

ERA ECR Conference

Our winners were:

Gabriele Humbert	University of Birmingham	Poster Winner (joint winner)
Luke Latham-Wheawall	Keele University	Poster Winner (joint winner)
Dan Gayton	Loughborough University	3MT Winner
Mairi Kerin	University of Birmingham	3MT Runner Up
Richard Sieff	Loughborough University	Post-doc talks
George Prestidge	Keele University	Quiz Winner
Shivangi Sharma	University of Birmingham	Quiz Runner Up
Adeola Awoyomi	Cranfield University	Energy 100 challenge Winner
Chudi Ojukwu	University of Leicester	Energy 100 challenge Winner
Georgina Jeerh	University of Warwick	Energy 100 challenge Winner
Jon Carter	Keele University	Energy 100 challenge Winner
Luuk Earl	University of Birmingham	Energy 100 challenge Winner

What people thought of the conference:

I had a great time catching up with, and meeting the new, PhD Students and Post-doctoral researchers involved with the ERA Skills academy. It was really interesting to see the variety of research that is carried out under the ERA umbrella. One of the highlights for me was watching the Energy 100 challenge presentations. I have been working with these researchers for the last five months and it was great to see how they had developed their ideas and skills during this time to produce some really world class ideas on how we could start to establish low carbon industrial clusters in the Midlands. It was also great to have the chance to meet up (all be it virtually) with some of the researchers in a more informal setting during the quiz night. I hope everyone enjoyed the event as much as I did, and I look forward to our next conference.

Lennie Foster

ERA Skills Manager

Review of Energy Research Accelerator (ERA's) first virtual Early Career researchers' conference – Achieving Net Zero

Energy Research Accelerator (ERA's) first virtual Early Career researchers' conference brought together insights from academia and industry to discuss the main opportunities and challenges to achieving Net Zero by 2050 – the target passed into legislation in the UK in 2019. Held online, conference activities ranged from panel discussions featuring leading energy studies academics to a three minute thesis competition requiring doctoral students to present their research concisely within the timeframe to a non-specialist audience using only one slide!

I was one of four speakers in the 'Post-doctoral researcher talks' session, which contained a diverse range of themes – from heat storage to nuclear power plant safety to marine bioethanol production. Likewise, my own talk focussed on another (and often overlooked) aspect of energy – socio-political dimensions. Drawing on my PhD research into Kenyan energy governance, I highlighted how vested political interests in fossil fuels and the under prioritisation of clean cooking energy (mainly due to clean cooking not being an electoral issue) pose significant challenges to achieving net zero globally. The findings from my PhD indicating that networks of local actors are likely to be critical in providing a check to instances where central government policy is at odds with low carbon energy transitions. As with the other activities, the session I spoke in was held using Microsoft Teams which worked well, allowing audience members to ask questions, give feedback and make connections. Perhaps a more even balance between technology and social science talks (reflecting the multi-disciplinary nature of energy) would be good for a future incarnation of this conference – which I hope there is; the event providing a great platform for a range of energy researchers at different career stages and so many thanks to the organisers.

Richard Sieff

Post-Doctoral Researcher

Now more than ever, it is crucial that scientists working towards green energy solutions are able to share research ideas and bolster progress. ERA has set up a fantastic platform to facilitate this and support early career researchers in the field simultaneously. I would like to thank ERA for giving me the opportunity to disseminate my research at their latest conference and for opening my eyes even further to the research going on across the Midlands. They have managed to highlight the barriers on the road to achieving net-zero carbon emissions and I'm proud to be part of an organisation leading the charge.

Luke Latham-Wheawall

PhD Researcher in Smart Energy and Materials Chemistry

Sharing is a fundamental aspect of scientific research and ERA found a way to make it possible even during this difficult time. I would like to thank the organizers for this nice event that allowed me to engage and interact with other researchers across the Midlands and to learn about real-world engineering challenges. See you next year!

Gabriele Humbert

PhD candidate Birmingham Centre for Energy Storage

The diversity in the backgrounds and research areas of the attendees, made for a really interesting conference. I found the guest speakers presentations very engaging and it made me feel like I wanted to continue to work in this sector in the midlands region once I graduate. There were opportunities for us to showcase our work, to ask questions of others, discuss ideas and network. Ordinarily I would not have been able to attend this conference due to ill health, so the fact that it was hosted online was a bonus!

Mairi Kerin

PhD Researcher

[A bit about what people thought about the Energy 100 challenge](#)

The ERA Energy 100 challenge was an excellent experience, both in developing interdisciplinary team-working and problem solving skills, and in applying these to tackle a really pressing and ambitious issue. The experience of working with people from diverse backgrounds and disciplines was really valuable as I had not had much exposure to this from my PhD. We were given tools and

guidance on how to be productive in these teams which is highly transferable to future relationships. The methodological and creative approach we used in problem solving was new to me but already these techniques have been useful in my PhD and beyond.

We actively developed these skills by working in teams to solve a problem, that of aiding the industrial transition to net-zero in the Midlands. The ambition and scope of this challenge was really exciting. With guidance, we were able to develop some really unique and interesting solutions to this problem and then refine these into a working proposal. The process started by exploring and clarifying the problem. I particularly found taking time on this part was very valuable, to avoid being biased by preconceptions. We then worked together to generate lots of ideas which might help solve the problem, utilising creative techniques to access non-obvious solutions. Only at the end did we edit the solutions and refine these into a clear. I think it is a testament to the success of the scheme that so many participants wanted to continue to implement their plan in a real project!

Luuk Earl

PhD Researcher