



◆ WELCOME TO THE RE:PLAY NEWSLETTER ◆

RE:PLAY is a three-year ESRC-funded project exploring how playful approaches to teaching and learning can transform UK higher education.

Traditional methods like lectures and exams aren't meeting the needs of today's diverse student population, but research suggests play can enhance learning, boost motivation, reduce fear of failure, improve belonging, and spark creativity—but we need robust evidence to show what works and why. RE:PLAY will provide that evidence.

◆ OUR FOUR THEMES ◆

1

State of Play

Surveying staff and students at six partner universities and interviewing university and industry leaders to understand current usage and perceptions of playful learning.

2

Play in Action

Investigating 32 case studies across the UK to explore real-world experiences, benefits, and barriers of playful learning for students and staff.

3

Design to Play

Co-creating a playful learning design framework with learning designers at six institutions, then testing it through the redesign of 24 modules.

4

Evidencing Play

Gathering data from redesigned modules to measure the impact of playful learning on student outcomes including motivation, creativity, and sense of belonging.



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[Website](#)



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1 STATE OF PLAY

◆ STUDENTS: 1800+ RESPONSES

We collected over 1800 survey responses from across 160 UK Higher Education institutions. This includes responses from our six partner institutions, plus an open call on Prolific to widen our reach beyond those six and get a broader national picture.

◆ STAFF: 180+ RESPONSES

Alongside the student data, we've also heard from over 180 staff from our six partner institutions, plus an open call on social media and Prolific to widen our reach.

◆ LEADER INTERVIEWS: STRATEGY VOICES

We have completed 6 interviews with university leaders, giving us valuable insights into how playful learning is viewed and supported at a strategic level. We're now scheduling interviews with industry leaders, to bring in a perspective from beyond higher education on how play is perceived and used in professional learning and development.

◆ WHATS HAPPENING WITH THIS DATA?

We have analysed all survey responses, creating reports for staff and student thoughts for each partner institution, broken down by question, so each partner can see how their own students and staff responded. Alongside this, we have been analysing the data and plan to publish this work moving forward, as well as the fully anonymised dataset.

A special thanks to our partner institutions:



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH



University of
Greater
Manchester



University of the
Highlands and Islands
Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd
agus nan Eilean



2 PLAY IN ACTION

◆ CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

Back in May, we put out a call for participation inviting Innovation Fellows to join RE:PLAY as case study partners, and we've received some excellent submissions so far. We're seeing a great spread across the eight types of play we're investigating, roleplay, simulations, gamification, digital worlds, hybrid play, playmaking, traditional play, and playfulness, and across all four disciplines: Arts & Humanities, STEM, Social Sciences & Business, and Health.

If you know someone already using playful learning in their teaching, the call is still open, [read more and apply here](#).

◆ CASE STUDY VISITS FROM SEPTEMBER

From September, we'll be heading out to visit our fellows and see their case studies in action first-hand. We're really looking forward to getting out and seeing the breadth of playful learning happening across the UK.

3 DESIGN TO PLAY

◆ REPLAY DRAFT FRAMEWORK: NOW LIVE

We're making great progress on the framework itself, with 5 out of 7 stages drafted, uploaded and in active use on our website. Each stage comes with a draft guide built by the RE:PLAY team of experts across institutions, so learning designers, fellows and educators have practical, hands-on support as they work through the framework. Each guide is being developed further with feedback as its used.

◆ REDESIGN UNDERWAY ACROSS ALL INSTITUTIONS

All six institutions have been working with their fellows to redesign their modules using the REPLAY framework over the summer, with each of these redesigns being deployed across the next academic year.





◆ PRE-REDESIGN INTERVIEWS COMPLETE

Before any modules were redesigned, we interviewed all fellows about their thoughts and experiences, and that analysis is now complete. To make sense of the interviews, journals, and huddle meeting data, we used an abductive approach, moving between our existing ideas about what makes playful learning design work and what the data itself was telling us, rather than starting from a fixed theory or a blank slate.

We used a framework built around four dimensions (Mediating Elements, Creative Constraints, Playful Stance, and Relationships) with Transformation at the centre, for the analysis and we're now looking at how these dimensions interact to understand what helps playful learning design succeed or stall. Ian's written a full post on this if you want to dig into the detail: [Ian's Blog](#)

We're now booking in a second round of interviews for September, this time post-redesign, so we can compare experiences before and after.



EVIDENCING PLAY

◆ PRE-REDESIGN SURVEYS COMPLETE

We've now completed collecting survey data from all fellows on their pre-redesign and control modules, capturing how students were feeling before any changes were made. We're now preparing to run the same surveys post-redesign next year, so we can measure how student feelings shift before and after.

◆ BUILDING THE COMPARISON

Alongside this, we're collecting module documentation and assessment scores from the pre-redesign modules. This will give us a clear baseline to compare against once the redesigned modules are in place, so we can properly measure the impact of the changes next year.



5 SHARING THE PLAY

◆ CONFERENCE ON THE BEACH

We had a brilliant time at CHI 2026, the leading conference in Human Computer Interaction, meeting researchers from all over the world and showcasing a range of our work. The highlight, was our lunchtime beach takeover: picnics, beach games, and the now-legendary RE:PLAY Sandcastle Competition, with a coveted trophy. Our sandcastle competition doubled as a research activity in creativity, belonging, and failure-normalising, we'd say that's a pretty good day's work.

◆ PLAYFUL LEARNING ASSOCIATION & IN-PERSON CO-I MEETING

In May we hosted the Playful Learning Association at Northumbria, alongside our in-person RE:PLAY Co-I meeting, wonderful to have everyone together in person.

◆ LEARNING WITH PORPOISE

Our framework session, "Learning with Porpoise," has now run three times: at the Playful Learning Association meet-up, an interactive un-conference event, and again at the Playful Learning Conference in Brighton, with the materials now available on our website.

◆ PLAYFUL LEARNING CONFERENCE, BRIGHTON

Brighton was a real showcase of the breadth of our team's work, including a keynote from Alex, a Taskmaster-style session from Malcolm, another outing for our Dolphin session, and a session exploring AI ethics and playfulness through our board game, AI Aboard.

◆ INNOVATION AWARD, SHINE AWARDS 2026

Huge congratulations to the Northumbria team, who went to the Shine Awards as nominees and came home as winners of the Innovation Award, recognising teams who challenge the status quo and embrace change. A brilliant recognition from our own institution, and a great night for the team.