



Category: Education Communications Campaign

Company: Gardiner Richardson and Northumbria University

Entry title: I Am Northumbria

Brief and objectives:

Confirmation and Clearing is the culmination of Northumbria University's annual student recruitment cycle and we managed the PR element.

Focused around the time when students receive their A-Level/BTEC results, universities either confirm the student has secured a place at the university they have applied for (confirmation) or a student may choose to use clearing (via UCAS) to secure a place elsewhere.

A PR campaign was required to position Northumbria as an attractive option for high-quality students looking to 'trade up', offering more than just a degree.

Objectives

- Attract high quality applicants
- Recruit via clearing
- Expand the geographic footprint of applicants outside the region

PR Objectives

- Increase Northumbria's profile nationally amongst key audiences
- Increase Northumbria's profile amongst target audiences in specific areas: North East, North West, Yorkshire and Northern Ireland
- Drive audiences to call the clearing hotline and visit information hub online.

Rationale behind campaign, including research and planning:

Northumbria University is a research-rich, business-focused university with a strong reputation for academic excellence. 93% of students find work or further education six months after graduation. Newcastle is cited as 'one of the best' student cities, with the third best offer in the UK in terms of accommodation. This makes Northumbria a great place to live and study.

Against a backdrop of funding cuts and rising student expectations, universities are under pressure to attract the best talent.

During planning phases, we took an audience-first approach, reviewing what attracts students and their influencers to Northumbria.

We targeted students:

∙ holding an offer from Northumbria University
∙ holding an offer from another institution
∙ who performed better than expected
∙ who performed worse than expected,
and
∙ parents
∙ teachers.

We created personas for each audience looking at their needs, challenges and the solutions Northumbria offers.

We took insights from the National Clearing Survey, which cited factors important to students in securing a place through clearing, e.g. course choice, location, accommodation, student experience.

Strategy and tactics, including creativity and innovation:

Our campaign was based on putting students in control of their choices, whether trading up, making the most of options or changing direction.

Working closely with the Northumbria in house team and advertising agency, we developed a multi-channel PR and social media campaign creating a 'buzz' around Northumbria ahead of results day.

The content strategy was rolled out across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and Uni website. Content focused on factors that matter to students (identified in the research phase) and reflected across blogs, videos and social posts.

Media relations positioned Northumbria as a university offering advice to students and parents. We generated a number of stories to build interest in Northumbria, targeting audience-relevant Higher Education and national media channels.

Social media:

- Regular social media content plans – ongoing schedules of relevant and shareable content using the agreed #IamNorthumbria hashtag
- Bespoke Snapchat frames created for students to share. Geo-targeting used at feeder schools
- Open day 'green screen' activity – working with Charge Agency to engage students at open days. Using #IamNorthumbria theme, students had pictures taken with iconic North East images as backdrop. Images shared on social media
- Facebook Live with clearing experts and case study – to de-mystify the clearing, confirmation and adjustment process
- Developed #IamNorthumbria social media frames for students to share images
- Case study videos – developed to share on social media and showcase real student experiences of clearing.

Media relations:

- A student survey working with Public Knowledge. The subject of the survey focused on students' experiences of A-Level/ BTEC results, the confirmation and clearing process, understanding adjustment and life choices after school/college. Results showed half of students don't know what adjustment is (the option to 'trade up'), which gave a strong national hook. We compiled 11 regionalised press releases on the clearing survey results

- Case studies – written and video case studies of students who went through clearing and adjustment from focus courses and key regions. Repurposed for use on website and social media
- Media pack created for key regional and national journalists to raise awareness and understanding of the Northumbria University offer
- Hidden gems survey – existing students survey showcased ‘hidden gems’ of university life. We compiled a press release and top 10 list, issued to media and used across social media and online blogs
- Clearing Q&A with Assistant Director for Undergraduate Recruitment – offered and covered by media as an advisory piece
- Interview with a psychologist – Secured interview with Northumbria Sandy Wolfson for J2 feature in The Journal to reassure students ahead of A Level results day
- Comment pieces on key focus courses, e.g. politics and international relations
- A Level results day media opportunity – media package to attend clearing ‘hub’ at Northumbria, interviews with key spokespeople, national and regional press releases.

Implementation of tactics:

A phased approach to implementation maintained momentum throughout the campaign, culminating in A Level results day.

The campaign launched in June 2016, with targeted bursts around: exam and post exam, clearing opening, release of BTEC results and Scottish Highers.

Awareness raising and subtle clearing and useful information drip-fed throughout to keep momentum in the run up to A Level results day.

Measurement and evaluation:

- 5.24m total audience reach in August 2016; including 2.6m in the North East, 2.3m national and 342k across other regions
- 13%+ increase in total audience reach on 2015
- For the first time, every North East media outlet featured Northumbria as their key university in clearing/A level result coverage
- A Level results day highlights included: BBC Radio Newcastle breakfast show live interview; attendance from BBC Look North, ITV Tyne Tees, Made in Tyne and Wear, The Chronicle
- Live social media broadcasts on Chronicle Live and ITV Tyne Tees
- Helen Bower quote in The Guardian discussing Northumbria’s clearing process, reaching 2.3m readers
- Times Higher Education interview with the Vice Chancellor
- 50 separate pieces of news coverage focused on clearing, including regional coverage outside the North East
- Northumbria was the UK’s top trending university (Twitter) re. organic posts about coming to Northumbria
- 120 ‘green screen’ participants.

Wider achievements

982 offers, a 56% increase on 2015

451 enrolled, 20% increase on 2015

Gardiner Richardson appointed to deliver 2017 campaign.

Budget and cost effectiveness:

Agency fees + third party: £20k

All content re-purposed. Joined-up approach between university, Gardiner Richardson and partners.