UVAC
UNIVERSITY VOCATIONAL AWARDS COUNCIL

Innovation Exchange 2026

Powering Futures: Transforming lives through clean energy, innovation and skills excellence

AGENDA

25 June 2026
9.30-4.30pm
Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) Catapult, Albert St in Blyth.

CATAPULT Offshore Renewable Energy

NORTH EAST INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Time	Session title
09.30	**Registration, refreshments and networking**
10.00	**Welcome, introduction and context setting** Unlocking the UK's potential: Bridging systems and connecting tertiary education pathways to raise standards, champion future skills, and deliver UK further and higher technical skills excellence **Dr Mandy Crawford Lee- Chief Executive UVAC**
10.15	**Exploring curiosity-driven research, skills, and technologies to meet industry needs, while securing a greener more sustainable future** (Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult) **Chong NG- Senior Associate Director, Applied Research, ORE Catapult**
10:40	**Offshore Renewable Energy Horizons: Powering the future of clean energy** (Industry- led panel) **Chair- Thomas Wildsmith, Head of Strategic Business Development, ORE Catapult** **Panellists- Mark David, Skills Project Manager, North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA)** **Chris Thompson, Chief Executive Officer, Epic Innovation**
11:10	**Clean Energy - A journey of discovery: Destination Net Zero** (Connecting workforce development with the wider research and innovation ecosystem to build an industrial skills base fit for the future.) **Professor Roberto Palacin- Academic Director for Electrification (SAgE)**
11:35	**Break**
11:50	**Equipping the workforce to thrive in the industries of today and tomorrow- The Energy Mix!** (Bringing education & industry closer together to co-design innovative solutions, raise standards, and champion future skills.) **Danielle Portsmouth-FutureSkills Lead, ORE Catapult,** **Katie Wray- Associate Dean, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Senior Lecturer Enterprise, Enterprise and Management, Newcastle University** **Grant Ingram, Professor of Engineering and Director of Partnerships, Durham University**
12.30	**Pride in professionalism: Inspiring technical skills excellence- from extraordinary to everyday!** **Cerian Ayres- Associate- International, UVAC** **Owen McAteer-Sector Engagement Lead, Enginuity**
13:00	**Lunch and networking**
13:50	**Staying at the forefront of innovation- turning great ideas into reality.** **Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult Site Tour**
14:50	**Digital transformation solutions in education, and key industry growth sectors** **Stephen Hilton, Professor of Chemistry and Enabling Technologies, University College London** **Blanka Hilton- Lecturer, School Deputy Director Graduate Research Studies, VR Lead** **Chris Turnbull- Training and Development Manager, Didactic Services Limited, and Training Manager and UK Expert for WorldSkills UK Renewable Energy Competition** **Chris Fairclough- Lecturer, Lead Technical Engineer and ETF and Royal Commission Technical Teaching Fellow**
15.30	**People, Place, Pathways and Possibilities: Building Ladders of Opportunity for All** **(Speaker Introductions)** **Chair: Professor Rene Koglbauer, Dean of Lifelong Learning and Professional Practice, Director of Educational Leadership Centre, Professor of Professional Learning and Leadership** • **Sharon Grant- Director, North East Institute of Technology** • **Chris Turnbull- Training and Development Manager, Didactic Services Limited, and Training Manager and UK Expert for WorldSkills UK Renewable Energy Competition** • **Owen McAteer- Sector Engagement Lead, Enginuity** • **Gary Potts- Deputy Principal, Middlesbrough College, Chair of the Energi Coast Skills Group** • **Hamidreza Jafarnejad- Partnerships and Outreach Director, Didactic Services Ltd** • **Kim Smith-Regional Lead Technical Education and Enterprise, The North East Combined Authority** • **Paul Butler- Chief Executive Officer, North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA)**
	Break
	People, Place, Pathways and Possibilities: Building Ladders of Opportunity for All **(Discussion)**
16.25	**Plenary, evaluation and next steps!**
16.30	**CLOSE**