

Session Title:	3.6 Regional Recruitment: Improving your engagement
Speaker(s):	Gemma Polatajko, Finnuala Jenkins
Chair:	Reena Littlehales
Reporter:	Amy Robinson

Speaker/Institution Bio/Information:	<p>Gemma Polatajko, Regional Student Recruitment & Access Officer (West Midlands) University of Reading Worked at Reading University for 5.5 years</p> <p>Finnuala Jenkins, Student Recruitment Officer University of Brighton Worked for various universities, currently in 3rd regional role covering SE England and London, 7 years in regional roles total.</p>
Overview/Aim of session:	Roundtable discussions for participants to learn from each other and share best practices and experiences, discuss current issues and share solutions.
Workshop Content	Workshop consisted of roundtable discussions.
Case Studies/Examples:	Workshop consisted of roundtable discussions.
Roundtable discussions:	<p><u>1. Obstacles of being a regional officer:</u></p> <p>Physical Location</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being located close to your university, but far from the region covered. • Being located in the region you cover, but far from the university you work for. • Being responsible for recruitment of a large area (e.g. half of the UK). <p>Building External Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty building relationships with some schools/colleges as they are already served by local universities. • However, some more open-thinking schools/colleges prefer working with non-local universities to gain new perspectives and expose students to new ideas and areas.

	<p>Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good communication within regional team members, but potential for miscommunication or lack of communication from campus-based teams. <p>Out-of-Region Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often an expectation to support/cover work in other regions or on campus, which impacts your own region. • Difficult asking other regional officers, or campus based officers to cover events in your region as it requires them to travel out of their own region/long distance. <p>Hours of Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistency in TOIL policies within the role at different university's, some officers reporting they struggle to manage or take TOIL accrued, whilst other officers are not eligible for any TOIL at all. <p>Team Structure and Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variability in team structures and responsibilities (administrative and delivery) between universities. • Not all regional roles are the same; some are based remotely within their region of responsibility, others based on campus and live near their university but responsible for distant recruitment area. <p>Recruitment Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misconception in role, often seen as the face of recruitment in your area and therefore responsible for final recruitment numbers, but regional officer often not responsible for all aspects of recruitment i.e. conversion. <p>Presenteeism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those working from campus often have more progression opportunities due to greater visibility on campus. • Regionally/remote based officers may find it challenging to connect with colleagues in their team, department and academic departments. <p><u>2. What do you find challenging when engaging with schools and colleges?</u></p> <p>Awareness Gap</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools/colleges often lack awareness of regional officers and their roles. • Many assume universities are unwilling or unable to travel long distances, not realising officers are local or travel-ready as part of their job (repeated by other officers present). <p>Region Size</p>
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- Regional officers frequently cover large areas, making it challenging to serve all schools effectively.
- Balancing requests and prioritising key/target feeder schools over low-priority schools is difficult.

Limited Availability

- Many universities now have regional officers, but Schools/colleges only limited time to allocate to external visits and support.

Work Type

- It was felt regional officers receive high demand for HE/Careers fairs but fewer requests for CEAIG sessions compared to local recruitment officers.
- This may reflect a mismatch in understanding or priorities from Schools/colleges.

Managing Expectations

- Schools/colleges may have unclear or unrealistic expectations about the type and scope of support regional officers can provide.

3. Solutions, top tips and best practice

Centralised Requests

- Implement a shared inbox for SCHOOLS/COLLEGES to direct their requests, streamlining communication and improving response times. HOWEVER many regional officers want to establish a rapport with their contacts and may prefer direct contact.

Budget Support

- Advocate for increased budgeting for Student Ambassador (SA) support to cover events effectively.

Clear Communication

- Ensure communications with SCHOOLS/COLLEGES clearly outline your regional role and the support you can provide.

Support Networks and Sharing Information

- Don't hesitate to ask other regional officers for help or advice, particularly when starting out or facing challenges.
- Don't be afraid to establish a network group for staff new to regional roles to offer guidance and support.
- Exchange details among regional officers about events, CEAIG requests, and SCHOOLS/COLLEGES contacts to ensure better coordination.

Building Local Knowledge

- Spend time in the area you cover, especially if you are not local, to gain insights into the community, students, and their needs.
- Utilise opportunities to visit local spaces, such as coffee shops, to immerse yourself in the area. If needed, consider staying overnight in a work-funded hotel to maximise your understanding (and save TOIL).

4. What do you find challenging when engaging with colleagues?

Support Disparity

- While regional officers often share extensive information and provide support to one another, many report there is less support from colleagues based on campus.

Self-Sufficiency

- Some regional officers feel the need to operate independently due to limited support and infrequent contact with on-campus teams, including their line managers.

Variability of Experience

- Officers who live near or are based at their university often report a different experience, with greater access to support and collaboration compared to those working remotely.

5. How do you keep connected with your colleagues and wider uni?

Regular Communication

- Maintain regular check-ins with your team via WhatsApp or informal online catch-ups to stay connected and informed.

Regional Networking

- Create a WhatsApp group with other regional officers to share updates, advice, and support specific to your area.

Safety Practices

- Prioritise safety on the road by notifying colleagues when you arrive at or leave an event.
- Share responsibility within the team for monitoring this in a group WhatsApp chat, as it can be too much for one manager to oversee everyone's locations.

6. Unique obstacles to regionals workers – how can these be overcome?

	<p>Wellbeing and Safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staying overnight can raise wellbeing and safety concerns, particularly when budget restrictions lead to really sketchy options. • Discuss these challenges with your line manager to ensure they understand the impact on you. • Consider reaching out directly to independent hotels, as they may offer more flexible pricing for midweek stays. <p><u>7. General Top Tips</u></p> <p>Be Data-Driven</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand your data and use it to inform your activity. If applications from a school aren't increasing, don't be afraid to question the value of continued engagement. <p>Make the Most of HELOA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend HELOA regional sessions whenever possible – they provide excellent networking opportunities and valuable training. • If your role covers a large area, you can attend multiple regional sessions to better suit your needs.
<p>Questions and Answers:</p>	
<p>Summary Key takeaways:</p>	<p>Role Variability: Regional officers face different challenges based on their physical location. Campus-based officers often benefit from better communication, support, and visibility, while those working remotely in their region may encounter comparatively less support. Both campus-based and remote officers covering large recruitment areas face significant logistical and travel challenges.</p> <p>Challenges: Managing large areas, addressing schools' lack of awareness about regional roles, and limited support from on-campus colleagues are common obstacles.</p> <p>Best Practices: Clear communication of your offering, building local knowledge of your region, creating a strong network within regional officers, and leveraging opportunities like HELOA sessions to share advice and develop professionally.</p> <p>Prioritisation: Use data to guide engagement, focusing efforts on activities and schools that drive measurable outcomes, such as increased applications.</p>

	<p>Safety: Advocate for appropriate budgets to ensure safe and comfortable overnight stays, prioritising wellbeing while travelling.</p>
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