

## 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.

**Are students customers?**  
**Office of the Independent Adjudicator**  
**Partnerships**  
**Students from overseas**  
**Graduates falsifying CVs**  
**Pants at work**

### **Are students customers?**

There has been quite a debate recently about whether or not students should be treated as customers.

Regardless of what the academic and administrative staff might feel, it is evident that many students see themselves in the role. Perhaps not in the same way as buying from Tesco, but 'value for money' is a common cry. Students claim that they are paying large sums of money and possibly putting themselves in debt for years to come. They expect certain standards of service, quality of facilities and responsiveness to their needs.

Otherwise they will broadcast their displeasure to potential students through You Tube and blogs.

### **Office of the Independent Adjudicator**

The OIA has reported that student complaints have increased for the third consecutive year.

The ombudsman can only deal with student complaints that have already exhausted the institution's own complaints procedure and cannot

deal with matters of academic judgment. If they find in favour of the student, they can recommend financial compensation (rarely more than a few hundred pounds) and other action by the university. If they find in favour of the university, there is no charge made against the complainant.

Either way it is a Pyrrhic victory for the HEI and can bring huge workloads and stress for staff defending their position. If referral to the OIA can be prevented by earlier effective action, it is to everyone's advantage.

For further information about the OIA see: [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk)

### **Students from overseas**

Many Higher Education Institutions are trying to recruit students from overseas, with China and India being favourite targets.

Such students can certainly enrich life for the whole student experience apart from enriching the finances.

But just how geared up are the universities to welcome these

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visitors? Do the staff really understand the cultural differences and the subtle pressures that these can cause?

In future editions we shall be reviewing some of the issues and suggesting what might be done to help these students to ease their way into the whole university life rather than stay in their same ethnic groups.

## **Partnerships**

Universities are increasingly setting up joint ventures with commercial organisations offering work based and in-house degree courses.

Some of these programmes are in leadership and management, others in technical disciplines. This means that the institution has at least two different customers - the students and the sponsor. These customers can have different and, at times, conflicting needs and priorities.

Customer service can encompass dealing with external stakeholders, businesses and funding agencies as

well as students and internal service providers.

## **Graduates falsifying CVs**

Graduates from lower-ranked universities are twice as likely to falsify their CVs to get jobs than those from higher-ranked ones, according to new research from employment-screening company Powerchex.

Of 3,876 financial services applications screened, only 14% of graduates from the top 20 universities submitted CVs with embellishments. This rose to just over 25% among those from universities ranked 51-100, and 43% from those outside the top 100.

Apparently those studying maths and finance were considerably more honest than those from the humanities and arts disciplines!

## **Pants at work**

60% of interview candidates believe that lucky underwear will get them through job interviews, according to research by recruitment consultants, Peninsula.

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