

Delivering effective external relations for an ambitious university



Named Scottish University of the Year in the Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide for the past two years, Dundee is justifiably proud of its teaching excellence and the quality of its student experience.

The University has ambitious student recruitment goals, particularly for international students. To help reach these goals, the marketing and communications functions have been centralised, coming within the remit of External Relations, which also encompasses student recruitment and admissions.

SUMS was asked to carry out a comprehensive review of structures, resources and good practice across five comparator institutions both in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK to enable Dundee to assess whether its External Relations division is now in the best possible shape to deliver effective marketing, recruitment and admissions activity.

SUMS' report focused on five specific areas, including recruitment and recruitment marketing; admissions practice; digital communications; market insights and analysis; and international recruitment.

Best practice examples emphasised the value of building a distinctive brand; developing a customer journey that brings the campus to life for prospective students; using CRM systems to manage and use data effectively; and making effective use of market insights and analysis.

In terms of international recruitment, SUMS identified the following key success factors from among the comparator institutions:

- A strong focus on target markets which is responsive to changing market demand and which aligns resource with strategic country priorities
- An internationalisation strategy that encompasses relationship-building across all aspects of university activity
- Decision-making processes that unite faculty and professional services staff around common goals
- Systems that support efficient, customer-friendly and fast turnaround in admissions
- Investment in digital marketing strategies and monitoring
- Effective use of market analysis and insights.

As a result of the research carried out by SUMS, a Good Practice Guide has been produced, to share wide-ranging insights with SUMS members about successful measures to boost international student numbers.

This type of research is really useful for institutions to be able to understand where they might be out of step with national trends and, crucially, help them make the case for investment in systems or in people.

Susannah Randall
SUMS Consultant

The work that SUMS carried out really helped us to raise understanding across the University of what it takes to build our profile and attract the best students from around the world. All the moving parts need to work together. There's no magic bullet to transform student recruitment. Success depends on shared goals and input across the institution.

Thomas Veit
Director of External Relations
University of Dundee

SUMS works for universities. SUMS is different – we really understand the culture of universities and how to bring about change within them.

SUMS consultants combine commercial expertise with a deep understanding of the sector. Our consultants come from the commercial sector – including from the big four consultancy firms – and senior roles within universities. Our principal consultants are a professional team that share their experience of commercial and public sector best practice. We learn from what has worked well elsewhere, from other sectors and within HE. We horizon scan, are aware of the issues that will be impacting UK HE and are developing solutions to help our Members meet the challenges ahead.

SUMS membership gives unique access to other Members and other SUMS international networks: in USA, EU and Australia.



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