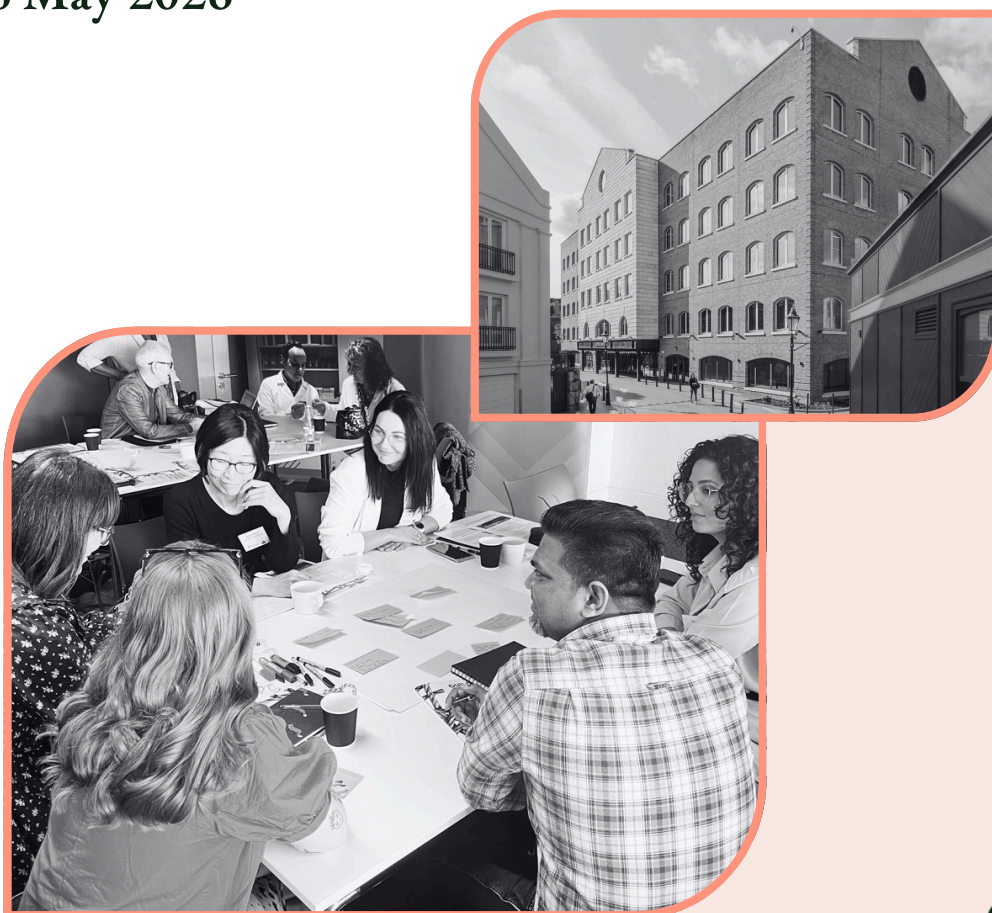


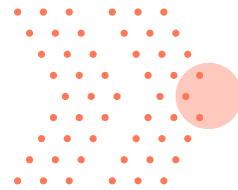
GuildHE Research Doctoral Festival 2026

Beyond the thesis: forging your own
path and amplifying impact

Northeastern University London
5 - 6 May 2026



Agenda



Day 1: Forging your own path in your research

Tuesday 5 May

9.00 AM - 9.30 AM

Registration and coffee

9.30 AM - 9.45 AM

Welcome and introductions

Professor Emile Bojesen, Director of GuildHE Research, and Director of Research and Innovation at the University of Winchester, will welcome participants and speakers to the GuildHE Research Doctoral Festival 2026. A brief icebreaker activity will follow, led by Ellen Graves from GuildHE.

9.45 AM - 10.45 AM

Researcher roundtables

The Festival is ultimately an opportunity for you to share your experiences of research with peers at other similar institutions, identify common areas of challenge, and find support. In small groups, participants will introduce themselves and their area of research, and share what they are hoping to get from the Festival. The session will be facilitated by GuildHE colleagues and fellow speakers.

10.45 AM - 11.15 AM

Break

11.15 AM - 12.45 PM

Rethinking research practice: interdisciplinary and experiential approaches

Dr David Freeborn, Assistant Professor in Philosophy, Northeastern University London

Dr Yu-Chun Pan, Director of Experiential Learning, and Faculty Director for CoMENS, Northeastern University London

What would it mean to make your research truly interdisciplinary? This interactive workshop invites doctoral researchers and early career academics to critically examine the assumptions underpinning their own practice and to consider how those assumptions might be productively challenged. Drawing on perspectives from philosophy and experiential learning, Dr David Peter Wallis Freeborn and Dr Yu-Chun Pan will guide participants through a series of structured activities designed to interrogate disciplinary boundaries, surface methodological assumptions, and explore how research conceived beyond the academy can generate meaningful real-world impact. Participants will leave with concrete reflections and ideas applicable to their own work.

12.45 PM - 1.45 PM

Lunch

1.45 PM - 3.15 PM

From unknowns to opportunities: thriving as a postgraduate and early career researcher

Peris Thuo, Head of the Early Career Researcher Network, British Academy

Dr Stefanie Schneider, EDI Research Fellow, EDICaucus

Dr Niek van Veggel, Programme Director, Anglia Ruskin University

This interactive workshop brings together complementary perspectives on often-unspoken challenges for postgraduate and early career researchers. Participants will hear from three speakers regarding strategies of navigating typical “unknown unknowns”, and are invited to reflect on their own experiences and set goals for the next five years. Themes covered will include mentoring, networks, research culture and professional identity.

3.15 PM - 3.45 PM

Break

3.45 PM - 4.30 PM

Alumni panel: So, you're working towards a PhD? What have others experienced? And what happens next?

Dr Ayodeji Afolami, Research Assistant and alumnus, Royal Agricultural University

Dr Alma Prelec, Postdoctoral Researcher and alumna, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

Peter Underwood, Phd Student, Bath Spa University, and PGR Peer Support Community Coordinator, GuildHE Research

The GuildHE Research PGR Peer Support Community Coordinator will facilitate what promises to be a lively discussion amongst a panel that have recently been awarded postgraduate research degrees, as they reflect on their experiences of doctoral study, what they're doing now, and share some advice for participants.

4.30 PM

Close for the day

Day 2: Making your research count

Wednesday 6 May

9.00 AM - 9.30 AM

Arrival and coffee

9.30 AM - 11.00 AM

Poster presentations

Participants who have submitted posters in advance will present their research in small groups. Each presenter will have five minutes to present their poster, followed by questions from the audience. Participants who are not presenting are encouraged to engage with the presentations, learn from their peers' research methods and approaches, and ask questions. This is a fantastic opportunity to showcase the diversity of our PGRs' research, and for participants to develop their skills, knowledge, and confidence in a supportive environment.

11.00 AM - 11.30 AM

Break

11.30 AM - 1.00 PM

Engagement and impact: building pathways through your research

Dr Julie Bayley, Assistant Professor and Director of Research Impact and Culture, Northeastern University London

Jasmine Stevens Wong, Senior Project Officer, National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement

What does it take for research to genuinely make a difference? This interactive session brings together impact specialist Dr Julie Bayley from Northeastern University London, and Jasmine Stevens Wong from the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), to explore how purposeful engagement can strengthen your research and support meaningful impact. Through guided discussion and short activities, participants will explore their own engagement opportunities, reflect on the skills that support impactful research, and leave with practical ideas they can apply straight away.

1.00 PM - 2.00 PM

Lunch

2.00 PM - 3.30 PM

Breakout workshops: research communication and engagement.

Participants are invited to attend one of the sessions.

Workshop A: From jargon to clarity - communicating with non-experts

David Horner, Head of University Partnerships, The Brilliant Club

Breaking down research so it is accessible for different non-expert audiences can be challenging. This session shares strategies to support researchers to do this successfully and allows time to plan putting them into practice.

At the end of the session, participants will have an understanding of how to translate their research into simple, accessible concepts, use concept-mapping strategies to break down complex research and apply these principles to forms of public engagement.

Workshop B: Unlocking research impact through external engagement

Professor Alison Truelove, Project Director, Developing Business-Aware Academics (DBAA)

Rachel Vowles, Lecturer in Business (Education and Scholarship), University of Exeter

This session will explore how engaging with non-academic organisations can inform and enhance participants' research careers. We'll offer an overview of the potential benefits for researchers and external collaborators, help participants to identify their expertise and networks, and build their confidence in developing new connections. Come along to join evidence-informed activities designed by the Research England-funded Developing Business-Aware Academics project team to inspire and equip you to take the next steps in connecting beyond academia! This session will involve data collection for the DBAA project, in the form of evaluation questionnaires.

3.30 PM

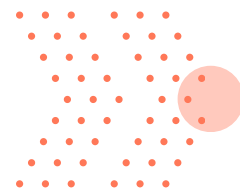
Final reflections

Professor Emile Bojesen will bring the Festival to a close and invite participants to feedback on their experience.

3.45 PM

Close

Biographies



Dr Ayodeji Afolami, Research Assistant and Alumnus, Royal Agricultural University

Dr Ayodeji Afolami is an agronomist and researcher in sustainable agriculture, with a PhD from the Royal Agricultural University in collaboration with the University of Gloucestershire. His work focuses on climate-resilient crop production, particularly optimising soybean systems under UK temperate conditions through field trials and farmer engagement. He currently works as a Research Assistant on a DEFRA-funded project, contributing to applied research that supports sustainable farming practices. With experience across the UK and sub-Saharan Africa, Deji is interested in translating research into practical impact and supporting the next generation of researchers.



Dr Julie Bayley, Associate Professor and Director of Research Impact and Culture, Northeastern University London

Dr Julie Bayley is Associate Professor and Director of Research Impact and Culture at Northeastern University London. Julie leads national and international initiatives to build impact-literate, healthy research cultures and has won awards from ARMA, INORMS, and ARIS for her leadership. Her bestselling book *Creating Meaningful Impact: the Essential Guide to Building an Impact Literate Mindset* was published in 2023, and she has held a range of sector roles including as a member of the REF2029 Research Diversity Advisory Panel. Julie is a Chartered and HCPC-registered Health Psychologist, and outside work she is a vascular patient advocate and former dementia carer.



Professor Emile Bojesen, Director of GuildHE Research, and Director of Research and Innovation, University of Winchester

Professor Emile Bojesen was elected as Director of GuildHE Research and took up his post in January 2025. Prior to this, he was the Cathedrals Group's Research & Enterprise Committee Chair. Emile is Director of Research & Innovation for the University of Winchester and Professor of Philosophy and Education. Before moving into university-level leadership, Emile was Faculty Head of Research and Knowledge Exchange for the Faculty of Education, plus REF 2021 Unit of Assessment Lead for Education. His theoretically-oriented research focuses on the educational experience and he has edited over six books and special issues of journals, as well as publishing more than 40 articles and book chapters. His research is best represented by his book, *Forms of Education* (2020, Routledge).



**Dr David Freeborn, Assistant Professor in Philosophy,
Northeastern University London**

Dr David Freeborn is an Assistant Professor in the philosophy of artificial intelligence at Northeastern University London, where he is a member of the Computational Philosophy Lab (CPL) and Northeastern University's Ethics Institute. He works on the epistemology of social networks and the ethics and reasoning of AI systems. He approaches this from an interdisciplinary background, drawing from the sciences and humanities. David completed a PhD in High Energy Physics at University College London in 2015, where he worked at CERN's Large Hadron Collider (LHC). He completed a PhD in Philosophy at the University of California, Irvine in 2023. David teaches courses in computer programming, digital humanities and responsible AI.



David Horner, Head of University Partnerships, The Brilliant Club

David Horner is the Head of University Partnerships at The Brilliant Club, a national charity mobilising the PhD community to support underrepresented students to access and succeed in higher education. With a background in education and widening participation, David has extensive experience in fostering collaborations between universities and schools to support students through key transitions in their educational journeys. In his current role, he works closely with partner universities to support them to meet their strategic priorities, including research and strategic advice on current and planned activities and co-delivering new access and success programmes.



**Dr Yu-Chan Pan, Director of Experiential Learning and CoMENS Faculty
Director, Northeastern University London**

Dr Yu-Chun Pan leads institution-wide experiential learning strategy and STEM academic operations. He has been at the forefront of degree apprenticeship development since 2017, with programmes awarded Best Apprenticeship in IT 2025 and shortlisted for Apprenticeship Programme of the Year 2026. Yu-Chun's work spans curriculum innovation, quality enhancement, and the integration of authentic industry experience into higher education. He is co-investigator on a QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project assuring quality in industry-integrated learning with King's College London and London South Bank University, and a QAA Expert Reader for Teaching, Learning and Assessment. He holds a University Teaching Fellowship, was nominated for a National Teaching Fellowship, and received a Northeastern Teaching Inquiry Fellowship.



Dr Alma Prelec, Postdoctoral Researcher and Alumna, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

Dr Alma Prelec is an academic and performer based at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London. Her first monograph, forthcoming with Legenda, explores theatrical connections between Spain and the former Yugoslavia, and expands on her AHRC-funded doctoral thesis, which was awarded the Association of Hispanists' dissertation prize in 2025. While pursuing her doctorate at Central, she worked as a film researcher for the London ICA, as a festival curator and interviewer for the Theatre Times, and as a Stipendiary Lecturer in Spanish literature at the University of Oxford (2021-24). She trained at the Oxford School of Drama and continues to work professionally; upcoming credits include ITV's Secret Service, directed by Oscar-winner James Marsh, and Season 3 of Vigil for the BBC.



Dr Stefanie Schneider, EDI Research Fellow with EDICaucus, and Lecturer in International Business, Northumbria University

Dr Stefanie Schneider is an EDI Research Fellow with the EDI Caucus and a Lecturer in International Business with Northumbria University. She has conducted studies on the impact of bias on funding assessment panels and internal selection processes, and on EDI training in the research and innovation sector. She co-designed three good practices reports with stakeholders which will be published in 2026. Before working for the EDI Caucus, Stefanie was a Lecturer in Intercultural Communication and published research on intercultural competence and labour force participation of highly skilled refugees. She has a PhD in Management and Business from Newcastle University.



Rachel Vowles, Lecturer in Business (Education and Scholarship), University of Exeter

Rachel Vowles is a Lecturer in Business Education at the University of Exeter Business School, working on the Research England-funded 'Developing Business-Aware Academics' project. With a background spanning education and theatre, she is highly experienced in running communication skills training within private, public and third sector organisations, including universities. Recent clients have included The National Trust, The London Science Museum, The Royal College of General Practitioners, and The Worshipful Company of Farmers. She is passionate about creating safe and vibrant environments in which dialogue can flourish and people can thrive.



Jasmine Stevens Wong, Senior Project Officer, National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement

Jasmine Stevens Wong is a Senior Project Officer at the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), where she supports higher education institutions and researchers to strengthen their public engagement practice. Her role includes delivering the Engage Watermark, NCCPE's charter mark that recognises an institution's strategic support for public engagement and its commitment to continual improvement.

Before joining NCCPE, Jasmine worked as Capacity Building Manager at the Travel Foundation, leading cross-sector programmes aimed at building more inclusive and sustainable approaches within the tourism sector. With a background in education, capacity building, and community-based project development, she brings experience in shaping engagement for real impact.



Professor Alison Truelove, Project Director, Developing Business Aware Academics, and Director of the Centre for Innovation in Business, University of Exeter

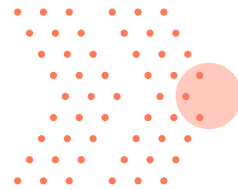
Professor Alison Truelove is Project Director / Principal Investigator of the Research England-funded 'Developing Business-Aware Academics' project (www.business-aware-academics.org), working in collaboration with the Chartered Association of Business Schools and a range of other universities and non-academic organisations to offer knowledge, skills and networking opportunities to doctoral and early-career researchers to engage effectively with industry. She is Director of the Centre for Innovation in Business Education at the University of Exeter Business School, leading on enhancing teaching practice, student experience and transition into higher education. She previously held teaching and research positions at the Universities of London and Cambridge, and has taught and published in the areas of historical linguistics, medieval culture and literature, and digital humanities.



Dr Nieky van Veggel, Programme Director, Anglia Ruskin University

Dr Nieky van Veggel started working at Anglia Ruskin University in 2010. He completed a Doctor of Education degree, researching evidence-based practice and course leadership in higher education. Nieky is a key member of the award-winning Professional Doctorate in Health and Social Care team, where he leads the Research Stage of the programme, and more recently became the Programme Director for the Professional Doctorate in Uniformed Public Services. He is also the lead editor of *Scholarship in Practice*, the global platform aimed at supporting practitioner-scholars in all career stages. Nieky's main areas of focus are applied and veterinary social sciences, evidence-based decision-making methods, and professional development of practitioner-scholars. He publishes on a number of innovative methodological contributions to Grounded Theory methodology, and has a keen interest in doctoral pedagogy and support.

GuildHE Research



About us

GuildHE Research is the leading advocate for the UK's diverse research landscape. We are a consortium of ambitious institutions forging new insights through specialist, vocational, applied, and practice research. We support and amplify that research, and provide a collegiate and inclusive research community. Our training and peer support for postgraduate research (PGR) students seeks to enhance their investment in emerging talent in research. We are part of GuildHE, a recognised representative body for UK higher education comprising nearly 70 diverse institutions characterised by specialist, vocational, and technical education.

[Connect with us on LinkedIn](#)



Rachel Persad, Head of Research Policy, GuildHE

Rachel leads on research policy at GuildHE and leads GuildHE Research. She supports the ambitions of member institutions to develop positive research cultures, share infrastructure, and achieve excellence and quality in research. She has co-authored reports on the [impact of humanities research](#), and the [role of smaller and specialist institutions in innovation systems](#), and has commissioned research into the [Lived Experience of Ethnic Minority Postgraduate Research Students at GuildHE institutions](#).

[Connect with Rachel Persad](#)



Ellen Graves, Policy Officer, GuildHE

Since joining in 2023, Ellen has been instrumental in shaping policy related to student support, postgraduate research students, and open access. Ellen manages the GuildHE Research PGR programme, including the Doctoral Festival and Global Majority PGR Network providing resources and support to postgraduate researchers and leads GuildHE's EDI work. Ellen's experience at the University of Bristol's Institute for Learning and Teaching, where she helped develop innovative teaching and learning solutions particularly in accessibility, inclusivity, and wellbeing, provided a strong foundation for her work at GuildHE.

[Connect with Ellen Graves](#)



Amanda Suwart, Membership and Partnerships Manager, GuildHE

Amanda joined GuildHE in April 2025, delivering our member engagement and events programme and bringing experience in higher education, international partnerships, and project delivery. Before GuildHE, Amanda led flagship global training programmes at the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), overseeing global membership operations and engagement, plus supporting stakeholder relationships across Asia, Africa, and the Americas.

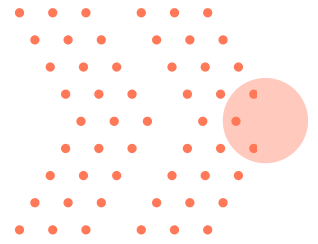
[Connect with Amanda Suwart](#)

GuildHE Research Doctoral Festival 2026

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