Non-Prescribed Higher Education (HE) Retention Strategy

2021-22

Introduction

Bolton College recognises and values the cultural, social and ethnic diversity reflected in our students and staff. As a result, we treat all with respect and dignity, and seek to create a positive learning and working environment.

1. Bolton College Access and Participation Statement, HE Strategy and Non-Prescribed HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy are built around the vision 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. In addition, the Non-Prescribed HE Student Enhancement Framework seeks to engage with and support our students in all aspects of the student experience at college. The retention and support of our students is a demonstration of our student focus and our mission to ensure their academic success. All staff will be committed to engage with students on a variety of levels to facilitate their academic success and their social well-being.

2. Our definition of retention includes withdrawal and academic progression/failure but our focus is on retaining and supporting all of our students in order that they can achieve their full potential.

3. Bolton College will provide an individualised and inclusive experience by providing a personalised approach to supporting our students both academically and in other ways.

4. The Non-Prescribed HE Student Enhancement Framework contains key activities that seek to enhance the student experience in their learning opportunities and activities in addition to ensuring that all possible activities are embedded in order to achieve retention of students throughout their time on their chosen course.

N. B. The Non-Prescribed HE Retention Strategy should be read in conjunction with the Non-Prescribed HE Student Enhancement Framework.

Key periods in the student journey

5. The College has identified the following key periods in the student journey as affecting student retention:

- Pre-entry
- Introduction and Induction to the College and the course
- Initial engagement – defined here as introduction to the academic elements of the student experience
- Early indications of disengagement/dissatisfaction
- Early indications of academic issues

6. We are, of course, aware that in addition to factors associated with the student journey, students may experience a range of personal and social issues which impact on their ability to engage with their course and to continue with their course. The Non-Prescribed HE Student Enhancement Framework activities will play a significant role in ensuring that students are able to participate fully in their learning experience and life of the College.

Pre-entry

7. In order to assist potential students in selecting the most appropriate course for their interests, aims and objectives we will assure the quality and accuracy of all information regarding our academic programmes of study.

8. We will offer applicants a personalised service from the point of application, covering academic, social and financial dimensions of their choices.

9. We will endeavour to provide pre-induction events to support student transition: these can incorporate tours of the College and College facilities; targeted events for potential students; meet and greet by course tutors and/or key student services personnel; and interview activities.

Induction

10. We consider induction to be a continual development process throughout the student journey.

11. We will proactively encourage and support new students in their engagement and involvement in the life of the College through departmental events and activities, and the central induction processes.

12. We have a Non-Prescribed HE standardised induction processes across the College so that all students enjoy high standards of support.

13. Academic departments and other student facing services will assess students' academic and personal needs proactively. This may include using academic assessment tools, skills inventories, alongside the deeper integration of social, pastoral and academic spheres.

14. Students will have a wide range of opportunities to gain the academic and transferable skills necessary for their programmes and chosen careers. We will take proactive steps to embed study and academic related skills in curriculum design and provide opportunities for skills development.

Initial Engagement: Early Indications of Disengagement/Dissatisfaction

15. We recognise that some students may wish to change their programme of study, and we will provide appropriate support and advice to facilitate any changes. Where appropriate the advice will focus on retaining students to the institution.

16. We will strengthen the personal tutor support and ensure that personal tutors utilise, where appropriate, other support from student facing services.

17. We will strengthen our approach to attendance monitoring by requiring the Course Leader and Curriculum Leader to monitor attendance on a weekly basis and to ensure evidence of engagement with a student (deemed to have issues of disengagement) is recorded and action taken.

18. We will require Course Leaders/Curriculum leaders to identify, track and monitor the progress of students from under-represented and/or WP groups through all phases of their involvement with the College: before induction, during their programme of study and, where possible, after completion of their course. This data will be included within each course Programme Plan.

Initial Engagement: Early Indications of Academic Problems

19. We recognise the importance of consistent and constructive early feedback. We will support those students underperforming in assessments throughout their course, but with a particular emphasis on first assignment submissions.

20. We will provide early formative assessment tasks and embed feedback practices which support target setting. These may help to alleviate concerns around assessment and the transition between course levels.

21. We will proactively monitor students vulnerable to academic underachievement to ensure they receive appropriate support when they require it. The College will monitor retention and student success at course level via the Programme Plan, and at College level via the Performance Enhancement Review.

22. We will encourage individual students and areas to engage with, and utilise, all appropriate academic and study skills resources.

Quality of the 'Student Experience'

23. The provision of a high quality student experience is vital to the success of the College. We support a range of mechanisms to identify and address issues of concern to students including: student rep system, course committees, Prescribed and Non-Prescribed HE Committee, Prescribed and Non-Prescribed HE Quality Assurance Committee, Prescribed and Non-Prescribed HE Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Group, internal student surveys, the complaints procedure, College support services.

24. We will annually monitor student satisfaction across a range of component parts of the overall 'student experience' from internal Module Evaluation surveys, College staff 'Walkthroughs', and course committees. We will use the findings to identify and address areas of lower satisfaction. Programme Plans and Meld actions will be included in the monitoring process annually.

Implementation of the Non-Prescribed HE Student Enhancement Framework

25. The Framework has a number of activities that both tutors and students will engage with. The completed activities will be monitored and evaluated and outcomes/findings will be integrated into each Programme Plan. Each programme Plan will also give an indication of attrition rates.

Reference Points:

- Bolton College HE Strategy
- Bolton College Access and Participation Statement
- Non-Prescribed HE Learning, Teaching, and Assessment Strategy
- Non-Prescribed HE Student Enhancement Framework (incorporating the learner journey; student engagement; student success; and enhancing learning, teaching, and assessment)
- Non-Prescribed HE Admissions Policy