

<b>Session Title:</b>	<b>4.1 Converting student prospects: how to connect from enquiry to enrolment</b>
<b>Speaker(s):</b>	<i>Barbara Bradshaw &amp; Jasmine Gwalter   The Student Room</i>
<b>Chair:</b>	<b>Hilary Beck</b>
<b>Reporter:</b>	<b>Andrew Smith</b>

<b>Speaker/Institution Bio/Information:</b>	<p><b>Barbara Bradshaw</b>   Senior Market Research Consultant</p> <p><b>Jasmine Gwalter</b>   Community Manager</p>
<b>Overview/Aim of session:</b>	To provide a snapshot of conversations TSR are seeing on the site as 31 January deadline approaches, and to share insight as to how students think, feel and behave.
<b>Workshop Content:</b>	<p><b>Jasmine Gwalter:</b></p> <p>The Student Room receives data from Year 9s beginning their GCSE journey, Year 11s going through their first full exam season, Year 13s researching and applying to university and current students looking at PG and career opportunities. This places TSR in a unique place to understand how students think, feel and behave.</p> <p>Begins with a brief snapshot of conversations they're currently seeing on the site:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30m page views since beginning of September, 18m of which are students visiting <i>Study Help</i>, <i>University</i> and <i>University Courses</i> areas – the most common topics students are searching for.</li> <li>• Provides snapshots of questions that are being asked, key topics including <i>Concerns around cost of living</i>, <i>how much it costs to live in London</i>, <i>grade boundaries</i>, <i>AI in relation to plagiarism</i>.</li> </ul> <p>TSR is home to thousands of conversations every year, but <i>money management and financial literacy</i> continue to be at the forefront of people's concerns – receiving information from universities around the application process and managing their money is really useful at this time.</p>

People come to TSR to get tailored advice from reps who have gone through similar life experiences as they can speak with authenticity – gives example of a nursing applicant who was helped by an official rep who addressed those concerns. Provided further examples (slide 8).

## **Barbara Bradshaw:**

Will run through results of recent surveys focusing on two stages of decision making – **enquiry to application** (24/25 entry prospective undergraduates) and **applicant to enrollment** (also including 23 entry students).

## **Enquiry to applicant**

### What information do you want from universities?

- 98% want information from universities from the beginning of year 12
- Most common – course information, information about the university, application and personal statement advice (slide 12). Barbara emphasizes the point that personal statement advice is important to 96% of applicants so universities should share information about this early.
- Open Days: majority of 2025 respondents were only planning to attend up to 3 on campus Open Days
- Students want to know about the city and campus – a key USP for many institutions.

First roundtable discussion – what are the top 5 barriers to entry to university for 2025 students.

- Cost/cost of living
- Open Days – cost, ability to attend
- Barbara shared slide (slide 13) with the 5 potential barriers, noting that 3 of the 5 are related to cost and so should provide a focus for institutions when giving information to applicants

Moving on to 2024 entry students – what prospective students wanted to know about an individual university before applying there (slide 14)

- Student satisfaction at top – are students having a good time?
- Accommodation – clearly more important for students further afield
- Commuters – 71% want to know about transport links
- Course structure and flexibility is also among the top three there with 60% citing this as essential to know before choosing to apply to a university
- Lower down in the list but something we see repeatedly wanted by prospective students is information about the Student support services available – 43% sought that information before application.

Roundtable discussion – are you providing travel and transport information to prospective students?

- One institution says they work with local transport providers to help with travel and/or local area tours
- Rural institution, also works with local transport to provide discounted travel especially to open days, park and ride options

Where are you finding information?

- The top three choices were university websites (71%), the UCAS website (57%) and open days (52%)
- Next 3 are Online forums, social media and friends and family – harder to have control of the messaging here when it's word-of-mouth, but this is why positive student experience is so important

### **Applicant to enrolled student**

Focus now is on the firm choice decision.

What information is important at this point in the cycle? (slide 17)

- Accommodation tops the chart, move away students even higher unsurprisingly.
- Big differences notable here between move away and stay at home students – more focus on nightlife for move away students, more focus on societies/sports for move away students. Student support more important for stay at home students.
- Student satisfaction still high in the for all groups.

Moving on to 2023 entry students - what they would have found useful from universities after accepting their firm choice.

- Enrolment, key dates, course related content
- University environment
- Connecting with other students

Provided examples of open comments (slide 19)

How do you want universities to communicate with you? (slide 20)

- Email is overwhelmingly the most requested form of communication (96%)
- Social media
- Applicant websites

How often do you want to be contacted at different stages in the process? (slide 21)

- It seems they are open to regular contact at each stage and that the regularity increases as they get closer to enrolment.

## Did your university provide information in good time (2023 students)? (slide 22)

- Really positive stats here – many said they received what they needed in good time
- However only around half said they had received a campus map, or information about where to go on the first day in good time
- They also asked accommodation students whether they got everything they needed in good time. Picture mostly positive – moving in details, what to do on moving in day high in chart. Only half said they received travel and practical information.

Roundtable discussion – What have you tried when sending information to applicants – is there anything you've found that works well or anything that isn't as effective?

- One university says that the feedback they have received is that they get too many emails

## What one piece of advice would you give to students in the year below about applying to university for next year? (2023 students) slide 24

- The main comment was about staying on top of all the different communications
- They also urged younger students to do lots of research, to attend open days and to choose a university that was right for them, regardless of rankings

Provided examples of open comments (slide 25)

## **Applicant Visit Days**

- Half of respondents planned to attend either 2 or 3 applicant visit days. Just 9% said they would attend all 5, and almost one in five 18% weren't planning to attend any. Low numbers, but actually a year-on-year increase.
- Offer Holder Day the most common term, followed by Applicant Day and Invitation Day

## Top 5 useful elements of an applicant day

- Topping the list was hearing from students about the course they would be studying and also hearing from lecturers. Among students who were the first in their families to go to university – 79% wanted to hear from the lecturer on their course.
- And they also wanted to hear from students about university life (63%)
- Tour of the campus and in particular for those moving away accommodation tours are still important at this stage

## **Peer-to-peer support**

- We asked about all the different stages in the journey when

	<p>they would seek support from peers such as current university students either in person or online. For most respondents 88% this is something they would seek.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most often when deciding where to apply, and after receiving an offer before selecting their firm choice.</li> <li>- Your students are your best ambassadors and providing any opportunities for applicants to connect with current students can showcase your university and aid conversion.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Case Studies/Examples:</b></p>	<p>Examples as above throughout</p>
<p><b>Scenarios/Roundtable discussions:</b></p>	<p>Top 5 barriers to entry?</p> <p>Are you providing information to students on travel etc?</p> <p>Are you sharing information on preparing to start university/arrive at accommodation? If so, how?</p>
<p><b>Questions and Answers:</b></p>	<p>See above notes throughout.</p> <p>Q. What was the sample size for the surveys? A. It varied – see slides002E</p>
<p><b>Summary/Key takeaways:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Universities are doing a lot of great things and doing a lot of things right and students are getting the essentials – but is there scope to provide more support, more opportunities to engage with current students as this may alleviate concerns.</li> <li>- There is scope to keep in touch regularly and after results day and provide more info that will help with settling in</li> <li>- Applicant days aren't a given, most won't attend all five and lots won't attend any – and from those who do attend it all about the personal connection with people and place, so those students and lecturers on the course and the tours</li> <li>- If possible try to link applicants with others joining their course or current students to help them feel part of the community before they arrive to help settle them in.</li> </ul>