



**Higher Level 4/5 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy**  
**2024-25**

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## **1. CONTEXT**

As a widening participation college with a diverse student body, Bolton College is one of the most socially inclusive further education institutions in England. We have a long tradition and commitment to access and widening participation. Our student body is diverse and most come to us with non-traditional entry qualifications and from non-traditional entry backgrounds.

Bolton College Higher Level 4/5 provision has many challenges including, student attrition, student engagement, (especially if they are part-time students with work and family commitments), and non-traditional entry students who have the opportunity to access Higher Level 4/5 courses.

It is against this institutional context that the learning, teaching and assessment strategy has been developed to transform and enhance our learning and teaching environment by focussing on student success and student engagement.

This document complements the wider college teaching, learning and assessment strategy, with additional objectives that fulfil the requirements and indicators of the Office for Students (OfS), QAA Quality Code, and the Advance HE learning, teaching and assessment initiatives.

## **2. UNDERPINNING PRINCIPLES**

The key to the development and implementation of any learning, teaching and assessment strategy is ensuring that we develop, implement, monitor and are assured, that we are offering the best possible student learning experience for all our students which support all students to reach their full potential and become confident independent lifelong learners.

It is critical that Bolton College implements a Higher Level 4/5 learning, teaching and assessment strategy that is transformational, motivational and meaningful to both students and staff and places the student at the heart of the strategy.

Bolton College Higher Level 4/5 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy will serve to focus our thinking towards developing a culture which: engages students both individually and collectively as partners to enhance their learning and the learning environment; inspires students to participate in active learning, and embraces student success within the context of a widening participation and inclusive College.

We will need to be clear about what we are offering and communicate this to our students and manage their expectations. We will seek to develop a culture of partnership with our students, engender a community atmosphere and provide a nurturing environment which enables them to become fully engaged with the Higher Level 4/5 aspect of the college and become confident and independent lifelong learners.

## **3. HIGHER LEVEL 4/5 LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGY**

The Higher Level 4/5 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy aims to enhance the student learning experience through quality enhancement in learning and teaching and through supporting and developing tutors in the scholarship and practice of teaching and learning.

The strategy will serve to challenge and to raise the expectation of both staff and students in the quality of learning and teaching; and will reinforce a continuous improvement agenda.

### 3.1 AIMS

Bolton College Higher Level 4/5 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy will aim to:

- Provide a high quality learning experience that values students as active partners in learning, supports student success and develops academic excellence in learning and teaching.

### 3.2 OBJECTIVES

**The Higher Level 4/5 Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategic key objectives are to develop and create a culture of partnership and mutual respect between staff and students in the learning experience by:**

- providing opportunities for students to be more engaged and be able to influence and shape the learning environment and education experience
- improving existing student feedback mechanisms and approaches, which will serve to inform the enhancement of the learning experience
- developing initiatives and activities which support student engagement and student empowerment in the learning experience

**To support students and student success throughout their period of study through a student life cycle approach by:**

- constantly developing systems which identify students who are 'at risk' and putting procedures in place which determines actions for follow up and intervention
- further developing a student induction model that includes academic/social integration actions that continue throughout the student's time of study
- further developing 'transition interventions' which aim to support students achieving success, at points across their time of study, where it is recognised that students may be feeling most vulnerable and lacking in confidence in their academic and practical application ability/attainment

**To develop curriculum design and assessment which is inspiring, relevant and practical by:**

- developing and implementing a portfolio of a Higher Level 4/5 curriculum which embeds the Bolton College vision and values of: employability and professional development, environmental sustainability and social and ethical responsibility
- developing an approach to assessment which emphasises 'assessment for learning' with formative assessment and constructive assessment feedback being at the heart of the learning experience
- developing innovative flexible methods of delivery and the increased use of technology enabled learning

**To engender a learning and teaching professional development culture where all staff, whose role is supporting Higher Level 4/5 learning, are committed to the enhancement and development of their learning and teaching practice and their own on-going professional development by:**

- developing a culture that enables staff to engage with staff development activities at College and externally; to be familiar with the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) in teaching and supporting learning and is recognised by Advance HE
- strengthening a culture that enables staff to engage in continuing professional development via in-house staff development activities
- strengthening and embedding sharing good practice activities in annual and quarterly staff development activities

### **3.3 KEY OUTCOMES**

#### **Key Outcomes:**

- A revised Higher Level 4/5 'learner journey' framework which informs Induction and transition interventions to support student success
- A strengthened 'student engagement' framework with a planned scheme of initiatives and activities to support student engagement and empowerment in the learning experience
- A strengthened professional peer review of practice procedure that includes peer observation, and peer sharing
- A strengthened personal tutoring procedure to support the enhancement of the role of the personal tutor in supporting students at risk, and student engagement and feedback events
- A revised attendance and monitoring procedure to support the student life cycle
- Increased use of innovative blended learning approaches to teaching, learning and assessment

#### **Key performance indicators:**

- Improved student attrition rates and student success/ attainment: e.g. retention, 'drop-out' rates, achievement indicators
- Student engagement in course surveys

#### **4. STRATEGIC THEMES:**

**The Higher Level 4/5 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy has been divided into four themes which have been identified as key priorities of the strategy to provide further clarity and focus. These four Key themes are:**

- Student engagement and empowering the learner
- Assessment for learning
- Supporting student success
- Academic excellence in learning, teaching and assessment

##### **4.1 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERING THE LEARNER**

Bolton College Higher Level 4/5 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy aims 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, mutuality 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.

We will proactively seek student feedback and participation in internal student satisfaction surveys which will inform the enhancement of the learning experience. We will ensure that we communicate the outcomes to students and report on the actions which have been taken and how the student feedback has led to enhancements in teaching and learning.

We will provide structured, flexible and regular opportunities for student feedback which will include 'face to face' and technology assisted processes e.g. a student engagement and feedback start of course feedback via the formal student induction process, module evaluations, regular one-to-one personal tutorials; and an annual end of year student survey.

In developing the opportunities/mechanisms above, 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.

##### **4.2 ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING**

The Higher Level 4/5 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy will encourage learning and teaching practice which is inspiring, relevant and practical.

All types of learning must be appropriately and formally assessed and it is important that the summative assessments are designed to test whether the particular learning outcomes have been achieved. However, assessment strategies that have an emphasis on supporting student learning, as well as measuring achievement of academic standards can improve the student learning experience and student success.

The Higher Level 4/5 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy wishes to emphasise the value of 'assessment **for** learning', as emphasised by Advance HE. We will expect all Higher Level 4 courses to adopt learning, teaching and assessment strategies and for tutors to demonstrate practice, which embrace and evidence this approach.

Emphasis will be placed on formative assessment, innovative and creative assessment design which, inspires challenges and motivates the learner to fully engage with the learning opportunities presented through assessment and not to take a wholly 'utilitarian' approach to assessment.

Students will be encouraged to understand, recognise and value the learning that takes place in undertaking all forms of assessment and will be provided with clear guidance in relation to meeting the assessment criteria and the grading of assessments.

We aim to encourage assessment design which best guards against opportunities for student malpractice and develop mechanisms that support the authentication of a student's work.

**Assessment feedback** is critical to the development of an 'assessment for learning' approach and all feedback will be timely and provide a basis for constructive feedback and guidance to further inform the expectations for student achievement and success.

Diverse forms of formative and summative assessment feedback methods will be expected to be employed across the programme / module e.g. initial verbal group feedback, individual tutorial feedback opportunities, written feedback which includes academic advice on how the student could further enhance their attainment in subsequent assessment submissions.

The Office for Students (OfS) report 'Assessment practices in English higher education providers: Spelling, punctuation and grammar' 2021, highlights the importance of spelling, punctuation and grammar in enabling a student to be academically proficient and employment ready. The OfS state:

*7a. The OfS has an interest in this issue for several reasons: a. Assessment is part of the learning process for students and delivers pedagogical benefits. If it is done poorly, or not at all, students lose out on the educational development provided by effective assessment.*

*7b. Accurate and effective spelling, punctuation and grammar matter from an academic perspective. Wherever a discipline requires analysis, effective communication is critical if students are to demonstrate an ability to engage with and convey complex arguments. This cannot be done without technically proficient use of sentence and paragraph structure, syntax, and other features of language.*

*7d. Employers rely on the qualifications awarded to students to ensure that potential employees have the capabilities they need. If graduates are not proficient in the use of English, and so are unable to communicate effectively in writing, then employers must either recruit from a smaller pool, spend time and money training graduates in basic written English, or operate with a less capable workforce. There is some evidence to suggest employers are struggling to recruit students with the right skills. (A 2019 survey by the Confederation of British Industry found that a quarter of respondents were dissatisfied with the literacy and numeracy skills of young people (see <https://www.cbi.org.uk/articles/education-and-learning-for-the-modern-world/>).*

All assessments, both formative and summative, of student work incorporates assessment of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

## **4.3 SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS**

### **4.3.1 Student 'Learner Journey' Approach: Transition Interventions**

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.

Adopting a 'learner journey' approach, and pre-entry engagement / interventions will be designed to ensure that new students fully appreciate the demands of studying a Higher Level 4 course before enrolment e.g. Invitations for applicants to visit the college and speak with course leader and staff to gain information and receive advice; student induction programme designed to familiarise students with the college and the course; current student peer links; personal tutor

meetings; learning materials on line; clear aims and objectives for being successful in assessments.

Diagnostic approaches will be adopted to identify academic/study skills ability and support put in place at an early stage of the learner journey life cycle; this will be part of the induction process.

The induction process will be reviewed and developed to reflect a Higher Level 4 student learning journey intervention model. 'Orientation/Induction' processes will continue throughout the students' time of study. The principles underpinning the Induction cycle will be to: aim to inform, support and prepare students for the next stage of study, so that they feel supported, confident and prepared to continue with their learning journey.

#### **4.3.2 Identifying students at risk and providing support**

Staff will monitor students who may be 'at risk' from success in their studies e.g. non-attendance of classes and work-based experience, lack of engagement with Moodle, and learning resources placed on Moodle, non-submission of assessments, low achievement in summative assessment.

It is necessary to develop an approach which supports students who have been identified at risk and to take action/make the necessary interventions. This may be undertaken by the personal tutor /module tutor/ or another, and each course leader will take measures, to state clearly in the student programme handbook, how they will support students' who are having difficulties in their studies.

### **4.4 ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE IN LEARNING AND TEACHING**

#### **4.4.1 Developing our learning and teaching community**

The Higher Level 4/5 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy will seek to strive for excellence and innovation in learning and teaching. We will develop our learning and teaching community of practice and enquiry across the Higher Level 4/5 provision which engages with innovation and research to inform teaching practice. We will provide opportunities for sharing best practice in learning and teaching and highlight new and innovative ways to engage and meet the diverse needs of students.

This will be achieved through: Staff development workshops and activities that include the sharing of good practice and innovation; and learning, teaching and assessment staff development sessions, via the HE Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Group, for all staff who deliver Higher Level 4/5 courses and modules. Staff will be encouraged to take advantage of any learning and teaching staff development opportunities in-house, externally, or at the University of Bolton and Advance HE conferences.

#### **4.4.2 Academic Professional Development**

We aim to engender a learning and teaching professional development culture where all staff whose role is supporting learning are committed to the enhancement and development of their learning and teaching practice and their own on-going professional development.

All staff who teach on Higher Level 4/5 courses will be expected to have a teaching qualification and we expect those staff that do not to undertake a teaching qualification.

We will enhance the college peer observation process via the BLUE process and sharing of good practice.

We will introduce, via staff development workshops, opportunities for staff to share pedagogic research and / or discipline-based research that informs their teaching and learning; and to keep abreast of developments related to the college HE provision (e.g. strategies, policies, procedures).



We will encourage and support Higher Level 4/5 tutors to submit a portfolio to Advance HE in order to gain Fellowship status.