

International Lifelong Learning Symposium 2026

21 May 2026, Virtual delivery

Session abstracts

Parallel Session 1, 09:30 - 10:10, Room 1

Session 1.1

From experience to identity: Can transformational learning shape lifelong practice?

Dr Pamela Donaghy, University of Manchester / Lloyds Clinical

Drawing on the lived experiences of 16 registered nurses, this grounded theory study identifies transformational learning, shaped by personal values, role models, and civic-experiential learning opportunities as central to sustaining health promotion practice. Introducing the Sustainable Health Promoting Nurse (SHPN) model, this session illustrates how identity, advocacy, and social awareness develop across the learning lifespan. The findings highlight how experiential and community based learning bridge the theory–practice gap and cultivate long term professional growth. Implications for curriculum design, placement partnerships, and lifelong learning pathways will be explored.

Parallel Session 1, 9:30 - 10:10, Room 2

Session 1.2

Coaching the “self”: From reflection to reflexivity in values discovery

Dr Winnie Sin Wai PUI and Dr Elly Tai, University of Cambridge

As higher education evolves into more flexible, equitable lifelong learning systems, leaders cannot rely solely on reflective practices to navigate complex educational issues. This interactive workshop positions coaching as a developmental practice that builds leaders' self-awareness, whether these leaders are coaching others or being coached themselves. Shifting focus from reflection to reflexivity, the session explores how leaders can align personal and institutional values in response to rapidly changing pedagogies, funding models and learner needs. Coaching will be presented as a portable, inclusive practice that fosters resilience, creativity and ethical innovation in an AI-enabled lifelong learning landscape.

Keynote, 10:25 – 10:55, Room 1

TBC

Leila Guerra, Associate Vice President (Education), London School of Economics and Political Science

TBC

Parallel Session 2, 11:00 - 11:40, Room 1

Session 2.1a

Towards a unified digital engineering ecosystem for Australia

Dr Kumudu Amarawardhana and Professor Sondoss El Sawah, UNSW Canberra

Australia's Digital Engineering (DE) ecosystem remains fragmented, with unclear roles for actors, uneven capabilities, and limited integration across sectors. This session presents a systems engineering analysis that conceptualises DE as a multi-layered system of systems. Using ecosystem mapping, actor–role classification, and structural decomposition, the study characterises key actors and structural elements, including infrastructure, processes, practices, digital threads, artefacts, models, and twins, and assesses interdependencies and maturity. Findings reveal structural gaps in governance, interoperability, and workforce capability that constrain national coherence. The session outlines evidence-based pathways

to align practices and improve cross-sector coordination to support sustainable, future-ready lifelong learning in DE.

Session 2.1b

Reframing awarding gaps as lifelong learning barriers: A department-wide, data-informed approach to structural change

Dr Emma Ransome, Birmingham City University

This session explores how a department-wide, data-informed approach can reduce attainment gaps and support inclusive lifelong learning pathways. Drawing on a comprehensive audit of attainment data, course-level intervention, and targeted staff development, the session demonstrates how reframing attainment gaps as structural rather than student deficits led to a 4.4% reduction across the department. Attendees will gain practical insights into using data, curriculum design, and staff capability-building to create sustainable, equitable learning environments for diverse learner cohorts.

Parallel Session 2, 11:00 - 11:40, Room 2

Session 2.2a

Beyond the technical: Integrating professional practice and lifelong learning in the AI era

Dr Shokry Abdelaal, ElSayed Abd-Elaal, Abdullatif Diaby, Elizabeth Smith and Amand Janssen, Adelaide University

This presentation showcases synthesised perspectives from over 1,000 students, academic staff, integrity officers, and industry experts to uncover the real-world impact of AI on teaching and academic honesty. Learn why traditional detection tools are falling short and why 88% of integrity officers now advocate for assessment redesign as the primary solution. From student ethical concerns to evolving industry demands for critical thinking, we provide a comprehensive roadmap for integrating ethical AI and building workforce readiness. Join us to bridge the gap between academia and the AI-driven workforce.

Session 2.2b

Artificial Intelligence and digital platforms in lifelong learning: Opportunities and risks for higher education in the UK and globally

Dr Inga Olari, Regent College London

Digital platforms and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are becoming the fundamental successor of lifelong learning in the UK and worldwide higher education. This session analyses how access to personalisation, and employability are being transformed through the use of adaptive learning systems, AI-based tutoring, learning analytics, and micro-credentials. Although the technologies are widening inclusion and flexibility, they also involve risks such as algorithmic bias, data-use academic integrity, and online disparity. Using evidence from secondary research, the session critically examines the opportunities as well as issues in emerging challenges. It makes practical suggestions on what institutions in an increasingly digitalising educational environment can do to tap into AI intelligently without jeopardising equity, quality and learner autonomy.

Parallel Session 3, 11:45 – 12:15, Room 1

Session 3.1a

“Who is the digital university designed for? Student experience as a lens on future technology strategy”

Tamudaishe Siringwani, Cambridge Early Learning Innovation Network

As universities accelerate digital transformation, a critical question often goes unexamined: who are these systems actually designed for? This session uses student experience as a lens to explore how technology strategy is perceived and navigated in everyday university

life. We reflect on the gaps between institutional intent vs lived reality and what these reveal about future digital priorities. This session invites institutions and individuals to rethink how student voice and feedback can meaningfully inform more human-centred digital strategies.

Session 3.1b

The human side of upskilling: Why police officers' real-time learning matters

Abigail Salter, The Open University

The Human Side of Upskilling: Why Officers' Real-Time Learning Matters explores why understanding how police officers learn in the flow of work is essential for future skills development. Drawing on early insights from my EdD research, this lightning talk highlights the lived, embodied and sensory dimensions of workplace learning, and why policing offers a powerful case study for rethinking lifelong learning, work-based education and upskilling in demanding professions.

Session 3.1c

Study skill workshops to enhance belonging and progression in an access framework

Isabella Henman, The Open University

The Open University Access provision provides distance-learning students with the skills to enable them to progress with undergraduate study. Many of these mature students have poor experiences of learning and have not studied for a substantial period. This provision of extracurricular study skills workshops is being trialled to enhance inclusion of students and allow sharing of strategies to develop a lifelong learning culture. Findings are shared from a mixed method research project using students as partners which focuses on facilitating community and belonging in distance-learning through online workshops created by staff and students.

Parallel Session 4, 13:10 - 13:50, Room 1

Session 4.1

Designing lifelong learning for the creative economy: A 3-pillar model linking industry, identity and community

Dr Ana Roncha and Kirsty Nevett, University of the Arts London

Higher education is shifting from one-time degrees toward flexible lifelong learning. Drawing on new online postgraduate programmes and strategic work on executive education at the University of the Arts London, this workshop introduces a practical three-pillar framework integrating industry, identity and community-centred learning. Participants will explore how to design programmes that integrate the framework in flexible-learning environments, responding to rapid skills change and modular learning expectations. Participants will map their own provision and prototype new approaches to stackable, work-integrated learning. The session offers practical tools for institutions seeking to align curriculum design with evolving workforce needs and lifelong learning policy.

Parallel Session 4, 13:10 - 13:50, Room 2

Session 4.2

Future tense: Tension mapping as a foresight tool for higher education promotional abstract

Dr Natasha Lawlor-Morrison and Crystal Tsay, University of Greenwich and Alexander Kofinas and Maria Jerez Jerez, University of Bedfordshire and Candice Chow, McMaster University Canada and Jan Klakurka, Heron University college Canada

In a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world, anticipating the future demands more than environmental scanning. This workshop introduces Tension Mapping — a scenario planning methodology grounded in the discipline of Strategic Foresight. Unlike traditional

tools, Tension Mapping surfaces tensions, generating unfamiliar and distinctive scenarios. Its defining innovation is free-choice variable selection: participants choose which tensions to explore, revealing the values and assumptions that shape how we imagine — and create — the futures we inhabit. Participants leave with plausible implications for generative AI in higher education and a practical foresight tool applicable to research, strategy, and decision-making.

Parallel Session 5, 13:55 - 14:35, Room 1

Session 5.1a

One policy, many real lives: Redesigning curriculum, assessment and belonging for lifelong learning

Professor Harriet Dunbar-Morris, University of Oxford

As lifelong learning policy gathers pace, universities face a critical challenge: designing provision for the realities of contemporary student lives rather than idealised models of full-time participation. Drawing on early insights from a Visiting Fellowship at the University of Oxford, this presentation explores how curriculum, pedagogy and assessment might be reimaged for modular, episodic and multi-generational learners. It considers what flexible, high-value learning looks like in practice, and how institutions can respond to the Lifelong Learning Entitlement without fragmenting learning or diluting standards.

Session 5.1b

Scaling lifelong learning: An original strategy for flexible professional development and curricular integration

Dr Connie Mitchell, Prince Sultan University

To lead the future of education, institutions must transition from static models to agile ecosystems. This case study presents Prince Sultan University's original strategy for Scaling Lifelong Learning, an institution-wide initiative that embeds flexibility into the student journey and faculty professional development. By integrating AI-enhanced reflection and partnering with Coursera, PSU has successfully engaged over 6,200 learners in industry-aligned digital pathways. This session demonstrates how to transform a university mission into a scalable, high-impact culture (avg. rating 4.7/5), providing a transferable framework for leaders to bridge the gap between academic curricula and the evolving global workforce.

Parallel Session 5, 13:55 - 14:35, Room 2

Session 5.2a

Enhancing learning through teamwork in acute non-invasive ventilation: Adapting established training for sustainable multidisciplinary workforce development in a healthcare setting

Dr Nicola Bowman, Marianna Amatuni, Aisling O'Donoghue and Dr Lola Loewenthal, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust

This session explores how health services can sustainably adapt established postgraduate training to meet evolving workforce and policy demands in healthcare settings. Using a multidisciplinary non-invasive ventilation (NIV) programme as a case study, we describe the transition from a single-profession nursing course to an interprofessional model incorporating doctors and physiotherapists. The programme aligns with British Thoracic Society quality standards and embeds structured teamwork, shared accountability, and governance awareness. We examine how existing educational infrastructure can be repurposed to widen participation without significant additional resources, offering a scalable model for workforce development, organisational resilience, and high-quality lifelong learning within healthcare partnerships.

Session 5.2b

Integrating 'real-world' experiences to assessments: Thematic exploration of assessment content presented by health and social care students

Dr Gayani Gamage, Regent College London

Learning occurs when a student can observe, identify and evaluate abstract learning concepts in relation to their own experiences. This type of learning typically leads to production of knowledge by mature and non-traditional route students. They 'own' rich personal/professional experiences but lacks the agency to connect to theoretical and abstract concepts. Therefore, this study explored the nuanced experiences of mature non-traditional route students' assessment work and connections with their life experiences. The findings provided insight into how assessment and experience were intertwined to produce enhanced theoretical understanding as it is 'situated' within a context where students 'participate' using real-world experiences.

Parallel Session 6, 14:50 - 15:30, Room 1

Session 6.1a

UA92 techfest: Designing practice-based learning for lifelong employability

Ngozi Nneke, University Academy 92

This session introduces TechFest, a practice-based learning initiative developed at University Academy 92 for final-year Computer Science and Cyber Security students in the World of Digital, many from underrepresented backgrounds. The session explores how flexible programme design, live industry showcases, and structured mentoring informed by Whitmore's GROW Model support confidence-building, career reflection, and employability readiness. Attendees will gain practical insight into designing inclusive learning experiences that promote learner agency and lifelong learning beyond traditional degree structures.

Session 6.1b

Designing for diverse learners: A pedagogical evaluation of four pilot lifelong learning courses

Dr Jenni Barrett, University of Lancashire

Lifelong learning pathways bring learners with diverse experiences, motivations, and commitments. This session will report findings from an evaluation of University of Lancashire's recent Lifelong University pilot courses, understanding how curriculum and pedagogy must adapt to meet learners' unique needs. Following delivery of four pilot short courses involving 132 learners, this session expands the challenge of flexibility beyond credits and delivery modes, exploring how flexibility can be delivered in curriculum design, authentic and choice based assessment, and inclusive, confidence building pedagogies can transform engagement and outcomes.

Parallel Session 6, 14:50 - 15:30, Room 2

Session 6.2a

Professional qualifications as lifelong learning: Strengthening higher education curricula

Professor Ghada El-Mahdy, Housing and Building National Research Center – HBRC

In an increasingly professionalized world, the pursuit of professional qualifications as a form of lifelong learning should be integrated into higher education curricula. While lifelong learning is formally included in the curricula of most national institutes in the MENA region, insufficient attention is given to promoting professional qualification pathways for graduates. This presentation examines the rationale for encouraging higher education students to pursue professional qualifications after graduation, as a means of preparing them for the increasing responsibilities they will face in their careers. It also reviews the factors that contribute to achieving professional competence and the outcomes associated with it.

Session 6.2b

Designing contextualised lifelong learning offers across borders

Thuraya El Kozeh, Regent European University

What does it take for a small European university to design genuinely contextualised lifelong learning for institutional partners across the world? This session draws on the early experience of Regent European University, a fully online institution bridging UK and European academic frameworks, to explore how flexible, stackable learning can be built with international co-design at its core. From standalone CPD modules for Saudi public sector professionals, to co-designed short courses for a Bangladeshi banking network, to controversial new doctoral pathways that challenge conventional notions of what "doctoral" means — this is an honest account of institutional design in practice.