# How do we help students to prepare for their careers in the new 'era of AI (Artificial Intelligence)'?

### CLT (Centre for Learning and Teaching)/ SOLSTICE Conference Workshop June 2024, Edge Hill University

Professor Peter Hartley, visiting professor at Edge Hill University

[profpeter1@me.com](mailto:profpeter1@me.com)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8480-8546>

Helena Knapton, Learning and Teaching Development Lead, Faculty of Education, Edge Hill University

[knaptonp@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:knaptonp@edgehill.ac.uk)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1043-7316>

Dr Susie Marriott, Senior Lecturer, Business School, Edge Hill University

[Susie.Marriott@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:Susie.Marriott@edgehill.ac.uk)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9209-1912>

Kate Stafford, Careers Adviser (Faculty Consultant) Edge Hill University

[Staffordk@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:Staffordk@edgehill.ac.uk)

## **Introduction**

In 2023 Peter Hartley, Helena Knapton and Susie Marriott published the third version of the student text on *Professional and Business Communication* (Hartley, Knapton and Marriott, 2023) with Routledge just as ChatGPT was launched and hitting the headlines. In the short space of time following publication, generative AI tools and patterns of hybrid working have been impacting the world of work and raise important questions for the ways in which we support students prepare for their employment following their studies, i.e.

* how much has changed in the worlds of business and the professions now that we are living in the ‘era of AI’ with various (and some quite different) predictions of likely futures? (e.g., Hobsbawm, 2022; Myerson and Ross, 2022; Susskind and Susskind, 2022; Suleyman, 2023).
* what implications do these changes have for the educational experience we offer our students? (e.g., Beckingham et al, 2024)

The CLT/ SOLSTICE Conference held at Edge Hill University in June 2024 provided an opportunity to discuss some of the implications of this changing world in relation to the broad theme of graduate employability from a range of different perspectives. Working with the different areas of expertise of the authors of *Professional and Business Communication* and including input from one of our Faculty Careers Consultants we developed a workshop that allowed us to explore the impact of these changes on graduate employment from different perspectives, using our individual areas of expertise. The focus areas were AI, accessibility, curriculum development and graduate expectations.

Depending on the numbers attending the session we planned for two approaches. The first was for the attendees to split into 4 groups, where each group would focus on one area dependent upon the expertise of the person leading that group. The second approach would have been to remain as a single group and address each of the four areas in turn.

We focused on key questions, including the following:

* How and where will our students be working in the future?
* Are we best preparing them for this range of futures?
* How could/should we modify our curriculum to help students make the necessary transitions?

The workshop was attended by academics from various specialisms, career development professionals, learning technology specialists and members of our student union. As we separated into four groups, the presenting team member used an individual presentation with bite-sized content focusing on their specialist area. Having smaller groups with a particular focus to the discussion along with the breadth of participant backgrounds allowed for a rich variety of perspectives, some of which were gathered into a Padlet and some have been presented on the accompanying PowerPoint. The opportunity to view the Padlet and add your own thoughts is available at the end of this paper.

## **Summary of discussion**

Key themes that emerged include:

### Hybrid learning and work skills, including communication and professionalism

Being expected to be able to work remotely and within an office space is likely to continue. The changes in university degree delivery will help them to develop the adaptability to do this, but there will still be a need for explicit development of professionalism and communication skills in preparation for these contexts.

### Professional awareness and preparation, including workplace norms and expectations

Students are often unaware of what professional awareness means, or what workplace norms and expectations may be in place. Creating opportunities for students to explore these concepts is important.

### Skills for the future, including ongoing reflection and the need for continual learning

It was a common view that there was a need to build in opportunities for students to reflect on their professional and personal development and to see this as something that they will continue to practice throughout their careers.

### Developing technical skills for the future workplace and ensuring curriculum meets accessibility standards

Whilst AI is the current headline technology that is being discussed and written about, there are other technologies that are already being used within the workplace that students also need to be aware of and able to work with.

## **Recommendations**

It was acknowledged that all colleagues play a role in preparing students for their graduate careers, whether they be a tutor, lecturer, support team member, industry partner or alumni. There is a balance we need to strike between being supportive and encouraging to students as they progress through their studies but also to bring an element of reality to help manage expectations, build resilience, and develop self-efficacy. Three practical recommendations are:

1. Development of a ‘futures’ module or integrated careers education programme to include emerging trends such as AI
2. Identify areas of the curriculum to build students’ resilience and ability to reflect on their own experiences
3. Continue to strengthen industry partnerships to develop employability skills that align with industry needs. This may include usage of Local Skills Improvement Plans when modifying or creating programmes, although industry specific knowledge will also be significant.

## **Join the conversation**

You can see the outputs on our Padlet and contribute to the discussion here:

<https://edgehill.padlet.org/careers80/NTR>

### References

Beckingham, S., Lawrence, J., Powell, S. and Hartley, P. (eds.) (2024). *Using Generative AI Effectively in Higher Education*. SEDA (Staff and Educational Development Association) Focus/Routledge.

Hartley, P., Knapton, H. and Marriott, S. (2023) *Professional and Business Communication*. 3rd edition. Routledge.

Hobsbawm, J. (2022) *The Nowhere Office*. Basic Books.

Myerson, J. and Ross, P. (2022) *Unworking*. Reaktion Books.

Susskind, R. and Susskind, D. (2022) *The Future of the Professions*. Oxford University Press.

Suleyman, M. (2023) *The Coming Wave*. London: The Bodley Head.