

Employability Symposium 2026

10 March 2026, Virtual delivery

Session abstracts

Keynote, 09:40 - 10:25, Zoom link 1

Employability with Purpose: Ethical, Sustainable Skills and the Power of Sector Collaboration

Dr Samantha Burvill, Swansea University

This keynote examines how ethical and sustainable skills can be embedded meaningfully within tertiary education, and why doing so is becoming central to future-facing employability agendas. Drawing on Medr-funded initiatives and Advance HE enabled partnerships across Wales, it explores the structural, cultural, and practical challenges institutions encounter and the strategies can and could be effective in overcoming them. Through sector-wide case studies, the keynote demonstrates the value of deep collaboration within and between institutions, highlighting scalable approaches that move beyond isolated good practice to systemic change. Attendees will gain insights into how collaborative models can be adapted and extended across the UK higher education sector to enhance graduate outcomes while supporting ethical and sustainable futures. The keynote concludes with reflections on what comes next for employability in a rapidly changing landscape, and an invitation to build collectively on the innovative work already underway across the sector.

Parallel Session 1 – Oral presentations, 10:35 – 11:35, Zoom link 1

Session 1.1a

Futureproofing employability: Designing equity and social capital for black and global majority youth

Lynette Nabbosa, Glasgow Caledonian University

How can diversity of voice and equity be built into employability design from the ground up? This presentation shares doctoral research exploring Elimu's employability and entrepreneurship programmes for Black and Global Majority youth. It introduces a social capital framework for equity by design, offering insights into embedding inclusion and evidence-informed practice within employability and enterprise initiatives. Delegates will gain practical ideas for building equitable, future-focused employability ecosystems aligned with Sustainable Development Goals 4.4, 8.6 and 8.b. The session speaks directly to the theme Futureproofing with diversity of voice, demonstrating how success can be designed, not assumed.

Session 1.1b

Future skills frameworks in life sciences: Co-creating inclusive, industry-aligned pathways

Dr Laura McCaughey and Tracy Maxwell, University of Glasgow

This session shares outcomes from the Future Skills Frameworks in the Life Sciences event, hosted by the University of Glasgow in partnership with SULSA in June 2025. Co-presented by Dr Laura McCaughey and Tracy Maxwell, it explores collaborative, student-centred approaches to embedding skills development in life sciences education. Key recommendations include reframing skills frameworks to build confidence, aligning skills language with industry needs, and adapting for future gaps such as resilience, AI literacy, and project management. Attendees will gain practical strategies for implementing inclusive, flexible frameworks and fostering partnerships between academia, professional services, and employers to create future-ready graduate pathways.

Session 1.1c

Navigating employability: Student perspective across the Higher Education ecosystem

Denis Persichini, University of Reading

Students navigate employability within a complex ecosystem of academic, professional, and third-space support. This session shares findings from a qualitative study with 21 undergraduates from twelve UK institutions, exploring how they perceive employability development, which factors support or hinder them, and which initiatives they consider most effective. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the analysis shows how students negotiate micro-level emotions and identities, meso-level interactions with staff and services, and macro-level barriers such as inequality and AI-driven recruitment. The session highlights opportunities for more inclusive, coordinated, and future-ready support and outlines how these insights inform a co-designed intervention.

Parallel Session 1 – Oral presentations, 10:35 – 11:35, Zoom link 2

Session 1.2a

From access to impact: Inclusive internships driving systemic change

Dr Hannah Lavery, Paulette Johnson Belinda Yare and The Open University

This session showcases how the Open University's Access, Participation and Success (APS) Student Internship programme provides work based learning opportunity which also serves as a driver of equity and inclusion. By embedding student led reciprocal mentoring, the programme enables authentic partnerships between students and staff, fostering individual confidence as well as personal and professional development. Our inclusive recruitment and programme delivery model prioritises underrepresented groups, ensuring diversity and psychological safety. Delegates will gain practical insights into designing internships that go beyond traditional employability approaches, enhancing progression and co-creating knowledge that benefits both students and institutions. Join us to explore a scalable and impactful approach that tackles some of the most pressing issues currently in HE.

Session 1.2b

Developing future skills through reflection: Lessons from a work-based degree programme

Dr Matthew Barr, Dr Oana Andrei, Dr Syed Waqar Nabi and Dr Alistair Morrison, University of Glasgow

How do we prepare students for careers that don't yet exist? This session presents compelling evidence from a four-year software engineering apprenticeship programme, demonstrating how work-based learning combined with structured reflection develops adaptable, future-ready professionals. Through analysis of student reflective essays across multiple cohorts, we reveal how apprentices develop sophisticated meta-skills, professional competencies, and the ability to transfer knowledge between university and workplace contexts. The session explores how reflective practice makes learning visible, supports skill integration, and creates a cyclical relationship between academic knowledge and professional experience—offering a model for employability development in an uncertain future.

Parallel Session 1 – Oral presentations, 10:35 – 11:35, Zoom link 3

Session 1.3b

Beyond the classroom: Mapping authentic assessment for real-world readiness

Dr Stephanie Baines, Dr Pauldy Otermans, Prof David Tree and Dr Nicholas Worsfold, Brunel University of London

How can assessment genuinely build real-world readiness beyond the classroom? This session explores how a balanced “diet” of assessment can embed employability across programmes. It introduces a practical, research-informed tool for mapping assessment authenticity across two dimensions, product and process, thereby enabling educators to visualise, evaluate, and enhance authentic assessment at programme level. Drawing on institutional examples linked to work-integrated learning and real-world tasks, the session demonstrates how assessment design can support skills development, progression, and sustainable employability outcomes.

Session 1.3c

Scaling working integrated learning in Criminology and Sociology: Building bridges beyond the classroom

Dr Adam Westall, Liz Cain and Alicia Denby, Manchester Metropolitan University

This session introduces a large-scale initiative to embed work integrated learning (WIL) within an undergraduate Criminology and Sociology programme. Moving beyond placements and prescriptive employability models, our initiative allows students to actively observe, engage and create authentic learning experiences through partnerships with local and regional public, private and voluntary organisations. Delivered across three core modules, across three levels of study, scalable WIL activities help minimise barriers in employment and empower students to develop real-world criminology and sociology skills. From this session, participants will take ideas for their own foundational tool kit and practical strategies for integrating WIL at scale.

Parallel Session 2 - Workshops, 11:50 – 12:30, Zoom link 1

Session 2.1

Multi-level coaching: Enhancing employability across leaders, educators and learners

Rihan Mustapha, Al-Khaleej for Education & Training (PNU-ELI)

This workshop introduces a multi-level coaching approach that supports employability development across leaders, educators, and learners. Participants explore practical, low-prep strategies that strengthen reflection, communication, agency, and collaborative skills, which are competencies that contribute to graduate success. The session demonstrates adaptable coaching-informed techniques that can be embedded into training, teaching, and leadership practice. Attendees leave with a set of flexible activities and discussion tools that can be scaled across teams and programmes to enhance institutional approaches to employability.

Parallel Session 2 - Workshops, 11:50 – 12:30, Zoom link 2

Session 2.2

Come together: Innovation through collegiate practice

Dr Stacey Noble, Dr Sarah Robin and Laurie Watson, Lancaster University

Teaching practitioners from Accounting and Finance, Careers, and Learning Development collaborated to design and deliver a new module for postgraduate Financial Management students. The module was developed with a focus on building students' learning through a combination of academic content, intensive workshops, and self-directed learning. Strengths from all three collaborators were central to the module. We share how we worked collectively in the third space to design a module. The module's success is an example of how innovative collegiate practice can transform the student learning experience, and help equip students with knowledge, skills, and confidence for the future.

Parallel Session 2 - Workshops, 11:50 – 12:30, Zoom link 3

Session 2.3

Making skills visible: Supporting students to identify, reflect and articulate their future skills

Dr Maxine Swingler, Jamie Murray, Ian Mindreau, Zayba Ghazhali Mohammed, Steven McNair and Fiona Stubbs, University of Glasgow

Increasing emphasis on development of transferable, future skills throughout degree programmes is driven by employer feedback suggesting that skills such as communication, resilience and flexibility are valued more than disciplinary skills (Isherwood, 2025; QS, 2024). Graduates' ability to reflect and articulate transferable skills is therefore a vital part of the application process, yet students often find this difficult (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2022), and academic staff can find it challenging to embed skills reflection in credit bearing courses (Daubney, 2023). In addition, students don't always recognise the value of skill development

gained through extra-curricular activities, part time work, and volunteering, or its relevance to their future career (Chapman et al., 2023).

In this session, we will share techniques developed in collaboration with academic staff, students and careers professionals that support students to identify, reflect, articulate and apply their future skills to further their career journey. These activities are informed by the U of G embedding employability framework and we will support staff to apply these techniques in their own learning and teaching practice. Workshop activities will include: 1) Using a reflection portfolio to support students to develop and articulate their skills; 2) Developing students' self-awareness of their skills and networking through use of LinkedIn ; 3) Assessing students' in the application of their skills to real world contexts: 4) Using students' reference requests as an opportunity to develop and articulate their skills and professional behaviour.

Workshop structure: Requires a main room and 4 break out rooms for the activities- each room facilitated by the co-authors. The session will begin with an outline of the activities (10 minutes), then participants choose an activity and work in break out rooms with a facilitator. After 10 minutes in one break out room, participants can swap to a different activity break out room. After 30 minutes, participants join the main discussion, The session will finish by discussing the student' perspective on these activities (led by the student co-author) and invite participants to critically reflect on the workshop activities in their own context (40 minutes).

The session will draw on established University of Glasgow Psychology courses, including a credit bearing professional skills programme. The activities and materials can be adapted to other subject contexts, and we will use interactive learning activities and classroom response tools to engage the audience. See this link for details of activities and materials <https://sway.cloud.microsoft/01nAK0gNBaIFW3lw>

We will also provide a student perspective on how building a portfolio using these employability activities have helped students to understand the skills they've developed during their degree and contributed to their professional identity in psychology. This session will be relevant for staff who want to embed employability into their learning and teaching practice.

Parallel Session 3 – Oral presentations, 13:20 – 14:20, Zoom link 1

Session 3.1a

Developing employability in Postgraduate psychology conversion students: Insights into student experience

Dr Steven McNair and Audrey Dee, University of Glasgow

Students on postgraduate psychology conversion courses aim to gain Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership and develop employability for future careers. However, little research explores their specific experiences. This study used qualitative focus groups with 13 University of Glasgow MSc Psychology conversion students to explore perceptions of employability development. Reflexive thematic analysis revealed three themes: (1) navigating employability and work experience challenges; (2) developing key skills and self-presentation for success; and (3) barriers such as structural inequalities and reliance on

social support. Findings highlight the need for student-centred approaches to enhance employability awareness and address contextual factors shaping career readiness.

Session 3.1b

Bridging learning and employability: A reflective portfolio co-created with students

Dr Danai Serfioti, Nottingham Trent University

This presentation introduces a co-created intervention that supports postgraduate students in developing their professional identity through a structured reflective portfolio. Grounded in positive education strategies and the Inner Development Goals framework, the portfolio helps students make meaningful links between academic learning and the transferable skills they gain across their studies. Its current format was developed through a comprehensive review of earlier versions, shaped by student feedback and input from student research assistants. The result is a practical tool that fosters personal growth, strengthens employability, and builds confidence. Graduate feedback highlights its lasting impact, with many continuing to use it for personal development and reporting greater confidence in their professional roles.

Session 3.1c

Co-creating green futures: Embedding sustainable business practice and CSR in the energy sector into Law students' employability learning

Godwin Daramola, University of Hull

This session showcases a co-created approach to embedding sustainable business practice and corporate social responsibility in the energy sector into law students' employability learning. Drawing on doctoral research, it illustrates how students collaborate in selecting real-world CSR case studies, shaping seminar questions, and designing authentic assessments such as ESG briefings and legal opinions. The presentation highlights how partnerships with careers and professional services support green skills, diverse career pathways, and inclusive, justice-focused perspectives, particularly for underrepresented students, offering adaptable principles for future-ready, sustainability-oriented employability practice in higher education.

Parallel Session 3 – Oral presentations, 13:20 – 14:20, Zoom link 2

Session 3.2a

Developing and assessing skills on a work-based degree programme: A student perspective

Dr Matthew Barr and Rose Howie, University of Glasgow

Work-based learning (WBL) offers rich opportunities for students to develop the skills required for employability now and into the future. Degree-level apprenticeships are one form of work-based learning in higher education, with student apprentices spending most of their time in the workplace. On our programme, the employability skills that apprentices develop in the workplace are assessed via reflective reports. These reports give voice to the students, allowing them to document their professional growth while providing insight into the

skills developed in industry. In this talk, we will hear directly from one of our apprentices, as she reflects on her journey.

Session 3.2b

Building real-world readiness for Law students

Dr Shalini Perera, Professor Nigel Spencer and Leonie Dos Santos, Queen Mary University of London

In our Law School we challenged ourselves to create a new Masters programme which integrated workplace learning in the curriculum: namely, the mandated professional learning to become a solicitor in England and Wales. The professional learning modules (covering both knowledge and workplace skills) were collaboratively delivered with a leading legal sector education organisation. The programme also allowed students opportunities to apply learning to work tasks as “lab projects” alongside the modules, with authentic and reflective assessments, building readiness both for the real world, but also (critically) for the final professional examinations future lawyers must take.

Session 3.2c

Employer insights for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment

Claire Crichton-Allen, Dr Scott Strachan and Dr Lizann Bonnarr, Strathclyde University

This session shares insights from semi-structured interviews with employers who recruit graduates across diverse sectors. It explores which UNESCO key competencies for sustainability employers notice in applications and interviews, how these capabilities show up in early workplace practice, and where they perceive gaps in graduate preparation. Participants will connect the findings to whole programme design, including curriculum intent, pedagogies, assessment, and co-curricular opportunities, and consider small, realistic design shifts that help students practise, evidence, and articulate sustainability competencies across disciplines. The session treats employer insights as a resource for redesign, not simply validation, supporting student learning journeys in complex professional contexts.

Parallel Session 3 – Oral presentations, 13:20 – 14:20, Zoom link 3

Session 3.3a

Graduate futures through third space innovation: A collaborative model for success

Laura Ingham, Rajinder Boucher and Sam Pennington, Bath Spa University

At Bath Spa University, improving graduate outcomes is a strategic, collaborative effort and our Graduate Scheme exemplifies this. We bring together Careers & Employability, HR, recruitment teams, and departments across the institution to co-create pathways that bridge education and employment. Designed to meet dual priorities—enhancing graduate success and advancing the People Strategy through workforce diversification and leadership development—the scheme embeds inclusive recruitment, structured development, and mentoring into institutional practice. This approach has delivered significant benefits, from

stronger Graduate Outcomes metrics to a sustainable talent pipeline. Join us to explore how intentional third space innovation can create lasting impact for graduates and institutions alike.

Session 3.3b

Nottingham Trent University's student knowledge exchange practice network: A transformative model for third space collaboration and innovation

Aga Kelly and Dr Rachel Bolton-King, Nottingham Trent University

In 2024, Nottingham Trent University launched the Student Knowledge Exchange (SKE) Practice Network, bringing together academics and employability professionals operating in the 'third space' - a collaborative area that blurs the boundaries between academic and professional practice - to shape curriculum design and influence pedagogy.

The Network's unique focus is on integrating knowledge exchange principles with employability while supporting academic development and demonstrating how SKE can advance wider institutional priorities.

At NTU, SKE is delivered through innovative employer-led projects, placements, internships, community engagement, Learning Companies, and enterprise initiatives, enabling students to gain real-world experience, transferable skills, and to build networks.

Session 3.3c

Third space innovation: Futureproofing employability through enhancing professionalism

Dr Henny Mills, Chris O'Malley and Salome Bolton, Newcastle University

Within the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering at Newcastle University, it was recognised that while disciplines such as engineering, computing, mathematics, and environmental sciences provide rigorous subject expertise, professional skills development is not an compulsory component - unlike in medicine or dentistry. This gap presents a challenge for employability, as graduates often enter the workforce without structured opportunities to develop competencies essential for professional practice. To address this, various staff across the faculty designed an optional, cross-disciplinary module aimed at integrating professional skills into the student experience, creating a "third space" for innovation beyond the traditional classroom.

Parallel Session 4 – Workshops, 14:30 – 15:10, Zoom link 1

Session 4.1

Preparing students for work beyond the classroom: Strategies for teaching practitioners

Dr Anastasia Jablonska, Kings College London

This interactive workshop explores how teaching practitioners can embed employability, applied psychological theory, and group performance into their curriculum. Using a criminology module as a case study, participants will engage in hands-on activities, discussions, and reflective exercises to explore strategies for developing students' transferable skills, including collaboration, conflict resolution, negotiation, and self-

awareness. The session demonstrates how to use real-world examples, career-focused activities, and authentic assessments to enhance student engagement and professional readiness. Attendees will leave with practical ideas and tools to implement in their own teaching, enabling students to build confidence, reflect on their learning, and prepare effectively for graduate careers.

Parallel Session 4 – Workshops, 14:30 – 15:10, Zoom link 2

Session 4.2

Beyond one-to-one: Innovating supervision in Higher Education

Dr Ashley Robertson, University of Glasgow

Group supervision is increasingly used in Higher Education, yet it is often implemented without explicit pedagogical design, limiting its effectiveness and sustainability. This interactive workshop presents group supervision as a designed learning practice that can be scaled without directly replicating one-to-one supervision. Drawing on an open, practice-based resource (https://ashleyrobertson.github.io/group_supervision/), the session outlines key design principles – purpose, structure, roles, and psychological safety – that support effective and sustainable group supervision across disciplines. Participants will apply these principles to their own supervision contexts and leave with one concrete, actionable change they can implement to support scalable supervision practice.

Parallel Session 5 – Oral presentations, 15:25 – 16:25, Zoom link 1

Session 5.1a

In-progress case study: Psychology student work placement: Chartering experiential learning approaches within the faculty of Engineering

Dr Mike Murray, Dr Scott Strachan, Ross MacLachlan, Morven McDonald, Daniel Campbell, Lizann Bonnar and Alex Bryce, University Of Strathclyde

Embedding employability competencies can be best served through experiential learning, which can involve some level of pedagogical shift. This “work in progress” study charts active and experiential learning practices within Strathclyde’s Faculty of Engineering, Scotland’s largest with eight departments with 4,000 undergraduates, and where employability is a strategic transformation priority. Using Norton’s pedagogical action research framework, insider-researchers - including three student interns from engineering and psychology - collaborate across disciplines, navigating ethical complexities while surfacing good practice in active and experiential learning. The initiative aims to leverage outcomes internally and model replicable frameworks for other institutions.

Session 5.1b

Scaling industry engagement: Connecting our students with professional insights across disciplines

Emily Crosbie, Marianne Savory and Laura Warrington, University of Leeds

This session highlights how Leeds University Business School enhances employability through student-industry engagement. We will share how academic and professional teams are collaborating to scale activities using the School's external connections. Real-world insights are now integrated into more modules across diverse programmes via initiatives such as undergraduate group mentoring and postgraduate business challenges, helping to build students' commercial awareness, networking skills, and confidence. Drawing on student feedback and implementation experience, we will discuss lessons on scaling, ensuring diversity, adapting across disciplines, and fostering collaboration. Attendees will gain practical strategies for embedding industry engagement to strengthen career readiness.

Session 5.1c

Making it count: How student consultancy can drive HE-BCI returns and graduate outcomes

Tiffany Frye and Duncan Silvey, Bath Spa University

Juno House at Bath Spa University demonstrates how strategic programme design can simultaneously advance multiple institutional priorities. Juno House is a creative consultancy powered by BSU students, graduates, and academics. By employing students and graduates on staff contracts to deliver client briefs, Juno House creates a sustainable mechanism where commercial revenue contributes to HE-BCI while developing graduate employability through authentic work experience. This session explores the operational framework and challenges overcome in setting up this programme. Attendees will gain practical insights into designing cross-departmental initiatives that align institutional priorities and create genuine value for students, employers, and the university.

Parallel Session 5 – Oral presentations, 15:25 – 16:25, Zoom link 2

Session 5.2a

ELEMENT: Employability for learning : Integrating employability learning into the core curriculum at scale : A case study- approach NTU School of Social Sciences

Angela Vesey and Bjorn Le Roux, Nottingham Trent University

ELEMENT: Employability for Learning is a Nottingham Trent University, School of Social Sciences initiative comprising ten credits of innovative online employability learning content which can be embedded into the core curriculum. Developed collaboratively between the School, NTU Flex Learning Developers, and the Employability team, we have reimaged the employability experience to be degree integrated, inclusive, flexible, and interactive, embedding structured reflective learning into the curriculum, with student generated assets which can be utilised for module assessment. Initially launched in 24/25, ELEMENT, this initiative has now been rolled out at scale with over 17 course users and growing.

Session 5.2b

Nothing can go wrong! Live brief format innovation

Dr Maria Bortnovskaya and Paul Dwyer, University of Westminster

How can HEIs help students see the value of what they are learning? This session provides practical insights for institutions seeking scalable, evidence-informed, high-impact employability interventions. Using simple economic theory to address the factors shaping student and employer perceptions of the value of the curriculum, the session presents evidence from a study of two Live Brief curriculum innovations. The presentation shows how redesigning these formats enables students—especially those from under-represented backgrounds—to identify, articulate and demonstrate their transferable skills. We outline how to develop scalable pedagogic formats to be deployed in third spaces like Westminster's new Zone29 facility.

Session 5.2c

Amplifying competencies associated with collaboration and communication through community building on taught Postgraduate programmes at an online, distance learning institution

Dr Hannah Lavery and Dr Judy Chandler, The Open University

Recent discourse, including the recent Education White Paper (October 2025), implies the value of Higher Education study primarily relates to students' employment returns as gained through study of vocational subjects. However, with the future employment landscape made uncertain with, for example, increasing ubiquity of generative AI, this encourages a refreshed focus on transferable competencies associated with verbal communication and collaboration. The presenters share student and employer perspectives on existing PGT programmes with vocational underpinnings (in Education and Arts & Humanities) and suggest ways in which the development of effective 'community' in an online, distance setting underpins delivery of these skills.