

## **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.

**Happy New Year?**  
**The Mandelson letter**  
**Two year degree courses**  
**More integration with business**  
**The unsung heroes**  
**Typical problem areas**  
**Undergraduate blooper**

### **Happy New Year?**

The year 2010 promises to be one of the most challenging ever experienced within UK Higher Education. Partly because of the parlous state of the British economy, the demands will be for HEIs to do very much more with very much less. They are to be more targeted, measured and accountable and be run like a business for business – which might be in conflict with some people's values.

There will be even more pressure on demonstrating value for money and on the quality of the student experience. Customer service in its broadest sense will clearly be paramount.

### **The Mandelson letter**

December 22<sup>nd</sup> seemed a pretty miserable date for Lord Mandelson, the UK Secretary of State for Business, Innovation & Skills, to send his letter to the Chairman of HEFCE, the funding council, about funding for Higher Education in 2010-11.

Universities are to make £533m savings whilst improving the student experience. They will also be 'fined'

£3,700 for each student admitted above the government quota.

If academic standards are not to be jeopardised, it is probably going to be the administrative staff who bear the brunt of imminent changes.

### **Two year degree courses**

Degree courses in two, rather than the typical three, years are being proposed by a UK government that wants more flexibility for the broader range of students than just traditional secondary school pupils.

The private University of Buckingham has been operating this way since its inception and claims great popularity and success among its students.

Other universities are concerned that students will be cramming to pass exams rather than having the time to explore subjects in more depth and breadth. They also feel that students will not have the opportunity to develop the more rounded social development and skills that would help with future employment prospects.

# timrussell

## **More integration with business**

The UK government is trying to promote closer ties between universities and businesses through targeted research and company based degrees.

## **The unsung heroes**

The staff with whom we have usually been most impressed in our work at universities are those who are so often overlooked and undervalued.

The maintenance staff, security officers, janitors, caterers, car park attendants and all those people who come under that umbrella department of (something like) Estates Services are the lubricants that keep the wheels turning.

When motivated to be so they are the most helpful and proactive people who know everybody and everything about how a university ticks. And if they don't know the answer, they usually know someone who does.

They often have the most interesting backgrounds too. We've met professional footballers, tour guides, clock makers and multilingual astronomers.

Customer focussed universities really celebrate these people as they are very mobile with transferable skills outside HEI.

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## **Typical problem areas**

A typical problem area we have found is room bookings. In many HEIs rooms are at a premium and the allocations made sometimes months in advance before the actual number of students is confirmed.

To ensure that they have a room of the appropriate size, academic departments have been known to book two or three different rooms for the same time. This can lead to a later lack of availability and all the problems that can bring for students and staff with last minute changes and communication.

In one university it was assumed knowledge that there was a critical shortage of rooms which had existed for many years. It was only after a detailed day by day audit over several weeks that the actual utilisation was proved to be 38%!

There are now some good software packages around that can help optimise the use of rooms.

## **Undergraduate blooper**

Desperate not to catch either swine or avian flu, this student decided to give up eating pork and drinking French mineral water.