Session title: Finding the leaks in your student recruitment hosepipe

Speaker: Penny Eccles (penny@pennyeccles.co.uk)

Chair: Grant Cullen

Reporter: Steph Harkes

Speaker information:

- Session led by Penny Eccles, in collaboration with UCAS Media. Penny has worked in the Higher Education (HE) sector for over 21 years, including stints at 7 universities. She is now an independent consultant.

Aim of session:

- To give everyone actions to take back to universities to combat their own 'leaky hosepipe'.

Workshop content:

- Penny gave an introduction to the *Leaky Hosepipe Solution*, explaining that the concept was inspired by her father who was often reluctant to buy anything new, especially garden tools. For him, this became particularly problematic when his hosepipe started to leak, resulting in more water leaking out than being effectively used.
- The key aim of the *Leaky Hosepipe Solution* is therefore to solve the problem we create for ourselves in HE when we actively capture leads, only to ultimately lose them without any real gain (similarly to Penny's father's experience with his hosepipe).
- **Penny has identified 28 key leaks from start to finish of prospective student journey.**
- Five key insights from evaluating these leaks:
    1. **We're all leaky** – every institution has their own struggles!
    2. **A 'good' or well-functioning hosepipe** = a high volume of quality enquiries, high application volumes, high rejection rate (as long as you have a strong conversion rate), a high confirmation threshold (likely resulting in comparatively heavy rejections at confirmation) to keep tariff high and a low proportion of Clearing enrollers.
    3. **The two most important leaks to watch** =
        1. The number of applicants who were 'unknown to you' upon application (on average, only 54% of applicants have had a pre-application relationship with universities).
        2. The quality of your enquiry data (again, an average of only 50% of enquirers logged for any given year went to any university in that year – conclusions from this are that our enquirers often don't know their year of entry (especially pertinent if dealing with younger students). The key problem this causes is a feeling of not being 'understood' by the institution, even if it's based on information they've provided. Here, data quality is crucial – do less, but do it better. Quality of courses also important. Focus on hero programmes (courses which are in national decline but increase at institution)).

4. **Missing or low interactions can do more damage than we know** – there's value in tracking everything possible including outreach, phone calls, social media interactions and interviews, as this helps to identify what the key relationships within the university are for prospective students. As part of this, Penny really highlighted the power of a friendly face/staff member who can be tied to an institution's brand and make things more personal. She suggests that those outreach staff involved in previous engagements with groups (as logged in tracking) should be front and centre at events, welcoming those they've met already (e.g. a staff member who has presented in the same school a few times meeting a cohort from there and their teacher).
5. **Points mean prizes** – for almost every hosepipe, the higher the number of *meaningful* touchpoints = the higher the enrolment rate. Huge value should be placed on identifying those you've engaged with already, including deferrals – contact them to make sure they actually come.
6. **Bonus – the most successful team is an integrated team!**

Examples of effective lead/client/customer nurturing:

- Penny mentioned a number of organisations she had identified as doing great work in keeping leads warm and actively preventing leaks:
  - Example 1 – a skincare company who offered a personalised consultation (even online) and subsequent product recommendations based on that. For many customers, it's nice to feel that the firm cares about getting to know them as an individual. Penny noted that she felt more drawn to buying from them with this.
  - Example 2 – the garage that Penny's car was serviced at sent her a video tour of her car and everything they were checking/suggesting needed some work doing. Again, the personalised experience was something that drew Penny back to them the following year.

Roundtable discussions:

- Five minutes spent on the questions 'what is your value exchange?' and 'what do people get out of signing up for your CRM?'
- Most delegates agreed that we don't offer anything special and would be keen to make the offering more compelling to prospects.

Questions and answers:

1. How would it be best to record engagements that are traditionally more challenging to track (such as school assembly presentations etc.)?

   Answer – Penny used to throw postcards around the room although acknowledges that wouldn't be as easy now. She suggests QR codes matched to the event and to staff members, but also flagged that a value exchange (mutual benefit) must be there.

2. What is the best way to record social media interactions?

   Answer – Although resource heavy, Penny suggested someone sending a direct message thanking the individual for enquiring, presenting the value exchange and asking if they'd like to be on the CRM/database.

Some discussion from delegates followed around this happening at Clearing but not at other times of year. It was agreed consistency was key!

3. Is there still much value in sending emails to leads?

   Answer – Emails are absolutely okay as long as they don't feel too impersonal. Penny suggests that a CRM can be a powerful tool but that we also need to avoid the trap of being perceived as a bit lazy. She suggests that post often works very well and also that students are often just looking for reasons to filter universities out (hence the need for touchpoints to be meaningful).

4. How often do you see reflection etc. within institutions?

   Answer - Not enough – although for most this is because there's seldom any time to look back. Where it is possible though, there are big gains to be made!