

Institution: University of Bolton

1. Context and mission

Mission

The University of Bolton is a Teaching Intensive, Research Informed (TIRI) university with a distinct emphasis upon professional and vocational education. The University proudly traces its history back to the foundation, in 1825, of the Bolton Mechanics' Institute; one of the first to be established in the UK. To this day, the University retains its primary purpose of providing educational opportunities to the widest range of individuals and enabling them to achieve their full potential at all levels from Access to Doctorate. It welcomes people who wish to invest in their futures through accessing educational opportunities and thus enhance both their life skills and employment prospects. Intensive teaching through a portfolio of focused high quality undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, underpinned and informed by research, is central to the University's abiding mission; as evidenced by the University's 'Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)' Silver award outcome and National Student Survey (NSS 2018, 2019, and 2020) results making it the top university for teaching quality in the north west. We are clear that much of the exceptional student experience is attributable to the close alignment of our research and teaching agendas. The University's Apprenticeships and Access to Higher Education provision is graded by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) as 'good' with emphasis on Management, Leadership, Teaching and Learning. The TIRI philosophy and the Platinum Critical Mass (PCM) course portfolio approach, developed as the core of its Strategic Plan (2015-20), have been a watershed development in the University of Bolton's real transformation and its journey as a successful institution, as evidence for example by the University's rise up league tables such as entering *The Guardian* Top 50.

HESA Performance Indicators show that our student population continues to be one of the most socially inclusive of any higher education institution in the country and we consistently exceed our access and participation benchmark indicators in regard to those from low participation, low household income or socioeconomic backgrounds. In line with its widening participation philosophy, the University prides itself on providing higher education opportunities to a diverse range of students, many from challenging socio-economic backgrounds who may face multiple barriers to access, participation, attainment and employment, which have to be overcome to achieve success. Over 70% are commuter students, an attribute that is considered to increase the risk of a non-continuation. The University continues to work constructively with other universities, colleges, the third sector and employers, through the Greater Manchester Higher Partnership, to further encourage participation from under-represented groups. Around 70% of our students are the first in their family to attend university and the University has a higher proportion of students with a declared disability (14%) and from POLAR 5 than average.

Size and Structure

The University is divided into three faculties: the *Faculty of Engineering, Arts and Creative Industries*, the *Faculty of Health & Wellbeing*, and the *Faculty of Professional Studies*. Health and Wellbeing is made up of Nursing and Midwifery, Social Care, Social Work, Early Years, Community Development and Youth work, Clinical and biomedical, Dental Technology and Sport. The Faculty of Professional studies incorporates Education, Psychology, Business.

2019/20	Full-time					
	PGR	PGT	First degree	Foundation	OUG	Total
UK	66	328	4776	463	162	5795
Other EU	6	19	175	0	6	206
Non-EU	125	144	326	0	1	596
Total F/T	197	491	5277	463	169	6597
	Part-time					
UK	80	703	323	106	318	1530
Other EU	6	5	1	0	5	17
Non-EU	6	13	1	0	12	32
Total P/T	92	721	325	106	335	1579
Totals	UK	Other EU	Non-EU			
	7325	223	628			

Includes all students counted as university numbers, including franchise

In terms of the balance between research, teaching and enterprise activities, the institution is focused on teaching informed by research in an environment where learning is the primary focus. We have significant links with local industry with over 40 companies represented on our Industrial Advisory Boards.

We seek to ensure a clear link between research and teaching by requiring all external research bids to identify which taught programmes might, in principle, benefit from the proposed research. For example, in which Masters programmes the results might be shared with students or how the research will influence course design. Our internal research funding schemes have three core criteria: how the research will enhance the curriculum for students (TIRI), the impact of REF performance including impact and value for money.

Our institutional research focus is on high quality research which is likely to have material impact on industry, communities and the student community.

We continue to support international excellence in our long-standing research teams in Engineering alongside specialist work in Psychology on mental health and wellbeing. There is a clear focus on a diverse but selective spread of research topics and teams, including textiles and nanomaterials in Engineering, mental health and counselling in Psychology, documentary photography Anarchy and the Aesthetic art, poetry, Nietzsche and political theatre in English Literature. In the Institute of Management diversity is to be found in relation to SMEs and the Digital Games Industry alongside Supply Chain, Logistics and Procurement. In Education research ranges from storytelling in the classroom to Further Education (FE) leadership. In Health there is a focus on the future on nurse education, on clinical values and on sports injury recovery.

There has been a long-standing presence in engineering teaching and research. Alongside developments in Education and Psychology in the post-war period the institution developed its health provision followed by initiatives in Business and latterly Law, Creative industries and Computing. Distinctive areas of the curriculum, research and industry collaboration are to be found in and the rapid rise of computer Games Design this century followed by the National Centre for Motorsports Engineering which was established in 2015.

The University's Equal Opportunities Policy covers all aspects of protected characteristics and the University's commitment to equal opportunities.
<https://www.bolton.ac.uk/assets/Equality-and-diversity/Equal-Opps-Policy-Aug-2014-1.pdf>

2. Strategy

Strategy for research and enabling impact – Current Assessment Period

The University approved a research strategy in 2015 which stated
In relation to Research and Knowledge Exchange - we stated will:

- i. *Improve the quality of research and enterprise activities which support teaching*
 - ii. *Ensure research centres map research onto teaching*
 - iii. *Make all teaching informed by high quality, current and innovative research and professional practice*
 - iv. *Identify, deliver and evaluate innovative and effective ways of teaching*
 - v. *Engage with business, industry and the community in knowledge transfer through consultancies, knowledge transfer partnerships and applied research linked to teaching*
- [University of Bolton, Strategic Plan 2015-20 p9]*

In the period of the plan (which is now being reviewed as part of a broader academic strategy review taking place during 2020-21) all of these objectives have been achieved. The quality of research has been enhanced and links to industry strengthened with additional KTPs and extended Industrial Advisory Groups in each School. In terms of the mapping of research centres onto teaching, all of our research centres now have substantial contributions to, or leadership of, a portfolio of Masters and/or Doctoral programmes. This link to teaching ensures the sustainability of our research provision. In terms of support for teaching from R&KE we have aligned our research pump-priming schemes and external bidding strategy with the taught programmes such that all internal and external bidding activity has an element of assessment related to the impact on the curriculum and/or student experience. We have been able to 'Identify, deliver and evaluate innovative and effective ways of teaching' by establishing our Centre for Pedagogy and our research teams in Education. We have had a number of schemes designed to develop evidence-based approaches to research-informed teaching including our Learning Enhancement Fund, our ST:RIVE initiative (Student Transition: Research, Innovation, Values and Engagement) and the education projects funded under our Jenkinson (research pump-priming) scheme. In addition, the University centrally has commissioned research and funded PhDs internally in the areas of student mental health, student progression, student online engagement and student resilience.

Research integrity

The University is a signatory to the UUK Research Concordat and makes an annual report to the Board of Governors and which is published in line with the national protocol. This was most recently done at the Board of Governors meeting of 17 November 2020. The University has incorporated research integrity and ethics into its research training arrangements both for staff and research students.

The Research and Graduate School work closely with staff in Schools to deliver a Master's level module that prepares them for taking on the role of a doctoral supervisor. Research ethics generally, and specifically the University processes, are explored. Alongside this are a series of scheduled sessions throughout the year that form the Research Degree Student Development Programme where the University's ethics processes are explained by experienced research supervisors; staff are also invited to attend these sessions. Research ethics documents are available at:

<https://www.bolton.ac.uk/join-us/researchprogrammes/research-policies-and-documents/research-ethics-framework/>

The University has not had any identified any instances of violations of research integrity during the current REF Assessment period.

There is a formal University Research Ethics Committee, School-based ethics committees and periodic audits of School operation of ethics processes. These are audited centrally by the

Research & Graduate School on a rolling 3-year schedule and action plans developed where necessary.

Open Research

The University is committed to open research support and publication, the principal internal vehicle for which is the University of Bolton Institutional Repository at <http://ubir.bolton.ac.uk/> . This ensures compliance with the open access requirements of REF.

This is reviewed and audited on an annual basis. This was done most recently on 30 November 2020.

Structures to support interdisciplinary research

Fortunately, the small to medium size of the institution means that each School covers a relatively wide range of traditional disciplines which means that our core organisational structure already facilitates interdisciplinary work in research as it does in teaching. For example, we do not have a separate Schools of Psychology and Education but a school of Education *and* Psychology, which for example facilitates pedagogical research. Similarly, we have one Engineering School covering all the major branches of engineering and thereby supporting collaborative research in textiles technology, fire and materials chemistry.

The University has a number of interdisciplinary research centres

- Centre for Pedagogy
- Centre for Worktown Studies
- Institute of Materials Research & Innovation

Strategy for the next five-year period

The University is currently reviewing its institutional strategy in the context of;

- (i) the expiry of the current strategy,
- (ii) (ii) the development of the University of Bolton Group and associated acquisitions of Bolton College, Alliance Learning, and the Anderton Centre
- (iii) (iii) the changing demands of the 21st century workplace and workforce, and
- (iv) (iv) the medium to longer term impact of Brexit, Covid and international recruitment. As part of that review, the institution is updating its academic strategy with a particular focus on expansion in the areas of health, social care and medicine. The University's commitment to research is non-negotiable and remains as core element of our Teaching Intensive Research Informed model.

We anticipate that while the core elements would not change they would be applied to a wider range of subjects.

In that context **five key principles** will inform our review of our research and knowledge exchange strategies for 2021-26

1. The institution will continue to be focussed on a **Teaching Intensive, Research Informed** model.
2. We will seek to expand and strengthen our research capacity in the disciplines where we are investing to expand our portfolio
 - a. eg in health and social care nursing, occupational therapy, physiology, social work, dentistry and medicine.

- b. eg specialist areas where we have national centres of excellence (eg Special Effects and creative technologies)
- 3. We will seek to maintain an emphasis on **community engagement** through cross disciplinary collaboration, e.g. mental health with art and cultural engagement, community engagement in happiness and wellbeing, creative and performing arts and inclusion.
- 4. We will seek to enhance our support for **inter-institutional collaboration**
 - a. For example by our continued membership of the Knowledge Centre for Materials Chemistry in partnership with Manchester, Southampton and Liverpool universities
 - b. Expanded research collaboration with our international partners already pump-primed through our GCRF work eg in Malawi and Botswana
- 5. We will seek to support for areas with **promising potential** such as
 - a. Accountancy and Entrepreneurship
 - b. Creative writing
 - c. Psychotherapy and counselling research

Whatever the precise details of our strategy and the priorities within that strategy, we will commit to **five key mechanisms** for delivering on that strategy:

1. A commitment to **diversity and inclusion** to ensure that the profile of our research community aligns with that of our student community and that they both reflect the range of skills, perspectives and talents required to deliver high impact critiques and solutions to the complex range of theoretical and practical challenges that face our societies.
2. A commitment to working with **external stakeholders** in industry, the public sector, communities and with international partners not as an additional dimension to our research and knowledge exchange activity but as a central component.
3. Continued support for **Early Career Researchers and research careers** to ensure that the University can 'grow its own' and develop rounded academics aligned with the institution's TIRI model.
4. Investment in the **digital infrastructure** to ensure widespread access to core applications and to facilitate national and international collaboration.
5. Regular, selective, **competitive funded calls** in new ideas and developments for projects, internships and collaborations.

3. People

Staffing strategy

The University's staffing strategy is to attract and retain the best staff we can. We also seek to ensure capability and capacity matches our portfolio. Beyond that we ensure that areas of growth secure investment ahead of pressure on teaching capacity. We also work closely with local and regional health trusts to secure a wide array of visiting professors and fellows.

The University requires all academic staff to have a Doctorate level qualification such as a PhD (or to register for one upon appointment).

In addition, strategic professorial appointments have been made to specialist chairs in Education and in Health.

Support and training of research students

The University of Bolton is committed to the highest level of researcher development at a personal and professional level to allow home and international researchers to reach their full potential. Working closely with our Academic School, the Research & Graduate School offers a comprehensive Research Degree Student Development Programme that includes: An induction programme to life at the university and as a research degree student; weekly webinars and workshops to enhance a student's research skills delivered by research staff from in our academic

School and from across the university; Research methods webinars and workshops; online resources available through our virtual learning environment for all webinars, workshops and training programmes; Progress monitoring and development review; An annual research degree student conference hosted by the Postgraduate Students Society; and, an Annual Research Summer School. All our research degree students are encouraged to engage with the Researcher webinars and workshops. Also, to participate in the research degree student conference for an opportunity to present their research project and to receive feedback from their peers and staff across the University. We work closely with external speakers such as the publishers (most recently speakers were from Elsevier and IEEE Xplore) to ensure Researchers at all levels have the opportunity to fully understand the publication process and to seek support to publish their work.

As a member of VITAE, we encourage all researchers to make use of the VITAE Researcher Development Planner and the VITAE Researcher Development Framework so that our research degree students benefit from the VITAE researcher development insight and expertise.

We also strive to apply the terms of the Concordat (commonly known as the Researcher Development Concordat) to support the career development of researchers, especially Early Career Researchers (ECRs). The University follows the Concordat principles of environment and culture, employment and professional development, and career development. As an example of this, the Research and Graduate School work closely with Staff and ECRs in academic Schools across the University to deliver a Master's level module that prepares ECRs for taking on the role of a Doctoral Supervisor. Entitled, 'Research Degree Supervision' this twenty-credit module provides the opportunity for ECRs to gain invaluable experience in providing feedback to doctoral students at all levels, including the initial Postgraduate Skills Record, the R1 and R2 assessments and preparing for the Viva. Feedback from those ECRs that have taken this module states that they are better prepared to take on the role of a Supervisor having completed this module, that is of great benefit to their career progression and research goals.

Equality and diversity

Leadership of the internally funded research project have been diverse with 34 being led by female academics and 10% led by colleagues from ethnic minorities. The Panel includes representatives from across the institution, includes a nominee of the SU President and chaired by an Assistant Vice Chancellor.

4. Income, infrastructure and facilities

Including: the institutional-level resources and facilities available to support research, including mechanisms for supporting the reproducibility of research as appropriate to the research focus of the HEI, and to facilitate its impact.

Institutional-level resources and facilities available to support research

The University has four internal annual research funding schemes:

- The **Jenkinson** Awards – designed to pump-prime innovative research projects often focusing on pilot studies
- The **Ryley** Awards – designed to support undergraduate and postgraduate research internships with an established research team or individual researcher
- The **Ainsworth** Awards - full PhD scholarships at national rates for exceptional students to work with established research teams on specified topics.
- The **ST:RIVE** awards – designed to foster action research projects across the University of Bolton Group led by a University researcher focusing on improving the student experience and/or related support systems.
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In total these research initiatives have funded over 80 innovative projects often interdisciplinary in character and pump-priming collaboration with external partners.

The main requirement for laboratory facilities is in engineering and the provision has been developed during the REF period with enhancements in particular in the fire chemistry area. More recently the opening of the National Centre for Motorsport Engineering has enhanced facilities both on campus and trackside in this area.

Mechanisms for supporting the reproducibility of research

Reproducibility of research is supported through the UBIR (University of Bolton Institutional Repository) where data from all research is mandated to be archived in line with the requirements of the Research Councils

Impact

The Jenkinson Awards have as one of their three criteria the contribution to the institution's REF performance. While this is an element of all 6 annual rounds of this scheme, in 2018 and 2019 there was a particular focus on impact of research. The institution has provided additional funds for research teams to support the delivery of stakeholder events, publicity and networking over the period. Additionally, the University's Industrial Advisory Boards provide a ready and accessible community of industrialist, entrepreneurs, service leaders and public sector representatives which facilitate research engagement, awareness and impact. For example, in Psychology a number of research projects have been carried out in partnership with Mhist a mental health charity which operates across the Greater Manchester city region.