

Final Report of the UROP Scheme on Student Communications and the Transition to Higher Education

Background

This UROP project, which is under the supervision of Student Communications Officer, Richard Sandford, looked at the breadth of student communications during the 'transition period' to Higher Education. The project involved the investigation and evaluation of the communication channels adopted by the University of Reading prior to Welcome Week. On their arrival, a survey was conducted with new students at the University. Focus groups were also held during this time to gather in-depth student feedback. It is hoped that the feedback we received will improve the communication channels between the University of Reading and new students. Better still; an improved communication strategy will hopefully help new students feel a greater sense of belonging to the University and academic community.

Overall Aims

The main output from the project is to recommend improvements for future transitions communications strategies at the University of Reading. These five key aims of the project guide the following discussion:

- Report on the communication strategies adopted by various Schools/Departments across the University, and comment on the effectiveness of these communication strategies.
- Investigate what information is provided to new students prior to arrival.
- Assess the effectiveness of electronic vs. print.
- Explore the University's social media presence, and find out whether new students find sites like Facebook and Twitter helpful during the 'transition period'.
- Review the activities of other institutions.

Methodology

During the first two weeks of the UROP placement, I worked alongside Sophie Harrison, who was undertaking a Reading Internship Scheme Project. It was during this time that a communications audit was conducted, and I had been delving into the communication strategies adopted by different Schools/Departments across the University.

Numerous meetings were held with members of University staff, in which I asked questions on the topic of student communications. Members of staff were asked to provide details about the stages of communication the School/Department has with new students prior to arrival. What information is sent to new students, and at what stage?

Members of staff were also asked whether the School/Department used electronic communication and/or print, and their reasons for doing so. Furthermore, questions were asked regarding their social media presence. What social media sites are active? What information is posted on social media sites, Facebook and Twitter? Are there pages dedicated solely to new students? All of this information has been compiled, and is displayed in an excel spread sheet (See Appendix A).

In addition, meetings were held with the Design and Print Studio, the Digital Development team, the Social Media coordinator and the Student Journey team, in which members of staff were asked to explain what communication strategies are currently in place at the University.

This project also involved looking at the flow of information new students are provided with from the University in general, to prepare them for their arrival in September. The online enrolment process was evaluated in terms of structure and organisation, clarity, content and display. I also took a look at the Welcome website for the University of Reading, and compared it to other institutions, namely, the University of Bath, the University of Exeter, the University of Warwick and Cardiff University (See Appendix B).

Finally, a survey was conducted with new students on their arrival at the University (See Appendix C). Focus groups were also held during this time to reveal what students really think about the communication strategies currently in place at the University.

Investigation

Communications Audit

The purpose of conducting a communications audit was to review how various Schools/Departments communicated with new students prior to arrival. The Schools/Departments that were contacted are as follows:

- Admissions
- Careers
- Counselling
- English Literature
- Film, Theatre and Television
- UPP (University Partnerships Programme)
- Systems Engineering
- Philosophy
- International Marketing
- International Services

Open Days

All findings were compiled into a spread sheet (See Appendix A). This report will highlight a few outcomes from the communications audit. Firstly, we will focus on the first point of contact. At University open days, only three of the ten Schools/Departments instigated contact with prospective students. Careers actively distributed printed leaflets and directed prospective students to their online website. English Literature sent potential students a follow-up email after attending the open day, in which recipients were directed to the website for further information. Finally, International Marketing sent a follow-up email to those who attended the exhibition/fair, and also distributed printed documents which contained information about entry requirements, fees etc.

International Students

International students undergo a totally different experience to home students prior to arriving at University, and it is the International Marketing team that hold responsibility for successfully communicating with prospective students. As previously mentioned, the first point of contact the University has with prospective students happens to be at University exhibitions/fairs which are held overseas. At these events, staff deliver presentations about studying at Reading, and agents who attend these events promote the University. Throughout the decision-making process, emails are sent at key moments to prospective students, directing them to the website to find important information about pre-arrival. On arrival, the Reading International Office (RIO) provides new students with Welcome bags, which contain information about the University services for international students.

Tom Eastwood, International Marketing Manager, informed that the International Marketing team use the International Student Barometer and feedback from recruitment fairs to inform decision-making and communication strategies. By using the International Student Barometer, the University

can make use of feedback from over one million students, and track the expectations, perceptions and intentions of international students.

Why Email? Why Post?

According to Tom Eastwood, print has more value. An electronic version can also be produced as a pdf document online. On the other hand, it can be expensive, and difficulties may arise when mistakes appear on printed documents. The aim of the printed documents distributed to international students at the overseas exhibitions/fairs is to drive prospective students to the website. Seemingly, market research undergone at Southampton University revealed that both home and international students value print, in comparison to electronic communication. During the recruitment process, Tom Eastwood believes that the distribution of printed documents and emails from different Schools/Departments of the University needs to be measured.

A-level Results

Additionally, we will look at the stage at which the majority of Schools/Departments are communicating with new students on a regular basis. On A-level results day, prospective students become new students and are confirmed to join the University of Reading community. As expected, new students are sent an influx of 'Congratulations' and 'Welcome' messages. Are these messages sent by email, or by post? Of the five Schools/Departments who contacted new students with this message, half used email to deliver the message, whilst the other half sent the message by post. Admissions communicate to new students only through email, and English Literature sent this message by email also. Differently, Systems Engineering and Philosophy sent postcards to new students. Meanwhile, the Film, Theatre and Television Department had chosen to send a Welcome letter by both email and post.

Why Email? Why Post?

Christina Edgar, Head of Admissions has decided for all communication to take place in email. New students receive messages instantly, the format allows the University to be less formal, and links can be embedded into emails directing new students to the University website. Print, on the other hand results in delayed information, the printing is costly, and there is a poorer postal system overseas. Similarly, Mary Morrissey, English Departmental Administrator, is aware of printing costs. Although a Welcome letter was sent to new students by email, postcards were also sent at key events during the decision-making process. Mary Morrissey does not believe that electronic should be the default mode of communication.

Richard Mitchell, Senior Lecturer in Cybernetics commented that students are overwhelmed with emails from different Schools/Departments across the University. Therefore, it would be more effective to personally target students (either by using print, or by sending emails to students in a particular year of study, for example). Print is very much still a desired medium of communication, as highlighted by Sukh Thiara, Humanities Administrator. On attending a focus group held by the History Department, she found that both students and parents preferred to receive hard-copies of documents as print is a more personal medium of communication.

Lisa Purse, Senior Lecturer in Film, Director of Teaching and Learning finds that both electronic and print are beneficial mediums of communication. Important information is usually sent to students

immediately by email, and then followed up by a face-to-face reminder. This is believed to be the most effective way of contacting new students. However, in the case of longer documents (e.g. programme handbooks), which require a lot of scrolling; print is believed to be the best option. New students can work through the handbook at any pace, and are able to highlight key information.

Social Media

Social media is only just beginning to make a noticeable difference in the recruitment process, particularly with use of the popular sites, Facebook and Twitter. Of the ten Schools/Department this project investigates, four do not have social media sites – Admissions, UPP, Counselling and International Marketing. Although, this does not mean that social media is not a beneficial addition to student communications. Christina Edgar, Head of Admissions, believes that social media is a personal form of communication. Admissions are in fact considering having a Twitter account, and trusts that a Facebook page dedicated to offer-holders would be useful. Secondly, UPP are confident in directing new students to JCR Halls Facebook pages. Counselling, in addition, do not have social media sites due to the nature of their work. However, the Department are considering having a Facebook page.

Tom Eastwood, International Marketing Manager, on the other hand, does not regard social media to be a brilliant recruitment tool. He believes that it is only when students have made an offer that Facebook and Twitter become an effective way for current students and alumni to interact with international students. Problems do exist with social media overseas, as boundaries prevent Facebook and Twitter from operating in certain countries. For instance, China has their own social media, which duplicate the features of Facebook and Twitter. The University cannot assume that social media used in the UK is accessible to all international students. Matt Daley, International Student Adviser, commented that social media is a more effective communication tool than recruitment tool. Once international students arrive, they set up social media accounts to connect with other people studying at the University.

English Literature, Careers and Film, Theatre and Television all use Facebook as a one-way communication tool. According to Mary Morrissey, English Departmental Administrator, Facebook should only be used as a social tool. Students who ask degree-related questions on the site will be directed to Blackboard, which is designed to securely provide academic information for students. Film, Theatre and Television, however, also have a separate careers Twitter feed for two-way communication with students. Likewise, Systems Engineering has a Facebook page for two-way communication with their students. Previously, the Department used Redgloo, which was used for interaction between students and staff. It was also used as a social medium for first year students. Philosophy also have a Facebook page, to post about current news, research and social events. Two-way communication takes place through private messaging. There is one noticeable thing in common across the board – social media is less focussed on new students. Philosophy are only starting to consider creating a Facebook page dedicated for applicants. At present, communication via social media is seen as a marketing tool, not solely to attract new students.

Further Meetings

Becky Russell, Communications Officer → Social Media

On meeting with Becky Russell, it became clear that the University has no social media strategy. Although the University have active Facebook and Twitter accounts set up by various Schools/Departments, there is not yet a dedicated Facebook page or Twitter feed for prospective students. On the official University of Reading social media sites, general information (i.e. current events, news and research) is posted and targeted to a mixture of audiences. During the recruitment process, there is a notable increase in the number of posts targeted at prospective/new students. Posts contain information about upcoming open days, 'Congratulations!' on A-level results day, and details regarding Welcome Week. Social media needs to reach audiences at key times. According to Becky Russell, social media should be an indirect form of communication and provide information that will help prepare new students for the transition to Higher Education. There is a great benefit in using social media as a recruitment tool. Prospective students already use social media as a form of communication with their peers. The University of Reading is already in user space (e.g. If a friend 'liked' UoR on Facebook, this page would be recommended to their friends on the news feed). Becky Russell commented that in the future, it may be beneficial to have separate social media sites for prospective students, undergraduates, postgraduates and alumni.

James Lloyd, Head of Design & Brand Implementation; Nayna Morjaria, Designer → Design and Print Studio

The Design and Print Studio are currently producing printed hand-outs for new students, as requested by the majority of Schools/Departments at the University. According to James Lloyd, although communication strategies adopted by the University during Welcome Week are increasingly electronic, there has not been a significant drop in the demand for printed documents. There is a general downward trend in the popularity of print; however there has been a recent demand for posters and banners to be displayed across the University. Print is convenient, accessible for all students (including international students), personal and direct.

Helen Setchell, Head of Web and New Media → Digital Development

The Digital Development team are currently modernising and transforming the University website. Their goal is to simplify the journey, improve the user experience and convey a sense of the University community. The website is used to attract prospective students who have already shown an interest in the University. The team commented that a future project on the website could work towards developing a virtual open day, for those students unable to visit the University. According to Helen Setchell, the Marketing and Communications Department are not entirely responsible for keeping new students at ease and welcome during their first weeks. Lecturers, course content and student accommodation also play a significant part in marketing the University.

The meeting also covered the question of designing a smart phone app for Welcome Week. Helen Setchell informed that there have been three attempts to produce a functioning app. These attempts have failed as the app does not add any value – all information which will be contained in the app will still be made accessible online, or included in the Welcome pack. Furthermore, a

member of staff would need to be held responsible for creating the app, and designing updates. Interestingly, the recommendation for an app was not gathered from student feedback.

In order to get student feedback, the team actively ask students: “What do you think of ...?” User statistics are also used to guide future projects. At present, the University has no market research function.

Karen Smalley, Head of Brand → Student Journey

On meeting with Karen Smalley, it was revealed that the University of Reading communications has no core objectives, Customer Relationship Management (CRM), brand values, investment or resource. She informed that there is a need to build a reputation for the University. The Student Journey tracks the journey a student makes from the age of 14, continuing until the postgraduate and alumni stage. First and foremost, the University needs to engage with current students – if current students are not satisfied, there will be difficulties in recruiting new students. Overall, Karen Smalley believes that big changes need to be made in student communications.

We also discussed the benefits of electronic and printed communication methods. She believes that print is a traditional means of communication. Printed prospectuses are not only intended for prospective students, but for their parents. The design and the format of a University prospectus influence the decision-making process in the early stages of recruitment. Face-to face interaction and outreach are also thought to be effective communication tools to attract new students. Similarly, digital engages users. Karen Smalley commented that the University need to deliver an interactive experience online to attract new students (e.g. have virtual films of the campus available via the website).

Online Enrolment – Pros and Cons

News students have to work through a lengthy online enrolment process prior to arriving at University, which has been deconstructed below in terms of pros + and cons -. Likewise, the instructions for the enrolment process have also been evaluated. As an important document that is compulsory for students to complete, the University needs to ensure that the process is easy-to-follow, concise, organised and efficient. The deconstruction may well spark the need for slight changes in the online enrolment process.

Pros +

- Stages of enrolment are clearly labelled and flagged when completed.
- Students are notified that the enrolment process does not have to be completed in one go.
- Links are provided to important documents and office contact details for further information/to update incorrect information.
- Minimal text – Only necessary information is provided.
- Clear differentiation between details which are mandatory/compulsory. A pink box is provided for students to input mandatory information.
- Overseas students are clearly directed.
- Breadcrumbs lie at the top of the page, so students can see previous steps of the enrolment process.

- Students are clearly informed when each stage of enrolment process has been completed.

Instructions for Online Enrolment:

- Accommodates for all students. Detailed information is provided, but for students who need to refer to a specific stage/page of the document, an index is provided.
- Copious use of screenshots for visual aid.
- The section labelled 'Problems' in 'How to log in' is in red font and grabs the attention of the user. All important information is clearly displayed in red.
- FAQ's and answers are provided throughout the document.

Cons -

- The image displayed on the right-hand side of the homepage is small and insignificant. It does not highlight the University campus.
- Breadcrumbs at the top of the page could be more noticeable. (E.g. different colour to the background, larger font etc.)
- Different stages of the enrolment process could have different colour schemes.
- The font is too small.
- The Finish/Confirm buttons at the bottom of each page could be larger/different colour so be more noticeable and easily navigate students to the next step.

Instructions for Online Enrolment:

- The 'Problems' section in 'Start of Stage 1' is in black font. The use of red font should be continued throughout the entire document.

Welcome New Students

In early September, Schools/Departments sent a Welcome Letter to new Undergraduate students. It was mandatory that this Welcome letter included:

- Summary of Welcome Week activities, including:
 - Faculty Welcome.
 - School/Department Welcome.
 - Module Enrolment talk.
 - Personal Tutor meeting.
 - Other School events/activities.
- What do new students need for their course?
 - Specialist kit.
 - Reading list.
 - Field trip information.
- Link to the University Welcome Website.

Links to social media sites were optional features of the Welcome letter.

Below, there details regarding the Welcome letter sent to new students by various Schools/Departments. We look at electronic vs. print, and the prominence of social media... Should social media be mandatory for the Welcome letter?

School/Department	Message Delivery	Link to Social Media
Systems Engineering	Email + Post	Yes
Geography	Email	Yes
English Literature	Email	No
Graphic Communication	Email	No
Classics	Email	No
History	Email	Yes
Art	Unknown	No

On arrival, new students also receive a Welcome pack in hard-copy from the University, which contains information about Welcome Week events, services at the University, maps and the Welcome Week timetable. In the survey, new students will comment on their opinion of the Welcome Pack.

Activities of other Institutions

Firstly, the current University of Reading Welcome homepage will be analysed. To view to full analysis with further detail and images, please follow the link provided in the appendix (See Appendix B). The ‘things-to-go now’ column along the side of the page is a useful feature; however, the links inside the box should clearly be detailing the next steps. At the moment, the box contains useful, but random information. Furthermore, the entire interface needs to contain less writing, as too much writing can discourage users from visiting the site. Font is also small, and the pages are littered with small, insignificant photographs. Social media has become a relevant communication tool in the recruitment process, but social media links are not prominent on the website. Links should be increased in size and appear in the same location on every page.

Cardiff University

Likewise, Cardiff University’s Welcome page needs an urgent update. Not only is the site difficult to find from the official Cardiff University website, but the page is unanimated, font is small and there are no images of the campus.

As users explore deeper into the site, there are major improvements – better colouring, font, format and design. It becomes an engaging website. One positive feature of the website is that new students can find a printable Welcome leaflet, which can also be downloaded on to their desktop or mobile device.

The Student Handbook is available online, but not as a pdf document – the page simply provides links which directs users to different parts of the website where they will find the information. A pdf version would be more useful for new students, which can either be printed as a hard-copy or downloaded. A breadcrumb tool which lies across the top of the webpage allows users to easily and quickly return to the previous page.

There is not a dedicated site for new international students. Firstly, users must find the International students webpage, and then follow the first tab which is labelled 'Coming to Cardiff'. Once directed on to this page, there is a useful left-hand column for navigating the page, sensible amount of font and clear layout. Overall, it is an organised and attractive website.

University of Exeter

The Welcome homepage for new students is well organised, well designed, and very animated. The site incorporates videos and live Twitter feeds, instantly allowing new students to follow and connect with current students. In addition, the iExeter smart phone app is promoted, which contains details of Welcome Week events. Social media links are present at the bottom of every page, however they are small and not easy to find. It would be more effective for these links to appear at the top of the page, larger, and against a coloured header.

Users can easily navigate to different parts of the site using a left-hand column. Once users are directed to their desired page, in most cases, a large image spans the width of the screen. Instead of littering the page with several, smaller images, only one image is used per page. As an alternative to providing a bulk of information on one page, checklists are displayed, containing links which direct new students to the different parts of the website. This avoids repeating information, and overall, improves the user-experience. There is also a separate page dedicated to International students.

The University of Exeter are one step ahead of other Universities in terms of social media, with a page dedicated entirely to the University's active social media accounts. These include: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (in which pictures are taken by both staff and students). On this page, all official University of Exeter social media pages are listed, including Freshers' 2013 on Facebook.

University of Warwick

An interactive photos stream spans across the top of the Welcome homepage for the University of Warwick. Underneath this large image, headings are displayed. These headings refer to specific time periods (e.g. 'Before you arrive', 'First weeks') and detail the next steps new students need to complete. The type of format simplifies the journey for new students, allowing users to work through the website in stages. Also on the homepage, the University aims to encourage new students to use Facebook and Twitter to connect with other students prior to arrival. A few official pages are listed, including pages for Freshers' 2013.

The Welcome Guide and the Student Handbook are both given to new students as hard-copies, pre-arrival and on arrival respectively. However, new students also have the option to access the documents online, in pdf format. The Welcome Guide also includes information for overseas students, who are directed to another online guide dedicated to international students.

The website is excellently organised, and uses a range of navigation tools including drop-down menus and breadcrumbs which lie at the top of the page. For instance, on the page 'things to do in your first weeks', new students are given the option to select whether they are an undergraduate, a postgraduate or an international student. Following this selection, an indented drop-down menu appears which provides useful, targeted information for that student. As a whole, it is an engaging and interactive Welcome site for new students.

University of Bath

The Welcome homepage is efficient and clear, making it easy for new undergraduates and postgraduates to find targeted information. On the homepage, similarly to the University of Warwick, social media is prominent – links are provided directly for Freshers' 2013, in addition to Facebook and Twitter pages for International students.

New undergraduates are welcomed by a page dominated by large blocks of colour, large font and photographs. It instantly grabs the attention of new students, and provides easy links to sections of the website. However, social media links have been removed from this page. In comparison, there is not a vibrant welcome page designed for postgraduate offer-holders, who are directed to a standard, grey-coloured University of Bath page.

New undergraduates are eventually directed to a standard University of Bath page, which has an easy left-hand column menu for navigation of the site. Additional information that students may require appears in a green box. To avoid an influx of repeated information on each page, links are provided to other sections of the site. Overall, this site is organised and has sufficient amount of information/imagery. However, the design and colouring (except from the vibrant undergraduate welcome page) is dull and unattractive.

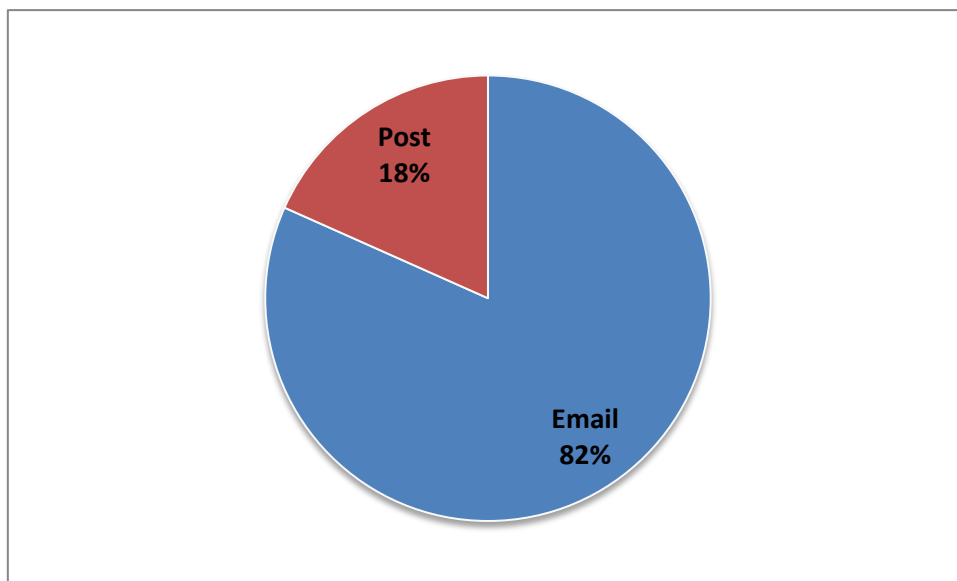
Survey Results

To view the survey which was conducted among new students at the University, see Appendix C.

Questions that required participants to select ONE answer are displayed in pie charts.

Questions that required participants to select MORE THAN ONE answer are displayed in percentage tables. In this case, each percentage is out of a total of 60 participants (i.e. n% of 60 new students like receiving printed communication).

Before arriving at University, would you have preferred to receive information from your School/Department by email or post?



Why?

Common answers included:

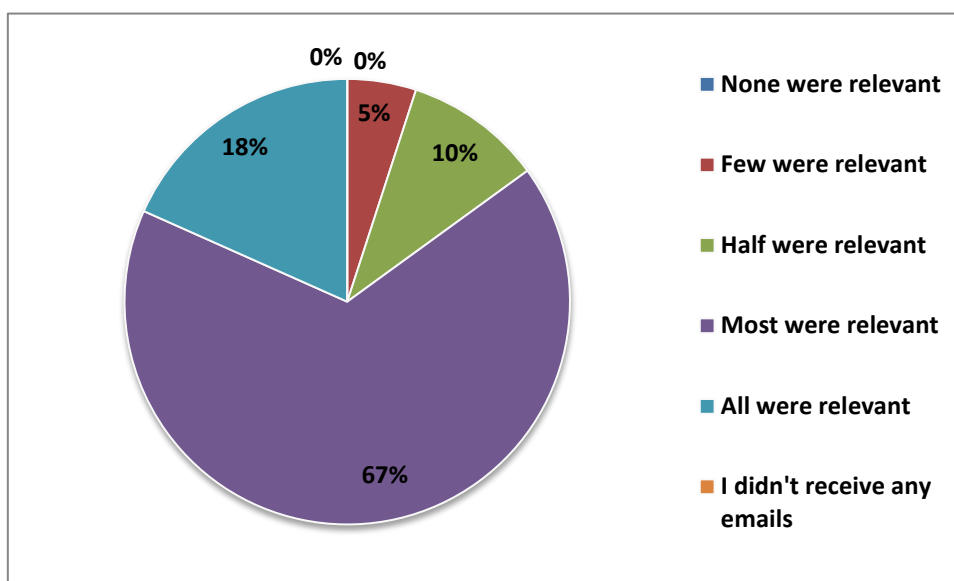
Email is... easier, faster, more efficient, more convenient, more accessible, archived, printable, and regularly checked.

Post is... more likely to be read, easily recorded, important, and easier to access/store.

What format should the programme handbook be?

Sent by email	48%
Printed document	70%
Downloadable document from the University website	17%

How many of the emails that you received before arriving at University were relevant to you?



Please describe your opinion of printed communication.

I like receiving printed communication	53%
I dislike receiving printed communication	5%
There is a place for printed communication in the future	13%
Printed communication is outdated	7%
Printed communication is the most effective form of communication	13%
Other forms of communication (face-to-face, electronic) are more effective than printed communication	22%

Please describe your opinion of electronic communication.

I like receiving electronic communication	47%
I dislike receiving electronic communication	2%
I receive too many emails	20%
I am happy with the number of emails I receive	27%
I want to receive more emails	2%
Electronic communication should be the only form of communication	3%
The University should use both electronic communication and printed communication	35%

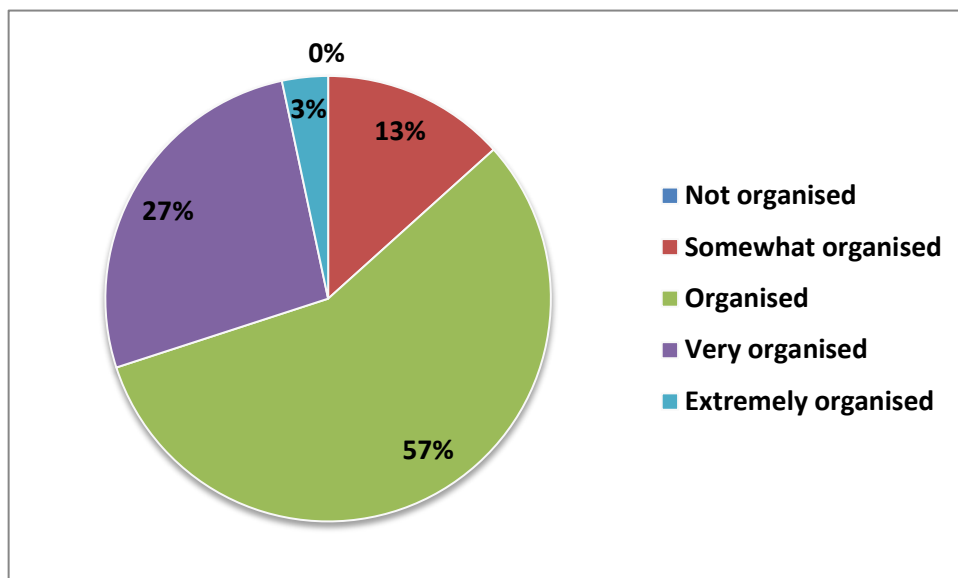
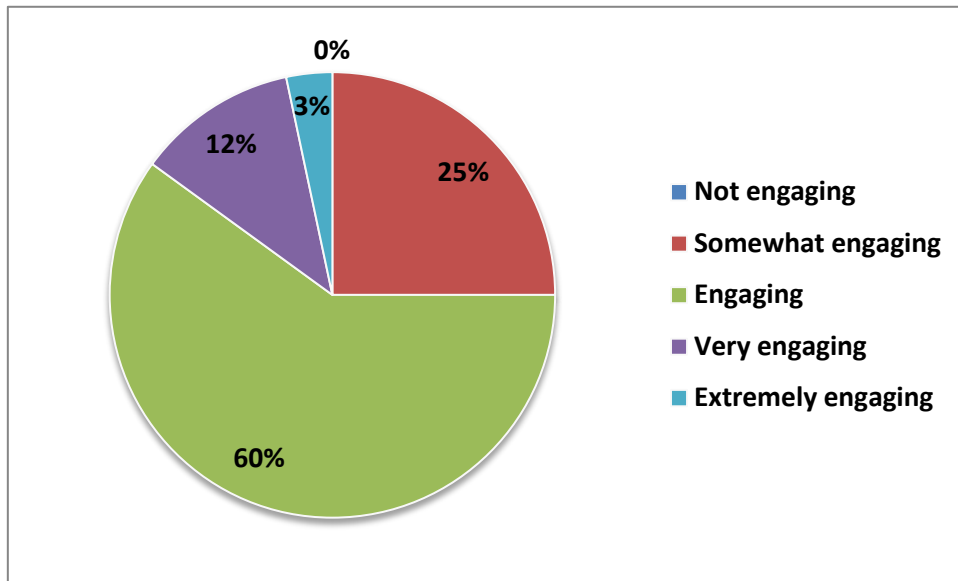
On arrival, you will receive the Welcome pack as a printed document. Would you have liked it in any other format?

Downloadable document from the Welcome website	13%
On a smart phone app	27%
Sent by email	38%
No - I like having the printed Welcome pack only	38%

New students need to access their Welcome Week timetable easily. Where should the timetable be available from?

Welcome website	12%
Link from the website to a personalised timetable	28%
Welcome pack (as a printed document)	62%
Sent by email	42%
Sent by post	13%

Tell me about the University of Reading Welcome website.



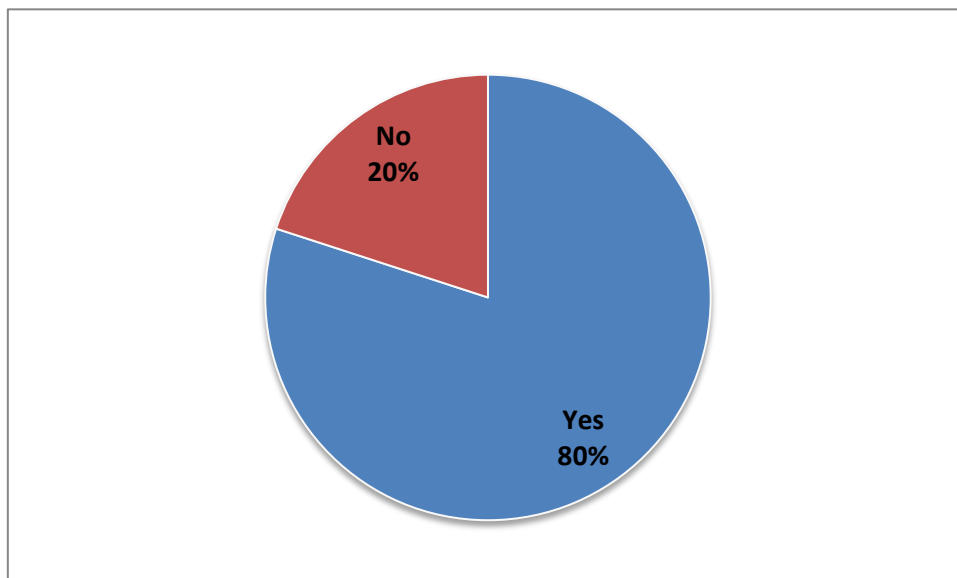
Have you found social media sites (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) useful before arriving at University for...?

Contacting members of University staff	5%
Getting to know other students	58%
Finding out what events are on during Welcome Week	73%
I have not found social media sites to be useful	5%
Other	3%

If you follow/connect with your Academic Department online, what social media sites do you use?

Facebook and Twitter were used by most participants, YouTube was selected by few participants, and 14 out of 60 participants did not use social media to follow/connect with their Academic Department.

Is it worth having a smart phone app specifically for Welcome Week (including information about the University services, key dates and maps)?



Why?

Common answers included:

Yes! A smart phone app would be...convenient, quick and easy to access, useful, and a popular choice for smart phone users.

No! A smart phone app would be... unhelpful for new students who do not use smartphones.

If you are an international student, how do you think is the best way for the University to communicate with prospective students living abroad?

Email	8%
Post	0%
Skype	0%
Face-to-face	0%
Social media	5%
I am not an international student	88%

Discussion

The majority of new students who participated in the survey prefer to receive information from their Academic Department by email, mainly due to easy access and speed of delivery. 67% of the 60 participants believe that the emails they received from the University prior to arrival were mostly relevant. However, with regards to the programme handbook, 70% of the 60 participants prefer to receive this document as a printed hard-copy. Overall, 53% of new students like print, and 47% of new students like electronic communication. There is not a clear, significant lean towards either print or electronic communication. In fact, 35% of the 60 participants believe that the University should use both printed and electronic communication prior to Welcome Week.

With regards to the development of a smart phone app specifically for Welcome Week, 80% of the 60 participants consider this to be a good idea. With a smart phone app, all information can be easily accessed on-the-go. However, this development would not benefit those students who do not own a smart phone. Interestingly, only 27% of the 60 participants would like the Welcome pack to be available from a smart phone app.

Prior to arrival, the popular social media sites, Facebook and Twitter were used by many new students to connect with other students at the University and to find out about University events. Overall, however, 14 out of the 60 participants did not use social media to follow or connect with their Academic Department online.

On a whole, the majority of new students thought that the Welcome website was engaging and organised. Although 27% of the 60 participants believed that the site was very organised, 25 % of the 60 participants believed that the site was somewhat engaging.

Finally, although the majority of the participants were home students, the 12% of the 60 participants who were international students believe that the best way for the University to communicate with new students living abroad is through email and social media.

Recommendations

- The University needs to produce a communications strategy, and needs CRM (Customer Relationship Management) to...
 - Coordinate all their interactions (telephone calls, email, and letter) with new students.
 - Know, understand and predict what new students want – and will want in the future.
 - Track and measure marketing campaigns over multiple channels – email, search, social media, telephone calls and direct mail.
 - Integrate social media to track and communicate with students.

Printed Communication

- Printed communication should be used hand-in-hand with electronic communication and face-to-face communication.
- The printed handbook should always be available as a printed hard-copy.

Email

- Emails should be monitored and restricted to avoid students being overwhelmed with unnecessary information from the University.
- Emails should be personally targeted to new students – this will stop new students deleting important messages from the University before messages have been read.
- Further research should be undergone with regards to the development of a smart phone app for Welcome Week. The University could consider developing a general smart phone app for all students at the University.

Social Media

- Links to social media sites should be mandatory in the Welcome letter sent to new students from their Academic Department.
- The University needs to formalise a social media strategy, and appoint a member of staff to create/update social media pages.
- More videos should be posted on the University's social media pages.
- Facebook and Twitter need to be used for two-way interaction, not one-way communication.
- In the future, the University should consider creating separate social media pages for new students, undergraduates, postgraduates and alumni.

Welcome Website

- The University needs to deliver an interactive experience online to attract new students (e.g. have virtual films of the campus available via the website).
- The Welcome website needs to be more interactive – incorporating YouTube videos, live Twitter feed and large images.
- The programme handbook should also be available from the University website.

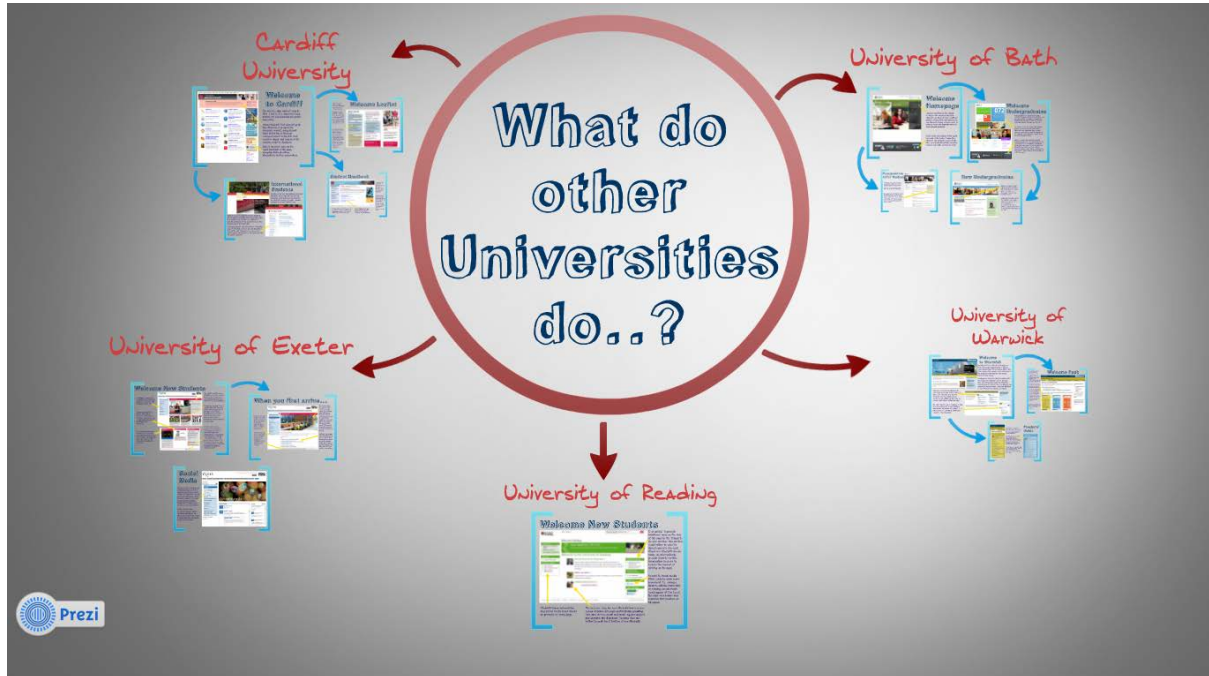
Appendix A - Communications Audit

Department	Open Days	Application	Offer-holders	Stages of Communication		Welcome Week	First Weeks	Social Media					
				Accepted	A-level Results								
Admissions		1) Email details of the next steps, refer prospective students to RISIS applicant portal.		1) Email details of the next steps, ask prospective students to complete an applicant survey.	1) Email prospective students 2 weeks before results day - 'what happens next?'			No social media - Considering a Twitter account and a Facebook page for offer-holders.					
		2) Email during Christmas, reminding prospective students that not all applications have been processed yet.		2) Email 'firm' choice students - 'Things to do in July' (i.e. Accommodation).	2) Email 'Congratulations' to successful students, providing links to further information online.								
		3) Email before the UCAS deadline - 'Reading Supports the Best and Brightest'.											
Careers	Located in the Student Union. Distribute leaflets, direct prospective students to the website.	Send emails to highlight key events and sign-post prospective students to the website. Distribute leaflets to raise the profile of Careers at Reading.				1) Stall at Freshers' Fayre - distribute leaflets, email students detailing key dates, direct new students to the website.		1) Rely on RUSU for social media contact, a Twitter account for Careers is desired. 2) Jobshop has a Facebook page and Twitter account.					
						2) Column in University newspaper, Spark*.							
Counselling				Email prospective students who have a disability/mental illness, to inform them about the welfare services available on campus.		1) Send training programme to Departments by email and hard-copy. Also available on the website.	1) Email students who attended sessions during Freshers' week, detailing future sessions. 2) Emails and leaflets sign-post students to the website and the Carrington building.	Due to the nature of work, the Department are not completely comfortable having social media accounts. Users will have not confidentiality.					
						2) Page in the printed Welcome pack.							
						3) Column in University newspaper, Spark*.							
English Literature	Send follow-up email to prospective students who provided feedback, directing them to the website and social media.	Email prospective students, inviting them to attend the Departmental visit days.	1) Send 'Good Luck' postcard during Easter. 2) Current students call undecided offer-holders before the UCAS deadline to answer any queries.		Send 'Welcome' email to new students, giving details of the first meeting in Freshers' week.	1) Distribute the printed Part 1 supplement on arrival.		Have a Facebook page for one-way communication. Used only as a social tool - academic information will be provided through Blackboard.					
						2) General course handbook can be accessed online.							
Film, Theatre and Television					1) Send 'Good Luck' postcard to prospective students before results day.	1) At the Department welcome meeting, provide new students with a printed route-map (to help guide students around the campus).	3) Send important information (i.e. key dates) by email.	1) Have a Departmental Facebook page and Twitter feed which posts about current news. These are mainly used for marketing purposes as a one-way communication channel. 2) The Department also has an interactive Careers Twitter account, in which students can ask questions.					
					2) Send a welcome letter by email and post (includes timetables, reading lists, theatre trip details etc.)	2) Send email to new students, containing the programme handbook (pdf document), also available on Blackboard.							
UPP			Email details of accommodation.	Send email which directs prospective students to an online arrivals guide (pdf document).	1) Close applications before results day, and then open for 'insurance' choice students. 2) Send an email to new students, containing a bulk of up-to-date information. 3) Request that new students complete an e-induction, then book when they will be arriving in September using e-arrivals.			No social media - direct students to ICR Facebook pages for Halls.					
									Systems Engineering	Send new students a 'Welcome' letter in the post, with the Part 1 module choices page.	1) Personal Tutors make first point of contact with new students.		Have a Facebook page for interaction amongst students, as well as staff-student communication.
											2) Email new students detailing key events. 3) Student Information Centre distributes leaflets.		
Philosophy	Send 'Thank you' email and postcard to those who attended the Departmental visit days.			Send general 'Welcome' email to prospective students.	Send successful students a 'Congratulations' postcard following results day.	1) Provide hard-copy subject brochures to new students on arrival. This can also be accessed online and if requested, sent by post.	Distribute leaflets to new students after Freshers' week, detailing upcoming events in the Department.	1) Have a Department Facebook page, which posts about current news, research and social events. Two-way conversation takes place via private messaging. 2) Prospective students use the Philosophy society Facebook page to interact with other students.					
					2) The undergraduate handbook and Departmental newsletter are both made available on Blackboard.								
International Marketing	1) Exhibitions/fairs are held overseas, in which staff give presentations about studying in Reading and the UK. Send a follow-up email to those who attended the event, directing to sections of the website. 2) Distribute printed documents to prospective students, which contains information on entry requirements, fees, contact details etc.	Send emails at key stages throughout the decision-making process, directing international prospective students to sections on the website.					Welcome week events (i.e. finalising legal documents) are held for international students prior to Freshers' week.	1) Social media is not a brilliant recruitment tool, however the UK Facebook and Twitter pages effectively allow international students to interact with current students and staff at the University. 2) Social media boundaries exist overseas, e.g. China.					
									International Services	Prior to arrival, communication with students is in the hands of the Admissions Department. Once students have their Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) number, they are passed on to International Services.	Reading International Office (RIO) provides new students with welcome bags (detailing services at the University).	1) Email all new international students with details of autumn term events. 2) Distribute Visa News to students, 2 times per term in hard-copy. The document is distributed across the University (i.e. Departments and RUSU) and can also be viewed as a pdf document online.	1) Twitter account provides information for new students - #InternationalUoR was set up last year.

Appendix B - What do other Universities do..?

Follow the link below to be directed to the online prezi:

http://prezi.com/0jpwxxwcaxfz/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy&rc=ex0share



Appendix C - Survey

UROP Intern Scheme – Student Communications and the Transition to Higher Education

Results of this survey will be used by a UROP intern to evaluate the effectiveness of the communication channels used by the University of Reading during the ‘transition period’ to Higher Education.

- All data will be anonymous.
- Survey takes <5 minutes to complete.

Before arriving at University, would you have preferred to receive information from your School/Department by email or post? **(Please circle one answer)**

Email	Post
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Why?

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What format should the programme handbook be? (The programme handbook contains the programme specification, module descriptions, assignment deadlines etc. You will receive this during Welcome Week.) **(Please circle one or more from the following)**

Sent by email	Printed document	Downloadable document from the University website
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How many of the emails that you received before arriving at University were relevant to you? **(Please circle one answer)**

None were relevant	Few were relevant	Half were relevant	Most were relevant	All were relevant	I didn't receive any emails
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Please describe your opinion of printed communication (i.e. leaflets, letters sent by post and programme handbooks). **(Please circle one or more from the following)**

I like receiving printed communication	I dislike receiving printed communication	There is a place for printed communication in the future	Printed communication is outdated	Printed communication is the most effective form of communication	Other forms of communication (face-to face, electronic) are more effective than printed communication
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Please describe your opinion of electronic communication (i.e. emails, website and social media). **(Please circle one or more from the following)**

I like receiving electronic communication	I dislike receiving electronic communication	I receive too many emails	I am happy with the number of emails I receive	I want to receive more emails	Electronic communication should be the only form of communication	The University should use both electronic communication and printed communication
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On arrival, you will receive the Welcome pack as a printed document (The Welcome pack contains information about Welcome Week events, services at the University, maps etc.) Would you have liked it in any other format? **(Please circle one or more from the following)**

Downloadable document from the Welcome website	On a smart phone app	Sent by email	No - I like having the printed Welcome pack only
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New students need to access their Welcome Week timetable easily. Where should the timetable be available from? **(Please circle one or more from the following)**

Welcome website	Link from the website to a personalised timetable	Welcome pack (as a printed document)	Sent by email	Sent by post
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Tell me about the University of Reading Welcome website. **(Please circle one answer from each line)**

Not engaging	Somewhat engaging	Engaging	Very engaging	Extremely engaging
1	2	3	4	5

Not organised	Somewhat organised	Organised	Very organised	Extremely organised
1	2	3	4	5

Have you found social media sites (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) useful before arriving at University for...? **(Please circle one or more from the following)**

Contacting members of University staff	Getting to know other students	Finding out what events are on during Welcome Week	I have not found social media sites to be useful	Other (Please state)
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If you follow/connect with your Academic Department online, what social media sites do you use? (E.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc.)

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Is it worth having a smart phone app specifically for Welcome Week (including information about the University services, key dates and maps)? **(Please circle one answer)**

Yes	No	Why?
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.....

If you are an international student, how do you think is the best way for the University to communicate with prospective students living abroad? **(Please circle one or more from the following)**

Email	Post	Skype	Face-to-face	Social media	I am not an international student
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