

“AdvanceHE

+ The Welsh Higher Education Employability Community of Practice

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August 2025



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1 Foreword

The Wales Employability Community of Practice emerged from a shared recognition that meaningful, sustainable progress in graduate employability requires sector-wide collaboration. Commissioned by Medr and supported by Advance HE, the Community has grown into a space where practitioners, academics, and professional service colleagues can work together towards a common purpose: to foster excellence in employability provision through evidence-informed practice, strategic dialogue, and collective ambition.

Wales offers a distinctive educational environment shaped by a unified tertiary education system, a devolved policy framework that prioritises equity and civic mission, and a strategic commitment to collaboration articulated through initiatives such as the Well-being of Future Generations Act. The Community of Practice is grounded within this context, enabling institutions to learn from one another, align around shared priorities, and elevate the voice of the Welsh sector within broader national and international conversations about employability. Our work recognises that employability is a dynamic and evolving process shaped by pedagogical innovation, labour market conditions, and wider social, economic, and environmental trends. Over the last year, our community has ensured that the Welsh sector is not only responsive to these developments but also proactive in shaping the future of graduate success. Our symposia have surfaced complex questions about how employability is conceptualised and communicated, while our collaborative working groups have generated practical outputs relating to the language of employability and sustainability within career support. By bringing together academic and professional colleagues from across the Welsh sector, the Community has helped to build stronger working relationships, deepen shared understanding, and develop collective expertise. These connections are already supporting more joined-up approaches to employability and will continue to benefit the sector beyond the immediate scope of this year's work.

As we look to the future, employability provision will continue to evolve in response to changing workplace expectations, emerging technologies, and broader social and environmental priorities. The sector is increasingly engaging with questions around how best to prepare learners for a world of work that is both dynamic and diverse. There is a growing need to reflect on how our approaches support inclusive participation, respond to sector-wide developments, and equip students with the adaptability and values required to thrive in a range of professional contexts. The work ahead will require imagination, curiosity, and a continued commitment to shared learning. It will also require us to listen carefully — to students, to employers, and to one another — as we shape support that is relevant, resilient, and inclusive of the full diversity of learners across Wales.

We extend our thanks to all members of the Community, and to our partners at Medr and Advance HE for their continued support and engagement. It is a privilege to lead this work, and we look forward to what lies ahead.

Fay Short, Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Employability), Bangor University
Chair (Academic), Employability Community of Practice

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2 Executive Summary

In partnership with Advance HE, the Wales Higher Education Employability Community of Practice (CoP), commissioned by [Medr](#), has delivered a significant programme of work in the 2024/25 academic year. Through thematic symposia, collaborative task and complete groups, and utilising Advance HE Connect as an online engagement platform, the CoP has addressed priority areas regarding employability within Wales. This work has strengthened cross-institutional networks, generated sector-wide tools and recommendations, and demonstrated the effectiveness of a national strategic approach to employability. It positions Wales as a proactive and coordinated sector, ready to address financial pressures, labour market shifts, and the growing demand for graduates who are work-ready, resilient, and ethically grounded.

The following report outlines the activities and impact of the CoP across the academic year, situating its work within global trends, national strategy, and the evolving demands of the labour market. It demonstrates how Welsh higher education providers are collectively responding to these challenges with purpose, collaboration, and innovation.

Across the year, the CoP:

- + Engaged 94 unique practitioners across three symposia (57, 50, and 46 attendees respectively), representing every Welsh HE provider.
- + Produced actionable outputs, including draft recommendations on employability language (bridging the gap between graduate attributes and employer needs) and sector-aligned practices for embedding ethical and sustainable employability.
- + Leveraged national intelligence, such as Jisc's [What Do Graduates Do? - Wales](#) report, to ground sector activity in data-driven insights.
- + Hosted a thriving digital hub on Advance HE Connect, with over 100 members across the Welsh sector able to access resources, case studies, and recordings of the online symposia.
- + Positioned Welsh HE as a collaborative, innovative sector, aligning employability provision with global trends (AI, green skills, skills-based hiring) and national priorities ([Welsh Governments Net Zero Strategic Plan](#) and [Stronger, Fairer, Greener Wales: a plan for employability and skills](#)).

3 Introduction

The Wales Higher Education Employability Community of Practice (CoP) is a strategic initiative designed to empower higher education providers across Wales to share best practices, advance employability outcomes, and shape future-ready provision. Facilitated by Advance HE and commissioned by Medr (Wales's Commission for Tertiary Education and Research), the CoP fosters sector-wide dialogue and co-created solutions to ensure staff are best able to support graduates in equipping them with the necessary and interrelated aspects of 'employability' to enhance successful trajectories upon graduation in a rapidly evolving labour market.

The CoP supports providers to embed employability and is useful at curricula, programme design, third space and policy levels. The 2024/25 programme focused on three priority areas:

1 Future-Proofing Welsh Graduates

With rapid shifts in technology and the economy, it's more important than ever to ensure that Welsh graduates are equipped with the skills needed for long-term success. This theme focused on strategies for future-proofing graduates from Welsh universities, examining how HE institutions can anticipate industry changes and ensure students are prepared for emerging roles. Leaders discussed policy initiatives, regional collaboration, and innovations in teaching that align with the unique economic needs of Wales while maintaining a competitive edge in the global market. Charlie Ball of Jisc provided the keynote and shared key information for the Welsh labour market ahead of a wider publication to the sector:

<https://luminare.prospects.ac.uk/what-do-graduates-do-wales>

2 Ethical and Sustainable Employability

As global priorities shift towards sustainability and social responsibility, higher education must equip graduates with the skills to thrive in a purpose-driven job market. This symposium explored the critical role universities play in shaping ethically conscious, sustainable career paths for students. Keynote speaker Dr Kierian Higgins (Ulster University) and Dr Alison Calvert (Queen's University Belfast) joined colleagues to explore best practices in integrating sustainability into curricula, fostering responsible career development, and partnering with industries that share these values. Their toolkit, available to Advance HE members, was shared with colleagues ahead of wider dissemination:

<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/education-sustainable-development-curriculum-design-toolkit>

3 Connecting Classrooms to Careers for Student, Staff and Employer Engagement

Unlocking the full potential of employability requires strong partnerships between universities, students and employers. This symposium explored innovative ways to connect the classroom to the workplace, enhancing both student and employer engagement in the career development process. The Task and Complete groups also presented their findings from the funded research the CoP was able to secure during the year.

4 Task and Complete Groups

Two task and complete groups were formed to explore two priority themes in depth. Each group operated collaboratively and remotely through the Advance HE Connect platform, with structured reporting and tangible outputs delivered by June 2025.

Employability Language Group

This group explored whether the terminology used by universities to describe graduate skills aligns with the language used by employers. For instance, are attributes like "critical thinking" or "leadership" understood and valued in the same way across sectors?

Initial findings suggest a disconnect exists between institutional frameworks and employer interpretations, which can hinder students' ability to communicate their strengths effectively. This raises important implications for graduate attribute frameworks, assessment strategies, and careers support. The full report made several recommendations, summarised here as:

- + Support students to map between implicit job language and Graduate Attribute frameworks.
- + Increase industry-facing experiences (placements, employer-led projects, mentoring) to contextualise skills.
- + Encourage industry review of job description language to make recruitment more inclusive.
- + Ensure Graduate Attributes are subject-specific and clearly communicated to students.

The full report will be provided as an addendum to this synopsis report, a combined campaign by Medr and Advance HE will publish the report in Q3 2025.

Ethical and Sustainable Employability Group

In response to growing global and national imperatives around sustainability and social justice, this group examined how universities can embed sustainability and ethics into curricula and student development.

The report presents 49 case studies showcasing how Welsh tertiary institutions embed ethical and sustainable employability (ESE) through curriculum innovation, extra-curricular activities, employer engagement, and alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015). Initiatives develop graduate skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking, enhance awareness of sustainability and ethics, and support employability through real-world applications and partnerships. Key benefits include improved skills and knowledge, stakeholder engagement, institutional reputation, and support for students and staff, though challenges persist around financial constraints, workload and time. Key recommendations include:

- + creating a practical toolkit to share best practices
- + leveraging the Community of Practice to foster collaboration and communication across sectors
- + conducting further research to map and strengthen integration of ethics and sustainability within higher and further education across Wales.

The practical toolkit will be developed over the summer period of 2025 and both the report and toolkit will be published in a joint campaign by Medr and Advance HE in Q3 2025.

5 Symposia

The CoP hosted three symposia throughout the academic year, each providing a forum for knowledge exchange, keynote contributions and institutional sharing. The series was designed to provide a structured platform for collective reflection and forward planning during a year of significant change for Welsh higher education. Against a backdrop of tightening financial pressures, shifting student demographics and increasing scrutiny on graduate outcomes, the symposia enabled institutions to examine how higher education can remain agile and relevant. Bringing together expertise from across Wales and the wider UK, the events supported evidence-based discussion on the integration of sustainability, employability and skills foresight within curricula and institutional strategies. The symposia underlined the CoP's role in facilitating strategic dialogue, enabling the sector to share effective practice, address shared challenges and identify priorities for collaborative action that strengthen the contribution of Welsh tertiary education to economic, social, and environmental wellbeing.

Symposium 1 (15 November 2024, Online): Future-Proofing Welsh Graduates

Keynote: Charlie Ball (Jisc)

Drawing from the report *What Do Graduates Do – Wales* (Jisc, 2025), this session unpacked regional graduate destinations, the evolving nature of graduate jobs, and the need for skills foresight in curriculum planning. Welsh institutions were encouraged to anticipate future economic demands through strategic course design and employer engagement.

Symposium 2 (28 February 2025, Online): Ethical and Sustainable Employability

Keynotes: Dr Kieran Higgins (Ulster University) and Dr Alison Calvert (Queen's University Belfast)

This event centred on embedding sustainability in higher education through curriculum and practice. The keynote introduced the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Curriculum Design Toolkit, with academic contributions from institutions including Aberystwyth University and Swansea University.

Presenters shared their experiences of embedding ESD in discipline-specific contexts and highlighted the role of industry-aligned placements and real-world learning in fostering responsible graduate outcomes.

Symposium 3 (10 June 2025, Wrexham University): Connecting Classrooms to Careers

The final in-person symposium focused on deepening connections between academic programmes and employment pathways. Sessions explored how to strengthen partnerships with employers, create authentic work-integrated learning and co-design curricula that reflect employer needs and student ambitions. The respective task and complete groups also shared their findings with the community (see section 2).

6 Alignment with global trends and sector drivers

The CoP's work aligns closely with key national and international developments.

Global Trends in Graduate Employment: As automation, AI, and green industries reshape the job market, graduates need adaptive, transferable skills. The CoP's focus on employability language and sustainability reflects this shift.

UN Sustainable Development Goals: Ethical and sustainable employability aligns with SDGs 4 (Quality Education), 8 (Decent Work), and 13 (Climate Action), reinforcing the social mission of higher education.

Welsh Government Priorities: The focus on future-proofing, regional collaboration, and ethical employment aligns with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, and supports the strategic goals of Net Zero Wales and the Welsh Government's Employability and Skills Plan - [Stronger, fairer, greener Wales](#). It also reflects Medr's first [Strategic plan](#), published in February 2025.

Enhancing Student Outcomes: The work responds directly to student needs for meaningful, values-driven careers, promoting engagement, motivation and retention across the student lifecycle.

7 Impact and reflections

The CoP model has proven highly effective in building sector capacity, enabling collaboration and empowering professionals across academic and careers services.

Highlights include:

- + Deepened cross-sector collaboration: Members have shared resources, co-developed tools, and aligned efforts through a shared strategic vision.
- + Integration of evidence-based practice: Engagement with national datasets (e.g. What Do Graduates Do – Wales) and sector frameworks has enhanced the rigour and relevance of the work.
- + Creative autonomy in delivery: Task and complete groups demonstrated the value of academic freedom, generating innovative and contextually relevant outputs.
- + Increased visibility of Welsh HE: The CoP has positioned Welsh universities as active contributors to the global conversation on employability and sustainability.

8 Recommendations and future direction

In response to shifting financial landscapes, changes in international student enrolment and widespread restructuring across the UK, employability must continue to evolve into sector-wide, collaborative strategies that are sustainable and future-focused. The work undertaken in Wales puts the sector at a distinct advantage with the task and complete groups having representation from a wide variety of providers: the employability language group had representation from 7 HE providers and the ethical and sustainability group showcasing examples from 9 providers. Advance HE, as the sector body supporting the work in a secretariat role, offers the scale, wider insight and frameworks necessary to support institutions during these uncertain times. Future employability provision should prioritise embedding work-readiness within curricula, through placements, live projects and lifelong learning initiatives, including consideration to micro-credentials. The engagement of careers services has been evident, and these third space professionals are essential in ensuring employability is a core learning outcome across the student lifecycle.

Collaboration at a national and sector level will also allow Welsh institutions to align with global skills demands, rapidly adapt provision in areas like green industries, AI, and infrastructure, and respond to employers' increasing preference for skills-based hiring. Data-driven approaches, informed by graduate outcomes and regional labour analytics, should shape provision and measure impact, helping institutions remain accountable amidst scrutiny on value for money. Importantly, employability strategies must balance labour-market responsiveness with higher education's broader purpose in order to allow achievement of core missions whilst simultaneously fostering resilience, critical thinking, and inclusion, so that Welsh graduates thrive in uncertain economies while universities remain

regionally and globally relevant. Based on the year's activity and feedback from participants, the following recommendations are proposed:

- + **Consolidate and disseminate findings:** Publish outputs from both task and complete groups as accessible reports and toolkits to inform policy and practice across Wales.
- + **Deepen employer involvement:** Scope the establishment of a formal advisory mechanism to integrate employer feedback into future symposia and thematic development.
- + **Sustain the CoP model:** Build on the CoP, and where possible future task and complete groups, which has proven effective in scaling innovation across the sector. We suggest that the focus for future activity should be on high-priority areas such as Net Zero skills, AI and digital skills, student enterprise and addressing inequities in graduate outcomes.
- + **Promote interdisciplinary approaches:** Encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration on employability to embed themes across academic boundaries.
- + **Align with Medr's strategic aims:** Map future CoP priorities to Medr's strategic aims as articulated in its first Strategic Plan, exploring the scope for ensuring coherence and strategic value across the tertiary sector.
- + **Professional development for employability leads:** Explore CPD pathways (aligned with the Professional Standards Framework and relevant sector frameworks) for staff leading employability initiatives, this could include digital badges and/or micro-credentials.

9 Conclusion

Over the past year, the CoP has successfully united practitioners, leaders, and stakeholders from across the sector to advance employability and skills development for students in Wales. Building on four years of prior initiatives, the CoP has acted as a strategic and practical forum for sharing knowledge, fostering collaboration and shaping the future direction of employability provision.

Key achievements include:

- + **Sector-wide collaboration:** Brought together professionals from all Welsh higher education providers to exchange good practice, discuss shared challenges, and strengthen institutional approaches to employability.
- + **Strategic alignment:** Supported policy engagement by responding to emerging consultations and providing a collective voice to inform national policy and funding body priorities around skills and enterprise.
- + **Practical outputs:** Delivered three sector-wide meetings, including one face-to-face event, featuring expert speakers, thematic workshops and structured networking opportunities.
- + **Knowledge sharing:** Developed and maintained a digital hub via Advance HE Connect, housing case studies, policy papers, research summaries and practical tools to enhance institutional employability strategies.
- + **Task and Complete groups:** Initiated focused workstreams to tackle priority issues, producing recommendations and shared outputs.
- + **Collective expertise:** Enabled members to build networks and professional capability, ensuring staff across the sector remain equipped with up-to-date knowledge and skills to support student employability.

This work has ensured Welsh higher education remains proactive in responding to a rapidly changing higher education landscape, characterised by financial pressures, shifts in student demographics, and the need for globally competitive graduate outcomes.

The CoP has delivered a year of meaningful, impactful work, driven by collaboration, innovation and a commitment to equity and sustainability. Its alignment with sector drivers, its focus on graduate futures and its emphasis on academic–careers collaboration makes it a model for systemic enhancement.

Advance HE is proud to support the community built through this work and look forward to continuing to support Medr in shaping a vibrant, resilient and ethical skills ecosystem for Wales.

Contact us

All enquiries

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Our strategic goals to enhance confidence and trust in HE, address inequalities, promote inclusion and advance education to meet the evolving needs of students and society, support the work of our members and the HE sector.

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