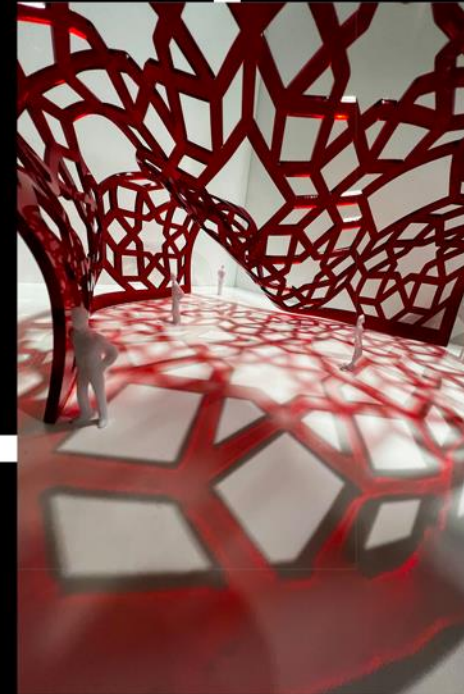


Progression to Employment: a differentiated approach

Sherri Ellis, Head of Employability,
Ravensbourne University London



Introduction

- 17 years in Higher Education (and FE)
- Academic and quality improvement background
- Approach employability through the lens of student success
- I lead the '**Careers Lab**' (note not the Careers Service)

Ravensbourne Context

Historically a creative, design & media institution, now expanded into business, computing and technology.

~5000 students across FE, UG, PG.

Diverse backgrounds

Home UG >80% APP

The shift

- Moving from a 'careers service' to an industry and employability team
- Reactive, on-demand service → embedding careers development and employability within curriculum
- Launching Work Based Learning as a core module



The challenge(s)

- **Practicalities** of launching a WBL program from zero to 700 students
- Historical and persistent **inequalities** in who can access placements
 - Barriers include finance, confidence, networks, caring responsibilities, etc
- **Change management!**
 - Work Based Learning presents a complex set of internal administration and support challenges, as well as external relations

Integrating Employability preparation as part of core modules

- 'Professional Life Practice' module
- Identifying student start points – some with no prior experience of professional contexts or employment
- Beyond CV workshops -> Communication skills, confidence building, growth mindset, professional behaviours and expectations, digital literacy



A note on digital literacy

- Don't assume Gen Z are digitally literate – they may be digital natives but appropriate digital communication often hasn't been taught, especially for professional contexts
- Particularly for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, digital interactions are often confined to mobile messaging / social use and entertainment.
- Explicitly teaching email etiquette, Teams communication, digital profiles and footprints, digital file management.

UK research consistently shows students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often have lower digital literacy, lacking not just access but also the skills, confidence, and quality of internet use, creating a significant digital divide that affects education and opportunities.

Work Based Learning Model

Delivering WBL at scale

- Embedded across 20+ creative/media/digital/business courses
- Ensuring all students could access meaningful industry engagement, apply their skills in real-world contexts and develop their professional communication skills



Differentiated approach

- Differentiated WBL pathways providing scaffolded approach
- Placements; student sourced or University sourced
 - Employer advocacy, modelling inclusive practices
- A range of industry engaged projects from high intensity -> smaller low intensity to meet a range of needs
- Module based live briefs, micro-placements, community projects
- Support systems for participation



The
results...



Work Based Learning in numbers

646

students participated
in WBL 24/25

92%

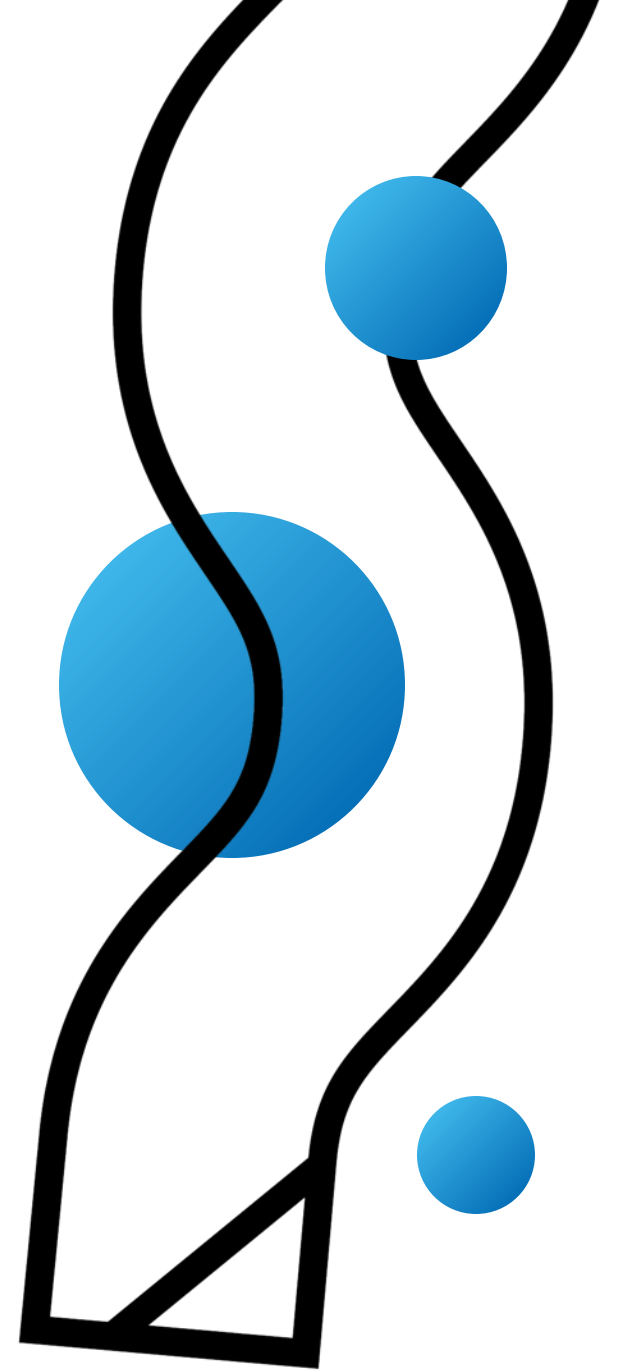
pass rate 24/25

10

industry
partnered projects

90%

students reported improved
professional behaviour and
increased confidence



Industry Partners

2024/2025 partners included:

- Playstation Studios
- JDO Global
- Vidsy
- New Wave Magazine
- Kinetic Art Labs
- Sony Filmmaking
- Planet A Consultancy x Creative Conscience
- Formcode
- Uncommon Creative Agency
- Scriberia

SONY

CREATIVE
CONSCIENCE

Vidsy.

NewWave*



STUDIOS™



Evaluation Highlights

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree

I was able to apply skills I have learnt on my course

I developed my professional behaviours e.g. teamwork, organisation, time-keeping, decision making

I built my professional network (made connections inside or outside of university)

I learned about areas of the industry that I did not previously know about

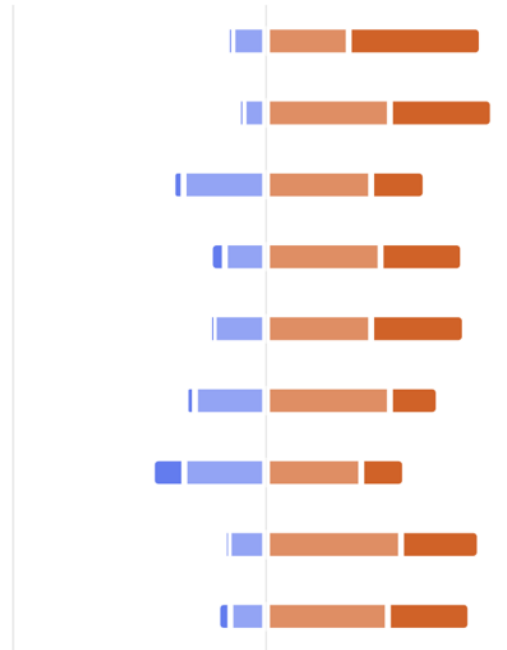
I have a deeper understanding of the industry (commercial awareness)

I have a clearer understanding of what I want to do once I graduate

I have made solid cross-disciplinary connections (connections beyond your course)

My confidence in responding to a brief / working in a profession environment has improved

My confidence in working with industry has improved



Neutral /
Disagree

Agree /
Strongly
Agree

90%

felt that it had developed their professional behaviours such as teamwork, organisation, negotiation, problem solving, decision making

79%

said it had improved their commercial awareness and understanding of the industry

84%

felt the module has improved their confidence in working with industry or in a professional environment

Student Feedback

Benefits of Professional Brief:

"It really tested you to think about real world constraints and timings"

Cross-Disciplinary Team Benefits:

"Being able to work with someone from fashion and then being able to work with someone from marketing and branding. It's two very different people. It's two different worlds of design."

Problem-solving:

"You get feedback and you're like, wow, like there's actually different routes we can go and there's the solutions to it. We're not stuck here."

Future networking:

"You meet friends, but you also meet social creative partners that I feel like in the long run... could actually really implement into your future."



Industry Feedback

Ideas and innovation:

Partners were impressed by the level of creativity and concept development the students demonstrated.

“It was great to see fresh thinking, and new ideas”

“Many of the outcomes showed real innovation, attention to sustainability and functional details”

Professionalism:

Students were engaged and professional, and worked well within the given timings, stepping up to the challenges.

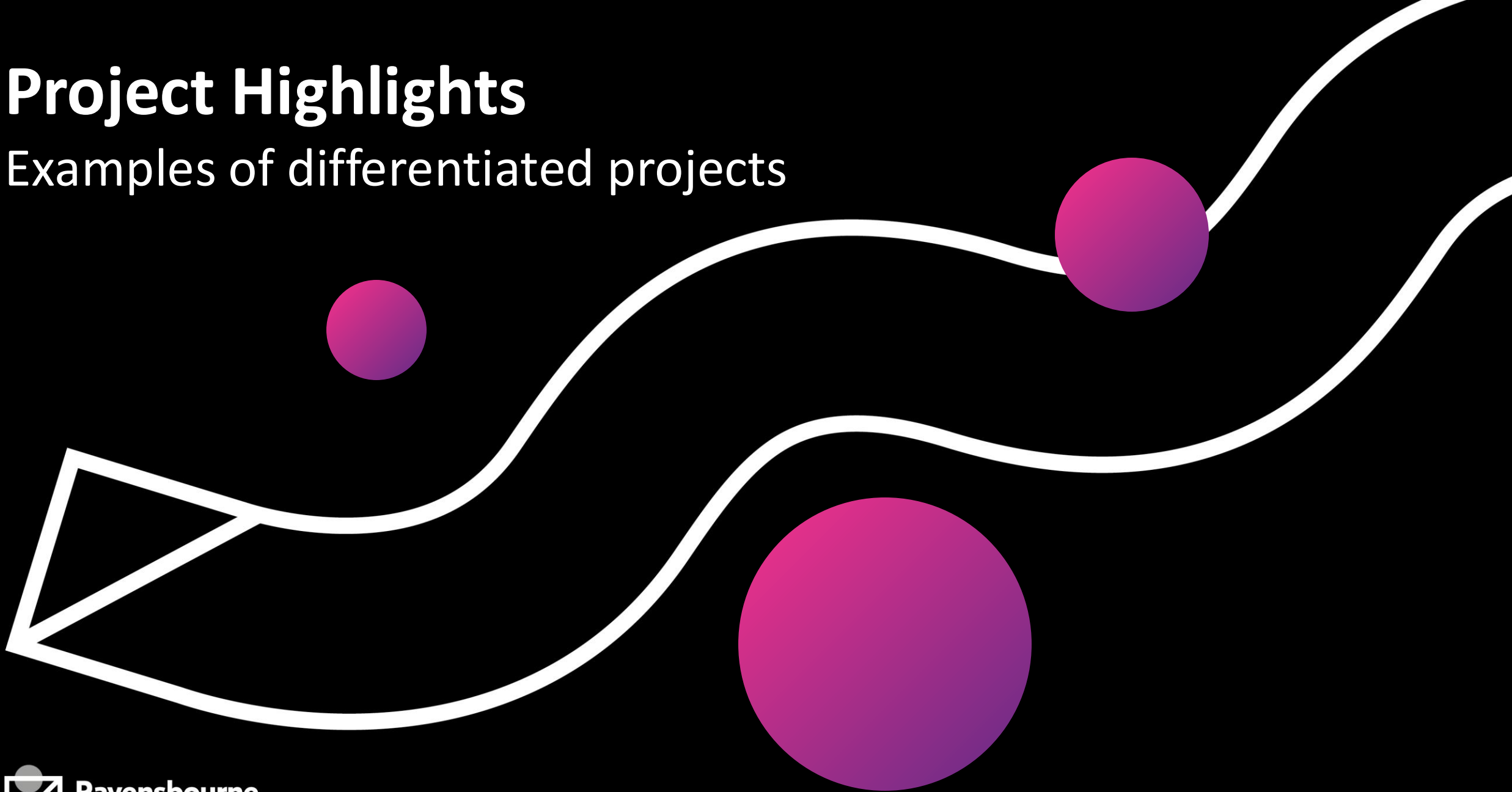
“Students responded well to the given brief, considering all the different elements they had to think about from the client”

“It was great to see students from different courses working together, bringing different perspectives into the project”



Project Highlights

Examples of differentiated projects



Highlights

PlayStation Studios

A collaborative project to create and brand a new game concept, working with PlayStation Studio creatives to understand the aspects and processes of game brand development.

Included students from: Graphic Design • Illustration • Fashion Design • Digital Marketing • Advertising and Branding • Games Development • Editing & Post Production • Digital Film Production



“

Students said:

Working with other courses has helped me to understand what the professional workplace will be like once I have graduated.

PlayStation said:

We were very impressed by the level of creativity and concept development the students demonstrated.

”

Highlights

JDO Global

Working with Creative Directors, Strategists and Visualisers, inter-disciplinary student groups responded to a product and packaging brief set by JDO and their clients.

Included students from: Product Design • Graphic Design • Illustration • Fashion Promotion • Digital Marketing • UX UI Design



“

Students said:

It really tested us to think about real world constraints and timings and consider a completely different audience.

JDO Global said:

Students responded to the brief with creativity, attention to detail and different perspectives. It was insightful to see what they came up with.

”

Highlights

Creative Conscience

Responding to the UN sustainable development goals, students worked with B-Corp consultants to develop solutions to critical environmental and ethical issues.

Included students from: Business Management • Computer Science • Fashion Promotion • Motion Graphics • Fashion Design • Illustration • Editing & Post Production • Cyber Security



“

Students said:

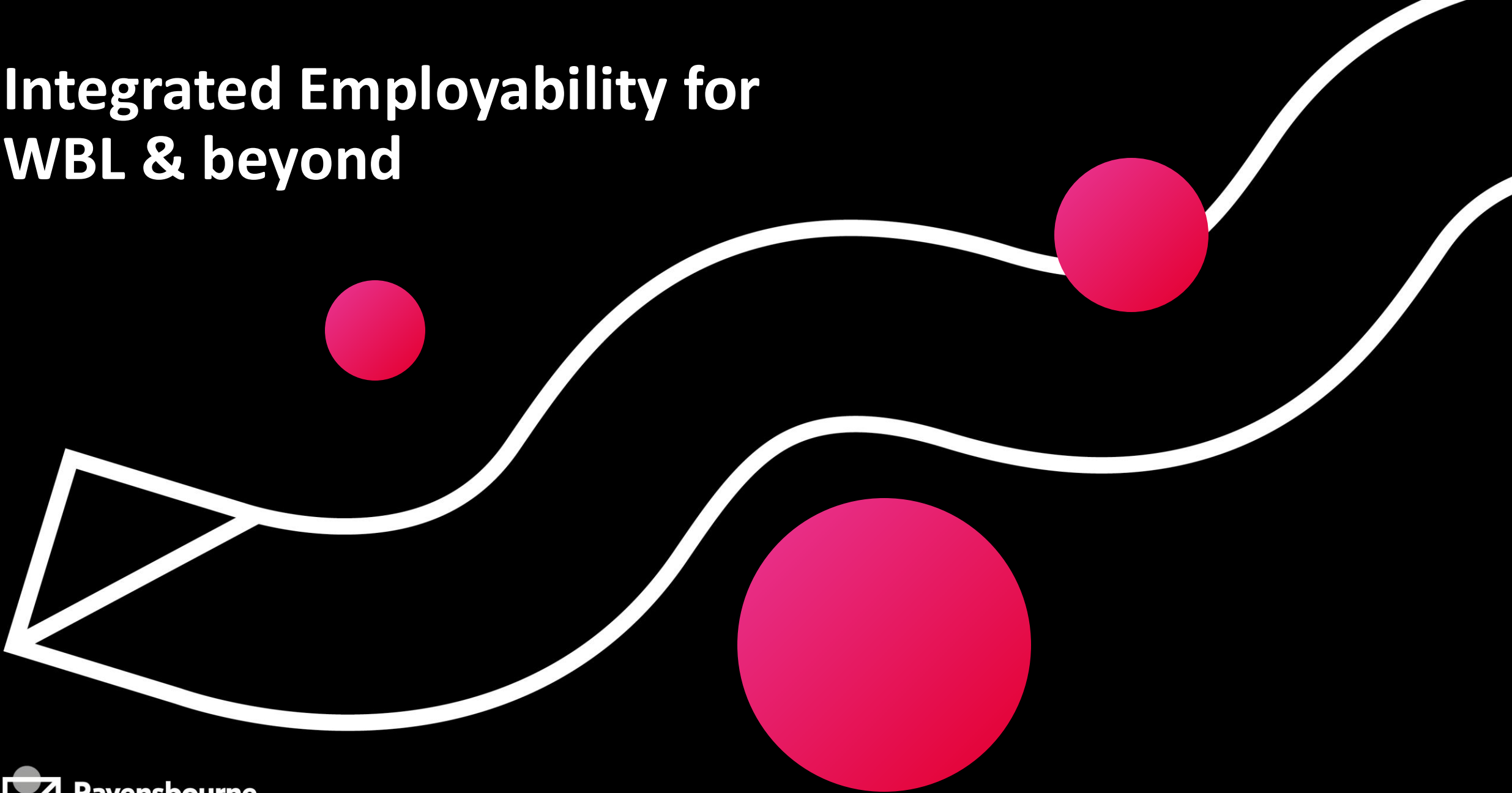
It really developed my understanding of why these issues are so important in business and helped me consider these issues as part of my work.

B Corp consultants said:

It was great to see computing and creative students working together on projects such as wellbeing apps that will benefit society.

”

Integrated Employability for WBL & beyond



An empowering approach

- Need to switch the mindset of students;
- Perceived as doing things for students 'Careers Service' to enabling career confidence and readiness through a 'Careers Lab' mindset.
- Employability & Career Development Programs to support inclusion throughout the year, including LaunchPad, Summer Career Club, Entrepreneurship Tasters



Targeted employability programs

- Removing participation barriers through industry advocacy and talent pipeline programs such as **Set in Motion** – a development program organised with a local organisation and production studio.
- **Radically inclusive** employability events such as 'Career Connect' in partnership with Black Create Connect
- Launchpad – **post graduate support** designed to empower underrepresented groups
 - Interview confidence
 - Knowing your worth
 - Being different in the workplace
- Summer Careers Club
 - Promoting a culture of **self-respect and professionalism**. Students awarded with completion certificates

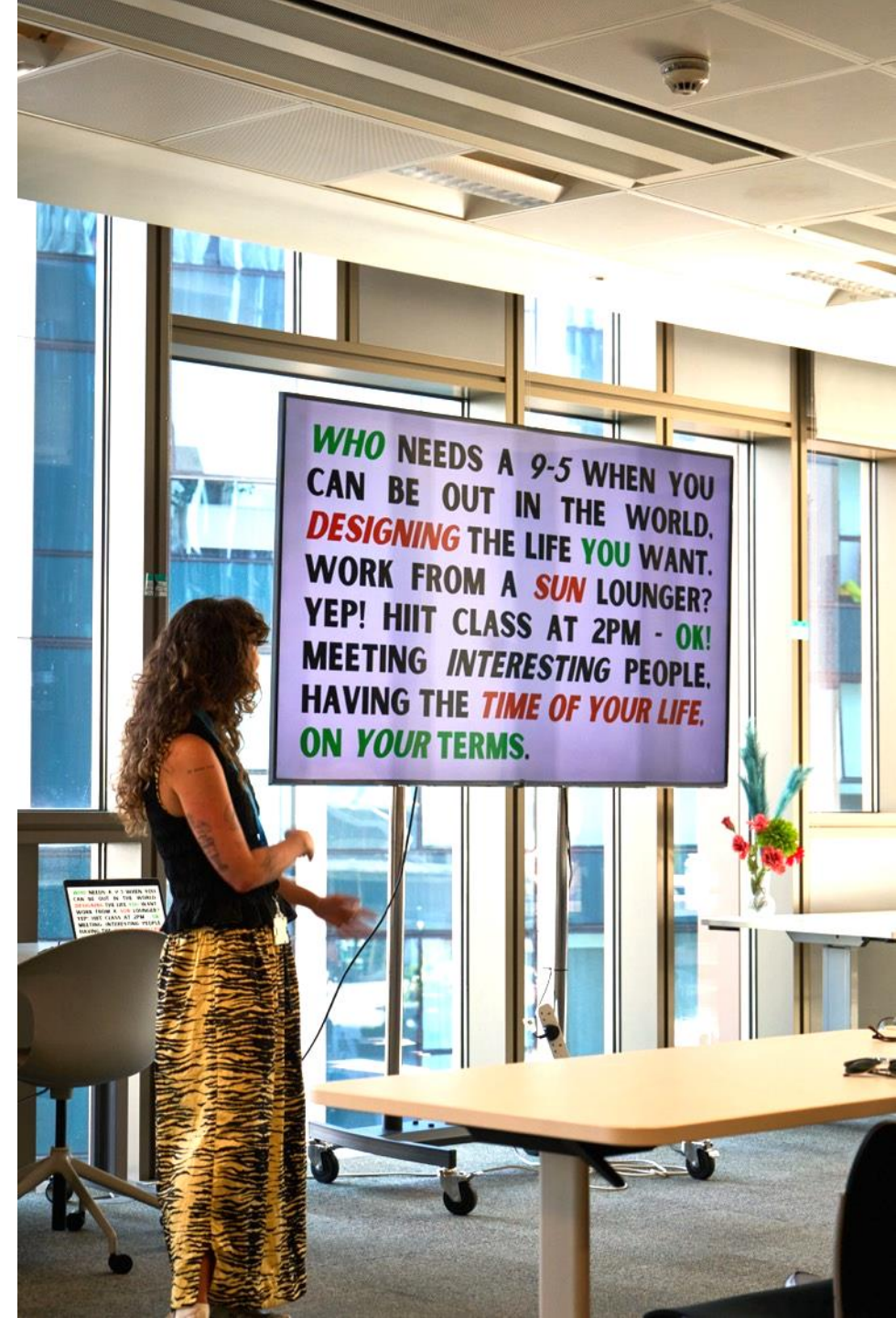


Future challenges

- Complexity of scaling employability offer
- Increasing engagement, particularly with the 'hard to engage' groups
- The workload of content development – transferring a lot of what we do in person into digital bite size content to reach a wider audience.

Takeaways

- Design choice + differentiation into employability pathways
- Employer advocacy – ensure opportunities are equitable and value the students worth
- Make inclusion measurable and visible, even radical
- Be brave!





Thank you