

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Welcome to our occasional newsletter about customer service within Higher Education where we review topical issues of interest to the sector.

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The Drummond Bone report on internationalisation in HE

We have just been re-reading the Bone report and finding just how eminently sensible it is in light of our experiences with Higher Education in other countries in Europe, South East Asia and Australasia. (www.dius.gov.uk/higher_education/shape_and_structure/he_debate/~media/publications/I/Internationalisation-Bone)

In Australia, Higher Education (Tertiary Education) is now the third biggest export dollar earner. In Singapore, two new universities have opened in the past five years and there is another on the way. The new Biopolis has Nobel prize winners and their research teams sharing a campus with the regional head offices of bioscience multinationals. Researchers, students, funders, manufacturers and marketers all on the same site.

They are now looking at the equivalent for media studies.

The UK has to take a collaboratively futuristic look at the world of education and research in order to remain relevant.

2009 UK National Student Survey

The latest survey shows some encouraging results generally on student satisfaction though there could be issues about the quality of teaching received particularly in universities at the upper end of the academic scale.

What might be a reflection of the amount of fees that students are being asked to pay is complaints that the big name academics listed on the websites are rarely seen and the facilities available are not adequate.

As students (and their parents) are paying more, so their demands are likely to increase.

Closing down the Union bar

We are hearing of cases of Students' Unions closing their Union bars for lack of trade. Whilst we are not condoning the spending of money on booze rather than books, it does raise a bigger question about the students' affiliation to their own university.

It would appear that with more students living at home while studying, their social life is revolving more around interests outside their

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university. This could result in a diminution of their student experience and overall satisfaction.

Ensuring student engagement is an even bigger challenge where students are part-timers.

Visas for international students

Scams have been reported in the UK and in Australia where prospective international students are being cheated by agents over student visas. The victims are being registered with shady colleges and then being deported when identified by local immigration officials.

A consequence is that there could be a reduction in the number of international student applications in both countries if there is a lack of confidence in the credibility of the agents.

Universities advertising on TV

We are seeing increasing numbers of British and Australian universities advertising on national and international television. Whilst the quality of the adverts is not particularly expensive, it does represent a growing awareness of universities to become global brands.

Tim Russell and Annelise Cruickshank are currently consulting with a number of UK and overseas universities in areas related to customer service. We can be contacted by:

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Typical problem areas

A common complaint we are hearing in our focus groups with students is that they feel as though they are being processed rather than educated.

They say that the impression they receive is that the systems are more important than the students and that universities are more concerned with attracting and retaining numbers than about individual learners. Interestingly, the same views are held by many of the academics we interview who feel a frustration and an 'emptiness' about not being able to build up long term and meaningful relationships with their students.

So there is hope if both customers and suppliers want the same outcome! We are currently working with universities on how to achieve a mutual satisfaction and a sense of collaboration whilst recognising that HEIs have to remain financially viable.

Undergraduate blooper

A literature student wrote of Margaret Atwood's book, "The Handmaid's Tale shows how patriarchy treats women as escape goats."