

**Student Recruitment Update from Katy Wills, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Success),  
Plymouth Marjon University**

**Date:** 5 May 2020

**Current Marketing activity**

The marketing team have focused on three key areas:

1. Ensuring we maintain our reputation with students, keeping them informed, involved, inspired, and as happy as they can be.
2. Ensuring we look after our applicants, keeping them informed, answering questions and moving their experiences online.
3. Ensuring we continue to attract applications for 2020 and enquirers for 2021.

Ensuring we maintain our reputation with students

For our students, we have had some incredible weeks of social media over this period, with some very positive feedback about our fast and reassuring messaging for both students and applicants. We introduced a Chatbot to help with student queries and responded to dozens of Chatback questions. The week we moved online was our largest ever on social media and certainly we moved through that initial change with very positive reputational results. We maintained the strong reputation we have with students which is the cornerstone of the Marjon name.

Ensuring we look after our applicants

The second of these points – looking after applicants – received very positive immediate feedback as we reassured them the same night that exams were cancelled. On 22 and 23 April we held Applicant Days online, having cancelled on campus events for 8 April and 23 April.

It is crucial that we build a strong and reassuring relationship with our applicants. The market is expected to be much more changeable this year, with UCAS planning a campaign to actively market to students that firm accept isn't a binding contract, and they should feel free to change their minds after they get their results. They will in particular be marketing to students who do better than they expected that they should consider "upgrading" their choice. In addition, with local universities due to be impacted significantly by loss of international students, we can expect that big incentives may be in use to try to attract our offer holders. In order to counteract that, it's crucial we do all we can to make our applicants feel like they already belong with us, and develop a sense of loyalty.

Our applicant engagement plan is centered around trying to knit applicants into as many areas of campus life as we can, and build their sense of already belonging to Marjon:

- a) Two academic sessions for future first years, to enable applicants to build relationships across the group, to access reading lists and to get onto learning space.
- b) Three optional study skills sessions, run by the Library team and repeating in a four weekly cycle, to build confidence, to demonstrate that we are there to help them through, and hopefully to enable some relationship building (for example a returning to learning session will bring together mature learners).
- c) Social sessions for those living on campus to find their room mates, or for those interested in societies to find like-minded people.

#### Ensuring we continue to attract applications for 2020 and enquirers for 2021

Finally, in terms of attracting applicants:

- Usually, between March and September, we receive around 800 applications. 15% of our intake only applies from the end of June onwards. This is a critical research and enquiry period for our intake in 2020. We need to keep enabling applications by giving the relevant information.
- Last year between March to August we held 3812 face to face conversations. These are across UCAS fairs, in schools and at on campus events, all of which are cancelled, and this prepares us for the 2021 application season. UCAS fairs were cancelled the weekend before our two biggest fairs in Exeter and Cornwall. We did attend Bristol UCAS fair which is our third biggest event. They may run in the Autumn but this is looking increasingly unlikely. Last year 260 applicants/ potential applicants visited our June Open Days.
- With these conversations ending, and careers offices closed, school or college leavers have lost easy access to information, advice and guidance.
- This week we are launching Marjon Live, a series of online events which replaces Open Day activity. This covers 11 student experience talks, on a repeating cycle until the end of July. Some will repeat twice a week, some every four weeks, and at different days and time slot to enable people working shifts to find a time to suit them. This includes a postgraduate study session replacing the postgraduate talks at June Open Days.
- Marjon Live also includes 33 Live Course Talks, running from Tuesday 2 June to Friday 5 June. These replace the undergraduate June Open Days course talks. Undergraduate Programme Leads will present their course, facilitated and assisted technically by the Student Recruitment Team, and supported by Student Ambassadors.
- To market Marjon Live and to maintain enquiries, we have made changes to pre-booked media where we can, and moved activity online, increasing spend in online search, and shifting spend to bring in enquirers from online sources such as WhatUni, Student Room and UCAS (as we won't be getting enquirers driven by fairs or from school visits). We also have prospecting ads across Spotify, DAB radio, YouTube, Snapchat and an online display ad campaign to prompt those who wouldn't normally

be considering university.

- Our widening participation activity has moved online, with GCSE Easter Revision school turning into online support over two weeks, with 67 students signed up. Summer School will also be online as we can't plan for an on-campus event in July.
- We are putting live a number of different communications campaigns in specific areas:
- Further push to teacher training; based on the organic increase in interest we want to make sure we are there where people are searching.
- A campaign to tap into the postgraduate "uncertain" market, of people who weren't necessarily planning PG study but for whom economic uncertainty could make it a sensible option. A subset of this is our own graduates.
- An undergraduate campaign aimed at the 70% of 18 year olds in the South West who don't apply to university, who may find the economic situation tricky in the coming year and may reconsider. (This would include other young people aged 18-21 who may not be in reliable jobs now).
- A push for our 100% online courses, PGCert, PG Dip and MA Professional Education Practice, and MSc Management for a Sustainable Future, to start at end of May.
- Reassurance campaign for all undergraduate applicants, including sending packs to their homes which include advice for supporters, (considering they will be getting less support from schools and colleges).

### **Summary and conclusions**

We're on track. The team has focused on firstly our current students, because we need to maintain our reputation through this period, secondly on applicants because we need to make sure they feel they belong with us and are reassured, and finally on new applications. New applications campaigns started in earnest just after Easter, with more landing in the first two weeks of May, just as people start to come to terms with the length of the changes coming, including long term economic changes.

We remain ahead, but vigilant to the challenges of maintaining both current applicant interest and new applications. The relative similarity of applications numbers to last year over the lockdown period should give us confidence for September.

Katy Willis. 5 May 2020