



## **INVESTORS IN PEOPLE ASSESSMENT REPORT**

## **COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE**



### **INVESTORS IN PEOPLE SPECIALIST:** Sue Holt and Bill Twiss

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Investors in People North of England is delivered by idg, official partner for the North East, North West and Yorkshire & Humber

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#### **Introduction**

This is a review of the **University of Bolton** using the Investors in People Standard. The University is a long-standing Investor in People and continues to use the framework as a good practice model to guide and benchmark its people practices.

Since the last review, the University, in line with the rest of the Higher Education sector, has been through a major period of transition and change. It has re-shaped, realigned its strengths and has developed strong external partnerships to support its employability agenda. It now has six Academic Groups and has removed a layer of middle managers to re-balance its ratio of staffing costs to income levels.

The review was carried out by Sue Holt and Bill Twiss between 21<sup>st</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> January 2014. The University employs 518 people. 86 or 17percent of them participated in one to one and group discussions about the culture and practices at the **University of Bolton**. This is within the guidance issued by the United Kingdom Commission for Employment and Skills for a University of this size.

#### <u>Outcome</u>

**The University of Bolton** continues to meet the Investors in People Standard. On behalf of Investors of People North of England, we would like to congratulate the **University of Bolton** on this achievement. There are several strengths to its people culture and practices, and some areas to consider for further development. We would like to thank everyone for their contributions. Discussions highlighted how the Investors in People culture is understood at the top and influences decisions to achieve the best outcomes for students.

#### **Beyond The Standard**

During discussions, people highlighted some practice that, if assessed to the depth required, could contribute to the achievement of a Beyond the Standard award: bronze, silver, or gold. In summary, these include:

- Stakeholder involvement
- Corporate social responsibility
- Innovation in learning and development
- Building capacity for the future
- Pride in the success of the University
- Fair recruitment and selection processes
- Using review and different methodologies to identify successes and shape future performance

#### How Does the University of Bolton Illustrate Investors in People Practices?

The University of Bolton has gone through enormous change at a rapid pace, which has left people feeling anxious about the future and uncertain about their roles. Against this backdrop, the review of the University's Investors in People practices confirmed that, although there are anxieties and some pockets of negativity, there are some excellent examples of good practice and some enthusiastic and forward thinking people who have the drive and desire to see the University succeed. Strong practice was evidenced in Sports Rehabilitation, where commitment, new ideas, motivation and positivity has driven up standards and achieved excellent outcomes. There are similarly forward thinking, pro-active departments, including Education and Psychology, Learning Enhancement and Student Experience, Libraries, Automotive and Mechanical Engineering, Resistant Materials and Creative Arts. The University plans to use these, and other, good practice examples positively. It will roll them out across other areas so that there is a consistent and visionary approach that enables people to be *"practitioner, lecturer and scholar."* This will inform and enrich teaching and make sure that students develop employability skills alongside academic achievement.

#### Planning and Communication

"We know we want to be platinum." "Teaching intensive, research led – we are all being supported with PhD's." "We need to develop a commercial edge – link more with employers and external specialists to give students a richer learning experience." "We will be a niche and boutique university known for our excellence."

The University of Bolton has a strong reputation for widening participation and engaging with learners who often come with non-traditional entry qualifications and from very diverse backgrounds. Traditionally, over 50 percent of the University's student population are mature students, students studying part-time or within the workplace and, predominantly, live locally and are often the first family member to attend University. These facts, coupled with Government policy changes, have created a difficult operating environment. This has necessitated some difficult decisions so that the future of the University is secured.

Student retention is a major focus for the University of Bolton. It constantly focuses its efforts on creating strategies by plannning to transform and enhance the learning and teaching environment and develop sustainable employability. It has brought in sector specific marketing expertise at a senior level to help develop the brand and ensure consistent communication as well as internal and external marketing strategies. New talents are, for example, bringing innovation into key areas like the Business School, information and learning technologies and collection and interpretation of management information.

There is a comprehensive Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy that outlines the aims of:

- Developing a culture of collegiality and partnership with students
- Providing a nurturing environment which enables students to become fully engaged with the University and become confident and independent lifelong learners

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are built into the strategy, coupled with the development of management information systems which highlight students *"at risk"* so that clear policies and procedures can determine actions to be taken.

The actions that support the strategy include developing new student feedback mechanisms, adopting a new Student Charter and providing opportunities for students to shape and influence the learning environment and educational experience. In order to achieve the aspiration of "Platinum", the University is supporting and encouraging people to grasp new ways of working, forge links with internal and external partners and make sure that student retention, achievement and progression rates are high. People know and understand that without Platinum, there are serious risks to their futures and to those of the University.

There are some good examples of the strategy in action, particularly in Automotive and Mechanical Engineering, where the team is working with a professional racing team to gain mutual benefits. Similarly, in the Sport and Spinal Injuries Clinic, there is an excellent mix of clinical practice, academic research and teaching expertise that results in excellent employment outcomes.

Some areas feel that more focused marketing for their subjects and additional resources, would help them achieve similar success. Some would like clarity about what is planned for the Senior Lecturer role and feel the approach needs to be balanced with succession planning and people's career aspirations.

#### Learning and Development

"We all have the opportunity to do a PhD if we want to." "I was supported to go to an exhibition in the States with my students; that was fantastic learning for all of us."

"I am able to keep up my professional practice. I like the mix of the practitioner, lecturer, scholar – it works."

"I have a deaf student and the University made sure I have had support to understand the student's needs."

As part of its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, the University sets out its plans for equipping staff with the professional skills and qualifications they need to deliver the vision. This includes:

- Developing an Academic Practice framework, which meets the UK Professional Standards framework and is recognised by the Higher Education Academy, and forms part of a Continuing Professional Development framework for University of Bolton staff
- Increasing the numbers of staff who have Associate, Fellow, Senior and Principal fellowship recognition from the Higher Education Academy
- Replacing the Peer Observation of Teaching policy and launching a Professional Practice Peer Review policy for supporting learning and teaching
- Enabling people to access active learning experiences, such as attendance at international events, subject specific conferences and wider networks, as well as being able to gain additional qualifications
- Using blogs and groups to promote peer coaching
- Giving people time and funding to become research active

Many people recognise the value of adding to their skills and updating knowledge through research, formal study and developing external relationships. Some perceive the time it takes to prepare, teach and mark students' work, leaves insufficient quality time for the other aspects that are now expected of them. Peer coaching to support people in developing more efficient time management strategies and avoid duplication, could help share good practice.

Strong practice in the leadership of Learning and Enhancement and Student Experience is innovating the approach to learning and development. It is making good use of technologies to identify in-house talents, produce useful guides, including one for assessment and to produce cost-effective and easily accessible learning materials. In keeping with its culture of equality and diversity the University is using Aurora to promote learning and development for female staff.

#### Ideas, Equality, Ownership and Empowerment

"Our Academic Group Leader gives us autonomy to get on with it." "We are involved in local changes – we review each other's modules and observe each other topph."

teach."

*"It was my business case that suggested the development of the Sports and Spinal Injuries Clinic – it is a great model."* 

The University provides a framework for people to work within and clear guidelines about what it expects. Within that, people are able to adapt and amend their roles and practice to suit the needs

of the students and their subject. There are some really good examples of people looking outside of the University to forge industry links. These inform teaching practice and enable students to become more job ready. The majority of people confirm that their ideas are listened to and often adopted, at local level. Some would like more opportunities to feed into strategic planning at an earlier stage, particularly when it affects their subjects.

The senior people at the University of Bolton have whole staff meetings where views are sought and the new Strategic Plan has been presented to staff for their views on how it might best be implemented to meet individual, team and organisational needs. Making strong links from the strategy through to local plans and action is important in getting people's *"buy in"* for the vision.

Some people are reluctant to put forward ideas and suggestions because there is still some residual fear from the re-structure and role changes that happened last year. Where people are more confident, they give examples of; developing the curriculum, putting forward bids for funding, engaging with local employers to deliver guest lectures and suggesting commercial ideas that could bring in extra income.

#### Leadership and Management

"Our new Academic Group Leader is good; she is tackling under-performance and some of the sloppy practices that have crept in."

"We have been without a line manager for some time and there have been lots of changes and swapping around, which has been unsettling and made it hard to develop a coherent plan for our subject."

Since its previous review, the University has changed its leadership and management structure, replacing three Faculties with six Academic Groups. The middle managers are now the Academic Group Leaders, who take responsibility for their teams and cascade strategic messages. There are some good people managers who engage their teams, manage performance and instil confidence. There are others who fail to cascade the corporate messages and ethos in a positive manner, which reinforces some of the pockets of negativity.

Expectations of managers are being re-defined and include overseeing the delivery of programmes, supporting the team and carrying out performance reviews. Leadership and management development opportunities are available but not consistently taken up.

Performance reviews in their current format are new and not yet consistently implemented. Some are used well to manage performance, set expectations and discuss aspirations. Others are less focused and consist of a discussion about professional development needs. For the performance reviews to be effective, the University needs to:

- Make sure people understand the measures used to monitor their performance
- Adopt a consistent approach that is both motivating and rigorous, so that people who do embrace the new ways of working can see that expectations are the same for everyone and action is taken to address those who resist the changes
- Manage the performance of managers so that they too, are held to account for their management responsibilities

Most people receive feedback, not always formally, but they do value feedback from students, peers and line managers. There is some good practice in peers reviewing modules, offering feedback on classroom performance and sharing good practice as a team. There are good examples in the Sport and Spinal Injuries Clinic, Motor Vehicle Engineering and Creative Arts.

Most people describe their line managers as: *"accessible, supportive and approachable."* Some people are frustrated by frequent line manager changes, without, they perceive, the rationale for the moves being explained.

#### Value and Recognition

People are anxious about their jobs and lack trust in the messages from above. Some feel that the majority of messages cascaded down are negative, rather than celebrating what is positive. Some perceive that although the University has set out its aspirations, there is nothing concrete in place to help people achieve the vision. For example, some would like more support to become research active, perhaps through coaching or peer group mentoring. Where there is good practice and therefore a positive reputation, people see recognition for their work. The team spirit remains strong and people see this as one of the motivating factors in their commitment to the students and the University. Crucially, most people take pride in the success they have with their students particularly in helping those without a tradition of higher education in their families gain first and higher degrees. Where managers are effective, they encourage people, lead by example and offer motivating feedback. People also receive praise and feedback from within their teams.

#### **Evaluation and Continuous Improvement**

The University has a plethora of measures that it uses to evidence its progress and success. These include:

- Recruitment and retention of students
- Achievement and progression
- Research activity
- Employability of students

The University has changed and evolved since the previous review. It has a key strength in its current financial position. It has centralised administration services, reduced the number of courses on offer and realigned its staffing structure and profile. It has introduced graduate traineeships and currently has eight graduates completing ten month placements. It has also developed a Centre for Advanced Performance Engineering, using a professional team and genuine racing cars to enable students to gain first-hand experience, working with active sector specialists.

The University recognises that it has work to do in re-positioning its brand, improving retention and securing better outcomes around employability. It has brought in senior level marketing expertise and is developing its marketing strategies to reinforce the brand and raise internal and external awareness of its new approaches and its niche offers.

The University has recently been successful in its bid to run a University Technical College. It is currently investing in premises and planning how to market this exciting development and opportunity for young people.

#### **Going Forward – Continuous Improvement Opportunities**

#### Plans and Vision

People confirm that the senior people have communicated the vision and aspirations for the future of the University of Bolton. Many are not clear what this means for them or how their departments feed into that strategy. The *"golden thread"* is not clear and some feel there is a lack of transparency and clarity about what is planned. Some Lecturers perceive that senior people do not engage with them in any meaningful way and therefore they cannot contribute to decisions or influence the things that need to change.

#### **People Strategies**

The centralisation of the administrative function has not been a popular move. People perceive that it is now disjointed, offers less support to students, there is a lack of clarity about who is responsible for what and the administrative staff feel stressed and overloaded. Some lecturers perceive poor administration processes and lack of support for students, results in higher attrition rates.

People suggest there is a lack of clarity about who is responsible for student recruitment and marketing and a lack of understanding about how much support people should expect from the central Marketing function.

#### Leadership and Management

There is a mixed picture around leadership and management effectiveness. Where it is effective, people confirm a supportive relationship with good feedback and involvement. For others, it is less positive and includes:

- An inconsistent approach to performance management with some people not having an appraisal discussion for a number of years and an inconsistent approach for those that do take place
- No structured approach to developing aspiring leaders, clarifying expectations or measuring management effectiveness
- Too many middle management changes that have happened rapidly with no clear, shared rationale and leaving people with no time to build teams and relationships

#### Value and Recognition

The sense of worth and recognition could be much stronger if:

- The University marketed and played to its niches and strengths more
- Feedback and performance management could be used positively to recognise and develop positive practice
- Leaders and managers were more visible and accessible
- Messages about no further major reorganisation were reinforced and believed
- Seeing more clearly individual and team continuations to the strategic plan

#### Learning and Development

People confirm that there is a strong and continuing commitment to providing professional development opportunities and there are some excellent examples. Some areas that people feel could improve are:

- Make induction more comprehensive
- Update the staff handbook and make it available via the intranet
- Clarify for new starters and job movers, where their responsibilities begin and end and how their performance will be measured
- Use talents wisely so there is a mix in each department, rather than forcing everyone to do a PhD
- Make more of internal expertise and share good practice so that others know what to aspire to

#### **Going Forward**

The University can learn from its change journey so that it is better prepared for ongoing change in the future. Making communication more regular, transparent and two-way, involving middle managers, making them accountable and ensuring that the University is positively marketed both internally and externally, are key elements. There are some shining examples of successful departments that can be used as exemplars for others to follow, with the University setting very clear expectations so that performance management is used pro-actively to develop the desired culture and behaviours.

It is exciting times for the University of Bolton as it cuts its path through the changing higher education landscape. It has many staff who are loyal, committed and energetic in their pursuit of creating the niche offer that will inspire current and future students. For those that are not in tune with the vision and direction, the University can offer support and coaching, clear communication, a consistent approach and opportunities for discussion, alongside clear performance management criteria.

#### The University of Bolton – Area of Focus for the Review

#### There has been a substantial amount of change in the recent past, some of which is ongoing. How well do people feel they have been engaged in the changes and can lessons be learned to support the University in managing any future changes?

People across all roles realise and understand the need for change and its impact on making sure that the University remains financially viable and able to achieve well in teaching and research. They know and appreciate that this is driven by several factors that are both internal and external. Most have a strong understanding of the economic and political influences on the Higher Education Sector. Equally, people also see several strengths in the University and feel that these could be developed, marketed and exploited more. There are positive views about Vice Chancellor's Forum and its usefulness in presenting topical issues for the future direction of the University. Teams provide a better picture of change management. Some of the views about how teams are working together include:

# "In our office it is like a continuous feedback loop – we talk about the common issues and how we deal with them."

#### "We very much enjoy developing the curriculum." "Open to us to develop new degrees and from September we will introduce a new one leading to a professional gualification"

Change has been difficult for many and especially those who have not been used to a culture of rapid change and its effects. Most people perceive change to have been reactive rather than proactive and that this has reduced their sense of worth and morale, although many see morale as improving, especially at team level.

During discussions people offered suggestions that could improve the leadership and management of change.

- More open communication especially through less formal and devolved means so that any fears about challenging plans are reduced development of *"the listening culture"*
- A more consistent approach to consultation so that people feel it is worth putting ideas, views and constructive challenges forward
- Openness and opportunities to feed views and ideas upwards
- Thinking out change more carefully so that there is less risk of duplicated effort, avoidance of conflicting messages and a greater *"right first time"* approach
- More visibility of the senior leaders so that they develop trust, respect and credibility with teams
- Using more personalised methods where there are sensitive issues for individuals rather than over reliance on e-mails
- Developing leaders and managers so that they become effective communicators
- Promoting a greater awareness of the bigger picture and strategy so that teams feel more engaged with it and align their planning effectively

One of the recurring themes in discussions about change management was the issue of and risks associated with the credibility of message. By working on some of the suggestions offered above people feel that there is an immediate opportunity to restore credibility and to reduce the risks of cynicism about communication.

# There is a new structure in place and some roles that no longer exist. How well do people feel this is working and are there further changes needed to make the structure effective?

The University has put considerable effort into structural change and into trying to align talents, interests and skills to how it sees current and future needs. This has affected most areas and perhaps the most significant structural change has occurred in moving to Academic Groups and in centralising administration. The majority of discussions revealed a balanced view with people understanding the need for a structure that is fit for purpose and affordable but some perceptions that current structures are creating stresses and pressure points and restricting the time available for key matters like: value added for students, treating them as customers and for continuing professional development. The majority of people feel that their skills and knowledge profiles enabled them to move into new roles but that things like: induction, clarity of role and specific development could have been better.

Some of the structures have not yet been in force for a full academic year and for some seeing and evaluating the full impact is still work in progress. In summary the balance of views is:

Positive and Perceived Benefits	Improvement and development
Understanding of the need to organise for the	People feel some areas under-resourced
changing face of Higher Education and the University	
Appreciation of the difficulties and uncertainty that senior managers face when working out structures	<ul> <li>Greater understanding of the rationale, for example:</li> <li>Why is there recruitment in some areas where staff have gone?</li> <li>Why are managers at Academic Group level moved, when the team has settled with them?</li> <li>Investment and spending decisions</li> <li>Clarity of how new structures relate to strategy and vision</li> <li>Is it realistic to assume everyone can be a researcher?</li> <li>Where do the less academic and more vocationally focused courses fit?</li> </ul>
Team commitment and putting the student first remains strong	Future security and continuity in roles and ability to service the student
Recruitment of new people is bringing additional talents in to the University	Career progression as Senior Lecturer roles reduce
Most people still gain satisfaction from seeing the students achieve and through the University's ethos of widening participation	Variances in parity and value between academic and other roles
Sense of positivity and willingness to look ahead and think outside of the box amongst some people which offers potential for it to be shared more	Time to build teams and develop the sharing of good and consistent practice in academic groups
Continuing financial viability	Some are spending too much time focusing on negatives rather than the positives

# Priorities for the University are primarily focused on Recruitment, Retention, Achievement and Employability. Do people feel the communication of priorities has improved and how do they see those priorities as directly linked to their roles and things that they can have an impact on?

There is no doubt that people fully understand the imperatives to recruit and retain students. They see these as critical to the University's survival and growth. As a widening participation University, people understand the challenges this creates in retaining students. In their discussions people highlight positive practice in aiding retention. This includes: constant monitoring of attendance to identify early intervention and support needs, the increasing use of personal tutors and knowing where the *"flash points"* are that lead to students dropping out of courses. In some areas the University has used this information to change the timing of exams. The recruitment and admission of under-graduate students is structured and robust. Some academics feel that interviewing prior to recruitment could be better and that this would impact positively on retention. Others question if incentives for recruitment could lead to cutting corners and practice developing in reducing points needs when going into clearing. In working to overcome the challenges resulting from the increase in student fees, people confirm that student numbers are holding up well and that trends are similar to those seen elsewhere in the sector.

Across the University, there is a very strong commitment to high quality teaching and learning that is increasingly influenced by research. The students achieve well and many gain foundation or honours degrees that without Bolton's commitment to widening participation, would not have been possible. The student experience and seeing the student as a customer or consumer of education is taking shape. The University recognises that this is a constant journey as student expectations rise.

Employability remains a major aim especially as parents and students see the need for well-paid jobs as an outcome from the tuition fee structure. The destination survey work that the University does shows that in many areas the University achieves strong outcomes in employment and in students going on to take professional qualifications or higher level degrees. The University's strengths and niche areas mean that employment prospects are good in disciplines, like resistant material, textiles, sports rehabilitation and creative and media, for example. As the economy recovers, people see the University's reputation and strengths giving students more employment opportunities in sectors like construction and engineering. Looking ahead, there is potential in developing the enterprise culture so that students enter self-employment through starting their own businesses.

## **Evidence Requirements assessed:**

Key:

√M	Evidence Requirement Met		√D	Met with Development Opportunity
x	Further Evidence Required			Evidence Requirement Not Assessed

Evidence Requirements = ER										
ER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	√M	√M	√M	MD	MD	MD	√M	MD	√M	√M
2	√M	√M	√M	MD	√M	√M	√M	√M	√M	√M
3	√M	√M	√M	MD	MD	MD	√M	√M	√M	√M
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#### Suggested Continuous Improvement Plan University of Bolton

Evidence Reference	Current Position	Suggested Action Required	Success Criteria / Measures	Responsibility	When
Indicator 1 Plans and vision	Clear strategic plan People do not understand what it means for them The <i>"golden thread"</i> is missing for some areas	Make sure strategic messages are well communicated and strategic outcomes are reflected in local plans. Base performance management criteria around local actions that will contribute to strategic priorities Where people are not clear about expectations or where there is continued resistance, use the good practice examples, coaching or shadowing to support the sharing of successful strategies and actions	More consistent approach People are clear about how they fit and what is expected People have clear expectations and there is a consistent approach to performance and under performance People cannot use <i>"excusitis"</i> , ideas and practice are shared and negativity is reduced	Senior Leaders Academic Group Leaders	As the new strategic plan is rolled out. This is currently work in progress

Evidence Reference	Current Position	Suggested Action Required	Success Criteria / Measures	Responsibility	When
Indicator 3 People Strategies	Centralisation of administration services is not popular with academic staff, who perceive it has had a negative impact on the student experience	administration lie. Remind	Responsibilities are clear Student needs are put first Administration is efficient and there is a seamless experience for students	Professional Services Leads	Now
	Some people are unclear about who is responsible for marketing and recruitment and how much support to expect from central Marketing	•	People take responsibility Results of marketing are tangible People take ownership and responsibility for successful marketing, recruitment and retention of students	New Marketing Director	Throughout current and next academic year

Indicators 4 & 5 Leadership and Management	Expectations of leaders and managers are not clearly understood and there is not a consistent approach to measuring their effectiveness Some middle managers do not positively cascade strategic messages or effectively articulate HOW people are expected to achieve the outcomes locally.	Clarify what is expected of leaders and managers and how this will be measured, in line with outcomes stated in strategic and local plans Work with managers at all levels to ensure messages are consistently and positively cascaded, with support for people to deliver what is expected	Leaders and managers are accountable There is a consistent and fair approach Messages are transparent and consistent and managers present a united front as the face of the University of Bolton	Human Resources / Personnel Top level commitment	By next academic year
	Leadership and management development is not taken up by many managers and there is a lack of clarity about how aspiring leaders and managers could develop themselves in preparation for a more senior role	-	People acquire the skills and attributes needed to motivate, manage and develop people Under-performance is dealt with, which reduces negativity		

rapid change, which has left some distrustful and anxious, particularly about job security and what will happen if they don't <i>"toe the line"</i> . Instead of being motivated and positive about new ways of working, some are grudgingly and slowly adopting new methods, some are using excuses not to engage. Others genuinely want to join in the journey but are not clear how to make a contribution.	messages are cascaded and successes are shared, do not always focus on the things that are not right. Give managers clarity so that they support people to adapt and change. Use good practice examples and peer coaching to spread bets practice.	there are things to celebrate and this raises morale A collegiate culture develops where people are not afraid to share, question and learn from each other for the greater good.	become more visible and <i>"going</i> back to the floor"	progress
People confirm that there is a strong and continuing commitment to providing professional development opportunities and there are some excellent examples. There are some areas that people feel could improve.	Make induction more comprehensive Update the staff handbook and make it available via the intranet Clarify for new starters and job movers, where their responsibilities begin and end and how their performance will be measured Use talents wisely so there is a mix in each department Make more of internal expertise and share good practice so that others know what to aspire to	People have a thorough understanding of expectations and where they fit People are able to use their talents to contribute more to the University- wide agenda	Personnel Learning and development enhancment	Underway now

All evidence requirements It is now an Investors in People requirement for client focused 18 mont development visit	nort	Investors in People Specialist	18 month intervention due July 2015 Three-year review due January 2017
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