



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Student Recruitment Strategy



Introduction

This is the University's first overarching student recruitment strategy. It is designed to foster the conditions that will enable us to achieve our collective ambitions and ensure the University is well placed to succeed in an increasingly competitive and complex global market for higher education.

Effective student recruitment is key to the University realising many of its long-term strategic ambitions; enabling us to have global reach and impact and to create sustainable, stimulating and diverse academic communities. We will do this by offering students around the world an accessible, relevant and engaging experience that meets their ambitions and prepares them for fulfilling futures.

Aligned with the University of Edinburgh Strategic Plan, implementation of this student recruitment strategy will enable the University to grow its student numbers sustainably, reducing reliance on a small number of markets and disciplines, and to enhance the University's reputation.

Context

Over the past decade, the University of Edinburgh's student population has grown from 24,500 in 2005 to over 35,000 in 2015. We have not just benefited from the demand for UK higher education over this period; the University's market share of EU and Overseas domiciled students coming to the UK has also increased.

Whilst there is much to celebrate about our achievements in student recruitment, the future poses new challenges. The University operates within an increasingly complex student recruitment environment and long-held assumptions about student recruitment have been challenged by a range of factors, including:

- changing fee, funding and immigration policy and regulation
- declining government funding of higher education in the UK
- a medium term demographic decline in the UK and other mature markets
- global economic uncertainty
- increased competition from overseas and private providers
- growing differences between pre-HE education systems across the UK
- changing student expectations in a digital age

There is evidence that the growth in demand from traditional markets for on campus programmes in the UK is beginning to slow in response to some of these trends.¹

In order to continue to both expand its student population and attract the brightest minds to the University, we will need to both grow our market share in established markets and identify and realise opportunities in new ones.²

From a position of strength, with appropriate targeted deployment of resource and the commitment of staff across the University to work collaboratively to implement and support this strategy, Edinburgh can flourish in the global market for higher education. Our leadership in online distance education, reputation for research excellence, strong international league table rankings, comprehensive academic offering and excellent reputation for graduate employability are all enviable assets. This strategy should help us not just grow student numbers, but improve the quality and diversity of our intake, and become a magnet for students with the greatest academic potential.

¹ Universities UK. 2016. *International Higher Education in Facts and Figures*.

² 3,831 full time Overseas fee status students recruited in September 2015. More than half of these students (1,993) were nationals of one of two countries (China and USA). Two thirds were nationals of one of six countries (China, USA, Malaysia, India, UK, Canada).

Actions

This strategy outlines a series of actions structured around four interrelated themes.



The actions are designed to strengthen the University's capacity to:

- understand our markets
- develop and sustain a portfolio of programmes and courses that is responsive to current and future market demands
- offer fee and funding packages that balance income generation with the attraction of a diverse cohort including the most promising students and those with great academic potential but limited financial means
- engage effectively with prospective students, their advisers, sponsors, employers and alumni about the Edinburgh experience and the lifelong benefits of joining our academic community

Market intelligence and insight

The University should more consistently and efficiently collect, analyse and use robust market intelligence to inform portfolio development, recruitment marketing plans and activity, and pricing.

Currently, a wealth of relevant information is held across the University, and particularly by key central service departments, but it is currently under-exposed, under-analysed and under-used. As well as more systematically using the information we have, we must do more to capture and analyse information about our enquirers, pre-applicants and those who decide not to apply to Edinburgh, to give us a comprehensive understanding of our markets. Our market intelligence and insight expertise must encompass traditional and emerging markets, including demand for on-campus and online provision.

To achieve this aim, we will:

Define clear roles and responsibilities regarding recruitment data collection, analysis and dissemination, recognising the utility of data and market intelligence collected by Schools, Colleges and central services.

Systematically use market intelligence to inform the design of the University's portfolio and fees and funding packages at both macro and micro levels.

Develop the business case for a fit-for-purpose Customer Relationship Management system, to enable personalised, positive engagement between students and the University, from first point of contact onwards and to collect data regarding market demand, impact and cost/benefit of recruitment tactics and interventions.

Develop the business case for a conjoint analysis study³ to understand the impact of different combinations of variables on student decision-making and choice.

³ Conjoint analysis is a market research technique that identifies the relative importance consumers attach to different product attributes or features and the impact this has on the choices they make.

Portfolio development, innovation and review

Our portfolio – the scale, shape and features of our academic offering – is at the heart of the student experience. We aim to develop a sustainable, financially viable, strategically sound portfolio that supports genuinely multi or interdisciplinary programmes and courses that capitalise on the University's comprehensive academic offering.

At present, much portfolio development and management depends upon grassroots engagement by individual academics. There is the potential for greater strategic oversight of the portfolio across School boundaries and for incentives to grow courses and programmes in line with broader strategic objectives. Whilst recognising that there may be sound strategic reasons for continuing programmes and courses that do not generate income, we must also be prepared to close those that have no recent record of student recruitment and for which there is no compelling evidence that this will change in the near future.⁴

There is much to make Edinburgh's portfolio of degree programmes and courses – what we teach and how – compelling. Sector-leading online distance learning practice, excellent graduate employability, one of the most comprehensive academic offerings in the UK, global teaching partnerships, and the potential for a distinctive 4-year undergraduate offering give Edinburgh the means to stand apart from both UK and international competitors.

To begin to realise these opportunities, we will:

Agree an explicit statement of what constitutes the 'Edinburgh Experience' to guide curriculum and portfolio development, to include clarity regarding the features of the 4-year undergraduate experience, including the meaning of flexibility, choice and breadth of study and the role of research-led learning.

Identify, articulate and agree responsibilities regarding institutional strategic priorities for growth, ensuring a mechanism for School input into decision-making:

- Clarify the increases in student numbers and income growth in the medium term that we expect from different levels and modes of study
- Agree the contribution of Schools to meeting these ambitions as part of a balanced portfolio across the institution.

Agree a common approach to portfolio management and review:

- Revise the current approach to programme development to take account of institutional strategic and financial priorities for growth, market demand, innovation, and the core features of the Edinburgh Experience, both online and on campus
- Strengthen the business case for new programmes and courses to systematically explain strategic rationale, engage with available market intelligence, and include robust student number projections, and an assessment of costs and minimum numbers required to ensure viability
- Require a business case to be scrutinised by the School or College before a detailed academic case is developed
- Align programme approval processes with student recruitment cycles to maximise quick programme growth and return on investment
- Explore the potential of enabling students to build bespoke, personalised programmes to enable them to support individual student choice without requiring the maintenance of programmes with low or no student numbers
- Revise approaches to programme review to ensure the review cycle includes evaluation of both short-term viability and ongoing sustainability of programmes, to include:
 - a review of all new programmes at an early stage (18-24 months) following launch
 - enhancing existing 6-year teaching programme reviews to include explicit consideration of the ongoing sustainability of courses and programmes to inform decisions about their continuation, in the context of the wider School, College and University portfolio

Explore the market potential of a series of skills-based and interdisciplinary 'University courses' that embody the benefits and features of the Edinburgh Experience and can be accessed regardless of a student's programme.

⁴ 5,637 undergraduates (including PGDE) were recruited in September 2015, across 400 degree programmes. 61 programmes recruited only 1 student. 254 recruited fewer than 10 students. 23 recruited 50 or more students. Only ten programmes recruited more than 100 students. 3,835 full time PGTs were recruited, across 253 programmes. 16 programmes recruited only one student, 127 recruited fewer than 10 students, 13 recruited 50 or more, and only two programmes recruited more than 100.

Fees and funding

Price – the combination of fees, living costs and scholarships – is key to our offer. We principally seek to attract the brightest and best to study at Edinburgh, regardless of background or income.

Financial incentives across higher education globally are concentrated on those with the greatest academic achievements and potential, and those from poorer backgrounds who have limited personal access to funds. Consequently such students are typically the most price sensitive.

In this context, it is vital that we get the package of fees and funding right; that our fees are set to enable us to attract a diverse cohort of students and maximise income, and that our scholarships and bursaries enable us to attract the very best to join this community.

To achieve this aim, we will:

Consider concurrently the strategy for the setting of fees and the provision of scholarships and bursaries.

Define three distinct types of funding, the first two managed centrally and funded through a combination of core funds and the generosity of the University's donors - with the aim of increasing the proportion of donor-funding over time - and the latter initiated by Schools, managed centrally and funded by programme- or School-specific tuition fee income:

- means-based scholarships, for those who otherwise would not be able to afford to attend
- academic scholarships, to attract those with exceptional academic ability
- incentive scholarships, to aid recruitment, where the market is particularly price-sensitive, or to raise awareness of, and stimulate demand for, new programmes, both on campus and online

Routinely review funding provision to ascertain impact on recruitment, income, retention and student outcomes, and to maximise impact and build ongoing evaluation into all bursaries, scholarships and funding agreements.

Understand and use the cost of provision of a course to enable decisions about the financial viability of a course and the need for specific recruitment support and incentives.

Define the strategic drivers and metrics that may justify the creation and continuation of courses that do not generate net income.

Develop a protocol to facilitate the University entering into more agreements with funders, industry and employers, enabling increased student recruitment, income generation and the forging of strategic partnerships.

Maximise Development & Alumni fundraising activity to focus on philanthropic sources for student support.

Create a 'Community of Scholars' to sustain and develop relationships between the University and those it supports, and to create a global network of ambassadors.

Enhance and improve consistency of the marketing and communication of scholarships and other financial support to demonstrate the University's commitment to access, diversity and academic excellence, attract a diverse and highly-qualified cohort, and maximise the impact of the University's investment in financial support.

Recruitment communications

In order to be heard in an increasingly crowded, multi-channel, multi-platform environment, the University must effectively convey clear, compelling messages in engaging ways about the purpose and value of our offering and the experience of being a member of the University of Edinburgh community.

These messages must be tailored by geographic, demographic, psychographic and behavioural market segment, specific to level and mode of study, and engaging not just with students, but their parents, advisers, sponsors and employers.

Recruitment communications should focus on what matters most to students and what we know about the key benefits and attractions of studying at Edinburgh. We must seek to not merely broadcast to our recruitment audiences, but to engage with them, in ways that embody our values, providing content that is interesting, thought-provoking and useful.

To achieve this aim, we will:

Agree stronger core, consistent messages.

Instil and build on our institutional values, brand values and key messages to provide the basis for tailored and targeted recruitment communications to inform the tone and content of our messaging.

Develop and deploy targeted recruitment communication journeys:

- Schools, Colleges and central services to collaborate to create consistent blueprints for the communication journey from initial enquiry to enrolment and induction, having determined the modes and themes of communication that are most valued by students
- On an annual basis, develop a School/portfolio-specific recruitment message matrix, combining University values, core messages, key facts and narratives, and recruitment market insight data to enable the development of tailored, appropriate and consistent communications

Develop an online recruitment hub, as a single source of good practice, market intelligence and insights, and recruitment marketing collateral for use by practitioners across the University.

Maximise the value of the University website as our primary student recruitment communication tool.

Make effective use of any Customer Relationship Management system to efficiently target, engage and interact with students and other stakeholders.

Define roles and responsibilities for recruitment communications across our devolved and complex structures.

Implementation

The University's Recruitment & Admissions Strategy Group (RASG) will oversee the implementation of the student recruitment strategy. An implementation plan will be agreed and monitored by RASG, identifying key tasks, institutional leads, planned outcomes and timescales.

RASG will report on progress to Central Management Group and Learning & Teaching Committee at least biannually, and will work closely with relevant Court and Senatus committees to progress aspects of the strategy.

It is intended that the University's Service Excellence Programme will include a focus on student recruitment and admissions activity and processes in 2016-17. This will provide an opportunity to ensure the University's recruitment operations are fit for purpose, and able to support the effective implementation of this strategy.

Measures of success

The actions included in the strategy are designed to create the conditions that enable the University to meet its broad student recruitment goals. Success will be measured by the implementation of these actions, and against key indicators, which will be further refined once baseline data has been agreed:

- **Quality and diversity of the applicants and student intake**

Average UCAS tariff point score on entry (Undergraduate only) (increase)

Number and percentage of applications rejected as unqualified (reduce)

Percentage of entrants with protected characteristics and widening participation indicators (increase)

Percentage of non-UK entrants from beyond the 5 best-represented countries (increase)

- **Pre-applicant and applicant experience**

Net promoter scores, e.g. positive responses to 'On a scale of 0-10, how likely are you to recommend others to apply to the University of Edinburgh?' (increase)

Offer conversion rates (increase)

- **Sustainability of portfolio**

Number of courses with ≤ 10 students enrolled (reduce)

Net tuition fee income, after bursaries and scholarships (increase)

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