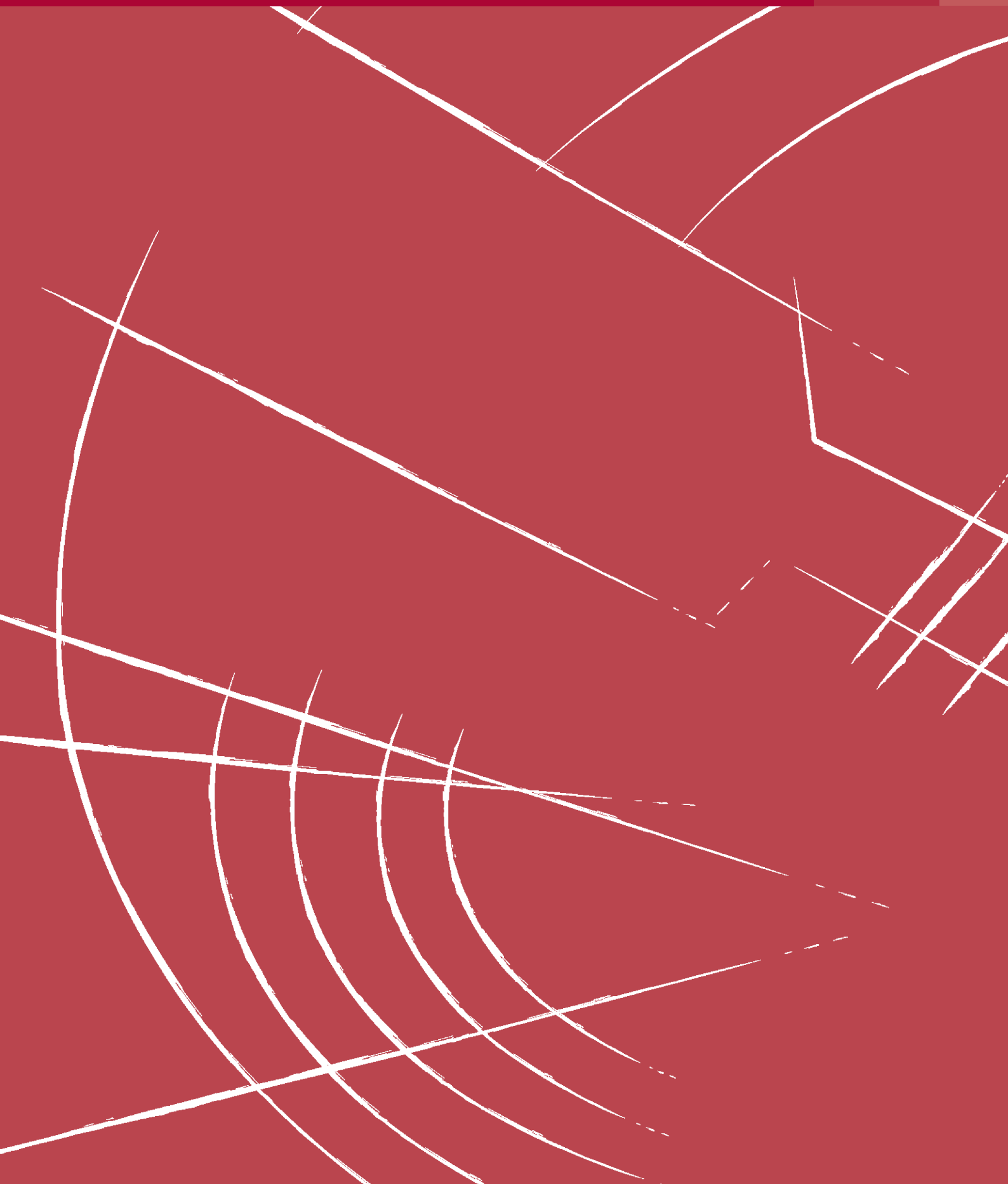


STRATEGIC PROPOSITION

The Professional University

A discussion paper for staff to accompany the strategic plan

University
of Bolton



Strategic Proposition:

The Professional University

The University of Bolton has examined six potential models for its strategic direction:

- Communities
- Enterprise
- Partnering
- Professional
- Learning and Teaching
- Vocational.

In considering them, we were seeking a model we believed we could credibly adopt (because of existing strength or the ability to rapidly acquire strength in relevant areas) but which would also provide significant aspirational value for staff and students. Of the original six models, we have discounted the Communities, Enterprise and Partnering models as being unable to give the university a sound basis for the future. Descriptions of the models are contained in Appendix B (page 17), but briefly:

The **Communities** model, while worthy and particularly relevant for a very local market, is unlikely to give the university a financial foundation on which to build a sustainable future. Difficult to define and explain to potential markets, this model suffers from a lack of focus and risks becoming “all things to all people” rather than a distinctive, differentiating factor. To prevent it from being a very parochial and narrow model, it requires expansion of the concept of communities into “communities of practice”, implying a multidisciplinary thematic approach to teaching and research which would be very relevant for our health and arts offerings, but perhaps less so for the wider academic profile.

While we have some pockets of good community engagement in the university already, other universities within close proximity, particularly Bradford, are well ahead of us and investing significantly more resources in this model to support the government's widening participation agenda. While Bolton has performed well in access terms, this has been more by default than by conscious intent, and we believe many of our financial issues cannot be solved unless we move towards a more stable student profile and a model with stronger potential for growing income.

The **Enterprise** model was espoused as Bolton's strategic model in the last plan, and for whatever reasons, consistently failed to achieve its targets so that Bolton staff have a very demoralised view of their capability and capacity to succeed in enterprise. The very successful enterprise universities tend to be those with large and prestigious research programmes and reputations to match.

Again, there are a very few small pockets of good enterprise practice in the university but not enough to credibly and quickly build on, given our lack of established research breadth and depth. While enterprise as an activity must be continued and improved, the university does not have sufficient strength in enterprise to take this model forward.

Partnering was seen as a useful and necessary activity in the university's future strategies, but was regarded as a cross-cutting theme of all models rather than a model in its own right. A valuable tool for building effective business relationships to benefit the university's students and graduates, partnering was nevertheless perceived as just one of many strategies available to help the university deliver its teaching and research, rather than the primary driver or differentiator.

One of the major risks of this model is that in order to attract quality partners from its current position, Bolton would too often have to play the “junior partner” role, making it extremely difficult to establish a strong, distinctive reputation in its own right. The university's future would also be irrevocably tied, either in reality or in perceptions, to the reputation of its partners, and the university would perforce spend as much time monitoring its partners, quality controls as it would managing its own business.

Of the remaining models, we have determined:

The **Vocational** model is the closest to where the university is currently positioned, both operationally and in market perceptions. We could potentially build a sustainable business based on articulation from and transfer between the Further Education sector and the university. As the government's education agenda increasingly targets under 19s, to the possible detriment of adult learning through the skills sector, there is potential opportunity for the university to attract students who might once have chosen further education and support them into a vocational HE route. It would imply significant growth in foundation and continued professional development (CPD) provision.

The risk of this approach is that Bolton continues to look like it always has, and continues to fail to attract high-quality local students who don't perceive it as a “real” university. Unless the university can significantly improve the quality of its student outcomes in retention and, in pockets, in employability, it is unlikely to consistently achieve its HEFCE student numbers. The vocational model is also likely to mean the university would continue to struggle to attain research funding, and there is significant risk that this model might not be sustainable in the longer term, as surrounding FE colleges become increasingly mixed-economy businesses and compete head-to-head with Bolton. As a model, it possibly lacks both ambition and confidence.

The **Learning and Teaching** model is a strong contender for the university's strategic direction. Bolton has a great deal of current and historical strength in teaching quality, and most of our academics are highly-committed and highly-motivated teaching practitioners. We could start to build our reputation and business with a vision of eventually becoming known as the best teaching university in the North, and from there, in the UK. Currently, there is no single university in England which would be consistently named by prospective students as “the best teaching university”, although there are probably a score or more who could potentially make the claim (excluding Bolton at the moment), and in pure marketing terms, this presents a potential opportunity.

One risk in adopting the teaching model is the difficulty in clearly differentiating ourselves from other universities, particularly “new” universities without research degree awarding powers, sufficient to achieve a genuine competitive advantage on which we can build a long-term sustainable business. Quality teaching is a “hygiene” factor in the perceptions of most of the population: they expect all universities to have a roughly equivalent level of quality teaching and are unlikely to be convinced to choose one university over another purely on the basis of teaching quality (course offering, location and prestige are the top three factors in student decision-making, and none are particularly benefited by a reputation for the best teaching quality). It might also signify that we do not have or aspire to high quality research, deterring some excellent staff from wanting to work at Bolton.

Elements of the Learning and Teaching model need to go hand-in-hand with some other differentiating factor, and that leads us to the Professional model, the terms of reference for which are detailed at Appendix A (page 11).

Characteristics of the Outstanding Professional University

The Professional University develops outstanding professionals who, themselves, develop their professional and social communities for the better.

It embraces high academic standards and overlays them with a clear sighted focus on professional requirements, leading the professions to increase their own requirements for rigorous critique, analysis and innovation. It is clear in its mission to develop highly respected and sought-after graduates who are not only technically competent but actively engaged in and informed about their professions, and who adopt lifelong learning as a personal and career habit. Rather than practitioners, it grooms professionals.

The university develops its curriculum in close consultation with the professions and key employment sectors, and achieves professional accreditation for all of its programmes wherever such accreditation is available. It builds partnership arrangements with professional bodies, both national and international, to offer continuing professional development opportunities at all levels. It does this with the specific intention of better preparing its graduates for their future professional lives; this focus prevents the university from becoming a “slave” to the professions and helps to ensure it recognises that students, not the professions, are its primary concern.

Its approach to professional knowledge is one of critique and questioning, constantly seeking to reflect upon, review and refresh professional knowledge and higher level skills to enhance professional practice and create reflective professionals.

Recognising the increasing trend towards portfolio careers, its teaching and research facilities are organised around clusters of professional interests, encouraging students to a broader understanding of professional issues through interdisciplinary exchange. It supplements its permanent faculty with nationally and internationally renowned visiting staff, including professional, business and community leaders from amongst its alumni.

While its curriculum is grounded in content relevant to professional accreditation, it is uncompromising in its academic expectations and independent in establishing its standards. It is neither “dumbed down” by the specific requirements of professional bodies, nor does it mimic the ivory-tower aloofness of traditional universities. It stretches and challenges the professions it serves through anticipating the issues with which they will be confronted, and produces applied research that contributes to the professions' advancement and informs further development of curriculum. It helps professions identify, cope with and benefit from technological advancements. Through close examination of professional body, consumer and policy developments, it anticipates “new” professions, and rapidly develops programmes of study and accreditation to accommodate these. It plays an important role in developing the concept of “the profession” and “professionalism” beyond traditional areas such as medicine, law and accounting to embrace all disciplines and their developing needs and capacities for professionalism.

While undergraduate, full-time programmes are an important component of the university's taught programmes, around 10% of the university's students are employer-sponsored postgraduate research students, and another 30% are undertaking continuous professional development programmes, including employer-sponsored executive masters and doctoral programmes. The university's professional focus and reputation for quality makes it a preferred choice of international students, particularly at postgraduate level.

Technology plays an important role in enabling students to organise their own learning. Remote access and wireless networks are critical for promoting students' mobility and flexibility as they move between their professional, on-campus and home environments. Technology allows students to communicate with their professional and university peers, access materials and teaching services, manage their professional and study commitments and facilitate their professional reflection. Technology competence and confidence is a core professional skill for all graduates. However, technology neither drives nor prescribes students' learning; learners choose the technologies which best meet their individual and professional needs.

The university's staff are recruited and developed to model the highest professional standards, both as academics and as experienced, current practitioners, and they are measured by the quality of their professional engagement and professional pedagogy. Both academic and non-academic staff are expected to demonstrate the highest commitment to their own professional development and conduct, and to act as role models for the university's students. They are themselves lifelong learners, and model this behaviour to their students.

The university's recognised commitment to improving professional standards also makes it an attractive target for corporate sponsorship, and an obvious partner for consultancies and bespoke organisational development.

Success Criteria

A decade after introducing this model, you would expect the University of Bolton to demonstrate:

- a reputation as the most professionally focussed university in the North (and thereafter in the UK, working to overtake Aston, Surrey and City Universities);
- a position in the top 30% of the league tables, based on success in teaching quality, industry research, graduate outcomes, graduate employability, staff-student ratios and investment in facilities;
- the highest proportion of professionally-related subjects with strong academic quality (requires new benchmark measure following cessation of numerical scoring);
- the highest degree of focus on professionally-accredited postgraduate courses (40% of students in postgrad/CPD);
- the fastest development of new, relevant, accredited and/or customised professional programmes meeting emerging market needs;
- the highest UK ranking for graduate employability in the relevant professions;
- consistently meeting home student target numbers with high-quality applicants (a "selecting" university);
- student retention in the top 10% of UK universities;
- consistently delivering graduates with much better outcomes than their incoming qualifications predict (a "value-adding" university);
- the highest proportion of "graduate returns" in the UK, including those returning to study, returning to research, returning to teach, or as employer sponsors or professional collaborators;
- profession-based scholarly and research activity amongst all staff (including professional and managerial staff) so staff are consistently engaged in advancing their own professions;
- achievement of 30% of its income through research funding from professional/industry research grants;

- the highest degree of practical and mutual connection with the professions, including co-sponsored programmes and accreditations;
- significant and lucrative partnerships with major international organisations, including other universities, governments and conglomerates;
- revenue growth which allows a surplus for investment every year;
- a significant contribution to the wealth, prosperity and prestige of the North of England.

The visible/tangible indicators of success:

- exercising professional integrity in admissions policy and practice, whereby a student is only admitted if the university is confident that this is the best place for that student to study;
- turning out students who can walk out of the university and into professional environments, and immediately perform to and exceed employer expectations; who are already planning their next course of study at Bolton at the time they leave their last; who actively “give back” to their professional and social communities;
- having respected professional organisations seek our help and our accreditation in developing and/or customising their CPD programmes;
- being able to offer students relevant and valuable professional placements in every year of their programme, regardless of the level of qualification;
- having a range of partnerships in place with key employers, so that many of its graduates leave the university and move immediately into employment with one of these partners;
- being sought after by industry and professional organisations to conduct research to help their businesses/professions/staff/clients;
- having our academic staff routinely spending time outside the university working in a professional capacity to refresh their professional knowledge, competence and passion;
- being financially sound and confident, such that the university can reinvest 3% of turnover in developing new professional areas of learning and research every year; meeting and anticipating market demand;
- visiting teaching and research appointments being hotly contested by high-calibre professionals;
- an estate (buildings, technology and facilities) which reflects the high-quality professional environments students aspire to work in;
- being able to select the “best” students (aptitude plus attitude) for every one of our programmes, and consistently meet our student number targets;
- being in a position of respect such that our students and staff can challenge “orthodox” professional practice, highlight deficiencies, suggest improvements, and be taken seriously by their professions;
- being held up as a role model for universities working with the professions, government and other employers;
- being known for fulfilling our promises and producing high-quality outcomes that exceed expectations;
- our staff being sought after to advise high-level professional and government policy development;
- our staff (professional/managerial as well as academic) routinely having papers published in their relevant professional journals/conferences.

How close are we to the vision?

Strengths

- A high and increasing number of our programmes already have professional accreditation, with recognition by over 30 professional bodies;
- 79% of current students are studying on programmes with professional or vocational accreditation;
- A high proportion of our teaching staff already have professional qualifications and experience in addition to their teaching and research qualifications;
- A high proportion of our mature-age students are already working in professional environments;
- Our graduate employability figures are respectable in most areas, and very strong in some;
- A high number of our departments have strong working partnerships with relevant professional bodies and professional employers and are already incorporating work placements in programmes;
- A relatively high and increasing number of partnership arrangements with feeder schools and colleges;
- High student satisfaction and reputation for excellent student support;
- Some innovative academic programmes which develop advanced professional practice, eg MSc Advanced Practice (Health & Social Care) and Research Doctorate by publication.

Weaknesses

- Low proportion of employer-sponsored students, relative to the average in the North West;
- Poor track record in attracting high-quality students;
- Run-down estate and facilities that reflect poorly on university's professional/quality image, and little ability in short term to upgrade these;
- Poor historical investment in alumni relations;
- Currently perceived as a "fall-back" university;

Opportunities

- A "new start": new title, new leadership, staff impetus for change;
- No-one else in the sector is single-mindedly pursuing this strategy, and nobody in the North West is currently pursuing it in a focused way;
- Potentially lucrative CPD and international student opportunities;
- "Aspirational Bolton"
- Growth of new "para professions" for which the university is providing, and can provide more, targeted CPD programmes;

Threats

- Should they choose to change their current strategies, any of our larger, wealthier local competitors could pursue this strategy with more resources than we are able to muster in the medium term;

- (As with all the models) success will depend on sustained investment in both staff and estates - this is not a strategy than can be successful if “half-baked”;
- Lack of familiarity amongst local student population with notion of the professions and professionalism, as well as with higher education;
- Difficult to establish foothold in more established professions (eg medicine, law, architecture) therefore requirement to actively target “new professional” sectors.

How do we get there?

Programme/Product Development

- Systematically identify and define professional outcomes for all programmes;
- Systematically identify professional accreditation/pathways for all programmes;
- Systematically identify gaps in current professional programming, followed by targeted development of relevant programmes;
- Market intelligence, including potential markets, partners, competitor activity, opportunity costs, dependencies within and between university schools, to be included as a standard item on every school's board of study agenda;
- Identify and achieve relevant international as well as national accreditations, particularly for postgraduate programmes;
- Create advisory boards of professionals for every school, to inform and guide academic programme development;
- Rapidly develop CPD programmes and marketing across all schools;
- “Disaggregate” programmes into modules or even topics, to allow full flexibility in CPD products;
- Develop consistent “recognition of prior learning” approach, to “fast-track” appropriately experienced and qualified students into postgraduate qualifications;
- Ensure all new taught programmes identify and meet professional and/or statutory accreditation/recognition wherever available;
- Work with employers and professional bodies to initiate accreditation mechanisms where none currently exist (eg some arts areas);
- Close those courses that do not have strategic fit (not necessarily those which do not lead to a specific, named professional accreditation, but those which do not lead to a recognised and in-demand professional outcome). This could impact on more traditional subjects which applicants, advisers and community expect a university to deliver; in some instances it may be more appropriate to “reshape” programmes to make them more applied;
- Develop partnerships with key employers to deliver customised provision to meet all their development needs;
- Where developing new postgrad/CPD offerings, develop in collaboration/co-crediting arrangements with professional bodies;
- Develop a new generation of Professional Doctorates and Master Professionals in key subjects;
- Develop progression routes into Bolton by building partnerships with local schools, colleges and professional employers;

- Review and revise programmes regularly in the light of feedback from students, graduates, professional and industry partners and progression data.

Learning Support

- Develop a support infrastructure focused on helping students develop their full, personal and professional potential.
- Provide resources for personal/professional mentoring and coaching throughout students' programmes, including assistance through professional registration on completion of study programmes, assistance for career transitions, graduate placements etc;
- Develop career guidance provision, entitlement to which lasts for a graduate's lifetime;
- Develop physical and information infrastructure to support students' professional engagement throughout their lifetimes;
- Enrol students as associate or student members of professional bodies which offer this membership category;
- Develop a Professional Skills and Standards Unit to coordinate and support professional skills development programmes in schools, and to co-ordinate internships and other professional placements for all students in every year of their study;
- Develop innovative teaching practices which support student learning in professional contexts;
- Develop e-learning and remote delivery expertise and infrastructure to deliver programmes when and where employers and individuals need them;
- Proactively identify causes of non-completion/progression and provide integrated, structured, customised support to assist students to succeed. This requires a comprehensive and consistent student retention strategy delivered at both corporate and school levels, and dedicated staff resource;
- Integrate professional skills in the curriculum and encourage a high degree of student self-responsibility, self-evaluation and self-awareness to improve graduates' skills for professional service;
- Develop reliable, robust and consistent mechanisms for comparing student satisfaction across modules, programmes and schools, and use this information in internal quality enhancement and professional development processes;
- Develop a superior level of service for international students through the creation of a dedicated international student service capability;
- Develop and maintain a database of staff expertise, professional membership, development activities etc to identify mentors, coaches and "experts" in professional networks and practices.

Research, Scholarship and Influence

- Apply research in the professional arena and identify opportunities for businesses and professional organisations to work with us, to share in the learnings from research, and to play a role in transferring innovative ideas and technologies to their own and other sectors;
- Inform policy development through our research and consultancy;
- Undertake research with relevance to strategic decision making in professional and industrial arenas;

- Join in and stimulate scholarly public debate on a wide range of professional issues;
- Develop profession-sponsored research scholarships;
- Integrate academic and senior professional/managerial staff research plans into the staff appraisal system;
- Develop researchers in public and private sectors through academic partnering, mentoring and training;
- Increase the number of collaborative university-professional/employer grant applications and successful principal investigators;
- Provide continuing training in developing professional research funding applications;
- Pursue full-cost funding to increase research sustainability;
- Increase sponsored research postgraduates to 50% of all research postgraduate students.

Staff Development

- Recruit, retain and reward staff who have developed, or are capable of developing high-quality teaching skills underpinned by relevant, current professional practice, scholarship and research;
- Ensure that all new full-time teaching staff have or attain both a recognised teaching qualification and also a recognised professional qualification;
- Refine professional development programme for academic staff and for professional and managerial staff, with objective of all staff in these groups holding a professional qualification (and also a teaching qualification for academic staff) by 2010 and all being engaged in current, relevant professional experience and engagement outside the university;
- Ensure professional achievements of staff are adequately recognised and represented in appointment, promotion and reward criteria;
- Develop new academic staffing workload model to enable 30% of academic time to be spent in profession-related practice, service, research or other engagement;
- Inculcate a culture which views the motivation for undertaking enterprise activity as a valuable opportunity for interaction with the profession, rather than being seen purely as income generation activity;
- Develop a fast-track teaching qualification for professionals, to assist them to join our teaching faculty as visiting or permanent staff.

Relationship Development

- Systematically identify gaps in current professional relationships/networks, followed by targeted relationship activity (academic and professional/managerial staff);
- Develop professional links with other universities internationally to broaden the base of possible exchanges;
- Develop reliable, robust and consistent mechanisms for comparing graduate and employer satisfaction across programmes and schools, and use this information in internal quality enhancement and professional development processes;

- Strengthen professional links in the sectors we serve by developing formal mechanisms for receiving feedback and comment, for example through industry/sector representation on all relevant programme validation and evaluation panels and external advisory panels for all subject areas;
- Conduct surveys of recent graduates and work towards developing an annual frequency;
- Develop and resource an active alumni programme.

Marketing/Communications

- Develop an appropriate marketing strategy to attract the right students (aptitude plus attitude);
- Develop robust approach to client relationship management and partnerships;
- Rapidly develop market intelligence about international student potential, and appropriate marketing for relevant programmes;
- Aggressively reshape and 'rebrand' existing products to increase market awareness and capitalise upon existing strengths to enhance local and national perceptions;
- Once the tuition fee cap is lifted, price courses according to the perceived value of the accreditation (e.g. AMBA);
- Increase international undergraduate and taught postgraduate fee income by 35%;
- Build student numbers in emerging and developing international markets by 15%.

Infrastructure Development

- Plan and fund investment in infrastructure (people, systems and estates) to deliver professional outcomes and environment, in some instances 24/7.

Appendix A:

Terms of Reference:

The Professional Model

Beneficiaries (*eg what are the characteristics of the students it would best serve, and attract*)

The Professional University is attractive to a wide range of students who aspire to a professional career (not just a job). Different schools will attract different types of students, but they will share an aspiration that sees a university qualification as a passport to life/status change.

The professional model attracts those students with a clear career map, who have “always known” what they want to do, and who are motivated more by career outcomes than the purely social attributes of a university. For those who are unsure of their ultimate professional direction when they enter university, it provides a strong, generic professional foundation with opportunities to experience particular professional environments, and flexibility to change direction if appropriate.

Mature students with professional experience and a strong sense of how they want to develop their careers, as well as children of professionals who have their parents’ example, are also likely to be very attracted to the model.

Other school-leavers with less experience of professional environments may need more help in understanding the concepts and benefits of the Professional University. The public sector and the defence forces are potential organisational target markets (ie offer large cohorts of prospective students with a professional/career “mindset”), as are SMEs and larger businesses, the service sector and professional bodies.

Students’ outlook of their own success in professional life will become an expectation rather than aspiration. Bolton students are chosen for a combination of aptitude plus attitude: the university is clear in its student recruitment about the commitment required from students to succeed.

Students undertake professional career placements in each year of their study programme to develop their own networks and to identify their own final year placement.

Professional attributes, ethics and conduct/social skills are embedded within all programmes (and not seen as an add-on), and interaction is actively encouraged between younger students and experienced professionals to help develop these skills, either in formal mentoring relationships or informal modelling. Graduates will develop a cross-discipline understanding and will appreciate the interactions between the various professions in their chosen field. In confidence, competence and understanding, they will be capable of “keeping the company of well educated professionals”.

As the university develops its CPD provision to further the ongoing needs of the professions, it will seek to become the ‘preferred supplier’ with such organisations in order to help them identify and achieve their lifelong learning aims. Lifelong learning is inculcated in graduates: ongoing professional and personal development to continually update and upgrade professional competence is “just part of being a professional”.

Products and Services (*the most likely “products” and services that would or could be successfully offered under the model*)

This model assumes a continuum of professional career development, from secondary school into undergraduate programmes (possibly via further education and the post-16 sector) and on to lifelong continuing professional development.

All programmes are developed to provide seamless progression routes and understanding of professional environments. While there is a high proportion of postgraduate and CPD provision, access, foundation degree and honours programmes are still key elements of the provision, but each are consciously structured to encourage students to progress to the next level. Programmes are structured to allow flexibility for students to study around other commitments, such as their professional engagement, and are regularly reviewed to ensure they maintain topicality, quality and relevance for their students and the relevant professions. Specialist programmes of training for advanced professionals, including professional doctorates, are available in every school, and where appropriate, “professional apprenticeships” are also offered.

Programmes are designed and delivered to be demand-led, and CPD products may be either packaged or stand-alone, with sufficient flexibility to meet students' requirements at any career stage. For example, students are encouraged and guided to identify the gaps in their professional knowledge and skills and may take a single module or even a single lecture if that's what is required to meet their need for professional development.

Professional career experience and development is a compulsory component of all programmes, and the university works with students and professional organisations to effectively match placements, not only in programmed contexts, but in extra-curricular work. Customised professional and personal development programmes are devised for every student.

Consideration should be given to marketing innovative four-year courses (potentially with a break point after the third year to allow a professional practice internship, where industrial experience is required before progressing), which would result in a masters qualification and professional affiliation. Alternatively, standard honours degrees should also be offered as fast-tracked, two-year programmes, perhaps through three-semester years.

In addition to content requirements of relevant professional accreditations, the legal, ethical and other high-level professional issues are embedded in curricula at appropriate levels and in all programmes. A Professional Skills and Standards Unit coordinates and supports departmental delivery of programmes comprising core professional skills including communication and presentation skills, social skills, language and professional etiquette, international/cultural professional contexts, study skills, legal and ethical issues pertinent to all professional activity. It is also responsible for co-ordinating internships and other professional placements, both at home and overseas, which are academically accredited.

Implications for teaching

The university's approach to learning and teaching is led by the needs of our students in developing their capacity as lifelong professionals. It is characterised by a concern for students' intellectual development – their ability to think critically and independently; professional development – their ability to apply their knowledge, competence and skills to their professional service and their ongoing professional expertise; and social development – their ability to use their professional service to benefit their communities.

Different modes of delivery, moving away from traditional teaching methods to more flexible, student-centred and demand-led approaches, enhance the learning experience and are supported (but not driven) by new technologies.

The development of professional academic and research practice, and an engagement with issues of effective teaching and programme development, are also fundamental.

There is explicit coherence between modules: students understand why they are studying particular modules, and the relationship of these to their professional development.

Assessment covers “professional competence” (including presentation, spelling, grammar, conduct) as well as subject competence. Training opportunities are provided on presentation skills and professional conduct, and students are assessed on their willingness to take responsibility and accountability for their own actions, decisions and judgements.

Implications for applied research

The university's research and scholarship is led by the needs of the professions our students aspire to serve. In order to legitimate professional practice it is important and valuable for professionals to research and critically evaluate their own and their colleagues' practice. Research is essential to both the maintenance of professional autonomy and the creation and development of specialist knowledge and expertise.

Most academic staff, and many professional staff, will therefore be research-active, researching and publishing in areas of basic research related to their profession, in research implementation or incorporating research into policy and professional practice, focusing on research which is relevant to professional decision-makers. The university's staffing workload model supports this activity, enabling productive blocks of research and professional engagement to take place throughout the year.

Our professionalism in conducting research and in research training is also developed. MA, MBA, MSc and MRes are available to students of all schools, with a clear objective of raising our research quality, competence and confidence. This leads to recognition of our research by the UK Research Councils, ESRC and industrial/commercial sectors, and our inclusion in HEFCE's published list of universities delivering strong research training.

Implications for enterprise

The Professional University's enterprise comprises a strong core of continuing professional development programmes, national and international professional consulting activity with government, professional and business organisations, and customised programme and research provision informed by the training units of professional organisations.

All enterprise activity arises from the university's commitment to advancing the professions, and requires a “strategic fit” with the university's teaching and research programmes.

Implications for community engagement

The Professional University plays a vital role in building the aspirations and professionalism of surrounding communities. It becomes a focal point for the professions to engage with the broader community through public events and services.

Funding implications (income and investment)

Income:

Short-term investment in developing and marketing a coherent continuing professional development program should contribute useful revenue. Similarly, relatively small investment in international relations staff should boost international student numbers and revenue. However, additional funding sources will be needed to cover the essential investments, particularly staffing and the estate.

Staffing:

Additional staff (academic and support staff) resources will be needed to provide appropriate student support, including in careers advice, work placements, mentoring, counselling and coaching. In some instances, staff support will be required 24/7.

Estate:

Facilities and buildings must be upgraded to ensure they reflect a recognisably professional standard and portray a positive image, rather than appearing tired, untidy and cluttered. Students, graduates and professional partners will expect the university to be at the “cutting edge”, and should be proud to bring their associates onto the university campus. Technology requirements including wireless networking and remote access are likely to require support 24/7. Some simulation and other professional technological products will be very expensive to deliver off-campus (education software licenses cannot be transferred into professional/business environments).

Structural implications

A more coherent support structure is required to coordinate the development and enhancement of professional activity as the university moves forward with this model. Student support, quality assurance, business and information systems and relationship management (including alumni) functions need a more consistent and centralised approach, building on significant progress achieved through the establishment of the central student support services.

The academic structure also requires an overhaul, with rationalisation and refocusing following the conclusion of the current academic review, and the establishment of at least one new unit, being the Professional Skills and Standards Unit (or similar title/function).

Staffing implications

To deliver the flexibility required in programming as well as the “head room” to allow academics to engage in professional practice, the university's academic programming model needs to change. The use of graduate teaching assistants may be one model suitable to ‘free up’ academics' time to refresh their professional experience. Staff are expected to take sabbaticals to develop research and ensure the topicality of their experience.

In staff recruitment, recent professional experience, professional qualifications and attributes become as important as teaching and academic qualifications.

“Professional” implies “not amateur” and generates expectations that clients (students) will be given a professional service (eg expectation that lectures will start on time, notices are printed rather than handwritten). “The Bolton Professional” and “The Bolton Academic” need to be reviewed to incorporate the attributes and behaviours expected of our staff.

The university will benefit from greater use of visiting teaching/research faculty from professional environments. There is a potential career path for retired/retiring industry professionals to join academia, and the university provides a career pathway for them, with visiting faculty positions through to permanent positions supported by appropriate teaching and research training.

In the support areas, an increased emphasis on supporting students' personal and professional development both during and after their study, and maximising student retention, will require significant additional staff resources.

Key Risks and Mitigations

- Bolton “doesn't buy it”: Bolton staff, particularly academic staff, don't buy it, and the local market doesn't buy it.

Common risk of all new strategies; requires comprehensive, considered and sustained communications/marketing programmes for at least five years for internal audiences, and at least 10 years for externals. Internal programmes need to address specific changes required, the critical need for those changes, how they will be supported, monitored and rewarded.

- Bolton's fortunes are tied to external (professional) bodies. If a professional body's reputation is damaged, Bolton suffers by association.

Careful choice and monitoring of partners is critical in all business relationships. Bolton maintains its own strict quality controls and requires the same of its partners.

- Bolton can't afford it. It requires significant investment in staffing, systems and estates to succeed.

The university's future relies on significant investment in these areas, regardless of which strategic model it adopts. A financial recovery and consolidation plan is required in the short term, before the university begins to build its investment capacity.

- Some professional accreditations will be costly/burdensome to achieve and maintain.

The university will work with the accrediting bodies to ensure it meets their requirements in the most cost-effective way, and to ensure those bodies understand the impact of their requirements on future professionals. Beyond that, the cost of accreditation is an essential business cost of the model.

- The university should be seen as preparing its students for the next stage of their career and helping them realise their aspirations (evidenced by the professional accreditation) and not necessarily serving the requirements of the professional bodies as its primary focus – there may be some instances where the two may not appear totally aligned.

All staff must be quite clear that students are the university's primary concern. Impact of any new activity on students – their experience and their potential success – is the first consideration prior to proceeding.

- Some prospective students may not benefit from this model, or may not be able to take full advantage of it.

The university will work closely with every accepted student to give them the maximum opportunity to successfully complete their programme of study and to progress to professional employment. It will also recruit carefully, so that students are well prepared for the requirements of their study programme before they commence. Should they not aspire to a professional career; they have the choice of other universities. However, no university is able to guarantee any outcome for any student.

- Our local market has an underdeveloped understanding of professions, professionals and professionalism. It will be hard to sell it to them.

A comprehensive and sustained communications/marketing campaign will ameliorate this issue. We will work closely with our professional partners to develop the understanding of the professions and professionalism, to our mutual benefit.

- We will lose the students we already attract by shifting our focus.

The students we already attract will benefit from the changes we put in place to achieve this model. We will attract more and higher-quality students pursuing this model than through our current (undifferentiated and unclear) offering.
- Over time this approach may well be taken as a given rather than viewed as a differentiator. If we are first in the market, committed and disciplined in our approach, we can maintain market leadership after others follow our example. If we don't increase our professional focus at this time, the university will be left behind in the marketplace when other, better-resourced universities take it on.
- Changes to government policy could impact delivery of the strategy.

This is a risk associated with every model. Government and industry policy agendas must be monitored closely to ensure we are adapting to and accommodating them as necessary, but the university must also maintain its strategic and commercial independence from short-term policy changes that are not driven by concern for student success.
- We won't be able to attract sufficiently high-calibre industry professionals into relatively low-paying academia.

We will identify the benefits we offer them through ongoing academic engagement, and pay them as well as we can. Payment is not the only incentive, as many professionals must demonstrate their own continuous professional development and association in communities of practice with their academic counterparts via visiting leaderships, fellowships and professorships. Having the right support systems in place will assist.
- We may appear too "functionalist" and instrumental for many academics.

The emphasis must be on the role of the university in developing and critiquing professional knowledge using academic expertise to help develop reflective professionals and practitioners.
- This is a very ambitious strategy. If we don't resource it and structure it properly, particularly with respect to staffing, we will end up with the same result as under the previous enterprise strategy - expecting people to do "everything" and making them ineffective at many things.

The requirement for additional resources and structural changes is recognised, and must be fully costed and planned. However, every model requires a similar level of commitment to succeed. Bolton has been accused of being unambitious in the past, and along with inappropriate resources, structure and lack of focus, this may have contributed to our current position.

Appendix B:

Alternative Model Descriptions

The Community University

The Community University is perceived as an essential contributor in the communities it serves – and these are NOT limited to narrow geographic boundaries. The “global” community is equally relevant as the “local” community – and embedded in activities which focus on social regeneration/revitalisation, again with national and international significance.

The university is closely tied with its local borough councils, regional development organisations, community and voluntary sector; and also with national and international organisations, and is a broker for and facilitator of social, economic and environmental prosperity for communities.

It is a provider of education and enterprise solutions, but also enhances communities' cultural welfare, through a variety of events in which communities engage. It is perceived as a creative, academic and cultural treasure, and the members of its communities actively aspire to belong to it.

Its program offerings incorporate a strong “community” focus, and its delivery extends beyond conventional campus-based and online methods, including innovative “community education” approaches which respond to urban, rural, international and virtual contexts. Its graduates take with them a strong sense of the importance of “giving back” through involvement in “real world” community issues; they are known for their pragmatic problem-solving and commitment to social justice.

In research, the Community University leads in economic, social and community capacity building. Its research into and resolution of “local” community issues has national and international relevance and prestige.

The Enterprise University

The university's current strategic plan asserts “we provide an enterprise model for the new generation of universities”.

It describes its enterprise role as:

- catalyst for innovation, regeneration and growth in Bolton and the North West;
- broker between organisations, stimulating knowledge exchange and successful partnerships;
- increasing the knowledge and skills of students with diverse educational experience, both for their own benefit and for that of the wider society;
- helping students apply their learning to practice and enable them to enhance their personal development and lifetime career opportunities;
- supporting graduates in their transition to work through its links with business and community contacts.

There is considerable scope for increasing the enterprise activity of the university within this model. An Enterprise University could be one which actively seeks to produce entrepreneurs, incorporating entrepreneurial theory and practice in every taught programme. It could be one which seeks to achieve enterprise outcomes out of all research undertaken. It could be one which focuses its efforts on producing spin-off companies or patents, or industrial consultancies. It could be one which produces the majority of its income, not from government-funded students but from industry-funded research and teaching programmes.

The Partnering University

The Partnering University consciously sets out to build sustainable, enduring partnerships with a range of stakeholders, such that it undertakes no initiatives alone. This does not mean that it does not initiate or lead new projects, but rather, that it takes a deliberate and single-minded approach to identifying credible, authoritative and “value-adding” partners for each of its activities. This approach keeps it intrinsically connected to its communities of schools and colleges, employers, professional bodies, research collaborators, government agencies and business and residential communities. It is a good, “all-round” university that makes its name and builds its position on the strength and quality of its relationships with others, and the holistic, synergistic and ultimately superior outcomes it delivers because of that approach.

It is recognised as a vital component within the Lifelong Learning Network. Progression agreements are in place with and actively promoted by a comprehensive set of respected and high-quality schools and colleges. It is the research and teaching partner of choice for FE colleges and other HEIs. It is a popular university, and highly competitive, for both local and international students. It has an international reputation forged through proactive partnering with hand-picked, quality universities in major markets all over the world.

It develops undergraduate and CPD programs in close collaboration with professional organisations. All its programs are accredited, and can be customised for a range of environments. It leads the country in provision of foundation degrees, which are recognised as the most current and useful first degrees in the sector. Its graduates leave the university with sound connections already formed through work placements, exchange agreements and research collaborations.

The university is held up as a role model for working with industry, government, the professions and other employers. It forms partnerships to provide applied research and teaching designed to ensure strong strategic fit with the specific needs of their businesses. It has a solid reputation for fulfilling its promises and producing high-quality outcomes that exceed expectations.

The Learning and Teaching University

The “best teaching university in the UK” tops a range of measures which the sector finds relatively easy to measure and which the market finds relatively easy to understand: teaching quality assessments, student outcomes (including satisfaction, retention, number of firsts etc), staff-student ratios, graduate employability, and the percentage of teaching staff with formal teaching qualifications as well as professional and academic qualifications.

It appeals to mature-age and part-time students as well as traditional school-leavers. Their expectations can be for more traditional methods of teaching (chalk and talk) but the university is knowledgeable about and skilled in customising and using a full range of teaching approaches, including “unconventional” methods such as neuro-linguistic programming (NLP). The university is concerned with the development and maintenance of the teaching relationship; there is an expectation that teachers will be available for contact time outside classes.

Excellence in learning and teaching is actively promoted and celebrated within and outside the university. “Lighthouse academics”, including amongst the professoriate, are active and visible to students in all years. The “best” teachers are as likely to be teaching a large first-year class as they are a small final-year class. The university is also likely to draw on visiting teachers from industry and the professions to supplement its staffing and refresh its content.

This university conducts research with the specific intention of informing and improving its curriculum and teaching methods and graduate outcomes rather than “research for research’s sake”.

This may mean that it is consciously an “undergraduate” university, although its mission means it is also likely to have strong offerings in CPD and short courses for lifelong/lifewide learning.

The Vocational University

The Vocational University is focused on producing graduates who can “hit the ground running”. Its graduates are highly sought-after by employers in the UK and overseas because they have developed outstanding capabilities in generic/core competencies as well as critical thinking, problem-solving and relevant professional/specialist knowledge and skills.

The university is renowned for its continual development of program content to meet the changing needs of employers. It has a reputation for being proactive, responsive, entrepreneurial, highly-focused and audacious in its development of programs for “new” careers. It is respected for its ability to quickly adapt its programs and delivery for the needs of specific employers. It also recognises the need for graduates to build “portfolio” careers and switch from one career to another during their working lives, and its interdisciplinary approach to programming develops their adaptability and skill in transferring knowledge to different environments.

A very large proportion of its students are part-time, and they demand flexibility in delivery. Many are mature and in full-time employment; others are young, ambitious and seeking a fast track into a successful career. Continuing professional development is critically important to them and their employers. All of the university’s programs are accredited by relevant professional or peak industry bodies.

It supplements its permanent teaching staff with experienced and innovative people from business, industry, the professions and government. It recognises the emerging importance of SMEs and both caters for and draws from this sector for its staff and students. It similarly recognises the ubiquity of the public sector.

In research, it leads in “real world” projects with direct application to and benefits for business, industry and the professions. It is largely funded through industry collaborations/consultancies.