



# Reimagining and Redesigning Recruitment at the **University of Portsmouth**



## Key Stats

University of **Portsmouth**

16

EVENTS

9,376

REGISTRANTS

642

1:1 APPOINTMENTS

394

SESSIONS

## Introduction

The University of Portsmouth is a university in the UK with more than 25,000 students offering a variety of degrees for both undergraduates and postgraduates. The recruitment team has spent the last 10 years perfecting their in-person recruitment programming to appeal to incoming students across demographic lines. But when COVID hit, they were forced to shift not only their event modality, but also their mindset – with only two months to make the transition.

“We had spent a decade building an in-person recruitment programme that we were really proud of,” recalls Kate Dunstone, Postgraduate and CPD Recruitment Manager. After the pandemic arrived, “We were thrown into the deep end for how to deliver recruitment events virtually.” Sophie Dear, Head of Marketing and Campaigns, adds: “Our process started in April with the lockdown, but we had to deliver our first open day at the end of June. So we didn’t

have much time to research, procure, and deliver.” At the time, the number of providers were limited so the University of Portsmouth chose one that seemed to meet the majority of requirements. But as the year progressed and more of the team wanted to do virtual events, they realised the product was quite limited. “We needed a solution and contract that was flexible enough to accommodate a broader set of use cases,” recalls Dear.

After going through another procurement process, this time with more rigorous requirements to accommodate expanding usage across departments, the team

realised that Cvent’s Attendee Hub offered a flexible, customisable, secure, and professional solution – and unlike other platforms, could provide a customisable experience their audience could relate to.

By adopting the Attendee Hub, the University of Portsmouth took their recruitment events online with ease. And once they made the transition, they were surprised to discover that the Hub provided a flexible, user-centered experience that didn’t just replicate their current offerings, but also offered new opportunities for growth.



## A Customisable Platform for a Diverse Student Body

Because they were moving both undergraduate and postgraduate recruitment events online, the University of Portsmouth needed a platform that was flexible and customisable, allowing the institution to appeal to three very different audiences: secondary education students, parents, and adult learners.

"It was really challenging to find a solution that met the requirements of the whole department," says Dear. "We needed IT security for students under 16... one-to-one appointments for post-graduates. And for our undergraduate events, it's this whole exhibition with lots of booths... So there's lots of different requirements there, and there were very few software

providers in the virtual event space that were able to meet those requirements."

Cvent's Attendee Hub offered the security the university needed, without losing sight of user experience. With features like Language Management that allowed Portsmouth to customise verbiage in the Hub based on the student population and event, the platform easily accommodated the unique needs of the university's multiple audiences. After their first virtual event, the success of the platform revealed the untapped potential of online programming – and transformed how the recruitment team thinks about what an event can, and should, be.

For the University of Portsmouth's first virtual "open day" event for incoming students, **70%** of registered students ended up attending. This was a huge success, especially considering that the industry benchmark is a **40%** conversion rate.

## Reaching New Audiences With Flexible Scheduling

Unlike in-person events, where travel expenses and work schedules can get in the way, the flexibility of the Attendee Hub allowed the University of Portsmouth team to reach more students than ever before. “By going virtual, we have the ability to reach more prospective students across time zones and more flexibility to offer more events during times that wouldn’t have been conducive for face-to-face,” Dunstone explains.

Offering flexible sessions also made it easier for busy parents to be a part of the recruitment experience – without sacrificing work hours. “We

ran sessions for parents as well in the evening, and they were really well-attended because parents had access to the content after potentially being at work,” says Lesley Anne Neville, UK Student Recruitment Manager. “It enabled us to put together an event that targeted both students and parents.”

As for postgraduates, Dunstone reports that: “Our guests have shared that their virtual experience has exceeded their expectations, from the ability to connect via one-to-one appointments with course leaders to the ability to access the information after the event. This has

The screenshot displays the 'Uni Week Live!' event interface. At the top, a banner reads 'UNI WEEK LIVE!' and '18-20 November 2020'. Below the banner, a navigation bar includes 'My Event', 'All Sessions', 'My Schedule', and 'Information Booths'. The main content area is divided into several sections: a 'Welcome Hannah' message with a 'Have feedback?' survey link; a 'Live and Upcoming' section featuring a 'Welcome to Uni Week Live! LIVE' video and a 'Join session' button; a 'Your Information' section with event registration details for Hannah Farrell; and a 'Try our personal statement quiz' promotion. The right sidebar shows 'Event Details' with a photo of a smiling woman and a 'Visit event website' link.



been an absolute gold star for what we're trying to do from an attendee experience perspective." The Hub's virtual features, like simplified one-to-one bookings, offer a more personalised experience than is possible at a face-to-face event.

Finally, the flexibility of Cvent's online platform supports prospective

students even after the event is over. Students have the ability to access information weeks later, with a library of online content they can reference if they have questions during this important decision-making process.

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— **Kate Dunstone, Postgraduate and CPD Recruitment Manager, University of Portsmouth**



## Moving to a Hybrid Future

After switching to Cvent's Attendee Hub, the Portsmouth team realised that while there will always be a place for in-person programming, moving events online offers new opportunities for accessibility, personalisation, and connection. "The combination of online and in-person would be really, really powerful," says Neville.

When the university opens back up, Dear, Dunstone, and Neville have plans to transition to a hybrid format that

leverages the best pieces of both worlds – in-person and digital. Ideally, Dear says, "We would run a series of small student-led campus tours, so they have the chance to visit the campus... but the conversations and all the content with their tutors and other staff would happen virtually in the platform." With the success of the Attendee Hub, the University of Portsmouth intends to keep virtual events as a key part of their portfolio for their future event programme.

Cvent's Attendee Hub is a unique online events solution designed for all industry types including higher education. With a focus on security, accessibility, and flexibility, the Attendee Hub offers event managers in alumni relations, development, recruitment, and more to connect with their audiences online and customise the user experience.

**Learn more at: <https://www.cvent.com/uk/education-solutions>**