

AHECS

Employability Awards 2026

**Supporting Student and Graduate Employability
Shortlists**

**ASSOCIATION *of* HIGHER
EDUCATION CAREERS SERVICES**



The TUS Hat-Trick: Sustaining Ireland's Leading Graduate Outcomes through a Regional Ecosystem Approach **Technological University of the Shannon Midlands Midwest** **Aoife Prendergast**

TUS Midlands Midwest has redefined the national benchmark for graduate success, securing the title of Ireland's top university for graduate employment for an unprecedented third consecutive year. According to HEA Graduate Outcomes Survey data (2022–2024), TUS consistently outperforms the national average, achieving an 85.5% employment rate for honours degree graduates within nine months, exceeding the national benchmark of 74.9% by over 10%. In critical sectors such as Engineering and Construction, this figure rises to a sector-leading 96.4%, with 73.7% of these graduates securing permanent contracts immediately.

The quantitative impact is evidenced by a robust regional ecosystem: over 60% of graduates are retained within the Midlands and Midwest, directly fuelling the regional economy. Longitudinal data indicates that 80% of graduates rate their programme as "Highly Relevant" to their professional roles, while employer feedback reflects a 20% reduction in onboarding time due to the "day-one readiness" of TUS alumni. By leveraging AI-driven resource scaling to increase employer networking events by 30%, TUS has created a high-impact, data-validated model for sustaining national leadership in graduate employability.

Supporting Student/Graduate Employability Award 2026



Future Ready Skills Course Queens University Belfast Tim Montgomery and Patricia Durkin



The Future Ready Skills Course (FRSC) is a 100% online, self-directed programme designed to support students in developing and articulating career skills gained through academic study, extracurricular activities, and part-time work. The flexible, work-at-your-own-pace format allows students to engage with career development alongside their academic commitments. Student feedback highlights the course's practical relevance, with many reporting increased confidence, a clearer understanding of career pathways, and greater ability to communicate their skills to potential employers.

FRSC strengthens employability provision across Queen's University Belfast. Initially piloted with 983 students across two schools, the programme has expanded to ten schools and now reaches more than 10,000 undergraduate students. Each version of the course is developed collaboratively with academic partners to ensure discipline-specific relevance, reducing pressure on schools to create their own careers content.

The programme demonstrates how digital careers education can scale effectively while maintaining quality. Continuous improvement is supported through course evaluations, analytics, and user interviews. Satisfaction levels remain consistently high, with all modules scoring above 90% and the Career Management Skills module reaching 98%. Additionally, 93% of students would recommend the course.

FRSC incorporates innovative learning design, including interactive learning resources that allow students to explore workplace scenarios and decision-making. The course also encourages critical engagement with emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. Inclusive design is central to delivery, with accessibility scores exceeding 96% on Canvas.

Through collaboration, data-driven development, and scalable digital delivery, FRSC provides a sustainable and impactful model for embedding career readiness within higher education.

Supporting Student/Graduate Employability Award 2026

Interview Wardrobe - Get Interview Ready Atlantic Technological University Collaboration

Deborah Seddon & Adette Ring - ATU Sligo

Fiona O'Donnell & Áine Kilroy - ATU Galway Mayo

Gerard Martin - ATU Donegal



The Atlantic Technological University (ATU) Careers Service has developed 'Interview Wardrobe – Get Interview Ready', an innovative ATU wide initiative that integrates sustainability, equity, industry collaboration, experiential learning, and wellbeing to enhance student employability. Designed in response to rising cost of living pressures and student feedback, 'Interview Wardrobe' events provide free access to high quality, interview appropriate clothing across multiple campuses throughout the academic year, with items available at any time through the careers team. This ensures equitable access to professional attire while actively supporting sustainability through donation, reuse, and circular economy practices aligned with EU Green priorities.

Developed in partnership with regional employers and internal stakeholders, the initiative strengthens community engagement and promotes responsible consumption. Clothing not deemed interview appropriate is re donated to the Student Union (SU) Free Shop or local charities, ensuring zero waste and reinforcing environmental responsibility.

'Get Interview Ready' complements 'Interview Wardrobe' by focusing on confidence building, interview preparedness, and performance. Delivered in partnership with industry professionals and ATU's counselling service, it provides group and individual speed interviewing activities that simulate real world interview pressure, and a specialist workshop offering practical anxiety management techniques such as grounding, breathing exercises, vagus nerve regulation, and visualisation. These components address both the practical and emotional dimensions of interview success.

'Interview Wardrobe - Get Interview Ready' creates a holistic, data informed model of employability support that reduces financial barriers, promotes sustainability, and strengthens students' readiness for interviews, assessments, placements, and graduate employment.

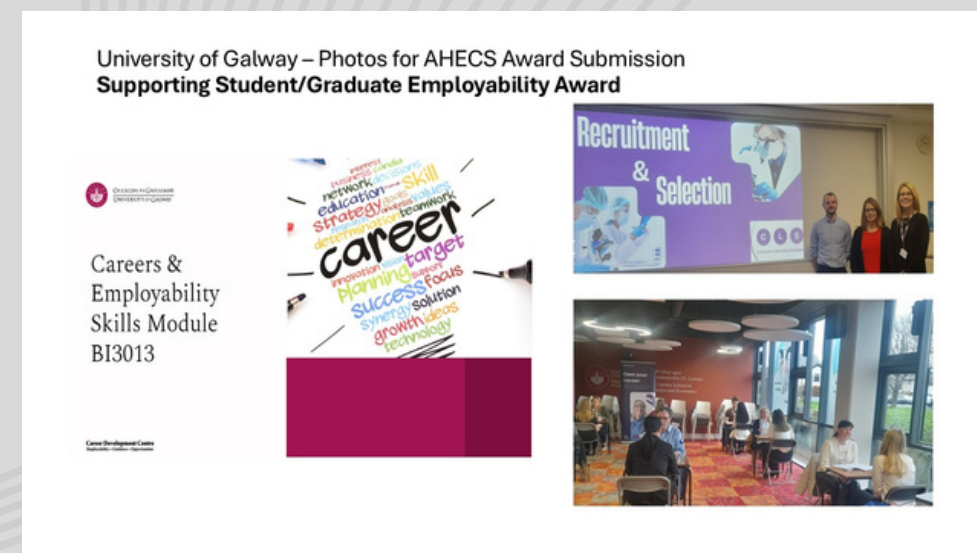
Supporting Student/Graduate Employability Award 2026



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

Embedding Career Development and Employability Skills: Empowering Students for Future Success University of Galway

Marie Laffey, Aisling Conroy, Susan Kenny and Monica Turley



The University of Galway Career Development Centre developed the Career Development and Employability Skills module, a 5 ECTS credit-bearing programme for second and third-year Arts and Science students, to address low engagement with careers services and delayed career planning. Following a gap analysis, the module was designed, delivered by the careers service to provide structured, curriculum-embedded career education, enabling students to develop self-agency, career research skills, employability capabilities, and confidence in navigating recruitment processes.

Students' progress through the Career Readiness Framework, moving from Discover to Develop and Apply stages, and gain practical skills including CV and cover letter writing, interview preparation, networking, postgraduate applications, and career planning.

The module integrates flipped learning, digital tools such as Career Pathways, CareerSet and Big Interview, collaborative projects, and employer and alumni input, creating authentic exposure to the world of work. Students have reported that the module supports personal development, reflection, and understanding of career pathways, with one student noting, “It made me truly reflect and plan on the future, without this module I likely wouldn’t have put much thought into my future career.” Academic colleagues have also recognised the module’s value, describing it as “a unique selling point for our undergraduate degree programmes”.

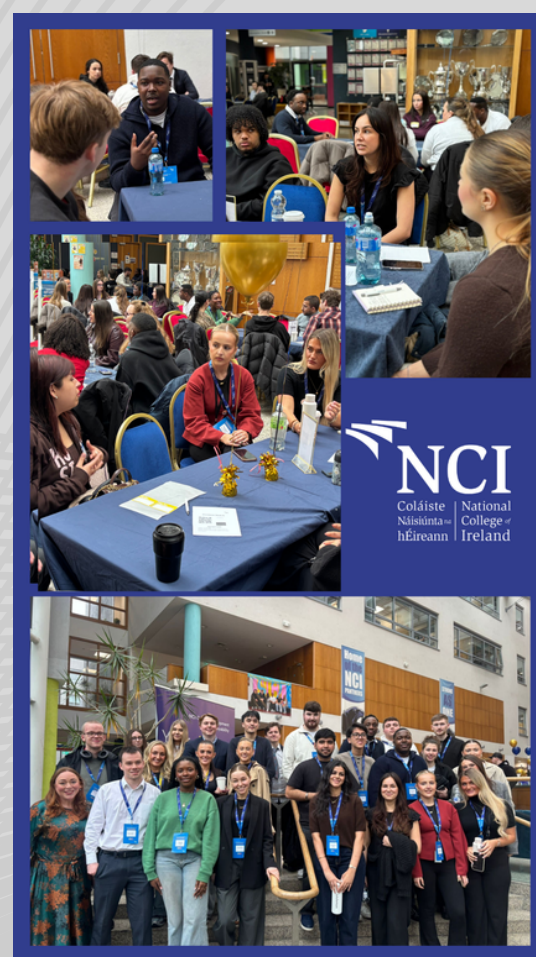
On completion, 100% of module participants continue to engage with careers services, demonstrating increased career confidence and proactive planning. The module has strengthened collaboration with academics, informed wider service initiatives including an online careers module and final-year career map and contributed to embedding best practice in employability education across the university.

Supporting Student/Graduate Employability Award 2026

Building Employability Through Curriculum, Employers and Peers

National College of Ireland

Caroline Kennedy



The Career Management Skills module at NCI is a 12-week, credit-bearing, curriculum-embedded module delivered to second-year School of Business students. Designed for a cohort where 70% reported having no professional network and only 17% had experience relevant to their career interests, the module was built to close opportunity gaps as well as skills gaps.

Its design is intentional. Small-group, structured networking formats reduce confidence barriers for students new to professional environments. Reflective career learning, MBTI and strengths profiling, CV and LinkedIn development, and employer-led mock interviews are sequenced to build self-awareness and professional capability before students engage directly with industry.

A structured employer networking event brings more than 30 employers across financial services, law, engineering, public sector, pharmaceutical and technology into meaningful conversation with second-year students.

A structured peer-learning event brings over 30 students currently on placement back to campus to speak with their successors, providing relatable, near-peer testimony that directly influences career decision-making.

The impact is measurable. By the end of the module, the proportion of students saying they had no idea what they wanted fell from 28% to 0%, while those saying they knew exactly what they wanted and how to achieve it rose from 6% to 20%.

Every employer who engaged recruited a student on placement or internship. Placement completers achieve 100% graduate-level employment, outperforming non-placement peers across all four School of Business programmes.

The module offers a scalable, embedded model that widens access to professional networks, strengthens career agency and delivers measurable graduate outcomes.

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Employability Awards 2026

**Strategic Innovation
Shortlists**

**ASSOCIATION *of* HIGHER
EDUCATION CAREERS SERVICES**



Pobal Bia- Student Food Pantry

Atlantic Technological University Galway

Sally Reidy and Sinead Lomas

Pobal Bia, the Atlantic Technological University's student food pantry, provides an innovative response to the rising cost of living and the burgeoning problem of food waste. By collaborating with FoodCloud, an initiative that redistributes surplus food from shops to community groups, Pobal Bia transforms potential waste into a valuable resource that directly supports students. This approach maximises existing resources and reduces the environmental impact associated with food disposal.

For a contribution of five euro, students can attend Pobal Bia on the Galway campus on Wednesdays and fill a tote bag with available food items, delivered by FoodCloud. Rather than receiving pre-packed parcels, students select items that suit their individual dietary needs and preferences, reducing waste while encouraging responsible consumption. Letting students choose their own food aligns with the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion by considering that our students come from a diverse range of cultures, with varying needs.

This initiative aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). This initiative reduces greenhouse gas emissions linked to food decomposition and production, while simultaneously supporting student wellbeing and financial resilience.

Pobal Bia is staffed by a team of student and staff volunteers. The student volunteers are encouraged to register with studentvolunteer.ie to receive recognition of their work in building this innovative, supportive, and environmentally friendly community. They are engaged in active, experiential learning, while creating a sustainable service with meaningful social and environmental impact.





The UDL Advantage: Enhancing Stakeholder Value and Student Outcomes through Strategic Redesign **Technological University of the Shannon Midland Midwest** **Aoife Prendergast**

This entry recognises the ambitious strategic redesign of career and employability services across the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS). By embedding Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles across seven campuses, TUS transitioned from a traditional, reactive model to a proactive, inclusive ecosystem that anticipates the diverse needs of its entire student body.

The initiative achieved multi-campus synchronisation, aligning geographically dispersed services to ensure equitable, high-quality support from Athlone to Limerick. Central to this innovation was the shift from reactive to proactive support; by building accessibility into the foundational design of all workshops, employer events, and resources, TUS reduced the burden of individual disclosure and freed staff for high-impact coaching. Furthermore, the integration of "digital-first" inclusive technologies provided asynchronous access to career guidance, optimising resources while maintaining deep engagement.

The success of this strategic overhaul was formally validated in September 2025, when TUS Careers & Employability won the eGovernment Award for Universal Design. This accolade confirms the project as a benchmark for public sector excellence, proving that embedding UDL into strategic operations not only improves efficiency but ensures no student is "designed out" of their professional future. By establishing a shared language of inclusion across all teams, TUS has created a scalable blueprint for the HE sector, demonstrating how strategic innovation can foster true institutional equity and long-term stakeholder value.

**Innovating Placement Preparation
through Technology-Blended Curriculum Delivery
Dublin City University
Elaine Daly and Yvonne McLoughlin**



DCU's Careers Service and the School of Physical Sciences have transformed placement preparation by embedding a credit-bearing "Professional Skills Module" directly into the second-year Physics curriculum. This strategic innovation ensures students are recruitment-ready early in their academic journey, combining class-room based learning with advanced technology-blended delivery.

The initiative has yielded impressive results. Physics students consistently secure work placements as part of degree programmes, with stakeholder feedback specifically noting a marked increase in student confidence.

The value extends beyond the School of Physical Sciences. It supports accreditation standards and has been successfully adapted to DCU's Institute of Education professional placement modules. This partnership ensures graduates are not only technically proficient but are future-capable professionals equipped for the modern labour market.



Innovating Career Learning for Gen Z at MTU

Munster Technological University Cork

Mary-Rose O'Sullivan and Roisin Garvey



MTU Careers has strategically transformed traditional careers advice into a scalable, mobile-first digital ecosystem that empowers students to develop essential employability skills. By combining bespoke multimedia learning with integrated digital platforms, MTU Careers delivers accessible, high-quality career education aligned with Gen Z learning preferences.

Central to this innovation are three interactive eLearning courses — Careers CV, Careers LinkedIn, and Careers Interview — delivered through the Canvas Learning Management System and embedded within pre-placement preparation across multiple degree programmes. Available 24/7 to all full-time undergraduate and postgraduate students, these courses provide structured, self-paced career learning. Since launch, they have generated 2,183 student enrolments, supporting students to develop high-quality CVs and LinkedIn profiles and undertake comprehensive interview preparation before entering the placement and graduate recruitment market.

To complement this structured learning, MTU Careers developed four short, mobile-friendly animations on key topics including careers fairs and graduate programme applications. Accessible via YouTube and the Careers Fair Plus app, these resources enable just-in-time learning at the point of need.

These bespoke resources operate within a wider digital ecosystem that includes CareersConnect, enabling students to self-book appointments and access jobs, employers and events, and the MyCareer eLearning hub, which provides self-assessment tools and AI-powered CV review and interview practice.

Developed in collaboration with MTU's Technology Enhanced Learning Department, this innovative approach maximises resources, strengthens student engagement and agency, and supports MTU's student-centred learning strategy and the Higher Education Authority's Impact 2030 focus on talent and career readiness.



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

Students Supporting Students: A Peer Ambassador Model for Work Placement Success in the B.Comm Global Programme University of Galway Breda Kenna and Marie Monahan



At the University of Galway, work-based learning (WBL) is embedded across more than 60 undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, enabling students to gain valuable workplace experience. Within the B.Comm Global programme, approximately 200 students undertake placements annually. However, many students are initially uncertain about the range of opportunities available or hesitant to pursue placements they perceive as less attractive, potentially limiting their skill development and career exploration.

To address this challenge, the Placement Ambassador initiative was introduced, adopting a peer-to-peer model where final-year students share their placement experiences with pre-placement cohorts. Through workshops, panels, and mentoring sessions, ambassadors provide practical insights on the application process, workplace expectations, and the benefits of exploring diverse placement opportunities.

The initiative has delivered measurable impact. Students who engage with the programme demonstrate stronger employability outcomes, with 80% securing employment within six months of graduation, compared to 60% of non-participants. Engagement levels remain consistently high, with over 120 students attending sessions annually. Participants report increased confidence, improved interview skills, and greater awareness of career pathways.

Placement Ambassadors also develop valuable leadership, mentoring, and communication skills while acting as role models for peers. Employers benefit from more prepared interns and graduates and improved engagement with university talent.

By combining peer-led support with data-driven insights and strong employer collaboration, the programme enhances employability, broadens placement participation, and fosters a sustainable culture of student-to-student learning. Its successful replication across placement programmes demonstrates a scalable and innovative model for preparing students to succeed in the workplace.

AHECS

Employability Awards 2026

**Building Effective Partnerships
Shortlists**

**ASSOCIATION *of* HIGHER
EDUCATION CAREERS SERVICES**

**Co-Creating Workplace Success:
UCC's Employer Partnership Forum
University College Cork
Yvonne Harding and Grainne North**



Partnering with employers and connecting them to students is at the heart of work undertaken at UCC Career Services. Through engagement with small, medium, and large-scale organisations, similar challenges were consistently emerging relating to work placement processes. This prompted a renewed focus to bring stakeholders together to establish a strong, collaborative partnership and in 2023 the work placement team launched a biannual Employer Partnership Forum with the aim of 1) strengthening relationships with its employer partners 2) encouraging collaboration and 3) co-designing future-focused placement practices. In 2023 nearly 50 employers from diverse industries participated in the forum, creating a rare opportunity for cross-sector dialogue. The forum was supported by a student survey completed by over 800 students and focused on key topics including job description design, skills gaps and hybrid working. Feedback was incredibly positive with employers reporting that the collaborative nature of the forum led to improvements being implemented to enhance the work placement offering within their organisations.

The 2025 forum further embedded partnership working, with a strong focus on collaboration, feedback and the placement experience for students. Almost 70 employers were surveyed in advance to identify key challenges facing industry in relation to the placement experience for students. UCC personnel, employers and colleagues from local universities worked together to develop solutions and to identify recommendations for implementation within organisations.

Employers have reported improved placement structures, stronger alignment between student capability and organisational need whilst UCC has enjoyed sustained and strategic benefits particularly around reputation and student outcomes.



Ollscoil Chathair
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

Inaugural INTRA Student Awards Dublin City University Sarah Fleming



For over 40 years, DCU's INTRA internship programme has built sustained partnerships between higher education and industry, enabling students to apply academic learning in real-world environments while supporting employers in developing future talent. Since its inception, more than 40,000 DCU students have completed INTRA placements across a wide range of sectors. Today, the programme supports students from 52-degree programmes across four faculties, working in partnership with hundreds of organisations.

In 2025, the INTRA team introduced the inaugural INTRA Student Awards to recognise exceptional student contributions during placements while strengthening engagement with employer partners. The awards were designed as a collaborative initiative that invited employers to formally recognise interns who made significant professional and organisational contributions.

The response from industry was exceptionally strong, with over 150 employer nominations submitted across multiple sectors. These nominations provided rich testimonials describing how students applied academic knowledge, demonstrated initiative and delivered meaningful impact within host organisations.

Six overall award winners were selected by a DCU judging panel and announced at a January 2026 awards ceremony attended by senior university leadership, employer partners and academic colleagues. The event provided an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of students while recognising the vital role employers play in delivering high-quality work-integrated learning.

The INTRA Student Awards demonstrate how structured recognition initiatives can deepen employer partnerships, showcase the value of work placement programmes and strengthen collaboration between higher education and industry.

Building Effective Partnerships Award 2026

The Sustainable Innovation Challenge:

Ulster University, The Open Championship (R&A), University of Liverpool, Manchester Metropolitan University, Berlin School of Economics & Law



Ulster University

Brian Byers, Student and Dr Rachel Shannon



Ulster University was the lead partner in the 2025 Sustainable Innovation Challenge. The Challenge offered students an immersive opportunity to apply academic learning to tackle a real-world sustainability problem, and was delivered by a consortium of partners from across the HE sector and industry. The Challenge was set by the R&A, who run The Open Championship. In response to The Open's sustainability programme, the R&A tasked the students with developing a product, service, or initiative that would leave a lasting social and environmental legacy in local communities near championship venues.

The successful delivery of the Challenge relied on an effective collaboration and partnership between four HE institutions and 20+ industry stakeholders. A shared vision and goals, clear roles and responsibilities, and open and transparent communication were key components that enabled the partnership to thrive. This, in turn, resulted in an exceptional immersive student learning experience delivered through an action-packed three-day programme and the development of impactful and lasting outcomes.

Students and employers reported a range of positive outcomes associated with their participation in the Challenge, including increases in key employability skills and the expansion of professional networks. The partnership has successfully developed a model that is being repeated, scaled and utilised across different contexts to address sustainability challenges, with student agency and co-design at its core. In addition, it represents a strong example of an innovative cross-institutional and multi-sector partnership which has enhanced the reputation of the HE sector through its delivery of student-led solutions to complex real-world problems.

Maynooth University Employer Partnered Legal Experiential Learning Programme

**Máire Buckley and Rebecca Boyle,
Maynooth University**



The Maynooth University Dentons Legal Insights Programme is a value driven partnership that opens doors to a profession traditionally hard to access. Collaboratively delivered by Maynooth University School of Law and Criminology, the Careers and Employability Service, the Maynooth Access Programme (MAP), and Dentons Ireland LLP, the initiative provides students from underrepresented backgrounds with meaningful, sector level engagement that builds confidence, networks, and professional capital.

What makes this programme distinctive is how it blends academic alignment, careers professional expertise, and employer commitment into a coherent, resource efficient approach. The partnership couples structured student preparation and evaluation with inclusive outreach and sector level engagement; raising quality and consistency across the experience and delivering outcomes no single partner could achieve alone.

The programme has earned strong institutional recognition, receiving the 2025 MU President's Award and being shortlisted for the 2025 MU Public Engagement Award. It has also demonstrated credibility through completion of two consecutive cohorts, and the expansion to a second major legal employer, Pinsent Masons. Most importantly, it advances social mobility by supporting students to envision and pursue futures in law, while strengthening the University's relationships with the profession.

Together, the partners have created a scalable, evidence informed model of inclusive employability that benefits students, the University, and the sector.

The Co-Curricular Advantage : Building Student Skills through Partnership

University College Dublin

Sophie Carey, Aradhna Mathur and Andrea Maynard

UCD Careers Network established a Co-Curricular Community of Practice (CoP), sponsored by the University Registrar, as a forum for collaboration, engagement and partnership to bring together staff leaders of co-curricular activities for students across the diverse university community. This was in response to one of key strategic initiatives emanating from the UCD strategy to 2030 focused on optimising the experience, wellbeing and sense of belonging of UCD students.

“The Co-Curricular CoP has been a highly successful initiative, bringing colleagues across UCD together to develop a shared understanding of co-curricular activity, enhance best practice, build strong connections and partnerships among activity leaders across campus and enhance our support for the development and experiential learning of our students outside the classroom.” Professor Colin Scott, University Registrar.

The Careers Network has led the CoP with 4 meetings annually since January 2024 and membership includes academic and professional staff activity leaders, representing a diverse range of co-curricular activities across our campuses. This forum presented an opportunity to educate and engage members on the university’s skills award (the UCD Advantage Award) which has expanded significantly recognising over 350 activities. Achievement of the award increased by 89% in 3 years to 1004 students. This is attributable to the partnerships created with activity leaders and pathways developed for students arising from our collaboration and the CoP has enabled better leveraging of resources across units and has optimised the experience, wellbeing and sense of belonging of UCD students across all our campuses.



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Employability Awards 2026

**Research Informed Practice
Shortlists**

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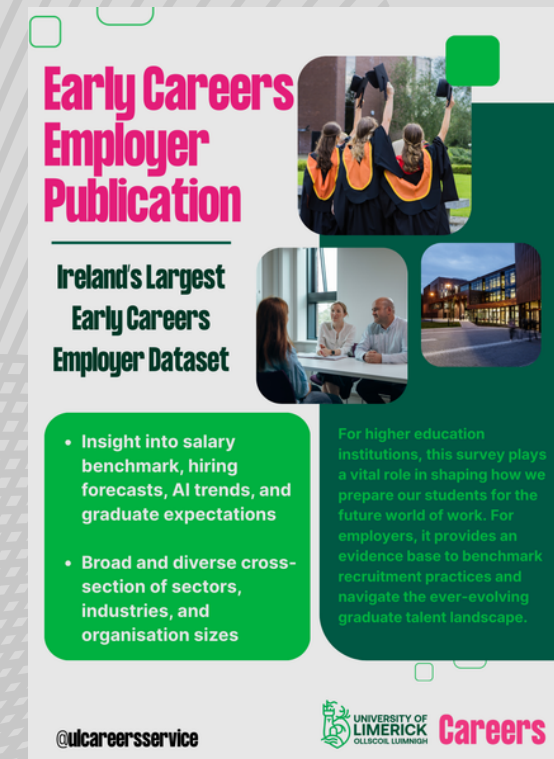
Research Informed Practice Award 2026

From Insight to Impact: The Early Careers Employer Publication

University of Limerick

Olga O'Sullivan, Aisling Ryan, Mark Robert,

Colm Deegan, Arlene Loughnane, Amy Trainor, Gavin Connell



The Early Careers Employer Publication (ECEP) was developed to address a growing disconnect between employer expectations and student perceptions of the graduate labour market. Convened by the University of Limerick and now in its twelfth year, the publication brings together employer recruitment data, student insight and careers leadership perspectives to provide a comprehensive view of graduate recruitment trends in Ireland.

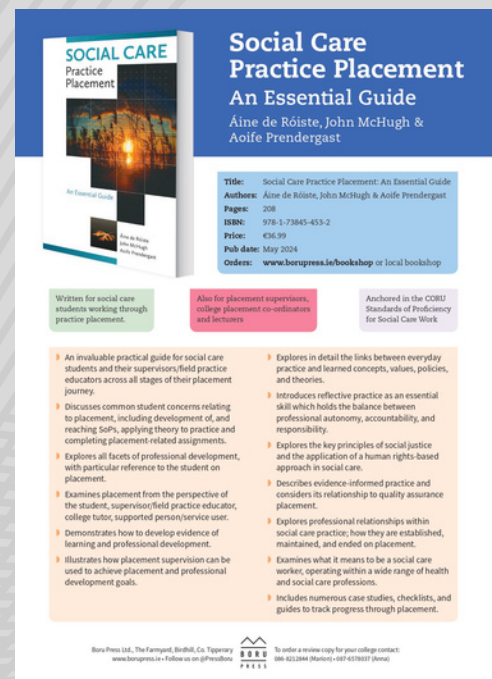
Engaging 319 employers across 14 sectors, ECEP provides nationally relevant evidence on recruitment timelines, salary benchmarks, emerging skills demands and evolving early talent practices. Its findings are actively translated into employability delivery through the GetGradReady framework, reaching more than 4,000 students annually and helping students make more informed and strategic decisions about graduate recruitment.

Beyond the University of Limerick, the publication has become a trusted reference point across the higher education sector and among employers seeking to benchmark their graduate recruitment strategies. By integrating research, sector dialogue and practical application, ECEP has evolved into a national evidence platform shaping how institutions, employers and students engage with the early careers landscape.

From AHECS to Strasbourg: Scaling Professional Standards in Social Care Placement through Evidence-Based Research

Technological University of the Shannon Midlands Midwest

Aoife Prendergast



This entry recognises the transformative impact of the co-authored academic textbook, *Social Care Practice Placement: An Essential Guide*, published in June 2024. Addressing a critical gap in the HE careers and employability sector, the research provides a robust, evidence-based framework for work-based learning, student engagement, and professional standards within social care.

Initially disseminated through the AHECS "Lunch & Learn" series and distributed widely to students and providers, the work has successfully standardised the placement experience. By synthesising qualitative student insights with quantitative benchmarking, the research has reduced "placement anxiety" and fostered stronger professional identities among graduates.

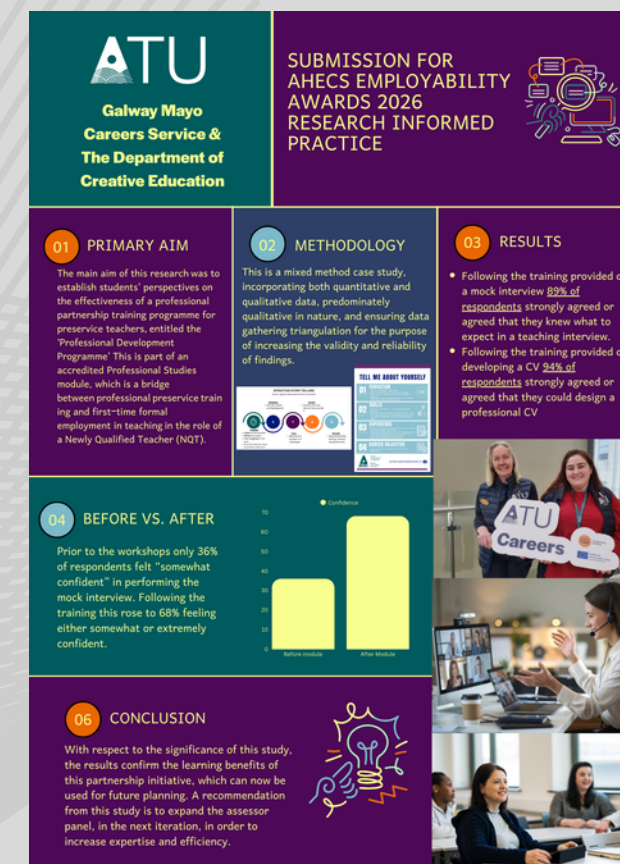
The project's reach has scaled from local and national levels to a prominent international stage. In May 2025, the research was featured on a panel at the AIEJI Congress in Copenhagen, engaging a global audience of practitioners. This was followed in November 2025 by a presentation to the European Parliament in Strasbourg during a specialised seminar for social educators. These milestones highlight the guide's ability to influence international standards for vocational training and professional resilience.

The results demonstrate a measurable improvement in stakeholder collaboration, providing a shared language for HEIs and placement providers. By professionalising the relationship between students, educators, and employers, this initiative has optimised HE resources while elevating the status of social care placements within the international graduate labour market. It stands as a premier example of how practitioner-led research can evolve into a significant contributor to European social policy.

An Investigation of the Effectiveness of a Professional Development Programme Partnership Between the Careers Service and the Department of Creative Education

Atlantic Technological University, Galway

Fiona O'Donnell and Dr. Pauline Logue



Over the past decade the Atlantic Technological University (ATU) Galway Careers Service and the Department of Creative Education have engaged in a professional partnership in relation to the development and delivery of a programme of pre-employment training, for student teachers, entitled the ‘Professional Development Programme’.

This programme prepares student teachers for employment interviews in the post primary sector. The aim of the study was to establish student and staff perspectives on the effectiveness of this training programme. Methodologically, this study was a mixed method case study, predominantly qualitative in nature. The research participants were final year preservice students (n=38), and staff (n=7). The data gathering methods included a student questionnaire, a student focus group (n=6) and a staff focus group (n=5). With respect to data analysis, a thematic analysis was conducted, aligned with the model articulated by Braun and Clarke (2022).

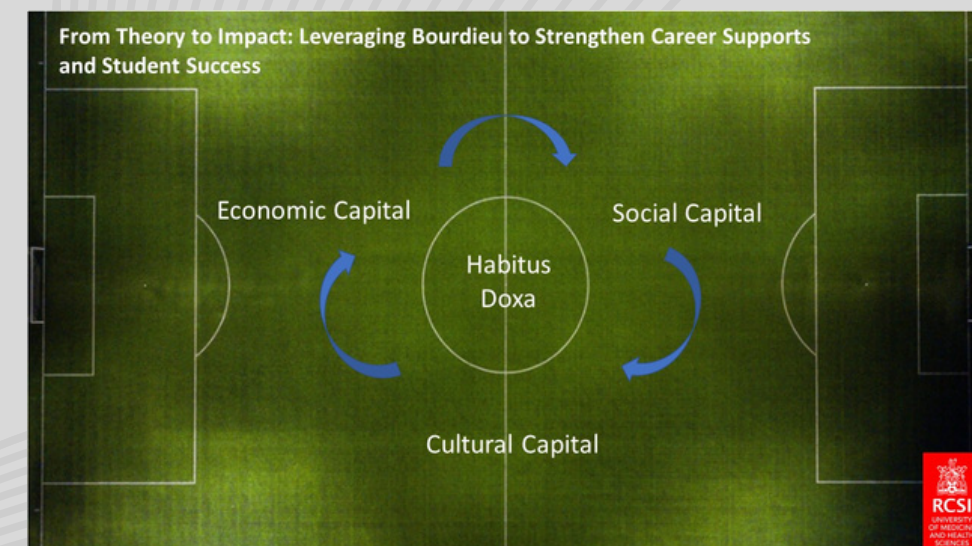
The research demonstrated increased skills and knowledge on the part of the student cohort in areas such as school ethos, school planning, The Teaching Council Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers (2016) and current trends in education. With respect to the significance of this study, the results confirm the learning benefits of this partnership initiative.

The most significant challenge that was uncovered was the resourcing and training of interview panellists, to keep in line with the increasing student numbers in the department. A recommendation from this study is to expand the assessor panel, in the next iteration, in order to increase expertise and efficiency.

From Theory to Impact: Leveraging Bourdieu to Strengthen Career Supports and Student Success

Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

Niamh Mullen



This research presents an evidence-based, practice-oriented framework to understand and enhance student success for first-generation and underrepresented medical students. A systematic review was undertaken to identify interventions that have been shown to be effective for these students and, to apply Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of capital, field, habitus and doxa as a framework for explaining how these interventions contribute to student success.

The research identifies seven key interventions, including dedicated student career support. These interventions offer a mechanism through which students acquire and convert economic, cultural, and social capital that is essential for progression in the medical field. Rather than treating these interventions as isolated initiatives, the research demonstrates how they work cumulatively and relationally. Early-stage supports foster belonging and habitus development, helping students negotiate the implicit norms and expectations of medical education. Later, field-embedded experiences such as clerkships, funded electives and research placements allow students to convert social, cultural and economic capital into recognised success markers, including assessments, graduation and post graduate placement attainment. The framework offers a clear set of practice principles that can be applied to all student populations and institutions: sequence interventions across the learner journey; make the hidden curriculum explicit; ensure access to visible and credible role models; pair financial support with mentored experiential learning; and design structures that create time, continuity and relational depth.

This research provides higher education careers and employability services with a theoretically grounded, practically applicable model to close equity gaps.

BUILDING FORWARD: MTU Career Development Programme for Mature Students; Building on the Past to Construct the Future, An Ongoing Story

Munster Technological University Cork

Caitríona Horgan, Christine Nolan and Maryrose O Sullivan



The contemporary workplace demands continuous upskilling, adaptability, proactive career self management, and ability to articulate competencies, draw insight from experience, and demonstrate future potential. Mature students enter higher education with strong motivation but also responsibilities, upskilling needs, and the uncertainty of work–life transitions. This cohort includes career changers, those specialising, individuals formalising experience through qualification, returners to second chance education, and international students pursuing new opportunities. Each brings a story of transition and redirection that can become powerful expressions of career potential.

The Building Forward Programme, developed by MTU Careers Office in partnership with the Mature Student Office, now in its sixth year, specifically addresses the career development needs of this diverse group. Each cycle is refined through practitioner research and participant feedback. Accessible delivery modes, modular structure and core career preparation content alongside student surveys and reflective evaluation guide ongoing enhancement.

Thought provoking, experiential sessions are designed to maximise cross campus and cross disciplinary connection. Its methodology is grounded in contemporary career theory: Career Construction Theory shapes the focus on narrative identity and meaning making, while Happenstance Theory informs activities that build adaptability and openness to opportunity. Storytelling and reflective practice help participants identify transferable skills, reframe experience, and articulate coherent future narratives.

Outcomes consistently show increased career confidence, clarity, proactivity, and belonging. Building Forward provides mature students with a research informed, structured developmental process that integrates experience, skills, studies, and future direction. At a time when emerging research indicates rising mature learner participation and AI driven career redirection, the programme is both relevant and substantive.

The logo for the Association of Higher Education Careers Services (AHECS) is displayed. The letters 'AHECS' are in a bold, sans-serif font, colored light gray, and are contained within a white arrow-shaped box pointing to the right. The background is a light gray with abstract, flowing, wavy lines in a slightly darker shade of gray, creating a sense of movement and depth.

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