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## ICEBREAKER

- **What's your biggest lesson learned from the last 6 months?**

Creativity, innovation, speed and resilience of staff in moving to delivering a digital experience. Staff have demonstrated an agile and flexible approach to working which has ensured institutions have developed trust in their staff to ensure the job is completed well whilst home working. In turn, institutions have supported their teams and developed new ways to support their wellbeing and mental health. It is important for staff not to beat themselves up as working from home is very different.

The importance and reliance of IT increased and institutions have invested heavily in this. Installing and adapting to new software was conducted at a more rapid pace than prior to lockdown.

There is still a high demand for information from prospective students and although digital events are supporting this, they will not replicate the busyness and buzz of an open day. It is important to manage the expectations of students, and more crucially the academics and staff taking part in the events, to ensure buy-in going forward.

## VIRTUAL

- **Do you think virtual elements will play a big part in the future of student recruitment and widening participation going forward, even when we are back to a more physical academic year?**

There are many positive aspects to virtual delivery:

- Cost saving
- Can cross geographical boundaries: international students and students who normally wouldn't travel so far
- Increase in demand for information from parents and digital offers this opportunity.
- Further opportunities to engage with speakers and external organisations
- Cover more subject areas
- Students/ parents can access materials and recordings at convenient times



Although there are many positives to holding digital events, they cannot replicate physical events. Students may experience digital fatigue. They need to visit and get a feel of the university and have the opportunity to talk to student ambassadors. In the future, virtual events should be used to enhance on campus or in-person activity.

Recently, institutions have been asked to conduct talks for schools and colleges and hold campus tours so, there is obviously still a need and desire for this. As things return to more normal, there will be an increased demand for face to face events. Some institutions will continue using virtual delivery moving forward alongside physical events. Senior managers might be too keen on the world of virtual and we need to remember why we did physical events and the benefits. It's about the right activity for the right group at the right time.

- **Tips for how we can recreate some of the interactive aspects of F2F delivery in online setting?**

Aim to support students who are unsure, not engaging or have a limited support network by:

- Using different platforms
- Camera and microphone off
- Downloadable materials
- Arranging meetings
- Following up with attendees after the event to ensure they got what they needed
- Use current students where possible to engage with prospective students
- Unibuddy
- Offering 1:1 sessions

Look what we are trying to communicate and present the answers in a way that addresses prospective students' needs.

Consider how to make it more interactive.

Need to stop beating ourselves up as a sector. All institutions record sessions, so students can access this at any time and therefore may not login during the actual event, providing universities with the number of visitors or data.

Digital delivery has meant the provision of general IAG has been lost unless students are willing to sit through dozens of open days. We work best when we work together and we need to look at how to do this. Study in Scotland has worked better than if institutions had contacted students individually.



## **STAFF / INSTITUTION / WELLBEING**

- **What has your institution done to support staff wellbeing over the last 6 months?**
  - Student support service introduced for students and staff - Be Connected which includes: fitness, skills sessions, have lunch, book club, weekly quiz
  - Additional days off
  - Induction programme for returning to work
  - Money for staff to purchase home office equipment
  - Individual thank you letters from the Principal, with chocolates
  - Regular messages from VC
  - Increased frequency of team and one to one meetings
  
- **What piece of advice would you give to someone wanting to become a student recruitment manager or progress within the sector with many recruitment freezes?**
  - Given that jobs are going to be scarce, if you like the look of a job then apply anyway. There will be jobs going forward with the need for new skill sets. Institutions may question if they have these skill sets within their teams.
  - Be as externally facing as you possibly can for example, becoming a school governor. This provides networking opportunities and helps you understand the sector.
  - Volunteer to support charities of interest to you at a national level. This will aid your understanding of governance in a formal setting.
  - HELOA is always looking for volunteers. HELOA mentoring is also invaluable.
  - Look for opportunities within your own institution in a shadowing capacity or standing in for your manager in meetings which will help build your profile within the institution.
  - Being a people person is key as being a manager is in investing in people. Having the passion and belief in what you do and conveying this to others will help to motivate your team.
  - If you don't feel aligned to your institution then seek out a new institution where you will be able to achieve more.
  
- **What are your biggest 'take-aways' from the way your institution has learned to adapt during lockdown/COVID (particularly in widening participation / student recruitment)?**

Before COVID, there was a resistance to trust staff to work at home. However, staff have kept everything going. Although it is much more intense working from home, people seem happier and we have witnessed fewer numbers of sickness absences. Moving forward we will be looking at flexible working.

Virtual delivery has a massive dependence on IT. It may have been difficult to get a new system running in the past but they have been very responsive. This has meant that we have been able to continue to deliver as a service to the institution and gain a stronger recognition.



It has been positive to see how well universities can pull together and handle the situation. We should celebrate this. News stories can portray universities as cynical. However, people working in universities will have seen lots of examples of staff showing consideration for students' interests.

- **What skill sets do you feel your teams need to develop in order to effectively operate at present and how are you planning to address this?**
  - Resilience
  - Mental health support and wellbeing.
  - Looking at how to support staff in resilience if we move into another lockdown
  - Being able to script for camera, social media, presentations, video editing, live webinars etc.

Skill set has always been varied and wide-ranging but even more so now.

- **What would be your key keep on strategies for student recruitment, widening participation or leadership strategy?**
  - Teams and the channels within Teams
  - The situation has made us think of what is important and what's not. Would like to retain some of the capacity.
  - Embrace technology. Use technology to enhance outreach not to replace it.

#### **SCHOOLS / OUTREACH / ENGAGEMENT**

- **With the lack of missed contact time with school and colleges, will students, careers leads and teachers become apathetic to outreach activities in the future?**
  - Schools would still like us to go into schools. Although we will probably have a blended approach, we will end up back to where we were with physical events.
  - Working collaboratively as a group of institutions has worked well and has gained a lot of schools engagement.
  - Struggling with widening participation targets in so much as they are struggling themselves to get back to studying. A lot of organised activity in top level schools but concerned about students in schools in deprived areas. Institutions are missing demand from them as they are overwhelmed with what they have to deal with. Use CRM to promote institutions but also to provide information so that they can make an informed decision before making an application.
  - Need to be flexible according to the demands and needs of teachers. Teachers and advisors are struggling to provide one to one advice and guidance. Teachers are calling on institutions to provide this. This is another way of reaching out to WP learners to offer personalised advice and guidance.



- **What does engagement look like? Is it sign ups? Any good examples of how universities are capturing data?**
  - Could put the open days pages behind sign in points but this may create barriers.
  - Unibuddy allows institutions to collect data as they have to have a Unibuddy sign up. However, the disadvantage to Unibuddy is that students cannot see presenters' faces while presenting. Teams has better delivery but can't capture the data. They all want to be a platform of choice so they are trying to improve and meet institutions' needs.
  - Wholesale is not a healthy route to go down. Students will expect a more modern experience. Universities at a senior levels like leads as they are measurable metrics which turn into money.
  - Much of our IAG does not give us measurable activity but will make a broader, wider impact on students

#### **CLOSING QUESTION**

- **What would you say should be our focus as a sector in 2021?**

From a student recruitment and widening participation perspective, the focus is to be as responsive as possible to what the schools and colleges need and want from us. The value is in the relationships that we are building with the staff in those schools. Listening to key stake-holders and how we can support them with the challenges they are facing. Use virtual platforms to enhance schools' experiences and to meet their needs. Opening out access to the universities' VLE to schools and colleges as many do not have the budget for this themselves. Universities need to be adaptable.

There is more that we have to do to support students in convincing parents that university is the right option.

Institutions should review what has gone well and what hasn't this year. Look at diversifying the channels to ensure that we're doing it better.

Keep supporting and motivating people. People need to make sure they are looking after themselves. Reflect with positivity about what worked well and what you could do in future lockdowns or virtual delivery. The sector has developed new ways of engaging that we didn't have before so any further restrictions should be easier.