

Practice and Research Network (PRN) Spring Showcase

Online 11 March 2026

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

©ASET and Individual Contributors

CONTENTS

Page

FOREWORD

Dr Helen Hooper , ASET Trustee and Research Specialist Group Chair Director of Equality Diversity and Inclusion, <i>Northumbria University</i>	1
--	----------

RESEARCH SHOWCASE

1. UK Universities and their role in Developing Student Employability - What does the future hold for Work-Based Learning? Joe Corah , <i>University of Leeds</i>	4
2. Supporting Students with Intellectual Disabilities at University College Cork (UCC) to identify and access employment pathways Carol Veiga , <i>University College Cork</i>	6
3. Designing a research informed student inclusion placement guide for employability practitioners Dr Helen Hooper , <i>Northumbria University</i>	8
4. Everybody Here Has A Story to Tell Rob McKay , <i>Manchester Metropolitan University</i>	10
5. Comparing Quality of Working Life in Paid and Unpaid Year-Long Placements Emily Milton and Dr Julie Udell , <i>University of Portsmouth</i>	12
6. Supporting Neurodivergent Students on Placement: Why It Matters Catherine Neville , <i>Northumbria University</i>	14
7. From Placement Officer to Doctoral Candidate - my WBL research journey Vicki O'Brien , <i>Liverpool John Moores University</i>	16
8. The “Future-Ready” HE programme design A multidimensional strategy for widening participation and regional economic growth Dr Katie McAllister , <i>University Centre Peterborough</i>	18

CLOSING REMARKS

Dr Helen Hooper , ASET Trustee and Research Specialist Group Chair Director of Equality Diversity and Inclusion, <i>Northumbria University</i>	20
--	-----------

FOREWORD

The Practice and Research Network (PRN) Showcase is an annual event organised by the ASET Research Specialist Group in Spring. Our aim is to disseminate evidence-based practice and support the growth of an active research practitioner network. We welcome contributions at any stage of development, from work in progress to fully evaluated projects, across all disciplines, at operational or strategic level, and covering any aspect of work based or experiential learning (including apprenticeships and volunteering).

The PRN Spring Showcase is a super informative and fast-paced session during which eight speakers rise to the challenge of providing insight into their research or practice with *just 5 minutes and 3 slides!* The abstracts and slides from each presentation, provide a good overview of the breadth and depth of research and practice shared.

This year's event took place on 11 March, and I'd like to thank each of the Presenters for making it such a successful and informative event. I was impressed and inspired in equal measure by the innovative practice and research being shared across our ASET community, and I hope the presentations below, will inform your own research, introduce new ways of working you can incorporate into your own practice, and highlight potential collaborators.

ASET is committed to supporting the growth of a strong community around research practitioners and to providing a collegiate and supportive space for you to share your work, test out your ideas and get constructive feedback and advice from peers. The range of ASET research support (including research and practice development funding), projects occurring across the ASET community, and additional dissemination and networking opportunities can be accessed from the ASET website [research pages](#). Further details are also available in the Closing Remarks.

2026 Spring Research Showcase 11 March 12-2pm Meeting protocols



- Please use headphones, your microphone is muted to ensure everyone can hear the speakers
- Please enable your video to fully participate
- Please type your email address into chat which will be shared after the event
- This will be an informal session, with short presentations in two groups, followed by a Q&A for each group
- Q&A - Please use the chat throughout to pose your questions.

©ASET not for reproduction, onward distribution outside ASET members, or for commercial purposes



Welcome to the 2026 Practice and Research Showcase

from Dr Helen Hooper, ASET trustee, Northumbria University

Schedule	Presentation title	Presenters
12.05- 12.10	UK Universities and their role in Developing Student Employability- What does the future hold for Work-Based Learning?	Joe Corah , <i>Work-Based Learning and Partnerships Officer (Sustainability), University of Leeds</i>
12.11- 12.16	Supporting Students with Intellectual Disabilities at University College Cork (UCC) to identify and access employment pathways	Carol Veiga , <i>Work Placement and Employment Pathways Coordinator, University College Cork</i>
12.17- 12.22	Designing a research informed student inclusion placement guide for employability practitioners	Dr Helen Hooper , <i>Northumbria University</i>
12.23-12.28	Everybody Here Has A Story to Tell	Rob McKay , <i>Senior Lecturer Enterprise Practice, Manchester Metropolitan University</i>
12.30-12.45: Q&A		
12.45-13.00: BREAK		

©ASET not for reproduction, onward distribution outside ASET members, or for commercial purposes

Programme continued...



Schedule	Showcase title	Presenters
13.05- 13.10	Comparing Quality of Working Life in Paid and Unpaid Year-Long Placements	Dr Julie Udell , <i>Senior Lecturer in Digital Marketing</i> , and Emily Milton , <i>Final Year BSc (Hons) Psychology Student University of Portsmouth</i>
13.11- 13.16	Supporting Neurodivergent Students on Placement: Why It Matters	Catherine Neville , <i>Specialist Autism Mentor and co-Founder of All Things Stim, Northumbria University</i>
13.17- 13.22	From Placement Officer to Doctoral Candidate - my WBL research journey.	Vicki O'Brien , <i>Senior Lecturer in Digital Marketing, Liverpool John Moores University</i>
13.23-13.28	The "Future-Ready" HE programme design: A multidimensional strategy for widening participation and regional economic growth.	Dr Katie McAllister , <i>HE Manager, University Centre Peterborough</i>
13.30-13.45: Q&A		
13.45-14.00: CLOSING REFLECTIONS		

ASET Research Support

- [Showcase Reports](#) (including slides)
- [Community Knowledge Exchanges](#) - concise articles written by YOU - ASET Community members - that focus on **current and pertinent topics within WBPL**
- Something to share? Instructions for Authors are available in the [Member Area](#) of the ASET website
- **[2026 Conference: Reimagining Work Based Learning for a Changing World](#)**
 - 8-9th September, Lancaster University
 - Previous [Conference Proceedings](#) Final Reports
- **ASET Grants**
 - Designed to support small scale WBPL projects
 - Research Grant
 - Practice Grant
 - [Final Reports](#) of previously funded projects

Dr Helen Hooper, *Northumbria University*
ASET Trustee/Research Specialist Group Chair

1. UK Universities and their role in Developing Student Employability – What does the future hold for Work-Based Learning?

Joe Corah
University of Leeds
j.j.corah@leeds.ac.uk


Abstract

This dissertation explores the current role, effectiveness, and future trajectory of Work-Based Learning (WBL) within UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), with a particular focus on how WBL enhances student employability. Through a narrative literature review, the study examines key pedagogical models—including Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory, the Triple Helix Model, and the ChANGE Framework—to evaluate how universities integrate workplace experience into academic curricula. The review highlights the documented benefits of WBL, such as improved professional identity, enhanced reflective practice, and stronger employment outcomes. It also identifies persistent inequities in access, inconsistencies in employer engagement, and variation in the quality and structure of placement opportunities. The dissertation further considers the impact of digital transformation, Industry 4.0, lifelong learning, and modular education on the future of WBL, emphasising the increasing need for flexible, inclusive, and digitally enabled models. Policy developments including degree apprenticeships, the Lifelong Loan Entitlement, and Skills Bootcamps are assessed for their potential to reshape WBL provision. Findings reveal both the value and the limitations of current WBL strategies, and propose recommendations for strengthening curriculum design, widening participation, enhancing digital delivery, and improving employer partnerships. The study concludes that WBL represents a vital, evolving component of employability-focused higher education, requiring ongoing innovation and robust evaluation.

Presentation - 3 slides

Work-Based Learning

Bridging Higher Education and Employment



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Context

Graduate employability is a major priority across UK higher education.

Approach

Work-based learning integrates placements, internships, and apprenticeships with academic study.

Impact

Students gain real workplace experience and stronger employment outcomes.

Opportunities and Challenges of Work-Based Learning



Opportunities

Stronger employability and professional identity
Development of communication, teamwork and problem-solving
Paid placements and apprenticeships can support social mobility

Challenges

Unequal access to placements and internships
Variable employer engagement across sectors
Digital and hybrid WBL models still developing

Recommendations for Universities and Employers



Embed work-based learning within the curriculum rather than as an optional extra

Improve inclusive access through flexible and remote placement models

Invest in digital WBL: simulations, hybrid placements and virtual collaboration

Support lifelong learning through modular courses and micro-credentials

Strengthen long-term partnerships between universities and employers

2. Supporting Students with Intellectual Disabilities at University College Cork (UCC) to identify and access employment pathways

Carol Veiga
University College Cork
carol.veiga@ucc.ie

Additional Contributors: Sue Knight and Catherine McVicker, University College Cork

Abstract

UCC has proudly been a pioneer in the provision of innovative third-level courses for students with an intellectual disability (ID) since 2009. People with ID are disproportionately disadvantaged in terms of equity of access to education and employment opportunities and continue to encounter systemic and structural challenges to meaningful inclusion in these areas. This poster will present an overview of the id+futures project and specifically the UCC ecosystem that supports students with ID to gain career readiness and transferable workplace skills and scaffolds their transition onto specialised/vocational training and/or work. This includes the provision of a Work Integrated Learning (WIL) module delivered by a multi-disciplinary team, with core sessions on career planning and goal setting, CV development, communication skills, workplace etiquette and teamworking. Additional initiatives include bespoke workshops with employability and career experts, the engagement of industry leaders and id+graduates on an Expert Advisory Group, partnerships with Further Education providers, and enabling students to undertake paid work placements/projects aligned with their skills and interests. We also focus on empowering and upskilling business partners to create disability-inclusive workplaces through inclusive recruitment training and the co-creation of portfolio of Easy Read Guides to support students' transition to the workplace.

Presentation - 3 slides

Overview of id+futures and WIL

- Informed by UN CRPD and UN SDGs
- Certificate in Social Citizenship and Disability-Inclusive Practice (c. 20)
- SS1029: Work Placement and Transition Onwards**
- 12 week summer **paid placement**, ~15 hours per week, over 3 days
- Extensive **pre-placement training** (1:1s, Group Sessions, Guest Lecturers and Bespoke training sessions)
- Multidisciplinary team** – Placement, OT, Theatre expertise, tutors, LSWs
- Alignment with mainstream activities** – Skills Centre, EmployAgility Awards
- Partner with Cork ETB** – employment pathways – circular tertiary options

SS1029 Facilitators: Carol Veiga, Sue Knight, Catherine McVicker



How we support our students



- **1:1 sessions** – CV, skills profiles and accommodations.
- **Career Interest Survey**
- **Targeted workshops/site visits/role play/simulations**
- Leveraging UCC **AI-powered tools and skills development** programmes
- **LinkedIn profiles**
- Development of **Visual Schedules** and other work-based aids (e.g. Assistiv)
- **Scaffolded induction and scheduled on-site visits** during placement



Assistiv



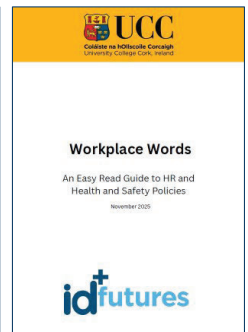
Website: www.ucc.ie/idplus



How we support our Business Partners



- Customised support with **job carving** and **assessing the tasks and work environment**
- **Disability Confidence training** – supervisors and mentors
- Information and support with **financial incentives and grants**
- **Easy Read Guides:** HR and H&S policies, unpacking your payslip, etc.
- **TIER** (open access resources)
- **Full on-site support with onboarding**
- **Scheduled check-ins** – weeks 2, 4, 7 and 11
- **Expert Advisory Group**



LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/idplusfutures/

3. Designing a research informed student inclusion placement guide for employability practitioners

Dr Helen Hooper
 Northumbria University
h.hooper@northumbria.ac.uk

Abstract

Equality of opportunity within student and graduate recruitment remains a critical sector theme and a priority for inclusive employability practice, given persistence of awarding gaps and graduate employment disparities for disadvantaged student groups. Work placement has been identified as the most effective activity a Higher Education Provider can introduce to improve their student employability and graduate employment outcomes. Previous research shows work placement can negate graduate employment disparities for disadvantaged student groups and that these student groups are less likely to engage. Studies exploring perceived barriers to engagement highlight employability skills, self- efficacy and resilience. However, none of this research explored the role that recruitment materials or processes play in attracting/detering disadvantaged student groups to work placement opportunities in the first instance. We performed a Systematic Literature Review to locate the research that identifies effective actions which employability practitioners can take to enhance support or remove barriers in student recruitment materials or processes to improve participation of disadvantaged student groups in work placement. We synthesised relevant actions found in the literature into an evidence based Inclusive Student Recruitment Guide for Employability Practitioners. We will present the Guide and discuss practical actions that employability practitioners can take to enhance student inclusion.

Presentation - 3 slides

Inclusive Student Recruitment Guide for Employability Practitioners

or: *Avoiding recruitment materials that could deter specific (student) groups from employment opportunities*
 Dr Helen Hooper

Motivations for the work

- Athena Swan- analysis of academic recruitment data demonstrated (far) **more male than female applicants**
- (And despite all our best efforts) **Why don't** (some) students **apply** for work based learning opportunities?

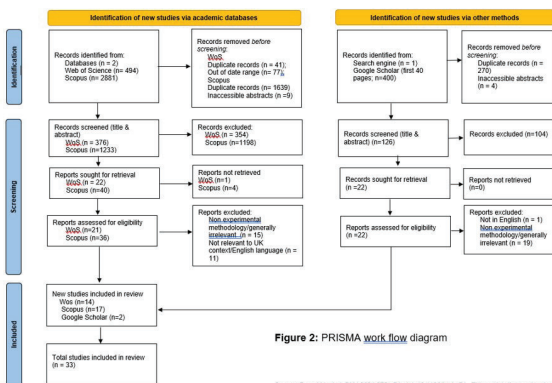
Could recruitment materials deter some groups?

- **Subtly gendered wording in adverts ONLY deters WOMEN**
- Bielby, L & Hooper L (2022) [Conference workshop](#): How can placement advertisements be more inclusive?
Use of gender decoder tools e.g, <https://gender-decoder.katmatfield.com/>
- A '**Competitive Salary**' deters **SOME** student groups
- Akel, S, Hooper, H and Sangal, V (2023): '[Evaluating the impact of a 'competitive salary' in a placement job advertisement on different student groups](#)'



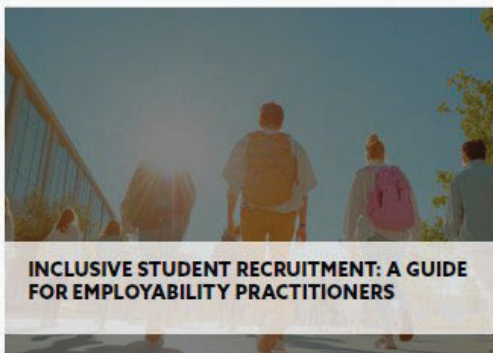
What other features of job listings could deter/attract specific groups?

2024-25 [Jisc Careers Research grant](#): **Final Report and Guide**



- **Systematic Literature Review** to identify high quality studies reporting on **recruitment interventions that demonstrated impact on underrepresented groups** (protected characteristics and WP indicators)
 - particularly the appeal of job adverts

Annual grants: <https://luminare.prospects.ac.uk/jisc-careers-research-grant>

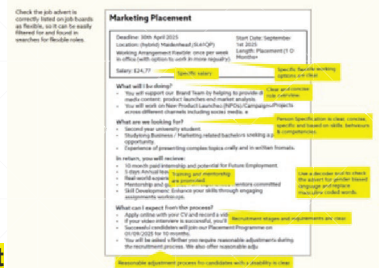


Scan to **download the Guide** from the Northumbria University Knowledge Bank



Project team collaborators:
 Beth Lawry (Newcastle)
 Sam McKinstrie (Robert Gordon University),
 Aleksandra Kajzer, Samuel Rattray, Megan Ferrell (Northumbria student research assistants)

- **Glossary** of key terms and concepts in EDI
- **Key recommendations**
- **Practical advice** surrounding:
 - Student engagement
 - Diversifying applicants
 - Bibliography
 - **Inclusive Job Advert Toolkit**
 - Impact of interventions



• **Inclusive Job Advert Toolkit = UNO REVERSE =** gender critical job advert analysis framework

Interested in finding out a bit more?

Hooper, H. (2026). An Evaluation of the Gender Inclusivity of UK Senior Academic Job Advertisements. *Gender, Work & Organization*. :1–17 <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.70092>

Avoid if you do not want to develop an unhealthy obsession with job listings!

4. Everybody Here Has a Story to Tell

Rob McKay

Manchester Metropolitan University

r.mckay@mmu.ac.uk

Abstract

Experiential Learning is predicated on reflection – by taking the time to think about what happened in our experiences and making sense of them in terms of formal knowledge, other experiences, context and outcomes, we inform our understanding and preparedness for future situations. Typically, where reflection on experiential learning is concerned, we use the ‘critical incident’ model of taking notable parts of our experience and subjecting them to examination. In my work with practicing entrepreneurs and leaders, this has proven too limiting. As part of a wider approach to using story in learning, I have created a prompt template based on Christopher Vogler’s updated version of the ‘Hero’s Journey’ mythic story structure. In use this has led to a deeper, more holistic reflection. For students, this approach holds out both the opportunity to create richer reflection assessments which incorporate a greater element of sense-making and enable them to craft compelling narratives as part of their professional identity and career building. This session would share the approach and key elements and invite collaborators keen to try this with their own experiential learners.

Presentation - 3 slides

Everyone here has a Story to Tell



Rob McKay, Centre for Enterprise, MMU

- Originated as a project looking at story structures in teaching and learning for practicing entrepreneurs and SME decision makers
- These are learners for whom experience is the primary source of knowledge
- While happy to share their experiences, the narratives of those had been crafted to ‘sell’ the individual and business
- So the depth and scope of reflection was always limited
- I wanted to make that story richer and more useful



Vogler - 'Hero's Journey'

- Hollywood Scriptwriter Chris Vogler updated, simplified and improved on Joseph Campbells 'Heros Journey'
- 12 stages in 3 acts – archetypal resonance
- I used these to create prompt questions about parts of learners experience that they had overlooked:
 - The role of social capital
 - Personal resistance
- Promising results so far (one cohort spent an entire afternoon in peer discussions prompted by the first two acts)



Wider Potential

- We typically assess experiential learning through reflective processes like Gibbs, based on 'critical incidents'
- But this
 - Relies on learners knowing what a Critical Incident is
 - Leads them to focus on the overly dramatic & negative
 - Atomises experience instead of a holistic narrative
- The Vogler template offers
 - A richer learning experience from reflection on experience
 - Automatically creating a compelling narrative of experiential learning (for example, to recount to a prospective employer)

5. Comparing Quality of Working Life in Paid and Unpaid Year-Long Placements

Emily Milton and Dr Julie Udell

Portsmouth University

julie.udell@port.ac.uk

Abstract

Up to 51% of graduates have completed at least one internship alongside their studies, but approximately 1 in every 5 internships offer no financial compensation (The Sutton Trust, 2025). Inspired by existing research models of Quality of Working Life (QWL), the present study explores placement-related quality of working life, comparing the experiences of students undertaking paid versus unpaid placements. Students completed a short survey reflecting on factors affecting their placement such as financial stress, autonomy, and support from both universities and placement providers to determine the overall placement quality. We will present the preliminary findings of this research to examine the impacts placements have on student life and suggest best practices higher education and placement providers can adopt to improve the quality of placements for students.

Presentation - 3 slides


Paid vs Unpaid Placements: Does Quality of Working Life Differ?

Emily Milton – Level 6 Project Student, BSc (Hons) Psychology

Supervisor: Julie Udell – Associate Professor in Professional Development
School of Psychology, Sport and Health Sciences

Background

- 66% of students experience significant financial strain due to their placement (Morley et al., 2023)
- Well-being & stress differ between paid and unpaid placements, but no difference in perceived learning benefits (Zegwaard & Adams-Hutcheson, 2024)
- Quality of Working Life focuses on job satisfaction in addition to the home-work interface and general well-being (Easton & Van Laar, 2007)

 UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH

Aims

- Is there a significant difference between the quality of working life (QoWL) for students undertaking paid versus unpaid placements?
- Which factors significantly impact placement quality besides financial compensation?



UNIVERSITY OF
PORTSMOUTH



The PRQoWL Survey

- 25 item self-report measure - 5-point Likert scale
- Items categorised into 4 factors: Well-being & Stress, Safety & Support, Autonomy & Impact, Relationships & Culture
- 101 participants as of 02/03/2026
- 71% of participants are University of Portsmouth students

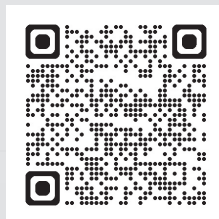


UNIVERSITY OF
PORTSMOUTH

Preliminary Findings

- No significant difference in placement-related quality of life between paid and unpaid placements
- Significant difference in PRQoWL between male and female students
- Industries with lowest PRQoWL ratings were education, research, and healthcare

QR code for signing up:



Contact details – Emily.Milton@myport.ac.uk or julie.udell@port.ac.uk



YOUR TIME.
YOUR PLACE.

6. Supporting Neurodivergent Students on Placement: Why It Matters

Catherine Neville
 Northumbria University
catherine.l.neville@northumbria.ac.uk

Abstract

This presentation will highlight why supporting neurodivergent students during work-based placements is both a legal obligation and a professional opportunity, outline the key challenges these students face, and introduce practical training solutions for placement providers and universities. With one in seven people in the UK being neurodivergent, and over 2.5 million students currently enrolled in higher education, the number of neurodivergent students on placement is significant and growing. Yet support for placement providers and these students is not developing at the same rate. Under the Equality Act 2010, both universities and placement providers have a legal duty to proactively offer reasonable adjustments, whether or not a formal diagnosis is provided. Yet support during placement often lags behind what is offered on campus. When given the right environment, neurodivergent students bring exceptional strengths to placement settings, including deep focus, creative thinking, strong analytical skills, and authentic perspectives. However, without adequate support, challenges such as sensory processing difficulties, executive functioning, emotional regulation, and masking can significantly impact their experience and outcomes. This presentation will introduce free and paid resources from All Things Stim to help institutions and placement providers build genuinely inclusive placement experiences.

Presentation - 3 slides

Neurodivergent students on placement: A growing reality and a shared responsibility

172,000
Neurodivergent
University Students

51%
increase in the
last 10 years!

146,000
Students with a
learning difference

37%
increase in the
last 10 years!

26,000
Students with a
social/communicat
ion condition

280%
increase in the
last 10 years!

(hesa.ac.uk)

Offering reasonable adjustments for neurodivergent students on placement:

- is the **legal duty** of both the university and the placement provider
- should be **anticipated** and **proactive**
- should be done **with or without formal diagnosis**

(Equality Act 2010)

This is not a niche issue - it is already part of everyday placement practice

When barriers are reduced, strengths can show up

Common challenges on placement:

- Sensory overload
- Unclear expectations
- Executive functioning load
- Sudden change and transitions
- Masking, fatigue and burnout
- Stress and anxiety
- Communication differences

Strengths that can flourish when supported:

- Deep focus
- Attention to detail
- Creative thinking
- Strong analysis
- Authentic perspectives
- Innovative problem solving
- Specialist knowledge

**Right support + Right environment =
Opportunity to learn, contribute and thrive**

What you can do next

1) Start with the free guide: www.allthingsstim.com/placement/intro

Use the free placement resource from All Things Stim

2) Share it with your teams

Review your current placement processes and identify gaps

3) Go further with training

Book specialist neuro-affirming training for university teams and placement providers

Catherine Neville

info@allthingsstim.com

www.allthingsstim.com



**ALL
THINGS
STIM**

7. From Placement Officer to Doctoral Candidate - my WBL research journey

Vicki O'Brien

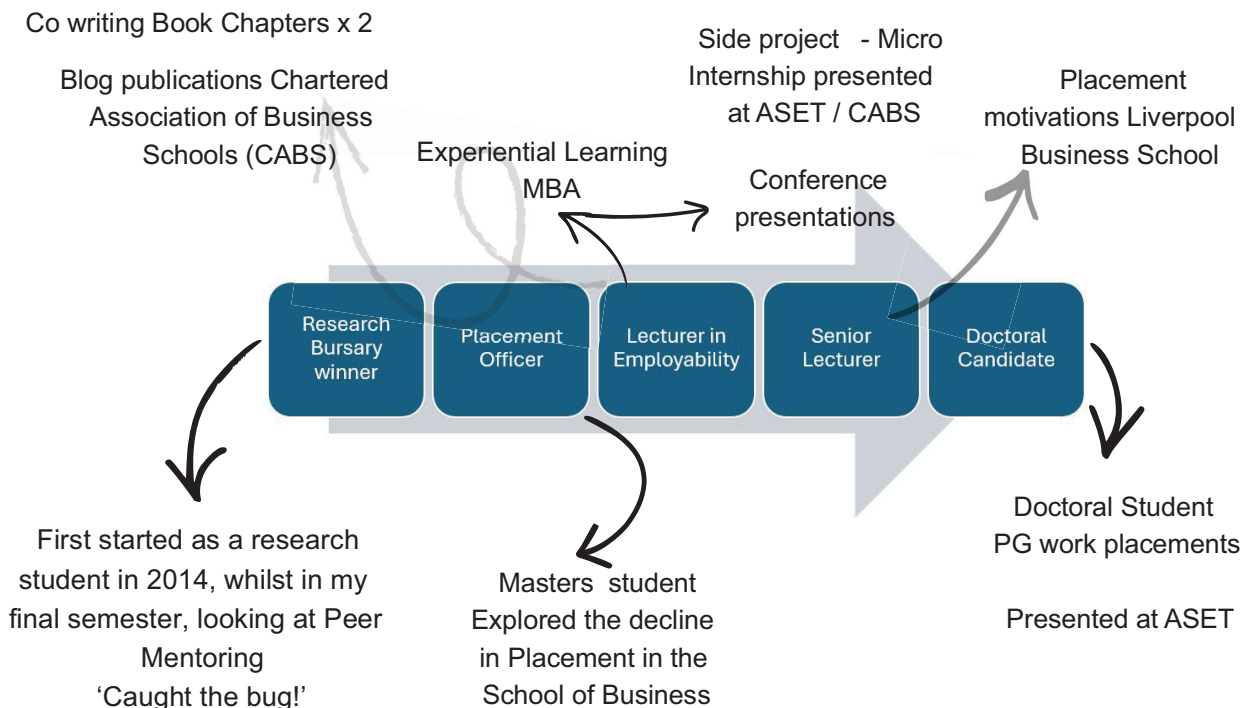
Liverpool John Moores University

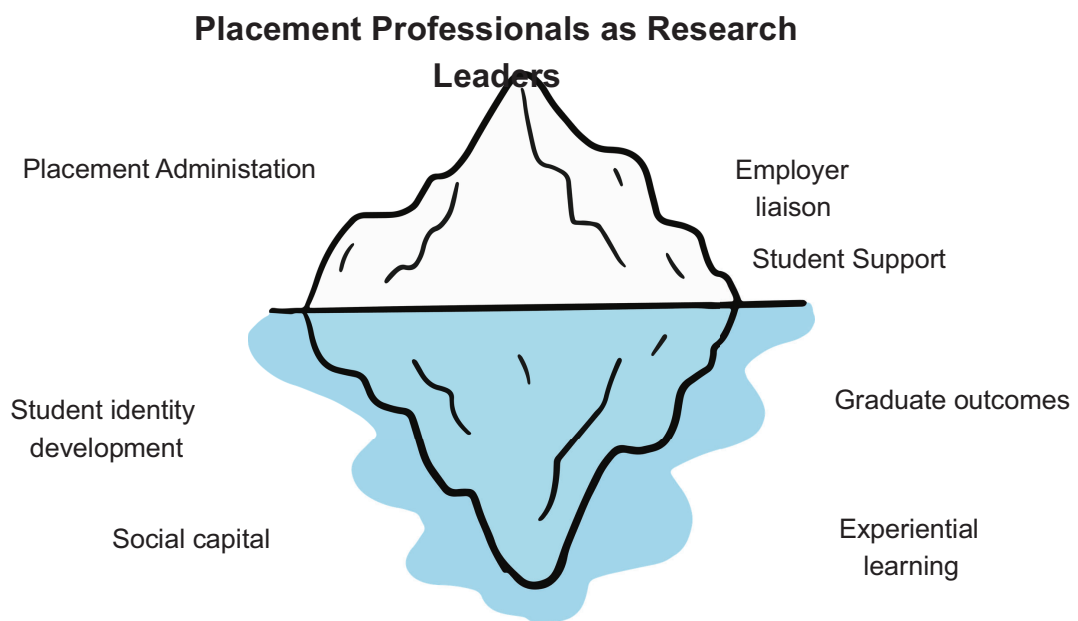
v.l.obrien@ljmu.ac.uk

Abstract

This presentation charts my professional journey from Placement Officer to doctoral candidate and explores how practice-led inquiry has shaped my evolving research profile. Beginning in placement support, I became increasingly interested in students' lived experiences navigating work-based learning, particularly those who do not traditionally engage. My early research (funded by an ASET research bursary) focused on peer support interventions and sparked an interest in WBL research. I followed this with an MA in Education, investigating barriers and motivators influencing placement uptake, which sparked a sustained focus on employability, engagement, and experiential learning. Over time, this practitioner insight informed conference presentations, publications, and curriculum innovation across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Now undertaking a Doctorate in Professional Practice in Education, my research explores whether placements enable postgraduate international students to develop career capital. This work integrates practice, policy, and theory, drawing on phenomenology and career development frameworks. Through this journey, I have come to see placement work not as operational delivery, but as a site of scholarly practice. This session will reflect on how professional roles can evolve into research identities, how practice generates research questions, and how placement professionals can build research-informed profiles that influence institutional strategy, student outcomes, and sector conversations.

Presentation - 3 slides





Placement work is not just delivery —it is research in action.

8. The "Future-Ready" HE programme design A multidimensional strategy for widening participation and regional economic growth

Dr Katie McAllister

University Centre Peterborough

katie.mcallister@ieg.ac.uk

Abstract

In an era where the traditional linear journey into Higher Education is no longer the norm, how can institutions pivot to become true engines of social mobility and regional prosperity? This talk introduces a "no wrong door" framework designed to dismantle historical barriers and align academic excellence with the urgent needs of the local economy. By seamlessly weaving together traditional Honours degrees, Foundation years, Cert/Dip HE options, and Degree Apprenticeships, this model creates a high-flexibility ecosystem that values every learner's starting point. We explore how integrating Lifelong Learning (LLE) modules allows us to move beyond "one-and-done" education, supporting local businesses through targeted upskilling and fostering a resilient workforce. Listeners will gain insights into how this multi-strand approach not only satisfies stringent Widening Participation mandates but transforms the university into a collaborative hub for the community. This is more than just a recruitment strategy; it is a blueprint for a sustainable, inclusive future where Higher Education serves as a lifelong catalyst for both individual success and regional economic growth.

The "Future-Ready" HE programme design

A multidimensional strategy for widening participation and
regional economic growth

The multi - strand entry & exit framework



Traditional Roots

Foundation degree
Full Degrees
Top-up degrees



Alternative roots

Level 4 CertHE
Level 5 DipHE



Vocational integration

Level 4 apprenticeship
Level 5 apprenticeship
Degree Apprenticeships



Lifelong Learning LLE

Stackable, credit-bearing
modules for agile upskilling in
the modern workforce.

Example:
Certificate in HE Business Management
Diploma in HE Business Management
Foundation Degree Business Management
BSc (Hons) Business Management
BSc (Hons) Business Management (Top-up)

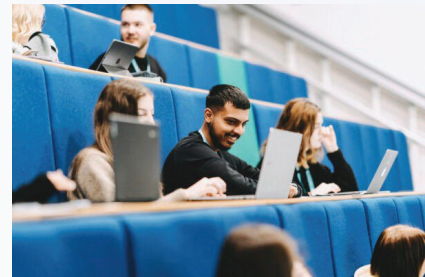
Example:
L5 Operations Manager

Examples:
Business and Law
Developing and Leading Teams
Stakeholder and Project Management
Performance Management with Data
Analysis Pt 1 & 2

Access & industry

- ✓ **Widening participation:** Dismantling systemic barriers through multiple, frictionless entry & exit points.
- ✓ **Business co-design:** Tailoring curriculum strands to meet the specific skills gaps of local industry.
- ✓ **Regional resilience:** Cultivating a skilled workforce that drives social mobility and local prosperity.

Ensuring every member of the community has a viable path to professional mastery.



CLOSING REMARKS

I would like to reiterate thanks to each of the presenters for making the ASET 2026 Spring Showcase such a success! I remain impressed by the time management skills of presenters. With just 3 slides in 5 minutes, each presentation distils; the rationale for the work, main methodology and key findings, meaning a lot of information is covered in a relatively short meeting.

The titles of this year's presentations somewhat obscure three common themes of innovative responses to the challenges practitioners face across the sector, research highlighting the crucial role that work based and placement learning plays in students' professional identity formation, and inclusive practice demonstrating positive impacts on underrepresented students' engagement with work opportunities. We also enjoyed the opportunity to gain insight into work at a range of stages of development and discussion of findings from personal dissertation and PhD research.

This year's Showcase was initiated and completed by two complimentary and equally thought-provoking presentations from **Joe** and **Katie**.

Joe's presentation was based on his research findings from dissertation work at the University of Leeds. Joe discussed his synthesis of sector wide challenges and opportunities faced by UK Universities surrounding their future role in developing student employability- effectively setting the context for the presentations that followed. Katie effectively rounded off this year's Showcase by in effect providing an institutional 'response' to Joe's initial provocation. Katie discussed development of the "Future-Ready" HE programme design she leads at University Centre Peterborough. This initiative is an impressive multidimensional strategy for widening participation and regional economic growth and provided an example of how institutions are responding to both challenges and opportunities.

In evidence throughout this year's Showcase was an ongoing emphasis on inclusive practice, including projects and initiatives aimed at identifying and removing barriers to work engagement for persistently under-represented groups.

Carol, Sue and Catherine discussed their collaborative work at University College Cork that focusses on supporting students with intellectual disabilities to identify and access employment pathways. Carole, Sue and Catherine's Showcase presentation provided us with insight into an effective case study that is achieving impressive impacts, alongside useful advice about how to establish such an initiative.

Across the sector the proportion of students seeking work based and placements learning opportunities who also report a diagnosed neurodiverse condition has sharply increased in recent years, so **Catherine's** presentation on her work surrounding inclusive practice in this space is highly relevant. Catherine is a specialist autism mentor at Northumbria University and co-founder of All Things Stim (<https://www.allthingsstim.com/>) and she also provided us with insights from her own lived experience in her presentation. Catherine discussed a number of barriers to engagement in work placement for students with a neurodivergent condition alongside a range of practical interventions, resources and advice for employability practitioners surrounding practice which supports this group of students to access and - importantly - succeed in the workplace. Catherine also outlined a number of important 'support gaps' and explained her ideas for new tools to address these needs and I hope Catherine secures funding for this important work.

I signposted attendees to an Inclusive Student recruitment Guide for Employability Practitioners in my own Showcase presentation. This guide can be downloaded from the Northumbria Knowledge Bank (<https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/business-services/engage-with-us/research/ip-and-commercialisation/knowledge-bank/>) which makes knowledge-based tools arising from research freely accessible for public use and benefit. I discussed how my frustration at not being able to find evidence-based practical advice surrounding design of inclusive student recruitment materials (e.g. job adverts which do not deter students from specific backgrounds from the advertised role) led to the research collaboration that underpins this resource. I discussed how combining perspectives with research collaborators **Sam McKinstrie** (Robert Gordon University), **Beth Lawry** (Newcastle University) and student research assistants generated a really useful Guide which has been

downloaded over 200 times. I also took the opportunity to promote and encourage attendees to apply to two sources of funding that are aimed at supporting employability research and are accessible to both practitioners and academics [1] ASET Research Grants and ASET Practice Grants (reports of previously funded projects: <https://www.asetonline.org/research-outputs/>) and [2] JISC Careers Research grants (reports of previously funded projects: <https://luminare.prospects.ac.uk/jisc-careers-research-grant>).

The intriguing title of **Rob's** presentation 'Everybody Here Has A Story to Tell' highlights Rob's creative thinking and innovative approach to assessment of the modules he leads at Manchester Metropolitan University. Rob's work underscores the role that work placements can play in shaping students professional self-identity development and his novel methodology has helped capture these important but difficult to identify processes that help to explain the 'how' and 'why' placements achieve positive student impacts.

Another pair of complimentary presentations gave us insight into different phases of the research journey, alongside two areas of employability practice that remain relevant across the sector. **Julie** introduced her final year undergraduate project student **Emily** from the University of Portsmouth. Emily is undertaking a comparative analysis between the quality of working life in paid and unpaid year-long placements. Emily discussed the difficulty of recruiting participants who completed an unpaid placement alongside some of her initial findings in an area of practice which remains highly controversial. **Vicki O'Briens'** inspired and inspirational presentation discussed her research journey from her starting point an ASET funded student researcher through to her current doctoral research exploring international student experiences. I plan to take on board Vicki's practical advice about the positive impacts of chocolate and wine, if and when research motivation starts to flag!

I will round off by taking the opportunity to acknowledge the generosity and collegiality of the attendees at the 2026 Showcase, as speakers were provided with a great range of questions to field, insightful advice and encouraging feedback about their presentations. I would like to encourage both presenters and attendees to consider sharing their work more broadly across the ASET community via a 2026 conference presentation and/or a Community Knowledge Exchange article (more information about both is provided, below).

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

Dr Helen Hooper, Northumbria University
ASET Trustee/Research Specialist Group Chair

ASET offers a range of support, including finding opportunities to get involved with Research into Work based and Placement Learning:

The ASET Annual Conference

The theme for the 2026 ASET [Conference](#) is **Reimagining Work Based Learning for a Changing World** and will focus on our practitioners at the centre of a rapidly shifting environment. The workplace has faced unprecedented evolution in the last few years and continues to do so, creating challenges and spaces for innovation in placement and work based learning. The programme will delve into how WBPL practitioners can innovate, create and collaborate in this changing context. The 2026 conference is at Lancaster University 8-9 September. Contributions across all disciplines, at operational or strategic level, and covering any aspect of work based or experiential learning (including apprenticeships and volunteering) are welcomed, and there are a range of presentation formats (posters, workshops, and oral presentations). This provides PRN presenters and attendees an excellent opportunity to disseminate their work alongside in person networking.

The published **Conference Proceedings** from previous meetings (including abstracts and slides etc) are available [here](#).

Community Knowledge Exchange articles - do you have something to share across the ASET community?

We welcome presenters and attendees inspired by the 2026 PRN Research Showcase to consider writing a CKE to share their research, practice and specialist knowledge. There is excellent scope for impact, the ASET Community has around 2000 individuals working at HEPs across the UK, Republic of Ireland and overseas.

CKEs are concise written papers authored by ASET Community members on topics related to specialist/good practice and/or employability research. An overview of [initial CKE articles](#) provides an insight into the range of topics covered. Login to the [Member Area](#) to access full articles and author guidelines. CKE submissions are welcomed throughout the year.

Funding- ASET Grants

ASET annually offers competitive funding opportunities for small scale projects in any area of work based or experiential learning.

Two grants, each worth up to £5500 are available annually:

- Research Grant
- Practice Grant

These grants support you to employ a student/recent graduate from your institution to undertake a paid project (up to 300hrs with a grant of £3750 plus an additional £750 to your institution towards costs of attending the ASET Conference to support your student to present their work on your project. A further £1000 is allocated by ASET to cover the student researcher's travel, accommodation and conference attendance, and will be paid by ASET against eligible student expenses). Previously funded Project Reports are provided [here](#).

The 2027 Grants will be launched at the 2026 ASET conference. Again, we welcome PRN presenters and attendees to start planning a project and an application in 2027!

Published PRN Spring Showcase Reports from previous meetings are published [here](#). We welcome both presenters and attendees to contribute to future Showcase meetings.



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/>

ISBN: 978-1-7393534-6-9



ASET
The Work-Based and Placement Learning Association
The Burton Street Foundation
57 Burton Street
Sheffield S6 2HH

Tel: +44 (0)114 234 5197

Email: aset@asetonline.org
Website: www.asetonline.org