helps them not just with their course, but with their ability to gain meaningful employment and play a wider part in the local community. However, a few of those who would benefit from improving their English to enable them to complete research and write essays more easily do not attend.
- Tutorial arrangements are good. Dialogue during tutorials is robust and challenging, providing most students with clear guidance on what they need to do to make progress. However, teachers often set target grades based on what is required for progression to the next stage rather than what the student might be capable of.
- The university has good and well-used resources to advise and guide students who need social or personal support and help. Students are given very clear guidance about the workload involved on their courses. The emphasis on progression to higher education is strong. Undergraduates from the Access course report they are particularly well prepared for their degree studies; staff who teach on the university's undergraduate courses confirm this. However, the university's printed guides for students on Access courses are poor, particularly in relation to financial support which might be available.
- Initial assessment is appropriate and provides helpful information about students' support needs. However, teachers do not always use this information effectively when planning lessons or assessment. Students with specific learning needs receive a thorough assessment and appropriate support is organised promptly. Teachers provide good support for students with specialist needs such as dyslexia or visual impairment.
- Former Access students are superb ambassadors for the university, offering excellent informal support, especially in time management and ensuring a healthy work-life balance. They are prominent in the lives of both current Access students and those who become undergraduates who find their support invaluable in helping them to stay on track.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Teachers encourage students to make good use of their experiences of diverse backgrounds. For example, in one lesson a student pointed out that in rural Zimbabwe eating with forks was unusual and people would be more likely to associate a fork with gardening or used as a hair comb. The teacher skilfully handled the ensuing discussion celebrating cultural diversity.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The vice chancellor, governors and senior managers are ambitious and relentless in their pursuit of high-quality teaching and research-based provision for Access students. Widening participation and improving the quality of students' lives are intrinsic to the university's mission. Governors are highly accomplished and Access students benefit from their extensive specialist skills. They challenge and support the senior team in equal measure. Cohesive and committed course teams deliver effective operational management of the Access provision.
- All staff have supportive performance reviews that include targets for improvements in teaching and research activity. The learning enhancement and professional development unit delivers a plethora of development activities to help develop teaching, learning and assessment on the Access programme and teachers value this. However, feedback following observations of teaching is not specific or graded, and does not consistently report or reflect on the impact of teaching on students' learning and progress.
- Quality processes and procedures on the Access course are well developed and leaders, governors and managers have a realistic view of strengths and areas for improvement. In places the self-assessment report is insufficiently critical and the action plan does not contain enough detail on how to remedy all areas for improvement. The systematic analysis of data to inform

management decisions and improve students' performance lacks rigour. Course teams seek the views of students frequently through their representation on quality forums and committees; students receive up-to-date feedback through a live blog.

- Managers and course teams plan the Access courses very well through an accurate assessment of students' needs and interests. The university promotes social inclusion and meets community needs very well by encouraging schools and others, including Manchester City and Bolton Wanderers football teams and the rugby league World Cup teams, to make use of the excellent sport facilities.
- Access students benefit from very good and some outstanding resources within a higher-education environment. Learning spaces include state-of-the-art teaching and research facilities and a social learning zone with 24 hour access. Creative use of social media, blogs and wikis supports learning effectively. In a small minority of lessons the layout of the room inhibits the learning of a few students.
- Staff and students promote equality and diversity with a passion across the whole university campus, from Bolton to Beijing, and Access students benefit from this. Enlivening events celebrate the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the university town and have embraced Diwa, Sari and Rangole workshops. Students' faith, belief and spiritual development are nurtured through meditation and the multi-faith chaplaincy service. Data on the achievement of different groups of students are analysed to identify gaps in performance. However, managers and courses teams do not always analyse the data in sufficient depth for it to be helpful in identifying strengths and weaknesses of provision.
- Effective arrangements exist to ensure the safekeeping and well-being of students. Greater Manchester Fire Brigade provides real-world learning experiences on the danger of domestic fires. Comprehensive audits of specific hazards and safety procedures relating to materials, equipment and techniques as well as detailed risk assessments are completed routinely. The university also meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding vulnerable adults.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

University of Bolton

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A
Outcomes for learners	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A	N/A
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A

Provider details

University of Bolton								
Type of provider	Higher education institution							
Age range of learners	19+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 74							
	Part-time:69							
Vice Chancellor	Professor George Holmes							
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected							
Website address	http://www.bolton.ac.uk							
Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	74	N/A	N/A
Part-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	69	N/A	N/A
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Number of community learners	N/A							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							

Contextual information

The University of Bolton is located just on the edge of Bolton in Lancashire. The university offers a wide range of undergraduate and post-graduate courses at higher education level and one further education course, Access to Higher Education (Access), offered in four subject combinations. The Access course represents 0.1% of the whole university provision. All students recruited onto the courses are adults and a significant proportion has no previous qualifications or recent educational experience. A significant minority of students have very complex personal issues. Most students enrolled on the Access course come from the local area or international locations.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Josephine Nowacki HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the Director of the Business School, as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews to gather the views of learners and other stakeholders and these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision. No subject areas were graded.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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