

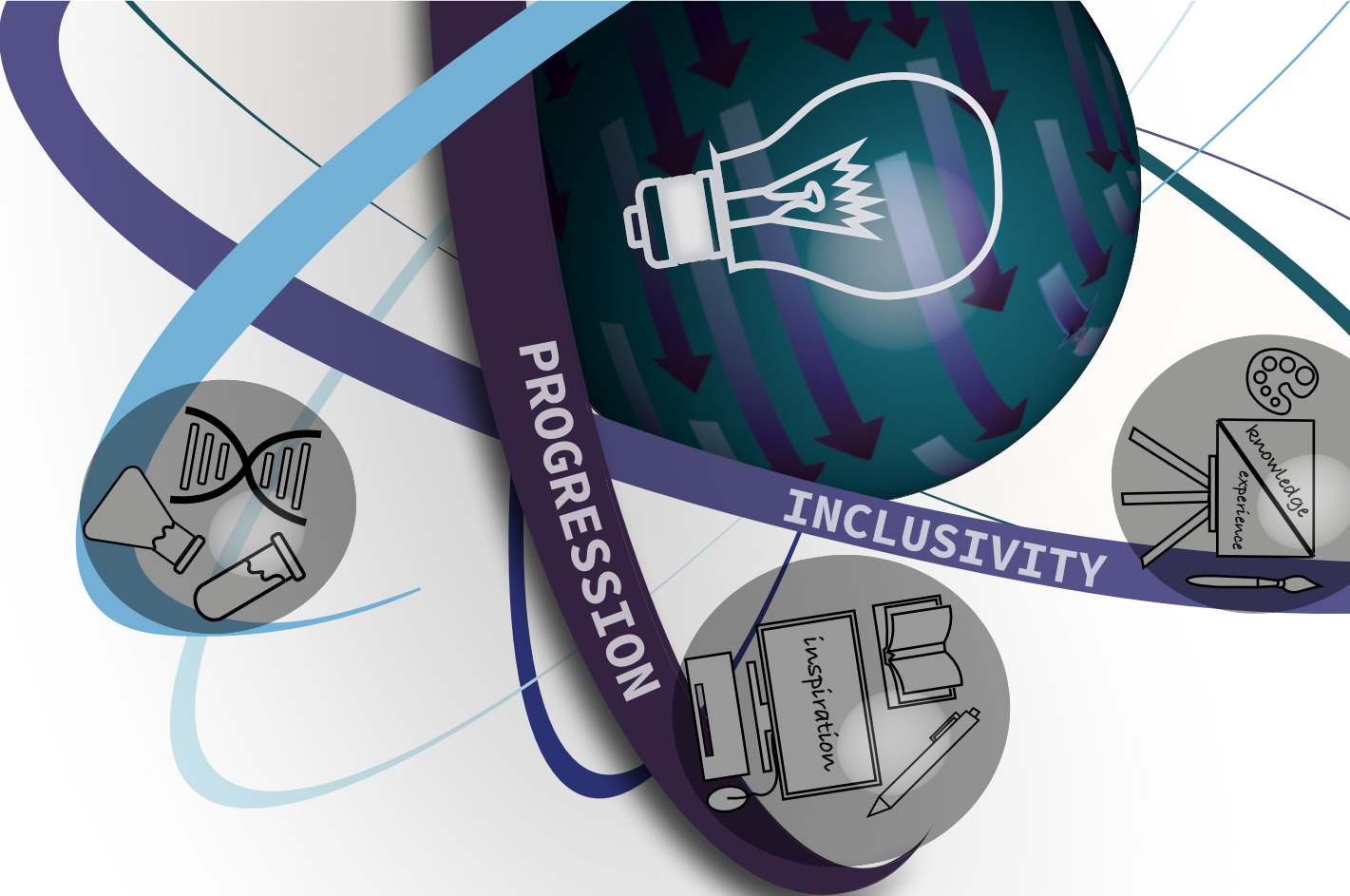


# Guiding Principles to Inform the Successful Progression of BTEC Students into Higher Education

National Education Opportunities Network (NEON)  
'Supporting BTEC Students Working Group'



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Ismail is studying at Sunderland College for a Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Extended Diploma in Art and Design and is specialising in graphics.



## Foreword from Dr Graeme Atherton (Director, NEON)

It is crucial that learners from all backgrounds are able to progress to higher education (HE) through a range of different routes. This report outlines the importance of the BTEC qualification as a mechanism to enable widening access to higher education and how learners undertaking the qualification are supported in considering HE progression. It is especially important that the role of BTECs in widening access to higher education work is fully understood at this time. The present government is placing renewed emphasis on vocational routes into higher learning and addressing perceived gaps in technical skills areas. In doing this they are seeking to construct new pathways into and through higher education that correspond with these goals. This commitment to strengthening vocational routes should be supported, but it is vital that they build on what exists. BTECs offer a proven route into higher education for many learners, providing them with a foundation for success upon entry, and these qualifications will be a key part of the landscape going forward. For this to happen however, as the contributions in the report emphasise, higher education institutions themselves also need to better understand the role BTECs play in facilitating widening access and success.

NEON will continue to work with Pearson and others to support the development of routes into higher education that meet the needs of all learners and advance our understanding of the role of BTECs. As the professional organisation for widening access to higher education in the UK, with over 100 organisations as members, it is vital that we support the development of this agenda.

I would like to thank Pearson for their contribution to the Supporting BTEC Students Working Group and, on behalf of our members, I would also like to thank the Chair and Vice Chairs of the group for putting this publication together.

**Dr. Graeme Atherton**

Director, National Education Opportunities Network (NEON)

Note that where the term 'learner' is used, this usually refers to those who are pre-entry to higher education, whilst the term 'student' usually applies to those who are in higher education.

# Introduction from Pearson

Pearson is a global learning company with more than 22,500 employees operating in 70 countries. We provide content, assessment and digital services to learners, educational institutions, employers, governments and other partners across the world. We are committed to helping equip learners with the skills they need to enhance their employability prospects and to succeed in the changing world of work. We believe that wherever learning flourishes, so do people. The qualifications that we provide in the UK include GCSEs and AS/A levels under the Edexcel brand and vocational qualifications under the BTEC brand. We also provide international equivalents of these qualifications for use in overseas schools and colleges.

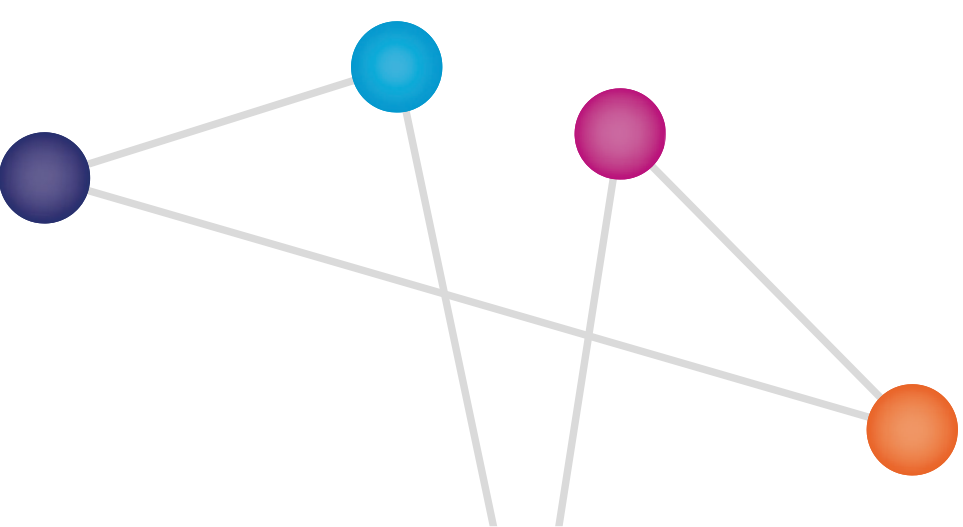
Over 200,000 learners each year take a level 3 BTEC National qualification. In recent years, there has been a big increase in the proportion of these learners progressing to university and now around half of them do so. In 2008, 13% of university students had taken a BTEC, but now nearly 1 in 4 learners enter university each year with a BTEC qualification. Of those, around two-thirds have taken a post-16 study programme consisting solely of BTEC while the other one-third have taken a mixed programme of BTEC and A levels. BTEC learners come from the full range of socio-economic and ethnic

backgrounds. However, the proportion coming from the lower socio-economic groups and from BAME backgrounds is significantly higher than for learners taking A level only programmes.

Pearson has close links to the higher education sector, particularly admissions departments. Our engagement has taken the form of email communications but also of visits, with well over 100 universities having been visited in recent years, some on more than one occasion. We keep them informed of all of the changes to qualifications. This has been particularly important in the case of the BTEC Level 3 Nationals, which have undergone considerable changes in the last few years, and this has led to implications for entry requirements for some degree programmes. The changes have led to significantly fewer learners achieving the top grades. Most degree programmes have entry requirements that are equivalent to those for A level learners in terms of UCAS points equivalence. However, some selective courses require higher grades for BTEC than for A level learners and so we are trying to encourage them to have different entry requirements for the reformed versions of the BTEC Nationals. Some courses now have them, but there is still a way to go to persuade all to do so.

We are also interested in improving the figures of retention and success of BTEC learners on their degree programmes. We have been involved in a number of higher education working groups to help to support the transition on BTEC learners into higher education. For this reason, we are very happy to be involved in the NEON Supporting BTEC Students Working Group. We are pleased that it covers all stages of support, including outreach work, fair admissions policies, transition to higher education and during their studies.

We are privileged to work with such a dedicated group and thank them for giving up their time to support the progression of BTEC learners, many of whom come from non-traditional backgrounds.



# An introduction to our 'Guiding Principles'

## Chris Bayes (Lancaster University) – Chair of NEON's 'Supporting BTEC Students Working Group'

Following a successful initial meeting held in London in September 2018, it was clear there was an appetite for a national group to investigate how academics and Widening Participation (WP) practitioners could work together support BTEC students across the 'Student Lifecycle'. The work of WP practitioners has traditionally supported learners from underrepresented backgrounds in the process of applying to study within higher education. In recent years, greater emphasis has been placed on supporting learners from these backgrounds, during their transition to study in higher education and in terms of supporting their progression and success beyond this. A visual representation of a Student Lifecycle approach is included below.

Within our initial meeting we had discussed how showcasing evidence informed practice was something we wanted to achieve. Over the course of the following year, as the group developed, we invited guest speakers from across the sector to share their experiences of working with BTEC students, and began to develop ideas around producing a set of 'guiding principles', which could act as a guide for WP practitioners when supporting BTEC students.

In November 2019, Chris Bayes (Group Chair) and Rebecca Sykes (Group Vice-Chair) co-convened a NEON Access Academy event in Manchester entitled 'Engaging BTEC students to succeed in higher education'. We used feedback from this event to further shape our thinking and have now developed the following guiding principles:

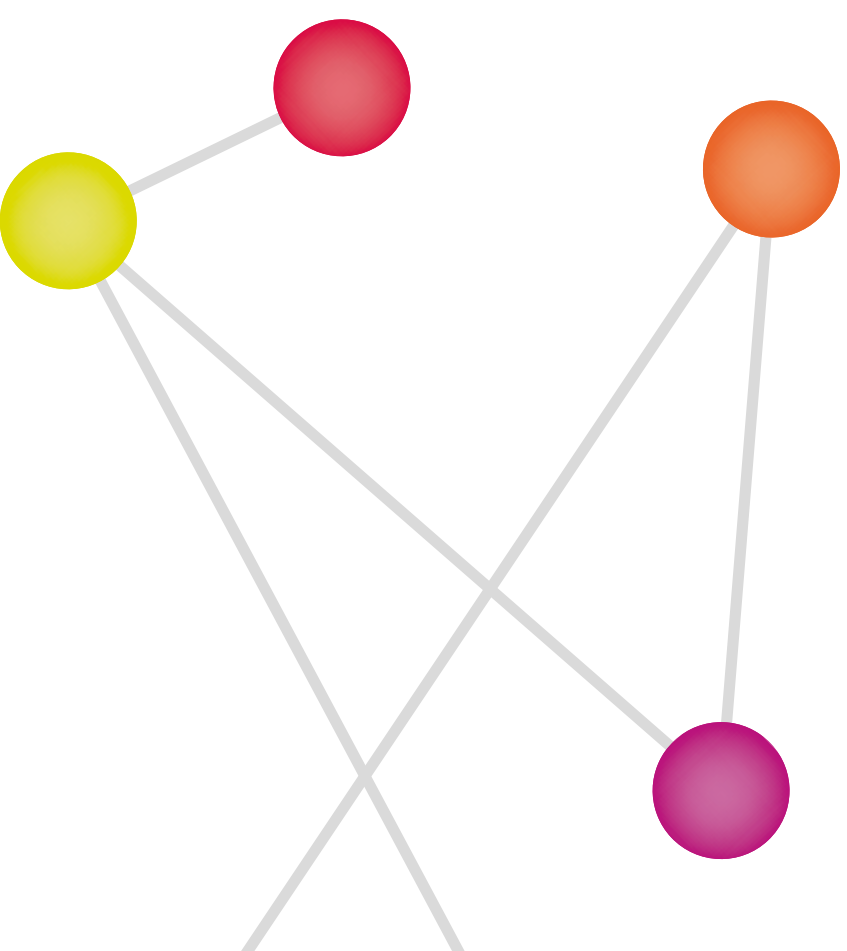
- ✓ Championing fair higher education admissions practices for BTEC learners.
- ✓ Conducting meaningful outreach activity with BTEC learners in schools and colleges.
- ✓ Supporting the transition and student success of BTEC students in higher education.
- ✓ Understanding the needs of BTEC students through engagement with research.

Over the course of the next few pages, we have collated several articles based on each of these principles. We expect and hope that colleagues will find these useful when shaping future practice.

Outreach

Transition

Student Success





# BTEC Guiding Principles: Index and Summary

Please see below an outline of our set of 'Guiding Principles' and associated 'takeaway' findings from each of the articles.

Click a 'Guiding Principle' to be taken to that article and to read more.

## 1. Fair Admissions Practice

- ▶ BTEC learners, who are often first in their family to attend university, should not have to dig for information or face additional barriers.
- ▶ Feature BTEC qualifications as prominently as A levels in prospectuses, and websites, as they are predominantly the second most common qualification used for entrance to higher education.
- ▶ Make entry requirements/eligibility criteria clear enough to be understood by BTEC learners without the need for them to make further enquiries.
- ▶ If BTEC qualifications are not accepted due to course content, this should be transparently indicated.
- ▶ Uniformity in practice across the sector and across university faculties to allow for a fair, informed choice for BTEC learners.

## 2. Pre-entry Outreach

- ▶ There are important nuances between BTEC and A level learners such as: curriculum, learning style, learner identity and learning environment.
- ▶ Specific outreach events and resources do not necessarily need to be made for BTEC learners but can be more inclusive through using language that BTEC learners identify with: 'college' in addition to 'school' and Level 3 Year 1/2, in addition to Year 12/13.
- ▶ Colleges do not have whole year assemblies to access all learners for a talk in one go, so a more labour intensive approach of going to course tutor groups is often required. Presentations can be more tailored (subject-specific), and therefore beneficial with this approach.
- ▶ Working with staff in colleges in a different way can be beneficial as some tutors have come from industry. CPD on the benefits of progression to employment via higher education first and around other themes for these staff members can help.

## 3. Transition, Attainment and Retention

- ▶ Use the core principles of Identify, Evaluate, Share and Embed to create an environment where BTEC students succeed during their studies and beyond.
- ▶ Identify: Utilise in-house business intelligence to conduct research to understand and inform practice. Through getting student voice into programmes you can ensure programmes are tailored to student needs.
- ▶ Evaluate: Evaluate success, make changes where needed, share best practice.
- ▶ Share: Collaboration is required across academic staff, student support and professional services and senior management. Challenge misconceptions amongst staff, raise awareness of different needs for different students.
- ▶ Embed: Academic skills improvement pre and post entry, inclusive curriculum content and assessment as well as sign-posting to key support services for BTEC students.

## 4. Research Led Practice

- ▶ There is an issue in some institutions within the sector around the disconnect between policy, practice and research.
- ▶ The transfer of knowledge between practitioners working with applicants prior to them progressing to higher education, and the academics working with the students on programme is key.
- ▶ Learners progressing to higher education via the BTEC pathway has increased from 13.3% in 2008 to 24.3% in 2015 (Pearson, 2016). That means 1 in 4 learners have studied a BTEC. BTEC learners represent a significant proportion of the undergraduate student intake each year.
- ▶ Some traditional universities have been guilty of reinforcing a deficit model perception of BTEC students. For some degree programmes, BTEC students' prior learning has better prepared them for the progression into higher education.
- ▶ By supporting the development of reflective practitioners across the sector, you can ensure that your staff are able to support today's increasingly diverse student population, regardless of their prior academic background.

# Championing fair admissions practices for BTEC students

## Alex Blower, Southern Universities Network

On Sunday 28th January 2018, an article on the approach taken to learners studying BTEC qualifications by higher tariff universities appeared in the Observer newspaper. Drawing on data from a study published by the Social Market Foundation, the piece levelled claims of 'BTEC Snobbery' at elite institutions of higher education across the UK. The study claimed that with almost half of white working-class and black British learners in England now reaching university with vocational qualifications such as a BTEC, there was an

**'institutional snobbery against vocational qualifications and the people who have them'.**

As an outreach practitioner who at the time was working for a Russell Group university, I found it to be an uncomfortable read. I knew my own institution had a strong, visible commitment to widening participation within higher education, so why were these claims being levelled?

Over the last few months, I've been involved in the *Supporting BTEC Students* Working Group for the National Education Opportunities Network. Following one particular meeting, I was asked to conduct a scoping exercise on the prospectuses of higher tariff universities.

The idea was to examine how transparent the institutions were in displaying their entry requirements for learners undertaking BTEC qualifications. Did they feature in the prospectus? If so, was there enough information available for learners to easily understand their eligibility for the university's courses?

Of the thirty institutional prospectuses selected (which included the twenty four Russell Group institutions), just ten had BTEC entry requirements uniformly featured on course pages. Similarly, it was only a third of the selected prospectuses that held enough information to make a reasonable assumption that if a BTEC learner should read it, they would understand their eligibility to apply.

Now for many of those institutions it may well be the case that for some of their courses they do not accept BTEC qualifications, or that they require an A Level qualification to be studied in addition. These are decisions which are absolutely the institution's prerogative based on the academic content of the course.

However, in a climate where each of these institutions are required to submit Access and Participation Plans demonstrating their commitment to widening participation, could a more transparent approach be taken? After all, research has demonstrated that learners studying BTEC qualifications are more likely to be from demographics which are under-represented in higher education.

When I presented the findings from the scoping exercise to the group, a justified point was raised.

**'There's only so much space in a university prospectus and we can't include everything'.**

A point which I concede, is reasonable. However, of the thirty prospectuses reviewed, entry requirements for the International Baccalaureate (IB) were featured in twenty-six. Given that according to the *Which? University* website more than 100,000 BTEC learners apply to university each year, but in 2017 the acceptance rates for UK IB learners totalled 2,190, why weren't BTEC qualifications as visible?

Based on the information presented above, it's fairly easy to understand why a claim of institutional snobbery might be levelled at these higher tariff providers. However, such a claim is not necessarily helpful for the learners. How many times have organisational practices changed because someone has called them a snob?

If we dig a little deeper into the issue, approaches to BTEC qualifications differ greatly across faculties, departments and subjects within higher tariff universities. That makes pulling the information together into a prospectus on an annual basis, to be honest, a bit of a pain. It's far less work to simply host the information on the website and say 'well students can find it there'.

However, that's not helpful for BTEC learners, especially if those learners are the first in their family to navigate the university application process. By our lack of transparency we are creating yet another barrier to those learners making an informed choice about their eligibility to apply for a course.

As practitioners involved in widening participation for higher tariff universities, we often ask learners to change. To take a student loan and go to university instead of getting a job. To move away from home instead of staying local. To take a different educational pathway to their friends and family members on the promise that 'it will be worth it in the end'.

With that in mind is a bit of extra work on our part, to make institutions more accessible to BTEC learners, too much to ask?

# Conducting meaningful outreach activity with BTEC students in schools and colleges

## Rebecca Foster, University of East Anglia

In my first few years working as an outreach practitioner words such as 'BTEC' or 'vocational learner', were words I seldom heard mentioned. These learners and their differences, compared to A level learners, were not even on my radar. When I then took a position in a college, I truly started to understand the nuances in curriculum and learning styles between A level and BTEC learners, the language used to identify their qualifications and the differences in the environment between sixth form schools, sixth form colleges and colleges.

Most importantly, I noticed that the learners I was working with were just as bright and brilliant as the A level learners I had previously worked with. However, they were barely getting a look in compared to their peers when it came to university recruitment and outreach practice. This is despite the fact, as noted in a previous article, that learners studying vocational qualifications are often from the most underrepresented backgrounds in higher education, therefore an inclusive approach is paramount. Furthermore, these vocational courses are accepted at the majority of universities, even if, as aforementioned, this is not explicitly advertised. Therefore, there is no reasonable justification for not including them in practice.

Over the last year, my main project as an outreach practitioner has been to use my knowledge and experience, as well as research into best practice around the sector, to make my university's outreach practice more inclusive for learners studying vocational qualifications.

By being more inclusive in our practice, we can make a big impact on these learners' futures.

Below are ideas, which should be of use to others interested in being more inclusive of vocational learners in their practice.

### Inclusive language

Inclusivity of language seems to be the quickest win when it comes to ensuring all students have a sense of belonging in higher education, but often seems to be overlooked. Ensuring that during talks, events and in marketing, language is inclusive is very important, as most activity does not need to be bespoke to vocational learners; they simply need to know that they can take part. To ensure my language is inclusive I use the checklist below:

**Vocational student checklist** (the words in bold highlight words for BTEC learners)

- ✓ Schools, sixth forms **and colleges**
- ✓ Year 12 **and Level 3 Year 1 (L3 Y1 for short)** Year 13 **and Level 3 Year 2 (L3 Y2 for short)**
- ✓ Or Year 12/13 **and equivalent**
- ✓ Teachers, **tutors and advisors**

### In school and college approach

When it comes to in college or sixth form college outreach, a different approach is needed to that traditionally used in sixth forms (namely getting all learners together in one room at one time in a format such as an assembly). Due to the sheer size of these institutions, this is often not feasible, as there is not one room big enough to accommodate the whole year.

Furthermore, learners often do not mingle beyond their course and thus do not have a year group identity. This large-scale approach does not allow practitioners to draw on the great advantage that these learners have already chosen a very specific subject, and thus we can present much more detailed course-specific talks to them.

I have therefore come up with a different approach for delivering talks in these institutions:

1. Rather than offering a certain number of talks to my school liaisons, I offer them a certain number of weeks. Within these weeks, I will set a talk theme (for example applying to university) and liaisons can advertise out to tutors/teachers to book in a talk with their class during this week.

2. Due to being able to speak to specific course subjects (i.e. Health and Social Care), I adapt generic presentations to have a subject-specific focus and therefore more appeal to these learners.

### Events

Whilst most events can be inclusive of any level 3 learner, no matter what qualification they are taking, putting on some bespoke events to target concerns and barriers that vocational learners specifically have, can be very important. This is to close the gap between their chances of going to university and those taking other qualifications.

At my institution, for example, I have put together a regional vocational awards event in collaboration with Pearson, which mirrors their annual BTEC awards ceremony

held in London. This event aims to provide recognition to vocational learners, as they are often in the shadow of their peers studying A Levels. The event also brings learners onto campus to develop a sense of belonging to the university, introducing them to others who went through the BTEC pathway and now study at university, making university study a lot less intimidating to the participants.

### CPD

Finally, a bespoke approach should also be adopted when engaging with staff in colleges and sixth form colleges who work with vocational learners. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, unlike many A level teachers who have gone through the university PGCE pathway to become a teacher, some vocational teachers and tutors may not have gone to higher education or engaged with it at all. Therefore, they may need more convincing of the benefits of higher education as a stepping stone to employment, to encourage their learners to attend. Furthermore, historically many of their students would go directly into employment and apprenticeships. Therefore, once again making them aware of higher education as a third future pathway can require more intervention. To combat these issues I have created bespoke CPD on:

- ✓ Writing a university reference for a vocational learner.
- ✓ What can university offer your learners (vocational focus).
- ✓ How to support a vocational learner on their journey to university.

# Supporting the transition and student success of BTEC students at university

## Rebecca Sykes, University of Leeds

### Background

The Student Success Project at Leeds works across the university to identify, evaluate, share and embed best practice in relation to retention, attainment and progression for all students.

In collaboration with academics and professional staff, as well as students, the Student Success team has used business intelligence and an understanding of processes to help create an environment where students have the greatest chance of being successful in their studies and beyond graduation. In time, the work will inform the development of a more inclusive curriculum, widening participation, student support delivery and systems enhancements.

A core project team provides a link with academics, faculties and university schools, services, Educational Engagement and Student Support. Data and research supports the assembly of an accurate and timely picture of 'at risk' students and facilitate a better understanding of the most effective means of supporting them. Student Success Officers (SSOs), based across faculties work to gather, analyse and act on student data and examine and support process improvements.

### The BTEC agenda

Internal and external research has identified that students holding a BTEC qualification are at increased risk of non-continuation within higher education. The University of Leeds is no exception.

### What we want to achieve at the University of Leeds

- ✓ A sound understanding of institutional data on BTEC students
  - ✓ A good understanding of the issues that BTEC students face
  - ✓ A complete understanding of research and best practice in the sector concerning support for BTEC students in higher education and what is appropriate to roll out at the university
  - ✓ Faculties and schools to understand the need and means to support BTEC students and their part in embedding support at the university
  - ✓ Awareness raising to challenge myths and change perceptions regarding BTEC students
  - ✓ Better monitoring of, at-risk, students (including BTEC) regarding non continuation, attainment, progression and target tailored support
  - ✓ BTEC students to feel supported during their transition to higher education
  - ✓ BTEC students to feel academically prepared for their transition to higher education
  - ✓ BTEC students to feel that they are welcome and belong at the university
  - ✓ Improving the retention of attainment and progression rates for BTEC students
- Datasets have allowed us to understand non-continuation and attainment rates and identify faculties and schools that face particular challenges.

We know from the sector research that BTEC students are at different starting points in terms of academic preparedness and understanding of assessment expectations in higher education, and that a sense of belonging is one of the biggest challenges facing BTEC students. We have identified faculties and schools that perform well with BTEC students and those that have the highest non-continuation rates. We have been able to have honest and open conversations; which have allowed a collaborative approach to work with colleagues and students in identified areas and will inform the structural changes we need to make as an institution.

We are monitoring students through an analytics pilot, which is able to identify at key touch points, students who are at-risk – this is not limited to BTEC students.

### How we will achieve this

#### Pre-Entry Outreach

- ✓ Updating communications and materials to be inclusive
- ✓ Using student hosts as peer mentors on outreach activity
- ✓ BTEC specific visits
- ✓ Webinars
- ✓ Development of an HE preparatory BTEC MOOC
- ✓ Knowledge transfer workshops for internal and external stakeholders
- ✓ Transition into Leeds event – Summer 2021

All our local and institutional communications will include BTEC and A level - all presentations and workshops in our outreach programmes have been updated to reflect this. The undergraduate guide and prospectus now includes BTEC information and any references on our web pages will be inclusive where possible.

An admissions audit means that our outreach team can be transparent around entry qualifications and manage expectations at UCAS fairs and careers/higher education events in schools and colleges.

Webinars have been developed and delivered for teachers and key influencers who are providing advice to BTEC learners.

We have held knowledge-sharing workshops with Pearson, who have delivered a session to colleagues about the changes to BTECs and how these will impact on higher education entry. We have also held workshops to bring together academics with feeder colleges and learners with the intention of each audience developing a better understanding of the challenges faced and how these can be addressed in the transition and during the higher education academic journey.

Our Teacher and Advisors' survey provided valuable insight about the challenges faced by BTEC learners, their concerns about higher education and how we can assist in addressing the gaps.

Elements of the MOOC will be delivered during Summer 2020 in an alternative format to provide the much needed support to BTEC learners as they enter higher education amidst a period of uncertainty due to COVID-19. ▶



# Supporting the transition and student success of BTEC students at university

## Rebecca Sykes, University of Leeds

The 'Transition into Leeds' event is in train and will see a cohort of offer holders experiencing a visit day onto campus prior to registering (now postponed until Summer 2021 due to COVID-19). The day will give learners an experience of campus, highlight key services, meet with fellow undergraduate students with similar entry profiles to try and address and overcome any concerns or anxieties prior to freshers week.

### On Course Support

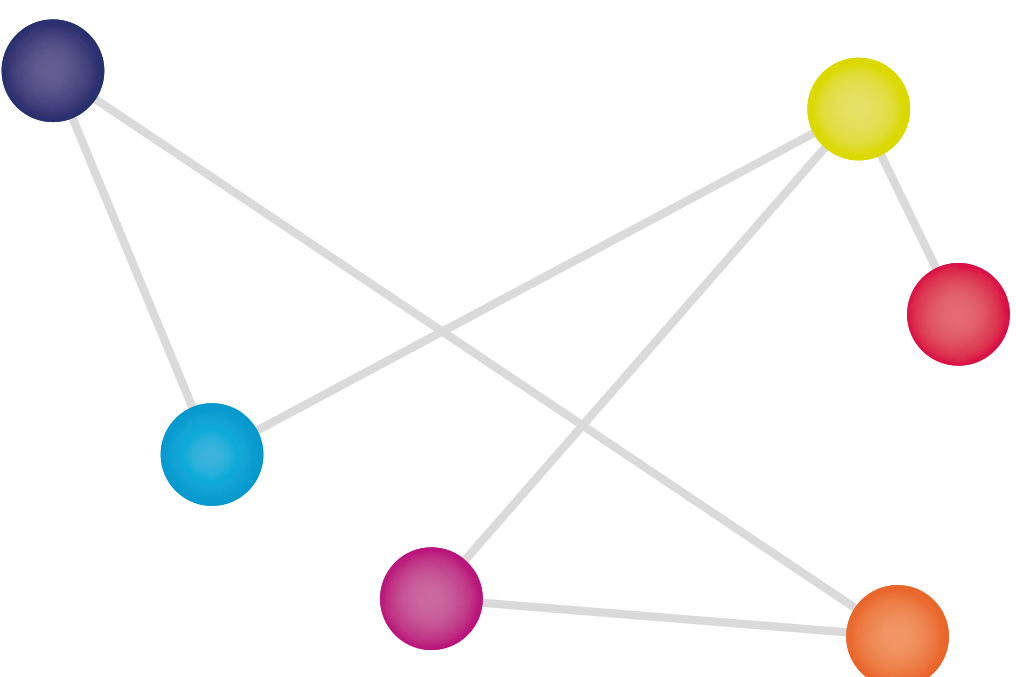
- ✓ Appointment of 8 Student Success Officers
- ✓ Student Success Forums
- ✓ Changes to curriculum, modules or assessment
- ✓ BTEC advisory group
- ✓ BTEC student focus group
- ✓ Sense of Belonging Survey
- ✓ Welcome, Induction and Transition review at institutional level
- ✓ Signposting to appropriate support
- ✓ Skills @ Library
- ✓ Careers

The appointment of the Student Success Officers will allow for early identification of students who are at risk of non-continuation. A large part of their remit is to analyse data and liaise with relevant colleagues across the institution to share findings, signpost and provide appropriate interventions.

Changes to the curriculum, modules and assessment will not be across the board and we recognise it will be a long process, but where we can, changes will be made. For example, one course leader has moved a 'pass for progression' module into Year 2 and this will have a big impact in supporting first year BTEC students. Some courses have said they will review elements of assessment.

Some great initiatives already exist across the university to support welcome, induction and transition. The Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences deliver a Post 16, pre-entry BTEC masterclass, which includes support for learners to be better prepared for the maths entry test and developing confidence in an interview. In our School of Law, BTEC learners are sent a series of short podcasts before welcome week, highlighting pastoral and academic support available; Law also allocate the same Personal Tutor for the BTEC entrants, which really helps to build the sense of belonging and provides personal and sustained support.

Finally, an evaluation framework has been developed to allow the evaluation and monitoring of all activity, processes and intervention to demonstrate evidence, impact and outcomes.





# Understanding the needs of BTEC students through engagement with research

## Chris Bayes, Lancaster University

I have been a Widening Participation (WP) practitioner since 2007. Prior to working within WP, I trained to be a history teacher, completing a PGCE at University of Nottingham. Although, I did not pursue a career in teaching, the lessons I learnt about how schools and the education system works have been invaluable to me in my subsequent career. Perhaps most importantly, my experiences as a teacher taught me the value of reflective practice. A key component of reflective practice was the completion of reflective journals; critically evaluating what had gone well in specific lessons and perhaps more importantly what hadn't gone so well, and how it could be improved next time.

I have taken these principles with me into my career in WP, and as monitoring and evaluation has become increasingly an important component of WP practice, reflective practice has been actively encouraged. In 2016, I was lucky enough to be selected to take part in a 'Paper in a Year' project, which was co-ordinated by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) and Professor Jacqueline Stevenson. Through this, I produced my first piece of published academic research, which was a great experience. Taking part in this programme gave me a greater understanding of research methods and the open access of research papers based on elements of WP practice.

During the writing up of my research paper 'Blurred Boundaries – Encouraging greater dialogue between Student Recruitment and Widening Participation', I hosted the

first meeting of NEON's 'Supporting BTEC Students Working Group', in September 2018. One of the most telling things about this meeting was how well attended it was. Particularly interesting was the number of academic colleagues taking part.

***This showed that we were covering an issue, which was hugely topical across the sector.***

During discussions throughout the day, it was apparent that many of these academic colleagues were operating in isolation from outreach and WP teams working within their institutions. As a reflective practitioner, I found this troubling. It highlighted a gap within some HEIs in the sector in terms of knowledge transfer between academics working with students when they have accessed university, and those working with prospective applicants prior to arriving in higher education. Participation in the writing course encouraged me to utilise research evidence and findings when developing projects in practice.

With regards to the progression of learners from BTEC backgrounds to higher education, over the course of the past decade we have seen huge increases in learner numbers accessing higher education via this pathway.

***A report from Pearson indicated that the number of learners progressing to university via the BTEC pathway has increased from 13.3% in 2008 to 24.3% in 2015 (Pearson, 2016).***

Each year, around 100,000 learners enter university with a BTEC National qualification, this equates to 1 in 4 learners having studied a BTEC. Therefore, BTEC students represent a huge proportion of the undergraduate student intake each year.

The higher education sector during the past decade has seen an unprecedented pace of change, and various strands of the sector have not fully kept pace with this. More BTEC learners are accessing Russell Group and research intensive institutions than was ever the case previously. Throughout my career, I have worked in various types of university and have encountered very different perceptions around the capabilities of BTEC students. Some traditional universities have been guilty of reinforcing a deficit model perception of BTEC students; I tire of hearing outdated prejudicial comments around how BTEC students cannot do certain things. The reality of the situation is their prior learning has prepared them more appropriately for the transition into higher education at some types of institutions than others.

***Greater connectivity between research and practice within the Widening Access community can help us support this change and to influence policy moving forward.***

If you are a practitioner working with BTEC learners or a teacher of BTEC learners in FE, the following research papers and policy briefings are hugely insightful in terms of helping to develop appropriate interventions to support BTEC learners and to provide an increased appreciation of the barriers faced by these learners when accessing higher education.

# References

## Further reading

- 'Transitions from Vocational Qualifications to Higher Education: Examining Inequalities' – Banerjee & Mayhew – Based on findings from 'Transforming Transitions' project
- Pearson - 'BTEC Students into Higher Education: Listening to Learners' Voices report
- 'Enhancing BTEC students' transition to HE: developing pedagogical partnerships across post-16 and HE sectors' – Dr Clare Gartland & Dr Christine Smith (University of Suffolk) – Report produced for Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach (NEACO) – National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP)
- Raven, N. 2018. 'The higher education progression of BTEC learners: trends, challenges and tactics' – In 2018 Forum for Access & Continuing Education (FACE) publication, 'Concepts of value and worth: National and international perspectives in Widening Access and Participation'
- Baker, Z. (2019) 'The vocational/academic divide in widening participation? : The Higher Education decision-making of Further Education students', Journal of Further and Higher Education
- Katartzis, E. and Hayward, G. (2019) 'Transitions to higher education: The case of students with vocational backgrounds. Studies in Higher Education'
- 'Policy briefings
- 'Changing patterns in vocational entry qualifications, student support and outcomes in undergraduate degree programmes' – Dr Robin Shields and Dr Alex Masardo, University of Bath – published by The Higher Education Academy (HEA)
- 'Reforming BTECs: Applied General qualifications as a route to higher education' - Scott Kelly – published by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI)
- 'Vocation, vocation, vocation – The role of vocational routes in higher education' - Nicole Gicheva and Kathryn Petrie – published by the Social Market Foundation (SMF)

## Next steps for NEON's 'Supporting BTEC Students Working Group'

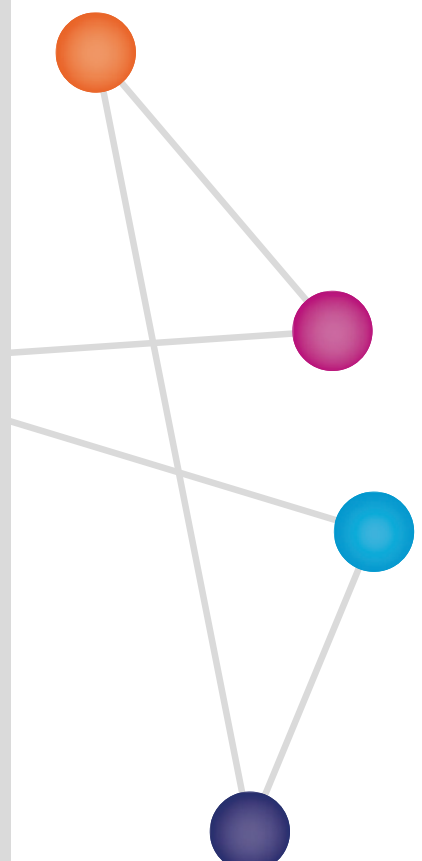
- Chris Bayes

We hope that you have enjoyed reading our publication and will find the 'guiding principles' useful in terms of informing your practice when 'Supporting BTEC Students'. The further education and higher education sectors, the widening participation (WP) agenda and post-16 qualification landscape are very much moving pieces. In over a decade of working in the sector and supporting the WP agenda, the only thing, which has remained consistent, is that things have been inconsistent!

The unprecedented and evoking COVID-19 situation will continue to place great pressures on those living within so-called disadvantaged communities, teachers and advisors working with young people in schools and colleges and the further and higher education sectors more generally in terms of their financial situation and future survival.

NEON will continue to support all of those working within the Widening Access community throughout this challenging time. With regards to 'Supporting BTEC Students', we are currently conducting a survey, which will inform a piece of research involving WP practitioners based on their perceptions around how their institution currently supports the access, progression and success of BTEC students, and how this could potentially be strengthened in future. The link to this survey can be found via - <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/MG6MHG8>.

Following on from this, we would like to do some further research involving selected practitioners drawn from across the further and higher education and vocational qualifications sectors, along with holding some focus groups and research interviews with those teaching BTEC learners, and to do this with learners actually doing the qualification themselves. If you are interested being involved, please contact us via [c.bayes@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:c.bayes@lancaster.ac.uk).





If you would like to find out more information about NEON, please visit - [www.educationopportunities.co.uk](http://www.educationopportunities.co.uk)

If you would like to find out more information about the 'Supporting BTEC students' Working Group, please visit - [www.educationopportunities.co.uk](http://www.educationopportunities.co.uk) or join our LinkedIn group via [www.linkedin.com/groups/8805592](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8805592).

We will continue to work towards supporting the implementation of cultural change amongst academics, practitioners and professional services colleagues within schools, sixth form colleges, further education colleges and higher education institutions and to encourage greater knowledge exchange between staff and students within these organisations.

