

Speaker Biographies

Claire Arditto | Head of Allied Health Professions | NHS England

NHS England – The Future of Apprenticeships in the NHS

Claire is a Chartered Physiotherapist, with 33 years experience of clinical and professional leadership within the NHS and arm's length bodies in England. She has a Masters Degree in Health Science, is a King's Fund Top Managers programme alumni and is a Platinum level certified leader in LEAN, quality improvement methodology. She has worked for NHS England both regionally and in her current role of Head of Allied Health Professions for workforce, training and education. Previous experience includes strategic and professional AHP leadership and general management within Acute & Community NHS Trusts and a clinical background within the field of complex neurological rehabilitation. Nationally, Claire has been the AHP lead for Enhanced Practice, delivering the commission and publication of the NHS England AHP Enhanced Practice schema and model curricula. Currently this is aligned to embedding the Enhanced Practice Apprenticeship as a mechanism to provide accredited training and upskill the workforce across the NHS.

Luke Bocock | Research Director | National Foundation for Educational Research

Apprenticeship Pathways: Progression in the Vocational Track

Luke Bocock is a Research Director at the National Foundation for Educational Research and a co-Investigator on the Nuffield-funded Apprenticeship Pathways project. Luke is a quantitative specialist, working on education and employment connections, including leading elements of the Skills Imperative 2035 work and leading a project for the Gatsby Foundation on apprenticeship completions.

Danny Buckley | Apprenticeship Coach and Employer Lead | University of Hertfordshire

From Compliance to Confidence: How Coaching and Early Intervention Keep Apprentices Thriving

Danny Buckley is the Apprenticeship Coach and Employer Lead at the University of Hertfordshire, where he leads the central Apprenticeship Coaching Team and oversees employer engagement across degree apprenticeship provision. His work focuses on strengthening learner outcomes through coaching, quality assurance, proactive monitoring and collaborative partnerships with employers and academic teams.

Dr Julie Derbyshire | Associate Professor of Nursing | Northumbria University

Multi-institutional Evidence on the Power of the Nurse Degree Apprenticeship from the Student Perspective

A Pathway to the Healthcare Workforce: Evaluation of a University–School Partnership Model for T Level in Health Delivery

Julie Derbyshire is an Associate Professor in Nursing and Head of Apprenticeships at Northumbria University. A Registered Nurse since 1992 with a background in neurosciences care, she is passionate about widening participation and student experience, and leads Northumbria's partnership with Bede Academy Sixth Form on their T Level Health programme.

Lou Doyle FIEP (Chair) | Co-Founder | SDN Mesma Group

Plenary Panel: Place, Partnership and the Future of Skills: exploring how place-based partnership and cross-sector collaboration are reshaping skills delivery.

Lou is a co-founder of SDN Mesma Group, providing award-winning technology, consultancy, programme management and professional development solutions to government departments and education & employment support providers. With over 20 years in the further and higher education sector, she specialises in change leadership and quality improvement, and has worked extensively on government-led reform programmes. She serves on the main boards of EPNE and Wise Academies, and sub-committees of employer providers, awarding organisations and universities. Lou is a previous recipient of the Department for Education's Apprenticeship & Training Awards Skills Champion Award, in recognition of her advocacy for technical education pathways into work.

Speaker Biographies

Matthew Drinkwater | | Director | Fashion Innovation Agency

Keynote Presentation: Exploring the creative impact of technology at the intersection of fashion, retail, and priority industry growth sectors

Coming from a career on the frontline of fashion and retail, Matthew has worked for brands including Harrods and Casio. He joined the College of Fashion to lead research, teaching and industry partnerships at the intersection of fashion, retail and technology. His work brings together diverse industries to create a vision of the future that incorporates wearable technologies, AR, VR, robotics, IoT, AI, materials technology and a host of cutting-edge developments. It also covers areas of design, manufacture, retail and supply that have parallels in a host of sectors, and looks at how a traditional industry adapts to disruption. Whilst examining the creative impact of technology, Matthew also considers the wider effects. He considers how traditional businesses can embrace innovation, new supply chains and new financial models. He looks at the effects of new materials and manufacturing processes (including manufacturing locally and on demand) as well as potentially huge shifts in retail. Matthew was named in the 100 most influential people in the world of Wearable Technology, amongst the Top 15 people in UK tech by BBC3, and as a 'fashion-tech trailblazer changing the course of retail' by Drapers magazine.

Christine Edwards | Education Strategy and Professional Learning Consultant | Creating Excellence

Plenary Panel: Place, Partnership and the Future of Skills: exploring how place-based partnership and cross-sector collaboration are reshaping skills delivery.

Christine is an education and skills consultant specialising in post-16 education, apprenticeships, organisational capability, inclusion and workforce development. A former Operations and Quality Director and Ofsted nominee, she works with education providers, employers and sector bodies to translate policy and evidence into practical approaches that strengthen workforce capability, curriculum delivery and learner progression. Her work places particular emphasis on developing the professional confidence and expertise needed to turn strategic ambitions into meaningful outcomes for learners and employers.

James Farr | Director and Co-Founder | Think

Plenary Panel: Place, Partnership and the Future of Skills: exploring how place-based partnership and cross-sector collaboration are reshaping skills delivery.

James co-founded Think, a skills and workforce-development consultancy, in 2015, and has 20 years' experience developing and analysing skills and education policy. He works with colleges, universities, apprenticeship providers, local authorities and employers on strategy, curriculum and labour-market planning. His recent work includes a series of projects over a two-year period funded by Gatsby focused on supporting and learning from the development of Local Skills Improvement Plans, as well as ongoing work funded by the Association of Colleges to support FE college networks to develop their approach to shaping skills devolution, working with their strategic authorities.

Simon Flenley | Assistant Director of Research & External Engagement (Skills) | UWE Bristol

Keeping Employers on Board, Not Bored

Simon Flenley has been working in apprenticeships for over 15 years, across the FE, ITP and HE sectors. Simon provides strategic oversight for the University's apprenticeship and skills products, identifying areas for growth across priority areas including health and social care, advanced manufacturing, advanced engineering and the built environment.

Speaker Biographies

Becky Griffin | Senior Apprenticeship Coach | University of Hertfordshire

From Compliance to Confidence: How Coaching and Early Intervention Keep Apprentices Thriving

Becky Griffin is a Senior Apprenticeship Coach at the University of Hertfordshire, leading and supporting apprenticeship coaches to deliver high-quality, learner-centred provision. She works closely with programme teams and the University's apprenticeship safeguarding lead to ensure tailored support, effective coaching, quality assurance and compliance, enabling apprentices to overcome challenges and achieve successful outcomes.

Andy Hall | Head of Policy & Public Affairs | ScreenSkills

Employer Voice: What Businesses Need from Higher Education and Skills Providers

Andy is Head of Policy & Public Affairs at ScreenSkills, leading engagement on policy across the UK screen industries. Andy previously worked at the Careers and Enterprise Company and has a background spanning skills systems, government affairs and international education.

Jo Hartley-Metcalf | Universities T Level Support Manager | UK Institute for Technical Skills and Strategy

T Levels and the Growth of University Progression: Evidence, Impact and What's Next

Katie Higgins | Senior Lecturer in Nursing QN | Manchester Metropolitan University

Innovating for the Future Workforce: Developing an Employer-Led Enhanced Clinical Practitioner Apprenticeship for Urgent Community Care

Katie is a qualified Nurse, Health Visitor and Advanced Clinical Practitioner with over a decade of Nursing experience. Most of her clinical experience has been in a community health setting and she is passionate about all aspects of public and family health. Katie moved into Higher Education at Manchester Metropolitan University in 2022. She teaches across the nursing programmes, specialising in public health, leadership, management, and innovation in healthcare.

Peter Hill | Director | Heathcoat Fabrics

Plenary Presentation: Inspiring technical excellence: parachute your learning!

Peter was born and raised in Tiverton where Heathcoat Fabrics is the main employer. He studied Biological Sciences at Birmingham University. At Heathcoat Peter has worked in a wide range of roles, including Industrial Engineer, Planner, Production Manager and General Manager, before becoming a Director. He is a firm believer in lifelong learning and is committed to improving his knowledge and skills throughout his career, by attending technical and management courses and studying for further qualifications e.g. a Diploma in Leadership at Exeter University. At Heathcoat Peter has had the opportunity to work on many exciting projects, such as designing and producing technical fabric used in renewable energy systems, defence and aerospace sectors. This includes the parachute fabric that Heathcoat designed for NASA, which was used to land the Perseverance Rover on Mars in February 2021. Peter has also been involved in projects to bring new technologies to Heathcoat, including implementing the first cobot used in the UK textile industry. Peter has had the privilege of working with many great colleagues at Heathcoat Fabrics, customers, suppliers and other partners, inspiring innovation and prioritising inclusion, and supporting the growth of the technical talent pipeline.

Claire Holland | Division Head | Sheffield Hallam University

Beyond EPA: Co-designing the Future of Apprenticeship Assessment

Dr Samantha Holland | Apprentice & Employer Engagement Fellow | Manchester Metropolitan University

The Policy Paradox: Defunding a Model that Delivers Workforce and Service Impact

Speaker Biographies

Dr Samantha Holland is an apprenticeship specialist, researcher and Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA) at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her work focuses on apprenticeship quality, impact and work-integrated learning. She leads strategic research initiatives, collaborates nationally and internationally, and is passionate about inclusive, research-informed innovation in higher education.

Rachel Howard | Senior Lecturer and Apprenticeship Programme Lead | Liverpool John Moores University
Multi-institutional Evidence on the Power of the Nurse Degree Apprenticeship from the Student Perspective

Rachel Howard is a Senior Lecturer and Apprenticeship Programme Lead at Liverpool John Moores University. Holding a BSc in Adult Nursing and an MSc in Public Health, she is also a doctoral student. Rachel combines clinical and academic expertise to deliver high-quality, evidence-informed education that promotes professional development and lifelong learning.

Catherine Hulse | Senior Lecturer and Course Lead, RNDA Programme | University of Staffordshire
Multi-institutional Evidence on the Power of the Nurse Degree Apprenticeship from the Student Perspective

Catherine Hulse is a Senior Lecturer and Course Lead for the RNDA programme at the University of Staffordshire. She is committed to excellence in teaching, student development, and curriculum innovation. A Registered Nurse, she holds an MA in Education and a PGCHE, and is a Fellow of Advance HE (FHEA). Her professional expertise includes complex care in the home setting, alongside higher education teaching, leadership, and curriculum development.

Lucy Hunte | National Programme Manager – Apprenticeships | NHS England
NHS England – The Future of Apprenticeships in the NHS

Lucy has worked in the training and education sector for over 25 years and for the past 15 years she has been working in the Apprenticeship arena. First leading the business development teams at 2 London FE colleges, and for the last 10 years working for HEE, now NHS England, offering strategic support to the NHS on all aspects of apprenticeship development, delivery, and implementation.

Dr Michelle Kennedy | Senior Lecturer and Deputy Head of School | University of Hull
Multi-institutional Evidence on the Power of the Nurse Degree Apprenticeship from the Student Perspective

Michelle Kennedy is a Senior Lecturer and Deputy Head of School at the University of Hull with over 30 years' experience in nursing, education, and leadership. A registered nurse since 1991, she has led educational innovation, completed a Doctor of Education, and champions nursing apprenticeships, research, and strategic healthcare education development.

Helen Kennedy-Holleman | Head of Higher Technical Education and Professional Skills | De Montfort University
Shaping Skills Provision to Meet Sector and Local Labour Market Needs

Helen is the Head of Higher Technical Education and Professional Skills at DMU. Her role involves the development and implementation of DMU's higher technical education offer and includes CPD, Micro-Credentials, Short Courses, HTQs, Apprenticeships, and preparedness for the Lifelong Learning Entitlement. She has firsthand experience of balancing the demands of work and study herself, having completed the Senior Leader Apprenticeship.

Anna Kime | Reader and Programme Lead for the Advanced Clinical Practice Master's Degree Apprenticeship | Manchester Metropolitan University
The Policy Paradox: Defunding a Model that Delivers Workforce and Service Impact / Innovating for the Future Workforce: Developing an Employer-Led Enhanced Clinical Practitioner Apprenticeship for Urgent Community Care

Speaker Biographies

Anna Kime is a Reader and Programme Lead for the Advanced Clinical Practice Master's Degree Apprenticeship at Manchester Metropolitan University. A Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (PFHEA), she specialises in workforce-focused apprenticeship education, collaborating with healthcare partners to develop practice-informed curricula that strengthen advanced practice capability and workforce development.

Andy King | Degree Apprenticeship Manager | Nottingham Trent University
Beyond Recruitment: The Real Drivers of Sustainable Apprenticeship Delivery

Andy is an experienced educator and leader with over 20 years' experience in further and higher education and regulatory inspection. He currently leads the Apprenticeship Quality and Compliance Team at Nottingham Trent University, overseeing quality assurance, regulatory compliance, and the design of apprenticeships across the institution

David Lockhart-Hawkins | Managing Director | Lockhart Hawkins Limited
The Retention Dividend: Turning Early Warning Signs into Apprenticeship Growth

David Lockhart-Hawkins FIEP is an apprenticeship strategic compliance and funding specialist, supporting providers to strengthen governance, funding assurance, learner records and audit readiness. Through Lockhart Hawkins Limited, he works with training providers, colleges and sector partners to translate complex funding rules into practical systems, controls and strategies that improve quality, compliance and outcomes, and has partnered with UVAC on the CFO Apprenticeship Toolkit.

Alistair Lomax | Chief Executive Officer | Arc Universities Group
From Competition to Collaboration: Building Regional Skills and Opportunity Ecosystems for Growth in Every Postcode

Alistair Lomax is Chief Executive of Arc Universities Group, representing universities across the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor. He works with universities, employers and policymakers to strengthen collaboration between education, research and industry, supporting innovation, productivity, workforce development and regional prosperity.

Dr Gill McGill | Associate Professor | Northumbria University
A Pathway to the Healthcare Workforce: Evaluation of a University-School Partnership Model for T Level in Health Delivery

Gill McGill is an Associate Professor and an interdisciplinary researcher at Northumbria University whose expertise spans military veteran studies and widening participation in higher education. Using collaborative, co-produced methodologies, her research examines student progression and educational partnerships, leading the research study evaluating the T Level partnership and pupil experience.

Hannah Mehr | Higher Level Apprentice
Employer Voice: What Businesses Need from Higher Education and Skills Providers

Sam Moorwood | Associate Director of Skills | Sheffield Hallam University
Beyond EPA: Co-designing the Future of Apprenticeship Assessment

Alison Morris | Director of Policy | Skills Federation
Employer Voice: What Businesses Need from Higher Education and Skills Providers

Alison is Director of Policy at Skills Federation and brings many years' experience in policy across skills and employment. Alison was previously Director of Operations at Education and Training Foundation and also worked at the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, working on policy areas including careers guidance and employer engagement.

Speaker Biographies

Iain Nixon | Group Executive Principal - Regional Skills | EPNE

Plenary Panel: Place, Partnership and the Future of Skills: exploring how place-based partnership and cross-sector collaboration are reshaping skills delivery.

Iain leads partnerships, apprenticeships, subcontracting, external funding and commercial activity across EPNE, a North East college group including Sunderland College and Northumberland College. He has driven employer-partnership and green-skills initiatives across the region, including strategic development fund projects on low-carbon energy and vehicle electrification, and has represented EPNE in engagement with national and regional government on further education and skills strategy.

Zach North | Director of Apprenticeships / Senior Lecturer | University of Hull

Leveraging Generative AI: Developing the ANCHOR Framework for Progress Reviews

Zach North is Director of Apprenticeships and Senior Lecturer in Advanced Clinical Practice at the University of Hull. He provides strategic leadership for apprenticeship quality, governance and curriculum enhancement, translating evidence and employer insight into faculty-wide improvement. His work advances learner success, digital education and responsible use of artificial intelligence.

Rhian Old | Chief Commercial Officer | Bud

Partner Sponsor Presentation: What are we missing? How AI can help universities see the bigger picture

Charlynn Pullen | Principal Research Fellow | Sheffield Hallam University

Apprenticeship Pathways: Progression in the Vocational Track

Charlynn Pullen is a Principal Research Fellow at Sheffield Hallam University and the Principal Investigator for this Nuffield-funded research on Apprenticeship Pathways. Charlynn's research focuses on apprenticeships and vocational education. She was previously Head of Research at the Education and Training Foundation and a Governor at the University of Bedfordshire.

Rebecca Rhodes | Associate Director | UVAC

Plenary Panel: Place, Partnership and the Future of Skills: exploring how place-based partnership and cross-sector collaboration are reshaping skills delivery / UVAC Innovation - Responding to Change

Rebecca is UVAC's long-standing associate and leads on policy relating to quality and funding in apprenticeships and technical education, as well as UVAC's technical support programme, webinar series and Black Box resources. She previously worked for the Skills Funding Agency, where she led the expansion of apprenticeships into higher education, establishing a network of 40 HEIs and chairing the HEI Operational Group, and was responsible for the SFA's apprenticeship funding policy, including developing the trailblazer funding model and the first co-investment model for apprenticeships.

Toni Rhodes | Chief Executive | Education Partnership North East (EPNE)

Plenary Panel: Place, Partnership and the Future of Skills: exploring how place-based partnership and cross-sector collaboration are reshaping skills delivery

Toni was appointed Chief Executive of EPNE in November 2025, having previously served as Deputy Chief Executive. With over 15 years' experience in education, including senior positions at Ofsted Outstanding colleges, she joined Sunderland College as Principal in 2021 before becoming Deputy CEO of EPNE. Toni holds a Master's degree in Globalising Justice and a Chartered Management Institute Level 8 qualification in Strategic Direction and Leadership, is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, and an Ofsted Inspector.

Speaker Biographies

Sharon Riverol | Senior Lecturer and Programme Lead of RNDA | Liverpool John Moores University
Multi-institutional Evidence on the Power of the Nurse Degree Apprenticeship from the Student Perspective

James Salmons | Associate Director – Apprenticeships, School of Health & Social Wellbeing | UWE Bristol
Keeping Employers on Board, Not Bored

James Salmons has over 10 years' experience in apprenticeships across employer and higher education settings. He provides strategic leadership for UWE's Level 5-7 Health and Social Care apprenticeship portfolio, overseeing 10 standards and around 1,000 apprentices. He also chairs employer boards, strengthening partnerships and collaboration.

Sammy Shummo | Group Director of Business Engagement, Skills & Training | LSBU Group
From Course Portfolios to Skills Ecosystems: A Practical Model for Reimagining Higher Skills

Currently serving as the Group Director of Apprenticeships at London South Bank University (LSBU), Sammy provides strategic direction for apprenticeship programmes, ensuring alignment with organisational objectives and fostering partnerships with local employers and stakeholders. Under his leadership, LSBU has experienced significant expansion, increasing both the number of apprenticeship offerings and the engagement of business partners.

Kim Smith | Regional Lead, Technical Education and Enterprise | North East Mayoral Strategic Authority
Plenary Panel: Place, Partnership and the Future of Skills: exploring how place-based partnership and cross-sector collaboration are reshaping skills delivery

Kim has a long track record across Government departments, the former North East Local Enterprise Partnership and North East Combined Authority, working on youth, education, careers, skills and regeneration programmes spanning schools, FE, HE, local authorities and the voluntary sector. She specialises in translating national skills policy into regional and local delivery, including contract management and grant funding, and has led work on the region's Regional Employability Framework and, more recently, the mayor's devolved adult skills and Skills Bootcamp programmes.

Dr Robin Webber-Jones | Deputy CEO and Executive Director of Curriculum | Bedford College Group
From Competition to Collaboration: Building Regional Skills and Opportunity Ecosystems for Growth in Every Postcode

Dr Robin Webber-Jones is Deputy CEO and Executive Director of Curriculum at Bedford College Group. He leads curriculum strategy, skills development and employer engagement across one of England's largest FE groups. His work focuses on tertiary collaboration, place-based skills ecosystems, social mobility and regional economic growth. Dr Webber-Jones is also a serving UVAC Board member.

Natalie Winchester | Deputy Head of Sixth Form | Bede Academy
A Pathway to the Healthcare Workforce: Evaluation of a University-School Partnership Model for T Level in Health Delivery

Natalie Winchester is Deputy Head of Sixth Form and T Level Health lead at Bede Sixth Form Academy. She pioneered the health care programme with Northumbria University and was influential in the creation of the School's clinical ward facility. Natalie is passionate about maximising pupil experience, transforming technical education and guiding pupils into fulfilling long-term health careers.

Speaker Biographies

Dr Nicky Witton | Director of Apprenticeships, Senior Lecturer, Enhanced Clinical Practitioner Lead | Keele University
Multi-institutional Evidence on the Power of the Nurse Degree Apprenticeship from the Student Perspective

Nicky Witton is the Director of Apprenticeships, School of Nursing & Midwifery at Keele University. Nicky joined Keele University having over two decades of Critical Care experience as the Lead Educator. As a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, Nicky continues to design, lead and facilitate higher education for under- and postgraduate Nursing and Allied Health Professional education, including apprenticeships.

Kate Young | Policy Lead | Enginuity
Employer Voice: What Businesses Need from Higher Education and Skills Providers

Kate is Policy Lead at Enginuity and leads work on skills policy to help address workforce challenges in UK engineering and manufacturing. Prior to this role, she worked at the Aldersgate Group and ChemTrust, building extensive experience across public affairs, policy development, and stakeholder engagement.