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CEPLER WORKING PAPER SERIES

Reimagining Employment Law: A CEPLER Workshop

Author: Nia Stead

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Introduction

Rarely does a legal discipline experience a period of change as significant as that currently facing employment law. Legislative reform, technological disruption, new expectations of legal education, and changing patterns of work are collectively reshaping the landscape within which employment lawyers operate. Against this backdrop, Birmingham Law School and the Centre for Employability, Professional Legal Education and Research (CEPLER) hosted a one-day workshop entitled **Reimagining Employment Law** on 19 June 2026. The event brought together academics, legal practitioners and employment law specialists from across the profession to consider how employment law should be taught, studied and practised in a period of rapid transformation.

The workshop emerged from a simple but important question: **how should we teach employment law in a period of radical legal change?** Participants considered the implications of the Employment Rights Act 2025, the growth of artificial intelligence and legal technology, changing expectations of students, developments in experiential learning, and the continuing importance of preparing graduates for professional careers in employment law.

What follows is a summary of the principal themes, ideas and discussions that emerged from the workshop. The purpose is to provide a record of the conversations that took place and to stimulate further discussion within Birmingham Law School and beyond.

Employment Law in an Age of Artificial Intelligence

The workshop began with a presentation from **Hannah Swindle**, Employment Partner at Gowling WLG, who explored the implications of artificial intelligence for employment law practice.

Hannah's presentation provided a valuable practitioner perspective on the rapid integration of AI technologies into legal work. She described how AI tools are already being used within legal practice for activities such as legal research, litigation support and business development. At the same time, she highlighted the increasing use of AI by employers themselves, particularly in areas such as recruitment, workplace investigations, grievance management and Employment Tribunal disputes.

The discussion moved beyond the opportunities presented by AI to consider the significant challenges that accompany its use. Participants reflected on concerns surrounding reliability, confidentiality, professional privilege, supervision and training. Questions were raised about how future employment lawyers should be prepared for a professional environment in which AI is likely to become a routine part of legal practice rather than an optional enhancement. Participants discussed the social and economic implications of AI replacing junior lawyers.

An important theme emerging from this session was that employment law may be particularly affected by technological change because workplace decision-making increasingly involves algorithmic systems, data management and automated processes. The challenge for legal education is therefore not simply to teach students about employment law, but to help them understand the technological environment in which that law now operates.

Preparing Students for Careers in Employment Law

The second presentation was delivered by **Mugni Islam-Choudhury**, Barrister and Head of Employment at No5 Barristers' Chambers, who offered insights into preparing students for employment law careers at the Bar.

Mugni began by making a compelling case for employment law as a career choice. Employment law, he argued, sits at the intersection of law, business and human experience. Because work occupies such a central role in modern life, employment lawyers find themselves dealing with issues that touch upon identity, dignity, equality and economic security.

Drawing on examples from contemporary case law (Higgs v Farmor's School [2025] IRLR 368 (CA)), he illustrated the complexity of balancing competing rights and interests within employment disputes. Such cases demonstrate that employment law often requires practitioners to navigate difficult questions for which there may be no straightforward answer.

The discussion then turned to the qualities sought by chambers when recruiting pupils. While academic excellence remained important, equal emphasis was placed on communication skills, interpersonal skills, legal experience and evidence of a genuine interest in employment law. Participants discussed the importance of helping students develop the ability to communicate complex legal ideas clearly, engage sensitively with clients and think critically about unsettled areas of law.

Those of us in the room who are interested in Careers and Employability learned a lot from Mugni's practice of asking a candidate to argue one side of a debate and then immediately argue the other. He said that approximately one-third of candidates clam up at interview which chimes with what I have heard from law firms. It emphasises the importance of students having opportunities to practice public speaking and presentation skills at university.

Perhaps the strongest message from this session was that employment law education should not focus solely on knowledge acquisition. Rather, it must also cultivate professional identity, judgement and the passion required to engage with disputes that often concern issues central to people's lives and livelihoods.

Digital and Interactive Approaches to Teaching Employment Law

The first academic presentation of the day was delivered by **Dr Francesca Lee and Jonathan Finn** of Aston University, who explored innovative and interactive approaches to employment law pedagogy.

Their presentation was informed by contemporary research concerning student engagement, attention span and digital learning. They argued that changing patterns of media consumption, particularly among younger students, are creating new challenges for legal educators. Research suggests that attention can be difficult to sustain through traditional delivery models, prompting a need to rethink how legal material is presented and discussed.

Rather than viewing these developments pessimistically, the presenters encouraged participants to consider how technology and interactive teaching methods might be harnessed to improve learning outcomes. Interactive tools, visual materials, storytelling, role play and audience participation platforms were all presented as mechanisms for encouraging deeper engagement with complex legal concepts.

What distinguished this session was its participatory design. Delegates themselves were invited to contribute views on student engagement, teaching methods and classroom participation through interactive polling (via Vevox) and discussion activities. This generated lively debate about whether legal education should adapt to students' learning preferences or whether students should adapt to established legal educational practices. We also discussed the risk that students become lost to their phones once they are instructed to use them to scan the Vevox/Padlet QR code.

A recurring theme throughout the discussion was the need to maintain intellectual rigour while also recognising that contemporary students may learn, communicate and engage with knowledge differently from previous generations.

Scaling Experiential Learning in Employment Law

After lunch, **Edward Jones** from the University of Leicester delivered an engaging and highly interactive session on experiential learning and the challenge of scaling authentic learning experiences for large student cohorts.

Edward began by setting out what might be described as an "ideal" employment law learning experience. Such an experience would combine doctrinal legal analysis, engagement with clients, critical reflection on law reform, opportunities for professional practice and meaningful feedback. Yet many of these elements are difficult to provide simultaneously at scale.

Rather than accepting this limitation, Edward invited participants to imagine alternative models. His approach involves students creating and operating their own simulated businesses (registered at Companies House as non-trading "dormant" companies),

within which employment law problems would emerge organically. Students assume different organisational roles, make decisions with real consequences within the simulation, and confront issues such as contracts, workplace disputes, disciplinary processes and tribunal proceedings.

What made this model particularly interesting was that employment law was embedded within a wider commercial and organisational context. Students were required not only to understand legal rules but also to appreciate the practical realities that shape workplace decision-making. The simulation aimed to provide authenticity, consequence and uncertainty while remaining manageable and scalable. Students realise both that law does not exist in a vacuum and the implications of poor decision making, such as redundancies.

The discussion which followed considered whether experiential learning can ever fully replicate the benefits of interaction with real clients. Nevertheless, there was considerable interest in the potential of immersive simulations to bridge the gap between traditional classroom teaching and clinical legal education.

Labour Law as a Tool for Social Change

The next presentation was delivered by **Dr Serena Natile** of the University of Warwick, who invited participants to think about labour law not simply as a body of knowledge but as a vehicle for social and potentially radical political transformation.

Drawing upon her Labour Law in Context module, Serena discussed the use of collaborative policy-writing exercises through which students work together to identify problems, develop policy proposals and imagine alternative futures for labour regulation.

A particularly interesting aspect of this approach was the distinction drawn between reform and reimagination. While many students naturally focus on achievable reforms, Serena encouraged participants to consider how law teaching might create space for more ambitious and transformative thinking. Students were challenged to imagine labour law from the perspectives of those at the margins of legal protection (including sex-workers and au pairs) and to propose alternative forms of legal organisation and governance.

The presentation introduced the concept of "prefigurative practice", whereby students are encouraged to engage with future possibilities as though they were already achievable. This approach seeks to develop imagination alongside analysis and positions labour law as a tool for envisioning different social and economic futures. For example, students might propose that there be a *maximum* wage as well as a minimum wage. There was no limit on the students' imaginations.

Here is a recent online exhibition of the students' policy briefs published to celebrate International Workers' Day (May Day):

https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/projects/transnational-social-security-law/labour-law-online-exhibition/

The presentation prompted considerable discussion about the role of legal education in fostering critical thinking and whether law schools should explicitly encourage students to engage with questions of justice, power and social change.

Employment Law as Political Practice

The final presentation of the workshop was delivered by **Jennifer Wright**, Academic Developer and Research Lead at the University of Law.

Jennifer explored the proposition that employment law may itself be understood as a form of political practice. Using gender and broader questions of social inequality as points of reference, she examined the relationship between legal education, professional practice and political engagement.

Participants reflected on a series of contemporary challenges facing legal educators and practitioners, including the changing higher education environment, professional regulation, the development of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination, and the growing influence of artificial intelligence.

The session concluded by posing a number of provocative questions. What are lawyers for? What responsibilities do legal educators have when preparing future lawyers? And how should employment law teaching respond to changing professional and societal expectations?

These questions provided a fitting conclusion to a workshop that repeatedly returned to the relationship between legal education, professional identity and broader social purpose.

Concluding Reflections

Although the workshop addressed diverse topics, several common themes emerged across the day.

First, participants agreed that employment law is currently experiencing profound change. Legislative reform, artificial intelligence and evolving workplace practices are reshaping both professional practice and legal education.

Second, there was broad consensus that employment law teaching should extend beyond doctrinal knowledge. Communication skills, professional judgement, critical thinking, technological literacy and an understanding of workplace realities were all identified as essential components of future employment law education.

Third, a strong emphasis was placed on active and experiential learning. Whether through clinical education, simulations, collaborative projects or interactive teaching

methods, many speakers argued that students learn most effectively when they are required to apply legal knowledge in realistic contexts.

Finally, the workshop highlighted the enduring importance of imagination. Reimagining employment law does not simply mean responding to change; it means creating space to think differently about the future of legal education, professional practice and the role of labour law in society.

The workshop did not seek to provide definitive answers. Instead, it succeeded in generating thoughtful discussion about the future direction of employment law scholarship, teaching and practice. If there was a single message emerging from the day, it was that employment law must continue to evolve alongside the changing world of work and that legal educators have a crucial role to play in shaping that future.

Prepared by Nia Stead (Assistant Professor), Centre for Employability, Professional Legal Education and Research (CEPLER), Birmingham Law School.












Edward Jones



Thanks to **Candice Hipkiss** for the photography.