



## Work-based Learning: Forging Pathways Between Theory and Practice in Higher Education Conference 2026

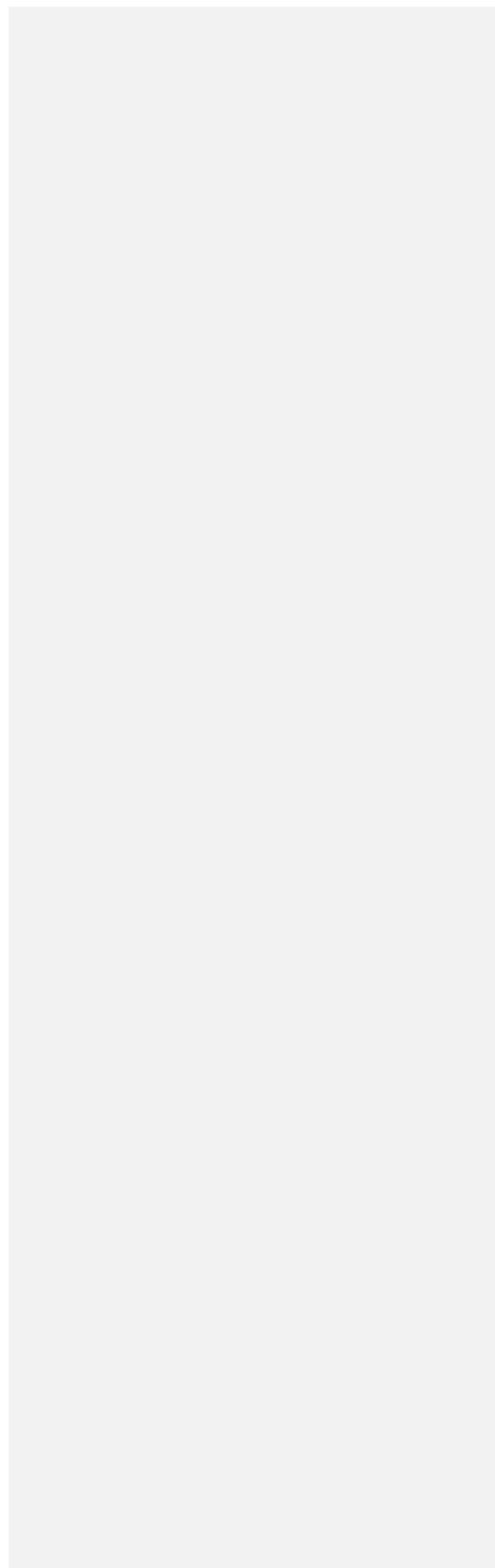
<b>Arrival</b>	9:00	Coffee and Pastries on arrival		
	10:00	Introduction: Practicalities of the day	Dr Fran Myers	
	10:05	Introduction: Forging Research Pathways	Dr Mandy Crawford Lee (UVAC CEO)	
<b>Opening</b>	10:15	Professor Dave Phoenix (OU VC)	Welcome	
<b>Keynote</b>	10:25-10:45	Dr Stan Lester	History and future of WBL	
<b>Presentations</b>	10:45-12:15	Presentation Session 1A	Presentation Session 1B	Presentation Session 1C
		Room 1	Room 2	Room 3
		<b>WBL curriculum design and delivery</b>	<b>Transforming lives through WBL</b>	<b>Collaborative relationships in WBL</b>
	<i>Session chair</i>	<i>Sarah Bloomfield</i>	<i>Mandy Crawford-Lee</i>	<i>Fran Myers</i>
		<b>Becky Qew-Jones and Kieron Chadwick</b>   <i>Beyond the Tick Box? Rethinking Stakeholder Roles in Apprenticeship Tripartite Reviews</i>	<b>Alison Kozary</b>   <i>'Are Apprenticeship Employers and Providers Getting It Right?' Gaining and Understanding of the Lived Experiences of CMDA</i>	<b>Louise Sutton</b>   <i>Enhancing Professional Capability Through Work-Based Learning Strategies (15min)</i>

		<p>(15min)</p> <p><b>Phil Power-Mason and Helen Carlton</b>   <i>Forging Pathways: Personal Account of Apprenticeship Research Careers</i> (15min)</p> <p><b>Sue Banger</b>   <i>Structure to Self-Direction in Work-Based Learning</i> (15min)</p>	<p><i>Apprenticeships by Listening to Their Individual Journeys</i> (5min)</p> <p><b>Mary Shek, Fran Myers, Sarah Bloomfield, Alice Winters and Kulvinder Buray</b>   <i>I Can Do a Lot More than I Thought: Facilitative Factors on Work-Based Learning for Upskillers</i> (15min)</p> <p><b>Thilanka Baratha Dewanarayana</b>   <i>A Case Study: Business Management Undergraduates in Higher Education Sector -Sri Lanka</i> (5min)</p> <p><b>Jeanette Davies</b>   <i>Playing the Game: Social Mobility, Capital and Inequality in Work-Based Learning</i> (15min)</p> <p><b>Joanna Booth</b>   <i>Bridging the Gap for Work-Based Learners During the Menopause</i> (5min)</p>	<p><b>Evelyn Mooney</b>   <i>Tripartite Relationships in Work-Based Learning: Perspectives, Practices and Possibilities from a nursing perspective</i> (10min)</p> <p><b>Anna Colantoni</b>   Title TBC (5min)</p> <p><b>Sarah Behenna</b>   <i>Diversifying Degree Apprenticeships: Insights from Mentoring and Employer Engagement in Work-Based Learning</i> (15min)</p>
<b>Publishing</b>	12:15-12:30	Trevor Gerhardt Kieron Chadwick Mandy Crawford-Lee	Panel Discussion: Best Place for my paper	Facilitated by Fran Myers and Sarah Bloomfield

<b>Lunch</b>	12:30-13:15	Lunch		
<b>Keynotes</b>	13:15-13:35	Professor Darryll Bravenboer		
	13:35-13:45	Dr Becky Quew-Jones		
<b>Presentations</b>	13:45-15:15	Presentation Session 2A	Presentation Session 2B	Presentation Session 2C
		Room 1	Room 2	Room 3
	Theme:	<b>Professional Development through WBL</b>	<b>Policy Perspectives in WBL</b>	
	<i>Session chair</i>	<i>Helen Charlton (FM)</i>	<i>Phil Power-Mason (SB)</i>	
		<p><b>Abigail Salter</b>   <i>Learning in the Line of Duty: Lived Experiences of Police Officers in a Work-Based Learning Context (15min)</i></p> <p><b>Paula McIver Nottingham</b>   <i>Writing and Publishing Practitioner Research: Hands-on Tips from a Journal Reviewer (15min)</i></p> <p><b>Natalie Read</b>   <i>Ethical Leadership Development Through Degree Apprenticeships: Understanding Identity Formation (15min)</i></p>	<p><b>Laura Hogben</b>   <i>'What's the Problem Represented to be?' Interpreting Tensions and Paradoxes in Degree Apprenticeships Policy Implementation (15min)</i></p> <p><b>Thilanka Baratha Dewanarayana</b>   <i>Education, Technology and Life (15min)</i></p> <p><b>Dominique Howard</b>   <i>What Work-based Learning Reveals About Knowledge Co-construction in Humanitarian Settings? (15min)</i></p> <p><b>Abigail Salter and Sarah Bloomfield</b>   <i>Innovating WIL Through Community Partnership:</i></p>	

			<i>Lessons from Australia, Canada and the UK (5min)</i>	
<b>Tea</b>	15:15-15:45	Book Launch (over afternoon tea)	'Higher and Degree Apprenticeships: A 360-Degree'	Tea and Cake
<b>Conference Close</b>	15:45-16:00	Dr Mandy Crawford-Lee	Conference close and presentation of Best Paper Award	

## **ABSTRACTS**



**Sue Banger**

**Title: Structure to Self-Direction in Work-Based Learning**

As work-based learning, degree apprenticeships, and professional education are playing an increasingly important role in shaping UK higher education policy and practice, a gap remains in our empirical understanding of how various pedagogical approaches influence learner development, progression, and outcomes in complex workplace environments. This doctoral study offers a nuanced exploration of how structured (pedagogical), self-directed (andragogical), and learner-driven (heutagogical) methodologies impact learning trajectories within the context of work-based higher education, framed through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT).

Within a pragmatic constructivist paradigm, this research investigates the interplay among teaching design, curriculum structure, and pastoral support in fostering apprentices' autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These factors are further analysed for their effects on self-efficacy, retention, and the formation of professional identity. This study is particularly relevant given ongoing tensions in degree apprenticeship delivery regarding regulatory compliance, employer expectations, academic standards, and the need to develop self-directed, adaptive professionals equipped for lifelong learning beyond formal program boundaries.

Methodologically, this project introduces an innovative Grounded Delphi Methodology (GDM), which synthesises the iterative consensus-building strengths of the Delphi technique with grounded theory-informed coding and theme development. A systematic literature review, guided by the PRISMA framework, established the conceptual and empirical foundations for the study, leading to the formation of a stratified purposive expert panel comprising academics, employers, tutors, mentors, and recent graduates across various apprenticeship standards from local universities. Through successive rounds of the Delphi process, this research aims to generate a well-informed consensus on the pedagogical conditions, curriculum structures, and support mechanisms that are most conducive to nurturing progression from pedagogical dependence to the self-determined learning characteristic of heutagogy.

Preliminary analysis reveals three interrelated themes with implications for the policy and practice of work-based learning:

1. The critical role of structured transitional scaffolding in empowering apprentices to progress from mere compliance to competent, autonomous professional practice.

2. The importance of sustained pastoral and mentoring relationships in enhancing motivation and persistence.
3. The necessity for a cohesive alignment between curriculum design, workplace learning opportunities, and assessment regimes in cultivating autonomy and professional judgment.

This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on lifelong learning, flexible provision, and the future of degree apprenticeships by presenting an empirically grounded framework for designing progression-oriented work-based curricula. It introduces a developmental model that maps pedagogical, andragogical, and heutagogical approaches across program stages, explicitly aligned with SDT constructs and sector-quality frameworks. By merging expert consensus with motivational theory, this study offers one of the first empirically derived progression frameworks for structuring the development of autonomy within degree apprenticeship curricula.

This presentation will be of interest to doctoral researchers, program designers, and policy stakeholders dedicated to enhancing the quality of work-based learning, advancing professional capability, and rethinking the role of higher education in a lifelong learning landscape.

**Sarah Behenna**

**Title: Diversifying Degree Apprenticeships: Insights from Mentoring and Employer Engagement in Work-Based Learning**

Degree apprenticeships are increasingly recognised as a key mechanism for addressing skills shortages across engineering, construction and digital sectors while widening participation in higher education. By integrating academic study with employment, degree apprenticeships provide a powerful model of work-based learning that bridges theory and practice. However, participation within many apprenticeship pathways remains uneven, particularly in male-dominated industries where women and other under-represented groups continue to face barriers to entry, progression and retention. Diversifying degree apprenticeship pathways is therefore critical not only for improving equity and access to higher education, but also for supporting the development of a skilled and sustainable STEM workforce.

This presentation draws on the Women in Industry project at the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) to explore how collaborative approaches to work-based learning can strengthen connections between universities, employers and communities while supporting more inclusive apprenticeship pathways. Funded by the Office for Students, the project sought to increase diversity within engineering and built-environment degree apprenticeships while responding to regional workforce needs. The initiative combined mentoring, employer engagement and community outreach to improve both recruitment and retention of under-represented groups within apprenticeship programmes.

Central to the project is the Women Like Me mentoring scheme, a peer mentoring and role-modelling initiative that connects experienced professionals with early-career women entering male-dominated sectors. The programme has supported more than 400 women since its inception and was expanded through the project to include degree apprentices. Mentoring was complemented by employer roundtables exploring inclusive recruitment practices, apprenticeship retrospective workshops with current and former apprentices, and collaborative engagement with further education colleges, schools and community organisations to raise awareness of apprenticeship pathways.

The presentation will share insights from the project's evaluation alongside emerging findings from qualitative research with employers, HR professionals, mentors and mentees. Evidence from the project indicates that mentoring and role modelling play a significant role in supporting confidence, belonging and career progression within male-dominated workplaces. During the project period the mentoring programme grew by 61%, with 38% of mentees identifying as being from Black, Asian, Mixed or other ethnic minority backgrounds. All mentees reported increased confidence and 90% indicated that mentoring helped them see a future career in engineering.

Findings from the research, including those presented in Behenna, Hobbs and Fogg-Rogers (2025) in *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, highlight several structural challenges affecting apprenticeship participation. These include the complexity of apprenticeship recruitment processes, limited awareness of apprenticeship routes within schools and communities, and the need for additional support for small and medium-sized enterprises engaging with apprenticeships. The research emphasises the importance of tripartite collaboration between universities, employers and education providers in strengthening work-based learning ecosystems.

By sharing lessons from the Women in Industry project, this presentation demonstrates how targeted interventions within work-based learning programmes can support the diversification of degree apprenticeships while strengthening the relationship between theory and practice in higher education.

**Joanna Booth** (5 min lightening talk)

Title: **Bridging the Gap for work-based learners during the menopause**

As an apprenticeship provider, we are seeing more 'upskillers' (age 25+) join our degree apprenticeship programmes within Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University (NTU). Due to their full-time work and study, we have found that these students have more complex support needs. One thing that is coming out more and more in informal discussions, and from our research into mature degree apprentice experiences, is the impact of the menopause on their apprenticeship. For example, that of brain fog during assessed presentations, and the role of anxiety linked to the menopause. Research has been widely conducted into the impact of menopause in the workplace (for example, see Beck and Brewis (2024)), but, to our knowledge (following communication with Prof Jo Brewis, who has widely researched this) there is no research examining the menopause from a student perspective, and perhaps more importantly, from an apprenticeship perspective. The research will focus on the lived experience of CMDA apprentices and the impact of the menopause on their studies.

**Anna Colantoni** (5 min lightening talk)

Title: TBC

Content: TBC

**Jeanette Davies**

**Title: Playing the Game: Social Mobility, Capital and Inequality in Work-Based Learning**

Work-based learning (WBL) is frequently positioned in policy and academic discourse as a mechanism for widening participation and enhancing social mobility, offering alternative pathways into and through higher education (HE) across different life stages. However, such framings often rest on implicit assumptions of meritocracy and equal access to opportunity. This presentation will treat “playing the game” as a conceptual tool for examining how learners recognise, negotiate and perform the often-unspoken rules that shape success in HE and professional WBL settings.

Drawing on a Bourdieusian framework, the presentation will situate WBL within broader debates about social mobility as a contested and uneven process. It will foreground the role of economic, cultural and social capital in shaping learners’ capacity to navigate academic and workplace fields, and will explore how habitus, particularly cleft habitus, can emerge for individuals moving between working-class origins and professional or academic spaces. Rather than treating WBL as an equitable HE pathway, the presentation will conceptualise it as a site in which existing inequalities may be reproduced or mitigated, depending on how institutional practices and workplace cultures interact with learners’ class positioning.

The concept of “playing the game” will be used to capture how success in WBL often depends not only on formal curriculum requirements or educational competence, but also on prior experience and access to capital that support familiarity with academic language, how to speak with authority (‘talk posh’), confidence in engaging with professionals such as tutors, future employers, awareness of professional norms, and how to interpret feedback and expectations that are rarely made explicit. For learners with some fluency within HE or professional environments, perhaps from within their family, social, cultural or extra-curricular networks, these rules may be taken for granted. For others, particularly first-generation HE students, mature learners and those entering HE via vocational or WBL routes, the requirement to learn the game while simultaneously performing academically within it can generate tension, uncertainty and misrecognition.

Positioned at the upgrade stage of a doctoral project, this presentation will clarify some of the conceptual foundations for a forthcoming life-history study exploring social mobility journeys across diverse WBL pathways, including degree apprenticeships and other vocationally oriented HE routes. By articulating the concept of “playing the game”, the presentation will clarify how the theory will be used in part to illuminate the lived experience of social mobility as process rather than outcome, capturing how learners understand their trajectories, negotiate belonging and interpret success and failure over time.

In doing so, the presentation will contribute to ongoing debates about equality and fairness in HE by challenging celebratory narratives of WBL as an uncomplicated social-mobility solution.

**Thilanka Baratha Dewanarayana**

Title: **Education, Technology and Life**

The scope of education is not confined to teaching and learning but progressing from basic skills to high order skills such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Contemporary learner profiles characterized as Gen Z and Alpha require a modern teaching role as a facilitator shifting role conventional practices.

Work-based learning through multiple dimensions but ultimately require prescribed learning outcomes to be reached to ensure success of higher education. Outcome based education (OBE) is adapted by many nations with novel techniques to bridge the gap between learning and teaching. Products and services available on the market are designed based on combinations of theories. However, work-based learning allows learners to understand theories and applications via the modern teacher's role.

The expertise of the teacher converts detailed and complicated paragraphs of theories into simple words of understanding for learners to absorb. Flexible and friendly environment will support both teacher and learner to actively engage in discussions, applications, calculations and arguments to assure both

**Thilanka Baratha Dewanarayana** (5 min lightening talk)

**Title: A Case Study: Business Management Undergraduates in Higher Education Sector -Sri Lanka**

This study examines the effectiveness of work-based learning (WBL) in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in higher education, focusing on

business management undergraduates in Sri Lanka. Within an outcome-based education

framework, WBL strategies—such as flipped classrooms, case-based learning, and simulations—were integrated into economics modules. A mixed-method approach was employed using questionnaires, classroom observations, and independent assessments

with a cohort of 75 first-year students. Findings indicate that 95% of participants demonstrated a positive shift in perceptions, alongside enhanced engagement and conceptual understanding. The study highlights the pedagogical value of WBL in aligning

higher education practices with contemporary learning demands

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**Laura Hogben**

**Title: 'What's the problem represented to be?' Interpreting tensions and paradoxes in degree apprenticeship policy implementation.**

Policy is embedded in every part of society; it shapes how we behave, reflecting power structures and values. The education sector has a plethora of policies, governance and guidance that dictate and frame behaviour. The apprenticeship sector is no exception, with the yearly Apprenticeship funding rules, Apprenticeship training provider accountability framework and specification and the Education inspection framework, to name a few.

The inception of the degree apprenticeship provided an opportunity for universities to join the quasi-market primarily associated with the further education sector. Despite this financial opportunity, degree apprenticeships also introduced a complex landscape of additional governance, compliance and quality assurance requirements.

Political and socially constructed policies and guidance are developed in response to 'perceived problems'. They rarely stand alone and often contain inherent tensions or paradoxes. One such conflict of apprenticeship policy is the juxtaposition of performativity versus coaching experienced by colleagues who conduct degree apprenticeship progress reviews. Degree apprenticeship progress reviewers are often the one constant, bridging the gap between the provider and the apprenticeship workplace. Consequently, they are colleagues who enact policy and are often de facto policy makers through their daily practice, experiencing this tension firsthand.

Recent research that explored the experiences of degree apprentice progress reviewers highlighted an opportunity to take a different perspective on this phenomenon. For example, why was 'Ofsted' referred to as the 'bogey man' and how did that perspective come about and ultimately shape behaviour?

Policy analysis can be conducted in many ways for different reasons. For this research, Carol Bacchi's 'What's the problem represented to be?' (WPR) approach was utilised. Promoting critical reflection over description, it acknowledges the requirement to "subject one's own problem representations to reflexive scrutiny" (Bacchi, 2009) and encourages engagement with a variety of perspectives. WPR recognises that some problem representations advantage certain groups while disadvantaging others and aims to consider different ways

of thinking about the 'problem'. Bacchi's six questions within WPR support a synthesis of primary data that considers the phenomenon and perspectives of degree apprenticeship progress reviewers, alongside key policy documentation and guidance.

The analysis showed how the problem and the degree of juxtaposition that apprentice progress reviewers experienced are represented in policy and related documentation. Bacchi's fourth question, 'Can the problem be thought about differently?' and their sixth question concerning disruption and replacement identify further research that can be undertaken to lessen the impact. Even when controversial, policy matters. After all, apprenticeship delivery should be excellent, with apprenticeship providers accountable for spending public funding.

**Dominique Howard**

**Title: What work-based learning reveal about knowledge co-construction in humanitarian settings?**

Humanitarian organizations consider the absorption and exploitation of new knowledge essential to improve decisions, practices and innovate (Rodriguez et al, 2020, Zarah and George, 2002). Current literature documents strategies fostering a work environment conducive to learning and participatory knowledge management approaches to integrate diverse sources of knowledge (Rodriguez et al, 20, USAID, 2022, Hovland, 2003). However, we still lack empirically grounded evidence on whether, how and under what conditions, learning leads to better service delivery and outcomes in high risks environments and humanitarian crises (Yanguas, 2021, Yousif et al., 2020, Riege, 2005). This gap is addressed by presenting the preliminary findings from an empirical study carried out in two projects providing humanitarian and medical assistance in a post war context. This study advances literature on organizational learning, absorptive capacity and work-based learning by revealing how knowledge is formed, shaped and enacted in a humanitarian work setting. Adopting an ethnographic engaged participatory research design allowed observing how the organizational space functioned as a site of learning, where knowledge emerged through work activities and the mobilization of different perspectives and resources. It also brought to light how co-constructing knowledge and meaning influenced decision making and practice (Alexiou et al, 2022, Morris and Blaney, 2010, Raelin 1997).

#### AIM OF THE STUDY AND QUESTION ADDRESSED

Building on Yanguas (2021) research, this study interrogates the intuitive and appealing hypothesis that knowledge causes learning, learning causes organizational change, which ultimately causes effectiveness. Acknowledging that valid and reliable evidence to sustain this hypothesis remain scarce, this study explores what we know about learning, knowledge and their interactions in two humanitarian medical projects. More specifically, it asks:

How do the findings from an engaged participatory ethnographic study illuminate the relationships between work, learning, change of practices and innovation?

#### CORE ARGUMENT

Referring to theories of epistemic justice and work-based democracy, I argue that addressing the tensions between divergent learning strategies foster the integration of learning and work. This requires unpacking assumptions about what counts as learning and legitimate knowledge (Rayner, 2012, Spender, 2008), and treating teams' members as knowing subjects and agents (Fricker, 2012). This argument seems grounded in the findings from an ethnographic engaged participatory study conducted in a high-risk environment. The research participants narratives highlight that learning strategies focusing on organizational structure and management strategy remain insufficient to produce knowledge, generate individual and collective learning, and improve practice (Yanguas, 2021, Poell & Van der Krogt, 2010).

Examining the aspects of work-based learning outlined by the research participants alongside learning strategies promoting classroom training and "follow up activities" brought to light the existence of distinct learning processes, each with their own rationale for learning through work. This analysis offers insights "into the dynamic interplay of forces which can impede or facilitate learning in the workplace", Raelin, (1997, 374). More importantly, by foregrounding learning through work as an epistemic and political process, these findings show how power, trusting people's capabilities to form knowledge and collective agency shape the relationship between knowledge, learning and change in high-risk environment.

**Alison Kozary** (5 min lightening talk)

**Title: Are apprenticeship employers and providers getting it right' Gaining an understanding of the lived experiences of CMDA apprenticeships by listening to their individual journeys.**

This project is assessing the extent to which employers and providers can learn from the apprenticeships lived experiences whilst undertaking the CMDA standard. Through a review of the construction of the apprenticeship standards and evaluating apprentices' perceptions of support throughout their learning journey. This project seeks to articulate apprentices lived experiences and determine whether existing support mechanisms have positively or negatively impacted their completion of the apprenticeship standard.

**Paula Nottingham**

**Title: Writing and publishing practitioner research: hands-on tips from a journal reviewer**

Embarking on study for 'vocational lifelong learning' in 2000 as a way to understand what learners needed from CPD in the creative industries workplace, I have tracked the evolution of this area of expertise since 2000-2026 and now work with doctoral candidates at Middlesex University. Over the years, as an academic practitioner, I have experienced many different versions of theory and practice in 'practice-based', 'work-based learning' and 'work-integrated learning'. Now as an active journal reviewer, guest editor and co-convenor for the Work & Learning Network (UALL), I would like to focus this presentation on the importance of examining the sometimes illusive conceptual modelling that is integral for this area of study, looking at the relationships of organisational studies and education as well as the debates around disciplinarity, and sharing recent trends and practical tips I have experienced as a writer and journal reviewer. I will end for this presentation with some tips to inspire and encourage practitioner-researchers to add their voices to the debate(s), complete research projects or public works, and publish.

**Becky Quew-Jones and Keiron Chadwick**

**Title: Beyond the Tick Box? Rethinking Stakeholder Roles in Apprenticeship Tripartite Reviews**

Work-integrated learning (WIL) continues to gain momentum across UK Higher Education (HE) as institutions, employers, and policymakers seek ways to connect theory and practice in response to changing labour markets, skills shortages, and the lifelong learning agenda. Within higher and degree apprenticeships (H&DAs), tripartite reviews sit at the centre of this, bringing together apprentices, employers, and training providers in a space for dialogue, accountability, and reflection (DfE, 2025). Despite their prominence, these reviews remain under-explored in existing literature and often positioned as a procedural necessity rather than a meaningful learning encounter (Felce, 2019).

Particular attention is paid to the role of the Work-Based Tutor (WBT) as they navigate institutional regulation, employer expectation, and individual learner need. The presentation explores how this role is enacted in practice, how it is interpreted by other stakeholders, and how it raises wider questions about professional identity, recognition, and pedagogic authority within WIL systems. These issues echo longstanding debates about whether tripartite processes function primarily as accountability mechanisms or as developmental spaces for learning and support (Roberts et al., 2019).

Drawing on qualitative insights generated within a UK HE context delivering H&DAs, the presentation establishes the contributions of the WBT. The session is structured initially as an exploration of existing findings (Chadwick & Quew-Jones, 2025). Following this, the audience will be encouraged to reflect on their own experiences of employer partnerships within the tripartite process, considering what is actually happening inside these reviews and, crucially, how different stakeholder groups experience and shape them. Finally, the session extends a key question for collective reflection with the aim of extending the findings of the initial research: how can we overcome some of the challenges identified around line manager and /or workplace mentor engagement?

This presentation raises questions about how HE partners interpret their responsibilities within the crowded apprenticeship space which is shaped by compliance regimes, digital systems, and evolving policy priorities (Rowe et al., 2017). Rather than closing with solutions, the presentation opens a space for dialogue, inviting delegates to leave not with

answers, but with an appetite to further explore stakeholder relationships, learning design, and the future shape of WIL in HE.

## References

Chadwick K, Qew-Jones RJ (2025); "“Just a tick box exercise?” An analysis of work based tutor intervention in supporting work-integrated learning". *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print.  
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Roberts, A., Storm, M. and Flynn, S. (2019) Workplace mentoring of degree apprentices. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 9(2), 211–224.

Rowe, L. et al. (2017) The challenges of managing degree apprentices in the workplace. *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 9(2), 185–199.

**Evelyn Mooney**

**Title: Tripartite Relationships in Work-Based Learning: Perspectives, Practices and Possibilities from a nursing perspective**

The tripartite relationship between the learner, the employer, and the higher education provider is widely recognised as central to effective work-based learning, particularly within degree apprenticeships and other vocationally aligned programmes. Although embedded within policy, quality assurance processes, and programme design, there remains limited understanding of how this relationship is experienced by different stakeholder groups and how it operates in practice to support the integration of academic theory and professional practice. This 15-minute presentation draws on a pan-university, cross-faculty scholarship project to examine the perspectives, practices, and possibilities of the tripartite relationship across diverse work-based learning contexts.

The project was conducted across several faculties within a large higher education institution and focused on degree apprenticeship programmes in nursing, social work, policing, and management. A qualitative, participatory approach was adopted, incorporating a semi-systematic literature review, pre- and post-event surveys, and a World Café knowledge exchange event. The World Café methodology enabled apprentices, employers or line managers, and university practice tutors to engage in structured dialogue, creating a shared reflective space for exploring lived experiences of work-based learning and generating collective insights into effective tripartite practice.

Findings indicate that apprentices can feel significant pressure as they balance academic study, workplace responsibilities, and professional identity development in demanding environments. Feelings of guilt around off-the-job learning and its perceived impact on colleagues were common. Despite these pressures, apprentices emphasised that a well-functioning tripartite relationship is vital to ensuring a positive learner experience. Consistent and relational engagement from employers and practice tutors helped them navigate workplace and academic expectations, apply theoretical learning in context, and experience a more coherent, supported apprenticeship journey.

Employers and line managers recognised their responsibility for supporting apprentices but frequently underestimated their influence on learning and skills development. Uncertainty regarding academic requirements, apprenticeship standards, and expectations within progress review meetings was evident, especially where employer engagement was not embedded in wider workforce development strategies. Where employers viewed work-based learning as a strategic investment in professional capability, stronger integration of theory and practice was observed.

Practice tutors emerged as pivotal yet often under-recognised within the tripartite relationship. Their dual role as academics and practitioners positioned them as key intermediaries between the university and the workplace, supporting apprentices and

employers to align learning opportunities, navigate expectations, and embed reflective practice. However, the findings suggest that this expertise is not always fully utilised, which can limit the potential of the tripartite arrangement to enhance learning outcomes.

Across stakeholder groups, the study identifies shared enablers of effective work-based learning, including clarity of roles and responsibilities, shared professional values, continuity of relationships, and structured preparation for tripartite meetings. The presentation argues that work-based learning should be understood not as a linear transfer of theory into practice but as a relational and negotiated process shaped by interactions and expectations across the tripartite set. By foregrounding stakeholder perspectives, the presentation aligns with the shared mission of the OU UVAC to support high-quality, inclusive, and practice-informed vocational higher education.

**Phil Power-Mason and Helen Charlton**

**Title: Forging Pathways - personal accounts of apprenticeship research careers (NEW PRESENTATION PROPOSAL)**

Individually, our research careers have always been focussed on developing impactful education within the contexts of the time. However, it is since our collaboration as apprenticeship and work-based learning researchers, that we have truly developed momentum and purpose. This has been shaped by a shared concern: how higher education can credibly and consistently forge pathways between academic knowledge and workplace practice, whilst navigating the fluctuating context of higher apprenticeships. Through sustained engagement with apprenticeship practitioners and leaders, we have come to understand the growth of “Higher Education Tripartite Practice” as more than the operational response to apprenticeship expansion: rather, it is a distinctive form of boundary-spanning pedagogic work at the heart of learner experience, partnership quality, and institutional performance.

In this session, we bring together our journey and the empirically grounded account of the rise of Higher Education Tripartite Practitioners (HETPs), and the role architecture developing around them. We present how HETP work is defined by persistent tension: supporting highly personalised learning journeys whilst simultaneously enacting compliance, quality assurance, and funding accountability expectations. We argue that it is the competencies through which practitioners manage this tension that makes tripartite practice distinctive. Drawing on cross-sector, cross-disciplinary, evidence, we explore how HETPs enable apprenticeship learning to occur, and surface a set of recurring role practices and foundations that collectively constitute a translational conduit between theory and practice.

In sharing key insights and research milestones, we also reflect on how our own professional trajectories have been shaped by building this evidence base through collaboration, iteration, coincidence, and good humour: learning to hold conceptual ambition alongside pragmatic contribution, and to convert practitioner dilemmas into questions that are both researchable and useful. We close by positioning this work, and our career trajectories, as unfinished. The professionalisation of HETP roles must accelerate, but the position of apprenticeships within work based learning and higher education is increasingly under threat. The next steps for our careers, whilst optimistic, are equally uncertain. Together, this invites reflection on how we understand and engage with the potential research and professional horizons in front of all of us.

**Nathalie Read**

**Title: Ethical Leadership Development Through Degree Apprenticeships: Understanding Identity Formation**

Degree apprenticeships are a key component of UK government strategy for workforce stability and skills development, designed to meet employer needs whilst enhancing opportunities for social mobility and talent retention in the local area. Central to the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship (CMDA) is a strong emphasis on ethical leadership, driven by government frameworks, professional body codes of conduct, and institutional curriculum design. However, limited research explores how apprentices themselves experience and develop ethical leadership, or how this impacts their leadership identity and organisational belonging.

This doctoral research explores how apprentices perceive their study on the CMDA to have influenced their ethical leadership understanding and leadership practices. Drawing from personal construct theory, the study employs qualitative research with 18 degree apprentices who have completed the taught element of the CMDA across a range of UK-based universities. Utilising interviews with projective techniques to capture the apprentices' lived experience and narratives of ethical development in context, the research critically examines how specific components of the CMDA shape ethical identity and contribute to sustained organisational commitment. In doing so, the study addresses pressing global issues in business and education, particularly around ethical leadership in a volatile socio-economic climate.

The research findings aim to extend ethical leadership theory within the under-researched area of degree apprenticeships, as well as contributing practical guidance on aligning leadership development with organisational values and societal expectations. By focusing on apprentices' first-hand perspectives, this research shifts the perspective from what ethical leadership is, to how it is formed and applied in real-world contexts. It provides new insight into which elements of the degree apprenticeship experience most significantly influence ethical leadership development and identity formation, and explores opportunities for educators and employers to enhance ethical climate and culture.

**Abigail Salter**

**Title: Learning in the Line of Duty: Lived Experiences of Police Officers in a Work Based Learning Context.**

This paper discusses work to date on my Doctor of Education (EdD) research, which explores how police officers experience learning in the workplace after completing a Police Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) programme.

Since the introduction of degree entry routes in 2018, policing has undergone a significant shift towards evidence based practice and formalised higher education partnerships. While this reform has been widely debated at organisational and political levels, far less is understood about how individual officers make sense of learning in real operational contexts once they leave formal training. This study addresses that gap by foregrounding the lived experiences of officers navigating learning, embodiment, identity, and practice within the complex environment of frontline policing.

Traditional police training relied heavily on in house, experiential learning, with limited engagement in academic study. The move to degree based entry routes has created cultural tension within the service, particularly between PEQF recruits and officers who joined through non degree pathways. These shifts raise broader questions about professional identity, what constitutes knowledge in policing, and how learning is defined, valued, and enacted in practice. Yet despite the scale of this reform, the personal, embodied experience of learning at work remains under researched.

A review of existing literature highlights three interconnected themes. First, workplace learning in policing is complex, culturally constrained, and underexplored. Formalised learning expectations often collide with operational pressures, hierarchical structures, and long established norms. Second, learning in policing is deeply embodied: officers rely on tacit knowledge, sensory cues, emotional regulation, and physical responses that shape how they notice, interpret, and act in unfolding situations. Understanding police learning therefore requires attending to officers' bodily, affective, and contextual experiences and not just their cognitive processes. Third, reflection is recognised as crucial to professional learning, yet remains challenging within police culture due to time pressures, emotional demands, and a perceived incompatibility between vulnerability and operational competence.

Against this backdrop, this study adopts Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore how officers with at least six months' post PEQF experience interpret their learning in day to day operational policing. IPA is well suited to examining embodied, emotional, and situated experiences, enabling a rich exploration of how individuals make sense of their development within morally complex, high stakes environments. The research will recruit 6–

10 officers from a large, environmentally diverse UK force. A purposeful sampling strategy will allow access to participants who can speak meaningfully about learning in action, including those working in reactive and proactive operational roles. Participants will have completed their PEQF degree and progressed beyond the immediate influence of assessments, allowing for deeper reflection on learning as it is enacted rather than taught.

This study aims to amplify the voices of officers themselves - those who carry the weight of decision making, public scrutiny, and continual adaptation. By centring the individual learner, it seeks to illuminate how officers navigate the intersection of formal education, tacit practice, embodied experience, and organisational culture. Findings will contribute to ongoing conversations about police professionalisation, the future of PEQF, and how learning can be better supported in high pressure work based environments.

Please be aware that the paper will just discuss the work to date - no data has yet been collected and I am currently awaiting ethics approval.

**Abigail Salter and Sarah Bloomfield** (5 min lightening talk)

**Title: Innovating WIL Through Community Partnership: Lessons from Australia, Canada and the UK.**

This lightning talk presents findings from a comparative study exploring how national policy environments shape community-engaged Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) in criminology and policing programmes across Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. Drawing on major policy frameworks, including the Boyer 2030 Commission, the Australian University Accord, the UK Blueprint for Change, and Canada's National Strategy on WIL - the project analyses how funding structures, regulatory pressures and institutional autonomy influence WIL design and delivery.

Three case studies illustrate diverse models of WIL, from low-cost community research and practitioner co-teaching to structured partnerships with policing and community agencies. Cross-jurisdictional analysis identifies shared challenges such as risk management and partnership sustainability, alongside emerging strategies including digital and GenAI-enabled practices and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals.

The talk proposes a practical framework for implementing sustainable, community-engaged WIL, highlighting how innovation often emerges from resource-light, collaborative and community-driven approaches with relevance across the social sciences.

**Mary Shek**

**Title: I can do a lot more than I thought: Facilitative factors in work-based learning for upskillers.**

### **Introduction**

While the Government skills offerings have often focused on young people, there has recently been an emergence of policy around lifelong learning that enables individuals to learn 'at a time that is right for them' (Gov.uk, 2025). However, whilst the literature is rich on traditional student development and the development of employability skills, less is known about the benefits that 'upskilling' brings to more mature learners already situated in the workplace. This paper contributes to the literature on how individuals gain from embarking on, and completing, work-based learning programmes.

Theoretical Frameworks such as growth mindset (Dweck, 2000 and 2017; Quew-Jones and Chadwick, 2025) and self-determination (Deci, Olafsen and Ryan, 2017) provide insight into the process of transformation for individual learners in a workplace setting. However, Fuller and Unwin (2005) claims that it is important to recognise the structure in shaping the nature and availability of work-based learning opportunities while individuals as active agents choose the extent they engage with these.

This presentation will highlight, using a framework, how upskillers transform themselves professionally and personally through workplace learning. This will be evidenced through a number of narratives and quotes.

### **Methodology**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted online with 28 apprentice alumni who had undertaken the work-based learning programme at the Open University in their mid/late working life. Their experiences of undertaking the programmes and the impact it has on them were explored.

Using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis (2006), we grouped the findings into themes. This is then represented in a visual framework. A number of individual narratives were developed.

### **Findings**

The findings show how upskillers start with initial feelings of failure carried over from school and impostor syndrome at work. Their rich 'journey' narratives provide insight into their working lives and show how self-perceptions change through completing work-based

learning degrees. The environment (learning programmes and work) offers opportunities for Individuals to learn to walk taller, gaining recognition and status around new knowledge and skills at the workplace.

**By Shek M., Winters A., Buray K., Bloomfield S and Myers F. The Open University**

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**Louise Sutton**

**Title: Enhancing Professional Capability Through Work-Based Learning Strategies**

My presentation will draw upon Consalia's experience of delivering work-based learning (WBL) programmes in partnership with Middlesex University. The presentation will highlight four key components we thread through all our WBL programmes ensuring relevance of learning to both the organisation and individual, and extending the learning reach..

Consalia is a Sales Business School delivering professional education programmes, sales apprenticeships and bespoke consulting projects. The apprenticeships are jointly validated sales degree apprenticeships at Level 6 for a B2B Sales Professional and currently at Level 7 for a Senior Sales Leader. The delivery partnership brings in the best of sales sector expertise from Consalia blended with the academic rigour of Middlesex University, with a programme pedagogy that delivers impactful and outstanding results for the learners, and which turns knowledge into practice and practice into knowledge.

The four key components include:

1. Adopting an action research approach for module and programme projects
2. Projects are negotiated projects. This means the students are undertaking real-life projects with organisational currency, identified by the learner and focused on the application of new knowledge and skills
3. Development of reflective practice as a learned skill for ongoing learning
4. Leveraging and developing communities of practice

Action research, often known as practitioner research or practice-based research (McNiff, 2017) involves finding ways to investigate and improve practice. The areas of focus are based on opportunities the learner has identified. It is an investigation managed by the learner in collaboration with other people and it helps them develop a new perspective on their current practice. As with all types of research, action research is about generating knowledge, but it is also about learning by doing in an authentic context.

Negotiated, work-based projects put the learner in the driving seat (Helyer, 2015). Each action research project is negotiated by the learner aligned to the module learning outcomes and relevant knowledge and skills will also be covered. The title is negotiated between the learner, the tutor and sometimes the employer may also be involved. I will share some vignettes from learner projects to demonstrate how action research and negotiated projects develop practical skills and build collaboration within an organisation.

Reflective practice is encouraged at all times during the programme: during workshops, peer learning opportunities as well as during their projects. We support several models as the critical element is developing their practice of reflection as an ongoing learning skill.

Communities of practice are everywhere in work-based learning environments. Whilst the learner is at the centre of their programme, their learning is not individual and different communities of practice will be around them and support them throughout. They will also be developing their own communities of practice with others in their organisation.

To summarise, this presentation will contribute to the evolving work-based learning / professional education discourse, by sharing Consalia's and Middlesex University's pedagogy and approaches to developing knowledge and skills and delivering professional education.

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