

The logo for the CIPR PRIDE AWARDS 2019 Gold Winner. It features the text 'CIPR PRIDE AWARDS 2019' in white on a black background, followed by 'GOLD WINNER' in large, multi-colored letters (pink, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple).

Category: Education Campaign

Company: University of Bedfordshire and Four Communications

Entry title: University of Bedfordshire 2018 Clearing Campaign

Brief and objectives:

The University of Bedfordshire (“the University”) recruits a large proportion of its undergraduate students via the annual clearing process.

In recent years clearing has become highly competitive with a rise in the number of universities vying to attract students to fill their under subscribed courses. In previous years clearing was used primarily by post-1992 universities but nowadays the Russell Group also compete for their slice of the cake.

To support its student recruitment campaign in the build-up and during clearing, the University appointed Four Communications (“Four”) to provide external PR support for a period of nine months.

The media campaign was an integral part of the collaborative approach to Bedfordshire’s student recruitment campaign ‘Graduate as a Professional’.

Objectives:

- Generate at least 30 pieces of national, broadcast, consumer and trade media to influence the opinions and perceptions of the target audiences
- The campaign should be timed to peak on A level results day
- To target local press, print and broadcast for A level results day
- Build the profile of key academics in the media, positioning them as subject experts in target press, thus promoting the University as a leading institution in a number of fields.

The idea, research and planning:

The team undertook a series of meetings with key academics and professional services staff, to devise a programme of PR activities and create a nine month forward planning PR calendar. It identified key dates such as results day, UCAS deadlines as well as

announcements expected in the news. This provided a structure and timeline for activities to ensure no media opportunities were missed.

Strategy, tactics, creativity and innovation:

Using the hooks created in the forward planning calendar the team contacted their key contacts in the target media to seek to place article slots and comment opportunities for clearing and student features.

They also identified broadcast opportunities with TV and radio stations such as BBC TV programmes, local radio as well as wider national stations, enabling the University to gain exposure with additional audiences.

Other tactics include:

- Sport/ 2018 FIFA World Cup

The University has a highly reputable and renowned sports school, the School of Sport Science and Physical Activity. Given the widespread interest in the FIFA World Cup taking place in Russia in June and July 2018, the team liaised with the University's sports academics to comment on issues such as training, injuries and drugs testing to promote the University's academic excellence in this area. A tailored media card was created highlighting the specialist topics of the academics.

- Working with academic staff

To build academics and spokespeople's trust and confidence in dealing with the media the team created a 'buddy' system which enabled the PR team to forge strong relationships with them. This was effective in building trust and gave them one key contact within the team.

- Alumni

We identified suitable graduates to produce case studies and showcase potential career paths to place in key publications including national supplements.

Delivery:

The campaign peaked on A Level results day. It delivered targeted media coverage, locally, regionally, and nationally focused on reaching prospective undergraduate students and influencers of university choice (parents, teachers and careers advisors).

It leveraged on established relationships built with national and trade education journalists and freelancers and included face to face meetings between the Vice Chancellor and key education journalist.

Measurement and evaluation:

The University achieved record-breaking media coverage for its clearing campaign – the campaign achieved 57 items of coverage in the much sought and highly competitive national

press and broadcast media, during a time when all universities, want to be featured in top national media.

The KPIs for media coverage secured was exceeded by nearly 300%. On the launch day of clearing both national BBC and ITV filmed live at the University's Luton campus A total of 113 press cuttings and broadcast interviews were achieved over the nine months. Coverage appeared on BBC, ITV and Sky and in national newspapers including The Guardian, The Times, Daily Telegraph, Daily Express, Time Higher Education and What Uni.

Highlights:

- A total of 57 individual pieces of coverage on clearing itself were secured
- Over 20 media interviews were arranged for academics and staff
- Over a third of coverage was on broadcast media
- Over a third of coverage was in national newspapers
- The campaign placed 13 student case studies and interviews
- The campaign peaked the week of A level results with 29 pieces of coverage secured in that week including two separate student case studies in the Guardian, an alumni case study in the Telegraph and quotes around student health and wellbeing in the Times
- Four national broadcast interviews were secured on the first day of clearing. Two were live from the University campus in Luton
- Local and regional coverage included Heart radio and BBC Three Counties radio, as well as BBC Look East, and ITV Anglia who both broadcast live from the University's clearing rooms in Luton
- 95% positive sentiment (June to Sept)
- Media coverage generated 34,704,117,068 individual website impressions (June to Sept).

Budget and campaign impact:

The annual UG recruitment target for semester 1 was over achieved by 80 home/EU registrants. Within this total the clearing target was 724 accepts; 697 accepts were achieved. Targets for clearing are based on historic recruitment and conversion rates.

Clearing conversion increased in 2018 by 11% to 55% from offer to accept.

The only media cost was the agency fee at £30,000.

The University's integrated student recruitment campaign generated (July to Sept):

- 450,756 web sessions – 23.88% increase

- 13,967 Clearing calls – 4.6% increase
- 1,257 offers
- 697 accepts

This was a conversion rate of 55% which exceeded previous campaigns.