

Supporting BTEC Student Success

“Regardless of qualification route or student demographics, it is vital that all students entering HE achieve their potential”. (Hastings and Noyes, 2023).

An increasing diverse body of students have been entering higher education over the past twenty years, including students with entry qualifications that are not A-levels. Between 2011 and 2020, the number of university students from England aged 18 accepted with a BTEC qualification grew from 25,700 to 41,600 (UCAS, 2020). An increasing proportion of students (particularly those categorised as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic or BAME) are entering higher education with BTEC qualifications, but they are often disadvantaged by a learning culture that presupposes and privileges A-level or Baccalaureate entrants. University staff need to be respectful of the experiences and perspectives of BTEC students and create an inclusive learning environment for them. Research conducted by Mitton and Hensby (2018) on BTEC students at the University of Kent highlights the value of respecting BTEC students’ experiences and perspectives, particularly for promoting students’ confidence in their academic ability and providing a new beginning in a personalised and supportive learning environment. Following negative experiences at GCSE level, the BTEC’s greater emphasis on coursework assessment was often emphasised as a key factor in students’ decision-making.

This resource offers research-informed approaches for supporting and building BTEC student confidence, enhancing their self-esteem, and fostering their sense of belonging. Adapting your students’ resources to accommodate BTEC students is also known to have a significant impact on the experience and outcomes of all students. BTEC students can easily transition and feel confident to learn in your classroom, as [this report reveals](#). On entry, they may have varying levels of academic preparation and will benefit from becoming self-directed learners as they transition into HE. Find accessible ways to foster independent learning skills such as time management, preparing for seminars and group work. Signpost students to Student Learning Advisory Service (SLAS) workshops on effective reading, note taking and essay writing skills. Here are some tips on how you can help BTEC students transition to university as smoothly as possible:

1. Understand and respond to their background: Recognise that BTEC students often have a more vocational education background. Keep up to date on BTEC programmes as they are evolving; stay informed about the latest developments in their former curriculum to align your teaching with their expectations. Aim to incorporate strategies for understanding students’ prior learning experiences and tailor your teaching accordingly, recognising that all students come with varying levels and types of academic preparation. Provide additional resources or support for those who need it. Be open to adapting your

teaching methods based on feedback from BTEC students; they can provide valuable insights into what works best for them.

2. Make learning objectives clear: BTEC students benefit from knowing exactly what is expected of them. Try to remove any mystery surrounding the assessment process and grading criteria through things like detailed assessment [briefs](#) that unpack coursework assignments. Put all relevant information and tips in one assessment brief document; make expectations explicit, and signpost to the document to help students know how they can progress. Design formative assessment tasks into your modules for students to understand how they are doing in relation to the learning objectives.

3. Value practical application: BTEC programmes emphasise practical skills and interactive learning rather than essay writing and test taking, which can lead to misconceptions of BTEC students' capabilities when they reach HE. Davis and Parmenter (2019) challenged this perception by co-developing with students a research-based pedagogy that provides BTEC students opportunities to use critical and a real-world examples and abilities. In your teaching, aim to include real-world examples and [case studies](#) to make the material more relatable.

4. Encourage active participation: Incorporate group discussions, problem-solving exercises, and hands-on activities. Hands-on, collaborative work can help engage BTEC students who thrive in practical settings and is also known to help other students engage and succeed (see more on 'authentic assessment' in Pitt and Quinlan, 2022). Support students to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, demonstrating how academic concepts relate to real-world scenarios.

5. Diversify assessment and feedback: Use various assessment methods such as presentations, practical demonstrations, group projects and written assignments to cater to different learning preferences and strengths. Be sure to provide a [clear well-structured assessment](#) for each assignment that demonstrates [racially inclusive practice](#) to reduce barriers in understanding what is required of them in the assessment process. Regularly provide constructive and timely feedback on assignments and assessments. BTEC students often appreciate guidance on how to improve their practical skills, but students may need your support in recognising and responding to feedback. Provide examples to help clarify your feedback and make space in class for students to make sense of assessment criteria and develop their feedback literacy skills. Read more about this in Pitt and Quinlan (2022).

6. Connect to/embed support services: Make sure all students are signposted to become familiar with university support services that can assist them in their academic journey, such as tutoring and career counselling. As BTEC students are often geared towards employability, they may benefit from engaging with the Careers and Employability Service. Encourage this and make space for Careers and Employability colleagues to come into your taught sessions. Also, try to emphasise how the knowledge and skills gained in your course relate to their future careers, and how their interactions at universities can help to build their professional networks and enhance their career prospects.

Remember that BTEC students bring unique strengths and perspectives to your course. By

understanding their background and adjusting your teaching approach accordingly, you can help them succeed in their university education and future careers.

Resources:

Allan, S. (2021) Educational Development, Lancaster University, Designing Formative Assessments.
<https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/media/lancaster-university/content-assets/documents/oed/ed/DesigningFormativeAssessmentv2Aug2021.pdf>

Boston University Centre for Teaching and Learning n.d.
<https://www.bu.edu/ctl/teaching-resources/using-case-studies-to-teach/>

CHERP, 2018, Ulster University, Guidelines for Writing Assessment Briefs
https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/315060/Guidelines-for-Writing-Assessment-Briefs.pdf

References:

Campbell, P., Duke, B (2023) An Evaluation of the Racially Inclusive Practice in Assessment Guidance Intervention on Students' and Staffs' Experiences of Assessment in HE: A Multi-University Case Study.
https://figshare.le.ac.uk/articles/report/An_Evaluation_of_the_Racially_Inclusive_Practice_in_Assessment_Guidance_Intervention_on_Students_and_Staffs_Experiences_of_Assessment_in_HE_A_Multi-University_Case_Study/23579565

Davis, C. and Parmenter, L. (2019) Student-staff partnerships at work: epistemic confidence, research-engaged teaching and vocational learning in the transition to higher education. *Journal of Educational Action Research*.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09650792.2020.1792958>

Hastings, J and Noyes, A. (2023) Predicting outcomes in sport and exercise science degrees: the effect of qualification pathways, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/0309877X.2023.2244434?needAccess=true>

Mitton, L. and Hensby, A. (2018). *Research report on the experiences of BTEC entrants at Kent*. Report to University of Kent, October 2018.

Pitt, E. and Quinlan, K.M. (2022) *Impacts of higher education assessment and feedback policy and practice on students: a review of the literature 2016-2021*.
<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/impacts-higher-education-assessment-and-feedback-policy-and-practice-students-review>

UCAS (2020) UCAS Undergraduate Sector-Level End of Cycle Data Resources 2020
<https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-sector-level-end-cycle-data-resources-2020>