



# Enquiry Experience Tracker

## 2021 Enquiry Experience Tracker

Summary of results for Example University

# Introducing the Enquiry Experience Tracker

The Enquiry Experience Tracker is a syndicated mystery shopping programme designed to help universities understand how well they respond to enquiries from prospective students.

Underpinned by the latest student behaviour data and conversion insights, the research provides universities with visibility of their service levels across key enquiry channels and student types.

It also enables universities to benchmark performance against the sector and the UniQuest standard of excellence, which helps them to understand areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.

**54**

**Universities**



**14**

**Assessment criteria**



**4**

**Enquiry channels**



**6**

**Student personas**



# Delivered in partnership by Edified and UniQuest

The Enquiry Experience Tracker is reassuringly powered by education experts Edified and UniQuest, the student engagement specialists.



Edified is a specialist research, consulting and delivery company focused exclusively on the education industry. We are dedicated to assisting education providers and promoters globally to dramatically improve results in student acquisition, student retention, student experience and student success.

Our partners each have 20+ years of experience working within education providers, government and service providers to the education sector. We are results oriented, using our expertise, energy and partnerships with curated service providers to help our clients gain ground quickly.

[edified.com.au](http://edified.com.au)



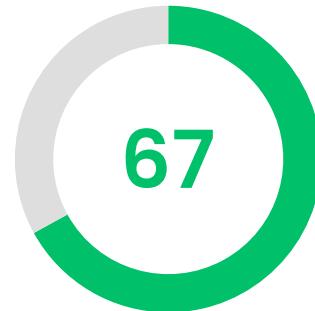
UniQuest partners with higher education institutions to bring all the capabilities needed to deliver personalised student engagement journeys at scale and without interruption, no matter what.

Acting as an extension of your Student Recruitment team, we apply the insights, an expert team, and the technology platform to deliver proactive and personal support for every international student. Our proven approach maximizes conversion at every step from enquiry to enrolment.

[uni-quest.co.uk](http://uni-quest.co.uk)

# Summary of overall results

Your Enquiry Experience Score



All scores are out of 100.

Increased and varied higher education choice, compounded by global disruption and uncertainty, has increased the propensity for students to contact potential universities prior to applying.

Generally, UK universities have responded well to the changing global landscape and have broadly maintained the ability to offer prospective students a positive enquiry experience.

UK average



n=53



Overall, the average Enquiry Experience Score across the UK is **57 out of 100**.

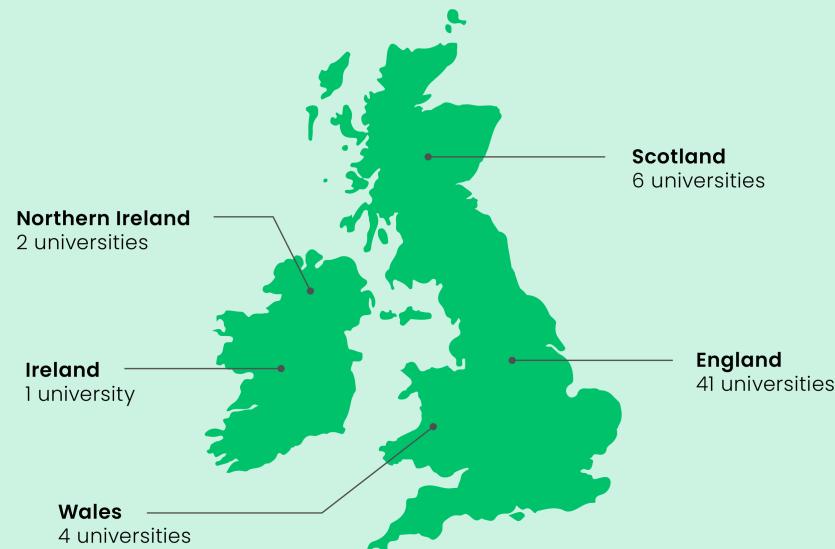
Example University has achieved an Enquiry Experience Score of **67 out of 100**, indicating they are performing better than many other UK universities. The score suggests that Example University is doing well to meet student needs but still has an opportunity to improve and deliver excellence in all aspects of the enquiry experience.

# Research methodology



# Research methodology

## Scope



The Enquiry Experience Tracker is a syndicated research programme involving mystery shopping and benchmarking.

The 2021 research round included a total of 54 universities. 53 of these are UK institutions, representing approximately 40% of all UK universities. There was 1 university from Ireland.

The sample has a broad geographic spread and includes institutions of different sizes and areas of specialisation, and from various university groupings.

**RUSSELL  
GROUP**

10

**MillionPlus**

The Association for  
Modern Universities

8

 **University  
Alliance**

8

Refer to the Appendix for a list of universities.

# Research methodology

## Mystery shopping

Mystery shopping was conducted during June to July 2021 using six prospective student personas representing both Home and International student types.

Enquiries were placed with each university using key enquiry channels, including live chat, phone, email and/or webform.

Mystery shoppers were allocated a student persona and list of universities. They posed as the student and made an enquiry to each institution, following scripts and guidelines provided by Edified to evaluate the process. These evaluations were compiled, validated and scored by Edified.



SCHOOL LEAVER



MATURE AGE



PROFESSIONAL



SCHOOL LEAVER



COLLEGE STUDENT



PROFESSIONAL



UK



UK



UK



NIGERIA



USA



INDIA



LIVE CHAT



PHONE



WEB FORM



EMAIL



WEB FORM



LIVE CHAT

Refer to the Appendix for further detail on personas and enquiries.

# Research methodology

## Scoring

Mystery shopping outputs have been analysed and assessed against 14 criteria including findability, responsiveness, clarity and personalisation.

The scoring methodology has been informed by insights from over 1 million student journeys and reflects the UniQuest standard for effective student engagement.

Scores for each criterion are weighted according to the model on the right, and are indexed to 100 to provide an overall enquiry experience score for each university.

The scores in this report are based on the experiences of the mystery shoppers, who report what happened as it happened. It may not reflect the typical or intended enquiry experience at each university.

Mystery shopping is an effective tool to better understand your enquiry management approach and gain insight into the student perspective. It is recommended that this report is used in conjunction with other information such as student satisfaction surveys, interaction rates and internal quality assurance to fully evaluate your performance.

Refer to the Appendix for definitions and our assumptions.

## Enquiry Experience Score



### Communication quality

Clarity, relevance, personalisation, persuasiveness and mobile friendliness of the university's response

Scored from 0 to 50



### Enquiry channels

Availability and findability of key enquiry channels  
Scored from 0 to 20



### Responsiveness

Time between initial enquiry and response from the university  
Scored from 0 to 20



### Follow-up

Receipt of a timely follow-up message from the university after the initial response  
Scored from 0 to 10

# Research methodology

## Benchmarking

The Enquiry Experience Tracker includes benchmarking so that universities can understand their performance compared to the sector and the UniQuest standard of excellence.

### UK average

This is the primary benchmark used in this report. It represents the mean Enquiry Experience Score of all UK-based universities in the sample.



### Group averages

This benchmark is included when it is relevant to show the performance of a group of universities. It represents the mean Enquiry Experience Score of all universities in the sample that are members of the relevant university group.



**MillionPlus**

The Association for  
Modern Universities



### Country averages

This benchmark is included when it is relevant to show the performance of a particular country. It represents the mean Enquiry Experience Score of all universities in the sample that are located in the relevant country.



### UniQuest standard of excellence

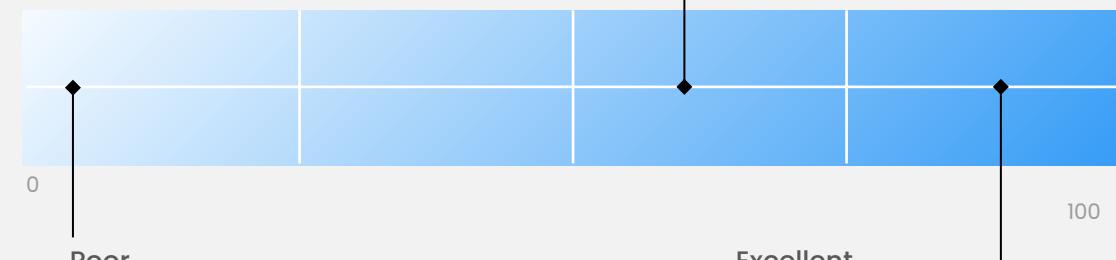
The overall Enquiry Experience Score ranges from 0 to 100.

The maximum score of 100 indicates an optimal enquiry experience is being delivered for prospective students.

This standard has been developed by drawing on insights from over 1 million student journeys managed by UniQuest, and Edified's specialist expertise in student acquisition.

### Good

A good enquiry experience is being delivered to prospective students. There are some areas for improvement.



### Poor

A poor enquiry experience is being delivered to prospective students. There are many areas for improvement.

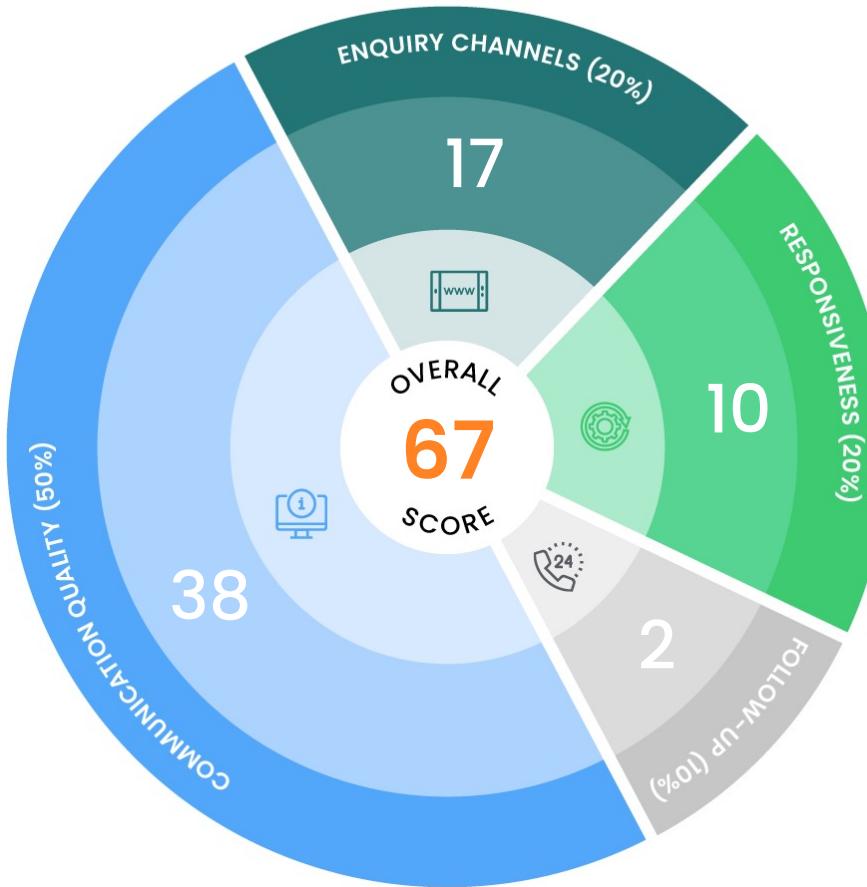
# Your results



# Your Enquiry Experience Score

The overall Enquiry Experience Score is out of 100. It is a total of the scores achieved in each of the criteria assessed: enquiry channels, responsiveness, communication quality and follow-up.

Example University scored well in the enquiry channels offered and quality of most communications. From the student perspective, the university's responsiveness could be improved in order to deliver a very good experience in all aspects of the enquiry process.



## Key findings

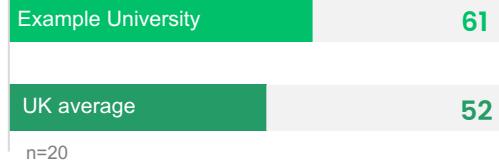
- The lowest scoring area was follow-up, meaning most mystery shoppers did not receive further communication from the university after the initial response to their enquiries.
- A mid-range score was achieved in responsiveness, brought down by the live chat wait times and a response time of almost three weeks for one webform enquiry.
- There is an opportunity to improve communication quality by increasing the persuasiveness of communication with prospective students, particularly over the phone where the experience was rated lowest.

# Your results by persona

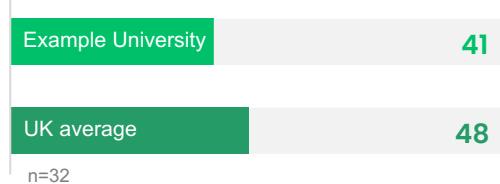
Below are the scores Example University has achieved for each persona compared with the UK benchmark.



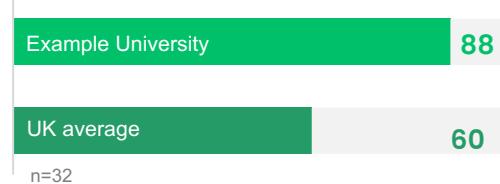
**UK – School leaver**  
Live chat  
Undergraduate



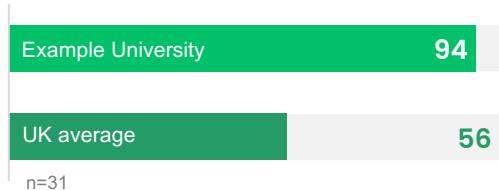
**UK – Mature age**  
Phone  
Undergraduate



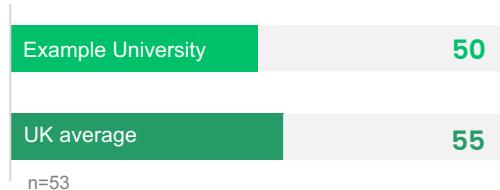
**UK – Professional**  
Web form  
Postgraduate



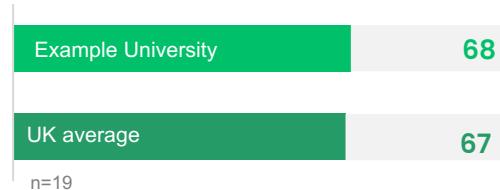
**Nigeria – School leaver**  
Email  
Undergraduate



**US – College student**  
Web form  
Postgraduate



**India – Professional**  
Live chat  
Postgraduate



## Key findings

- Persona scores indicate that mystery shoppers encountered a variety of experiences when interacting with the Example University. There was no consistent trend around any channel or student type resulting in a better experience than another.
- Across the UK averages, prospective postgraduate personas recorded slightly higher scores than undergraduates, indicating they received a better experience overall.
- Across the UK, email-based enquiry responses were rated more consistently than real-time channels (phone and live chat). Remote working may have impacted these channels in 2021.
- Example University scored highest for the Nigeria – School leaver email enquiry, achieving one of the best scores out of the UK.

Note: the persona scores do not include the channel availability rating but have been indexed to 100 for comparative purposes.

# Your score for enquiry channels

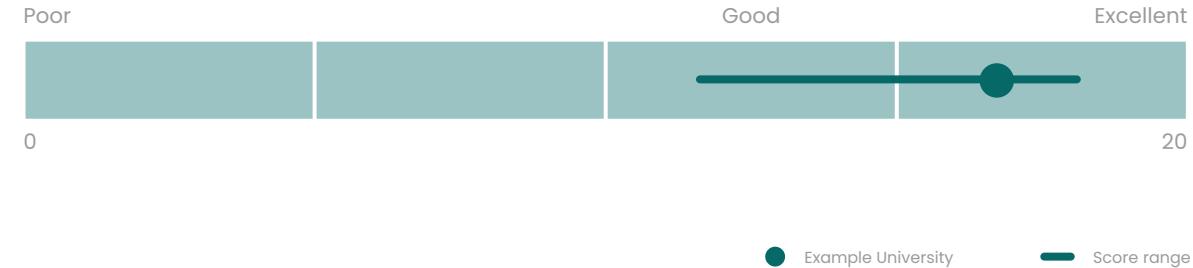
This criteria measures the availability and findability of prospective student enquiry channels.

Consideration was given to email, web forms, phone, live chat, peer-to-peer channels and options for mobile messaging. Mystery shoppers were also asked to indicate how easy it was to find enquiry contact details on each university's website.

## How your enquiry channel score compares



UK scores  
n=53



## Key findings

- Example University scored very well for enquiry channels and at the top end of the scale compared with others across the UK.
- While most universities offered traditional enquiry channels like email and phone, these details were sometimes difficult to locate. Not every university has an obvious webpage listing contact details for prospective students.
- Not every university has an obvious or centralised point for receiving and managing prospective student enquiries. Some universities refer students to faculties, whereas others direct students to contact Admissions or specialised Enquiry teams. Some universities even have different contact details for each campus.

- Surprisingly, a number of universities still list fax as a contact method. Only 6% of universities assessed offered mobile messaging. There is a clear mismatch here between what universities offer and how students like to communicate.
- Peer-to-peer enquiry channels have become a common enquiry channel, with over 80% of universities offering an option such as Unibuddy or The Ambassador Platform (TAP).

*"The contact us link was easily found on the header of the homepage... the link to the enquiry form was appropriately titled and recognisable."*

*– Mystery shopper for Example University*

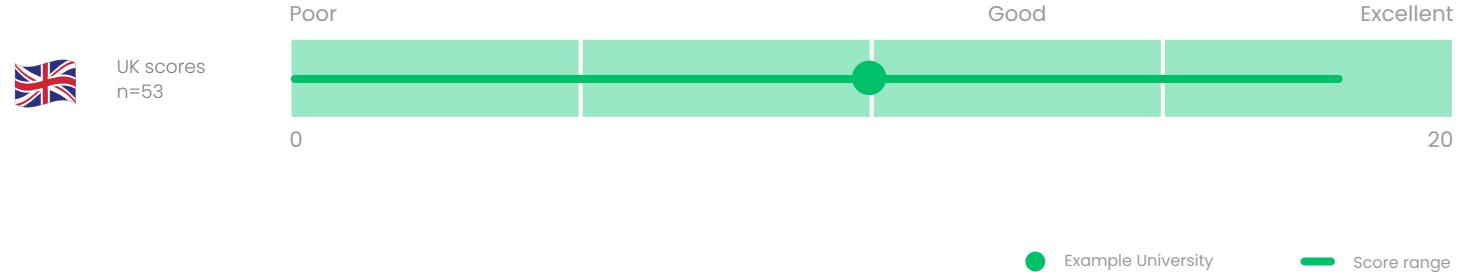
# Your score for responsiveness

10

This criteria measures how quickly your university responds to enquiries from prospective students.

Mystery shoppers were asked to record the time taken between the enquiry being initiated and being connected with someone who could help with their enquiry (i.e. an actual response, not an automated reply or message service).

Maximum points were awarded for instant connection by live chat or phone and responses within four hours to email or web form enquiries.








– Mystery shopper for Example University

# Your score for communication quality

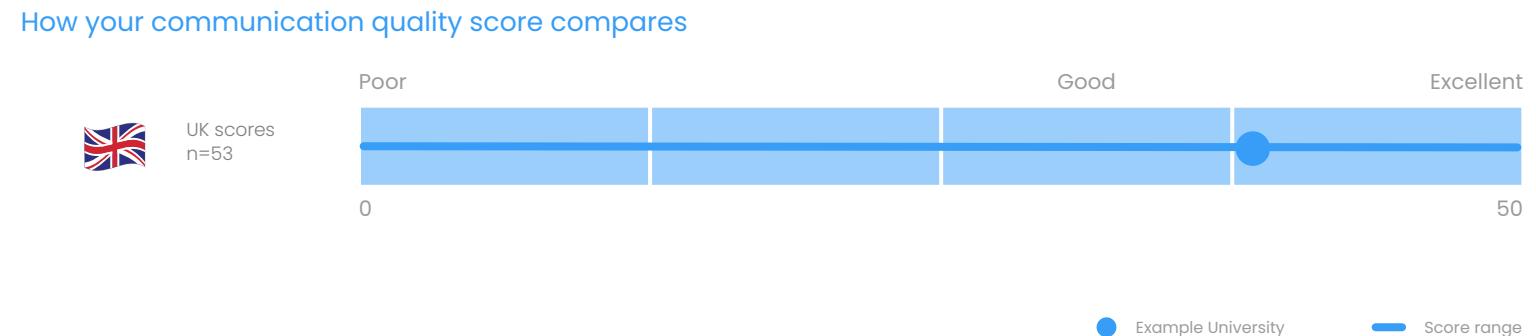
38

This criteria measures the standard of the content in your communications.

Consideration was given to the clarity, relevance, personalisation, persuasiveness and mobile friendliness of each communication.

Mystery shoppers were asked to assess how easy the communication was to understand, along with how relevant and personalised the information was. Consideration was given to tone of voice and how universities communicated their key selling points.

For relevant channels, mystery shoppers also checked communications using a mobile device to see how optimised the experience was for mobile.





## Key findings

- Example University scored at the top end of UK university scores for communication quality and within the ‘excellent’ range on the UniQuest standard of excellence.
  - Mystery shoppers typically rated communication from Example University as very easy to understand and mostly tailored to their study level, study area and fee status.
  - Communication through real-time channels (phone and live chat) tended to offer generalised advice that was less relevant to the student’s context. There was also a missed opportunity to sell the university and convert enquirers into applicants.

- UK universities generally scored well in the area of mobile responsiveness, with 4 out of every 5 relevant communications awarded full points in this criteria.
  - The lowest scoring area for UK universities was persuasiveness. Communications tended to be factual and focused on transferring information about requirements, dates and process. The majority missed the chance to connect in an engaging way and failed to explain why the student would benefit from studying with their university.

"There was very little enthusiasm to get me to actually apply! Absolutely zero enthusiasm to 'sell' me the university."

– Phone mystery shopper  
for Example University

# Your score for follow-up

2

This criteria measures whether a university follows up on prospects in a timely way after responding to an initial enquiry.

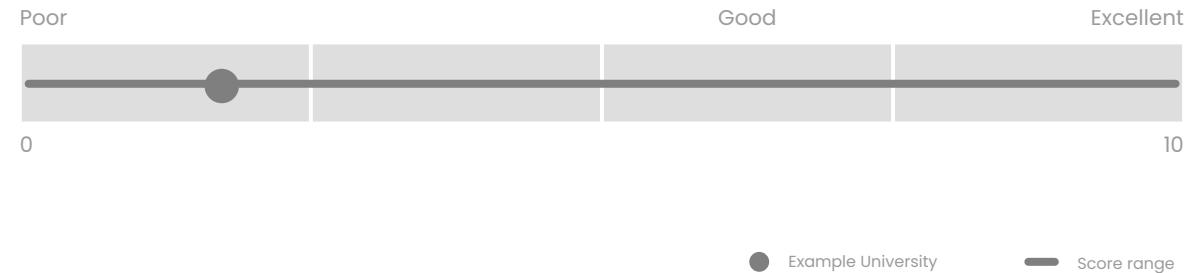
Mystery shoppers were asked to record whether a follow-up communication was received within a week of the initial reply from each university.

Too often universities can view enquiries as tasks to be completed, rather than as potential students with whom a relationship can be built. The purpose of this criteria is to understand if universities are capitalising on the opportunity of a new lead and take a proactive step to progress the relationship with that student.

How your follow-up score compares



UK scores  
n=53



## Key findings

- Practices for enquiry follow-up appear to vary widely. A small number of UK universities followed up with mystery shoppers, consistently and proactively making contact a few days after the initial response to see if students had any further questions or would like help with their application. Most universities did not.
- Mystery shoppers sometimes reported receiving campaign or promotional emails before they had received a reply to their actual enquiry or immediately after the initial response. This created a jarring and sometimes confusing experience. Email marketing can be an effective way to maintain engagement with prospective students, but a careful balance must be struck between automated and personal communication to ensure a smooth student journey.
- Only one mystery shopper recorded a follow-up email from Example University. The *Nigeria – School Leaver* mystery shopper received an email about the University's quarantine support package four days after the reply to their initial enquiry.
- The *India – Professional* mystery shopper received an automated email following completion of the live chat, providing a copy of the chat transcript and an invitation to complete a customer satisfaction survey. This appeared to be generated by the chat tool itself, and no further communication was received after that.

# Examples of your enquiry experience

These samples give greater insight into the experiences mystery shoppers had when communicating with Example University.

Screenshot



## Opportunity

The email follow-up received by the *Nigeria – School Leaver* mystery shopper was timely, relevant and helpful. It gave a sense that the Example University cares about its students and was a welcoming place to study.

The email shared information about the quarantine support package available, explaining “how we can support your arrival if you decide to apply”.

There was a missed opportunity in this communication, because it did not include a prompt to encourage students to take the next step and make an application. There were no links to application information or mention of key deadlines. Including this information in future emails is highly recommended.

Screenshot



## Room for improvement

The live chat conversation recorded by the *India – Professional* mystery shopper rated very highly. It was friendly, personalised. And easy to understand

However, the conversation was completely passive. Chat operators can enhance impact of their conversations by taking a more proactive and persuasive approach. This can be achieved by sharing a course’s key selling points and wrapping up the chat with next steps, such as how and when to apply.

“He answered all of my questions but did not take the initiative in the conversation. He did not try to guide me or mention any next steps.”

– Mystery shopper for Example University

# Recommendations

The scores achieved by Example University in the Enquiry Experience Tracker indicate the university is delivering a good experience to prospective students when they enquire.

Here are some tactical recommendations that Example University can implement to improve its performance.



## Maintain fast response times across all channels and student types.

You've already demonstrated your ability to respond quickly to student enquiries. It's likely that this is a result of good systems, processes and highly engaged staff. Make sure you have regular reporting on and visibility of response times across all enquiry channels and student types. This will help you to promptly identify and rectify any future issues if they occur.



## Communicate the benefits of studying with Example University.

Every communication you have with a prospective student is a chance to persuade them to choose your university. Consider your key selling points and how they relate to the needs and motivations of different types of prospective students. Update your email templates and chat scripts so your proposition is presented in a clear and compelling way.



## Follow-up with prospective students within 5 days.

Take a proactive approach and get back in touch with prospective students shortly after responding to their initial enquiry. A personal email or phone call with an offer of further assistance conveys a feeling of care and makes students feel valued. Personal communication can be supplemented with email marketing campaigns to ensure your university stays top of mind while students work through the decision-making process.

2022 Enquiry Experience Tracker

# You never get a second chance to make a good first impression

**Join the 2022 Enquiry Experience Tracker to see how your performance tracks over time.**

- *Will your communications with prospective students improve?*
- *How will your activity in the coming year compare with the sector?*

All UK and Irish higher education institutions are invited to join the 2022 Enquiry Experience Tracker. Mystery shopping will be conducted in May 2022 and results released in October 2022.

**Register now**

[edified.com.au/eet](https://edified.com.au/eet)

## Registration

The cost to participate is £2450, which includes mystery shopping by six personas and a personalised report with sector benchmarking.

Registration for the 2022 Enquiry Experience Tracker closes on 18 March 2022.

An early bird discount of £250 is available to institutions who register by 31 December 2021.



# Thank you

If you have any questions,  
please do get in touch.



**Natalie Letcher**  
Chair and Co-founder  
UniQuest  
[natalie@uni-quest.co.uk](mailto:natalie@uni-quest.co.uk)

**UNIQUEST**



**Elissa Newall**  
Partner  
Edified  
[elissa@edified.com.au](mailto:elissa@edified.com.au)

 **Edified**  
Education Industry Experts

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: List of universities



## Appendix 2: Persona and enquiry details

UK — School leaver



**Addison**  
17 years old  
Home student

Lives in the Midlands, looking to move for the right university

Completing A Levels in 2021, predicted grades BBB in Biology, Chemistry, Maths. Has not yet made a UCAS application.

Interested in undergraduate health courses, ideally radiography but considering physiotherapy or nursing as backup options.



**Enquiry channel**  
Live chat (desktop)



**Enquiry timing**  
June 2021



**Enquiry topics**

- Course information
- Entry requirements
- How to apply
- Accommodation

## Appendix 2: Persona and enquiry details

UK — Mature age



**Chris**  
**23 years old**  
**Home student**

Has been working in retail and sales since completing sixth form back in 2013.

Lives within a 20 mile radius of the university.

Received CCD (Sociology, Business Studies, French) and didn't feel motivated to go to university, but now wants to get on track for a more fulfilling career. Hasn't made a UCAS application yet, knows there are some deadlines soon and feels a bit anxious about missing the window.

Interested in undergraduate psychology, counselling or social work courses.



**Enquiry channel**  
Phone



**Enquiry timing**  
June 2021



**Enquiry topics**

- Course information
- Entry requirements
- How to apply
- Fees and funding
- Dates and deadlines

## Appendix 2: Persona and enquiry details

UK — Professional



**Jessamy**  
28 years old  
Home student

Has a BSc (Hons) Biomedical Science from University of Suffolk.

Graduated with second class honours (2:1) and has been working as a lab clinician for the past four years.

Interested in postgraduate study to become a secondary school teacher.



**Enquiry channel**  
Web enquiry form



**Enquiry timing**  
June 2021



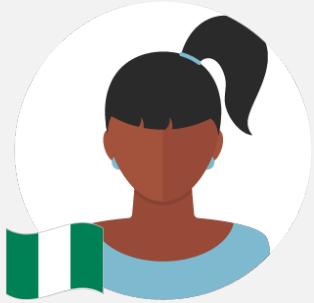
**Enquiry topics**

- Study options
- Entry requirements
- Tuition fees
- Scholarships

Note: if a web form was not available, the enquiry was placed by email instead.

## Appendix 2: Persona and enquiry details

### Nigeria – School leaver



**Oladele**  
18 years old  
International student

Completing final year of high school and preparing for WASSCE in August.

Lives in Lagos, Nigeria.

Interested in undergraduate management and commerce courses.



**Enquiry channel**  
Email



**Enquiry timing**  
July 2021



**Enquiry topics**

- Scholarships
- Course information
- Entry requirements
- Tuition fees

Note: if an email address was not available, the enquiry was placed by web form instead.

## Appendix 2: Persona and enquiry details

US – College student



**Hailey**  
22 years old  
International student

About to begin her final year at University of Delaware, taking a history major. Class of '22. Current GPA 2.5

Looking to begin a Masters Degree in the UK after graduation.

Lives near Philadelphia, USA

Interested in postgraduate communication and journalism courses.



**Enquiry channel**  
Web enquiry form



**Enquiry timing**  
July 2021



**Enquiry topics**

- Study options
- Entry requirements
- Scholarships
- Dates and deadlines

Note: if a web form was not available, the enquiry was placed by email instead.

## Appendix 2: Persona and enquiry details

India — Professional



**Pavish**  
**25 years old**  
**International student**

Has a B.Tech from NIT Trichy (National Institute of Technology in Tiruchirappalli) and graduated with 7.5 GPA.

Has been working as a software test engineer and looking to improve career opportunities.

Lives in Chennai, India.

Interested in postgraduate data science courses  
Looking to begin study in January 2022 if possible.



**Enquiry channel**  
Live chat (mobile)



**Enquiry timing**  
July 2021



**Enquiry topics**

- Course information
- Tuition fees
- Scholarships
- Entry requirements
- Intakes

## Appendix 3: Definitions and assumptions

### Research scope

#### How were mystery shopping personas and scenarios developed?

Mystery shopping personas were informed by UniQuest trend data based on a sample of approximately 340,000 prospective student enquiries handled on behalf of UK universities in 2020.

Personas were based on analysis of market trends and insights, focusing specifically on:

- 2020 top enquiry markets
- 2020 top study areas
- 2020 top enquiry topics
- 2020 top enquiry channels

Here is an example of the insights used to build the persona 'Hailey':

- The United States was one of the top three enquiry markets in 2020 and generally converts strongly from enquiry to enrolment.
- Most prospects from the US enquired about postgraduate study. Writing and journalism was one of the most preferred study areas indicated.
- Digital forms were the most popular enquiry channel used by prospects from the US, accounting for 75% of all first-time enquiries from this market in 2020.
- Students from the US frequently enquired about course information, entry requirements, scholarships, credit transfer and application deadlines.

Please get in touch if you'd like to know more about the other personas or about other UniQuest student insights.

#### Why wasn't China included?

The research focused on the markets that generally produce the most international enquiries for UK universities. Even though China is a key recruitment market, Chinese students don't typically enquire to universities at the same rate as other markets, preferring to use education agents, local offices and social media communication.

The 2021 Enquiry Experience Tracker focused on the US, India and Nigeria, which not only account for the largest volume of prospects but also result in the largest number of enrolments coming from international student prospects.

#### Why has the Enquiry Experience Tracker only focused on universities in the UK and Ireland?

This year (2021) is the first time the Enquiry Experience Tracker has been produced. The scope was limited to universities located in the UK and Ireland to concentrate efforts and establish a meaningful sample size that would provide a credible sector benchmark.

We are in the process of rolling out to other countries, such as Canada and Australia. In time, we intend to deliver country-based benchmarking to enable comparison across study destinations.

## Appendix 3: Definitions and assumptions

### Methodology

#### Which contact details did the mystery shoppers use when making enquiries to universities?

Mystery shoppers were asked to review university websites and locate the contact details they believed would be most relevant. Additional desk research was conducted by Edified to complement and validate the mystery shopper findings.

For future research rounds, universities will be asked to nominate the contact details for mystery shopping.

#### Why were email and web enquiry form enquiry channels interchanged at times?

In conducting this research, we identified that some universities offer both email and web form enquiry methods to prospective students, while others only offer one option.

If a web form was stipulated for a persona, and was not offered by the target university, email was used instead.

If email was stipulated for a persona and was not offered by the target university, a web form was used instead.

This substitution was permitted because both channels can deliver a comparable experience for students and can therefore be evaluated side by side.

#### How was live chat defined?

Live chat was defined as any tool that delivered a synchronous and immediate chat experience within the university's website. This included chatbots.

Tools such as Unibuddy or The Ambassador Platform (TAP) were not included due to their asynchronous nature.

Mobile apps (e.g. WhatsApp) and social media messaging (e.g. Facebook Messenger) were not included because the interactions take place on a separate platform to the university's website.

#### How were scores calculated if live chat was not available?

For several universities, live chat was not offered as an enquiry channel. In these cases, personas using live chat were excluded, and the research focused on personas using channels that were available.

For universities without live chat, the overall Enquiry Experience Score is calculated using the personas that did not use live chat.

## Appendix 3: Definitions and assumptions

### Methodology

#### How long did the mystery shoppers wait for a response?

A maximum allowable response time was set for each channel. After this time was exceeded, mystery shoppers abandoned their enquiry and scored the university 0 for responsiveness, communication quality and follow-up.

The response time was counted as the time between when the enquiry was initiated until the time the mystery shopper was connected with someone who could help with their enquiry (i.e. an actual response, not an automated reply).

The maximum allowable response time was set by channel:

- Live chat and phone: 15 minutes
- Email and web form: 3 weeks

Live chat and phone enquiries were only placed during UK business hours.

Where technical or connection errors were encountered, a second attempt was made.

#### How was the 'mobile friendliness' criteria measured for phone-based enquiries?

Mobile friendliness was not assessed for phone-based enquiries because it was not relevant to the experience. Scores for this persona were indexed to the same level as other personas for comparative purposes.

#### How were responses scored if a university sent multiple responses to an enquiry?

On occasion, mystery shoppers received more than one email reply from a university in response to their enquiry. In this situation, only the first personal response was evaluated for communication quality.

Any subsequent response was recorded as a follow-up communication.

#### Why are there differences in the sample sizes listed for each persona?

The sample size noted against each persona varies because not all personas were mystery shopped for every university. This is due to two different reasons:

1. Live chat was not available for every university. Therefore, these universities were not included in the sample for personas requiring live chat.
2. Some universities were admitted to the Enquiry Experience Tracker research as a result of a special offer made available through the 2021 BUILA Conference. The offer included mystery shopping of one international student persona. These universities were included in the sample for the US persona and were not included in the sample for the other personas.