

# **Practice and Research Network (PRN) Meeting**

**Research Showcase  
Online 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2023**

**Editors: Debbie Siva-Jothy  
Dr Helen Hooper**

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## FOREWORD

Welcome to the 2023 ASET Practice and Research Network (PRN) Showcase. We enjoyed a fantastic and fast-paced session during which eight speakers gave us insight into their research or practice as a 'lightening talk' - presenting in *just 5 minutes and across 3 slides*. All our presenters rose to this challenge, resulting in a dynamic and super informative session. The abstracts and slides from each presentation, along with the questions posted to the presenters (collated from the chat box) provide a good overview of the breadth of research and practice that was shared across the network. We hope these presentations will inform your own research, introduce new ways of working that you can incorporate into your own practice and highlight potential collaborators.

We are keen to grow a strong community around research practitioners and to provide a collegiate and supportive space for you to share your work, test out your ideas and get constructive feedback and advice from peers. The Research Showcase is an annual event and there is also opportunity to present your work at the [2023 ASET Conference in September](#).

We look forward to you joining us at future events!

Dr Helen Hooper

### Programme

**10:00am** Open and Welcome  
Helen Hooper, ASET Research Working Group Acting Lead, Northumbria University

**Research Showcases**

1. Breaking The Glass Filter:  
Solving Employability Challenges in Photography & Media for Working-Class Students  
**Alex Vann**, Lecturer in Photography, Leeds Trinity University
2. Exploring placement experiences in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students – WIP...  
**Nina Walker**, Learning and Teaching Specialist, University of Hertfordshire
3. Exploring placement perceptions and barriers  
**Chris Jones**, Employability Manager, School of Architecture, Design and the Built Environment Nottingham Trent University
4. Equality vs Equity – supporting physics students to achieve their career goals  
**Andrew Mizumori-Hirst**, Director, White Rose Industrial Physics Academy, and  
**Beth Medley**, Employability and Placement Officer, University of York

**10:30 am** Q&A  
**10:45 am** BREAK – 15 minutes

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### Programme contd.

**11:00 am**

**Research Showcases**

5. Planning for a Placement Student Pilot Networking Event  
**Dr Rachel Shannon**, Strategic Project Officer, Ulster University
6. Work Shadowing  
**Claire Newbold**, Employability Lecturer, University of Reading
7. How do Business Students use Mentors to Develop their Pre-Professional Identity?  
**Stephanie Schiaffonati**, Senior Lecturer, University of Lincoln
8. Student support: responding to UUK Suicide-Safer Placements recommendations  
**Alistair Boot**, Principal Lecturer & University Placement Coordinator, Harper Adams University


**11:30 am** Q&A  
**11:45 am** Closing Reflections

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### ASET – Zoom meeting protocols

- Please rename yourself upon entry to the session so that your name and institution are visible to all e.g. "Sue-Durham" ('rename' via right-clicking on your video)
- We will be using the chat box facility and we will share the chat file with attendees after the session
- Please now type your email address into the chat box
- Please have your camera enabled if you can
- Please use headphones, if possible, to avoid sound feedback
- Your microphone is muted. This is to ensure that everyone can hear the speakers
- This will be a participatory session. In order to manage this for the benefit of all, we ask that you unmute your mic when you wish to speak. Please mute again after speaking
- If you have a question during the session, please use the chat box
- If you would prefer to ask a question anonymously you can direct message an ASET colleague via the chat
- To see all attendees at the session click "gallery view" (top right hand corner)
- During breaks, please do not leave the session– please mute and switch off your camera

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# 1. Breaking the Glass Filter: Solving Employability Challenges in Photography & Media for Working-Class Students

Alex Vann  
Leeds Trinity University  
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## Abstract

This presentation outlines challenges faced by working-class students with little insider access or knowledge of the creative industries – a notoriously closed-shop industry that often relies on unpaid internships, work for “exposure” and/or contacts within the field to secure work, much of it insecure and low paid. Using primary research I have conducted into employer hiring preferences and practices, I will outline the strategies being employed at Leeds Trinity University to break down barriers to entry and provide equality of opportunity and favourable outcomes for our students.

## Presentation - 3 slides

### BARRIERS TO ENTRY

#### 01. NO A PRIORI KNOWLEDGE

- No fixed career path
- No frameworks for entrepreneurship
- Industry needs vague/not signposted
- Working-class students often unacquainted with networking etiquette & soft skills

#### 02. HIGHLY COMPETITIVE

- Work in the field is a “vocational”
- Growth industry, yet oversaturated
- Exponential growth in freelance work via social media & apps caused an “arms race” between creators
- Not regulated/low professional bodies to lobby for fair pricing

#### 03. CLOSED SHOP

- Strong reliance on internships/low paid entry level work in industry
- “Who you know, not what you know”
- Heavily London-centric industry

#### 04. ACCESS

- Industry often composed of “one man bands”
- Reluctance/fear from potential employers of taking on “dead weight”
- Media industry is strongly composed of upper middle classes
- Working class students not exposed to the field in family life

### WHAT EMPLOYERS WANT

#### ENTHUSIASM

“You don’t...I’m willing to learn, and a clear demonstration of genuine interest in all aspects of professional working.”  
Lens Lab Leeds

#### ACUMEN

“Photographers have to be excellent business... Initially commissioning photography on a commercial basis because they want to support the industry. They commission photographers because they have a communications challenge they wish to solve.”  
Diagonale Ltd

#### DRIVE TO SUCCEED

“They need to accept that a full-time wage is only achievable when they are ‘adding value’ to the business... whilst they are still learning they are not a value and can only get to the next level by picking up on any errors/faults they are making in their own time.”  
Open Studios Ltd

#### DETAIL ORIENTATION

“...the main things (skills we look for) are usually, lighting fundamentals and an eye for detail, an understanding of how to deliver to a client brief, and professionalism...”  
Photography Works Ltd

### WHAT WE CAN DO

#### BEND WITH THE WIND

- HE needs to take account of industry norms, it values what they protect and they don’t want them to be “broken”. We have a responsibility as educators to prepare our students for the realities of the workplace

#### BE THE CONTACT

- Through the education and training of HE institutions to create more well-informed on the behalf of “industry” students

#### BE UP TO SPEED

- Academic needs to keep pace with development to stay on top of industry trends, not step behind many areas of industry in terms of time equipment/methodologies etc

#### GIVE & TAKE

- HE institutions need to find ways of working with industry that do not conflict with their roles by charitable mission, yet incentivises businesses to work with us. Industry is not a charity, if they provide greater access for students, we must reciprocate somehow

#### PROVIDE WORK PLACEMENTS

- At Leeds Trinity work placements are assessed modules and occur in Level 5 & 6. Level 6 usually placed in placements can often transition into employment after graduation

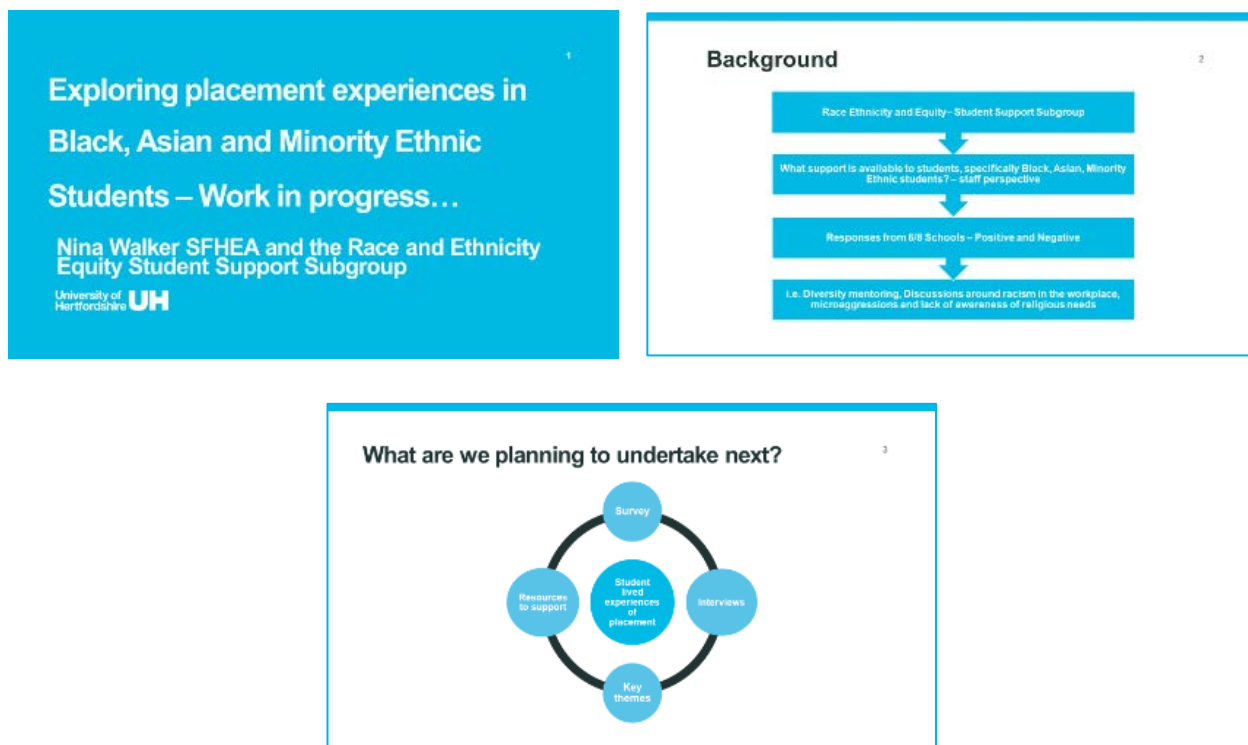
## 2. Exploring placement experiences in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students – Work in progress...

**Nina Walker**  
 University of Hertfordshire  
[C.2.Walker@herts.ac.uk](mailto:C.2.Walker@herts.ac.uk)

### Abstract

This session aims to briefly outline the background work that has taken place in exploring the perceptions of staff around the support for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic on placements. It will then focus on discussing the progress so far in planning how to effectively explore the student perspectives surrounding support on placement. This is a “work in progress” and will invite comments and suggestions from the audience around the proposed workstream.

### Presentation - 3 slides



### 3. Exploring placement perceptions and barriers

Chris Jones

Nottingham Trent University

[Chris.Jones02@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:Chris.Jones02@ntu.ac.uk)

#### Abstract

Architecture, Design and the Built Environment at Nottingham Trent University in relation to choices and perceptions around sandwich placements. With the proportion of students choosing to enrol on a sandwich pathway gradually declining, we are seeking to understand more about the factors influencing decision making about course choice and placements. This will help us to develop messaging and information both pre- and post-enrolment to ensure students are able to make informed decisions about the pros and cons of doing a placement, and that any barriers to placement engagement based on lack of understanding, information or confidence are removed. At the same time, we are mindful of the importance of respecting student choice and providing inclusive support and experiential learning opportunities for all students. So we also want to look at how we position our language, messaging and support around placements in a way that promotes the positive benefits of undertaking a placement without making students on non-sandwich pathways feel they are at a deficit. This project is still a work in progress, but we will share the findings of our survey with first year students, our current thinking and planned next steps.

#### Presentation - 3 slides

#### Exploring Placement Barriers and Perceptions

in the School of Architecture, Design and the Built Environment

**Context**

Project team: Chris Jones School Employability Manager  
Nick Prior, Learning and Teaching Manager  
Simone Allin, Senior Lecturer

**Our aim**

Increase uptake of sandwich placements

Quality experiential learning for all students

**Balancing act..**

Encourage SW uptake...  
...without discouraging non-SW students

**Next Steps**

**More questions!**

- One to one interviews with first year students
- Partnership with TASO funded project looking at barriers to placement for widening participation students – the view from the final year

**Thinking about communications**

- Clearer explanation of SW placement and benefits in course marketing
- Earlier information about placement and work experience opportunities
- Inclusive language that values FT students

**Co-created student event**

Plans for student-led drop-in marketplace event promoting placements and work experience opportunities to first year students

**Differentiation / targeting**

- Additional targeted support for FT students e.g. mentoring
- Consider more differentiation of teaching and assessment approaches for final year FT students

#### Exploring Placement Barriers and Perceptions

in the School of Architecture, Design and the Built Environment

**(Some) Key findings**

(Survey of first year ADBE students, n=211, 88 FT, 123 SW)

**Motivations**

- Course content and university location / reputation are main motivations for course choice.
- Only 16% of FT students stated employment prospects as a factor influencing course choice

**Influences**

The importance of advice from friends and family and the (surprising?) extent and impact of having family working in a relevant industry

**(Some) potential barriers**

- Time** (want to finish the course in 3 years)
- Money** (concerns about finances / pay were a significant barrier)
- Understanding** (only 30% of FT students had enough info to make an informed choice)

**Aspirations**

Despite not being enrolled on a sandwich course, many FT students are open to the idea of doing a placement. 56% stated it was very or somewhat likely they would do a sandwich placement



#### 4. Equality vs Equity – supporting physics students to achieve their career goals

Andrew Mizumori-Hirst and Beth Medley

University of York

[Andrew.Hirst@york.ac.uk](mailto:Andrew.Hirst@york.ac.uk)

##### Abstract

The White Rose Industrial Physics Academy (WRIPA) is a collaboration between five university physics departments of Hull, Leeds, Nottingham, Sheffield, and York. WRIPA's aim is to increase the number of physics graduates that pursue technical careers via curriculum development, careers support and employer engagement. To achieve this strategic aim, we now place a stronger emphasis on developing equitable career support structures. At the School of Physics, Engineering and Technology, University of York we have changed how we support students, including support for year in industry candidates. We have introduced person-led careers support, including (near) peer mentoring and networking events. For example, in the academic year 2021/22, WRIPA engaged with 516 York physicists from a school cohort of 545 undergraduates of which 138 interactions were 1-to-1 career planning meetings. Our initial findings (informed by student feedback) highlight the key 'barriers' (e.g. imposter syndrome fear of failure, disability) that preclude students from pursuing work opportunities. This five-minute presentation will highlight the benefits (and drawbacks) of 1-to-1 meetings in terms of student motivation and confidence. The presentation will also show how this 1-to-1 approach complements and interlinks with other activities (e.g. development of digital career planning tools and near-peer mentoring).

##### Presentation - 3 slides

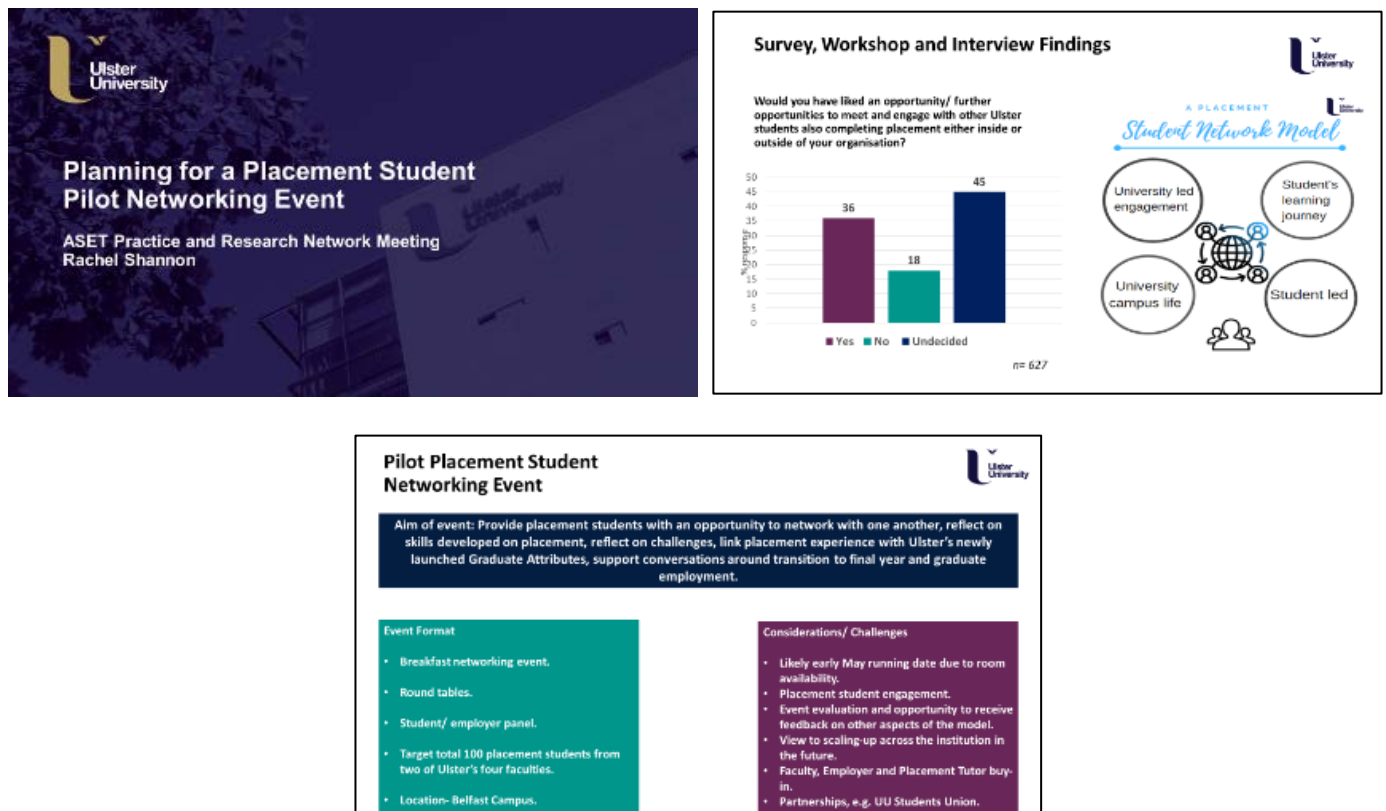
## 5. Planning for a Placement Student Pilot Networking Event

**Dr Rachel Shannon**  
 Ulster University  
[r.shannon@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:r.shannon@ulster.ac.uk)

### Abstract

Each year approximately 1,500 students complete a yearlong placement at Ulster University. During the COVID-19 pandemic many reported feelings of isolation and disconnectedness and expressed a desire for enhanced placement peer interactions. The literature identifies clear benefits around learning and wellbeing associated with placement peer interactions, however, there has been a dearth of evidence-based information available on Ulster students' experiences and views on placement peer connectedness. The Employability and Careers Department disseminated a survey to all placement students in April 2022. The survey achieved a 45% response rate, and a significant proportion of the sample was keen for peer engagement opportunities. Through funding secured through an ASET summer project bursary, campus workshops and interviews were held in August 2022 to design an Ulster placement student network in collaboration with placement students. Based on the findings from the survey, workshops, and interviews, a draft placement student network model was designed and presented at the 2022 ASET Conference. The model was structured around the following four strands University led engagement, University campus life, Student led, Students' learning journey. A pilot of the university campus life strand is being progressed, with a networking event scheduled for placement students in May 2023. This contribution to the ASET Practice and Research Network Meeting will present the aim of the event, planning progress, and challenges experienced to date.

### Presentation - 3 slides





## 6. Work Shadowing

**Claire Newbold**

*University of Reading*

[c.newbold@reading.ac.uk](mailto:c.newbold@reading.ac.uk)

### Abstract

Summary of the work shadowing initiative developed in Maths and Stats at University of Reading. Work shadowing links our first-year undergraduates with students completing their professional placement year. Our aim is for first year students to gain a better understanding of what it is truly like to be a placement student. I will share how the programme works, the benefits to those involved in work shadowing and the challenges I had to overcome to ensure the programme remains a success.

### Presentation - 3 slides



## 7. How do Business Students use Mentors to Develop their Pre-Professional Identity?

**Stephanie Schiaffonati**  
Lincoln University  
[sschiaffonati@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:sschiaffonati@lincoln.ac.uk)

### Abstract

As colleagues will undoubtedly be aware, the marketisation of HE in the UK in recent years has further increased HEIs' need to produce "world ready" graduates, (Grant, 2021). The results from my Systematic Literature Review, completed at the end of the taught element of my PhD (Professional) Education in 2021, showed that mentors can support development of self-authorship or Pre-Professional Identity (PPI), by giving a better-informed picture of work and work opportunities, (Magolda, 1998, 2014; Jackson, 2017). But there was less clarity in the literature about how universities can support student to stay engaged with developing their PPI. I have hypothesized that mentoring can help to maintain or improve this engagement. This study explores how a particular type of mentoring: a long standing, close-tie mentoring scheme, pairing a student with an experienced business mentor, for business students in a post-1992 UK university helps students with their PPI. Although not exclusive to placement students, the mentoring scheme being reviewed has sought to support second year students who are looking to take a placement year between their second and final undergraduate year. I am currently in the data collection stage of the research and am conducting semi-structured interviews with mentors and mentees giving a unique dual perspective. I will be using NVIVO to complete a thematic analysis of the data using themes from PPI and self-authorship frameworks.

### Presentation - 3 slides

**Stephanie Schiaffonati**  
PhD (Prof) Education  
(Aiming for submission in Sept 2025)

- Completed 2 years (part-time), taught modules (masters equivalent)
- Completed Confirmation of Studies
- Completed first annual review
- Written draft literature review and methodology (sort of)
- Now working on data collection
- Semi-structured interviews
- Students and graduates, not necessarily placement students
- Summary of research on next slide (poster)

**Professional Development so far**

Everything takes longer than you think:

- Internalising the researcher identity
- Learning the mechanics of the PhD process – admin!
- Arranging and editing interviews

But I have:

- Built a discipline of careful reference management
- Learnt to review, review, review
- Participated as much as possible: PG seminars/webinars/writing retreats

## 8. Student support: responding to UUK Suicide-Safer Placements recommendations

**Alistair Boot**

*Harper Adams University*

[aboot@harper-adams.ac.uk](mailto:aboot@harper-adams.ac.uk)

### Abstract

In October 2022 and as part of their Suicide-Safer universities initiative, Universities UK issued new recommendations for placement support. They called it a checklist. Through this presentation Alastair Boot will share how they have responded to these recommendations at Harper Adams University. The process required a widely collaborative approach as it touched the interests of so many parties and some changes were potentially contentious. Not all UUK recommendations were accepted but changes made include to the placement tutor role and its management, the validation of employers and the sharing of disclosed disabilities.

### Presentation - 3 slides

**Supporting placement students: responding to UUK recommendations**

**Collaboration**

- Course Management
- Student Services
- Quality Assurance
- Placement Managers
- Wellbeing

**Changes**

1. New placement tutor role description
2. Changes to validation and employer placement agreement
3. New procedures for sharing student disclosures
4. Higher, clearer expectations of tutor contact
5. More visibility and monitoring of tutor contact

Alastair Boot ([aboot@harper-adams.ac.uk](mailto:aboot@harper-adams.ac.uk))

## Questions Raised

**Question for all colleagues to consider:** do HEP's do enough to collect industry data, skills matching and skills anticipation data through employer skills surveys should we coordinate this collection to ensure we do not overload employers?

### Showcase 1.

Breaking The Glass Filter: Solving Employability Challenges in Photography & Media for Working-Class Students.

**Alex Vann**, Lecturer in Photography, *Leeds Trinity University*

1. How do we help students build their 'cultural capital' - i.e. understanding and adapting to those unwritten expectations of behaviours and interpersonal skills particularly in the creative sectors?
2. Have you noticed a reduction in engagement post-pandemic?

### Showcase 2.

Exploring placement experiences in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students – WIP...

**Nina Walker**, Learning and Teaching Specialist, *University of Hertfordshire*

3. Nina, are you going to be contacting those BAME students who have not been engaging/undertaking placements?
4. Nina, will you aim to survey students prior to their experiences to measure their expectations verses their actual lived experience?
5. Nina (not a question but would be good to keep in touch) - we've been discussing how we can prepare students to identify microaggressions whilst on placement and how to address when it's not a usual part of office culture, for those who may just think they have to 'deal' with incidents in the workplace to empower students to not put up with bad practices!

### Showcase 3.

Exploring placement perceptions and barriers.

**Chris Jones**, Employability Manager, School of Architecture, Design and the Built Environment *Nottingham Trent University*

6. Not a question - but a comment for Chris. We are doing some work in the business school in this area. We have worked with someone in your area too. We are looking at information, structural and other barriers at play here too. This includes what information students seek when making applications in the first place, how we present and provide information, and a range of other factors etc. We have survey findings to support our work too.
7. Chris @ NTU - do you have any successful techniques to engage those who do not seek the placement support available? I find they struggle to make that first step. University of York, support for physics students: [www.wripa.ac.uk](http://www.wripa.ac.uk)

### Showcase 4. Equality vs Equity – supporting physics students to achieve their career goals

**Andrew Mizumori-Hirst**, Director, White Rose Industrial Physics Academy, and **Beth Medley**, Employability and Placement Officer, *University of York*

8. In terms of the 1:1 support was time allocated in the timetable (Uni of York) to provide this support? How did you ensure students who needed the support got the support?
9. Who has delivered the one to one support and what are the resource implications of this? I agree the issues of imposter syndrome and lack of confidence are very significant
10. What CRM system are you using Beth?

**Showcase 5.** Planning for a Placement Student Pilot Networking Event .

**Dr Rachel Shannon**, Strategic Project Officer, *Ulster University*.

11. Rachel, do you pay for your students to return to the uni to attend?

**Showcase 6.** Work Shadowing.

**Claire Newbold**, Employability Lecturer, *University of Reading*

12. Win-win-win. How many sessions to the first years attend with the PPY student and employer?
13. Claire - I love this model! Are there any specific employer barriers or have they been really responsive?
14. Fabulous idea Claire @ Reading! Sorry, I may have missed it but is the work shadowing part of a module or carried out at a quieter time in the academic year?

**Showcase 7.** How do Business Students use Mentors to Develop their Pre-Professional Identity?

**Stephanie Schiaffonati**, Senior Lecturer, *University of Lincoln*.

15. I like the idea of the traditional matching mentor with a senior academic- is there a process you follow to make this happen and has this been popular?
16. Steph, thanks for sharing/giving an insight into your 'research journey' , what advice would you give to anyone else thinking about starting? (apart from – don't do it!) Also, is there a 'main advice' you've learned so far from the literature on pre-professional iD development? Thanks
17. what's the mentor matching process? how are students and mentors matched up...is there choice in this?

**Showcase 8.** Student support: responding to UUK Suicide-Safer Placements recommendations

**Alistair Boot**, Principal Lecturer & University Placement Coordinator, *Harper Adams University*.

18. Alistair, could you provide further info about the support you offer to those placement providers who are less wellbeing literate?
19. Alistair-this is such a delicate area- are there particular steps taken to encourage students to disclose to key support staff in place- when having difficulties?
20. Alastair - is this a university wide initiative that you are managing or department specific?
21. Slightly random one for Alastair. Does this link into an approach to your apprenticeship provision, as another form of WBL? Thinking with the stringent line of Ofsted on safeguarding and wellbeing.

## CLOSING REMARKS

First, I would like to thank each of the presenters for making the 2023 ASET PRN Showcase such a successful and informative event- I was impressed and inspired in equal measure by the innovative practice and research being shared. We also enjoyed the opportunity to gain insight into work at a range of stages of development.

The titles of the presentations somewhat obscure a common theme of research into developing inclusive practice running throughout the 2023 Showcase, with work focussing on identifying and removing barriers to engagement and strategies aimed at enhancing support, including for persistently under-represented groups:

Alex Vann's research explored the hiring preferences of creative industry employers in order to develop strategies to help tackle barriers faced by working class students who remain under-represented in this sector. As a first-generation student myself, Alex's findings on the impact of 'insider knowledge' strongly resonated.

How to enhance support for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic placement students is the focus of the research that Nina Walker is involved in. Nina discussed findings from an initial exploration of staff perceptions and planning to take the work forwards to capture student experiences. This will enable different perceptions of what represents effective practice to be identified and addressed and is of sector wide relevance. I look forward to revisiting this project upon completion.

The projects discussed by Chris Jones, Andrew Mizumori and Beth Medley, Claire Newbold and Stephanie Schiaffonati share the common aim of enhancing student engagement in placement and work-related learning opportunities by identifying barriers and developing more inclusive supporting structures and resources. As student engagement in placement and work-related learning enhances employability and graduate employment, findings from such research into practice that is proactively accessible are valuable. Equally valuable were the open and honest discussions of the benefits and drawbacks associated with introducing new ways of working.

Chris discussed work in progress aimed at reversing the decline in uptake of sandwich placements. Findings from a student survey that have helped identify specific factors which influence student decisions and how this is informing the enhancement of more inclusive messaging, pre- and post- enrolment information and associated support were discussed.

Andrew and Beth Medley critically reflected on the design and introduction of an innovative equitable career support structure aimed at increasing the retention of physics graduates in technical careers. The presentation included evaluation of the impact of 1-to-1 career planning meetings alongside the associated pros and cons of implementing such an approach at scale. These findings are relevant to multiple STEM disciplines, where non-retention, especially of women and ethnic minority students, in post graduate technical careers is the start of 'leaky pipeline' leading to a persistent lack of diversity at senior levels in both academia and industry.

Claire and Stephanie summarised their work exploring the impact of shadowing and mentoring initiatives. Claire's work explores whether first year students gain a more authentic understanding of what being on placement is like by linking them with students completing a professional placement. Stephanie's research has focussed on evaluating the impact of a mentoring scheme that pairs students with an experienced business mentor on the development of the students pre professional identity. Stephanie also generously shared her experience and advice on engaging with a PhD.



Rachel Shannon gave us an update on the implementation of a placement student networking event designed to address isolation and disconnectedness that some students experience while on placement. The model for this initiative was originally developed in collaboration with Samantha McCombe- the recipient of the 2022 ASET Summer project bursary and a particularly interesting element is the challenge of scale (there are @1500 placement students at Ulster University).

The final Showcase presentation focussed on a particularly sensitive and important area of practice; Alistair Boot discussed his work at Harper Adams University in response to the 2022 Universities UK recommendations for placement support as part of the Suicide-Safer universities initiative. This is an impactful example of practice and Alistair shared lessons learned and resultant advice about changes to the role of placement tutor, employer validation and sharing of disclosed disabilities.

I will round off by taking the opportunity to acknowledge the generosity and collegiality of the 50+ PRN members in attendance at the 2023 Showcase, as speakers were provided with a great range of questions to field, insightful advice and encouraging feedback about their presentations.

I look forward to meeting you again at future ASET PRN events!

Helen

## Did you know?

The ASET website has a useful list of publications associated with Work Based and Placement Learning <https://www.asetonline.org/research/journals-papers/>

## Join us on LinkedIn

1. **ASET Placement and Employability Professionals Group**  
Request to join here: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/1929302/>
2. **ASET Practice and Research Network**  
Request to join here: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/7403604/>

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