

# Inspection of University of Bolton

Inspection dates: 14 to 17 May 2024

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

---

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Apprenticeships **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

## Information about this provider

The University of Bolton provides higher-level apprenticeships at levels 5, 6 and 7. At the time of the inspection, there were just over 900 apprentices in learning. Around a third of apprentices study at level 5. There are over 200 enrolled on the nursing associate standard and smaller cohorts on assistant practitioner and dental technician. Over 500 apprentices study level 6 apprenticeships. The largest cohort includes around 250 registered nurse degree apprentices and over 100 operating department practitioners. Provision at level 6 also includes senior and head of facilities management, electrical or electronic technical support engineer and digital and technology solutions professional. Smaller numbers are enrolled at level 7. The largest apprenticeship at this level is the advanced clinical practitioner with 65 apprentices. Almost all apprentices are adults. Most are from the north west of England, but many are from locations across the UK. Around 150 apprentices attend satellite sites in Yorkshire and Devon.

## **What is it like to be a learner with this provider?**

Apprentices enjoy their experience at university. They acquire valuable knowledge, skills and behaviours. Employers appreciate the significant contribution apprentices make to their workforce. Nursing associate apprentices are swiftly able to apply their knowledge when they assess patients. They apply their critical thinking and know when they need to escalate concerns to senior clinical staff. Senior leaders in health learn about managing change. They put this into practice by improving aspects of specialist doctor job planning. Electrical or electronic technical support engineer apprentices, who work for an NHS trust, design tests to detect wiring faults on x-ray scanners. Employers recognise that this project is hugely beneficial as it has the potential to reduce machine downtime and help treat more patients.

Apprentices benefit from highly relevant curriculums. Employers actively contribute to the content, design and, in some instances, the teaching of the curriculum. On the operating department practitioner apprenticeship, NHS employers provide apprentices with training on practical tasks, such as airway management skills. Apprentices on the electrical or electronic technical support engineer apprenticeship can study optional modules about renewable energies, introduced at the request of an international employer. This ensures they maintain currency and relevance.

Most apprentices appreciate the high standard of education and training they receive. They enjoy being taught by experienced vocational experts. Apprentices in engineering do not find the lectures they attend to be sufficiently engaging and, as a result, they find it difficult to learn.

Lecturers successfully develop apprentices' character, resilience and their wider professional skills. Lecturers introduce advanced clinical practitioner apprentices to Schwartz Rounds to support their health and well-being. This allows apprentices to explore the challenges and rewards that are intrinsic to providing care. Lecturers create a calm and focused learning environment, putting on additional sessions to help apprentices improve their performance to benefit themselves and their team. Apprentices attend regularly and are punctual.

Apprentices know how to keep themselves and others safe when at university and in the workplace.

## **What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leaders are passionate about providing specialist apprenticeships that benefit the communities they serve. They offer pathways to enhanced career opportunities that apprentices may not be able to access via traditional routes. Leaders align their provision to high-priority areas such as healthcare, digital and engineering. They use information from their industry advisory board and the local skills improvement plan to understand industry requirements and fill skills gaps.

Lecturers sequence curriculums effectively so that apprentices can develop the

knowledge and skills they need. Nursing associate apprentices initially learn about the key principles of professional practice, then develop their communication skills and academic writing. This provides the foundation knowledge they need before they move on to more complex components such as anatomy and physiology, medicines management and acute care. Likewise, senior leaders start by developing their analytical and critical skills before they consider how to motivate and inspire teams and then develop their own strategic business proposal.

Lecturers have specialist knowledge and a wealth of academic and vocational experience. Teaching staff have completed, or are in the process of completing, teaching qualifications. They are also registered with relevant professional bodies. Apprentices have access to industry-standard learning resources. These include high-fidelity mannequins, medical simulation suites and anaesthetic machines.

Most lecturers use an effective range of teaching strategies to motivate apprentices and to help them grasp key concepts. They use discussions, simulations and interactive digital tools. Apprentices readily recall learning from previous modules and place this in new contexts. For example, nursing associates study community health and link this to their own practice and the implementation of health promotion strategies such as smoking cessation and well-being advice.

On a few apprenticeships, lectures are not sufficiently engaging. Engineering apprentices find teaching too slow paced and lacking in interaction. In some instances, lecturers do not use questioning effectively to check apprentices' understanding carefully before they move on to a new topic. Lecturers rely on closed questions and accept superficial responses from apprentices.

Lecturers successfully integrate the development of apprentices' English, mathematics and digital skills. Apprentices readily undertake drug calculations, measure body weight and calculate accurate swab weight. Senior leader apprentices use analytics to reinforce their discussions around key topics such as workforce well-being. Engineering apprentices learn to use computer-aided design software and find this useful when they complete design projects at work.

Leaders ensure that on most apprenticeships, on- and off-the-job training is effectively coordinated. They share planners with employers to explain when topics are taught so that employers can provide the most suitable placement and help apprentices readily apply their learning. Apprentices, work-based trainers and employers actively participate in progress reviews. However, on the advanced clinical practitioner apprenticeship, staff do not use reviews effectively to monitor apprentices' progress or to coordinate their training. The skills taught on the course are not always contextualised in mental health practice.

Most lecturers make use of a variety of effective assessment tools to evaluate apprentices' learning. They provide rich feedback on how apprentices meet the learning outcomes and provide developmental guidance to help them further develop their work. On a couple of apprenticeships, apprentices are unclear about how they will be assessed. Operating department practitioners and facilities

management apprentices do not receive the information they need regarding workload and assessment schedules in a timely manner. Therefore, apprentices struggle to plan and manage their workload. On a few engineering apprenticeships, lecturers do not provide apprentices with feedback on their work quickly enough. Therefore, apprentices cannot fully consolidate their learning and make rapid progress.

Apprentices' work meets the requirements of their apprenticeship and is often of a very high standard. Apprentices achieve well, particularly those on level 5 and level 7 apprenticeships. Last year, all healthcare assistant practitioners and advanced clinical practitioners achieved merits and distinctions. However, apprentices with additional learning needs achieved less well than their peers. Leaders now monitor the progress of apprentices more carefully and intervene swiftly to ensure they are successful.

Leaders and lecturers ensure that apprentices are prepared for their next steps. Most apprentices remain in employment immediately after completing their apprenticeship, a few are promoted during their apprenticeship. So far, just over two-thirds of advanced clinical practitioner apprentices have been promoted to more senior positions.

Leaders ensure that most apprentices benefit from effective careers advice and guidance. Apprentices discuss their career options and receive regular communications about career planning and publishing their work. Senior leader apprentices understand that they can complete a Master's or a PhD. Engineering apprentices have all had discussions about becoming chartered engineers and have attended a presentation from the Institute of Engineering and Technology.

Leaders have created a well-planned and varied curriculum to support apprentices' personal development. Nursing associate apprentices have been nominated for a community award for the support they give teaching assistants who work with children with complex needs. Lecturers and work-based trainers develop apprentices' understanding of fundamental British values and equality and diversity effectively. These themes are revisited during lessons and progress reviews. Most apprentices confidently apply these values to their professional roles. Lecturers ensure most apprentices have a broad understanding of radicalisation and extremism.

Leaders have made significant changes to the management of apprenticeship provision and have transformed the culture. Leaders recognise the importance of professional development for lecturers. They have created a centre for higher education research and practice to focus on the quality and improvement of teaching. Leaders promote fellowship of the higher education academy and higher-level study. They have established a rigorous observation process linked to appraisal and continuous improvement to ensure that lecturers routinely benefit from bespoke action plans and development activities.

Leaders have recently established effective quality assurance and improvement processes to secure an accurate oversight of the quality of training that apprentices

receive. Leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and take swift incisive actions to bring about improvements in underperforming areas. Leaders have developed a culture of continuous improvement across the organisation and place apprentices' experience, development and progress first.

Governance arrangements are increasingly effective. Governors have extensive knowledge and experience of education and training. Senior leaders provide governors with insightful reports on key performance indicators. Governors challenge and support senior leaders to bring about sustainable improvements.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

### **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Ensure apprentices experience a consistently high standard of teaching through lecturers providing stimulating lectures and carefully checking apprentices' learning.
- Improve the organisation and quality of assessment and feedback on a minority of apprenticeships so apprentices can manage their workload effectively and know what they need to do to improve.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	133794
<b>Address</b>	Deane Road Bolton BL3 5AB
<b>Contact number</b>	01204528851
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.bolton.ac.uk">www.bolton.ac.uk</a>
<b>President and vice-chancellor</b>	Professor George Holmes
<b>Provider type</b>	Higher education institution
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	29 January 2020
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	None

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the acting head of apprenticeships and lead for the centre of higher education research and practice, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

### Inspection team

Helen Whelan, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Alastair Mollon	His Majesty's Inspector
Angus Forsyth	Ofsted Inspector
Victoria Wickington	Ofsted Inspector
Liz Greenhalgh	Ofsted Inspector
Scott Cubitt	Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2024