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#HELOANWNI

HELOA

North West &
Northern Ireland

Practitioners Guide to Working in Higher Education



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Welcome from the UK Chair

Hello and welcome to the fantastic group that is HELOA North West and Northern Ireland (NW & NI for short). You are now part of a community of Higher Education professionals, whose mission it is to help support students in making informed decisions.

By getting involved with the NW & NI you will have the chance to support your development and enhance the information, advice and guidance you provide for prospective students and their supporters.

How will we do this? The answer is pretty simple: by working together, sharing our knowledge, insight and by asking a lot of questions. You and your colleagues are what drive us forward and keeps us relevant. We are a hive of expertise, from entry roles to Directors. It's really important to note that our new members are an essential part of what makes us work so well and have kept us going for over 30 years. It is your questions, thoughts and ideas that make us reflect on what we do, how we do it and make sure we keep on developing.

I would highly recommend joining in our conversations on Facebook at HELOA UK Official, look out for the digest each fortnight, and wherever possible attend your group meetings and national training events. There is always a lot going on and we work on many fronts, from best practice and professional development, through to sharing sector developments and engaging with key partners to support our mission. Now more than ever it's important to stay connected with each other and share our learning. No matter if we are working from home, the office or on the road, we always have friends on hand to help out.

I joined HELOA very shortly after getting my role in Higher Education and quickly realised how broad and useful HELOA is. The more you engage and contribute, the better it becomes. Once you build up a good understanding of HELOA do not shy away from getting involved in a variety of exciting roles that become available. We are here to share best practice and offer opportunities for professional development.

Whether this is your first role in Higher Education or you are new to this area, you are now part of a large, engaging and supportive community. I continue to be fascinated and impressed by our members and our work, and I hope you find being a member an equally positive experience.

Yours in collaboration



Jonny Atkinson
HELOA UK Chair





Who does HELOA work with?

Rebecca Hollington, Jack Clare & Fiona Curry

HELOA Partnerships Team

The simple answer is 'any organisation that plays a role in supporting students' progression to Higher Education'. Our aim is to work with third-party organisations (be these associations, statutory bodies, commercial organisations) to develop mutually beneficial and meaningful partnerships.

Our relationships support the aims of the HELOA strategic plan to deliver a tangible membership benefit such as training sessions, shared practice or knowledge, membership discount, or income to HELOA to support in subsidising training costs for members.

We focus our partnership activity into either Partners, Sponsors or Collaborators to ensure that we are clear and consistent in our purpose and mission, and the expected benefits of working with these organisations. All of the organisations we work with are integral to our mission as an association, and you can find out more about our work on the HELOA website.

We have three key partners who we like to think are the 'pyramid' to providing a wealth of knowledge and understanding of the HE sector as well as ensuring we have a strong voice in the products, services and activities they undertake in engaging students and their influencers.



Student Loans Company



UCAS

The Student Loans Company: provide us with lots of information and updates on all things money- you might have seen them at your group meetings or our training events. It's a complex, yet important part of our members' knowledge to ensure that students feel like they know their loans from their grants and breakdown a key barrier to HE progression. Our members also have a valued role in feeding back to the SLC to ensure that they are producing the right information and events based on feedback from students themselves.

The Student Room Group: support us in understanding more about student sentiment and shifts in behaviour. Over the last couple of years, more and more of our members have found themselves providing essential pastoral support to students who, faced with increasing pressures in education and home life, may turn to our lovely members. TSR share essential information on student wellbeing and mental health support, as well as engaging our members with insights on student views.

UCAS: the cherry on our partnerships cake is UCAS. We work closely with UCAS at both a strategic and an operational level through our two main working groups: the Events and the Product Development Groups. UCAS recognises the integral part our members have in supporting and guiding students through the consideration and application process to HE, and (therefore) interacting with UCAS services and events. We provide advice and guidance to UCAS on appropriately engaging students, and they share data insights and opportunity to shape their future products and services.

We do lots more, and work with lots of amazing organisations to ensure that we support you, our members, to in turn support potential students to make informed decisions about their future education.

Yours in partnership.



My year in a Student Recruitment Team

Holly Parker

Year in Industry Placement Student, Liverpool John Moores University

Your first year is such a new and exciting experience. Working in HE is very fast paced so the time will fly by and you learn a lot along the way. When I began work within Outreach, everything was completely new to me. Although I was a student at the university, there was a lot of information I still had to learn and the prospect of attending events on my own was quite daunting to me.

It's really important to shadow colleagues during your first month so you get a good feel for what different events should be like. If you're unable to do this, be sure to introduce yourself to members from other universities because you will see them all the time and it's so comforting to see a familiar face at an event when you're finally doing them on your own. If you're struggling to set your stand up as well everyone is so helpful, just don't be scared to ask for a hand. The events that you go to with colleagues are a good opportunity to get to know everyone and build good relationships, so try to do as many as you can with other team members.

I wish I knew when I first started that it's okay not to know everything at once. The more events you do, the confidence in your knowledge grows, it just comes with time. At the beginning, if somebody asks you a question that you really don't know the answer to, you can always say 'I'm not sure but I will double check for you' and then ask a colleague or refer to your university's website or prospectus. It's important not to panic! Students are usually really patient, and they will be patient with you when you are not 100% sure. It's better to give correct information and advice rather than trying to be quick in your responses.

It's also okay to say no to some events. Organisation and managing your time is such a big part of working in HE. When you travel across the UK you need to be sure there's no overlapping with events and that it's not too physically draining for you. Speak to colleagues about what their typical weeks look like, so you have an idea of when you may be doing too much. This is where the relationships that you've built with your team are vital because they will always try to help out and cover if they have the capacity, and vice versa. On the other hand, it's good for you to put yourself forward for events that may be out of your comfort zone and there's so many opportunities to do this within the sector. It's such a diverse, interesting and rewarding role. You'll always be on the move doing a wide variety of events so time flies very quickly. Try and make the most of it and be confident in your own abilities, it will come naturally to you in no time!





How important our roles are to universities

Jonny Parks

Student Recruitment Assistant, Lancaster University

A long time ago in a sports hall far far away...

You're into the last five minutes of your six-hour school fair. You look around, there are no more sandwiches left and yet, still a noticeable amount of vegetarian options. The sound of clattering banners begins to fill the sports hall and there's one minute to go. You're inching subtly towards the pile of empty cardboard boxes under the table, when you hear, 'I'm really interested in studying 'X', can you tell me more about the course and any entry requirements?' The internal monologue begins; 'I have a four-hour drive, I need to get going...I'm tired, should I give them our enquiries email?' But instead, you forget the clock, grab the prospectus and take as much time as you can. Admittedly it's been a while since I've stood in a school sports hall, but scenarios like this remind me why our roles are so important to the university and indeed, also to potential applicants.

Almost all course information can be found on a university website, with our prospectuses accessible online. Therefore, we have to ask, why did this student take their time to find your stall? For me the answer is obvious, as person to person interaction and individual engagement with university staff provides a level of reassurance which no webpage can fulfil. Indeed, the benefits of investing those extra ten minutes at the end of the day pays dividends in the long run. If a student leaves you feeling inspired, then maybe they will register for your open day, attend your next webinar and add your university as their firm choice.

From a recruitment perspective, it may be a numbers game, but our roles ensure the wider university never forgets each application is a student with aspirations. Now more frequently online, we continue to offer a friendly face at the beginning of a daunting pathway. We signpost, share course knowledge, inspire and promote the core values of our institutions. In a sense, we 'start the recruitment ball rolling' and open doors for a student's journey towards higher education.

Although it must be stressed our roles are not confined to the front lines and our skillsets are highly transferable. During this year's exceptionally busy clearing season, my team assisted the admissions department by answering calls and double-checking forms. At the beginning of lockdown, we immediately began collaborating with our marketing team to promote webinars and also worked closely with the faculties and events team during our online open days. As such, we are adaptable and capable of applying our expertise in other departments at times of great demand.

Some of us are working from home and others from the office and sometimes the 'lockdown blues' can make you feel detached from institution you work for. But if you're reading this, remember you're an important part of the team. Put the kettle on, raid the biscuit tin, join that Teams meeting and keep up the good work - you got this!



Supporting students from a Widening Participation background

Jessica Richmond & Shannen Dabson

Senior Coordinator at Future U & HE Progression Adviser at Shaping Futures

Meeting a diverse range of people is one of the many perks of working within the Higher Education (HE) sector, and this is especially true within Student Recruitment and Outreach teams. As we travel around the country attending schools, colleges, careers fairs and conferences, we are with people from all walks of life. In the world of Widening Participation (WP) there are numerous ways to define groups of people: BAME, SEN, Care Leaver, Low Participation Neighbourhood to name just a few. Whilst you may have heard these terms on the agenda of meetings, or in your institution's Access and Participation Plan (APP), it's not language we would use in everyday life, or terms that learners typically use to define themselves. So how can we use these classifications to provide support to the young people who we work with?

The first thing you can do is educate yourself. Knowing which groups fall under WP criteria and the support on offer from your institution is a great place to start. Typically, WP learners are identified as they are less likely to progress onto further education than their peers. University WP teams work with these learners to break down barriers and raise aspirations, with the aim of increasing participation and promoting social mobility. All HE practitioners should have to have an awareness of WP groups and the support your institution offers; this could be anything from mentoring programmes and specific projects to bursaries and contextual offers. It would also be useful to know of any external providers of WP support such as your local Uni Connect partnership. Keeping up-to-date on sector news, research and changes will also help you to feel more confident when engaging with WP learners. Wonkhe is a useful starting point as it offers a wealth of articles, events, podcasts and newsletters.

HE practitioners have a duty to provide support to learners from WP backgrounds and for many of us, this begins with outreach delivery. It is important to consider the diversity of our audience to ensure we do not make assumptions or snapshot judgements about the circumstances of those in the room. For example, it can be easy to slip in phrases like 'moving away from mum and dad' when talking about accommodation. Try to keep in mind that each person's home life will look slightly different and stick to more general terms unless you know more about the audience. It is also useful to mention additional support on offer for WP groups. For example, if you are talking about student finance, mention the opportunity to apply for Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), as there could be learners with hidden disabilities in the room that find the information beneficial. Learners might not tell you that they fall into one of the WP groups, or even know themselves that they do, and so being inclusive, accepting and accommodating is essential to provide a true reflection of our sector.

There is lots of support out there to help you to get your head around the jargon and understand the plans and priorities of your institution and the wider sector. Here are some recommended resources:

- Your institution's Access and Participation Plan will be available on their website.
- UCAS
- Uni Connect Partnerships



Working with data

Lee Dudding

Data Insight Officer, Edge Hill University

Know what you want (and how you want it)

The first step to working with data is to actually get hold of the data, and to do that you need to know who to contact. You'll know that universities are very varied organisations; in some universities you might need to speak to Admissions, in others it'll be the Market Research team, or it might be your Planning team. Be aware that different colleagues might provide different data; for example, you might need to contact one person for application data and another for current student data. Try to identify a contact who you can rely on to either provide the data or to direct you to someone who can.

Once you've got your contact, be specific and clear in requesting your data. General requests such as 'can you give me data about students in the North West' may not be useful for your contacts; instead, consider questions such as 'which schools and colleges have had the most UCAS applicants over the last three years' or 'which courses in the North West had the highest applications last year'. It might be useful to ask your contact what data they have and to understand the differences between these (for example, the difference between your internal Admissions data, and data that's been purchased from UCAS).

Be Excel-lent

You don't need to be a pro with Excel, but there are a few formulae and features that'll make your life a lot easier. Formulae such as VLOOKUP and COUNTIF are very useful and knowing how to use a pivot table can really help visualise data. These are very powerful tools that don't take too long to master, so it's definitely worth investing some time into looking into these and getting to grips with them.

There's a lot of things that Excel can do, but it's not immediately clear how to do it. For that, Google is your friend. It's my job to know how to use Excel, and I still find myself Googling things every week. There's usually an article or guide in the first few results that should help.

Tips for analysis

Keep it trendy: when you're looking at lots of lines of data, sometimes it's hard to work out what the story is. Make it more obvious by adding a trendline in Excel to help visualise change over years or add in columns calculating the change over years (either as a whole number or percentage) and then sort by that.

It's all relative: that said, when considering changes in data, remember that it's all relative. There's probably more to be explored in a growth of 20 applications from a school where you got five applications last year, than a college where you got 500.

Context is key: once you've identified some interesting cases in your data, think about why that may be. You'll know better than anyone why data might change over a number of years; think about reasons within your university as to why things might have changed, as well as external policy decisions – and suggest these when you send the data out.

Take note(s): there's little worse than sending some findings to someone, going on leave for two weeks, then coming back to questions asking you to show your working when you've forgotten. Keep track of any calculations you make with the data or if you edit the data in any way. You can do this in the spreadsheet itself, in a separate document, or by noting in your report or email what you've done.



Preparing for an event

Sarah Byard

Student Recruitment Officer, Lancaster University

My favourite aspect of being a Student Recruitment Officer is working in schools and colleges with students (or in their Teams/Zoom/Google Hangout space!). I have worked with hundreds of schools and colleges across my time in Higher Education and have put together some advice for you on what you need to do before attending an event.

Know your school

If you are attending a school-specific event (rather than a large scale UCAS event, for example), do your research. What specialisms does that school offer? Where do students tend to go after sixth form or college?

It's useful to know the school as it means you'll be prepared for the kind of things you'll be talking about the most. If you know that a school specialises in Maths and Science, and students tend to go on to study Physics at university, then you should make sure you're up to date on those courses.

Know your contact

It's good to know who the event organiser is in case of emergency. Make sure you have a contact phone number in case you get stuck in traffic, can't find the car park or for anything else that may crop up.

Not only is it good to have a contact for logistical reasons, but if they have time then you can have a conversation with them at the event. You're more likely to be invited to future events if you work on that personal connection. Relationship building is key in our role.

Know your location

This may sound obvious, but make sure you know where you're going and how you're going to get there. Don't leave this until the last minute – some venues are a bit out of the way and SatNavs don't always know best!

If you're attending a virtual event, make sure you know the platform you'll be using. If you're unfamiliar with the platform, have a play around before the event. Create a tester meeting or live event and test your sharing capability, any chat or Q&A function and work out how to turn your microphone on (and how to mute disruptive students!).

Know your resources

Know what you need to take with you if you're attending a physical event. Make sure you have everything you need (generally a stand, tablecloth, prospectuses and other printed material, but you may have more than this). Make sure you know the processes at your institution for ensuring you have your resources in time for your event.

If your event is virtual, ensure you have anything you want to share with students ready to go. I have a document of links I intend to share for each event so I can easily copy and paste them into the chat (or, if I have a colleague with me, I brief them on what I will need to be shared).

Most importantly, take a deep breath and have fun with it!



Choosing where to stay

Carl Ibison

Recruitment Officer, University of Central Lancashire

I have been staying in hotels now for well over 17 years for the work I do at UCLan.

Some have a member of staff that will book you the cheapest room miles away from your event and the only food available comes in a box. This makes life easy but if you can avoid this or at least try and influence your hotel booker, it can save you lots of stress as not all cheap places need to be on a service station. Most universities give you a budget and leave it up to you to book your accommodation as long as you're in budget.

Hints and tips

When you first start booking hotels, it is exciting but make sure you give it some thought. Firstly, think about how you are travelling, is it close to a train station or is there a car park, free or charge or payment needed? Bespoke hotels can be very nice places to stay but remember you always take a bit of a risk as you never know what you are going to get. Chain hotels although they can be much the same you know what you are going to get, and they are mostly clean and comfy. Some universities make a log of where people have stayed previously and what they thought about it, but remember, again everyone is different, not everyone needs a pub next door and some grass outside for their guide dog to use as a toilet like I do!

If you have the chance try and turn up to your hotel early the day before that way you can get to look round the town or city you are staying in, this gives you chance to look for places to eat in the day light and more so gives you the chance to look round some lovely places that you might never have visited on your own.

As a new team member, I would suggest finding a hotel near the event, this can cut down your stress in the morning and a good tip is just to pop to see where your event is the night before so in the morning everything is familiar and they have not suddenly dug the road up and you end up in temporary traffic lights for an hour.

Food

Food is very important to all of us, otherwise we die. Double-check you can get food near or in your hotel, after a long drive the last thing you want is driving about looking for food. It is always good to look at the menu for the hotel as these can often be silly prices, but many these days are not that bad. If you like a good breakfast, check if this is part of your deal and it is the kind of breakfast you want.

Colleagues from other universities

It's often nice to have someone you know stay nearby or in the same hotel. That way you can go out together for food etc. Do not get sucked into staying in the hotel that everyone else is staying in if it doesn't tick all your boxes. It can be nice to stay down the road and just see them when you want to, as we all need our own time on occasions!

Any issues

Remember when you're staying in a hotel you have paid good money to do so, you're not in your Aunt Margaret's spare room! So if the heating is not working, bath dirty, sheets look like they have not been cleaned etc., mention straight away, I have become good at this over the years and on a few occasions moved hotels if I was not happy. The first manager I had when I started doing this job said, 'make sure the hotel you stay in is at least as nice as your home.'

Before writing this, I tried to remember how many hotels I have stayed in and it's in the couple of hundreds, with the vast majority of them being really good. Don't be nervous it's an exciting adventure so enjoy!



Making the most of your travels

Ben Kibble-Smith

Schools and Colleges Account Manager, Liverpool John Moores University

Picture the scene. It's your first week of a new job, you're clutching train (or airplane) tickets and you're on your way for your first overnight stay. "But I've never been to Bedford before" your brain is screaming to itself. "Why me!?" follows immediately after.

You board the train and begin walking down the carriage – you take your seat and immediately check the A4 plastic pocket with your trip itinerary. "Change at Birmingham" you mumble to yourself "stand set up must be complete before 8am" you continue to read.

This, for those of us who are lucky enough to have been in the job for a few years, is a regular occurrence by now. Annual Higher Education fairs occur throughout most of the year and have allowed me to visit many different locations across the UK (and wider). I chose to start this piece with my initial reaction to being informed I was representing my former employers at the UCAS Bedfordshire event. I didn't leave because they sent me to Bedford, by the way.

Whilst there I walked around, bag in hand, and stumbled into my hotel. A nice affair, I daren't venture out of the room. "I've never been to Bedford before" constantly ringing in my ears, thinking I would get lost and contemplating whether my manager would send a search party to find me. A quiet tea in the downstairs restaurant was a push for me, after all, I have to be set up by 8am. But I decide to brave it alone.

Upon arrival downstairs, I recall it's the World Cup and England were playing tonight. I glance a look at others in the room, no one immediately recognisable catches my attention. I take my seat and enjoy my tea, always, always a burger (this also has changed, as if I had a burger for every meal I stayed overnight somewhere, I'd begin to look like one by now).

Out of nowhere, a friendly face appears – "mind if I join you, you're from X aren't you?". I revel in delight at this newfound acquaintance, we begin chatting, eating and then eventually enjoying a pint (or two). We finish and make our way outside for somewhere to watch the match, swanning along the old canal which bursts through the heart of Bedford. I find a local spot, a huge outside TV (it was 28°C), some deck chairs, and... a beach.

"What a delight" I said to my newfound friend, as we continue to enjoy the local ale and watch the England match. A memory I'll never forget, but a story I can't help but repeat to new members of HELOA. By going outside your comfort zone, you will gain new experiences and see some amazing places.

I can't stress enough the importance in making the trip work with you – organise a museum trip, find the best local restaurant, go for a few drinks. Whatever you like to do when you're away for a few days, try to replicate it, as you'll have some great memories, stories and new friends to talk about in the future.





Working with academic colleagues

Georgia Hargreaves, Stephanie Rimmer & Tiegan Yates

Subject Specific Student Recruitment Assistants, Edge Hill University

Coming straight out of university, the prospect of working professionally with academic colleagues seemed daunting for us. However, throughout the year in our roles we've found a few ways to make the most of our relationships with the subject departments that we work closely with.

Building relationships

The first step to building a strong relationship with academics is getting to know them. Relationships can be built everywhere from impromptu chats in the corridor to networking at wider university events. It can also be easy to feel like academic members of staff have a more prominent role in Higher Education than yourself, being able to cast this thought aside early on proves helpful. We recommend that as well as meetings, discussions over coffee and lunch can help create equal and friendly working relationships. During these discussions, we find that engaging in conversations about the academics' personal interests and research can lead to more productive discussions when it comes to you and your work.

Once you have established a good relationship with academics, we find keeping in regular contact will help maintain the relationship. This can be through small interactions such as a phone call to ask how the open day went or an email to wish them good luck with the new term. If academics can see you are there to support their departments, they are more likely to support your work in return.

Communicating with academics

Clear communication is essential to working effectively with academics. By asking academics for what you need directly (but friendly), you can eliminate the risk of sending a lengthy email without a clear point. We've found that many academics appreciate this as often their time is scarce. Academic staff also seem to respond well to emails that have a clear subject line and important pieces of information, such as dates and times, highlighted bold throughout the email.

Although you may send regular emails to academic colleagues, this isn't the only way to communicate. We've found that some academics do engage much more through other channels, such as telephone calls or in-person meetings. Sometimes you may be waiting on an e-mail reply for a week or so, when really the matter you have emailed them with can be sorted by a 5-minute-long telephone conversation.

Getting the most out of academics

Academics can be great colleagues to have but often their time is limited, acknowledging this can be useful so that you can decide how most effectively to use it. Setting deadlines for your academics makes it much easier for them to schedule the work within their busy timetables. We advise that you set a deadline reasonably early, so that you can factor in chasing-up time and any lateness.

Another way to ensure you get the most from academics, whether it's in terms of content or staffing for events, is to make it as easy as possible for them. If you need them to make a new subject session, send them template slides to fill in, or if they're running a session on a campus visit, make sure you have student ambassadors to take the students to lunch.

Hopefully these hints & tips have given you some food for thought and plans of action for the next time you need to engage with academic colleagues!



Getting to know people in your institution

Mark Hoddell

Marketing and Student Recruitment Co-ordinator, University of Chester

When you first start working at a university, there are so many different academic and support departments. It's a lot like the inner workings of a watch with so many different cogs needed to make sure it all runs smoothly and on time. You wonder how you are going to remember who to contact and which department they work in. To get a good understanding of how everyone is connected in one way or another, getting out to meetings with different departments helps. Ask to go along so you can introduce yourself or wanting to get more involved in a certain area that would benefit in your role. This way, it will help you understand the challenges and issues facing those areas, and you can gain a wider understanding of the issues that are affecting that area of the institution. Plus, it helps build relationships with colleagues that may be able to help you further down the line at an on-campus event or recording a video for a workshop that you are delivering.

Another way of getting to know people is volunteering for working groups where it might be of personal or professional interest. At Chester, I have been involved in a variety of working groups. Being involved with Green Chester, which aims to make the university become more sustainable and environmentally friendly. From helping to organise the Green Christmas fete, to helping promote alternative ways to get to campus and looking at how catering can be more sustainable in reducing food wastage. I built good working relationships with Catering, Estates and Facilities to academic departments that I never worked with as the group came from all parts of the university.

Also I am involved in the National Student Survey. I've been asked by my line manager to cover a meeting a couple of years ago, and I have ended up being involved ever since. Academic Quality Assurance Services and Registry led the group, also I work with IT support and the Students' Union to help promote the message to third-year students for completing the survey. The survey provides feedback on how the university has performed over the time of student studying their course. It helps the institution to understand how to improve for current and future students.

A couple of things to remember if you are wanting to get involved with working groups:

- Think about what interests you and how this might help with your current role and in the future.
- Don't take on too much, but the one or two working groups you attend ensure you can spend quality time being involved.
- Don't always say yes to everything, you have your own workload to manage. Make sure you are able to give time to that task.
- By giving a part of your time now, it will be paid back later whether it will be a small gesture or helping out with a major project or event.





Confidence in different situations

Lily Wearden

Student Recruitment Officer (North West), Aberystwyth University

Coming from somebody who used to hide during my lunch break in high school (I know), I am aware of how daunting some elements of this job can be. I would never have believed then that I would go on to be paid to do hour-long presentations.

Confidence in work situations comes with time. The more you do something, the easier it'll be, and that's the bottom line. But here are some tips that you might find helpful in the meantime:

Presentations

I was so excited when I got my first job, but I was terrified about the prospect of talking in front of large groups. When I was younger, I used to shake with terror when in the spotlight in front of even one person. If you are anything like me; I promise – it gets easier!!

The most important thing is **KNOW YOUR STUFF**. If you know the topic inside out, there will be less to worry about. If you're not sure about something then it will feel like revision when preparing, which makes the whole situation more nerve-racking.

Being alone on the road

This is another area of the job that made me feel nervous at first. Eating at a restaurant on my own felt humiliating and I was certain everyone would be watching and judging. But trust me – no one cares. Going out on your own can be liberating and it's a great way to build your confidence in other situations.

Order that chocolate milkshake and no one will tell you how many calories it's got. Listen to a silly podcast while you're eating. Finally get around to reading that book you've been recommended. I really love this part, and I feel it is so healthy to be comfortable in your own company. Plus, if you're on your own you can take as many photos for Instagram as you like without anyone getting bored!

Yes, it is great to be happy in your own company and to go out by yourself, but it is also great to socialise with other practitioners. You are likely to bump into them again – and it's fun! I know it can feel strange to go up to a stranger and ask if they want to hang out, but I have never been rejected.

Often there will be a group of people (usually from HELOA) who are all eating together after a fair and would like another buddy. There is no harm in asking; being friendly and approachable is literally in our job description, so we promise we will be nice to you.

Decision making and voicing your opinions

Especially if you are new to the sector, department, or institution, it can feel daunting to put ideas forward or feel like you have anything valuable to contribute. This is probably true for any new job, and like the above, it will take time to get used to. However, if you have an idea that you think will help improve something, then there is no reason not to put it forward. We **LOVE** new input, as it is harder to see room for change and improvement when you have been doing the same routine for years. We **NEED** new eyes to come in and keep us up-to-date.

Remember, you got the job because you were the best possible candidate, and your team believe in you. You are in control of how much you get involved with. It's okay to make small decisions without running them by everyone on your team, and it's also okay to put forward new ideas. Help yourself to stand out and be heard. If there is a project you want to do, ask, and you'll feel like you are being paid to have fun.

I love my job and often think about how crazy it is that I am earning money to enjoy myself. Who'd have known that was possible?



Using your own initiative

Reena Kaur

Widening Participation Officer, Edge Hill University

So, the good news is you're probably already using your own initiative - just reading this booklet is a great start. However, it's key to know and understand how you are using your initiative to excel in your role/team plus have examples you can articulate for career progression.

There are lots of different ways for you to show initiative and multitude ways to think about what initiative might mean to you, your team and current and future manager. It's important to think about the following; Is it doing something new? Filling a gap? Redesigning an activity or event? Showing initiative is not about reinventing the wheel but finding ways to enhance.

From my four years in the sector here are some of my top dos and don'ts .

Do	Don't
Volunteer to do a new project/get involved in something different.	Volunteer to do everything – you want to keep a good work/life balance.
At conferences, training events and HELOA meetings – speak to sponsors and people you don't know.	Assume that if you are not a budget holder that your ideas and options aren't valid - your manager will appreciate to see what you have learnt from the conference and training you attend.
UCAS/HE Fairs – always chat to someone new at each fair and avoid just chatting to only people you know – this builds your network massively!	Overdo UCAS fairs – keep that work life balance and sometimes you need a night in with a bed buffet.
Make use of your PDR process and 1-2-1's to show what you have been doing as well in other areas.	Forget that change takes time – it may not happen overnight and that's okay.
Engage with the HELOA NW&NI Mentoring Programme.	Overlook opportunities or sideways steps to develop a range of skills.

Whilst at the University of Reading, I noticed that the system in place led to ambassadors double booking and the same ambassadors working all the shifts, because the system at the time, each staff member sent out their own requests and allocated work. As a new member of the team, I had more capacity and I offered to take over this process particularly for upcoming busy summer months. This was a simple task but once overseen by just me we had no clashes for work and an increase in the number of ambassadors working. This responsibility improved my organisational skills, attention to detail and surprisingly my Excel skills.

Some other examples that I've picked up from HELOA friends are:

- While on the road visiting a school a few hours away, are there any other schools nearby/on your journey that you can visit?
- Read relevant HEPI (Higher Education Policy Institute) and Wonkhe articles and share with the team, be the person in the team that can answer questions! Why not even listen to Wonkhe podcasts while on the road?

These are just a few examples and every team will be different – but find your own example of a process or a project that you can improve. See you on the road!



Skills bank tracker

Andrew Cooper

Schools and College Account Manager, Liverpool John Moores University

Working in Outreach/Recruitment/Widening Participation is working in a fast paced role and you will quickly realise you have developed a wide variety of skills, but there will be many things that you will overlook and not realise you have. We have all had interviews when we wish we had an example to give, so keeping a log or a tracker of activities of what you have done is a real assist and can help you in your future career even if you leave HE.

There are two sides of our roles that we traditionally do. There is the administrator, being in the office, looking at data, arranging events. There is also the deliverer (not as in a delivery driver, although I have had to drive prospectuses back and forth to a warehouse so maybe) where you are almost like a performer/events manager. Already I've touched on a few roles so you can see how easy it is to forget everything you have done.

It's important to breakdown the activity as well. I have lost count with how many times I have heard in an interview "I have good communication skills which I demonstrate when taking campus tours on an open day". Yes, it is a good example, but this can be spun out to showcase so many additional skills. I firstly wouldn't have said open days, as there may be times you run tours on school visits, so wouldn't want to narrow your answer. In addition, you would be demonstrating that you can communicate effectively with different stake holders, as you would have very different conversations with a student, than a teacher or a parent/guardian. You are showing you are reliable as you wouldn't be allowed to take a tour if people felt you were going to say something inappropriate. You also have to show adaptability and leadership as you never know what questions may be asked of you which can also lead to being able to demonstrate conflict resolution. From one sentence we have already unpacked a variety of additional skills which are often overlooked.

Don't be afraid to seek out new opportunities as well. My degree was in Drama and English, so using Excel was alien to me, but I could appreciate its benefits so took the time to learn it. This then helped in interviews because I could say I could analyse data and use it to predict trends. Sometimes it may also be asking to support an event with another team so you can gain different experiences.

Keeping track of every activity you do with a short breakdown is useful as it enables you to see where you need developing but also how many amazing things you achieve in a short space of time. Ask colleagues to say what they think your skills are (via email, over a coffee or recommendations on LinkedIn) and always remember you probably have done more than you think.



NW&NI Committee details

The group meets four times a year, with three meetings (January during National Conference, May and September) as well as our Training Day (December).

We keep you up-to-date with a monthly update and have lots of projects and opportunities to get involved in throughout the year. Feel free to get in touch with us at any time!



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