

Marketing and Student Recruitment Strategy

2021-2023

i. Overview

This document describes the direction of travel for marketing and student recruitment for the years 2021 to 2023. It moves from the general to the specific, from contextual commentary to specific targets and actions. It covers:

- Marjon strategy, team vision and purpose
- Operating context: globally, nationally, regionally and within Marjon.
- Our goals and considerations across four strategic areas:
 - How we develop our brand and reputation
 - o How we operate efficiently
 - Our finances
 - o Our team
- Our measures of success and targets
- Our Action Plan: specific actions to deliver our goals

This document is set in a context of, and will be delivered alongside our approved <u>Access and Participation Plan 2020-25</u>, which details our outreach and widening participation plans, and includes the development and delivery of other strategies such as a Care Leavers Plan, a Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and a Customer Service Framework.

The document does not specifically cover Knowledge Exchange and external civic engagement, except where that touches on communications. It does include school liaison and reputation as that is a core part of the Student Recruitment team's work. The document has close links to our People Strategy, not only with regard to team development and staff engagement, but also with regard to student engagement and employment opportunities.

The action plan within the document will be updated with the team at regular intervals in order to plan workload and intermediate deliverables.

The strategy includes working with and communicating with current students as well as recruiting new students, because our student experience and word of mouth is our most valuable brand asset.

ii. Marjon Strategy

Our Marjon Growth Plan 2017-2025, *Centred on Student Success*, describes how we will grow to 1000 students per undergraduate cohort through three key themes: Proud to be Marjon, Centred on Student Success and Building a Vibrant Future. Our Marketing and Student Recruitment Strategy ties into these themes, through promoting our student centredness; through communications designed to engender pride in our community achievements; through new programme development; through student engagement to promote ever more varied and inclusive life on campus; through steady growth in student numbers; and through work to set our developing campus right at the heart of our community.

iii. Team purpose

We grow the Marjon community, through inspiring and enabling people to make the right choices for them about their education, and helping to develop Marjon to be the right choice.

iv. Team vision

By the end of 2023, we will be a digital-first team, within a digital-first University, continuing to develop a market-leading website and digital communications through effective use of a CRM system. We will have close relationships with more geographically diverse schools through engaging outreach activity across the region, and we'll be recruiting students from a wider area across the UK, with a steady and reliable stream of international recruits. Through working closely with our students to deliver student success, we will be working towards making Marjon the primary university of choice for our courses within the local area.

v. Operating context

Global context

- We are operating in a world of digital disruption, where the education sector has not yet been significantly impacted, but this is changing and accelerating rapidly as covid restrictions force major changes to teaching and student experience.
- The growth of mobile means the speed of disruption is exponential, as people get the ability to search, be inspired, discover and learn in their hands 24 hours a day. The disruption from Amazon to bricks and mortar retailing; from AirBnB to hotels; from Netflix to traditional TV; from Uber to taxis, and from Monzo to big banking shows how quickly new models can undermine traditional industries. McKinsey and Company predicts digital touchpoints are increasing 20% each year. We must lead into this disruption, not be overtaken by it.
- Higher education serves many purposes, but one purpose answers to the question of "how to improve my level of education". The variety of answers to this question is constantly growing. Further Education has moved steadily into Higher Education; Apprenticeships offer an alternative, flexible option; private providers are opening institutions; big brands are developing continuing professional development options; modular and micro-credentials and online learning all provide a potential threat to the traditional, on-campus, three-year undergraduate degree, and to full commitment Master's programmes.
- Technological changes in the first half of 2020 demonstrate how quickly digital developments can become mainstream, and how quickly those who are not adapting can be left behind. Being ahead of digital change is critical.
- Globally, higher education enrolments are predicted to rise from 214 million in 2015, to 377 million in 2030, and to 594 million by 2040, an average growth of 4.2% each year.
- The events of 2020 will leave many people with an uncertain future. Education could be a solution to provide certainty in their life. Equally, flexible options, including lower commitment, could be in higher demand as people navigate recession and uncertainty.
- Career changers and returners to learning represent a significant opportunity to support
 people into different careers. Early indications are that teaching and health courses will
 grow in popularity, offering reliable work and recognition of key workers.
- Service and flexibility expectations grow ever higher. Our students and future students are comparing the highest customer service levels in the world to Marjon.

- Digital marketing developments offer new opportunities for more targeted and specific marketing and require constant reaction in order to optimise spend. One example is the coming growth in voice search which will result in fewer results returned, the decline of the "long tail" from search engine results pages, and conversational content winning out over visual content.ⁱⁱⁱ
- With the announcement from Google Chrome that from 2022 it will no longer allow third
 party cookies, which have already been blocked by Safari (the browser used on Apple
 devices), first party data will become increasingly valuable as a digital marketing resource.

National context

- Continuing in the context of the last few years, tuition fees are unlikely to increase in the
 near future, meaning that in order to manage increased costs, and deliver improvements for
 students, the only option is to grow.
- Subject level TEF and REF 2022 could impact the market, as could mooted changes to the
 National Student Survey and how that could affect national league tables.
- Curricular changes and the impact from Covid-19 could impact on certain courses,
 particularly creative courses. Government intervention focused around graduate earnings
 could also impact on certain courses.
- Increasingly, employability will be a key determiner of market success. In order to grow we need to set and reach ambitious targets in this area.
- Students are more diverse than ever, coming from a wider variety of backgrounds and having widely differing needs and expectations. Student voice has become student voices.
- The international higher education market for students from outside the EU remains surprisingly strong despite the challenges of travel in 2020, with growth of 2% in 2020 for acceptances from students outside the EU (but a drop of 15% in EU acceptances). Recent changes to visas mean that there are rising hopes that the UK may be able to regain its strong position in the market vs Australia.

Regional context

 30% of 18 year olds in the South West go to university, compared to 45% of 18 year olds in London. That leaves a high proportion of local young people who haven't gone to university; a large addressable market in the South West.

- The proportion of young people eligible for Free School Meals who progress to university is the lowest in England at 17.2% (compared to the highest of 49% in Inner London). In the South West those not eligible for Free School Meals progress to HE at a rate of 40%.^{vi}
- The population of 18 year olds in Plymouth is forecast to grow by 20% to 2030. Across the South West, this growth is 15%. With University of Plymouth reducing student numbers over the last few years, this gives an increased addressable market of school leavers.
- There is an opportunity to gain momentum across Dorset, Somerset and West Cornwall with students potentially more able to stay at home and commute to campus.
- Marjon's recent and current accolades leave us in a strong position to promote ourselves in the regional market (1st in England for student satisfaction, Complete University Guide 2020; 6th in UK for Education, Guardian University Guide 2021; 5th in England for Course and Lecturers, WhatUni Student Choice Awards 2020; Top 5 in UK for Student Voice NSS 2020).
- Discussions with local stakeholders tell us that a large number of people in this rural area do
 not want to leave home, or feel they can't. This could be due to family-owned business
 commitments, caring responsibilities and the time taken for rural travel. Commuting to the
 local university by bus is not an option for most of the South West, as it is in London, but a
 hybrid model of learning offers significant opportunities.
- Health is the largest sector recruiting undergraduates in the South West^{vii} and there is a significant shortage of nurses. Through many years of relationships, we have developed good relationships with the NHS which could enable significant growth in this area. We hope to be able to launch significant extra allied health developments including nursing, by 2022-2023.

Marjon context

- We have seen good successes in recent years, with growth in the student intake of just under 30% from 2017 to 2020, reaching c. 940 intake in 2020 to courses on site. We need to deliver 8% growth each year in order to double our student body from 2017 to 2030.
- Our rebrand in 2017 to Plymouth Marjon University, and new MARJON campaign have supported us to gain more visibility and awareness. Our relationships with schools, through widening participation partnerships and the National Collaborative Outreach Programme,

- now UniConnect, mean we now have a much improved reputation amongst local sixth form stakeholders.
- Despite local schools finding it hard to bring in visitors due to COVID, we are working closely
 in partnership with them to develop online suitable activities and events, using experience
 gleaned from our virtual Easter Revision School and virtual Summer School 2020.
- NSS results, particularly in 2018 and 2019, have driven some good league table results and enabled us to push a good reputation for student-centredness.
- Our social media continues to get good cut-through, with the student experience now well
 embedded within the team through an annual graduate internship, use of Marjon Change
 Makers, and an active blog platform. Our student-led TikTok platform (a Change Maker
 project) was recently nominated by a student panel for an <u>industry award</u> the Edurank
 Think Students Award Shortlist, for the Best Campaign Supporting Student Wellbeing.
- Through working with students, including the Students' Union, we have improved our
 reputation for extra-curricular activities which is such a critical factor in university choice,
 developing 17 new societies last year. We will continue to engage with students to further
 develop opportunities outside studies, including job opportunities.
- Our campus safety and student support are strengths and often cited as the reassurance needed for students to choose Marjon.
- There is an opportunity to make our brand more distinctive, for example a wellbeing campus, leaders in sustainability, embedding values in the curriculum.
- We have some exciting curricular developments, with the largest opportunities likely to be in the areas of health and wellbeing.
- We have seen some good results from focusing on conversion in specific areas such as
 Applicant Days and Interview Days. Measuring and focusing on conversion across the entire
 university, (from multiple enquiry points to apply), is difficult due to having no CRM system,
 but improving operations in this area offers an opportunity for growth.
- Our values are a key tenet of our strategy and well embedded, and this gives us the opportunity to use them more as part of student communication.
- Our relationships with local schools and reputation within UniConnect, formerly NCOP, are
 excellent, giving us opportunities to expand our influence, and demand now significantly
 outstrips our ability to supply support. We now have nine Progression Agreement holding
 schools and colleges^{viii} and good relationships across all of these.

- Our digital marketing is ambitious with an award for our website in 2018 and a new, sectorleading website delivered in 2020, but we know there is untapped potential for driving further growth as new digital marketing technologies emerge.
- We keep in touch with alumni through a regular alumni newsletter which has a good open and engagement rate, and have trialled fundraising campaigns around the "Going Places" fund. We will focus our alumni communications to encourage postgraduate study, student mentoring and placement opportunities.
- Our curriculum has exciting opportunities around health courses, and we are launching
 100% online distance learning courses in 2021.
- We have not yet invested in international recruitment but this should be a significant opportunity by 2022.
- We remain towards the lower end of key league tables, and it will be some time before we can expect the first REF results to improve this position. This is a significant factor for some applicants for whom league table positions are important.

vi. Strategic areas

This section describes our aims across four key strategic areas. The measures of success and targets are in section vii, and the action plan to deliver these goals is in section viii.

A. Optimising our brand and reputation

Starting with insight:

We'll improve our use of insight, gathering and sharing more insights to enable the Marjon offer
to attract more students. This includes decliner surveys, applicant insights, trialling social
listening technology, review mining and using market data for curriculum planning. This will
include understanding the wide diversity of student needs and views across Marjon, and
analysing contextual information around how students join Marjon and which activities and
channels are working.

Engaging staff, students and friends of Marjon:

- We'll continue to partner with students to build our reputation, improving our customer service
 and student communications; (for example using Chatback; working more closely with the
 Student Union, Student Reps, and actively growing the number of student colleagues we work
 with).
- We'll develop more opportunities for local friends of Marjon to become involved with our student centred work, including developing our mentoring and placement reputation.

Getting good content into the right places:

- We'll develop a new content creation team and process, with a focus on being the content
 people seek, instead of interrupting the content they seek. This team which will include
 students will create content in the overlap between what Marjon has "earned the right to
 have a perspective on", and "what our audience cares about". ix
- We will work across the University to develop Marjon into a thought leader in specific areas, which might include sharing research or opinions on health, education, student support, social capital.
- We'll optimise the use of new digital marketing technologies including targeting and display technologies, (for example testing programmatic, smart display campaigns, video in search results).
- We'll work on search engine optimisation including developing a landing page strategy to ensure that enquirers find the information they seek.
- We'll further develop our #wearemarjon series of case studies, finding ways to demonstrate the richness of student achievement and opportunity.
- We'll develop specific marketing plans and segments for education and health (as the most likely growth areas), defining a clear market proposition.
- We'll develop international marketing opportunities to ensure we have a reliable intake of
 international students by 2023, testing this at the right moment, ensuring that the campus and
 culture are right, and that we have teams lined up to support international students in the right
 way.

Developing our regional influence:

- With growth in student numbers and increasing partnerships, we'll focus on building and maintaining our momentum as a credible university of choice in the South West.
- Our outreach work will continue to promote our student-centred brand reputation, delivering information, advice and guidance to be more helpful, tailored and welcoming than other universities. The team will continue to work closely with students to help us develop and deliver activities. We'll continue to partner closely with Progression Agreement holding schools and colleges, potentially developing these relationships to MAT level, and we'll continue to work in a targeted way across all of our top recruiting feeder schools and colleges.
- We'll develop our reputation as a civic university through promoting and improving our relationships with alumni, with local media, and political and business stakeholders, and engaging with them in supporting more 18-year olds to go to university. Within Cornwall, we'll develop our reputation in Truro for local, high quality education, initially within postgraduate studies.
- As the campus develops, we'll ensure we create a strong sense of our location and space within the North of Plymouth, with an open campus which is seen as a beacon within the local community.

Enhancing and personalising the student and applicant experience:

- We'll further optimise the full application journey to remove friction and complexity. This
 should involve ensuring that the on campus and online experience are seamless and further
 development and review of experience by student group, as set out in our Access and
 Participation Plan.
- This will also involve developing a hybrid model of applicant engagement which offers both on campus and online experiences and enables potential students to engage in a way which is meaningful and effective.
- We'll develop new customer service principles which include how, when and where enquirers
 can access information, incorporating models such as chatbots and live chat which allow easy
 self-service.
- We'll further develop our brand to emphasise the support and community offered at Marjon,
 ensuring that our values resonate throughout the entire brand experience.

B. Developing operational efficiencies

- Our information needs to be accessible in every sense, recognising that searchers want answers
 fast. Speed will be an absolute priority in supporting applicants, enquirers and student queries,
 both in online queries such as page load time, and individual queries.
- In working with colleagues to develop a new digital strategy for the university, we'll need to
 consider how to invest time and budget in new technologies, making decisions that will
 prioritise technological developments. This would include ensuring everything we deliver is
 mobile-first (including student experience once at Marjon).
- We will push further on a hypothesis-based approach to marketing spend to develop a theory, test it, and then amend it or roll it out, weighing up different spend options.* We will share learnings consistently and regularly.
- We'll deliver more efficient results through using data to deliver personalised and tightly targeted marketing, following digital signals across search, display, video and social media, across the full customer journey. A Customer Relationship Management platform will be essential to this.
- We'll develop comprehensive first-party data sets and deliver marketing automation solutions
 that use this data to enable us to stay connected to the people who engage with us online (and
 beyond). This reduces the potential hit on our digital marketing effectiveness when third party
 cookies become obsolete.
- Through new delivery models of outreach work, we'll aim to reach more isolated communities.
- We'll continue to hone our geographical targeting models, which include school-based modelling and digital targeting by geography, to bring efficiencies to local, regional, and national targeting.

C. Developing our team

- In line with the People Strategy, we'll develop new ways to maintain a healthy, interconnected team, expecting each team member to play a part in keeping us connected and enjoying work.
- We'll develop the team's digital and leadership skills, aiming to improve the spread of skills across digital marketing in particular.

• We'll share skills across the university, in particular writing for the web and social media.

D. Planning our finances

- We'll plan budgets each year to be prepared for quick changes, for example from out of home to digital technologies.
- We'll continue to grow our toolbox of results, testing and honing our spend decisions each year based on past results.
- We'll work with specific budgets for new courses to ensure strong launches.
- We'll work to an optimum spend per recruit based on benchmark data.

vii. Targets and measures of success

This section includes measures of success and top-level targets. It does not include our standard indicators that we measure month by month (eg course page views, open day bookings, good conversations) as almost all of these are not currently comparable year on year.

Measures of success

The detailed action plan overleaf shows what we aim to do and when, though timelines may shift with priorities. Below, therefore, are measures of success that would demonstrate that the Marketing Strategy is being delivered.

- 1. By the end of 2021 we'll be delivering content which significantly increases enquiries and have a carefully optimised model of retargeting across the See-Think-Do-Care framework.
- 2. By the end of 2023 we'll have a seamless online and offline student journey which smartly uses technology across the University, including a customer relationship management system.
- 3. By the end of 2023 (but with ongoing progress) we'll further increase student satisfaction and pride in Marjon through closer partnership working and promoting good opportunities, demonstrated in National Student Survey or other survey results.
- 4. By the end of 2021 we'll be sharing more useful knowledge and insight about our student base as well as our applicants, in order to be used for management decisions.

- 5. By the end of 2023, as we have launched new courses in allied health, we'll be recognised by city and regional stakeholders as a strategically significant and important part of the region.
- 6. By the end of 2023, we'll have further built relationships with education stakeholders (head teachers, heads of sixth forms) to increase local applications to study at Marjon.
- 7. By the end of 2023 we'll be heading towards being the university of choice for our courses for the local area, increasing numbers of students (UG and PG) from PL postcodes by 50% from 553 Firm Accepts (all courses) in 2020 to 829 in 2023 intake.
- 8. Across the plan and each year, we'll successfully deliver our Access and Participation Plan objectives and targets, closing the gaps, and with any issues raised with the Office for Students resolved.
- 9. By mid-2022, we'll have an upskilled team who actively share skills across the University.
- 10. Each year, we'll spent to budget and be able to demonstrate in our business plan how we have delivered additional value for money.

Targets

We record and interrogate many Key Performance Indicators across marketing in order to understand our direction of travel and results of specific campaigns, including web-based metrics, social media metrics, prospectus requests, open day bookings, personal visits to campus, and numbers of good conversations. These vary depending on the context, and most have been significantly affected by 2020 lockdown and so setting specific targets is less relevant. However once these measures settle, we will set specific targets for growth.

This section therefore only covers top level targets:

- a) To increase onsite entrants,
- b) to reduce (or maintain) the cost per entrant, and
- c) to improve positions in the league tables.

It also includes measures of success.

a) Onsite entrants and

b) cost per entrant:

Entrants	Actual	Actual	Actual	Expected	Target	Target
	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21 ³	21-22 ⁴	22-23 ⁴
UG onsite, year 1 ^{1,2}	468	521	520	546		
Total onsite year 1 entrants	729	840	813	938	1013	1094
Spend during prior year	£	£	£	£	£	£
	780,000	579,000	555,000	573,000	573,000	573,000
Cost per year 1 enrol	1070	689	683	611	566	524

- 1. This does not include year 2 and 3 entrants as spend is not allocated to this
- 2. Omitted new entrants from DBS Berlin, Cornwall College, London Diocese, Ambition, Exeter College, Duchy College, SEGI, HUST, City College Plymouth
- 3. Estimated entrants 18/9/20
- 4. + 8% growth each year, assuming no additional marketing budget

Note that cost per entrant above is based on no increase in marketing budget; following review we may agree to increase marketing budget and maintain a steadier cost per entrant in order to be more sure of success.

c) League Tables

League Tables goals reflect the Marjon Growth Plan *Centred on Student Success* goals. The WhatUni Student Choice Awards are a specific goal which we work on within marketing because they involve us encouraging students to complete reviews.

	2018	2019	2020	2021 goal
WhatUni Student	79 th overall.	23 rd overall.	30 th overall.	Top 20
Choice Awards	20 th for	5 th for Courses	7 th for Course	
	Courses and	and Lecturers	and Lecturers	
	Lecturers	(April 2019)	(July 2020)	
	(April 2018)			
NSS ¹	Joint 12 th	Joint 19 th		Top 10

¹ NSS results were reduced in 2020 due to impact of Acting students, and mistaken inclusion of BA Film. Without Acting and Film, satisfaction was 87% compared to 83% sector. With them, satisfaction was 80%. This impacts on other league tables too, including Good University Guide and Complete University Guide.

	88%	86%	83%	
	satisfaction	satisfaction	satisfaction ²	
Times Good	119	102	115	Top 100
University Guide ¹	(Sept 2018)	(Sept 2019)	(Sept 2020)	
Complete University	130	127	128	Top 100
Guide	(June 2018)	(June 2019)	(June 2020)	
			Student	
			satisfaction	
			1st in England	
			3 rd in UK	

viii. Action Plan

A. Optimising our brand and reputation

Starting with insight

Develop an insight plan across the student journey to include market data, social listening, decliner surveys, review mining and withdrawal surveys. (H1 2021)

Use insight to support colleagues in developing courses and curriculum in line with market demand and local employer needs. (H2 2021)

Use our Marjon Student Experience survey to understand our students, improve our student experience and optimise our messaging. (H2 2021)

Use insights from the lean analytics cycle, creating hypotheses, testing and make continual incremental improvements. (H2 2021)

Engaging students, staff and friends of Marjon

Continue to promote student engagement and involvement in order to enrich experience on campus, specifically:

² Includes Acting but excludes Film (ie the figure we expect to be confirmed once mistake is correct)

Develop Marjon Student Talent Days to promote Marjon as a student employer (H1 2021)

Deliver Student Colleague training plan (H1 2021)

Embed student-led customer service standards and a student-led welcome experience (H2 2021)

Improve and promote Marjon Change Makers each year (H1 2021)

Enable student reps to give wider opportunity and more impact (H2 2021)

Develop a team of student and staff content writers (H2 2021)

Improve overall staff and student communications through news, events and moments of pride (H2 2021)

Engage alumni and friends of Marjon in mentoring and placement opportunities (H2 2021)

Getting good content into the right places

Using a team of content writers, develop a plan based on Hero Help Hub model. Experiment with conversational content in preparation for voice-search growth. Experiment with targeting key influencers and their followers within social media. (2021)

Develop a landing page strategy to ensure our content plans land effectively (2021)

Further develop and optimise trials across programmatic and signal-led targeting, including custom affinity audiences, in-market audiences, similar audiences, and remarketing, using See Think Do Care framework. (2021)

Trial new content and format opportunities across TrueView ads, bumper ads and smart display campaigns (2021)

Improve our reputation across all review sites, focusing on minor as well as major sites. (2021)

Launch new course areas with particular focus on growing allied health course numbers and reputation and education (2021-2)

Trial international marketing opportunities (2021-2)

Review sponsorships as new post COVID activities emerge (2021-2)

Developing our regional influence

As UniConnect funding ends and moves to an outreach hub model, expand our political impact in a campaign to drive up proportion of local 18 year olds who go to university (2021)

Deliver celebrations for our 180th celebration lasting into 2021 (2021)

Promote university achievements to stakeholders through annual impact report (2021)

Enhancing and personalising the student and applicant experience

Deliver access targets in our Access & Participation Plan, including Children's University, Marjon Scholars, raising GCSE attainment, supporting care leavers, encouraging support from military families, and increasing ethnic diversity in the University. (ongoing)

Develop student journey which consistently incorporates specific student groups such as mature, deferred, PGR, PGT, including reviewing our welcome to Marjon and early drop-out rates for specific groups. (ongoing)

Develop a hybrid model of enquirer and applicant engagement which is effective both online and offline. (2022)

B. Developing operational efficiencies

Develop business case for a CRM system working with colleagues, to segment, personalise and automate our communications (2021)

Work with relevant colleagues to develop a digital strategy so that we can market a digital first, mobile-first, flexible learning experience with confidence (2021-2)

Continue to optimise new website to maximise conversion (2021)

Develop enquiry management approach that measures conversion of enquiries, and increases it year on year (2021)

Continue to use Comms Planning Group to "create once, communicate everywhere" (ongoing)

Begin monthly lessons learned meetings to share hypotheses and test results, working results into our toolbox of tactics and strategies to improve efficiency of spend (2021) Use monthly lessons learned meetings for sharing richer data on students and courses. (2022)

Develop online advice, information and guidance that is rated highly and converts effectively to application, and enables us to meet growing demand from schools using operational efficiencies (ongoing)

Trial online options to support more isolated communities, or more geographically distant strategic partners, with outreach advice, information and guidance (2021)

Develop a marketing operating model that can support growth in modular and online learning, micro-credentials, and multiple start dates. (2022)

C. Developing our team

Develop new digital and leadership skills plan for team, including project management, copywriting, web training, data visualisation, research and insight skills. (ongoing)

Develop an HE and marketing terminology to support new team members (2021)

Run twice-yearly team strategic planning sessions. (ongoing)

Publish brand and writing guidelines (2021)

D. Planning our finances

Plan budgets to take account of trials, which are analysed and improved upon each year. (ongoing)

Maintain flexibility for changing circumstances (ongoing)

Review spend across digital to optimise operationally (eg agency vs inhouse) (2021)

Plan awareness campaigns in advance without complete commitment (ongoing)

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