

The Kilburn Report

A study of the recruitment of international students from local Language Schools in Bournemouth.



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A study of the recruitment of international students from the local Language Schools in Bournemouth.

Conducted for Professor Richard Conder, Pro Vice Chancellor.

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- Letter from Anglo Continental
- Letter from Anglo World

Introduction

In August, 1999, after discussions with Professor Richard Conder, it was decided that a sustained and concentrated marketing effort should be applied to the recruitment of international students from the local Language Schools.

Although there are 80 Language Schools in Bournemouth, 22 of which the University has a corporate agreement with, it has long been felt that this unique position the University enjoys has never been fully exploited.

Over the past 10 years, very little attempt has been made to take a corporate approach to liaising with local Language Schools. Various initiatives have been carried out at School level but a coherent approach has not been adopted, leading to a duplication of effort and frustration on the part of Language School Executives and University Placement Advisers, who would prefer to deal with one person and make one telephone call.

Bournemouth is unique in its practice of having 7 Schools all trying to liaise with the local language Schools. All other Universities have a centralised approach, routing enquiries and detailed application processes via the respective International Offices.

The strategy adopted in the past year has been to liaise effectively on behalf of the whole University with a selection of the largest Language Schools, who provide U.K. Universities with high calibre international students.

This strategy has been put into operation by a series of activities which include :-

- Large scale open days on campus for Language School students and staff.
- Monthly advice clinics for potential students held at Anglo Continental, Anglo World, English First, and M.L.S.(Conducted by David Kilburn)
- Tours of the campus (carried out by DK), followed by individual interviews across academic Schools, especially for those applicants who have studied in Bournemouth for 9 months but have never had an opportunity to visit the University.

The feedback from both Language Schools and international students about the new strategy has been extremely positive and the outcomes are excellent both in terms of increased numbers of applications and raising awareness.

It makes economic sense for the University to target a largely captive market of international students locally, who like the area and would consider staying on to study at Bournemouth University. We ignore this market at our peril and have lost a considerable sum over the years to competitors (Oxford Brookes, Portsmouth, Warwick) who have 'trawled our waters' and are incredulous that we have not captured a large share of the market over the past 10 years.

The good news is that real progress has been made this year and the University needs to maintain this marketing push to increase our market share and eventually seek recruitment opportunities in other U.K. locations.

A Summary of the Findings

2.1 Local Language Schools

Of the 22 Language Schools the University has corporate agreements with, liaison has been focused on those Schools with the greater number of international students who go on to study at University at undergraduate and post graduate levels.

This strategy has been adopted to try to maximise student recruitment and not dilute the marketing effort.

The Schools that have been targeted specifically are Anglo World, Anglo Continental, M.L.S., Anglo European and English First (EF). Other Schools have been visited and various collaborative arrangements have been arranged, such as joint attendance at overseas recruitment fairs.

The main findings are as follows

- Language School executives and University Placement advisers are delighted with the personalised service they now receive.
- Communication channels with the University are now much improved.
- Any problem areas/issues can now be given to one person to resolve internally.
- There is a willingness to engage in steering student applications to Bournemouth University.
- Some University Schools are poor at process management which causes tension.
- There are still some areas of inconsistency, especially relating to English language scores required in IELTS and TOEFL. For example, BAPR have been asking for 7.5 IELTS when the University usually asks for 6.5 on its Masters courses !
- The Language Schools appreciate a speedy process and there is no doubt that we are losing applicants to other Universities when we fail to process applications quickly.
- The Language Schools also look for and appreciate consistency of approach across all Schools.

2.2 Bournemouth University

Bournemouth University has ambitious targets for the recruitment of international students. Schools are expected to deliver a 15% increase year on year. In 1999, only 2 Schools managed to achieve these targets. Service industries achieved the target in 1999 and the Business School achieved the target in January 2000, when the MAIBA course had its second intake.

The strategy to target local Language Schools is extremely sound and in the course of developing this strategy across the Schools, some important lessons have been learned which are represented in the following key findings.

- 2 Schools are excellent at process management and appreciate what needs to be done to recruit successfully.
- 2 further Schools are aspiring to achieve the same level of recruitment.
- 1 School has some excellent courses and staff but is being held back by pockets of inertia.
- 2 Schools effectively do not engage seriously in the recruitment of international students.

A key challenge for the newly configured International Office is to standardise the ability of each school to maximise its potential and optimise the recruitment of international students from the local Language Schools and other distribution channels. All schools can improve, some need to improve dramatically.

Workshops on best practice are needed as a matter of urgency so that the pockets of excellence within the University can develop other areas which are currently under performing.

Market research has shown that typically 33% of all international student admissions come from those students who are already studying in the U.K. Bournemouth University can only claim 5% of its international student intake from this source.

The changing International Educational Market

The international educational market is dynamic and is currently changing in a number of ways.

- The greater aggression and more sophisticated approaches being used by several competitor countries, notably Australia.
- A greater emphasis on in-country provision.
- A far greater use of technology based learning.
- A greater emphasis upon life long learning.
- Generally more demanding and discerning customers who are not wedded to some of the traditional buying patterns.

The marketing implications of the points raised above indicate a need for a far more targeted and strategic approach, underpinned by far stronger and more meaningful propositions.

Detailed cost benefit analyses need to be carried out to measure the return on investment in targeted countries.

Given the expense of overseas recruitment, it makes sound economic sense to have a sustained marketing effort aimed at maximising international student recruitment from the local Language Schools.

Every School within the University needs to play its part in the rapid processing of applications, interviewing, adherence to quality standards, and pastoral care provision to ensure that Bournemouth University secures more international students locally and retains them.

Unless Schools can process applications within 24 hours they run the risk of losing students to increasingly aggressive predator U.K. Universities , such as Oxford Brookes.

Perceptions of Bournemouth University amongst Language Schools

As stated previously in this report, the University as a whole is characterised by the sum of its constituent parts. If 6 Schools are excellent but only 1 is not then the whole University suffers as a consequence.

A great deal of resistance was shown initially from Language Schools to the idea of collaboration due to past arrogance, incompetence, and lack of professionalism exhibited by staff who are no longer with us.

Confidence has been restored and we are handily placed to reap the rewards of close collaboration provided we can continue with our excellent practices and delete examples of poor customer service.

The local Language Schools have made the following positive points.

- The Campus is clean and welcoming and the courses are innovative, exciting, vocational.
- The prospects for employment are high.
- The central point of contact is working well.
- Speed of response has improved.

The following negative points have been made.

- There is still a lack of consistency across the University. Some Schools have unrealistic expectations of IELTS and are asking for grades that are too high.
- There are still some quality issues whereby certain Schools are not making sufficient checks as to the academic ability of the applicant.
- There is difficulty obtaining a satisfactory and timely response from some Schools regarding applications which puts University Placement Advisers in a difficult position, and shows Bournemouth University in a poor light.

As a University, we need to address the above points as a matter of urgency if we are to maintain credibility and sustain the competitive advantage of our location

Perceptions of Bournemouth University amongst international students studying in local Language Schools.

Many of the international students studying locally are not aware that there is a University in the town ! Even those students who know of our existence do not know where we are located and have not visited the campus , despite living and studying here for 9 months !

Monthly visits to the leading Language Schools to give advice sessions, University open days, informal campus tours/interviews over the past 6 months have all gone a long way to try to resolve the issue of lack of awareness amongst international students studying locally.

There are many positive views held by international students, including

- They like the campus, the atmosphere, the friendliness and the exciting courses we offer.
- They like the fact that they can continue to live and study in a safe, secure environment amongst friends they already may have.
- They like the town, the beach, the social life and the environment.

On the negative side, some applicants to the University are

- Despondent at the lack of customer care in some instances.
- Frustrated at the lack of consistency exhibited.
- Bewildered why they have been rejected when friends with similar qualifications/profiles have been accepted.
- Unsure about studying at the University because they have never visited the campus and rely on League tables , comments from friends, etc.

The challenge facing the University is to eradicate the negativity and promote itself vigorously to this huge market by opening its doors more widely and actively pursuing this market segment more aggressively.

Lessons from good practice

If Bournemouth University is to achieve a higher share of the international student recruitment market, there are several lessons to be learned, which include :

- A mindset that gives far greater recognition of the way in which international student recruitment now needs to be seen as a business.
- Ambitious targets and properly communicated short and long term objectives for the international office.
- A long term perspective characterised by the development and nurturing of relationships.
- A detailed understanding of each of the target markets and, in particular, a clear understanding of the customers' needs/expectations and of the competition and its strengths.
- A co-ordination and commonality of effort across the institution underpinned by effective process management.

As indicated earlier in this report, there are some excellent examples of good practice emanating from at least 2 schools within the University.

These examples have to become the standard across the University so that we have unity of purpose and each international applicant will be treated in the same way, speedily, effectively and courteously.

Examples of good practice include the following :

- Every applicant is dealt with professionally and any queries/questions are answered within 24 hours.
- The message given to each applicant is the same. For example, a score of IELTS 6.0 is the requirement for all undergraduate courses.
- Help and advice is readily available and freely given, even if it means not accepting a student because it is not the best course of action for them to take.
- The applicant is treated like a customer and not fobbed off or patronised.
- All University Placement Advisers and Language School executives are treated with respect and courtesy.
- When asked to give talks/presentations/advice clinics at the Language Schools, fit in with their schedule rather than impose our own.

Issues and recommendations

There is no doubt that the international student market is becoming increasingly competitive and that the nature and degree of competition is likely to increase substantially over the next few years.

One area of serious concern is the issue of process management. At its simplest, process management can be seen to be how applicants are dealt with by the organisation from the point of very first contact through to the point of very last contact. In practice, this translates into the ways in which the initial contact is made and how this is handled, and then how the recruitment, reception, accommodation, teaching and support services are managed.

It is fair to say that at Bournemouth University, we do not manage the process professionally in all cases. There are pockets of excellence and a few individuals who really understand the market and how to capture it. The challenge now is to harness the expertise and disseminate it across the institution.

Other areas to which consideration needs to be given include :

- Continual updating of the web site
- Availability of electronic application forms.
- A series of workshops to train a wide variety of staff across the University to better understand process management and cultural issues.
- A stricter adherence to achieving recruitment targets.
- Continual review of international activities to ensure value for money and cost benefit.
- A more strategic use and management of relationships with key influencers and stakeholders.
- A more strategic use and management of databases to aid market intelligence.

Outcomes

There is no doubt that the recent intervention with local Language Schools has been successful, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

The Language School executives and Placement Advisers are much happier with the institution and its improved communication link.

As far as increased applications/ enrolments are concerned, the following list is indicative of the current situation. This list is not exhaustive and there will be more names, mainly those students who have had direct contact with the individual Schools.

This list is comprised of those students who have been seen by David Kilburn on a one to one basis at an advice session in their host language school.

Student name	Language School	Course	School	Status
Shan Shan Guo	Anglo World	BATS	S. I	U.F.
Roberto Cimmino	Anglo World	BATS	S.I.	U.F.
Hse Jin Yang	Anglo World	BATS	S.I.	C.O.
Monica Crusellas	Anglo World	BAIMM	MS	C.O.
Guo Shu Gin	Anglo World	NMP	MS	C.O.
Xiao Meng Zhang	Anglo World	BAPR	MS	U.F.
Muge Asamaz	Anglo World	M.A.Comm.	MS	C.O.
Eva Salet	Anglo World	BAIHM	S.I.	U.F.
Erica Claire	Anglo World	MAIBA	B.S.	C.O.
Mi Waing	Anglo World	BABS	B.S.	C.O.
Li Me Chen	Anglo World	BAFS	FAL	C.O.
Li Yin	Anglo World	MAIBF	FAL	C.O.
Freda J.C.Chen	B.B.S.	BAIHM	SI	UF
Yanina Andronova	E.F.	BATS	S.I.	C.O.
Markos Huebener	E.F.	NMP	M.S	C.O.
Tracy Zhang	E.F.	MAIBA	B.S	C.O.
Mehmet Gultekin	M.L.S.	MAIBF	FAL	CO
Hsin Lan Chuo	M.L.S.	MAIBA	B.S.	R
Tugba Basaran	M.L.S.	BATS	S.I.	CO
Wchai Lee	M.L.S.	MSc Tourism	S.I.	CO
Euna Jeung	M.L.S.	MSc Tourism	S.I.	CO
Diaok Stephen	M.L.S.	BABS	BS	CO
Yt Tu Juan	M.L.S.	BABS	BS	CO
Chen Ye Yang	Anglo Continental	MAIBF	FAL	CO
Ligia Sanchez *	Anglo Continental	MAIBA	BS	CO

Karin Hernandez	Anglo Continental	MSc Design	DEC	UF
Daniel Machado	Anglo Continental	MSc Design	DEC	UF
Kai Hsin Wang	Anglo Continental	MA. Int mark	BS	CO
Angela Rivera	Anglo Continental	Archeology	CS	CO
Alfredo Bustamente	Anglo Continental	MA. Digital	MS	CO
Angelina Peraza	Anglo Continental	MAIBA	BS	CO
Midori Onaka	Spectrum	BAIHM	SI	UF

* January start.

** N.B.

There are other applicants who have applied directly to Schools throughout the year, mainly because of increased marketing activity and awareness raising. In October, Registry will be able to confirm the numbers of international students who have come from local Language Schools to study at the University. Professional process management by University Schools will ensure that the names listed above, and also those who have applied during the year, will become firm enrolments.

Strategies for the future

No organisation can stand still and given the intense competition in the international student recruitment market , Bournemouth University needs to consider the following strategies for future action.

- Establish a world class International Office which constantly innovates and drives forward international student recruitment professionally.
- Set up a series of regular training workshops to ensure all University personnel are aware of cultural and financial issues with regard to international students.
- Reduce the number of target markets globally, focusing on those markets with the greatest rate of return.
- Continue to drive forward strong links with local Language Schools and their associated schools elsewhere in the U.K.
- Improve the nature of the international student experience.
- Give cultural awareness training to all U.K students, particularly emphasising the need for international capability.
- Drive web site development so we are at the leading edge of technology and ensure the widespread use of electronic applications.
- Ensure the International Office has a presence at each recruitment fair and that only professional marketing academics are selected to attend, by invitation only.
- Establish a system across the University, directed by the International Office, to ensure that costs of overseas recruitment fairs are amortised by sharing stands with collaborative partners, such as the Arts Institute, the major Language Schools and Bournemouth and Poole College, thereby branding Bournemouth as a destination.
- Audit collaborative programmes overseas to ensure that the quality of provision equals home based courses.

Conclusion

The challenges facing the University over the next 5 years with regard to the recruitment of international students are many and varied, as outlined in the report.

The strategic decision to engage in a focused way with major Language Schools has been successful and needs to become a long term strategy, rather than a short term measure. It is a far more cost effective way of recruiting students than flying all over the world. This does not mean however that the University should cease all overseas marketing activity.

Carefully researched target markets will always produce tangible results provided they are marketed correctly by the right individuals with the necessary skills to exploit the potential.

There are many pockets of excellence within Bournemouth University and with the vocational nature of our innovative courses, the temperate climate, safety factor, modern campus and professional staff, there is no reason why, with careful planning, we should not be able to attract increasing numbers of international students .