



Service Excellence!

Dr Radka Newton, a senior teaching fellow at Lancaster University Management School in the United Kingdom, published an article this year, titled, **Universities need to make student experience a priority**. (Newton, 2019)

Universities are people businesses! This is according to Dr Newton who asserts that. Universities offer a service in a highly competitive global environment, and as such students see themselves as customers. Today's students are informed and discerning, and just as in any other sector, students expect a high level of service and expect brands to build relationships with them. Bearing this in mind, the author is suggesting that the student experience may be just as important as enforcing academic standards and assessments. Institutions must continually improve and evolve to meet the ever changing needs of the customer in order to maintain a competitive advantage.

In the article the author highlights the importance of listening to the needs of the student, as students “..expect to be partners in the process rather than subordinates”. To this end, the author felt this could be accomplished by trying to answer the question, '**How can we better understand the lived reality of our students and the challenges they face?**' From her research, the author suggests that the questions a student asks, may not be what they are really asking, and that the approach to improving the student experience is the ability to look behind the questions and demands, to the real needs. The author offered the following case in point:

In one of the service design projects, that addressed the low levels of up-take for career support, the students were asked to map out their learning journey and identify their most important moments, together with their thoughts and feelings. The results were surprising, in that the students' feedback was not on the services offered but rather on the challenges and distractions they faced, such as, their struggles with the first assignment. This led to a revision of the institution's support service, to become more sympathetic to student needs and experiences.



When I read this article, I felt it resonated with the student-centred practices followed at Da Vinci, in particular, the author's comment that students "...expect to be partners in the process rather than subordinates", as Da Vinci's brand promise is to co-create reality with the student.

Da Vinci staff are there to ensure that the learning journey for the student is a remarkable one. At the start of the learning journey every student is allocated a Programme Convener (PCon) and the PCon will walk the learning journey with the student right through to graduation. The PCon is always available to offer a sympathetic ear and provide the necessary support and assistance when required. This remarkable service is not limited to the PCons but displayed by all Da Vinci staff, underpinned by a 'Purple Cow' culture. This culture is based on Seth Godin's book on remarkability (Godin, 2004). Da Vinci staff are always looking for ways to enhance the student experience. A Da Vinci student is not a number - within a very short period of time every student is known by name. As additional support, every student benefits from a quarterly consultation with our student support specialist, who assists the student to plan their studies and address challenges. The student may also just need a listening ear, as we understand that as a distance learning student, it is not easy to juggle the demands of home, work and studies.

To monitor the level of service The Institute is providing and to improve our offerings, a student, when submitting each and every assignment, is required to give feedback on the various aspects of both the Teaching and Learning, and the Design component of the module.

Notwithstanding the above, the Da Vinci staff are not complacent and continually strive to demonstrate remarkability.

Bibliography

Godin, S., 2004. *Purple Cow*. [Online]

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