

# **Strategy and positioning through marketing and communications**

Peter Allen  
Marketing Director

# Agenda

- What have universities said and done so far?
- How clear are their positions in the market?
- How have we helped our institutions so far?
- What happened at Derby, what's your experience?
- What can we do next?

I looked at the BBC website listing of who's charging what and read the links

BBC News - University tuition fees: Full list - Windows Internet Explorer  
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-12880840

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## University tuition fees: Full list

After the deadline for submitting tuition fee plans for 2012, every university in England is planning to charge at least £6,000 - with a high proportion clustering around £8,000 to £9,000.

More than 80 universities have revealed their plans, about two thirds of the total.

More than two-thirds of these want to charge the £9,000 maximum fees for some or all courses - and only a handful are offering all their courses below £8,000 per year.

Universities in England wanting to charge above £6,000 are required to submit their plans for approval by the Office for Fair Access (Offa).

There have also been 17 further education colleges submitting plans to Offa, suggesting that degree courses taught in these colleges will cost more than £6,000 per year.

After Offa has approved access agreements with universities and colleges, the final figures for fees are expected in July.

University fees declared so far are listed in the table below. Please send further updates to [educationnews@bbc.co.uk](mailto:educationnews@bbc.co.uk)

| University    | Tuition fee | Confirmed or expected | University group | Further information |
|---------------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Anglia Ruskin | £8,300      | Confirmed             | Million+         |                     |

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## How have universities performed so far?

- Most of the statements are mixtures of press release and sales pitch
- Many are defensive
- Most are generic
- Many refer to elements that the customer expects as standard rather than being points of differentiation
- Most refer to internal issues such as investment or costs (imagine!)
- Most use estates spend to justify higher fees
- Several link research quality with teaching quality
- Several use ‘global’ references
- Most use employability or student experience
- One or two talk about their institution or class size
- One or two talk about ‘fair fees’.

## What effect does this give?

- These feel like holding statements while we all try to get our act together before the 2012 marketing campaigns start in earnest
- For the customer, there is very little to choose between each university as they are all claiming the same points of excellence (which are, at this stage, standard for the sector)
- Many universities are sustaining the ‘employability’ criterion rather than talking about personal development etc so they’re falling into the trap set by the media and potential customers.
- No one seems to be making a case to offset the view of students as customers who get what they want.
- When you look at them on paper there are a lot of similarities between universities but, as we know, when you are there, they are tangibly different from each other. It’s a pity that this isn’t coming through at the moment.

## What internal work have you done so far?

- My own experience includes, trying to lead a CMT session on different ways into finding a position around price level, unique selling points, areas we felt were very strong etc : unsuccessful outcome
- Examining internal data on our actual student body was useful in 3 main ways: it revealed what our student profile actually is (different from what we believed); it revealed our performance in key areas against our benchmark competitors; it revealed what our students value about the Derby experience
- We undertook external research among applicants on selection criteria, comparative value of Derby vs competitors on their UCAS list and attitudes to fee price. This was invaluable and I would still recommend it now to give you an external view to offset internal 'accepted wisdom'
- Have you looked at the selling points you used to use, to see how they could be adapted to provide a clear position in the new price-sensitive market. (it worked for us despite our initial doubt)
- **What's your experience been so far?**

## **How do we support effective positioning for our universities?**

- Do your senior management believe there is a need for this or is it just business as usual?
- How well will your wider culture and team respond to questions and work on this area?
- Are you just being asked to support the proposition through marketing communications or deeper than that?
- Do you feel that there are strong tangible points of difference at your university?
- How consistently are they delivered? Does the customer feel them?
- How do you see your role in helping your institution succeed in this new market (particularly if the cap comes off institutions in the future?) – can you keep the momentum going and move towards a genuine market-orientated culture?
- How robust is your communication strategy to get your message across?

## Things to think about when establishing your position

- Does it have a basis in the reality of your university?
- Will your student customers feel it / realise it?
- Is it different from others around you?
- What needs to change in order to deliver it consistently / avoid shortfalls for the customer?
- Does the emerging situation have a structural impact on you?
- Communication wise, who do you need to tell and what do they need to know?
- How do you make the message relevant to them?
- How do you move away from ‘internal speak’ and generic statements, to something more beneficial to the potential student?

## Interactive Session:

- **What do you need to support a future positioning?**
- Data? Management change? Student feedback? External research?
- **Do you have a tangible difference already or what do you believe is your best option for establishing one?**
- How do you sense test this and make it consistent?
- Is this something that's valued by your current / future students?
- **Positioning and future success are reliant on more than just marcomms messages: what can you do to prepare your institution for the next challenge?**
- Whose support do you need to gain? Do you and your team have the expertise? What can you do now to prepare ahead of any announcement about unrestricted numbers?

## Notes from our session: what needs to be addressed now?

- Internal comms on positioning – so staff are aware and on board
- Whole university needs to deliver on promises made via marketing
- Key information Sets reveal the reality of each course: now is the time to address/improve the problem areas
- Business alignment : employment, SSR, NSS performance needs to improve to stand customer scrutiny
- PVC and Director of Marketing should lead this project
- Investment will be needed and should be prioritised
- More student voice
- Alumni could/should be contributing to policy decisions as well as promotion
- Keep momentum up to achieve organisational change
- Prepare institution for potential drops in demand, look at simplifying the course portfolio

Peter Allen, Marketing Director

[p.allen@derby.ac.uk](mailto:p.allen@derby.ac.uk)

01332 591985



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