

Feedback notes from Challenges in Postgraduate Recruitment, 13th May 2009, NEC, Birmingham

1. International Students *concern or celebration*
 - problems running courses if not enough fee-paying International students.
 - too many International students – don't get cultural and language benefits? Danger of "short changing" both International and UK students if there is a lack of diversity (e.g. 80% Chinese students on one course). However, good mix can benefit everyone!
 - Different cultural approach to education. Need to encourage independent thinking.
 - British culture workshops.
 - greater diversity of International students.
 - many Institutions have International quotas for money reasons.
 - limited resources so tend to target specific countries – lack of diversity – expensive to market.

2. What can we do to help improve employability of International student?
 - improves employment prospects in UK but what about abroad.
 - International Careers Adviser and Placement Officer at Coventry University.
 - seminars – presentation of ideas help soft skills.
 - bringing Postgrad students into union bodies, etc.

Do current structures allow response to market segments?

Broad structural issues:
Recruiters Vs Admissions

If this is joined up, then you can address market segments in a more joined up and successful way.

Problems occur because Admissions systems which are entrenched in older/traditional systems. Whereas Recruiters tend to focus and come against these issues and find the system holds them back.

Acknowledged that Registry is in a difficult position but a more cohesive approach between Admissions and Recruitment would allow for better/stronger response in terms of Customer Service.

Problems with potential and prospective markets, level of information and need for contact via email. Universities concerned with level of email communication – opening floodgates.

International student Ambassadors – Trial dealing with emails from students in their countries.

- US way ahead – although students receive lots of funding – level of Customer Service, Communications are extremely high making prospective student feel valued – positive Alumni.
- Segregated system – devolve Marketing/Recruitment and Admissions to the department so more holistic approach for those subjects. In this way they can drive where/how courses are developing. Clearer in seeing direct information/Stats and know how to direct change.

What are you doing with current UG cohort?

- potential studentships research nurtured. Academics interested in working with a number of students.
- Admin also write to these students.
- Write to all 3rd year students congratulating and encouraging them onto PG courses.
- Cranfield University – All PG don't manage to fill all studentships. Do not have access to UG stream.
- Not difficult to fill studentships but difficult to get high calibre students.

Events

One University write to year 2 students doing degrees to see who are on course for 1st in their degrees are written to and invited to discuss future studentships. Plants the idea.

Difficulties – encouraging students to progress when the academics then cherry pick external students.

Advantage of this is that University maintains their selecting position.

Might be easier to practice market segmentation to meet the needs of each department. Can focus on courses not doing well, etc.

Events

Road shows in each faculty offering information, applications, etc.

Events

Occupational choice – sessions on employability and skills. One session focussed on PGR – they start to think about potential progression.

Events

Focussed departmental Events for external and current 3rd year students.

Group Feedback

Session 1 – Question: What changes to external messages are required for those returning to higher education?

Group response:

- Each institution represented in our group did not intentionally differentiate its approach to promoting postgraduate study to represent those returning to H.E.
- This was mainly due to an internal focus (i.e. viewing postgraduate education as it is presented within each institution rather than from a wider perspective) and a lack of resource.
- Lack of resource was a major issue as many representatives wished to adapt their marketing provision for different segments but lacked the time to do so. In addition to those returning to H.E it was felt that international students, those seeking CPD opportunities and vocational degrees all warranted a different marketing approach but this was hampered due to resource constraints.
- There was also concern that making assumptions over the various audiences interested in postgraduate study was risky as you could alienate yourself from a potential market if not careful.
- It was agreed that the approach to marketing the different routes into postgraduate education would potentially need to be simplified when targeting returners to H.E given the pace of change. The distinction between different levels of study (MRes, Professional Doctorate etc) would need to be carefully worded.
- The focus on 'career advancement' would also need to be enhanced via external marketing - written from an employer as much as employee perspective and via more direct marketing campaigns rather than the current passive approach.

Session 2 – Question: Is the number of international students on full time programmes a cause for concern or for celebration?

Group response:

We approached this with the aim of summarising the main positives and negatives of having PGT/R courses dominated by international students:

Positives:

- Significant generator of fee income
- Provides fresh academic input from a different cultural perspective – potentially enriching the research/study environment
- Allows the potential of developing informal/formal partnerships with international institutions and departments
- If international students reflect a higher level of academic quality in a certain area then this must take priority. Maintaining the quality of the programme cohort should take precedence over maintaining a UK-international balance
- Certain courses are designed with an international audience in mind (i.e. Public Health courses for developing nations) – this should be encouraged
- International students can act as ‘promotional agents’ upon returning to their home country if their experiences are positive.
- Encourages free market principles and mobility of skills

Negatives:

- Potential alienation and isolation of UK students
- Over-reliance on a particular international market can limit the educational experience as overseas students tend to want to network with peers from diverse educational and cultural backgrounds
- If the political or economic situation changes in an country upon which you are reliant for international students this could jeopardise the sustainability of a course (i.e. withdrawal of scholarship funding from a major sponsor)