

Parallel Sessions

Reimagining Work Based Learning for a Changing World

Day 1: Tuesday 8 September

Stream A 09:55-10:40	A1 From Placement to Partnership: Maximising Value in a Changing World of Work Dr Emma Bonfiglio, Keele University	A2 The development of a quality framework for international WIL Dr Norah McRae and Judie Kay, WACE and Sam McKinstrie, Robert Gordon University	A3 What Are They Getting From It? Student and Staff Perspectives on the Career Readiness Impact of Work Based and Experiential Learning Daniel Lewis and Thomas O'Fee, Northumbria University
Stream B 13:45-14:30	B1 Beyond the Lecture: Teaching Employability Through Play, Partnership, and Practice Dr Catherine Teehan, Jo Emery and Catherine Elmer, Cardiff University	B2 Streamlining to make delivery of skill development in embedded Company Projects modules scaleable Shelley Morgan, Lancaster University	B3 Where there's a WIL, there's a way Erica Cargill and Sam McKinstrie, Robert Gordon University

Parallel Sessions

Reimagining Work Based Learning for a Changing World

Tuesday 8 September

Stream A: 09:55-10:40

Session A1

Title: From Placement to Partnership: Maximising Value in a Changing World of Work

Presenter(s): Dr Emma Bonfiglio, Keele University

Additional Contributor(s): Dr Colin Rigby, Keele University

Abstract

Work-based learning has traditionally been designed around placement models that prioritise student employability outcomes. However, universities and employers are operating in an increasingly complex environment characterised by technological change, evolving workforce expectations, economic uncertainty, and growing pressure to demonstrate impact from collaborative activity. This interactive workshop invites delegates to consider a provocative question: Are we still designing work-based learning around a model of work that no longer exists? Drawing on practice-based experience and insights from research on organisational adaptation and innovation, the session explores how we move beyond transactional placement arrangements towards more strategic partnerships that create value for students, employers, academics, and universities. Particular emphasis will be placed on engagement with SMEs, which constitute the majority of UK businesses and frequently interact with higher education in ways that extend beyond conventional placement models. Participants will reflect on the strengths and limitations of current partnership approaches, identify opportunities for mutual value creation, and explore practical ways to redesign employer relationships around shared outcomes including talent development, impact, organisational capability, and regional impact.

Session A2

Title: The development of a quality framework for international WIL

Presenter(s): Dr Norah McRae and Judie Kay, WACE and Sam McKinstrie, Robert Gordon University

Abstract

The World Association for Co-operative and Work-Integrated Education (WACE) has developed a framework for Global Quality Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) WACE Global Quality WIL Framework | Best Practice. This framework was informed by the quality WIL frameworks from across the world. However, none of these frameworks specifically addresses quality as needed for international WIL or Work Based Learning experiences. As a result, researchers from WACE conducted a research project to identify what constitutes quality for international WIL experiences towards the development of an International Quality WIL framework.

The research involved interviewing practitioners from across the globe, including the UK. At this workshop, preliminary findings from the research will be discussed, with a particular emphasis on the findings from the UK and its relevance to the ASET community.

We will share what we have learned about what constitutes quality for international work-integrated learning

(WIL) programs (e.g. cooperative education; practicum, work placement). Specifically, what quality actions are needed before, during and after each international WIL experience from the institution, the host organization and the student. Discussion at the workshop will also help us identify resources and training to build capability for practitioners developing and delivering international WIL and work based learning experiences.

Session A3

Title: What Are They Getting From It? Student and Staff Perspectives on the Career Readiness Impact of Work Based and Experiential Learning

Presenter(s): Daniel Lewis and Thomas O'Fee, Northumbria University

Additional Contributor(s): Lesley Wilson

Abstract

As work-based and experiential learning become increasingly embedded across university curricula, understanding their impact on student career readiness, and whether students themselves recognise that impact, is an important consideration for anyone supporting these activities. This practitioner workshop draws on findings from a three-year research project at Northumbria University exploring how work-based and experiential learning activities contribute to student career readiness. Using quantitative and qualitative data gathered across the first two years of the project, we will share how students and staff perceive the skills being developed, what they expect and value from experiential activities, and where those perspectives align or differ. The session combines a research-informed presentation with structured discussion activities, using Kolb's experiential learning cycle to explore the reflective and conceptual stages of career learning.

Participants will draw on their own institutional experiences to consider how different forms of work-based and experiential learning develop different professional capabilities, what progression in career readiness looks like across years of study, and how we communicate the value of these activities to students from an employability perspective. Participants will discuss and engage with practical strategies for supporting reflection, communicating career benefits, and measuring the impact of work-based learning on student outcomes.

Parallel Sessions

Reimagining Work Based Learning for a Changing World Parallel Sessions

Tuesday 8 September

Stream B: 13:45 – 14:30

Session B1

Title: Beyond the Lecture: Teaching Employability Through Play, Partnership, and Practice

Presenter(s): Dr Catherine Teehan, Jo Emery and Catherine Elmer, Cardiff University

Abstract

Employability skills such as problem solving, collaboration, communication, and decision making are often described to students, but far less often experienced within academic programmes. This practitioner led workshop explores how hands on activities, games, and puzzles can be used as pedagogical tools to teach employability through practice rather than instruction. The workshop centres on an interactive crisis-based simulation in which participants work with partial and evolving information, mirroring real workplace and placement environments where no individual has the full picture. As new information emerges during the activity, teams must collaborate, communicate, and reprioritise decisions to prevent escalation from disaster to catastrophe. A key focus of the session is cross team collaboration.

The approaches shared have been co developed through partnerships between academic staff, school based professional services, and central careers teams, demonstrating how employability teaching is strengthened when expertise is shared rather than siloed.

Participants will take part in the activity, reflect on the employability skills surfaced, and work collaboratively to redesign an element of their own employability teaching using playful, practice led approaches. The workshop will conclude by inviting delegates to consider how partnership based pedagogy can support innovation in work based learning within a changing higher education and workplace context.

Session B2

Title: Streamlining to make delivery of skill development in embedded Company Projects modules scaleable

Presenter(s): Shelley Morgan, Lancaster University

Additional Contributor(s): Ajay Bains, Lancaster University

Abstract

Lancaster University Management School (LUMS) Company Projects Team innovated after the recruitment of two new Company Projects Managers in September 2024 to streamline and strengthen the delivery

of the embedded, curriculum-based work-related learning offer within the School, which benefits 300+ students each year, through delivery of 70-80 projects with local, national, and international clients.

The offer is core to LUMS' student recruitment messaging, particularly internationally. Academics are increasingly interested in embedding work-related learning and it is an institutional priority, so scalability is an important consideration.

Covered in this session, core elements of our delivery:

1. Introduction of a Client Account Caseload Management approach: two interchangeable colleagues internally but who act as a dedicated point of contact for their clients: increased flexibility, consistency, and contingency planning while creating warm relationships with clients
2. Trial of new teaching approaches, including the at-scale introduction of:
 - a. strength-based group pitching workshops and review (in-curriculum) benefitting 200+ students this year
 - b. scenario-based interdisciplinary bootcamps (compulsory, extra-curricular): practical application of skills in communication, teamwork, and organisation, which benefitted 60+ students this year

This session covers how evaluating existing processes to trial new ones has improved student experience and resulted in positive evaluations from stakeholders (academics, internal referrers, clients).

Session B3

Title: Where there's a WIL, there's a way

Presenter(s): Erica Cargill and Sam McKinstrie, Robert Gordon University

Abstract

This workshop will share a strategic project aligned to Robert Gordon University's 'Roadmap to 2030'. The vision enshrined within this Roadmap is for RGU to become the leading university in the UK for work-integrated learning. The session will share the activity of five workstreams which together underpin the achievement of this vision. Delegates will learn about the approach taken to achieve institutional transformation with work-integrated learning at its core. The workshop activity will support participants to develop a stakeholder map to inform their own transformational projects whether these are at course, departmental or even institutional level.

Parallel Sessions

Reimagining Work Based Learning for a Changing World

Day 2: Wednesday 9 September

Stream C 14:15 -15:00	C1 From Manual to Automated: Transforming Placement Management to drive smart, more efficient strategic change Presenters TBC, University of Salford	C2 How do we create scalable, inclusive, meaningful work- based learning in a non- vocational discipline? Julie Udell, University of Portsmouth and Dean Marshall, Liverpool John Moores University	C3 Professional Challenge: delivering short placements at scale in interdisciplinary groups, solving SDGs through authentic assessment Steph Binks, Leeds Trinity University	C4 Less Admin, More Impact: Automating ISR Placement Monitoring without Increasing Workload Sara Jones and Katherine Walker, Nottingham Trent University

Parallel Sessions

Partnerships and Building Skills for the Future

Wednesday 9 September

Stream C: 14:15 – 15:00

Session C1

Title: From Manual to Automated: Transforming Placement Management to drive smart, more efficient strategic change

Presenter(s): TBC

Additional Contributor(s): TBC

Abstract

The University of Salford's management of work placements and work experience has been hindered by fragmented systems, outdated processes, and heavy reliance on spreadsheets, emails, and accompanying Word documents. These inefficiencies have resulted in inconsistent practice across the University, limited data visibility, duplication of effort, and complex, time-consuming processes for students, staff and partner organisations.

This session explores the journey taken to redesign placement management through workflow automation. Using Microsoft 365 tools, Power Apps and Power Automate, key processes including approvals, risk assessments, evaluation and reporting were automated, reducing administrative burden and improving accuracy and transparency. A pilot implementation in one School enabled iterative refinement and demonstrated measurable improvements in efficiency, consistency, and user experience.

The aim of this contribution is to show how embedding workflow automation within everyday practice can act as a catalyst for strategic change and organisational transformation.

Key messages:

1. Automation can reduce administrative burden while strengthening compliance.
2. Consistent workflows improve data visibility and enable scalable practice.
3. Redesigning processes creates space to rethink roles and enhance work-based learning

Session C2

Title: How do we create scalable, inclusive, meaningful work-based learning in a non-vocational discipline?

Presenter(s): Julie Udell, University of Portsmouth and Dean Marshall, Liverpool John Moores University

Abstract

As pressure grows across higher education to embed employability and work-based learning within the curriculum, many disciplines face a common challenge: how can meaningful placement and employer-engaged opportunities be delivered at scale, particularly in non-vocational subjects where traditional placement routes may be limited, competitive, or inaccessible to some students?

This interactive Practitioner Workshop explores how two UK higher education institutes address this challenge within undergraduate psychology programmes through complementary case studies demonstrating diversified and scaffolded models of work-based and employer-engaged learning.

The first focuses on Psychology Career Pathways (PCP) at the University of Portsmouth, a Level 5 credit-bearing module offering multiple pathways including Work-Based Learning, Research-Based Learning, Careers in Psychology, and Social Enterprise. The second explores Liverpool John Moores University's use of credit-bearing, group-assessed hackathons, where students develop and pitch solutions to real-world organisational briefs as a scalable model for authentic workplace experience.

Rather than presenting placements as a single model, the workshop considers how flexibility, inclusion, student readiness, and sustainability can be balanced while maintaining meaningful learning and professional development outcomes. Following a short presentation, participants will engage in a collaborative design activity, developing their own scalable work-based learning ecosystem for a large student cohort. Using real-world constraints around placement capacity, staffing, student diversity, and employer engagement, participants will explore how placements, live briefs, research projects, simulations, volunteering, hackathons, and other models can be combined within their own disciplinary contexts.

Session C3

Title: Professional Challenge: delivering short placements at scale in interdisciplinary groups, solving SDGs through authentic assessment

Presenter(s): Steph Binks, Leeds Trinity University

Additional Contributor(s): Holly Siberry, Leeds Trinity University

Abstract

Annually, Leeds Trinity University delivers a 2-week Professional Challenge at Level 4, to over 500 students. This is an integral part of the professional placements model, where professional work-based experiences are embedded in all Undergraduate programmes (excluding healthcare and teaching) at Level 4, via choice between an external placement or Professional Challenge, a short placement at Level 5 and a project at Level 6. This is also delivered at Franchise Partnerships. Professional Challenge sees students working in interdisciplinary groups to solve real-world industry challenges, set by local organisations and focussed on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Fostering collaboration between academic staff and professional services, the challenge blends academic knowledge with professional skill development, ensuring students receive an authentic work-related learning experience and are assessment.

We will demonstrate what we've learnt from delivering Professional Challenge, including the challenges and impact on student's career readiness and personal development, as well as a look at what the future holds for short placements in the changing landscape of work-based learning. Session aims: share learned practice from delivery of embedded placements founded in external partnerships at scale across disciplines and generate ideas for adapting this for the future and into different institutions and environments.

Session C4

Title: Less Admin, More Impact: Automating ISR Placement Monitoring without Increasing Workload

Presenter(s): Sara Jones and Katherine Walker, Nottingham Trent University

Abstract

Mid-way through the 2023/24 academic year, UKVI introduced increased requirements for monitoring International Student Route (ISR) student contact points during work placements. This presented a significant operational challenge: how to scale engagement, maintain compliance, and continue delivering a high-quality experience for both students and employers all without increasing staff workload.

Our Response: We transformed a traditionally manual, time-intensive process into a streamlined, automated solution using CareerHub

- Monthly automated timesheets created via form functionality, enabling consistent, trackable student engagement
- Targeted Right to Work communications, with tailored UK and International versions to ensure clarity of responsibilities for employers and students

Nottingham Trent University placement team's new process evolved through improvements driven by student and employer feedback and has led to:

- A measurable reduction in re-engagement interventions
- Fewer insufficient engagement meetings
- Greater confidence and clarity among students, employers and our staff carrying out the process

The automated approach has delivered both efficiency gains and improved student oversight. Significantly, by replacing labour-intensive calls, emails we estimate a saving of approximately 250 staff hours, allowing teams to focus on higher-value student support.

Process enhancements include:

- Student self-approval of hours, with full audit visibility
- Automated confirmation emails, reducing student anxiety
- Improved visibility of annual leave and absence patterns
- Early identification of non-starts, enrolment issues, placement changes, and early finishes

2024/25 Academic Year

- 1,625 students monitored (Aug 2024 – July 2025)
- 95% timesheet approval rate (1,554 approved)
- Only 11 re-engagement cases
- 20 insufficient engagement meetings

2025/26 Academic Year (to date)

- 941 students monitored (Aug 2025 – April 2026)
- 94.5% timesheet approval rate (890 approved)
- Just 8 re-engagement cases
- 13 insufficient engagement meetings

This session will be practical, interactive, and reflective. We will walk delegates through our end-to-end process, from initial challenge to implementation and refinement. We will share live examples, highlighting what worked and what we would do differently. The session will also include facilitated small peer-group discussions to create space for reflection and feedback, enabling attendees to consider how these approaches could be adapted within their own institutions.