A good practice guide: Market Research

As UCL adapts to a changing landscape in Higher Education it is essential that innovative ideas for new programmes of study are supported by sound evidence that there is a market for them amongst applicants, and that the qualification will be both recognised and welcomed for future study or employment.

It is desirable that market research is undertaken as early as possible in the programme proposal and approval process to ensure that that valuable time and resources at departmental, faculty and central levels are not wasted in developing programmes that will not meet recruitment targets.

The Student Recruitment Marketing team provides specialist research services to support the development of new programmes. Their website explains more about the service and how to access it: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/cam/activities/market-research

Points to consider when conducting market research
- It is essential to start by searching for similar programmes in the UK and overseas. What does the marketing say about these other programmes? What are the fee levels? Is there information on what graduates do with the degree?
- It is possible to find out how well these other programmes are recruiting. And whether they are attractive to student groups (e.g. overseas).
- It is also very important to see whether there is anything similar already at UCL. If there is another programme with a similar name, it will be important to differentiate the programmes to ensure students are clear about what is distinctive about the offer. In some cases, starting the new programme might cannibalise existing activity: it is therefore essential to have a report on any overlaps so that these can be managed.
- What will make the new UCL programme distinctive/attractive relative to the competition? Why will students want to study this subject, here? A few 'unique selling points' will be useful when developing the marketing materials for the programme.
- Are the entry requirements in line with competitor programmes?
- Could you ask existing students, alumni or prospective students for their view on the attractiveness of the proposal (see Appendix for a suggested outline survey).
- Could you ask employers or professional associations whether the proposal will produce the graduates they're looking for?

Other sources of help
- UCL Careers Service maintains good relationships with a wide range of employers. Consequently, they may be able to provide advice on whether there is evidence of employer demand for graduates with the ranges of skills and knowledge the proposed programme aims to deliver. They can also provide information about the career destinations of graduates from existing UCL programmes.
- Contacts via academic networks at institutions offering a similar programme may be able to report on the number and type of students it attracts, graduate destinations, etc.
- Professional contacts in industry may be able to assess the objectives and content of the programme and advise on whether graduates would be attractive to them for future employment.

Appendix - Draft general survey

One year MA Programme in ……..

UCL is proposing a new one year MA programme.

The programme aims to …….. Highlights of the programme include:
- Key selling point 1
- Key selling point 2
- Key selling point 3
- Key selling point 4

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This programme is suitable for ………..

1 - Do you think this proposed degree programme is appealing?
- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- Probably not
- Definitely not

Comments

2. What element of the programme most interests you? *
- The interdisciplinary approach
- Intensive training in …..
- The placements in NGOs
- Other - please give details below

Comments

3 - What statement best describes you?
- Prospective undergraduate student
- Current undergraduate student
- Prospective graduate student
- Current graduate student
- Parent or guardian of a prospective/current student
- Higher education advisor/teacher
- Other (please specify)

Please use this section for any other comments you have concerning the MA programme