

From Blocked to Booked: Driving Postgrad Conversions with Authentic, Non-Traditional Grassroot Engagement

HELOA National Conference



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About Me: Why PG Recruitment Matters

Passion

- Creating authentic, human-centred PG experiences
- Students should pursue PG study for passion, curiosity, or career goals

Challenges I've Faced

- Academic blocks and closed departmental cultures
- Exclusivity agreements
- Securing UG→PG rollover is not guaranteed
- Creating touchpoints that meet students where they actually are

Experience

- 10+ years in HE
- Regional UG & PG Recruitment: Wales & South West
- National UG & PG Recruitment: Midlands, London, Leeds
- Worked in public and private institutions

AGENDA

- 01 Sector Scan: The Current PG Landscape
- 02 Consistent Blockers to Authentic Engagement
- 03 Solutions, Not Problems: Extending the PG Playbook
- 04 Guerrilla-Style PG Recruiting
- 05 Summary and Conclusion

Sector Scan: The Current PG Landscape

Affordability is The #1 Driver and Concern

Cost remains the biggest factor influencing PG decision-making (Voice of the Online Learner, 2025; FindAUniversity)

PG Audiences Are Shifting

The 30+ age group now dominates PG recruitment, while participation among younger audiences is declining (FindAUniversity)

UG → PG Progression is Not Automatic

Recent HESA/Jisc data confirms that progression rates are far lower than often assumed. Average UG-to-PG conversion at many universities sits below 10–15%, varying by discipline

International PG Recruitment is Volatile

Unpredictable international markets mean domestic pipelines and grassroots engagement matter more than ever (UUKi, 2025)

Competition Between Universities is Intensifying

Recruitment pressure is directly linked to financial deficits across the sector (Times Higher Education)

Sector Scan: The Current PG Landscape

PG is No Longer Secondary

HESA data (March 2025) shows that more taught postgraduate degrees were awarded than undergraduate degrees in 2023/24

Cost of Living is Impacting Choices, but Not Satisfaction

Over 60% of PG students say cost of living affects them, yet course satisfaction is at a record high (86%), including among distance learners (PTES, 2025)

Window of Opportunity

Students value quality and experience; institutions that communicate value clearly and humanly are best placed to convert

The picture is complex: students are more cost-conscious, the market is more competitive, but satisfaction is at an all-time high. That creates a real opportunity, if we engage in the right way and assume loyalty is not automatic

Consistent Blockers to Authentic Engagement

Access & Structural Barriers

- Limited open access due to exclusivity/sponsorship agreements with other institutions
- Closed departments and academic gatekeepers that restrict access
- Capacity constraints: PG recruitment often under-resourced
- Digital overload: students disengage from generic emails and spray gun campaigns
- Timing confusion: students underestimate when to explore PG options

The challenge isn't demand; it's access.

Consistent Blockers to Authentic Engagement

Student Barriers

- Funding anxiety: top-cited barrier to PG study
- Confidence gaps: many don't feel PG-ready
- Information gaps: unclear routes, modes, and deadlines

These barriers aren't personal; they're systemic and solvable.

Consistent Blockers to Authentic Engagement

Perception & Market Barriers

- Stereotypes: certain universities perceived as more prestigious, research-led, or employability-focused
- Our presence seen only as the 'hard sell' or a transaction
- Assumed loyalty: UG students don't automatically progress to PG

**Hidden perceptions can block engagement;
proactive, human-centred outreach is key.**

Solutions, Not Problems: Extending the PG Playbook

Human-Centred Tactics

- Authentic conversations over scripts
- Micro-engagements: corridor chats, coffee table conversations, pop-up Q&As.
- Highly-present recruiters during high-pressure windows (Jan–Apr peak)
- Data-led targeting: focusing on segments with proven signals of interest and competitor presence
- Campus Representatives and Student Ambassador led engagement

Structural Solutions

- Multi-touchpoint pathways: events → conversations → follow-up
- Personalised, student-first communication (not marketing-first)
- Rapid response times for PG enquiries

Small, consistent relational actions outperform big one-off campaigns.

Solutions, Not Problems: Extending the PG Playbook

The Hidden Influencers: Parents and Guardians

What the Data Says

- 71% of students say parents/guardians influence their study decisions
- Influence remains strong at PG level: 66% of PG responders still cite parental guidance
- Students whose parents have degrees are almost twice as likely to pursue PG study (26.2% vs 15.5%)

Why This Matters

- Parents often support financially or emotionally
- They want clarity on investment, ROI, and stability
- They often don't understand PG timelines/funding
- In May 2025, TSR reported that 20% reported receiving no direct communication from universities (Parent Report 2025)

Engagement Opportunities

- P&G-friendly guides.
- What is PG study? explainer content.
- Parent led forums and dedicated PG pages

Parents are hidden influencers – engage them deliberately.

Solutions, Not Problems: Extending the PG Playbook

Progression & Roll-Over Opportunities

Early Pipeline Work

- UG→PG pipelines built across years, not months
- Early segmentation: identifying likely PG sectors within your UG community
- Alumni reactivation via personalised micro-campaigns

PG Literacy for UG Students

- Demystifying the “why PG, why now?” conversation
- Using alumni case studies and future career framing

High-Value UG Touchpoints

- Masterclasses, careers-focused workshops
- Subject-specific PG tasters
- Quick human centred wins

You build progression; you can't assume it.

Brainstorm Practical, Easy-to-Implement Ideas to Improve PG Prospective Student Engagement and Conversion

1. Split into small groups or pairs
2. Brainstorm 3–5 “quick wins” your team could implement immediately or in the next 3 months

Focus Areas (for inspiration)

- Events & Outreach – micro-events, pop-ups, webinars
- Communications – personalised emails, SMS nudges, FAQs
- Parents & Influencers – guides, info sessions
- UG→PG Rollover – micro-campaigns, alumni case studies
- Human-Centred Touchpoints – authentic conversations, relationship-led approaches

Submit Your Ideas Live and Feedback

- Go to: menti.com
- Code: 3603 3335

Guerrilla-Style PG Recruiting Case Study

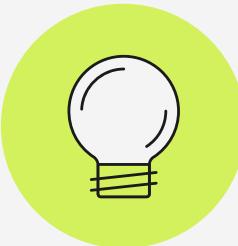
Techniques

- Be where students actually are: corridors, cafés, libraries, social spaces inside and outside of campuses
- Respond to restricted access with presence, not avoidance (be present in high footfall areas)
- Low-resource, high-impact setups (pop-up tables, walkabouts)
- QR micro-resources for instant capture
- Working with student societies, course leaders, informal influencers

Framing

- Guerrilla recruiting is not chaotic; it's nimble, relational, and hyper-present

Summary



PG recruitment requires intentional, human-centred engagement; It isn't automatic



Blockers are real but solvable; access, perceptions, and assumed loyalty create barriers



Understand your audience: mature students, parents, and UG pipelines all influence decisions

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Non-traditional tactics work, grassroots, guerrilla-style, and relationship-led approaches cut through formal barriers



Quick wins matter: small, thoughtful touchpoints can significantly improve PG conversion



Communicate value clearly: highlight quality, outcomes, and authentic student experiences

Engage creatively and consistently; presence, trust, and personal connections outperform assumed loyalty

PG recruitment
thrives when we stop
assuming loyalty and
start showing up,
consistently, humanly,
and courageously.

Next Steps:

- Be present
- Be human
- Be flexible
- Be bold
- Be where the students are