STRATEGIC ADVISORY SERVICES

International Recruitment Diversification Playbook

Project Contributors

Project Director

Lilia Shea

Contributing Consultants

Rachel Wallace
Anushka Mehta

Managing Director

Megan Adams

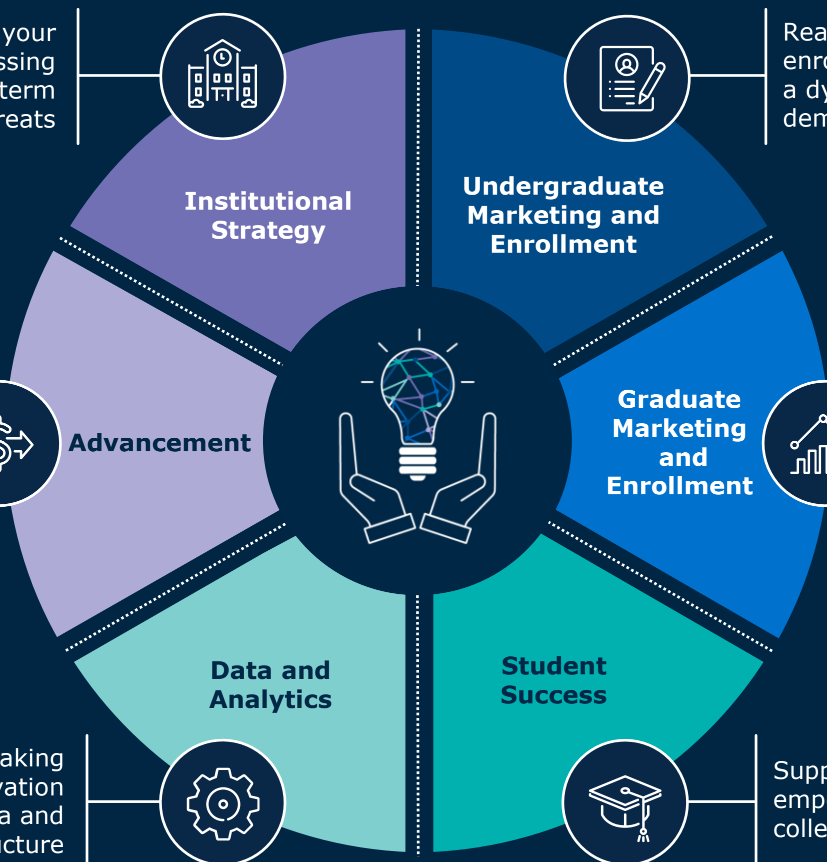
About EAB

At EAB, our mission is to make education smarter and our communities stronger. We harness the power of more than 1,500 institutions to uncover and apply proven practices and transformative insights. From kindergarten to college and beyond, EAB partners with education leaders to accelerate progress and drive results in three key areas: enrollment, student success, and institutional strategy. For more information, visit eab.com.

EAB

Education's Trusted Partner to Help Schools and Students Thrive

Insight-powered Solutions for Your Top Priorities and Toughest Challenges



Institutional Strategy: Future-proof your institution by addressing immediate and long-term opportunities and threats

Undergraduate Marketing and Enrollment: Reach, engage, and enroll future classes in a dynamic market with demographic headwinds

Advancement: Meet aspirational giving goals in an era of competing fundraising priorities and shifting donor interest

Graduate Marketing and Enrollment: Secure enrollments and revenue in an evolving graduate, online, and adult learner market

Data and Analytics: Improve decision-making and accelerate innovation with a modern data and analytics infrastructure

Student Success: Support, retain, and empower students in college and beyond

We partner with 2,800+ institutions to accelerate progress, deliver results, and enable lasting change.

95%+ of our partners return to us year after year because of results we achieve, together.

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Executive Overview

International student recruitment has become significantly more expensive, driven by rising costs of acquisition. While institutions often rely on high international student tuition fees to fill in domestic funding gaps, the growing cost of acquiring an international student erodes the margin on these students and cuts into overall net tuition revenue.

Rising agent commission fees are a core driver of higher international student acquisition costs. Universities rely on agents as a major recruitment channel because agents provide customised student support and offer region-specific knowledge and market access. However, agent commission rates have risen sharply across major recruitment markets, with UK institutions reporting rates increasing from around 15 percent to over 30 percent in some cases, alongside growing expectations that universities offer larger scholarship awards to secure enrolments. Increasing regulation, for example the UK Agent Quality Framework and Australia's Agent Code of Ethics, combined with the rise of agent aggregation, has added resourcing and compliance demand costs at a time when agent activity is becoming harder to monitor.

Agents will remain a critical part of recruitment moving forward, due to their in-country expertise, native language capabilities, and direct student access. However, recruitment teams must explore alternatives to reduce risk and spending.

This playbook is designed to help university international recruitment teams diversify their recruitment approach, evaluate their full recruitment channel mix, and shift away from agent-only recruitment as the default.

1. **Assess Current Lead Source Strategy**

2. **Improve Collaboration With Academic Staff**
   - Launch Collaborative Bootcamps to Support Marketing Needs
   - Use Finder's Fees to Incentivise Recruitment

3. **Strengthen Counsellor/Sponsor Partnerships**
   - Address Counsellor Needs and Concerns
   - Proactively Communicate to Nurture Sponsor Relationships

4. **Optimise Digital Marketing Approaches**
   - Address Top Student Concerns
   - Integrate Student Voices
   - Prepare for Changes in the New Digital Landscape

Translate Tactics and Tools to Real Impact With EAB Support

Reach out to your Strategic Leader to schedule a **1:1 Partner Intensive** on recruitment channel diversification

Explore other EAB materials including our **Recruitment Cost Calculator** and extensive **digital marketing resources**

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Assess Current Lead Source Strategy

SECTION

1

Understand and Evaluate Your Current Lead Sources

Recruitment teams hesitate to diversify beyond agents as a lead source, and when doing so, often struggle to determine how to best allocate their funds. Recruitment teams often operate within tight institutional budgets while still carrying accountability for ambitious enrolment outcomes. At the same time, an increasingly complex lead source landscape makes it difficult to determine which channels recruitment staff should prioritise. The high proportion of students sourced through high-cost recruitment agents intensifies this challenge.

At Alpha University[1], **recruitment leaders addressed this challenge by creating a framework to structure their team's annual budget allocation**. This framework (detailed below) requires staff to take stock of their current lead landscape, set a budget based on their enrolment goals, and then assess and reassess lead source ROI to create a cost-efficient, diversified lead source portfolio.

This framework encourages Alpha University staff to think more openly about the range of lead sources available to them, to avoid focusing solely on the highest-yield sources, such as agents. The framework also prompts staff to continuously test and explore new lead sources.

Heads of recruitment, marketing, or similar should use this framework to determine budget allocation for each course. EAB recommends a per-course basis as your lead landscape will look different for different courses.

Key Steps in Allocating Your Lead Generation Budget

1 Understand the Lead Source Landscape

- Brainstorm all available lead sources
- Explore new, experimental sources

2 Base Budget on Lead and Enrolment Goals

- Use conversion data to set lead targets aligned to enrolment goals
- Multiply by cost of acquisition (COA) to estimate total budget and ROI potential

3 Create a Paid Lead Source Tier System

- Assign lead sources to tiers based on ease of use, performance, and ROI
- Allocate largest budget to 'top tier' sources but reserve 10% for experimentation

4 Evaluate Lead Source Performance and Adjust Tiers

- Review lead source performance at the end of each recruitment cycle
- Shift budget toward top-performing tiers and scale back underperformers

See page 22 for corresponding toolkit.

1. Pseudonym for US regional institution

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Improve Collaboration With Academic Staff

SECTION 2

Launch Collaborative Bootcamps to Support Marketing

Academic staff are well-positioned to support marketing efforts through their subject-matter expertise and direct insight into student preferences and outcomes. Yet, collaboration between academic and recruitment staff remains limited outside central planning committees. Many academic staff hesitate to engage in recruitment efforts, due to unclear expectations, limited time, and lack of incentives.

The University of Hull's former Executive Director of Marketing, Communications, and Student Recruitment, Francesca Carey, launched a series of one-day Student Recruitment and Marketing Bootcamps to:

- educate academics on the marketing team's function and goals
- enhance marketing content and student recruitment activity through academic insight and expertise

1 Pre-Session: Director Selects Participants and Compiles Course Data and Insights

Select High-Priority Courses

Best-fit courses drive bootcamp success

1. 'Priority' subject areas with high growth potential
2. Subject areas with enthusiastic or 'friendly' academic staff

Assemble Leaders and Staff

Diverse stakeholders offer different views on recruitment

- Bootcamp leader (marketing director or equivalent) invites staff from data, strategy, events, and web/content teams
- Leaders in attendance include heads of marketing, recruitment, and communications
- Heads of school select best-fit academic staff

Prepare Data and Insights

To demonstrate marketing decisions are data-driven

- Marketing team prepares course-specific analyses that surface student demand, preferences, and decision drivers, drawing on survey data, focus groups with advisors and schools, and historical enrolment trends

2 Full-Day Session: Evaluate Current Materials and Co-Design New Materials

Start with Agenda and Status Quo

Bootcamp leader sets direction and expectations

- Set a loose agenda to ensure a participant-led experience
- Emphasise that the bootcamp will be a safe, confidential space to drive open communication
- Share institution enrolment trends data and a refresher on the recruitment cycle
- Discuss the top five competitors' marketing materials and websites
- Provide a refresher on the university brand

Perform SWOT and Stakeholder Analysis

Academics share expert, course-specific insights

- Split into groups; groups rotate through a SWOT exercise, spending a few minutes on each section
- Discuss SWOT exercise as a large group and translate findings into actionable next steps and ideas (e.g., strengths advertised on course webpage more prominently)
- Identify inaccurate or out-of-date info in existing materials

Make Live Edits and After-Action Plan

Recruitment/Marketing staff ensure actionable results

- Making real-time edits to the course webpage with an in-room web designer, demonstrating immediate impact of bootcamp participation
- Recording ideas for new marketing materials with an in-room copywriter
- Writing up an after-action plan at end of session to outline next steps and ensure accountability

See pages 27-34 for pre-sessional checklist, SWOT matrices, and after-action template.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Bootcamps Drive Collaboration and Innovation

Francesca Carey

Chief Marketing Officer

Aberystwyth University

Former Executive Director of Marketing, Comms and Student Recruitment, University of Hull

Advice from the Expert: A Smoother Path To Bootcamp Success

Use Executive Sponsorship to Secure Academic Buy-In
Finding an executive ‘sponsor’ is vital in engaging academic staff. At the University of Hull, Carey secured sponsorship from the Deputy Vice Chancellor. Create a proposal with course performance, enrolment trends and competitor data to build the case for a targeted bootcamp to strengthen course-specific marketing.

Start With a Pilot For Easier Scalability
Start with a pilot bootcamp for a single course (preferably a course with ‘friendly’ academic staff) to minimise resource waste and iron out early kinks. Record all impacts to help get further bootcamps greenlit.

Get Creative to Fill-In International Data Gaps
Sourcing data on international and postgraduate students is more challenging compared to home and undergraduate students. Involve global staff, when possible, in pre-sessional data collection to fill these gaps. Consider surveying agents, international school counsellors, and students (see page 38) to further inform analysis.

Bootcamps Secure Academic Buy-In and Build Better Campaigns

Pre-session analysis **ties marketing approach to concrete data**

+52% **Increase in academic confidence in marketing** team according to post-bootcamp survey

Creation of **new marketing and recruitment tactics** based **on academic insights**

Faster response time from academics when asked to **support marketing efforts**

Elimination of incorrect, out-of-date or generic marketing materials

[Academics] felt more positively about marketing and **student recruitment activity**.

[Marketing colleagues]…had an **improved awareness** of subject matter content…’

Post-Bootcamp Survey Findings

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Use Academic Finder's Fees to Incentivise Recruitment

Julie Cook

President

International Trading Institute

Digital marketing channels struggle to replicate the trust and personal endorsement that make agent-led recruitment effective. To bridge this gap, International Trading Institute President Julie Cook adapted influencer marketing strategies for student recruitment.

The ITI model offers academics a small commission when a student enrols using an academic's unique code, recreating a trusted, relationship-led referral mechanism within a digital context. This approach delivers the strongest returns when engaging the institution's 'star' academics with established online followings. However, institutions can extend this model by offering referral codes to staff, students, or alumni with credible online presence, broadening reach without defaulting to agent channels.

1 Create Personalised Links to Help Track Applications

ITI's marketing director created individualised links for all academics and staff linked to the course (e.g., academic directors, advisors).

2 Write 'Elevator Pitch' for Easier Staff Use

President Cook created a short blurb about the course, including financial info, key dates, application requirements, and the course's 'unique selling point.'

3 Encourage Staff to Share Pitch with Audience

Academic staff then shared the blurb alongside their personal link with their audience (typically through newsletters, social media channels, and WhatsApp groups).

4 Monitor Communications to Ensure Accuracy

While President Cook did not require academics to submit posts for approval, ITI staff review social media feeds and newsletters to ensure correct and consistent information.

5 Recruitment Teams Take Over Once Link Is Used

Once an applicant uses an academic's link, the recruitment team steps in to support student through application and answer all questions. Academics are kept informed of student's progress.

6 Award Staff Commission Once Student Enrolls

Once a student enrols, the academic receives a 10% commission payment and recognition (via internal email/post) by the marketing team.

Approach Drives Enrolment, Engages Academics

6% Of all applicants sourced through academics so far

Stronger sense of collaboration and interest from academics in recruitment work

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Strengthen Counsellor/Sponsor Partnerships

SECTION 3

Address Counsellor Needs and Concerns

At the undergraduate level, counsellors, not agents, are the key to reaching students. Recruitment teams, however, often lack detailed insight into counsellor and student needs and preferences. This gap matters because counsellors operate in close-knit, relationship-driven networks and frequently move between schools, carrying trust and influence with them. At the same time, both counsellors and students face an increasing volume of generic promotional content as institutions compete more aggressively for international undergraduates. To cut through this noise, universities must move beyond broad messaging and develop a clearer understanding of what counsellors and students value, building partnerships that respond directly to those needs.

Four Challenges Recruiters Face When Working With Counsellors

1

Lack of Insight Into Student and Counsellor Preferences

- Recruitment staff have limited direct contact with undergraduate students and counsellors, as most recruitment runs through agents
- As a result, recruitment teams have less insight into undergraduate international student decision-making behaviour and preferences

Recommendations

Use market research and surveys to better understand student and counsellor needs and preferences

2

Missing Region-Specific Context

- Recruitment staff lack deep knowledge of individual markets, which can frustrate counsellors and students
- Counsellors report unnecessary documentation requests (e.g., English proficiency proof from English-medium schools) and limited awareness of local issues and current events

Ensure recruitment staff receive training on country-specific nuances and best practice

3

International School Counsellors Lack Country-Specific HE Knowledge

- International school counsellors often come from roles at domestic universities or out-of-sector and therefore lack familiarity with each country's higher education system and application process
- Counsellors advise students applying to multiple destinations and often lack up-to-date knowledge of country-specific admissions process

Create training materials or events for international school counsellors

4

Market Saturation Overwhelms Counsellors and Students

- International schools report a surge in university outreach; one association of international schools received nearly 1,000 visits in 2024 alone
- A high volume of generic and irrelevant recruitment materials overwhelms counsellors and their students

Develop marketing materials that provide direct value to counsellors and students

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Targeted Support Strengthens Counsellor Relationships

Counsellor and Student Surveys

- Launch short, targeted surveys to counsellors and students to better understand their needs, concerns, and priorities
- Ensure surveys follow EAB best practices: quick and easy to complete, deployed regularly to assess changes over time, and oriented towards driving actionable impact

UWE Bristol: Staff survey counsellors 4x per year. They use their findings to support counsellors and strengthen relationships as well as better understand student demand trends.

Counsellor Trainings

- Offer counsellor trainings (e.g., webinars, in-person events, info packets, online modules) that help counsellors understand and navigate your country's HE landscape
- Training materials should include information on programme types, fees and funding options, the application process (e.g., key dates, central portal systems), English language requirements, etc.

Carleton University: Counsellor webpage includes recorded training video, FAQs, and digital resources

University of Birmingham: Guide combines institution-specific detail and application guidance with broader UK info

Staff Trainings

- Ensure staff are trained on best practices when engaging with international students and counsellors (e.g., clear slower speech, following cultural norms)
- Inform staff on each country's education system, as well as international school curricula (e.g., International Baccalaureate)

UK: 'Global Engagement Academy' offers professional development courses on intercultural communication, global trends, etc.

Real-Value Recruitment Materials

- Go beyond info sessions on being an international student and offer advice on specific career pathways and workforce skill development
- Partner with local organisations (e.g. banks, charities) to make offerings more relevant and useful for students, parents, and counsellors

Massachusetts Institute of Technology: Engineering outreach programme hosts hackathons and labs globally

University of Chichester: 'Be Prepared' webinar series advises students on healthcare, finances, jobs

EAB's Global Match platform connects universities with a global network of 3,000+ counsellors across 180+ countries

See pages 38-43 for survey creation and counsellor support tools

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Proactively Communicate to Nurture Sponsor Relationships

Government sponsorship can diversify recruitment pipelines and lower acquisition costs, but unlike agent-led recruitment, it extends the university's accountability to sponsors well beyond enrolment. These partnerships help institutions recruit full-fee-paying students while avoiding agent commission fees and supporting a longer-term pipeline. However, unlike agents or school counsellors whose role typically ends at enrolment, sponsors remain actively involved throughout a student's studies, closely monitoring academic progress and raising concerns when issues arise.

At the University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE Bristol), recruitment staff noted that some sponsored students missed key deadlines, exams, or classes, and staff did not consistently respond to sponsor concerns. In response, UWE Bristol introduced a four-part strategy to proactively support sponsored students and strengthen communication between sponsors and university staff.

1

Sponsor-Specific Email Ensures Queries Don't Slip Through the Cracks

Challenge Addressed: Sponsor Emails Getting Lost in General University Inboxes

- A dedicated sponsor inbox allows government sponsors to send queries directly to the right team, rather than general student support or recruitment accounts
- Recruitment staff monitor the inbox on a daily rota, ensuring all sponsor communications receive a timely response

2

Dashboard Alerts Identify Sponsored Students at Risk

Challenge Addressed: Sponsored Students Missing or Failing Courses

- Recruitment staff maintain a student success dashboard that flags international students at risk of failure
- Dashboard uses student record data to identify students who have not completed a certain number of credits
- Employs a 'traffic light' system that automatically issues next-step guidance emails to 'yellow' cases and assigns 'red' cases to a designated staff member for follow-up

3

Student Website Keeps Sponsored Students on Track

Challenge Addressed: Sponsored Students Failing to Register for Classes Each Year

- A dedicated website encourages sponsored students to complete key enrolment steps, such as re-registering for classes
- The website uses short animations rather than text-heavy pages or instructions, making instructions clear and engaging
- Staff use the website to flag students who have not completed required registration before the start of term

4

Regular Newsletter Drives Proactive Communication

Challenge Addressed: Sponsors Frustrated by Missed Deadlines or Limited Updates

- Recruitment staff circulate a regular newsletter to sponsors with relevant university news, policy updates, and international student information
- Updates include reminders about key student immigration and academic obligations, reinforcing the university's commitment to shared accountability

See page 44 for the sponsor communication tracker tool.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Optimise Digital Marketing Approaches

SECTION 4

Digital Marketing Content Underpins All Other Efforts

Digital marketing is not a peripheral support to agent-led recruitment; it is a core capability needed for diversification. Recruiting international students increasingly requires sophisticated digital marketing. Yet recruitment teams often treat digital activity as secondary because many students ultimately apply through agents. However, this assumption constrains growth and diversification.

Digital channels create value even when students ultimately enrol through agents. Digital marketing offers a lower-cost way to diversify recruitment in two ways. First, it provides a direct pipeline to undergraduate and distance learners who are less likely to use agents. Second, even students who work with agents continue to engage with institutional websites, social platforms, and content as they evaluate options and make final enrolment decisions.

Most institutions underinvest in digital marketing relative to its influence on enrolment decisions. Today's learners spend up to nine hours per day on social media, and social platforms influence nearly 60 percent of international students' final enrolment choices. Despite this influence, few universities actively use paid social media in major source markets to address students' most pressing concerns and priorities. A search of the Meta ad library (which includes Facebook, Instagram, Threads, Messenger and WhatsApp) found limited evidence of institutions running ads that directly address students' most pressing concerns and priorities.

Shifts in technology, regulation, and student behaviour reduce the effectiveness of traditional digital tactics. Despite the continued value of many fundamental digital marketing tenets, the rise of artificial intelligence and increased 'ad fatigue' among Generations Z and Alpha limit the impact of traditional marketing campaigns. Additionally, in Europe, GDPR regulations make lead generation and conversion from social media posts far more difficult. To cut through this noise, universities must position themselves as authentic, expert, and omnipresent voices that deliver value beyond standalone ads and rise above AI-generated and bot noise.

Four Steps To Ensure Your Digital Marketing Content Is Ready for Today's Students

I

Hone your current marketing fundamentals: ensure your team is optimised for digital marketing and regularly posting social media content (see pages 45-51)

II

Assess your current marketing materials for alignment with international student preferences, remember to account for regional and per-course differentiation (see pages 18 and 52)

III

Ensure your marketing presence incorporates student voices through showcasing student testimonials, hiring student interns, or connecting applicants with student ambassadors) (see pages 19 and 53-56)

IV

Prepare your digital marketing team to face emerging challenges (i.e., student ad fatigue, AI impacts on SEO, the rise of bot activity) (see page 20)

Source: 'Social media influences nearly 60% of international students' decisions,' Keystone Education Group, 2025; EAB interviews and analysis.

Address Top Student Priorities in Marketing Materials

Many university digital campaigns showcase institutional features rather than directly answering students' decision-making concerns. Addressing international student priorities is essential to university digital marketing campaigns. Student surveys consistently find that international students' priorities when making a university selection are university rankings and teaching quality, career and graduate outcomes, culture and support for international students, and affordability. And yet, EAB's researchers searched the Meta ad library and found that university-paid social ads rarely address these priorities, instead focusing on images of campus, generic student photos, broad slogans, and course names. While course info and campus imagery play an important role in digital marketing campaigns, many recruitment teams overlook critical opportunities to align their messaging with key student priorities.

Recruitment teams should tailor their digital marketing content to specific regions. International school counsellors and agents report that universities frequently circulate the same materials across markets, even when local priorities differ. Stronger campaigns adapt content to what matters most in each region, such as affordability in one market and reputation or teaching quality in another, and use student stories that help prospective students see themselves in the institution.

International Students Concerned About Cost, Reputation, Outcomes, and Culture

#1 Ranking of **'high quality teaching'** as their **top priority** when selecting a country to study in

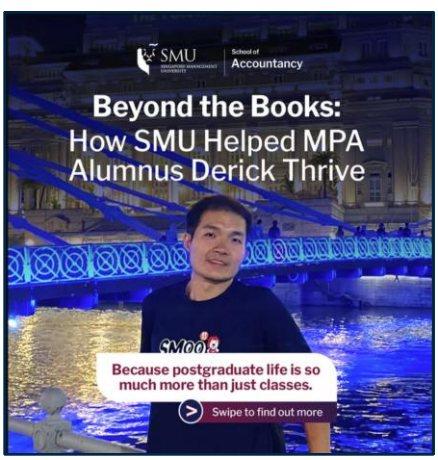
67% Of international students **named 'cost of living'** as a concern when making their university choice

#2 Student ranking of a **'welcoming environment'** as their top priority when selecting a country to study in

67% Of international students cited **'career development'** as their main motivation for studying internationally

QS, *Global Student Flows*, 2025; IDP, *Emerging Futures*, 2025

Paid Social Ads Must Address Top Student Priorities



Meta ad shown in India demonstrates how Singapore Management University offers its international students **support** and a **welcoming culture**

LinkedIn ad advertises EAE Business School's **graduate employability rankings,** thus demonstrating its **ROI for international students**

Meta ad shown in Pakistan by a consultant advertises the University of Northampton's financial support options, demonstrating international student **affordability**

See page 52 for the student priorities marketing tracker tool.

Meta Ad Library, 2025

Integrate Student Voices into Your Marketing

International students seek human connection throughout the recruitment process, but universities rarely provide it at scale. In a 2024 QS study, international students planning to study in the UK ranked asking questions of current international students as their most useful source of information when making study decisions. Yet access remains limited. Just 15 percent of respondents reported speaking with a student ambassador about their course or university choices.

Offering prospective-student-to-ambassador connections is just one way to help bridge the gap between applicants and your institution. Below, read three approaches to optimising the students already on campus in your marketing.

Ensure Real-World Voices Are Present in Your Digital Marketing Strategy

Hire Student Workers

A Win-Win for Students and University Staff

- Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University launched a pilot programme in 2022 that used student interns to expand recruitment into a new market (Indonesia)
- Student interns with market-specific knowledge and language skills led market research, vendor negotiations, creative development and writing, and implementation and monitoring
- Interns expanded online ad viewers and earned real-world experience for their own CVs

See page 54 for guide to employing student workers.

Source Student Testimonials

Testimonials and Profiles Help Prospective Students Picture Themselves on Your Campus

- The University of Sheffield includes a range of testimonials that span formats (e.g., short YouTube videos, interview-style profiles, 'day in the life' Instagram reels)
- The University of Manchester offers a range of international student profiles housed on a single easy-to-navigate webpage

See page 53 for student story collection tool.

Offer Ambassador and Alumni Connections

Personal Connections Humanise the Recruitment Process and Engage Prospective Students

- McGill University's alumni network hosts info sessions in destination markets, and students can also connect with recent graduates from their country via WeChat or WhatsApp.
- Loughborough University's Global Alumni Ambassador programme strengthens engagement in key regions. Ambassadors share career insights with students, supporting recruitment efforts.

Review EAB's International Alumni Engagement to Support Recruitment report for more on working with alumni

Source: 'Destination: UK', QS, 2024; EAB interviews and analysis.

Prepare For New Challenges in the Digital Landscape

Even well-resourced digital marketing teams face declining effectiveness as ad fatigue, AI-driven search, and bot traffic reshape how students discover universities. These new challenges limit the impacts of tried-and-true marketing strategies. Institutions should implement the following tactics, sourced from EAB's Adult Learner Recruitment marketing experts, to sustain impact and reach in this evolving landscape.

1. Develop an **Omnipresent Voice**

Challenge:

- Data privacy regulations make it more difficult to track and target students
- Gen Z is increasingly aware of advertising tactics and 'numb' to the sheer volume of digital marketing content they view daily

Action: Become An Authentic, Multichannel Voice

- Tailor marketing content by platform (e.g., YouTube for alumni stories, TikTok for influencer content or memes)
- Leverage student influencers for authenticity
- Explore measuring ad spend ROI by broader metrics (e.g., engagement rates, sentiment analysis, brand awareness)

2. Optimise Digital Content for **AI SEO**

Challenge:

- Searchers are now more likely to use AI overviews provided by search engines to obtain answers without visiting a webpage
- Gen Z users have changed their search queries from phrases to questions (e.g., 'Is a Masters programme worth it?')

Action: Adapt Web Content for AI Searches

- Incorporate conversational keywords in webpages (e.g.' blogpost that answers student questions')
- Adhere to Google's quality standards around accuracy, originality, informativeness, expertise, and newness
- Use mobile-friendly, easily readable content

3. Flag and Deter **Bot Activity**

Challenge:

- Bots are increasing in volume and sophistication, with 24% of internet traffic in the education sector now bot-based
- Bots inflate ad click-through rates, forcing ad platforms to pay for fake engagement, and distort marketing analytics

Action: Become An Authentic, Omnipresent Voice

- Flag robotic click behaviour (multiple clicks on a website <2 seconds)
- Identify 'user agents' sent by bots in advance
- Deploy 'honeypot' links in emails (stealth links only detectable to bots) to flag and block users that click said links
- Use reCAPTCHA tests to guard your university webpage from bot abuse

Connect with EAB's Digital Agency for an **AI Search Visibility Audit** to assess your website

Appendix: Tools

SECTION 5

Tool 1: Understand Your Lead Source Landscape

What Options Are Available to You?

Before paying for lead sourcing, it is important to understand the different lead sources available, how they perform in practice, and their respective advantages and limitations. Because there is no centralised lead source for international postgraduate recruitment, institutions must rely on multiple channels to recruit effectively.

TIMING

End of the fiscal year

Agents

- Recruitment consultancies or individuals in source countries who recruit students on behalf of a university, typically paid on a per-capita commission basis
- **Benefits:** High conversion rates, reduces university staff workload
- **Downsides:** Most costly lead source (up to 30% commission rates), coming under increased public and governmental scrutiny

Paid Search

- Sponsored search engine results
- **Benefits:** Converts leads quickly, leads are higher-intent
- **Downsides:** Often a costly lead source, particularly in comparison to other lead sources. Cost can vary based on course type

Organic Leads from Your University Website

- Students who fill out lead generation forms on your website, including by interacting with your virtual tour or registering for an event
- **Benefits:** Can be relatively low-cost, leads are higher-intent
- **Downsides:** Most university websites are not fully optimised for lead-conversion efforts, and optimisation cannot typically be done without help from another team (e.g., IT, web)

Known Lead Sources

- Includes institutional inquiry and application starter lists, current undergrad students, and alumni
- **Benefits:** Low-cost and high-intent source, leads are easier to find and connect with compared to other sources, no need to develop institutional awareness
- **Downsides:** Maintaining alumni list hygiene can be challenging, lead volume grows slowly

Digital Ads

- Display or banner ads that can appear on social media or search engines
- **Benefits:** High-intent lead source, social platforms simplify targeted marketing
- **Downsides:** Often costly and hard to do well and know which platforms will lead to best outcomes

Government Sponsors

- Source country governments or organisations that sponsor students to pursue education abroad
- **Benefits:** Higher-pay students due to government covering their fees
- **Downsides:** Sponsor expectations and 'hands-on' mentality requires more time and resources from university staff

Tool 1: Understand Your Lead Source Landscape (cont.)

Test-Taker Lists

- Lists of students who have taken English language tests, such as the TOEFL or IELTS
- **Benefits:** Low-cost lead source
- **Downsides:** Can only serve as one piece of a robust lead generation strategy

Student Search Platforms

- Platforms that provide students with information about specific courses, universities, and careers in exchange for student data
- **Benefits:** Engages leads through gamified/algorithmic content, can provide high-intent leads, creates institutional awareness, platform handles recruiting leads
- **Downsides:** Institutions need to differentiate themselves with unique value offerings

Additional Lead Sources Specific To Your Recruitment Team

Source	Benefits	Downsides

Tool 2: Setting Enrolment Goals

How Many Leads Do You Need?

Clear goal-setting is a critical first step in allocating lead generation budgets. Without clarity on how many leads a course needs, it becomes difficult to assess which lead sources are appropriate or cost-effective.

Lead targets should align with enrolment and net tuition revenue (NTR) expectations for the course. These expectations reflect how much tuition revenue the programme must generate to support institutional financial goals.

To translate those enrolment and NTR expectations into recruitment activity, teams should work backwards from historical performance and estimate how many leads are required to achieve the desired enrolment outcome. Application, offer, and yield rates indicate how many leads are typically required to produce one enrolled student. Using these conversion rates allows recruitment teams to estimate the total number of leads needed to meet enrolment targets and set a realistic lead budget. This approach also makes it simple to calculate a net tuition revenue ROI for your course, which can help build a case for your budget with leadership.

TIMING

End of the fiscal year

Bottom-Up Lead Generation Goal-Setting Exercise

Use the example to the right and the below steps to determine your target volume of leads generated, your ideal lead generation budget, and your course's anticipated ROI based on that budget. **Be sure to calculate your cost per lead** (typically total marketing expenditure divided by number of leads) **before beginning the exercise.**

1. Determine your **application, admit, and yield rates** based on the previous recruitment cycle's performance.
2. Using those rates, work backwards to figure out **how many total leads you would need** to reach your goal number of enrolled students.
3. Use the current number of leads in your funnel to determine **how many new leads you would need to reach your total lead number.**
4. To determine an **ideal lead generation budget needed to reach your lead goal,** figure out your average cost per lead and multiply that number by the amount of new leads you need.
5. You can now calculate your **potential course ROI** by dividing your total student-generated net revenue by your lead generation budget.

Example

Enrolment Funnel	Programme X
Existing Leads	3,000
New Leads Needed	1,200
Total Leads	4,200
Application Rate	2%
Applications	84
Admit Rate	80%
Admitted Students	67
Yield Rate	50%
Enrolled Students	34

Budget Planning	
Average Cost per Lead	£50
New Leads Needed	1,200
Marketing Budget Needed	**£60,000**

ROI Calculation	
Net Tuition Revenue (NTR) per Student	£15,000
NTR Generated	£510,000
Marketing Cost	£60,000
ROI	85:1

Tool 3: Creating a Paid Lead Source Tier System

How Should You Allocate Your Budget?

One effective way to determine how much of your budget to allocate to each of your paid lead sources is to develop a paid lead source tier system, based on each source's level of effectiveness, lead quality and quantity, and required hands-on attention.

Though your chosen pool of lead sources will be unique and based on your course's needs and goals, it's best practice to centre your strategy around lead sources that will provide high-intent students and those that will provide a large quantity of leads. However, your strategy can also include some sources that require more hands-on monitoring to generate quality leads. A small part of your budget should also be funneled into a few sources that you are testing for the first time to continue to innovate and expand your reach.

Make sure you set success thresholds for each source's performance to make it easy to evaluate how well your strategy worked at the end of the recruitment cycle.

TIMING

After budget approval

Paid Source Tier System Exercise

TIER 1

50%+ of budget

Tier 1 should consist of tried-and-true foundational sources that you plan to use for each recruitment cycle. They should provide high-intent student names.

Examples: student search platforms, paid search, test-taker lists

List your Tier 1 sources here:

TIER 2

40% or less of budget

Tier 2 should contain sources that have been effective but may need more hands-on management to be fully optimised to generate leads effectively.

Examples: Paid social, streaming service ads (e.g., YouTube)

List your Tier 2 sources here:

TIER 3

10-15% of budget

Tier 3 should consist of new-to-you sources that you want to try. Don't be afraid to test every year to stay innovative—just remember to ensure whatever you test is measurable and trackable.

Examples: Short form video marketing, Twitch

List your Tier 3 sources here:

Tool 4: Evaluating Lead Source Performance

How Successful Was Your Strategy?

Evaluating your lead source performance is an important final piece of your strategy. To ensure you know exactly how well each source performed, you need to have sound lead attribution. Creating a lead attribution strategy, if you don't have one already, requires working closely with your CRM management team to make sure each lead is being attributed to the correct source. While lead attribution can happen throughout the year as leads convert, ensure you have a strategy in place before the year begins so you aren't having to fix issues that crop up along the way.

After creating a performance target for each lead source in Step 3, you should now have a clear idea of how well each of your sources performed. But what happens if any one of your sources didn't meet its success threshold?

EAB best practices state that for Tier 1 and 2 sources that didn't perform well, you can consider trying to use them again for another one to three cycles. Since these are your foundational sources, perhaps consider adjusting your budget split if a source severely underperformed. If the source still isn't working out after a grace period, move it down one tier and adjust your budget allocation accordingly. For Tier 3 sources, as you are testing them for the first time, take time to decipher what went wrong. If it was an internal error, consider fixing that issue and trying again. If not, consider moving on to test a new source.

TIMING

End of a recruitment cycle

Determining Future Lead Source Usage Based on Performance

Example

Lead Source & Tier	Performance Target (Leads)	Actual Performance	Plan for Next Year
Student Search Platform– Tier 1	1,000	1,000	Keep
Test Names – Tier 1	600	550	Keep
Paid Social – Tier 2	400	200	Keep but adjust budget allocation
New Source – Tier 3	100	5	Locate error and cut if not fixable

Having a reliable lead attribution strategy is crucial to determine how each source contributed to your lead pool.

Create performance targets based on past performance and estimate realistic targets for new sources.

You might consider keeping Tier 1 and 2 sources for another one to three cycles if they underperform. If Tier 3 source issues can't be fixed internally, consider moving on.

Tool 5: Marketing Bootcamp Pre-Session Checklist

Instructions

This checklist will help you stay organised as you develop your Student Recruitment and Marketing bootcamp, from approval through launch. Fill in this checklist with names and deadlines to ensure all items are completed.

Use this checklist to prepare your bootcamp proposal for senior leadership review.

Bootcamp Proposal	Who will complete?	Deadline	Action item completed
Assess historical enrolment trends to determine need for improved marketing materials			❑
Secure 'sponsorship' from point person influential with academics (preferably at senior level)			❑
Select ideal course for pilot bootcamp. Ideal course should either be: • A **priority area** for the university (i.e., of strategic importance or enrol a high number of students) • Attached **to 'friendly' academics** who have expressed an interest in participating in a bootcamp or who have been open to working with recruitment/marketing teams before			❑

After SLT-approval, use this checklist to ensure that a diverse range of staff are involved.

Staff Selection	Action item completed
Director of Marketing or equivalent	❑
Director of International Student Recruitment or equivalent	❑
Director of Communications	❑
Events team member	❑
Liaison or equivalent role who works with secondary school counsellors	❑
Director of Strategy/Planning or equivalent	❑
Staff member(s) with expertise in web editing	❑
Staff member(s) with expertise in content copywriting	❑
Academic staff from chosen course	❑
[*Additional staff as necessary]*	❑

Tool 5: Marketing Bootcamp Pre-Session Checklist

Finally, compile a list of the materials you will need for the session itself. A data-based overview of the course's student preferences, enrolment trends, competitive landscape, and demand serves two purposes: it guides the session and it increases its legitimacy with academic staff in attendance.

Materials Needed for Session	Who will complete ?	Deadline	Action item completed
Assessment of course student preferences. Sources may include: • Current student survey results • Survey results from students who have declined their place at your institution • Takeaways from focus groups or 1:1 interviews with recruitment partners (e.g., government sponsors, school counsellors, agents)			❑
Assessment of historical enrolment trends for both your institution (using internal data) and the subject area more broadly (using HESA data)			❑
Assessment of competitive landscape. Sources may include: • Win rate against competitors • Sample competitor materials (paid social ads, webpage, etc.)			❑
• Labour market data analysis for chosen course to outline skills gaps and market trends (available through EAB's *Market Insights)*			❑
[additional materials can be listed here]			❑
			❑
			❑
			❑

Tool 6: Marketing Bootcamp SWOT Analysis

What is a SWOT Analysis?

A SWOT analysis uses a diagnostic framework to evaluate an **institution's competitive position** in a market to develop strategy.

Effective SWOTs incorporate diverse perspectives to align analyses with institutional priorities.

Using a SWOT Analysis to Strengthen Marketing Strategy for a Course

Split your bootcamp attendees into small groups and assign each one section of this framework. Encourage them to think through the course's relevant attributes in relation to competitors. After brainstorming, ask each group to share their findings and solicit any additional ideas from the collective attendees.

Strength

Sample questions for discussion:

- What makes our course stand out from its competitors (modules offered, academic staff, access to employers, facilities, etc.)?
- What careers or accolades have our students from this course gone on to earn?
- What do students tell us attracts them to our course or institution?
- Do we have strong graduation, retention, and employment rates?

Next Step Question: Are these strengths clear in our marketing materials and webpage?

Weakness

Sample questions for discussion:

- What do we hear from students, recruitment staff, and agents that is preventing students from enrolling in our course?
- Which metrics (graduation, retention, employment) do we perform most poorly on?
- Where do our competitors stand out from us?
- Are any parts of the course curriculum out-of-date with current industry or labour market trends?

Next Step Question: What specific changes to our marketing materials or recruitment approach could address these weaknesses?

Opportunity

Sample questions for discussion:

- What new markets might present recruitment opportunities?
- Have there been any recent changes to the course – such as new modules, academics, facilities, or partnerships – that would attract students?
- Have there been any university changes or positive attention that we could take advantage of?

Next Step Question: What immediate next step can we prioritise to take advantage of these opportunities?

Threat

Sample questions for discussion:

- Are our students particularly susceptible to any upcoming policy decisions?
- Do we have any competitors, either in the UK or abroad, who pose a threat to our market share?
- Are we seeing any shifts in the labour market of this course that might reduce student interest in this field?

Next Step Question: How are we currently monitoring these threats? How can we ensure continual monitoring?

Tool 7: Marketing Bootcamp SWOT Matrix

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 8: Bootcamp Individual SWOT Analysis Worksheet #1

Strength	Why is this a current strength? Please provide specific examples.	What next steps might we take to capitalise on this strength? Who should own those steps?

Weakness	Why is this a current weakness? Please provide specific examples.	What next steps might we take to mitigate this weakness? Who should own those steps?

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 8: Bootcamp Individual SWOT Analysis Worksheet #2

Opportunity	Why is this an area of opportunity? Please provide specific examples.	What next steps might we take to capitalise on this opportunity? Who should own those steps?

Threat	Why is this a current weakness? Please provide specific examples.	What next steps might we take to ward off this threat? Who should own those steps?

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 9: Marketing Bootcamp After-Action Report Template

Instructions: Review all notes and materials emerging from the session and complete. Fill out thematic section first, then move to the action plan.

Theme Summary

What themes emerged across this discussion?

1

2

3

4

5

How did these themes compare to previous bootcamps?

Present in previous bootcamps:	New to this bootcamp:

Tool 10: Bootcamp After-Action Report: Marketing Staff

Next, fill out the following sections of this after report to clarify next steps for each team and ensure accountability. Use the academics' small group SWOT analyses and any additional notes created during the session. Plan to share the after-action report with not only the bootcamp participants, but also colleagues and/or senior leaders needed to complete the actions.

Next Steps: *These are action items able to handled directly by the* ***Marketing/Recruitment teams.***

Item Description	Justification	What would our team need to accomplish this?	Deadline
E.g., Update digital marketing to promote AI modules in data analytics course	*E.g., Labour market data shows increasing need for AI skills and competitor courses already advertise their AI offerings*	*E.g., AI module description from academics and examples of assignments or projects that leverage AI*	*E.g., Asap, expect to be completed by end of month*

Tool 10: Bootcamp After-Action Report Template: Partner Team

Next Steps: Use this template to capture follow-up actions that fall outside Marketing or Recruitment's direct control but can be advanced by another team (e.g., Planning, Communications, Admissions, Finance).

Item Description	Justification	What would the team need to achieve this?	Who would need to own this?	Deadline
E.g., Review and streamline postgraduate offer timelines	*E.g., According to student focus groups, current turnaround time is slower than competitors, creating delays in conversion and possible melt*	*E.g., Updated process map and clear guidelines for issuing offers; collaboration with IT to automate where possible*	*E.g., Admissions team (possible collaboration with IT)*	*E.g., Before next cycle begins*

Tool 10: Bootcamp After-Action Report: Senior Leadership

Use this section to capture larger initiatives identified during the bootcamp that will require senior-level approval, new funding, or major infrastructure changes. These actions often extend beyond a single recruitment cycle and should be presented to the Senior Leadership Team for consideration.

Item Description	**Justification**	**Necessary Resources**	**Deadline**
E.g. Implement a unified CRM system integrating marketing, admissions, and recruitment data	*E.g., Current systems are fragmented, limiting visibility across the recruitment pipeline, hampering data-driven decision-making and resulting in unnecessary spend e.g. marketing materials sent to student who just accepted an offer*	*E.g., Capital investment in CRM platform, IT support for integration, staff training budget*	*E.g., Develop and present proposal at next annual planning*

Tool 11: 'Influencer' Course Info Blurb Template

I. Key Information Form

Detail	Your Course Info Here
Course length	
Application requirements	
Application deadline	
'Unique selling points' or differentiators. Examples may include: • Curricular standouts (e.g., popular modules, internship opportunities) • Student support details (e.g., mentorship, career counselling) • Teaching staff qualifications or awards • Finance options (e.g., discounts, scholarship opportunities) • Career outcomes (e.g., sample graduate employers, employment stats)	
Call to action ('Apply Now,' 'Request Info,' etc.) with personalised link	

II. Sample Blurb

'Exciting news: I'm teaching in a new [Programme Name] Course!

The truth? Most [professionals] don't struggle because they lack indicators or strategies. They struggle with consistency, discipline, and the ability to scale their success.

That's why I'm excited to be teaching in the new [Programme Name] at [Institution Name] – a programme designed to give serious [professionals] the same structured training that [leaders in relevant field] receive.

What makes this programme different?

- A clear, professional roadmap
- Real-time application and mentorship
- Learn from the best – I'm honoured to be teaching alongside industry leaders like [staff names]

Applications are open – check the link in the comments to learn more and apply by 5th September!

Programme differentiators that align with student priorities

Call to action with deadline for urgency

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 12: Counsellor Survey Workbook

1 Establish Your Survey Goals

When launching a counsellor survey, recruitment staff should first identify the specific goals they have in mind. A survey should not simply be a way to 'temperature check' counsellor opinions, but also to establish an understanding of specific metrics or areas for improvement.

Guiding questions:

- *What do we most want to know?*
- *What decision(s) will the answers to our questions inform?*
- *Can we confirm that what we want to know is best learned via survey?*

List survey goals here:

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 12: Counsellor Survey Workbook

2

Decide Who To Survey

Identify which counsellors to reach out to. Depending on your survey focus, include a representative sample across regions, school type, experience level, etc.

Guiding questions:

- *Who would know the answers to our questions?*
- *Whose opinions are most important when considering our goals?*

Make sure to focus on representativeness rather than the biggest possible N-value.

List notes on who to survey here:

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 12: Counsellor Survey Workbook

3 Design Your Survey Questions

The recruitment team should then put together a list of survey questions.

To maintain good survey design, staff should work towards reducing total survey error, increasing survey response rates, improving the validity of results, and reducing their analytical burden once the results are in. Staff can achieve these goals through careful question design with a focus on

a) keeping questions short and easy to complete

b) ensuring each question serves a specific purpose.

Tips for success:

- *Ensure questions directly inform the decisions you are hoping to make using this survey*
- *Design questions that are easy to analyse (avoiding questions that are long, syntactically complex, use needlessly large words, complicating or cognitively demanding e.g., drag-and-drop, 'rank and order' type questions)*
- *Avoid double-barreled questions and 'jargon'*
- *Bias towards brevity (both in terms of question length and number of questions)*

List question ideas here:

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 12: Counsellor Survey Workbook

4 Assemble and Test Questionnaire

Before officially launching the survey, the recruitment staff should test the survey with colleagues for readability and UX issues. Ask 1-2 colleagues with little information about the survey to take it with the survey designers observing in real time. The colleagues should verbalise the process at arriving at an answer for each question to help the survey designers understand how respondents may perceive it.

Tips for success:

- *Ask yourself if every question is needed, then remove any unnecessary questions to reduce respondent effort*
- *Begin survey with your most interesting questions and leave demographic/personal info questions towards the end of the survey (respondents find them tedious)*
- *Ask testers about their survey experience, including: how they interpreted the questions, how long it took them to complete the survey, if they felt any multiple response questions were missing potential responses, etc.*

Compile notes on testing outcomes here:

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 12: Counsellor Survey Workbook

5 Deploy Your Survey

Now that the survey is complete, the recruitment team should send it to the selected counsellors. To increase response rates, staff should address participant concerns around privacy/purpose of the survey, as well as offer any potential incentives for participation.

Tips for improving response rates:

- *Explain how data will be used to assuage any data privacy concerns and demonstrate the impact of participating in the survey*
- *Include staff and institutional credentials to increase perceived validity of survey*
- *Offer small incentive for participation if budget allows (e.g., gift card)*

Compile notes and to-dos on survey deployment here:

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 13: Counsellor Readiness Checklist

Recruitment teams are increasingly engaging directly with undergraduate students to diversify their pipelines and reduce dependence on costly agents. Yet they are entering an already crowded landscape, often without the counsellor-specific insight needed to build meaningful school partnerships. The staff member responsible for counsellor engagement should use this checklist to stand out in a competitive market and deliver genuine value to students and schools.

Marketing or Recruitment Team Action Item	Present?
1. Understand Counsellor and Student Needs	
Regular survey of counsellors (at least annually)	
Regular survey of international students (at least annually)	
Regular market research assessment (e.g., third-party reports, data analysis, market listening) of international student preferences and priorities (at least annually)	
Internal understanding of where counsellors and students face the most friction in the recruitment process	
2. Provide Targeted Training and Resources for Counsellors	
Training materials or information for counsellors that cover but are not limited to: • Your country's higher education structure (including different types of degrees, foundation years, length of degree, credit system, etc.) • Any central application system (e.g., in the UK: applying through UCAS, the personal statement, key deadlines, firm vs insurance choices, navigating Clearing) • The visa process (including processing time, key deadlines, materials needed, etc.) • Benefits of studying in your country, and at your institution in particular	
Regular webinars, Q& A sessions, or digital guides complement counsellor training	
3. Create Student-Focused, High-Value Marketing Materials	
Marketing or recruitment materials for students that add real value for them in the application and enrolment process, such as guidance on: • University selection process • Immigration and visa process • Finding accommodation • Working part-time • Financing their studies • Setting up a bank account • Seeking medical care • Advice around adjusting to your country's education system • Advice around developing a social life • Early career support and guidance	
If possible, partner with local organisations (e.g. banks, charities) to enhance relevance and credibility	
4. Strengthen Staff Cultural and Market Competence	
Provide regular staff training on: • Intercultural communication and relationship building • The local primary and secondary education systems • International school curricula (e.g. International Baccalaureate) and their implications for English-language requirements • Key political, economic, or social developments that affect recruitment markets	
Circulate regular (e.g., monthly) updates on relevant market changes (politics, visa policy, economic shifts, natural disasters, etc.)	

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 14: Sponsor Communication Planning Template

Unlike agents, university sponsors tend to follow their students' progress closely after enrolment and are quick to raise concerns if the student appears to be struggling. To strengthen sponsor relationships and better support international students, university staff should increase communication with sponsors and send proactive reminders to students. Recruitment teams, in collaboration with student support staff, can use this template to identify where interventions—such as student email reminders or sponsor newsletter updates—are most needed.

Key International Student Deadline	Potential Risks	Action Step Needed	Action Step Date	Action Step Owner
E.g., International student Biometric Residence Permit collection	*Students will forget to collect BRP, placing them at risk for lack of compliance with UKVI*	*Send reminder emails and WhatsApp messages to students*	*6 September*	*Compliance and visa staff member*

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 15: Digital Capabilities Diagnostic

This diagnostic tool is designed to help you evaluate the robustness of your digital recruitment marketing capabilities. The focus throughout is on the concrete specifics of that approach, the infrastructure required to support it, and the process and outcome metrics that can help you identify performance gaps.

The diagnostic is structured according to six core aspects of digital recruitment marketing performance, with a set of criteria listed under each. Rate your current capabilities with a simple yes/no answer and tally the results at the end of the survey. A key is offered there to help you interpret your score.

	Yes	No
1. Mastery of the Digital Landscape		
I can name and rank the top five social media outlets most often used by applicants in my region of choice		
We assign dedicated staff capacity to continuously evaluate new digital recruitment options that we could incorporate in our outreach		
I am able to describe the relative contributions of different digital investments – including SEO, display advertising, and social media – to recruitment success		
Total Yes Responses:		

	Yes	No
2. Testing and Innovation		
We perform A/B split tests to evaluate the effectiveness of the graphics, imagery, copy, and formats used in our digital outreach		
We have tested social network platform ads (e.g., Meta, WhatsApp), understand its strengths and weaknesses, and have integrated it into our outreach as appropriate		
Total Yes Responses:		

	Yes	No
3. Campaign Structure		
The way we use any social media network for recruitment is based on proven, network-specific practices		
We use display advertising for both inquiry and application generation		
We use Google, LinkedIn, and Meta display ads in recruitment marketing		
We have custom-designed communication flows specific to inquiry and application generation		
Total Yes Responses:		

Tool 15: Digital Capabilities Diagnostic

	Yes	No
4. Multichannel Perspective		
Our recruitment outreach integrates social networks, email communications, paper mailings, and school-sponsored websites		
Our recruitment outreach incorporates each of the top three social media networks used by international students in each region		
We analyse our data to show which communication channels reinforce one another when used together and which do not		
We gather data and perform analyses to determine which digital channels work best at different points in the recruitment cycle		
We measure how student response to display ads varies across mobile and non-mobile devices, and we tweak our digital ad spend accordingly		
We have data on student receptiveness to digital outreach by message and communication type		
We know which types of messages students are glad to receive over WhatsApp/text and which they deem preferrable over email		
Total Yes Responses:		

	Yes	No
5. Data And Analytics		
We capture data from all student interactions with our recruitment outreach, across all channels, and are able to cross-reference it		
We generate granular data comparing the performance of recruitment ads on different social networks (including click rate, reach, and net cost per interaction)		
We know how to use students' preferences for communication channels change across different parts of the recruitment funnel		
We gather data and perform analyses that tell us how digital communication preferences vary across demographic groups (including parents for undergraduate students)		
We feed digital marketing data into predictive analytics used across the recruitment cycle		
Total Yes Responses:		

Tool 15: Digital Capabilities Diagnostic

	Yes	No
6. Outcomes		
Our institution's display advertisements have boosted application volume by more than 10%		
Our digital advertising budget is grounded in research on the impact on application volume for specific increments of additional spend		
We have specific strategies in place to reduce digital ad spend wasted on click bots and other unproductive audiences		
We can measure the incremental improvement in recruitment marketing response rate attributable to our digital advertising efforts		
If we partner with a third party on digital marketing, that third party is agnostic with respect to network and focuses selectively on channels proved to generate superior ROI		
Total Yes Responses:		

Interpreting Your Results	Total YES responses
1. Mastery of the digital landscape	
2. Testing and innovation	
3. Campaign structure	
4. Multichannel perspective	
5. Data and analytics	
6. Outcomes	
Grand Total:	

Grand Total Score	Assessment
1-8	Your institution has yet to implement many or most of the practices we've found drive exceptional digital recruitment results. There is potential for large, rapid performance improvements.
10-17	Your institution is functioning at a high level, but is missing significant opportunities associated with a few best practices you've not yet implemented. Significant room for improvement is likely.
19-26	Your institution is functioning at an unusually high standard. Further gains in performance are possible but will require significant focus and innovation to realise.

Tool 16: Sample Content Calendar and Post Plan

Social media marketing staff should use this content calendar template, separated by common post types, to keep social media content updates timely.

Week 1: Thought Leadership Post (e.g., perspectives on news, trends, research findings)

Description of post: These posts display academic expertise, either through reposting articles or interviews with academics or collaborating with academics to create a post about their research.

Time required: 9-10 hours

Steps to follow:

Task	Estimated Time	When to Complete
Determine an academic staff member with whom to collaborate for the post. This could involve sending an email to departments or selecting an academic you are already aware of.	30 minutes	Three weeks before posting
Prep for a meeting with the academic staff member you choose to collaborate with. Decide on interview questions for the academic if necessary. Complete this task several days before meeting with the academic.	Two to three hours	Three weeks before posting
Meet with the academic staff member to capture the content that you need.	One hour	One to two weeks before posting
Edit the content you collected from the faculty to craft the post. This could involve editing the video or creating an infographic.	Three hours	Week of posting
Craft the post for multiple channels. This will involve slightly adapting the length and content. A thought leadership post will be suitable for Instagram or TikTok.	Two hours	Week of posting
Review the post using a content sign-off checklist (see page Y).	One hour	Week of posting
Publish the post.	5-10 minutes	Week of posting

Week 2: Student User-Generated Content Story Post

Description of post: User-generated content centers the student voice and allows international students to share about their daily life. Common types of user-generated content include day-in-the-life videos, student takeovers, and two-way engagement story posts. The instructions below describe how to make a two-way engagement post, where the social media team shares a question/idea/prompt on their story for students to respond to. The social media team can then repost these responses to their own stories. These types of posts are best for social media platforms with a stories feature (e.g., Instagram, Facebook).

Time required: 3-4 hours

Steps to follow:

Task	Estimated Time	When to Complete
Decide upon a prompt for your story, design the graphic, and make the post. Story posts are typically best suited for Facebook and Instagram.	Two hours	Week of posting
Review the post using a content sign-off checklist.	One hour	Week of posting
Make the post and monitor student responses to the post. **Repost these to your story**. Save the responses as a Highlight on your page.	One hour	Week of posting

Tool 16: Sample Content Calendar and Post Plan

Week 3: Meme-able Post

Description of post: These posts show that an institution has a sense of humour. They generally apply internet trends to the institution, demonstrating that the institution is aware of the current cultural moment.

Time required: 3.5-7 hours

Steps to follow:

Task	Estimated Time	When to Complete
Collaborate with students (either student-workers or general students) to determine an idea for the post.	Two hours	Week of post
Craft the post. Do any necessary organisational work and/or outreach.	One to two hours	Week of post
Review the post using a content sign-off checklist.	One hour	Week of post
Publish the post.	One hour	Week of post

Week 4: Student Testimonial Post

Description of post: These posts share the details of a student's journey from prospect to graduate. Best practice institutions collect student stories via an online form.

Time required: 4 hours

Steps to follow:

Task	Estimated Time	When to Complete
Sift through your student story collection form to select a student to profile. *See the 'Student Story Collection Form.'*	One hour	Week of posting
Draft a post about this student. Consider pairing with a blog post about the student on your website, or short filmed content on Instagram or YouTube.	Two hours	Week of posting
Review the post using a content sign-off checklist.	One hour	Week of posting
Notify the student that their story will be posted. If they already gave permission to post their story, you only need to notify them and don't need to ask for permission. If your student story submission form does not include a release or consent form, ask the student for permission to share their story.	30 minutes	Week of posting
Publish the post.	5-10 minutes	Week of posting

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 16: Sample Content Calendar and Post Plan

Use this template to plan the posts you want to make each month. Fill out the template for each post type.

Post #:

1. What type of post will this be?

2. To which platforms should your team share a version of this post?

3. List the steps needed to complete this post. Check them off as they are completed.

4. Does this post require any outreach or collaboration? With whom? How long will this take?

5. How many weeks in advance should your team begin preparation for this post?

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 17: Build-Your-Own Content Sign-Off Checklist

Develop a List of Values that Your Unit Wants to Uphold With Your Marketing Materials

Follow these steps when selecting values:

- List values (broadly defined, see the table below for examples) that are important to your institution and your marketing team. If your institution has a codified list of values, consult these as you create your list.
- Write clear definitions for each value on your list.
- Develop reflection questions for each value. These should be consulted before posting any content to social media.

Value	Value Description	Reflection Question(s)
Example: Authenticity	Our images and videos represent the true experience of students at our institution	• Does this content represent the student's true experience? • Do students share both the positive and challenging aspects of their experience? • Are we using photos of real students rather than stock photos?
Example: Inclusivity	We make a concerted effort to profile the broad range of students at our institution	• Does our content positively portray students from marginalised communities? • Are we avoiding tokenism (i.e., misrepresenting marginalised student's experience for the purpose of value signaling in marketing)?
Example: High Quality Standards	We ensure that our content is professional and easy to understand	• Are the names of the students or academic staff in the post spelled correctly? • Are there any grammar errors in the post or in the caption?

Sources: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 18: Student Priorities Marketing Tracker

Digital marketing material, whether paid social ads, social media account posts, or web content, should reflect international students' top priorities and concerns by region. Use this short template to brainstorm new marketing ideas that directly answer student concerns (e.g., 'can I afford this course?', 'will I make friends at this university?,' 'will I land a job after graduating?'). Marketing team staff should use student surveys and A-B ad testing to determine which priorities resonate most with your students.

Country/Region	Priorities	Current Marketing Materials Targeting Student Priorities	New Marketing Ideas That Target Student Priorities
	E.g., University prestige/rankings	E.g., Web content noting each course's high ranking	E.g., Instagram posts highlighting university's brand recognition

Tool 19: Student Story Collection Form

Marketing staff should use this tool to help collect student stories that can be then featured on relevant social media accounts or the university website. Staff should advertise this form and encourage academics and advisors to ask students to submit their stories when appropriate.

Background Information

First Name:
Last Name:
City:
Country:
Email:
Course:

Student Essay

In the space below, tell us about your experiences as a(n) [INSTITUTION NAME] student and your unique story. Here are some examples of questions you could consider as you're writing:

- What's been your experience studying at [INSTITUTION NAME]?
- How have any of the following [scholarships, staff support, career services, academic staff] helped make possible or improve your university experience?
- What inspired your course choice/career path?
- What do you see yourself accomplishing in the future?
- In what ways have you become involved in the local community?
- In what ways have you become involved in the university community (e.g., through societies, sports)?
- What advice would you give someone who's hesitant to study in the UK?
- How has [INSTITUTION NAME] helped you achieve your goals?

Student short essay (500 words max):

Student Photo

Please upload a high-resolution photo of yourself.

If you would like, share your social media handles so we can tag you when your story is published:

E-Signature:

To electronically sign this form, type your full name in the box below. *Note: include a disclaimer that says your team reserves the right to edit typos and shorten text as needed without changing the meaning of the student's story.*

Signature:

Additional Tips for Story Collection

- **Work with academic and professional staff to encourage student submissions.** When academic or career support staff hear of a moving student story, they should encourage that student to submit their story via the form. This tactic increases quantity and quality student story submission.
- **Develop media strategies for promoting the form.** Send a periodic email to students or include links to the form in the captions of student story posts.
- **Reshape submission form to use with alumni, staff.** Your team could also create submission forms to have academics share research impact stories and alumni share career outcome stories.

Sources: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 20: Guide to Employing Student Workers or Interns

Involving international students in your marketing or recruitment teams, whether through internships or paid positions, has multiple positive impacts. First, incorporating student voices in marketing teams provides an 'inside look' into social media trends and student preferences in students home countries (particularly useful in non-English-speaking countries). Second, involving students in the marketing team also tees up an opportunity to incorporate the students beyond social media campaigns, such as in sourcing testimonials or connecting with interested applicants. Finally, involving students supports their own career development: students have the chance to build out their CV and gain valuable skills while in a more supportive environment than an external job.

Complete the following steps to incorporate student workers in your marketing and recruitment approach.

1. Recruiting Students

Advertise open positions on multiple channels. These might include:

1. **All social media channels on which your unit is active –** By advertising on all channels, you are likely to attract more students. You will also receive applicants with different platform preferences, which will maximise the social media capabilities of your team.
2. **Email –** Be creative with your use of email to maximise reach. Send a general email to students, or email individual academic units and ask them to share the application with students.
3. **Directly to selected students –** Look at your tags on social media to find students who have created their own content about your institution. If you like their content, consider reaching out to invite them to apply. Additionally, ask academic staff from marketing, business, management, and other relevant courses to recommend students.

2. Selecting Students

Develop a written application that emphasises student social media knowledge – Consider using the following application questions:

- What do you like about our institution's social media accounts? What do you think could be improved?
- What is your experience with social media?
- Which social media platforms do you regularly use?
- List three of your favourite social media accounts (this could include brands, influencers, news, etc.) Why do you admire these accounts?
- How will you bring a diverse perspective to our social media team?

Note: It can be helpful to ask students about their social media experience, but don't require them to share their profiles with you in the interview process. Many Gen Z social media users maintain a stealth presence, meaning they use apps to consume content rather than post.

Select the top applicants for behavioural interviews. Use these interviews to learn about how applicant's experience and strengths will apply to the social media role. Consider asking the following questions:

- What are your strengths? How will you apply them to the role?
- What are some areas where you hope to expand your professional skills? How will this role help you?
- How would you respond to feedback that indicated you needed to change direction on a creative social media project?
- How would you highlight the experience of other students at [insert institution name] in addition to your own?

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 20: Guide to Employing Student Workers or Interns

Build your team. Look for the following traits in student workers:

- **Strong written communication –** Social media scripts and captions should be engaging, easy to understand, and free from grammatical errors.
- **Reliability –** Student workers should be able to adhere to a social media content calendar and respond to comments and tags in a timely manner.
- **Diverse perspectives –** Your team of student workers should reflect the regions that your university recruits from. Consider also sourcing student workers from markets your institution is entering, which will give your marketing team key insights into the student population there.
- **Creativity –** Your team members should build upon current social media trends while pitching new ideas. A creative social media presence will help your account stand out.
- **Strong interpersonal Skills –** Social media student workers will frequently interact with academic staff, administrators, and peers. It is important that they maintain the correct balance of friendliness and professionalism in these interactions.
- **Language and cultural knowledge of key markets –** Your social media student workers will need language expertise for the specific country markets you're planning to target (e.g., China). They should also be familiar and active users of region-specific social media platforms (e.g., Bilibili, Weibo).

3. Managing Students

Apply the following values to cultivate a strong working relationship with your student workers:

1. **Collaboration –** Gen Z and Millennials appreciate collaborative workplaces. Both groups express a desire to work in a culture of curiosity for the ideas of others. Give students opportunities to be creative and share their ideas with the team.
2. **Understanding of cultural differences:** For many of your student workers, this will be their first time working in a foreign country. Be supportive and understanding of student adjustments to norms and office expectations in a new country.
3. **Professional development –** Providing student workers with opportunities to enhance their CVs (e.g., capstone projects, portfolio development) makes their work valuable for their own career progression. Their role as a social media student worker can serve as a launchpad to external jobs.
4. **Flexibility –** International students will need to balance coursework, societies, and other family/life constraints. Allow students to work virtually and create opportunities for flexible hours to help balance their diaries.
5. **Work-life boundaries –** Gen Z and Millennial employees are particularly protective of their personal time. They generally want to maintain space between their work and their personal hobbies, and they appreciate employers who emphasise the importance of boundaries with work.

Apply the following principles for student oversight:

1. **Allocate at least 20% of student time towards collaboration with peers and supervisor(s) –** During this time, your team should discuss ideas for social media content, adapt your strategy, evaluate ROI, and review new posts. Teams who meet regularly, even if the meeting is virtual, are more aligned with their goals.
2. **Develop a standardised structure for content review by peers and staff –** One example is provided below:
   - For the first 3 months, new staff should self-review content with the content sign-off checklist. After completing the self-review, they should send it to a tenured student worker for review. As a final step, they should send content to full-time staff for review.
   - After the first three months, new staff members can peer review the posts of other student workers. Staff should first self-review their content with the content sign-off checklist, then send to a peer. The staff should then send it to the full-time staff for final review.

Source: Handshake, 'Six Things Gen Z Wants from their Job,' 2022; EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 21: Student Worker Planning Worksheet

Recruiting and Selecting Student Workers

Marketing and recruitment staff should use this worksheet to design and promote their student worker application.

1. List the questions that your team will ask in the written application[1]. If your team decides to use a video cover letter[2], also list the prompts that applicants will respond to.

2. List the channels that your team will use to advertise open student worker positions.

1) Many institutions use a Google form as a low-lift option for creating an application. Click here to learn how to create a Google form.
2) Some institutions request a video cover letter to help them evaluate students' presence in front of a camera.

Tool 21: Student Worker Planning Worksheet

Recruiting and Selecting Student Workers

3. List the evaluation criteria that your team will use to select applicants to interview.

4. List the questions that your team will ask applicants in interviews.

5. List the evaluation criteria that your team will use to select and hire student workers.

Tool 21: Student Worker Planning Worksheet

Managing Student Workers

Use this worksheet to develop a plan for managing student workers.

1. List the values your team wants to uphold while managing student workers. Include a definition for each value.

2. Create a weekly diary for student workers. Allocate 20% of time towards collaborative meetings with peers and social media staff.

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