

Building international strengths



University strategies are placing increasing emphasis on the recruitment of international students, but in an uncertain political climate, competition is fierce and market conditions are harsh and volatile.

Internationalisation in universities often embraces a wide range of activities including recruitment, research collaborations and capacity-building. Many universities are finding that in harsher market conditions, increasing resources are being drawn into achieving international recruitment targets at the expense of wider internationalisation objectives.

The University of Hull asked SUMS to undertake a comparative review of the International Office (IO) to set out a blueprint for its future development. The review was triggered by the development of a new University Internationalisation Strategy and the need to ensure that the International Office had the right capabilities, structure and priorities to support this strategy.

We were able to draw upon SUMS' recent internationalisation work within a number of different universities to compare the University of Hull's approach against good practice in the sector. SUMS has recently developed a new Good Practice Guide, 'International Student Recruitment', for members that complements our other sector-wide SUMS Good Practice Guides.

The review recommended that the International Office increase its concentration on core activities, such as student recruitment and the development of international partnerships and collaborations, that require their specialist knowledge of overseas markets.

Alongside this we recommended that the University articulate its wider internationalisation objectives, and develop a more coherent strategy for internationalisation that will support the achievement of these objectives. In order to increase the focus of the IO, SUMS recommended relocating activities such as marketing and lead management, either to specialist departments within the University, or to external suppliers.

The review also recommended ways to increase the visibility of the International Office's work. An International Advisory Group, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education, for example, would offer the opportunity to exchange ideas and market intelligence on international opportunities and test proposals against the Internationalisation Strategy.

Increased competition for international students and the demand for high quality international partnerships mean that universities need to provide expert strategic support in these areas. Hull has recognised the potential to improve its performance and has a great opportunity, following this review, to drive change.

Helen Carasso
SUMS Consultant

Hull commissioned this study to enable us to build on the many valuable individual initiatives and activities that were already taking place around the University to recruit international students and build internationalisation into our teaching and research. As the SUMS report highlighted, improved information sharing, streamlined organisation and – most importantly – an over-arching Internationalisation Strategy can be expected to increase the effectiveness of our marketing and academic collaboration in international markets. We now have a route to take that will achieve those goals.

Professor Alan Speight
Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education
University of Hull

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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