HELOA National Conference Jan 2022
Workshop 3.6
A Student Journey – Robbie Pickles, University of Keele

Please note this workshop was kindly covered by Robbie, as Vicky Irwin (SMRS) was unable to deliver the original workshop planned in the programme due to unforeseen circumstances.

The Application of Marketing to Student Recruitment

If we look back 10 years or so, marketing wasn't really involved in student recruitment activity and the link with marketing didn't really exist.

Nowadays, we need to understand marketing if we want to work successfully in student recruitment.

Brand

When we think about this, it used to refer to factors such as the colour of our stand and tablecloth and our logo.

Now, our brand refers to what we say about ourselves, who we say it to and why we say it.

We can ask ourselves 'How can we use our brand to attract people?'

But by asking this question, there is also a danger that we can start to exclude people.

Table discussion:
What do our institutions' brands tell people about us?
Could we be excluding anyone with our brand?

Feedback from table discussions:

- A couple of institutions discussed the fact that their brands try to achieve a balance of conveying the history of the university, combined with an idea of driving forward, the future and being ambitious (this may be the future of the institution or the future of the individuals the university is aiming to attract)

- Often there is a balance to be considered between trying to be taken seriously and being fun or different and standing out

- Sometimes our brands try to convey the idea of the university being 'a place for you,' or something similar. This can often be more of a feeling the student needs to experience though, how do we get this across in our comms?

- Even names of institutions may possibly begin to exclude some people e.g. words such as 'rural' or 'arts' in an institution's name may lead individuals to think they offer a particular range of courses or type of experience, when in actual fact a wider range of courses or type of experience may be offered than what an individual may conclude from the name

We also need to ask ourselves 'How long might our brand last?
'How might our alumni feel as our brand changes?'

We need to get our brand right for different groups of students e.g. for Keele University, they have a significant proportion of applicants who come from the local area, but they also have applicants from around the world.

How do you create a brand for both local students, which says come and study with us in your local area and international students, to encourage them to move long distances and pick Keele?

Personas

Table discussion:
Do we have personas in our institutions? If so, what kind of personas do we have?
How do we use these?

Feedback from table discussions:

- Some universities using personas, some do not yet have them

- Some are using personas, but perhaps don't yet tailor the info sent to students based on personas

- Some universities base their personas on students' journeys to university and the differences in this for different students e.g. a persona reflecting a student for whom it may always have been the natural next step to go to university, compared to a persona for a student who is considering university, but is more unsure or apprehensive and may have a variety of concerns to overcome

We need to remember that we must remain honest about who we are as an institution
How do we use the persona to tailor the information we send?

We must also be careful not to make assumptions about students which may be incorrect. For example, we must be careful not to make assumptions such as 'Those who are 1st in family to go to university wouldn't want a traditional Oxford style graduation.'

Table discussion:
How can we find out how students *really* feel, to avoid making such assumptions?

Feedback from table discussions:

- Focus groups with current students
- Use our insight from conversations on stands at careers fairs, or over the phone in enquiries teams
- Speak to teacher and advisers, who usually have an accurate idea of how their students feel
- Read research such as that carried out by The Student Room
- Online surveys
- There are so many scenarios where we must be careful not to make assumptions e.g. assuming that all mature students want information about family accommodation - they may not actually have their own family

The sources we use to find information about how students feel is critical, there is often a misconception that we can use just one source and gain a full picture.

The key is to use multiple different sources

We can also actually ask students what information they want to receive from us

We should be mindful to use these tools and sources of information hopefully and helpfully, not cynically and must always keep in mind that we should be presenting our institutions honestly and openly