



2026 sagea DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

Themes & Call for Presenters

SAGEA is delighted to invite you to submit a speaker proposal for our 2026 Development Conference, taking place on Tuesday 10 and Wednesday 11 November, at the Fairways Hotel, Spa and Golf Resort.

Our overarching theme for this year's conference is **Enhancing and Sustaining Graduate Development in a Changing World of Work.**

The world of work is changing faster than most graduate development programmes can evolve. AI is reshaping what graduates need to know, and expectations are shifting on both sides. This year's SAGEA Development Conference brings employers, solution providers, career services and foundation colleagues together to explore what it takes to enhance graduate development for a changing world - and sustain it well beyond the programme itself.

We're inviting proposals for talks, case studies, panels and debates on new and emerging thinking in early talent development, based on the themes below.

Member-led content shapes a practical, relevant and inspiring programme, because the best insights come from the real interventions, innovations, challenges and lessons being experienced across our community. Reflect on the work you've been doing in early careers development, and consider what you could share to spark ideas, strengthen practice and shape the future of our sector. We have provided the themes as a guideline but we're open to suggestions that meet the overall development theme.



CONFERENCE THEMES TO BE ADDRESSED

Graduate Managers: The Glue That Makes Your Graduates Stick

SAGEA's 2025 Candidate Insights tells us that 90% of newly employed graduates cite their line manager as their most important source of support.

Graduate managers play a pivotal role in the success of early career programmes, and as the people guiding young professionals through their first months on the job, they see first-hand what's working and what's not.

This session should explore how managers can be better prepared to work with graduates, how they're experiencing graduates in the workplace, their perceptions of skills gaps, and how we can collectively better prepare young talent for the realities of work.

We envisage a best-practice case study followed by a mixed panel of graduate managers.

The AI-Augmented Graduate

AI's impact on the world of work is already being felt but not always understood. Amid the noise about AI displacing jobs, the ISE's latest Development Survey suggests a more nuanced reality: AI will reshape early careers roles and skill requirements, but it won't eliminate early careers opportunities.

For this session, we're looking for an employer and/or careers service colleague who has meaningfully embraced AI - building AI literacy

and responsible application into their entry-level talent experience.

The session could also explore the need to build self-awareness and emotional intelligence (EQ) - the "hard skills" essential to navigating the workplace and careers alongside AI.

What does good look like when embracing the AI-augmented graduate, and what can others learn from your journey?

Life After the Programme: Recruitment as the New Retention

According to SAGEA's Candidate Insights 2025 53% of graduates plan to stay with their first employer for between one and four years, with just over half thinking about working internationally at the end of their programme.

Yet internal mobility remains an underutilised talent lever, and too many organisations are still losing people they should be keeping. Navigating non-linear career paths and retaining high-performing graduates requires earlier, more targeted intervention - identifying flight risks, segmenting talent by impact and potential, and equipping leaders to have meaningful career conversations.

Retention is rapidly becoming the most important form of recruitment.

This session should explore how to align the employment deal with what top graduate talent values most: credible development, understanding career pathways in an AI-shaped world, and flexibility that is both fair and sustainable.

If your organisation is getting early careers retention right, we'd love to hear your story. This session could also include a panel of graduates who have stayed for five or more years - and are willing to share why.

Building Tomorrow's Workforce: Where Workforce Planning Meets Emerging Talent

Organisations that get this right treat workforce planning and emerging talent as one conversation. They use workforce data and forecasts to shape how they recruit, develop and retain early-career talent, graduates and the next generation of leaders.

We are inviting presentations and case studies that show how this integration works in practice.

- How workforce planning insights have directly shaped your emerging talent strategy - recruitment targets, skill priorities, or pipeline design
- How early-career and graduate programmes are being built around future capability needs
- How data, forecasting, or skills gap analysis has changed the way you think about growing talent from within





Strategic Development ROI – Measuring What Matters

What does it cost to develop young talent, and how do you know if it's working?

This session should examine training and development models that are working, employer perspectives on training effectiveness, what the investment really looks like, evaluation frameworks, and what graduates themselves think of the development they receive.

The First 90 Days

Many onboarding programmes prioritise information transfer over meaningful experience, and graduates sometimes feel a gap between what was promised and what they encounter. This session should explore the graduate perspective on those critical first three months: what transition challenges they experience, what happens after formal onboarding ends, how they manage their career progression, where the real gaps are, and what practical interventions can accelerate confidence and impact from day one.

This session should answer questions like:

- Areas where Universities and/or Career Services can strengthen their support
- How onboarding design translates into real experience on the ground
- Key gaps between intent and lived experience
- Practical interventions that accelerate impact in the first 90 days

The Golden Thread in Graduate Development – What Is Yours?

Graduate programmes begin with the best of intentions: attract high-potential talent and develop them into capable, confident professionals. But often there's a disconnect - graduates are assessed against one framework during recruitment, then onboarded and developed using another. The result: fragmented development journeys, a lack of clarity and purpose for graduates, and unclear returns for the business.

The answer lies in a consistent, skills-based framework that connects every stage of the graduate journey - from attraction and assessment through to onboarding, development and succession planning.

We're looking for a case study that has successfully joined the dots between front-end assessment and long-term career growth. If that's you, we'd like to hear all about it!



Wellbeing In the Workplace

Young talent entering today's organisations can feel overwhelmed, exhausted and disconnected - dealing with transition challenges, financial pressures, imposter syndrome and much more. How are employers meaningfully responding?

This session should explore what it takes to genuinely prioritise mental wellbeing and build a workplace culture where early-career employees feel a real sense of community and belonging.

Graduate Employability and the Expectation Gap

Employers often feel graduates lack workplace readiness, while graduates themselves feel well prepared. Higher Education Institutions face the challenge of bridging the gap between academic achievement and workplace expectations.

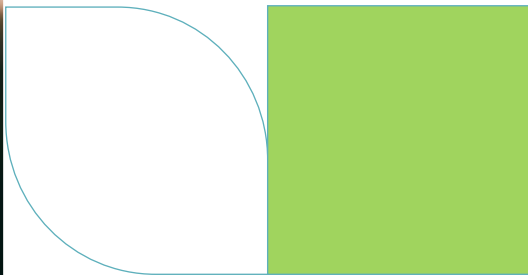
What are employers really looking for, and why?

This session could be co-presented by a Careers Service expert and a graduate recruiter or run as a facilitated panel discussion.

The Future of Employability: How Career Services Should Evolve

Career Services practitioners must prepare students for a labour market that's changing faster than traditional curricula can keep pace with, while students themselves face increasingly non-linear careers with multiple transitions.

This session should explore how career guidance is changing, and how Career Services can evolve to better equip students for the realities of 2026 and beyond.



PRESENTING OPPORTUNITIES

Sessions that showcase current employer practices and highlight models and skills that create a genuine learning experience for delegates will be given priority.

Sessions led by employers, or that include employers as co-presenters or panellists, are particularly well received.

Sessions should be lively, inspiring and packed with valuable take-aways - not sales pitches.



FORMAT FOR PROPOSALS

A proposal to run a session providing details of:

- Clearly defined learning outcomes and objectives
- A clear session structure or talk “storyboard”
- Which of the themes your session will address?
- Presenter information (name, job title, organisation, contact details, etc.), with the primary contact clearly indicated.

Please only include presenter names you’re certain are available and have agreed to participate - we reserve the right to cancel agreements if accepted proposals change substantially.

- Speaker biographies (max 75 words per presenter)
- Feedback scores from previous events you may have spoken at

Please use this [link](#) to submit your proposal.



COST OF SUBMISSION

There are no fees for submitting a proposal. Please note that SAGEA does not cover speaker costs for successful submissions, including travel and accommodation. Discounts on conference tickets are

available to speakers chosen through the submission process; speakers without a conference pass will only have access to their own presentation.



OUR SUBMISSION PROCESS

The conference planning team will review and select submissions, giving preference to those that demonstrate:

- Originality of content
- Originality of session delivery
- Practical application
- Relevance to the overall conference theme, aims and objectives

You will receive feedback on the eligibility of your submission within two weeks of the deadline. To ensure great outcomes, successful sessions will be partnered with a member of our selection team, who will work with you to sound-board content via a webinar demo before the conference. **We can’t wait to see what you’ll bring to the stage.**

Please [submit](#) your proposal by Friday 28 August 2026.

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