



## **Applicant Decision Making - Research Findings**

**Paul Tebbutt, Central Registry**

Research was undertaken to gain a better understanding of non-mature applicant decision making. The research was undertaken by means of questionnaires administered at visit days and at enrolment and were supplemented by focus group discussions. The research suggests that ultimately the success of recruitment for Nene College may depend on the quality of student experience and on student satisfaction.

### **Findings**

It is evident that Nene College has some significant strengths, particularly its pleasant campus environment and good quality campus facilities. It is also clear that its lack of university status is a major weakness. However, having said this, it seems that course availability and content may often be decisive.

The research found that word of mouth has a powerful influence on application and enrolment; 30% of applicants and 50% of enrolling students were found to know a Nene College student or alumnus. This indicates that current of past students are a powerful source of word of mouth recommendation and are important in generating applications and critically important in promoting enrolment. The research indicates that recommendation counters the College's lack of university status by enhancing the reputation of the college and the evaluation of other factors which seem to be linked to status such as Library and IT facilities.

Contact with the College during the application process was also found to be important. Experience of the college environment with its quality buildings and green site were found to be important as was friendly and efficient contact with administrative staff, tutors and students. Both aspects come together in the Visit Days which clearly influence the decision to accept an offer.

Ability to obtain information with regard to the College was found to influence decision making with those gaining more information being more likely to accept an offer. In addition to this it was found that provision of information can be used for post decision reinforcement and counter 'second thoughts'. It might be suggested that provision of information at critical times may be influential.

## **First polling booths for Nene**

For the first time, Nene housed sufficient students on Park campus to deserve its own polling booth. Members of the local Labour group, including Lee Jameson, a second year BA (Hons) Law student nominated themselves to take an exit poll. Hoping for a bigger student turnout than the last election, when, it was alleged, only 26 students cared enough to vote, they had luckily exceeded this by 10am. Final numbers of voting students are still to come, but 160 (slightly over 10% of resident students) had voted by 2.30. Lee's assessment from earlier canvassing, was that between 30-40% would vote. Of the students canvassed, over 50% had said they would not vote, citing lack of interest in politics, lack of student representation at national level and lack of interest fullstop. It was felt, particularly by Lee's companions John Craig and Mark Bolar, both sixth formers in Northampton schools, to be something of a chicken and egg situation, in that an increase in the numbers of young politicians would encourage more students to vote, but only the use of the student vote would encourage politicians to come up with student-oriented policies.

The lack of political interest traditionally displayed at Nene was well illustrated by the turnout of 8 people at a meeting held on campus by Tony Marlow. Only two students attended, one of whom was an active member of the Labour Party.



Lee Jameson (r) with John Craig (l) and Mark Bolar outside Nene's first ever polling booth

It was found that applicants view pass rates as the most important indicator of institutional quality with graduate employment a clear second.\* This suggests that success in these areas might prove important if applicants begin to make use of data being made available. In the meantime research suggests that applicants may use environment, grades and reputation as quality indicators. Improving employment prospects was the predominant reason given for entry into Higher Education and some concern was expressed with respect to how Higher Education College degrees would be regarded by employers.

The research found indications that applicants self-select themselves accepting offers which match their academic ability. This suggests that setting entry grade requirements will influence how many applicants accept an offer as well as the calibre of the applicants. Practical experience within the College suggests that there may be an envelope within which to place an offer (8-14 points) with grade requirements outside this envelope discouraging acceptance.

Evidence was found to suggest that Nene College's market falls into three segments with differing concerns. One segment includes less academically able students from a wide geographic area for whom grade requirements are an important factor in choice. These students look for good campus environment with sufficient halls on campus, social and sports and facilities and a good range of courses. The second important group appear to be more local students for whom the proximity of the College is important. These students are less concerned with campus environment and social facilities, but are more concerned with Library and IT facilities and the reputation of the College. For these students, grade requirements are less important suggesting they are academically more able. There is perhaps a third group of students who are possibly more academically able students from a wide geographic area who are concerned with reputation, status, IT and Library facilities and research/teaching rating; this group is less concerned with grades and is less likely to accept an offer from Nene College. Cutting across these groups are gender differences; males appear to be more concerned with sport and social facilities whereas females are more concerned with reputation, campus, a safe environment, range of courses and course content.

\*The tables in the THES (Friday 23 May) should not be taken as an accurate indication of the College's pass rates as the figures are based on the number of graduates as a percentage of the total undergraduate population and not on the percentage of students failing to complete their courses.

*Nene's recruitment indicators for the academic year are increasingly positive. The ratio of applicants to places has increased from 3 : 1 in 1995/96 to 3.7 : 1 in 1996/97.*

*Likewise, firm acceptances have increased from 2082 in 1996 to a predicted 2200 this year.*

## STUDENT *News*

### Fashion student wins top design award

Yet more credits are chalked up to Nene's Fashion Department with a winner in the Cancer Research Campaign Recycled Fashion competition for the second year running. 1st year BA Fashion student Emma Bassnett created a dress from unwanted jeans which won her a work placement with Vivienne Westwood, grande dame of British designers. A truly deserving winner, Emma is by all accounts a thoroughly pleasant, competent and hard working student. And just to prove that the Fashion department expects high standards across the board, six of the ten designs selected for the final catwalk were designed by Nene students. As a final coup, there is talk of Nene's hosting the event next year. Many congratulations to all involved.



*Wonderbra' model Caprice displays Emma's talents*

## STAFF *News*

### Obituary

### Paul Johnson

Many of you will already know of the sudden death of Paul Johnson during the Easter break following a short illness and subsequent operation. Those of his colleagues who were able to, attended his funeral service with family and friends on April 15 at the Christadelphian Meeting Room in Northampton.

Paul joined Learning Resources in February 1995 in a new post as the language support technician and quickly established an important role in this area of work where his personal contribution and commitment was highly valued by all users. At the same time, he played a considerable part in the wider activities of Learning Resources where he also demonstrated a rare ability to genuinely value and represent the 'customer' point of view and indeed gently chided those colleagues who might occasionally have lost sight of this.

He has been, and will be, missed by all his colleagues and those who knew him in the course of his work throughout the College.

*Mark Edwards, Media Services*

# Nene Logos for PC Users

For all you long-suffering people who have been wrestling with the difficulties of getting the Corporate logo onto memos, leaflets etc, there is good news. With the help of IT Services you can now have the logo added to your word processing programme as a Macro. If you have found difficulty resizing the logo to fit available space the Macro overcomes this problem. Because there are different versions of Word Perfect and Word in use throughout the College it is necessary for the Macro to be installed in your programme as a customised item. When installed you will have a Macro logo located in your menu bar and you simply activate it when you want the logo to appear on the document you are working on.

If you would like to have it installed, please contact Rob Howe on ext. 2483 if you are based at Park Campus or Beryl Lewis on ext. 3134 if you are based at Avenue Campus.

John Rawsthorne  
Corporate Affairs Coordinator

**PS it really does work!**

# Staff Football v KUS

A strangely juvenile Kingsthorpe Upper School team challenged the cream of Nene to a 'friendly' football match on 2 April. Ignoring for the most part the lure of the Pavilion Bar adjoining the pitch, the match was played out in fine sunshine on rock-hard ground. Consequently much of the play was at head height, but a group of academics with their heads in the air and feet far from the ground provoked no comment. Curiously. From the kick off, tough forward play and neatly worked passing from the KUS side was well matched by brave attacking from Nene. Unfortunately, Nene's 'forward at all costs' policy was to prove so risky that twenty minutes into the match, KUS overtook the central defence somewhere around the halfway line and side stepped the charging goalkeeper, a vision in purple, to score (albeit, it is alleged, some 10 yards offside). Suitably riled, Nene dug in, halting the forward march of the KUS team with scorching tackles and solid defending. Regaining command of the game, Man of the Match Roger Dixon came galloping up to equalise from a corner. It's difficult to say whether it was the sheer class of the shot or the sun glinting off Roger's lily-white legs blinding the goalkeeper, but at 1-1, no-one was complaining. Knight and white charger in one.



*Mick Dowle in flight*

Continued hard and fast play saw a first half casualty in Richard 'all or nothing' Sanders, relieved of most of his skin through over-familiarity with unyielding ground. He limped gamely through the remainder of the match as referee. His place was taken by Mark Anderson who proved to be as gritty as he was swift, despite playing a strangely midfield looking

game for a nominal defender. The teams were well matched throughout the second half, with attacks on goal from both sides and a notable missed goal from two foot out which would have given Nene the lead. But that's football. Close calls on the Nene goal were successfully repelled and the team showed commendable stamina to hold youthful KUS to a draw. I have no doubt that they remain unbeaten champions in the post match drinking session in the SU.

A match is planned against Peterborough College staff soon to cement relations. Watch this space.



*back row (l to r) Mark Hampton, Ian Healy, Mick Dowle, Roger Dixon, Jamie Weatherston, Bob Payne, Jon Stevens, Mark Anderson. front row (l to r) Stuart Johnston, Mick Sumpter, Tony Westbury, Adrian Little, Duncan McCollin, Richard Sanders.*

## NCSU Announces Sponsorship Deal

Birmingham based property developers JJ Gallagher Ltd have undertaken a sponsorship deal with Nene's Athletic Union worth £12,500 over the next 5 years. The money will help greatly in developing health and safety in sport, kits, equipment and coaching. The Rowing Club, similarly, have received £3000 for a new boat and blades.

### Sport Questionnaire - Are you interested in Coaching?

Nene College Sports division, in partnership with the National Coaching Foundation (NCF) and Northamptonshire County Council (NCC), is developing a regional centre for coaching at Nene College. This will include sporting facilities, information technology/library services and courses. Both the NCF and NCC will be supporting this development and encouraging people with varying interests in sport/coaching to participate. To help the College develop a coaching centre which benefits all types of user, we would be grateful if you could take a little time to fill out this questionnaire.

1. Age      18-25      26-35      36-45      46-55      55+
2. Sex      Male                      Female
3. Occupational status? .....
4. In which sports do you wish to undertake a coaching course?  
.....
5. How would you use the coaching centre?  
  
IT/Library Resources      Sports Facilities      Coaching Courses
6. Is coaching something you would want to practice after undertaking a course at the College?  
  
Yes                      No  
  
In which sports? .....
7. Do you practice coaching at the present time?  
  
Yes                      No  
  
In which sport? .....
- To what level .....
8. Do you hold any coaching qualifications at present?  
  
Yes                      No  
  
Which qualifications do you hold?  
.....

Thank you for filling out this questionnaire.  
Please return completed forms to the Sports Hall (Park Campus),  
Technicians Office by 9 June

## NEWS in BRIEF

- From a member of the Senior Management Group in response to rumours of Nene hosting a Game Fair during the conference 'open' season. "Excellent news - please encourage them to shoot the squirrels!"
- Nene Staff can avail themselves of a 20% discount on tickets for the Royal Theatre's performance of Ibsens's 'Ghosts' from 10 - 25 October. Discounted tickets cost £11.25 between Monday and Thursday and £11.66 on Friday. They can be obtained from the Royal Theatre Box Office on Northampton 32533. Nene College ID will be required. Nene has sponsored the play and will receive a mention on all publicity material.

## What's on Avenue Gallery

- 2-25 June Selection of work by School of Art lecturers
- 4-17 Aug Art exhibition tracing the history of hot air ballooning to the present day.
- 6-24 Oct Printed Fabrics, by Simon Clarke, works based on drawings and colour from the Cornish coastline. The exhibition explores printed textile techniques and how they respond to different substrates.

### NENE News

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