

NEON 'SUPPORTING BTEC STUDENTS' WORKING GROUP

Friday 25th September

INTRODUCTIONS AND OVERVIEW

- Introductions – Say hello in the chat
- Maria-Anna Petrou (Events and Training Officer, NEON) will be managing the chat function throughout – Any comments or questions, please pop these in the chat
- Will be breaking into small groups at various points during the meeting, opportunities for discussion
- If you are new to the Group and interested in finding out more about our work, please see <https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/programmes/working-groups/supporting-btec-students/> for further details
- We also have a LinkedIn Group - <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8805592/> - Feel free to join
- Today's meeting is being recorded and will be shared via the NEON website, as with our previous meeting

INTRODUCTIONS

EXTERNAL SPEAKERS

BREAKOUT

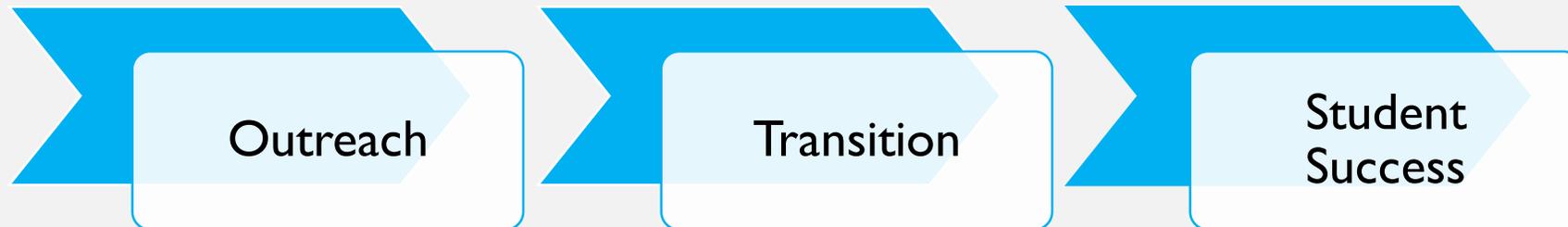
- We are now going to break into small groups
- Each group will be led by a facilitator – Alex, Becky, Chris & Maria-Anna
- Chance to discuss the presentation
- Following the discussion, we will reconvene as a group and ask questions

NEON 'SUPPORTING BTEC
STUDENTS' PRACTITIONER SURVEY

BACKGROUND

METHODOLOGY

- We issued a questionnaire to colleagues who have engaged with the working group to date earlier in the year via SurveyMonkey - <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/MG6MHG8>
- The questions were developed to be reflective of 'guiding principles' model and to gain insight into practice 'Supporting BTEC students' taking place across each stage of the student lifecycle



BREAKOUT DISCUSSIONS

OPTIONS FOR BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Championing fair admissions practices for BTEC students –
Alex to facilitate

Conducting meaningful outreach activity with BTEC students in schools and colleges –
Becky to facilitate

Supporting the transition and student success of BTEC students at university

Understanding the needs of BTEC students through engagement with research –
These two will be combined and facilitated by Chris

KEY FINDINGS FROM EACH PRINCIPLE

- An inconsistent approach to admissions practice across the sector
- A lot of uncertainty amongst practitioners as to institutional admissions practices
- A recognition there could be greater knowledge transfer between admissions and outreach across the sector

- Respondents as to what could be improved to support BTEC students
- Some questioned why outreach would need to be tailored
- Most do not have a clear sense of how many students they engage with are from specific curriculum backgrounds

- Screening to establish support needs for students based on prior qualifications is uncommon
- Extensive amount of on-course support available, but this tends to be accessible to all, rather than targeted at BTEC students
- Support tends to be evaluated robustly

- Across the sector, numbers of BTEC students isn't communicated to academics prior to start of courses
- Practitioners seem to be making evidence informed decisions, but this could be developed further
- Some engagement with research when developing projects, but scope for further developments here

TAKE A BREAK



RESUME IN 5 MINS

SUPPORTING THE TRANSITION AND STUDENT SUCCESS OF BTEC STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY

Rebecca Sykes

University of Leeds

‘DOES SCREENING TAKE PLACE TO ESTABLISH SUPPORT NEEDS FOR STUDENTS BASED ON PRIOR QUALIFICATIONS?’

- Many respondents unsure whether screening took place in their institutions or left the answer blank.
- Those who did answer stated:
 - No, this could potentially be discriminatory and create stigma for those with certain types of qualifications. We encourage diagnostic testing and early formative assessment to highlight areas, groups, or individuals requiring further support.
 - Not centrally but attention is paid to this in some departments where it is known to make a difference to progression.
 - No - support needs are established on the information provided by the student.
 - To some extent, but they tend to offer maths support to 'All students' and then find that mostly BTEC learners sign up.
 - Not in general but the programme we run works with WP students in target departments. One of the eligibility criteria for most of the departments is that students have one or more BTEC (non-A level qualification) so that is something bespoke that is offered primarily (though not exclusively) to 'BTEC students'.

‘WHAT MECHANISMS DOES YOUR INSTITUTION HAVE IN PLACE TO SUPPORT THE ACADEMIC TRANSITION OF BTEC STUDENTS? ARE THESE SPECIFIC TO BTEC STUDENTS, OR PART OF A WIDER OFFERING?’

- An Academic Support club, Academic 1:1s, mentoring scheme, E-mentoring.
- Wide range of support provision for transition into HE including PALs, academic and study support tutors, pre-enrolment programmes, and Personal Tutoring, and embed work experience placement opportunities in all courses. These are all available to all students. Some programmes, where there are known issues with subject material (e.g. numeracy), provide pre-enrolment programmes targeted at BTEC entrants.
- We have a comprehensive academic study skills support offer which is open to all students. All students have an academic mentor who will discuss with them their individual development needs.
- We offer transition activities to all
- Support is given across curricula and if requested by school/college additional support is available. This is for any student that requires it.
- We have piloted a 'Success Programme' this year which has targeted students in four departments across the University (with larger than average proportions of BTEC students), who have accessed the institution via a BTEC pathway.
- The maths support programmes are meant to work specifically with BTEC students, but they often work with non-BTEC students as well.
- These are part of a wider offering. Students in specific departments that have higher proportions of vocational learners do tend to have more academic support modules written in, for example on our sport course
- Unsure - though some BTEC students will go onto study practical based degree subjects and so may not need support primarily for an academic transition

**‘TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE SUPPORT OFFERED FOR
BTEC STUDENTS AT YOUR INSTITUTION REVIEWED
AND EVALUATED?’**

- To every extent, comprehensively and constantly. These students make up a significant proportion of our intake and reflect a key part of our strategy to engage with, and build, community.
- All support is reviewed and evaluated periodically.
- We developed a strong evaluation model for the LSP. We have developed a theory of change and are using a mixed methods approach. Quantitative data around 'rates' (retention, attainment and progression) are important but so are the perceptions of students and feedback from staff members.
- Regularly. We have a widening participation evaluation team and a Widening participation working group for transition and retention which fits into our inclusive education plan

Many respondents left this answer blank or stated unsure.

‘DOES MONITORING TAKE PLACE TO TRACK
STUDENTS WHO ENGAGE WITH THE SUPPORT
OFFERED?’

- Four colleagues answered yes
- Two said no
- Three said they were unsure
- And one said not routinely.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES SURVEY ANALYSIS

UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF BTEC
STUDENTS THROUGH ENGAGEMENT WITH
RESEARCH

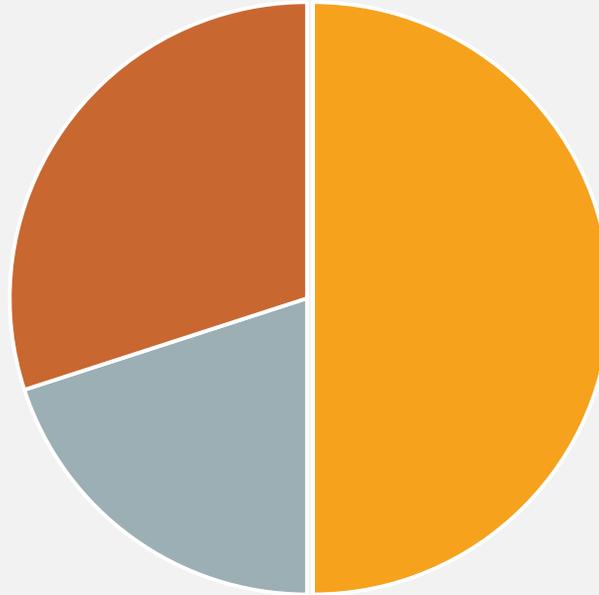
Chris Bayes

Lancaster University

‘WHAT INFORMATION ABOUT STUDENTS PRIOR
QUALIFICATIONS IS COMMUNICATED TO
ACADEMICS AT YOUR UNIVERSITY WHEN THE
STUDENTS ARRIVE?’

- This information is available to academic via the student database. Where there are large cohorts of BTEC students, something that occurs in some discipline areas, this will be flagged up to enable suitable support to be put in place.
- All prior qualifications are recorded on our student record system – **Will academics locate this?**
- n/a
- None
- Variable across institution
- Unsure
- **If there have been any concerns about the students ability then the academic will be made aware. The student may be invited in to chat with the academic to make sure they are entering onto a course at the correct level.**
- They won't know how many students are entering from a BTEC pathway.
- Not sure, I don't think any is.
- **We have a new scheme where academics and associate students are told what qualification make up there is in their class to adapt their teaching accordingly**
- We stress the guidance we can offer A-Level AND BTEC cohorts. We hope the college then sees we are able to provide for multiple cohorts
- Unsure - I'm assuming their A levels, BTECs etc. first and then GCSE's if necessary

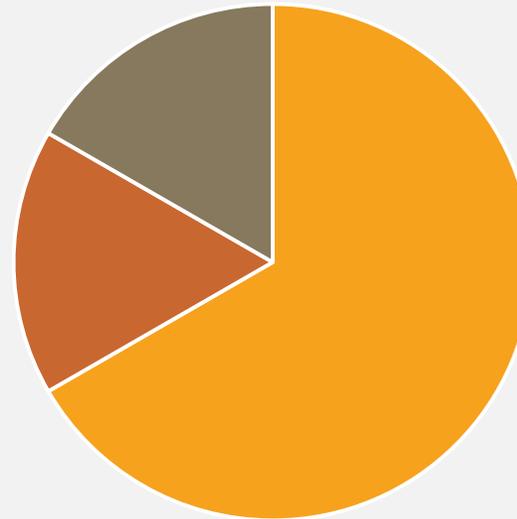
‘ARE THESE MECHANISMS OF SUPPORT EVIDENCE-INFORMED?’



Selected responses

- “Yes, see above. Based on collection and analysis of data.”
- “Yes, but we are now moving to embedding more study skills development within programmes of study.”
- “Available on request, but support is also embedded into each course.”
- “Student Success projects have been evidence informed, as they have been looking to meet an institutional need with regards to retention of BTEC students.”
- “Most support is available to all.”

‘WHEN DEVELOPING ACTIVITY TO SUPPORT
BTEC STUDENTS, DO YOU ENGAGE WITH
RESEARCH?’



■ Yes ■ No ■ Unsure ■

Of the 8 respondents who said “Yes”, see below for further details

- Yes, our policy development and practice are evidence-based. Engagement with published research also occurs within projects that feed into policy-making.
- Yes we always look to see what other universities are doing and what evidence has been published.
- Yes broadly in terms of policy, publications widening access media and personal experience.
- Yes, mainly internal research based on our context, but also national research.

‘IF SO, HOW HAS THE RESEARCH INFLUENCED YOUR PRACTICE?’

Nine respondents answered this question. The responses were mixed.

- Significantly - influenced areas of greatest need.
- We have an online resource that includes some in-house research, outcomes, and recommendations, which have been embedded in policy and practice.
- Our practice is guided by evidence e.g. we are now moving to embedding academic study skills development into course modules.
- Speaking with teachers ensures activities are targeted appropriately.
- Not really.
- Yes, it has helped us shape our programmes and understand what has and hasn't worked in other institutional contexts similar to those at our university.
- Familiarisation with the University, recognise strengths and incorporate these in their studies.
- I have used best practice and qualitative responses in research to look into how BTEC students support needs differ and then use this to inform what activity and initiatives I put in place.

CHAMPIONING FAIR ADMISSIONS PRACTICES FOR BTEC STUDENTS

Alex Blower
Southern Universities Network

‘WHAT IS YOUR INSTITUTION'S OFFICIAL POLICY TOWARDS THE ADMISSION OF BTEC STUDENTS?’

- “We aim to support and promote social mobility. We recruit students with a mixture of academic and/or vocational qualifications, and we offer a wide range of degree apprenticeships and foundation programmes. We have a wide range of support provision for transition into HE including PALs, academic and study support tutors, pre-enrolment programmes, and Personal Tutoring, and embed work experience placement opportunities in all courses.”
- “We welcome BTEC students.”
- “Pre Marketisation of HE: "BTECs? Is that like an A-level for WP kids? You need A Levels to get in here, sorry“ Post marketisation of HE: "Yes, they will do. Get them in. Set up a campaign. Post entry support and altered teaching techniques? Just get them here"
- “We accept them and support their application for the majority of courses”
- “There is no official policy as BTEC students are considered on merit along with traditional A Level learners.”
- “We don't have one, we just accept them as standard.”
- “Not quite sure, but I think it's fine.”
- “Not sure if I'm honest, as we remain impartial and so wouldn't know the ins and outs of the unis entry requirements etc.”

‘WHAT HAPPENS IN PRACTICE? IS THE POLICY APPLIED CONSISTENTLY TO ALL DEGREE PROGRAMMES?’

- “Yes. The university has a very inclusive approach to recruitment and admissions and has a very long established and effective widening participation team to support and promote the admission of BTEC students. Programme teams regularly review curricula and implement a 'success-for-all' approach.”
- “Yes.”
- “In practice BTEC learners get chucked into the same post as all UGs and have no additional support.”
- “Yes, and they often bring a wealth of skills.”
- “Yes.”
- “No.”
- “There is a lot left to be desired in terms of transparency on our course website pages. A lot of courses simply list BTEC extended diploma considered in relevant subjects excluding..... and don't really go into much more detail than that. It is very inconsistent with more detail being put in by admissions tutors who have a good understanding of BTEC qualifications and others being very vague! I am currently pushing for a much more transparent system and webpages on our websites help vocational students navigate our webpages. Things are moving in the right direction with BTEC grades now being listed in our prospectus where they weren't previously.”
- “Unsure. Sorry!”

‘IN YOUR VIEW, IS THERE A CONSISTENT APPROACH TAKEN ACROSS THE SECTOR WHEN IT COMES TO THE ADMISSION OF STUDENTS’

- “No there isn't a consistent approach. This is partly because of academic snobbery around the value of vocational qualifications to enter HE. It is also partly because some courses are highly theoretical, rather than geared to the employment market, and are thus much more challenging for individuals from a BTEC background to access.”
- “I don't know.”
- “Not really. Snobbery will live long in the sector.”
- “It varies amongst courses and within institutions as well as across.”
- Not across the whole sector
- No, I tend to feel that BTEC in some areas of the sector the qualification is not viewed as highly as A' Levels.
- No definitely not
- No, not at all.
- I don't think so, no.
- Absolutely not. I think a lot of it comes down to snobbery and laziness from marketing departments to list all qualifications equally as it would be understandably time consuming, even though in the long run it could mean a lot more students for the university.
- I think this is dependent on the institution, and how traditionally academic they view themselves
- Nope, I still think they are viewed negatively when in fact those courses are more relevant for some degrees than A levels.

**‘DO YOU THINK THE INFORMATION
PROVIDED BY YOUR INSTITUTION IS CLEAR
AND EASY TO UNDERSTAND FOR BTEC
STUDENTS?’**

- The information we provide students in secondary school workshops informing them of alternative pathways is accessible but there is much room for improvement
- If you mean UCAS tariff, then yes, I think it is clear. There are so many permutations, that sometimes the applicant is directed to get in touch with the university to discuss individual qualifications but contact details are easy to find.
- It depends what information you are referring to. Generally I would say yes but specifically I don't think there is enough for any students on what studying academically in HE actually involves in terms of academic study skills, delivery and assessment.
- Again a varying picture. And again may vary within an institution as well as across E.g degree which you can't access with BTEC/unclear if fa access to really clear/ accessible to contextual admissions
- From what I have seen so far, the information on how to access courses is clear across a variety of different qualification backgrounds. However, it would be useful to understand how clear students who had taken BTECs would find it.
- The admissions process is clear and concise highlighting the grades that are required for entry. If there are any discrepancies potential students are advised accordingly and are given advice and guidance on how to proceed.
- It could probably be a bit clearer. The banner information relates to A level qualifications. Underneath that, the entry qualifications refer to BTECs. It might be beneficial if BTECs were included in the banner but, to be fair, most of those applying to our uni have A levels and there is only limited space on a webpage.
- No I think it is cryptic and anecdotally I know it has lead to confusion with some students.

CONDUCTING MEANINGFUL OUTREACH
ACTIVITY WITH BTEC STUDENTS IN
SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Rebecca Foster
University of East Anglia

‘WHAT COULD YOUR UNIVERSITY DO TO BETTER SUPPORT BTEC STUDENTS IN THE PROCESS OF MAKING AN APPLICATION TO UNIVERSITY?’

- Clarity in admissions: Listing grades next to A-levels, drop down for nuances (not just BTECs accepted in certain subjects), also clarity on tariff points and equivalencies beyond extended diplomas (how much is a double award worth, a certificate?)-Admissions staff don't seem to know this!
- Not holding a deficit model-Highlight that BTECs are a completely valid entry route to university
- Transition resources pre entry and schemes i.e Set up a pre entry support programme-make contextual offers and support them post entry in a life-cycle approach to ensure they are comfortable and thriving
- Information on website about what studying at degree level entails (need for independent study, the balance of reading and practical activities), and the types of support that are available –help transition and retention
- Clarity and ease of language - accessible language not dumbed down language
- Focus groups with BTEC students study at the university to find out support needs
- Academics to be aware of who are in their classroom and make changes accordingly
- Advertise more to BTEC students go to colleges for liaison

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE

- We have delivered a programme this year with social work entitled 'Access to Social Work'. This has been piloted successfully with five local Further Education Colleges (FECs). The programme is a several stage intervention project with delivery split between sessions in the colleges and visits to the University.
- It involves input from academic colleagues and student ambassadors, who have gained their place on the Social Work programme via a BTEC pathway. We have seen an increase in both applications this year to this programme from the participating colleges.
- <https://www.face.ac.uk/blog-post/praxis-makes-perfect-developing-research-informed-widening-participation-practice/>

WHAT DO YOU FEEL ARE THE NEEDS OF BTEC STUDENTS WHEN IT COMES TO THE DELIVERY OF OUTREACH ACTIVITIES? DO THESE NEEDS DIFFER FROM STUDENTS WHO ARE STUDYING A-LEVEL?

- Study skills work-Academic essay writing - building an academic toolkit as well as confidence building activities for participating in seminars and tutorials, Exam skills,reference writings, revision techniques
- Being aware of differences, not that BTEC students are less academic or worse. BTEC student more equipt for practical, active learning, but less experienced with conceptual, theoretical aspects of a discipline.Thus outreach activities should provide reassurance around this, drawing on the positive aspects of BTEC approaches. In courses little overall difference between the cohorts and their inclusion in the cohort is of mutual benefit.
- Practioners need to become more familiar with the content and modes of learning and assessment for BTEC students.Awareness that btec students chose that for a reason-not assuming that they are the same as those of A level students.
- Express to BTEC students how HE will benefit them and lead on from their current qualification. Remove assumption uni sisen't for me-role modelling and confidence building
- Advice on navigating entry requirements
- In many cases they are more subject and career focussed, but may lack confidence especially in their first year
- Needs to be more acknowledgement and support around the feeling of deserving to be there (in HE) as much as those who have taken A-Level routes.

CONTINUED

- Showcase career opportunities - meet an academic, visit campus. Provide assistance with UCAS application/personal statement. Link them with BTEC learners who have gone through the university process (show them they can achieve).
- if they don't like doing exams they should consider their choice of University and assessment methods before applying.
- I would say that a lot of initiatives don't need to be different merely use inclusive language to include both and ensure both curriculums are covered. The main need for a different approach I believe is for closing the drop out gap between btec and A-level learners by running study skill sessions, but again these could be open to everyone
- Not necessary - The difference between BTEC and A Level is the teaching and grading and so I'm not sure why the outreach capacity would need to be different.

**‘DO YOU RECORD HOW MANY STUDENTS IN
YOUR SESSIONS ARE FROM BTEC
BACKGROUNDS SPECIFICALLY?’**

- Mostly no
- Our student database includes details of qualification backgrounds and these data are analysed regularly to inform high level policy. We are also aware of cohorts within particular discipline areas that have a large BTEC contingent and monitor progression, providing local transition support as needed.
- Not for one off sessions but for repeated engagements we track the students, if we have permission, including the qualifications they are studying.
- No. This is mainly because the groups we see are not mixed groups (so either BTEC or A Level or Access).
- We wouldn't usually, apart from on tailored projects.
- We are starting to note qualification on evaluations

‘IF SO, HOW MANY LEARNERS ARE STUDYING BTECS IN COMPARISON TO OTHER QUALIFICATIONS?’

- Around 38% of our entrants have a vocational qualification (compared with 62% for academic qualifications), a figure that is increasing year-on-year. These students are more likely to be BAME and to come from Lower Participation Neighbourhoods.
- More students studying both BTECs and an A level. Straight A level students still make up the majority for us though.
- I feel there are a lot of BTEC students but some are moving over to CACHE and similar
- Ours is a programme for students at University and around 85% of the students on the programme have one or more BTEC/non-A level qualification.
- My data is slightly skewed as my main project is in vocational learners. I actively encourage my colleges to come to events, so a 3rd or more of my participants tend to be vocational learners.
- Fewer, but this is often due to the difficulty establishing relationships with FE colleges. It is easier to forge a relationship with a sixth form attached to a school
- There is definitely a surge of students studying BTECs these in comparison to 5 years ago.

**‘HOW DOES THIS INFORMATION INFLUENCE
THE APPROACH YOU TAKE TO THE DELIVERY OF
OUTREACH ACTIVITY?’**

- As one of the Uni Connect projects, we have placed officers in our partner organisations (Schools/Colleges/Universities) so that we work directly and on a daily basis with pre L4 students so we can address and respond accordingly. This also means we can flag how our officers in our partner Unis and colleges with HE centres design their work too.
- Subject specific information
- Adapt workshops/presentations to fit the audience.
- Awareness and tailoring to students not doing exams currently but maybe having to do them in the future
- We stress the guidance we can offer A-Level AND BTEC cohorts. We hope the college then sees we are able to provide for multiple cohorts
- We should pay more attention to this as in essence we are discouraging students from a BTEC pathway from applying by not making clear reference to their courses in Outreach & Recruitment activity.

FEEDBACK

SCHEDULING FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

ANY OTHER BUSINESS?



- Thank you for participating!