Hulda Fridriksdottir

How to stand out from the crowd over Clearing

22nd February 2022

Presented by...

Hulda Friðriksdóttir

Head of Client Services

- Joined The Student Room in 2017
- Oversees the Client Services team which is responsible for end-to-end campaign delivery of millions of ads, emails and engagement products every year
- Share insight-led feedback to maximise ROI for our partners

Meet panelist…

Oscar Larsen

Client Services Executive

- First point of contact for current and upcoming campaigns, ensuring they deliver on time.
- Administering the Official Reps by running regular training sessions and providing support on site.
- A keen interest in advertising and is looking to be involved in upcoming TSR campaigns.

Will be here to answer any questions in the Q & A or chat

Before we begin

Housekeeping:

- We will share the deck and recording with you afterwards.
- Please put any questions about the content in the Q&A section.
- Any technical issues or general questions/feedback please pop them in to the chat.
- If you think of any questions or would like to share any thoughts after the webinar please email us:
  hulda.f@thestudentroom.com
  oscar.larsen@thestudentroom.com

Agenda

- **Overview of Clearing on TSR**
- **Creative review**
  - Display
  - Email
  - SMS
- **Tips to stand out in Clearing 2022**
- **Questions, comments and feedback**

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Overview of Clearing on TSR

Clearing 2021

Overview of Clearing 2021 on TSR

What did 2021 applicants think of Clearing?

Clearing 2021 survey:

We asked students who went through Clearing last year and received comms from us how they felt about a range of topics including:

- Usefulness of emails and SMSs
- Frequency of communication
- What they'd like to see more of
- What we could do better

We received **246 responses** and these were the most common themes…

Overview of Clearing 2021 on TSR

What did 2021 applicants think of Clearing?

Common themes:

- **Social proofing** was an important factor in decision making.
- Students asked for more information on **preparing for uni**, with some suggesting a “survival guide”.
- Students asked for more help with **uni accommodation**, especially with such short notice.
- Students wanted **student finance** advice.
- We also had students saying they would like more **mental health assistance** as Clearing is such a stressful time.

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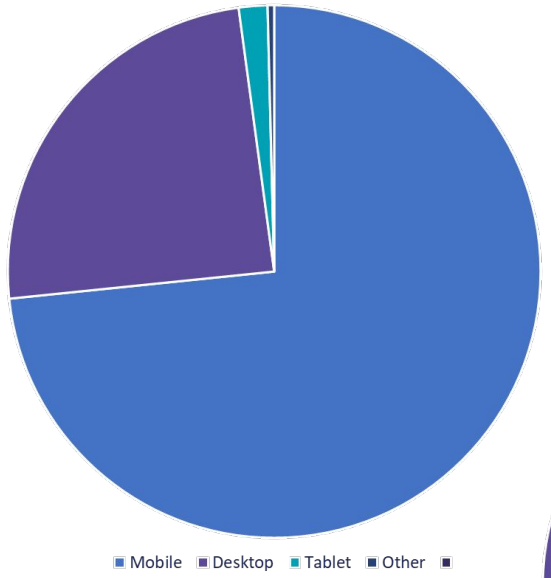
Creative review

Clearing 2021

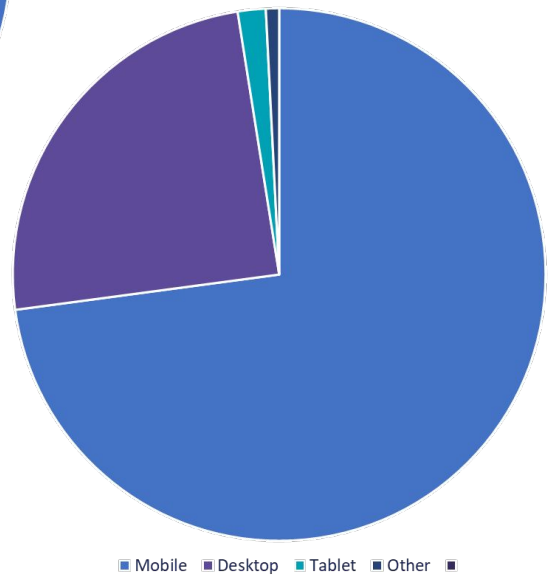
Creative review

Device ownership

DAILY USERS



SESSIONS



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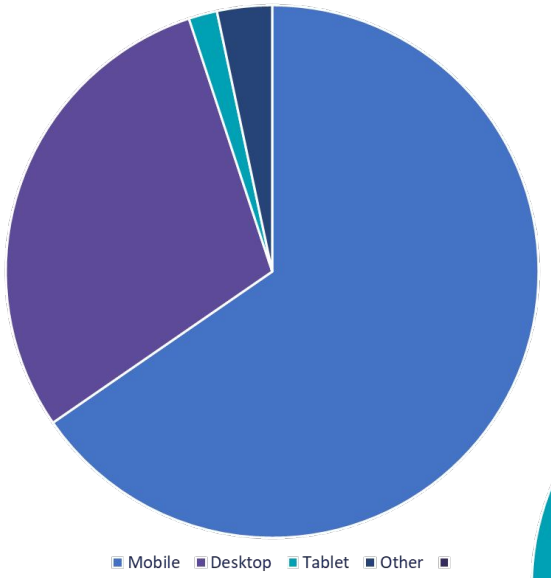
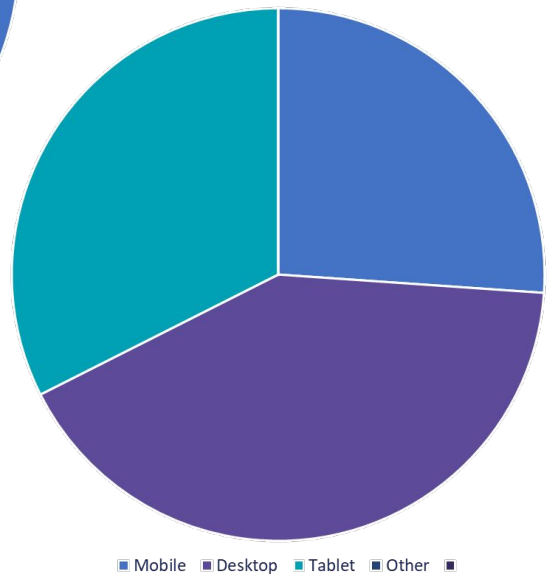


AVG SESSION DURATION



Display
Clearing 2021

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Display - Clearing 2021

TSR in numbers

+76m
impressions delivered across all campaigns

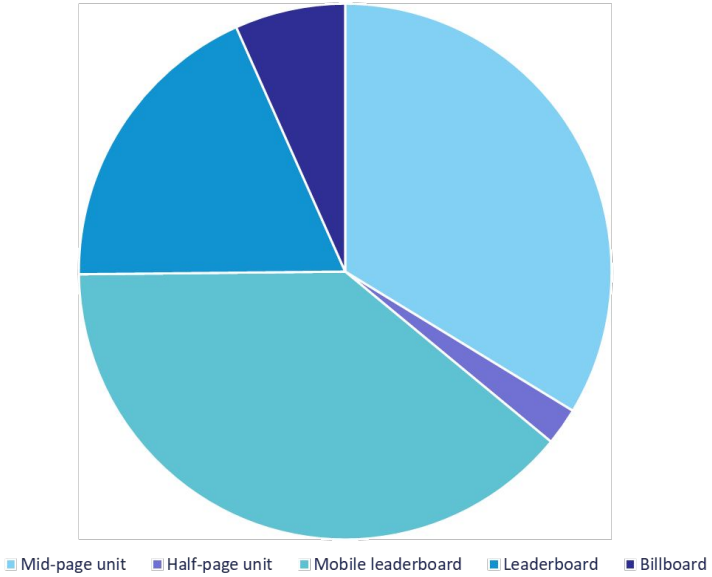
40,477
clicks tracked across all campaigns

224,543
conversions tracked across all campaigns

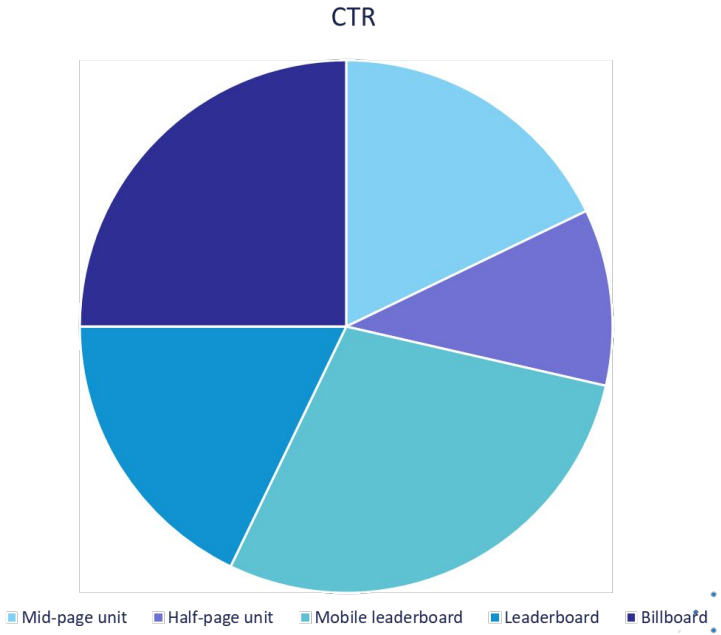
Display - Clearing 2021

Ad unit ownership

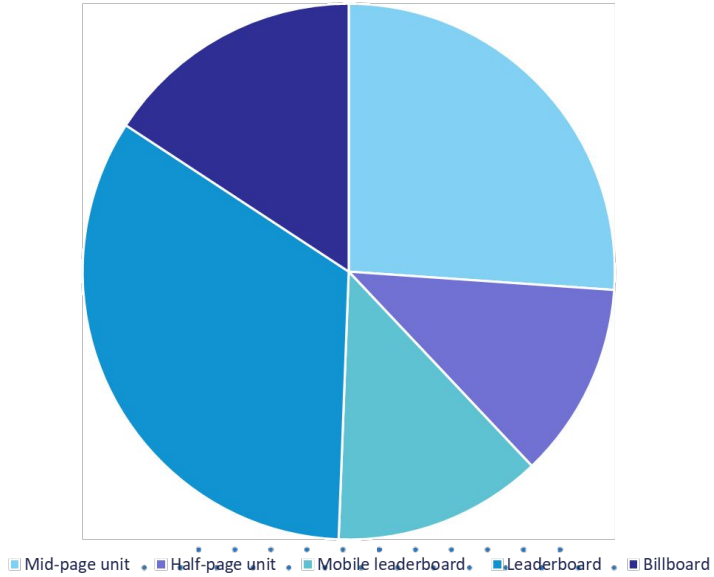
Total impressions



CTR



Conversion rate



Display - Clearing 2021

Layout

For the best performing creatives in 2021 the layout was split in the middle

1. Logo - message - CTA
2. Message - logo - CTA

The use of **real-life imagery continues to decline** and only one creative had people featured in a single frame of a five frame gif.

All top performing creatives had the CTA in the bottom right corner and made to look like their own button overlaid on the creative.

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Display - Clearing 2021

Colours

Data taken from sample

Display - Clearing 2021

Messaging

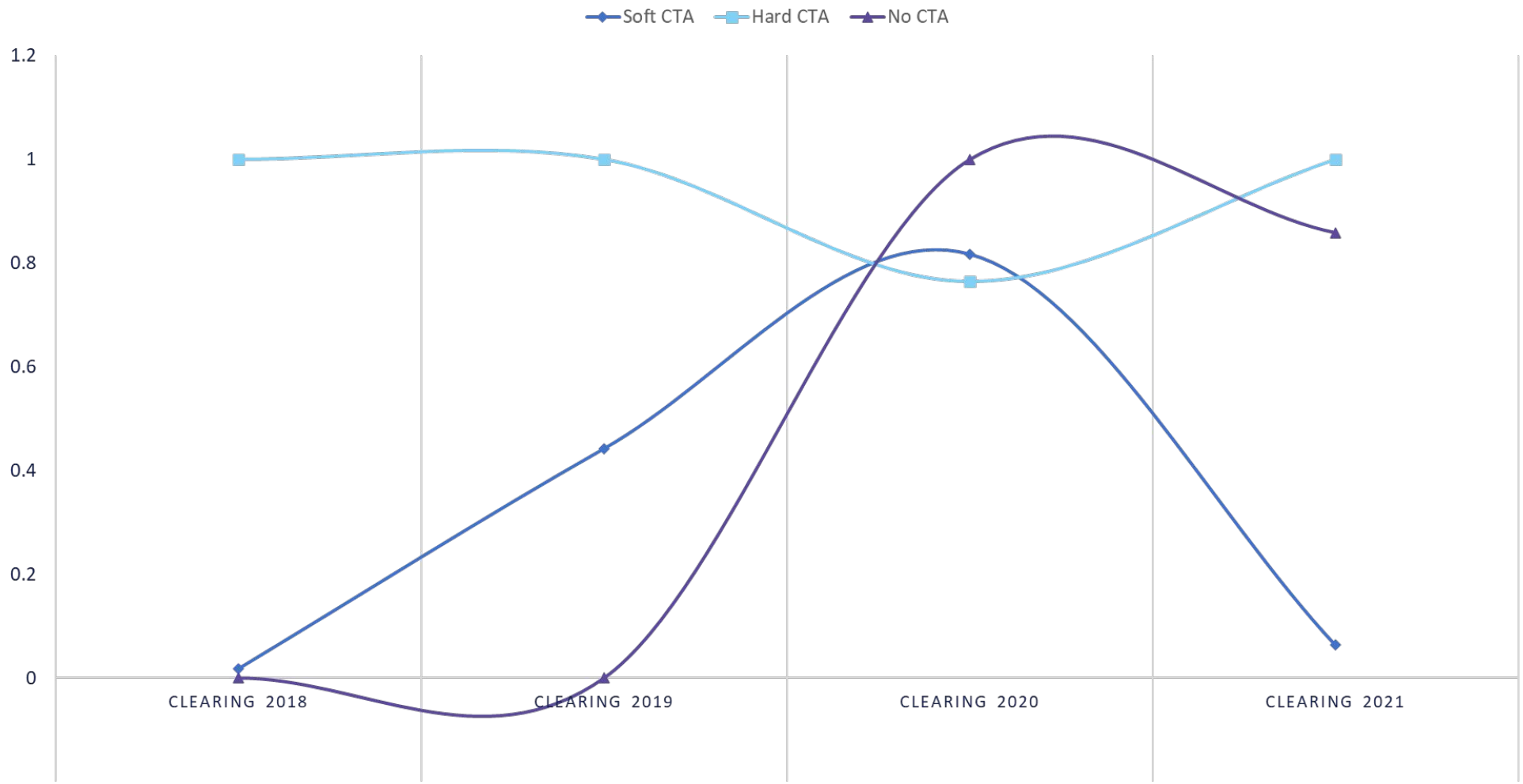
We had some great campaigns in Clearing 2021 and the best performing ones had these common themes:

- Mentions of the **future.**
- Underlying tone of **empowerment** for students.
- Conveying **the value** of the course.

The **best performing creative** in all of Clearing 2021 mentioned **mental health support** offered to students.

Display - Clearing 2021

Call to action (CTA) trends



Data taken from sample and represented based on the equation that the highest CTR that year =1

Display - Clearing 2021

What to avoid for Clearing 2022

Examining the worst performing creatives some common themes were found, some of which have been declining in performance over the last few years and some which were new:

- **Real life imagery**.
- Serif fonts.
- **Impersonal, un-inspirational or factual** information.
- Creatives **not fit for the size**/device.

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Email
Clearing 2021

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Email - Clearing 2021

TSR in numbers

428,977
total email opens

32.5%
highest recorded CTO

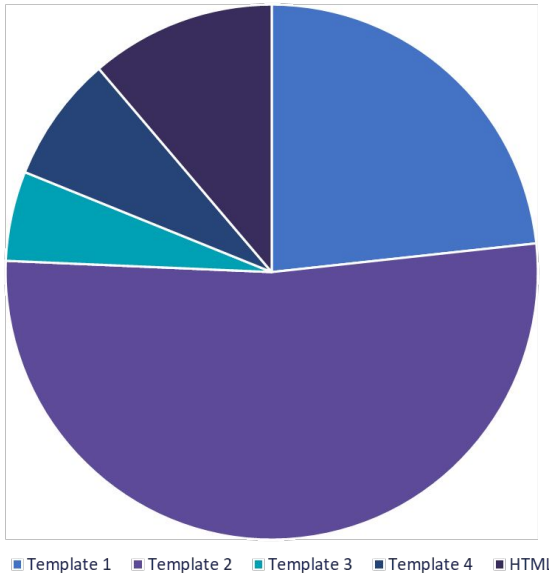
+1.3m
emails sent

14,511
total clicks on campaign links

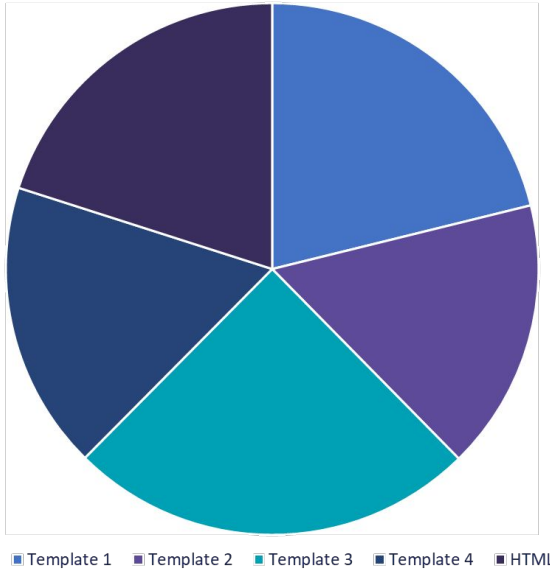
Email - Clearing 2021

Template ownership

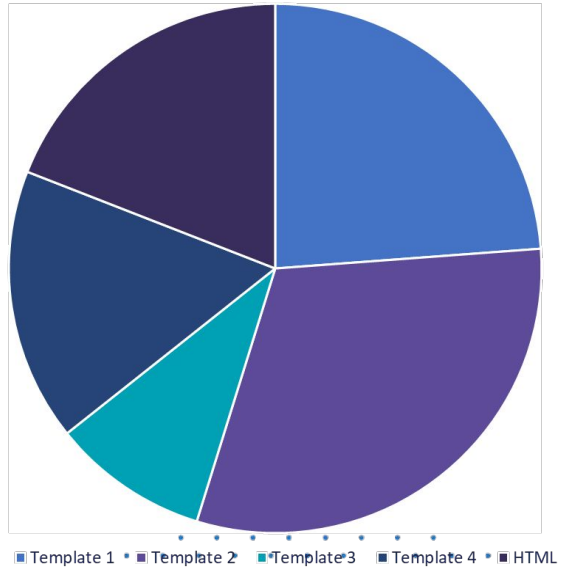
Send amount



Unique open rate



Unique Click to Send rate



Email - Clearing 2021

Subject lines

These are the types of subject lines we saw in Clearing 2021. For the most part the subject lines were:

- **Factual** about offering.
- Not emotionally driven.

They were predominantly short and:

- The **Uni name** was often mentioned
- **Courses** were mentioned
- Mentions of **time**
- **Clearing** mentioned

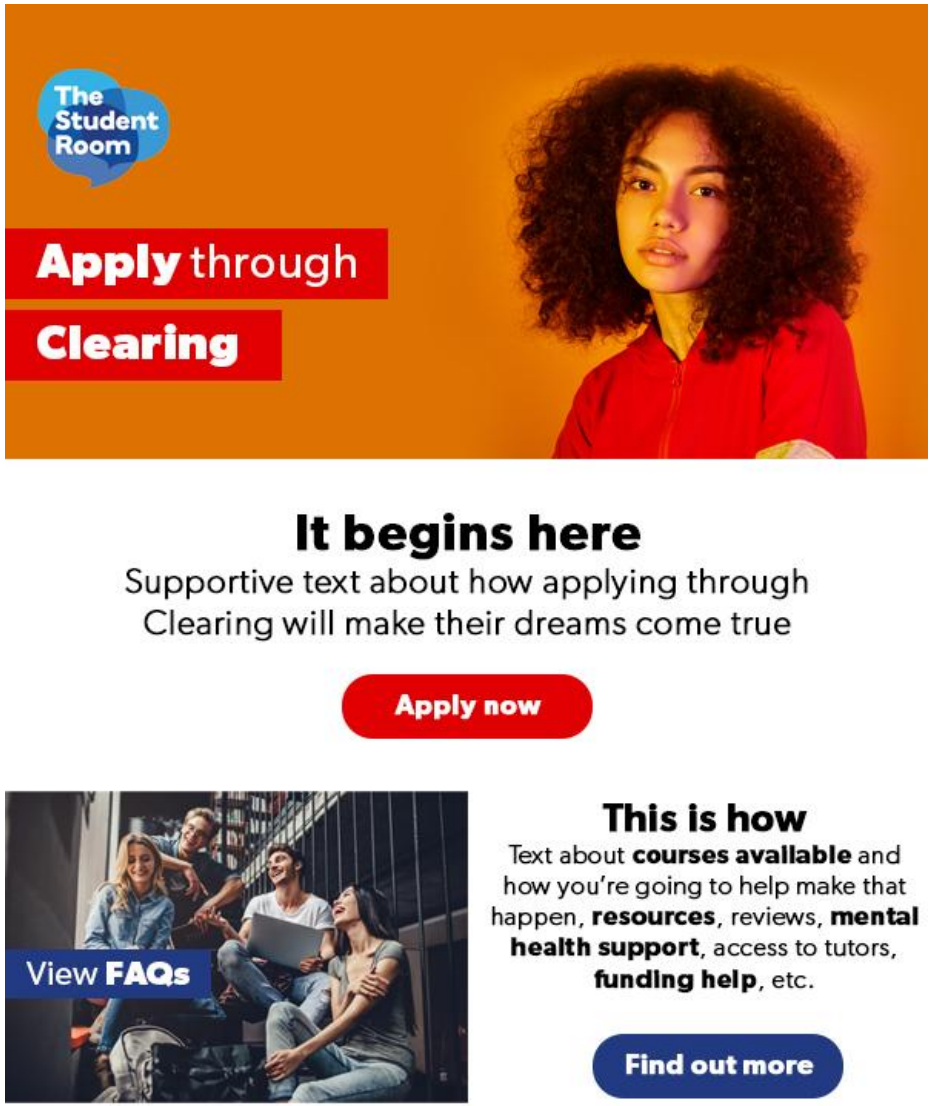
Extraordinary starts now
Clearing at X Uni: x course
Are you ready for tomorrow?
X course **is fully funded**
Clearing spaces available
There's still time to apply to X Uni
Start a x course **degree at** X Uni
X course **at** X Uni
Clearing places in x course
Top uni you haven't discovered

Email - Clearing 2021

Imagery

Contrary to display **real life image heavy creatives are preferred** in emails. The top performing creatives had these common themes:

- **Boxes with text overlaid** on header and sub section images.
- **CTAs** included in the images.
- Lots of images with **people looking straight ahead** with variation of interesting **graphics and illustrations.**
- **Appropriate images** included in sub-sections such as laboratories for sciences etc.



Email - Clearing 2021

Messaging

The best performing emails in 2021 had these common themes:

- **Short** and to the point.
- **Informative/step by step** copy of how to apply.
- **Inclusive** tone throughout.
- **Courses** explained and laid out clearly.
- Promoted **Clearing FAQs.**
- **Accommodation** options explained.

Email - Clearing 2021

CTAs

Similarly to 2019 & 2020, the top performing emails had a variety of CTAs with the most common themes being:

- A **wrap-around of hard CTAs**
- Most popular hard CTA was **‘Apply now’**
- Most popular soft CTA was **‘View courses’**
- Lots of **’find out more’** and **‘vacancies’** mentions in top soft CTAs

Email - Clearing 2021

What to avoid for Clearing 2022

When looking at the worst performing emails from Clearing 2021, a few themes became apparent and should be avoided:

- Images that **do not contain people.**
- Large images that **exceed mobile screen** size.
- **Complicated or inaccessible** language and grammar.
- Using **unsupportive tone.**
- **Soft CTAs** in header image.
- Long copy in CTA buttons.

SMS
Clearing 2021

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SMS - Clearing 2021

TSR in numbers

88,367
SMSs delivered
across all campaigns

3,855
clicks tracked across
all campaigns

30.89%
CTR
highest tracked
across all campaigns

SMS - Clearing 2021

Messaging

Short piece of text that packs a big punch.

The types of SMSs that did well in Clearing 2021 contained information quite similar to email subject lines, including:

- **Uni** names
- **Course** names
- Available **places**
- And of course, **Clearing**

Mix of CTAs, with most popular SMSs containing either a **hard or no CTA**

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Tips to stand out in Clearing 2022

Poll:

How is your Clearing 2022 campaign coming along?

Tips to stand out in Clearing 2022

How is the student community currently feeling?

Students have faced an **unprecedented level of disruption** over the last few years, with this current group of Year 13's experiencing the most so far. With no experience of a GCSE exam season, and significant disruption to their schooling it's likely that **many will feel ill-prepared for the challenges and decisions** they will have to make from now till August.

With little previous experience of what is to come during the A-level exam season, students are also being expected to tackle a brand-new way of revising and learning as Advance Information is given out for the majority of their subjects. Our recent survey showed that **67% of students did not understand how best to use this Advance Information to tackle their revision**.

With schools still feeling a significant resource pinch due to the ongoing staffing challenges because of Covid-19, it is often the **auxiliary student support such as careers advice or university application support, that is the first to be reduced.**

Tips to stand out in Clearing 2022

How is the student community currently feeling?

All of these circumstances coupled with the steady climbdown of historically high grades over the last few years means that **this cohort of Year 13's may face the toughest challenges of the pandemic to date**. They are likely to face **huge amounts of pressure and anxiety** and will be seeking out **genuine support and guidance** more than ever before.

So what can you do?

Highlight the support you're able to offer students throughout your campaign

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Give evidence of social proofing wherever possible

Address the issues young people are facing - head on

Be factual whilst also being inspirational

Remember that there is potentially a very anxious person at the end of your campaign - tailor it accordingly

Mobile first design for all of your creatives

Minimal use of real life imagery in display and heavy use in emails

Gifs would be a great addition to emails

Avoid complicated messaging - make your campaign accessible to everyone

What is your why? It should be easily understood by prospective students

Be certain that how you currently convey your USP translates to young people

Set your ethos early on and use them to govern all decisions

Your audience is savvy and will see through any insincerity

If you were to make a £30,000+ investment during the most stressful time of your life - what would you want?

Any questions, comments or feedback?

Thank you!

Join us again: tsrmatters.com/webinars

And stay in touch:
hulda.f@thestudentroom.com
and you can also find me on **LinkedIn**