

<b>Session Title:</b>	<b>Recruitment and marketing for challenging course areas</b>
<b>Speaker(s):</b>	<b>Charlotte Renwick – Leeds Beckett University Caitlin Clifford – University of Wolverhampton</b>
<b>Chair:</b>	<b>Jack Clare</b>
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<b>Speaker/Institution Bio/Information:</b>	<b>Charlotte Renwick – Director of Marketing, Recruitment and Admissions, Leeds Beckett University</b>  <b>Caitlin Clifford – Interim Head of UK Recruitment, University of Wolverhampton</b>
<b>Overview/Aim of session:</b>	<b>The aim of the session</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understand how to research and track the performance of courses</li> <li>2. Manage conversations and relationships with key internal stakeholders, in particular academic colleagues</li> <li>3. Consider practical marketing, recruitment and conversation strategies for challenge courses</li> <li>4. Monitor and track performance and success of initiatives</li> <li>5. Confidence to create an action plan for challenge courses</li> </ol>
<b>Workshop Content</b>	<b>Research and review course performance</b>  <b>Is your challenging course(s) a market share problem or a demand pool problem?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use HESA and UCAS Data to see the size of the pool, whether it is growing or declining over at least the last five years, and at what pace (ten years ideally). Trends rarely change!</li> <li>○ By using HESA and UCAS data as well as your own, you can work out your market share for specific courses and well as the wider discipline.</li> <li>○ Above 1% share for a large university is a decent performance</li> </ul>

- If you already have upwards of 20% market share for a niche course area, increasing this will be tough!
- If you already have a very high market share, but this is declining, this probably means that this course has peaked in the potential people available to recruit. On the contrary, If you already have a very low market share, you might be able to increase that a bit, but this impact will probably be small overall.

## **Using HESA and UCAS data to set realistic expectations and bust any myths that might exist**

- Know your numbers – work backwards and use your data. Look at the percentage of firm choices and what does that pattern look like feeding through the funnel
- Having that kind of context means you have realistic sensible conversations
- 18 year olds are not necessarily bound by logic and what their interest matches to careers
- Leeds Beckett use Data HE – They have 70 University clients in the UK
- How does your course compare with competitors – who are your main 5 competitors? Know who these institutions are!
- Is there a particular caveat or offering they have that you don't e.g. their contextual offer scheme is more generous than yours or are their online prospectuses pages better?
- Try and gain an insight into the bigger picture e.g. population changes, COVID-19, applicant sentiment etc.

## **Managing conversations with key stakeholders**

- Managing conversations and relationships with key stakeholders on recruitment and conversation to underperforming courses can be challenging!
- Be prepared with the quantitative data so you can go into discussions with relevant data to support your recommendations
- Be realistic with the interventions and activities, and concentrate on those that will provide the greatest return on investment
- Listen to stakeholders feedback, and be prepared to negotiate and compromise to ensure they are on board to

support your ideas and objectives

- In an ideal world you have a huge demand for your course areas, but in reality that isn't always the case
- Be confident in your approach and your suggestions. At the end of the day, YOU ARE THE EXPERTS!

## Planning your approach

Practical Marketing, recruitment and conversation strategies to include in your action plan

## What to consider in your action plan?

- **Stage in the recruitment cycle/funnel**
  - Recruitment, lead generation and applications
  - Conversion from application to firm accept and enrolment – have you got a really good applicant pool, but they are just not converting?
- **Level and semester of study**
  - Undergraduate or Postgraduate or integrated
  - Semester 1 intake, or multiple intakes e.g. January, September etc....
- **Area of delivery and team responsibility**
  - Marketing; communications; course enquiry handling; internal and external events; school and college engagement; nurturing
- **Activity and additional uplift**
- **Progress and monitoring**

## External and Internal Events

### External Events

- Engage with academic colleagues from challenging course areas and encourage them to attend external exhibitions so they can see first hand what the audience is looking for from their course – do they need to change their approach?
- Ensure representation of student ambassadors from challenge course areas at external exhibitions
- Providing the opportunity to send academic colleagues to exhibitions and events e.g. UK University Search, UCAS and Find A PHD Live fairs in geographical regions where recruitment to your institution is strong or is an area where you wish to grow.

- Identity alternative large scale subject exhibitions in your region e.g. STEAM Fairs (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths)
- Represent challenging course areas in stand design and marketing materials e.g. Television screens, banners, as well as freebies
- Ensure personalised follow-up activity with data leads after large events e.g. UCAS exhibitions
- Could you deliver a talk at an exhibition if you are not already doing so? (An easy win to promote your challenge course!)

## Internal Events

### Events aren't actually always the answer!

Consider the following before deciding whether an event is an appropriate recruitment and conversion activity

- Size of your enquirer or applicant pool – do you have the numbers?
- Stage in the recruitment cycle and funnel – is it the right time in the calendar to deliver such an event e.g. March too many exhibitions!
- Planning and build-up time – do you have adequate time to plan, market the event, organise it and then deliver it? (Yes/No?)
- Costs and resources – do you have the additional budget for an unplanned activity to take place?
- Will your event be on-campus, virtual or hybrid?
- Are you already delivering events that could be adapted or tweaked to better market challenging course areas? (Yes/No?)
- Is this a reactive or planned activity – If this is not budgeted for how will this affect spend on remain activities throughout the year?
- Overall it is about targeting certain enquirers – do you have the costs and resources to result in a quick win!

### Alternatively...

- Could you enhance the presence of challenging course areas

at existing events or activities?

- Could you provide subject specific campus tours for course areas with key activities?
- Keynote webinars? – These could be useful for topical issues or research within a subject area
- Additional Q&A sessions for applicants in challenging course areas with academics and students
- Sneak in a course which in the taster day the school/students weren't expecting
- Bringing applicants and course leaders as well as personal tutors together ahead of enrolment e.g. Community groups on social media platforms, on-site events and webinars

## **School and College Engagement**

- If demand is a problem, combine the course which isn't as popular with a more popular course(s), and deliver subject-related activities at either applicant events or a taster-day for WP students?
- If a market-share problem – review what key messages are required to beat the competition and increase understanding of your audience (who may be a different demographic to your 'bread' and 'butter' student?)
- Is there a way you can offer CPD to your audience's supporters e.g. Teachers and Advisers, but also Parents and Guardians too! This can provide a springboard to promote your course which is not picking up the numbers!
- Can you offer a unique experience or opportunity to pupils to provide a hook for engagement?
- Use topics of interest to target your audience to draw them in to discovering the subject
- Have a targeted approach – concentrate activities on your top feeder schools and colleges for that particular subject area (Datafiltr is a very useful tool to help with this, if your institution has this)
- It is not all about recruitment! Can you offer more personalised support to applicants e.g. a drop-in advice session on skills to help you survive university e.g. cooking, managing bills etc...

## **Driving more demand**

- Can your course be restructured or reshaped in-line with changing interests of Generation Z and the interests of Generation A as they progress to University in the 2020s?
- Can your course be offered as a combined honours course (if this is not offered with this option already), with a more popular subject to make this more attractive e.g. Business Marketing with PR (Business is popular, PR is less popular)
- Is there an international market for your course (if there is already - can this grow?)
- Can you offer scholarships targeted at specific countries for specific programmes? (ideally, the programme(s) which are less attractive) which may quickly generate more applications quickly
- Could you offer a scholarship for UK home students with a financial incentive e.g. accommodation discount in first year?
- Even more specific : Could you offer a scholarship for females studying STEM subjects and work in STEM careers
- Can this course work better if it is a distance learning course – this may bolster your numbers of international students

## **Marketing activity**

- Invest in Pay Per Click channels so you don't waste precious budget, only paying for traffic that have some interest in your course
- Work with your web team or media agency to track beyond click throughs to look at the quality of each web visit
- Further refine your advertising spend in line with this ensuring you are sending web traffic to the optimal place and that you have engaging content and calls to action to drive people further down the conversion funnel
- Use digital re-marketing to convert interested individuals – Where there is a finite number of people interested in studying a specific subject, rather than massive campaigns for many people that aren't interested in that particular subject area
- With the digital space, it gives you a lot of opportunity to target very carefully e.g. postcode level
- If notice a trend in December that recruitment for a particular course is down, this is far too late to have a reactionary response, as you may get more applications, but the conversion rate to enrolment is very poor

## Nurturing activity

- Aim of nurturing activity is to keep in regular contact with enquirers and applicants to support their decision making to application, firm accept to enrolment stage in their application journey
- Using student ambassadors to run a call campaign to call enquirers and applicants to keep them engaged e.g. “Are you aware we have an open day next Saturday.... is this something you would like to attend... how is how you can book on!...”
- Segmenting call campaigns by stage of entry e.g. Undergraduate and Postgraduate level; Enquiry vs Applicant; course/subject specific; campaigns; traditional vs mature learners
- Good representation of highly trained student ambassadors e.g. senior ambassadors, placement students
- Create a ‘call back form’ for website and communications – academic colleagues call enquirers who request a call back
- Timely and personalised comms to data leads captured at internal and external events – signposting keep these people warm and hopefully help them make decisions going forward
- Using Bonjoro for semester 2 enquirers and applicants. Bonjoro is an app that allows personalised video messages to be recorded and sent directly to prospective applicants that are undecided with their decision making and require additional activity to boost their application(s) and support conversion ahead of the main cycle application deadline (end of January)

## Monitoring Impact and Success

- Make sure you have measurable outcomes and benchmarks for your activities
- Regular meetings with key stakeholders to monitor activity and assess progress towards your key goals and objectives
- Have a RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating to visualise performance and identify any key challenge areas for particular programmes or subject areas
- Evaluate the activity – could it be done in a different way moving forward to increase impact
- Review application, firm accept and enrollment data (that enquiry to enrolment journey) on a regular basis e.g. the impact individual activities and how many attendees from said

	activities went on to actually make an application, and how many actually enrolled – what is the conversion rate?
<b>Case Studies/Examples</b>	<p><b>Leeds Beckett University</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public Relations as a discipline is one of the biggest declining subjects nationally</li> <li>To overcome this, Leeds Beckett University created a joint course which combines Marketing and Public Relations together to try and sway the tide of declining numbers</li> <li>Course title: Undergraduate BA (Hons) – Marketing and Public Relations</li> <li>Marketing is a subject discipline which is growing and will continue to grow throughout the 2020s as Generation A progress</li> <li>The student support team on the course offered free PR advice to leadership teams in key schools and colleges</li> <li>The team also ran sessions which included topics related to wider business and management outreach activities</li> <li>Leeds Beckett are currently exploring growing this course internationally, with specific marketing to certain agents/ certain markets e.g. China, India etc..</li> </ul>
<b>Scenarios/Roundtable discussions:</b>	<p><b><u>Activity 1</u></b></p> <p>What do you currently identify as the most challenging subject areas in your institution?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use your phone to scan the QR Code.</li> <li>Voting Code is 2673 0585</li> <li>Select 3 subject areas you think are the most challenging to recruit and market for</li> </ul> <p><b>Round-table discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The largest consensus from the round-table discussion was that 10 people thought Art was a challenge course area (highest of any subject)</li> <li>Nursing had a bulge in applications during COVID-19, but has this now trailed off?</li> </ul> <p>Also is this now becoming a more challenging course to recruit for e.g. the effect of the cost of living crisis + strikes?</p>



	<p><b>Activity 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ You have 5 minutes to use the template on the table to create a mini action plan for a challenging subject area:</li> </ul> <p>Think of recruitment and conversion activities and initiatives for;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Marketing</li> <li>○ Nurturing</li> <li>○ Events</li> <li>○ Schools and Colleges</li> </ul> <p>Consider how you would monitor the progress and success of your initiatives?</p> <p><b>Round-table discussion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Could you use student ambassadors for call campaigns and exhibitions? They could call applicants to invite them to offer holder days. N.B. – some universities already do this e.g. Oxford Brookes</li> <li>○ Parents and Guardians are such a key influence on decision making e.g. they will often drive their child to an Open Day or book their train travel for their child so that they can attend – so they are very influential in recruitment and conversion. Round-table felt the impact and significance of this is underestimated by leaders within HEIs.</li> <li>○ Universities don't communicate well enough to parents the whole journey of higher education <b>Call to action:</b> Ensure that your information, advice and guidance to Parents is thorough enough – can this be improved?</li> <li>○ The nature of recruitment and admissions has completely changed. Students now need to be really strategic and not as quite as selective as they used to be, as the population has grown and spaces have become more competitive</li> <li>○ However, there is concern among practitioners that UK (home) students may get left behind as some institutions are obsessed with the financial incentive that comes from recruiting International studies, which is at the detriment of UK (home) students, especially mature/disadvantaged students who often require more support, particularly financially</li> <li>○ Nurturing different communication channels so that things can to be tailored appropriately to the right audiences</li> </ul>
<p><b>Questions and Answers:</b></p>	<p>See notes above in the Round Table discussions</p>

<b>Summary and Key takeaways:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Research and review course performances is key to identifying underperforming subject areas. Use a variety of external and internal data and intel to finalise your list.</li><li>2. Ensure buy in from key stakeholders for additional activity – recommend activities that you can realistically deliver within the timeframe and resources available.</li><li>3. Devise an action plan with relevant activities to target enquirers and applicants at each stage of the recruitment cycle and funnel.</li><li>4. Set measurable outcomes for each activity ensuring that all stakeholders are aware of their responsibilities and monitor success regularly.</li></ol>
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