

Workforce development
in higher education

Building adaptive
learners in an AI-
driven world

Inclusion as
infrastructure

HE Horizons.

Advance HE Members' Quarterly Magazine: February 2026



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Welcome



Welcome to the second edition of HE Horizons.

I'm delighted by the positive response to our inaugural edition. The feedback from members has been both encouraging and energising, confirming the value of creating a shared space for exchange across our global community. Thank you to everyone who took the time to engage with the content and contribute their perspectives.

This edition focuses on workforce development, explored through two critical lenses: how workforce development contributes to institutional impact and effectiveness, and the implications of AI, automation and the future of learning. These themes are inseparable from the broader challenges facing our sector. As roles evolve and traditional boundaries shift, the question is not whether our institutions will change, but whether we are equipping our people to navigate that change with confidence, capability and purpose. The contributors to this edition offer insight into how institutions are approaching these challenges. From building adaptive leadership capacity to reimagining student-facing roles in an AI-enabled environment, the articles demonstrate that workforce development is far more than a functional necessity. It is a strategic lever for resilience, innovation and sustained institutional effectiveness.

What emerges clearly is that the pace of change is unlikely to slow. The World Economic Forum estimates that around 60 per cent of the global workforce will require significant reskilling by 2027. For higher education, this raises fundamental questions about how we develop our own people while simultaneously preparing students for futures we cannot fully predict. The tension between managing immediate pressures and building long-term capability is real, but it is also where strategic thinking matters most.

I hope these articles prompt reflection and discussion within your own institutions, and perhaps offer perspectives that translate across different contexts and systems.

Looking ahead, our next edition will explore lifelong learning, examining how it can transform education systems, empower individuals, and drive global skills agendas. I warmly invite contributions from our global membership to the forthcoming edition which will be published at the end of April. I'd also like to draw your attention to our Lifelong Learning Symposium: Shaping Global Futures on 21 May, which will bring together practitioners and thought leaders from across our membership.

Thank you for your continued engagement with this publication and with our global community of practice..

Alistair Jarvis CBE
Chief Executive

Workforce development in higher education



Managing through the now, preparing for what's next

Dr Charles Knight, Director of Educational Excellence and Student Success, Advance HE, and Fiona Lennoxsmith, Head of Leadership, Governance & Management, Advance HE



When you look at the risks your organisation faces, is the idea that workforce development leads to institutional resilience one that has currency?

Workforce development must be understood as building the organisational capability to perform effectively today while remaining adaptable to partially visible futures. This requires learning communities and networks that can make sense of change, exercise judgment, and drive institutional purpose.

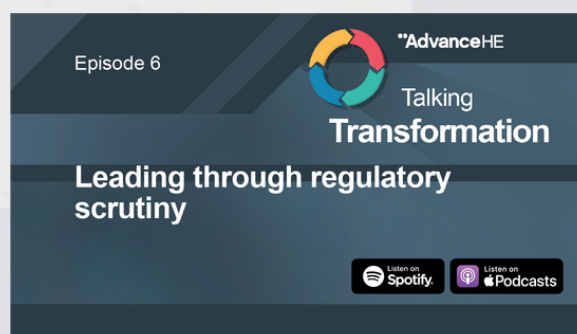
Automation, data-driven decision-making and artificial intelligence are reshaping roles and expectations. Leadership portfolios are widening in scope and geography, and students' needs, behaviours and expectations continue to evolve. In this context, workforce development becomes a strategic function: enabling adaptability, supporting sustainability and strengthening institutional resilience over time.

'The World Economic Forum estimates that around 60 per cent of the global workforce will require significant reskilling by 2027.'

As an example, at the institutional level, most universities now identify AI as a strategic priority, and over half report using AI to support curriculum design or administrative processes.

Yet sector-wide, experience surveys consistently show that staff feel under-supported in developing digital and AI capabilities. The challenge, therefore, is not whether AI is entering higher education; it already has, but whether institutions are equipping their people to use it critically, ethically and productively.

As routine tasks become automated, professional value increasingly lies in judgement, creativity, ethical reasoning and relational work. Digital and AI literacy are becoming baseline capabilities across roles.



Prof Sarah Williams, Pro Vice-Chancellor (External Collaborations) at Buckinghamshire New University, shares her experience managing a complex Office for Students investigation, sharing what it demanded of her as a leader.

Leadership in larger, more complex systems

These changes have significant implications for leadership. Senior roles in higher education are characterised by scale, interdependency and exposure to external risk. Leaders manage complex portfolios, and global engagement introduces cultural, regulatory and geopolitical considerations into everyday decision-making.

The World Economic Forum estimates that around 60 per cent of the global workforce will require significant reskilling by 2027, with leadership, adaptability and learning capability identified alongside digital skills as critical future competencies.

For higher education, this raises a fundamental question: are leadership development approaches preparing people merely for their next role, or for sustained leadership in conditions of ambiguity and change?

Increasingly, leadership development in higher education is moving away from narrowly defined role preparation.

Developing agility in our systems requires leaders not only to think systemically but also to behave systemically. Systems do not benefit from overstretched leaders, and resilience cannot be built without firm systemic foundations.

Sustainability and agility emerge in cultures where power is appropriately devolved and where innovation, and the associated risks, are actively supported. In such environments, senior leaders increasingly act as stewards of transformation: setting strategic direction, maintaining guardrails, enabling interdisciplinary collaboration and ensuring alignment to purpose.

Much of their work is focused on the system rather than operating within it. This does not remove the need for judgment or decision-making; indeed, strategic dilemmas often sit outside any individual's expertise, but shifting power dynamics enable curiosity, engagement with experts and communities, and decisions grounded in data, interdisciplinary insight and shared ownership.

Student-facing roles and evolving practice

Alongside leadership, the nature of student-facing work is evolving rapidly. Students' expectations of flexibility, relevance and personalisation continue to grow, while cohorts become more diverse in background, circumstances and aspirations.

For colleagues involved in teaching, assessment and student support, this has profound implications for professional practice. Pedagogy is shifting towards blended, experiential models that combine digital, in-person and workplace learning.



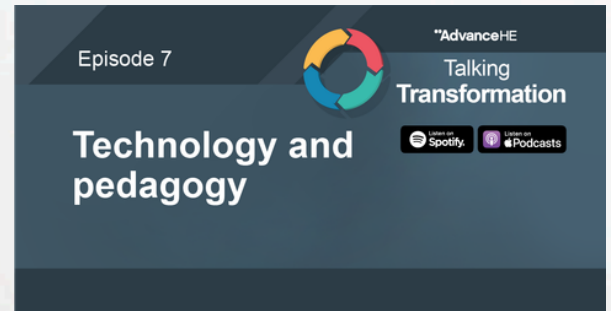


Assessment must continue to uphold academic standards and integrity in an AI-enabled environment, promoting authenticity rather than simply securing existing formats. Student support increasingly requires integrated approaches that recognise the interdependencies between wellbeing, belonging, learning and employability.

Looking ahead, the pace of change is likely to intensify rather than stabilise. Developing staff capability in student-facing roles must therefore extend beyond responding to immediate pressures and instead build confidence, adaptability and professional learning capacity over the long term.

Managing today while building tomorrow

The central workforce challenge facing higher education is one of simultaneity. Institutions must deliver education, research and services at scale today, often under acute financial, regulatory and capacity pressures, while also preparing for operating models that may look materially different within a decade.



Episode 7 of our Talking Transformation podcast features Laura Milne from the University of Chester discussing the ever-increasing role of artificial intelligence and technology in HE. Click the image to listen now.

Short-term pressures can easily crowd out longer-term investment in people. Yet what is predictable in the coming years is change, whether driven by internal ambition or external forces. The question, therefore, is how institutions prepare their workforce for this reality. Workforce development must be future-oriented, aligned to purpose and strategic ambition, and designed to support adaptivity and sustainability rather than short-term compliance.

This includes ensuring that transformation initiatives are deliberately designed with agility and are rolled out with workload, sequencing and frontline insight in mind. It also requires active investment in communities of practice that bring together academic and applied expertise to address complex, 'wicked' problems.

Effective workforce development is strategic, inclusive and adaptive. It recognises the interconnected contributions of academic, professional and technical staff and focuses on building sustainable capability over time. At Advance HE, we see workforce development as a critical lever for enabling institutions to navigate complexity with confidence, supporting them to manage the demands of the present while shaping the futures they seek to create.

No more business as usual: the urgent case for strategic reinvention of higher education

**Dr Julia Chen, Director, Educational Development Centre,
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University**



AI-driven job displacement took centre stage at the recent World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos. The Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund warned of an AI ‘tsunami’ hitting the global workforce, underscoring the urgency for higher education institutions to rethink whether their current curriculum graduates students into unemployment or a navigable future.

Alongside concerns of AI automation becoming AI domination, there is a growing recognition of the enduring and increasing value of human-centric skills. The most recent Hong Kong Education Bureau (EDB) Employers Survey, published in 2025, shows that employers consistently rank work attitude (including passion, patience and perseverance) higher than technical knowledge required for the job; and interpersonal, analytical and problem-solving skills, and language proficiency as other important aspects for work.

On top of employer preferences, universities must also understand the nature of the future workforce. In my keynotes at education events, I often refer to several frameworks used to characterise the future, including VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity), TUNA (Turbulence, Unpredictability, Novelty, Ambiguity), and BANI (Brittleness, Anxiety, Nonlinearity, Incomprehensibility). These acronyms capture the reality that tomorrow’s graduates will enter environments marked by rapid change, unpredictable challenges, and complex systems that defy simple solutions.

In such a context and the possibility of an AI tsunami that brings about an entry-level jobpocalypse, traditional curricula may no longer be sufficient. Universities must design future-ready degree programmes with at least the following four mandatory components to help students survive overwhelming uncertainty.

1. AI literacy should be a foundational element of every degree programme. It must, however, go far beyond the use of AI tools to a deep understanding of the capabilities and limitations of AI systems, and their ethical, social, and economic implications. Importantly, students should also be trained to be designers of AI solutions, not just their consumers. This includes hands-on experience in learning to leverage AI to enhance productivity and innovation in their chosen fields.

2. While AI is transforming every sector, deep (trans)disciplinary education remains essential. Whether in engineering, business, or humanities, students can benefit from a strong foundation and rigorous training in their chosen fields. This expertise enables them to solve discipline-specific problems and apply AI and other emerging technologies in contextually relevant ways. Universities should ensure that disciplinary curricula integrate up-to-date industry practices and relevant technological advancements.



3. In a recent 'Student Voices' forum I organised, students in two universities in Hong Kong described soft skills as the new hard skills. Indeed, they are power skills and powerful skills, such as emotional intelligence, communication, collaboration, leadership, and intercultural competence that are critical for success in life. In a world where teams are often 'glocal' and diverse, the ability to connect, persuade, and work effectively with others is indispensable. Universities can embed training opportunities in these skills through interactive learning and assessment tasks, internships, and co-curricular activities.

Perhaps most crucially, curricula must intentionally cultivate attributes that prepare students for a future defined by VUCA, TUNA, and BANI. This means developing:

- Resilience: The capacity to recover from setbacks and persist in the face of challenges.
- Agility: The ability to adapt to new circumstances.
- Self-learning: The ability to learn to learn and a commitment to continuous learning.
- Systems thinking: Seeing the interactions of elements within complex systems, and the effects of one step on the next in holistic problem-solving.
- Value development: Cultivating a strong sense of purpose and ethical grounding to avoid becoming brittle or overly anxious in the face of uncertainty.
- Analytical skills: The ability to make sense of complex, volatile, and nonlinear situations, and to draw actionable insights from data, discussions, and experience.

These attributes cannot be taken for granted. They need to be nurtured through experiential learning, reflective practice, mentorship, and exposure to real-world challenges.



Universities should design curricula that encourage experimentation, reward curiosity and initiative, and allow students space to rebound from setbacks. It is also imperative that universities be aware of the dangers of emotional dependence on AI as personal advisors. There have been too many post-AI counselling suicide cases to risk students' emotional stability on AI.

A call to action: dare to make paradigm shifts with strategic roadmaps

As AI continues to reshape the landscape of work, universities must dare to make urgent and thoughtful reforms to their curricula to prevent today's students from becoming redundant in the future. It is worthwhile to deliberately and explicitly embed complexity, uncertainty and unpredictability into course syllabi that integrate diverse perspectives and encourage authentic learning through academia-industry collaborations. Institutions should develop strategic roadmaps for curriculum innovation, starting with pilot initiatives and scaling successful models. Continuous dialogue with the industry and ongoing assessment of emerging trends are essential to anticipate evolving talent needs. When universities show this courage and determination, there may be a chance that higher education can remain relevant for the benefit of students and the society.

People and culture development as a strategic lever for higher education transformation

By Sarah Hubbard, Senior Consultant, Senior Leadership & Strategic Transformation, and Fiona Lennoxsmith, Head of Leadership, Governance & Management, Advance HE



For many higher education organisations, financial uncertainty has become a key driver for change and transformation. In times of constraint, the instinct can be to cut what looks non-essential and people and culture development is often the first to go. Paradoxically, this can strip out the fuel transformation requires; our greatest asset remains our people, and development can become the strategic engine of survival, and beyond that, renewal.

Our ambitions are realised when people, culture and ways of working are fully aligned to strategic intent. If we want things to be different, we have to do things differently; when everyone understands the 'how' as well as the 'what', teams are empowered to deliver with focus, energy and impact. People and culture development is a systematic approach to building the skills, adaptability and confidence of colleagues and teams to meet current and future organisational needs.

In higher education, this includes leadership capability, collaboration and the capacity to innovate under pressure alongside skills development.

Drawing on Sengei's learning organisation tradition and cost-effective approaches to capability building, we offer people and culture development as mission-critical organisational strategy.

Why development matters most in scarcity

For some, financial pressures have been deeply ingrained in the bricks and mortar and for others, they are more recently reshaping organisational life. Unfilled vacancies mean more than numbers, they represent colleagues whose knowledge, relationships and contributions mattered deeply in the context. For those who remain, the weight of competing priorities and complexity grows.

The experience of doing more with less and doing so without clarity, has become a shared reality across our sector. It shapes how we respond, and stress reactions can erode psychological safety and trust; we might feel our personal agency has been diminished and change imposed rather than co-created.



Without intentional capability-building, this can lead to burnout, conflict and reduced impact exactly when institutions need resourcefulness and innovation most.

When investment in people diminishes, the psychological contract shifts and in ways that are hard to reverse. Trust ebbs away, flexibility narrows, quiet quitting might go unnoticed until they show up as patterns in cultural behaviour and performance gaps. Beyond the loss of energy and commitment, capability erodes. Our skills fade through lack of practice, and the new capabilities essential for our survival from digital fluency to adaptive leadership, remain undeveloped. Confidence matters too. Doubting their own capability, colleagues hesitate to experiment, challenge assumptions and try different approaches. These hesitations accumulate, creating barriers to change that can show up as inaction, rework and delay, at the very moment when institutions need agility and imagination most.

In times of scarcity, people and culture development makes transformation possible. Change readiness, through the layers of the institution, is non-negotiable if transformation is to be accepted, embedded and sustained in a genuinely efficient manner.

Adaptability invites an alternative to financial flexibility. When we cannot spend our way out of a problem, we must think our way out with the capability to pivot, innovate and collaborate under pressure.

Developing colleagues signals respect, commitment, value, trust and confidence. It is a meaningful act, experienced profoundly whilst serving pragmatic ends, for example, protecting institutional knowledge, sustaining culture and reducing recruitment costs.

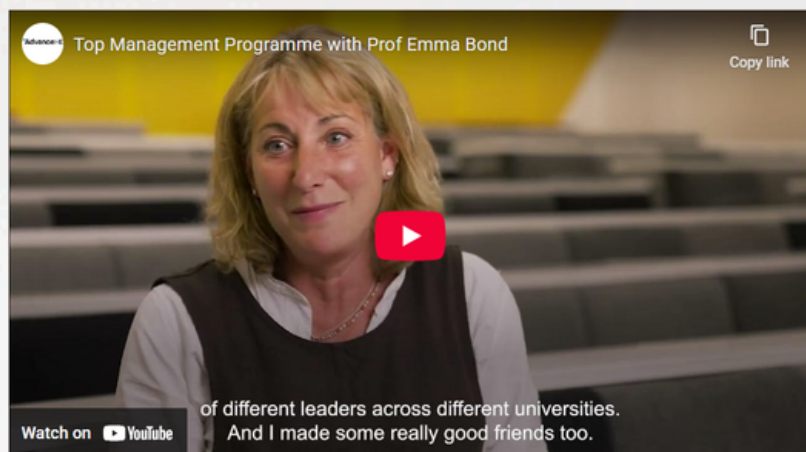
A systemic lens: to learn is to change

How do we create conditions for transformation that endure? Madrazo and Sengeii describe how systemic change is both personal and collective as we are part of the system we seek to change. Higher education often mirrors three cultural dysfunctions. Fragmentation, where our faculties and services are siloed in their working practices; reactivity, where we are firefighting to meet KPIs, focused on short term fixes; and destructive competition, where collaboration is undermined by competing priorities and interests.

These dysfunctions are part of our stories in 'how things work around here' and often create a starting point, where we have problematised ourselves away. Madrazo and Senge invite us to account for how these dysfunctions have become established by design and what lies beneath are all the resources needed to thrive, if only they were connected.

'Communities of commitment', for example, peer networks, shared learning and developmental leadership at all levels is where learning is embedded in the work through practice and reflection. They are spaces where colleagues can share insight, learn together and feel supported rather than isolated. By building capability, they restore connection and confidence.

These communities matter even more when colleagues have left, helping to reconnect those who remain, re-anchor trust and honour the contributions of those who have gone. Critically, by design they foster collective leadership and trust, both essential for navigating complexity and sustaining change.



Professor Emma Bond from the University of Suffolk talks about her experiences of the Advance HE Top Management Programme. Click the video to watch.



If we replace the idea of a change process with that of a learning process, we can invite colleagues (and students) as co-designers, build containers for dialogue across academic and professional boundaries and embed regular cycles of action and reflection; experience then becomes capability. People and culture development initiatives are much more than content; they are about what emerges between us – the trust, collaboration and shared experience of an inquiry process. They are a catalyst for alignment of purpose, practice and performance.

At one institution, self-organising communities of practice have become a cornerstone of capability building and connection. In their Leadership & Management Community, alongside seminars and leadership conversations, colleagues established mentoring and action learning groups. Other initiatives are now available to all universities through [ODHE network](#), extending impact across the sector.

In the first year, one in three participants reported that their understanding of leadership had changed through participation, and one in 10 said they had changed their approach. Three years on, one in eight colleagues are actively engaged across eight communities of practice, spanning areas from project management to sustainability in learning and teaching. These are spaces where insight is shared, confidence grows and development is embedded in the work.

Cost-effective, high-impact approaches

Some of the most effective strategies are low-cost and high-impact, especially when embedded in the work itself:

- **Engage colleagues:** collectively engage those who've already gone through internal or external development programmes in the service of the institution.
- **Peer learning networks:** tap internal expertise through mentoring and communities of practice.
- **Change-by-design initiatives:** embed development and engagement as part of transformation design.
- **Micro-learning in workflow:** deliver short, targeted modules aligned to live tasks.
- **Action learning projects:** combine development with real organisational challenges to build capability and solutions.
- **Leadership shadowing & stretch assignments:** build future leaders through lived experience; recognise resourcefulness and collaboration regardless of outcome.
- **Strategic partnerships:** share resources with other HEIs, industry and professional bodies to expand access.
- **Advance HE member benefits:** leverage free events and resources (eg the [Academic Leaders Survival Series](#)) aligned to local priorities.

Final words

Whilst on paper, it is easiest to cut or defund what's hardest to quantify, the determinants of transformation are human and relational: trust, adaptability, creativity and shared practice. Reframing people and culture development as strategy in action allows universities to turn uncertainty into opportunity. In the language of learning organisations, transformation is an inside job and a collective one. What is your next step?

Start small

- Which capability matters most for the changes ahead?
- Choose one practical step to weave development into the work of your institution, faculty, department or team.



Beyond knowledge and skills

Building adaptive learners in an AI-driven world

**By Dr Malliga Marimuthu and Associate Professor Michael Volkov,
La Trobe University, Australia**



Artificial intelligence and automation are transforming the landscape of higher education. Institutions are no longer simply preparing students for existing jobs; they are shaping adaptive learners ready for roles that do not yet exist. Remember, ChatGPT offered its initial launch as a free research preview in November 2022.

Think how the world, and specifically education, has changed since then. The question is no longer if digital transformation will reshape teaching and learning, but how it will be harnessed to strengthen workforce development and institutional impact.

We are entering the Fifth Industrial Revolution, characterised by unparalleled synergy between human and machine intelligence.

Society is moving beyond the redefinition of how people work and learn through the use of robotics, AI, automation and data analytics. We are entering the age of cognitive partnership where AI is not merely an auxiliary function, but rather, a core component of our cognitive function enhancing interaction with the world around us.

For universities, this requires a shift from knowledge transmission to capability building for developing graduates and staff who can learn, unlearn and re-skill across their careers. The true value of digital transformation lies in creating learning ecosystems that are flexible, responsive and human-centred. Universities need to embrace this pivotal shift from pure automation to human-machine collaboration, where technology complements human skills rather than replaces them.

AI and automation already support personalised learning, predictive analytics and streamlined administrative systems, freeing educators to focus on creativity, ethics and critical thinking skills that machines cannot easily replicate. But the challenge extends further beyond tools to reimagine assessment, curriculum design and faculty roles for an era of continuous change.

Learning for the digital future workforce

From a workforce-development perspective, the challenge is twofold:

What skills will graduates need? Future-ready skill sets will combine technical fluency, AI literacy, data analytics, automation awareness with meta-capabilities such as critical thinking, adaptability, collaboration and ethical judgement. These will anchor graduates in the ability to learn and unlearn continuously.

How will institutions deliver and sustain those skills? Traditional degrees alone will not suffice. Institutions must integrate micro-credentials, stackable qualifications, digital badges and flexible short courses. Workforce development will increasingly rely on personalised and modular learning pathways, co-created with industry partners to respond rapidly to emerging needs.

AI and automation enhance institutional impact in three key ways. First, they strengthen alignment with employer and industry needs by using analytics to detect skill gaps and adapt curricula. Second, automation improves efficiency, freeing resources for innovation and student engagement. Third, they support sustained learning ecosystems, allowing graduates and staff to access lifelong upskilling opportunities. However, adopting these technologies requires ethical frameworks and digital confidence among educators.

‘Universities need to embrace this pivotal shift from pure automation to human-machine collaboration, where technology complements human skills rather than replaces them.’

Universities must ensure equitable access, protect data and train staff to design inclusive digital learning experiences. Collaboration with industry and government will be critical to co-design programs that balance technical progress with social responsibility.

The future of learning is digital, dynamic and lifelong. When designed thoughtfully, AI-enabled education can make universities more inclusive, flexible and impactful by equipping graduates not only to thrive in automated workplaces but to lead with purpose and humanity in shaping them.

University education needs to emphasise creativity, critical thinking and human-centric, sustainable solutions with curricula that blend technical skills (including AI and data) with soft skills (emotional intelligence and teamwork) to develop resilient graduates who augment technology, not just use it, fostering innovation for societal wellbeing.

Universities must adapt by focusing on personalised, adaptive learning, fostering interdisciplinary projects and collaborating with industry to meet these demands for a future workforce augmented by smart technologies.

Key takeaways:

Build capabilities not just skills: learners must stay adaptable in an AI-driven world.

AI enables better teaching: by automating routine work and enhancing personalised learning.

Flexible learning pathways are essential: micro-credentials and modular learning will shape future workforce development.

Keep innovation human-centred: ethical, inclusive design must guide all AI-enabled learning.

Reflections on Principal Fellowship and strategic change in teaching and learning

Dr Ola Elshurafa, Director of the Program for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, Saudi Arabia



From individual recognition to institutional transformation: Dr Ola Elshurafa explores how pursuing Principal Fellowship became far more than a personal achievement. As Director of the Program for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, she reveals how the reflective process of evidencing strategic leadership sharpened her ability to drive systemic change – from navigating AI integration to building sustainable cultures of excellence. Her experience demonstrates how individual professional development can become a catalyst for institution-wide impact, offering a compelling case for investing in senior academic leadership pathways.

When I first began preparing my Principal Fellowship application, I expected it to be a reflective exercise, a chance to pause and think about the work I had been doing in higher education. What I did not anticipate was how profoundly the process would reshape the way I talk about leadership, the way I understand impact, and even the way I chart future directions in teaching and learning. Today, as Director of the Program for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Descriptor 4 (Principal Fellowship) of the Professional Standards Framework isn't simply a framework I "meet"; it has become a lens I carry with me into every conversation, every strategic initiative, and every endeavour towards educational enhancement.

'For me, the true value of Principal Fellowship lies in the clarity and confidence it has brought to my leadership.'

For me, the true value of Principal Fellowship lies in the clarity and confidence it has brought to my leadership. The process of evidencing Principal Fellowship pushed me to articulate the strategic thinking that often sits behind the scenes – how I influence policy, build institutional alignment and drive transformative change in teaching and learning.

Being awarded Principal Fellowship affirmed the impact of this work, but more importantly, it sharpened my sense of purpose. It has given me a stronger voice when advocating for innovation, a deeper commitment to building sustainable cultures of excellence, and a renewed awareness of my role in shaping the direction of learning and paving the path for inclusive and effective teaching for high quality learning, Principal Fellowship has not only recognised my leadership; it has elevated it.

Principal Fellowship situates us not just as senior practitioners, but as people who shape institutional direction. It pushes us to think beyond isolated acts of good practice and to focus instead on sustained, systemic influence. In my day-to-day work, This means I am constantly asking:

- How do our decisions today influence the learning culture of tomorrow?
- How do we ensure that quality, inclusivity, and innovation remain aligned as we scale?
- How do we move from pockets of excellence to institution-wide transformation?

This reflective conversation - internal but deeply strategic - has become central to how I lead at the Program for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

One of the unexpected gifts of the Principal Fellowship journey was gaining a clearer vision of the through-line connecting the many strands of my work. Whether we are designing professional development pathways, aligning policies with international standards, or supporting faculty to embed active learning, the question is always the same: *what is the strategic purpose behind this?*

Principal Fellowship emphasises leading through influence rather than authority. This resonates strongly with my role, where impact is achieved through partnership - across colleges, departments, committees and leadership teams.

Principal Fellowship has allowed me greater clarity and confidence when framing institutional priorities. It validated not only the outcomes of my work, but the strategic thinking behind it. And that validation, in turn, strengthens my ability to advocate for meaningful change.

‘Principal Fellowship situates us not just as senior practitioners, but as people who shape institutional direction. It pushes us to think beyond isolated acts of good practice and to focus instead on sustained, systemic influence.’



From Bahrain to the world: the strategic impact of Principal Fellowship

Dr Amina Buallay, Advisor to the Chairman of the Board of Trustees at University College of Bahrain, reflects on how achieving Principal Fellowship supported strategic leadership and transformation in higher education across the Gulf.

No conversation about strategic leadership today can ignore the seismic shifts brought by artificial intelligence. In higher education, AI is not an isolated trend; it is transforming assessment, pedagogy, student support and the nature of academic work. The question is not whether universities should adapt, but how - and how quickly.

In this emerging landscape, Principal Fellowship has sharpened my leadership in several ways:

1. Framing AI as a pedagogical opportunity, not a crisis

Descriptor 4 calls for leaders who can interpret complexity and guide institutions through ambiguity. Rather than framing AI as a threat to academic integrity, my approach has been to guide faculty toward designing AI-aware assessments, supporting ethical use, and embedding AI literacy into learning outcomes. These formed my strategic priorities when creating PNU's Gen AI Use policy.

2. Ensuring change is systemic

AI adoption cannot sit within a single committee or training session. It requires policy change, capacity-building, creative experimentation, and quality assurance. My role has been to bring these threads together into a coherent institutional strategy. Principal Fellowship has strengthened my ability to communicate this integrated approach.

3. Keeping the student experience at the centre

AI will reshape graduate attributes and employability expectations. As universities rethink curricula, Descriptor 4 encourages us to lead with a commitment to the student's long-term success - not just short-term solutions.



Perhaps the most meaningful impact of becoming a Principal Fellow is the shift in how I view my own leadership. Principal Fellowship is not an end-point; it is an identity marker - a reminder that my role is to cultivate cultures of excellence, curiosity and continuous improvement.

Since being awarded Principal Fellowship, I've found myself:

- more intentional about mentoring emerging leaders in T&L to enhance practice and outcomes for learners .
- more focused on sustainability - designing initiatives that endure beyond individual enthusiasm.
- more assertive in advocating for evidence-informed decision-making.
- more aware of the responsibility to model reflective, ethical leadership.

This identity shift influences every aspect of my daily work. Whether I am drafting a policy document, consulting with faculty, leading a workshop or a program, or designing an initiative, Descriptor 4 quietly underscores the work: *lead with strategy, lead with integrity, lead with impact.*

If I could offer one message to colleagues considering Principal Fellowship, it would be this: it is not just a recognition of past achievement. It is a catalyst for future leadership.

It invites you into a broader conversation - about purpose, influence and the future of higher education. It pushes you to articulate your vision for transformational change and equips you with the confidence to act on it.

For me, Principal Fellowship has provided a clearer voice, a stronger sense of direction, and a renewed commitment to shaping teaching and learning that is forward-looking, inclusive and resilient.

And in a world where AI continues to challenge and inspire us, that kind of clarity may be exactly what higher education needs.

Educational excellence takes centre stage at Advance HE Gulf Fellowship Network Forum

Nearly 200 educational leaders and innovators from across UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Egypt gathered in May 2025 at Amity University Dubai for the Advance HE Gulf Fellowship Network Forum 2025, marking a significant milestone in the region's pursuit of teaching excellence in higher education.

How workforce development unlocks institutional impact on inclusion

The future of inclusion and the promise of the Inclusive Institutions Framework

Dr Ruth Gilligan, Assistant Director Inclusive Institutions, Advance HE



Across the global higher education landscape, institutions are working harder than ever to deliver meaningful, measurable impact. We've seen this in research, where a shift toward crossdisciplinary collaboration has unlocked insights that no single field could have generated on its own. Universities that successfully bring together diverse expertise often find they can respond more creatively and effectively to complex challenges – from climate resilience to AI governance. That same lesson now needs to shape how we think about inclusion.

For too long, inclusion activity in higher education has been shaped – and sometimes constrained – by siloed responsibilities and narrow legislative frameworks. In many systems, those silos aren't intentional; they've evolved over time through layers of regulation, policy interpretations and risk management. The result is a patchwork of initiatives that may be effective in isolation but rarely add up to the whole-institution transformation we know is needed.

Consider the way legislation can unintentionally reinforce fragmentation. In the UK, the 2025 Supreme Court ruling on the definition of “sex” in the Equality Act 2010 – confirming that sex must be interpreted as biological sex – offered clarity in one respect but created new uncertainty elsewhere. Institutions were left questioning how this definition applies when it intersects with the Gender Recognition Act, health and safety regulations, and sector-specific operational requirements such as residential provision or data reporting. This kind of partial clarity can inadvertently deepen fragmentation, placing even greater weight on local interpretation and institutional judgement.

Historical cases also show the limits of single-axis approaches. Kimberlé Crenshaw's now landmark analysis of *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors* remains strikingly relevant. In that case, Black women alleged discrimination but were told the law could only consider race or sex, not the combination of both. Their experiences existed at an intersection the legal frameworks of the time weren't built to recognise.



Although decades old, the case continues to resonate because it shows how people who embody multiple marginalised identities can fall through gaps created by siloed systems.

This challenge is mirrored in parts of the UK today. In Northern Ireland, differing legal scopes mean trans people have greater protections from discrimination in employment than in education, creating uneven experiences for staff and students across the same jurisdiction – not because of institutional intention, but because different legislative instruments govern each space. These inconsistencies create uneven experiences and leave institutions compensating for systemic gaps through local policy workarounds.

Globally, fragmentation takes different shapes. In Aotearoa New Zealand, inclusion work often manifests as parallel tracks: “indigenous inclusion” initiatives aimed at supporting Māori aspirations sit alongside broader diversity or multicultural programmes. Because these approaches originate from different histories and obligations – Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) on one hand, global diversity discourse on the other – they’re not always aligned, and collaboration across them can be limited.



Host Dr Elliott Spaeth, Senior Consultant in Inclusive Education at Advance HE, discusses compassionate pedagogy with Dr Claire Killingback (University of Hull) and Rosie Jones (Teesside University). Click the image to listen.

Different contexts, different mechanisms – but the pattern is universal: fragmented systems cannot fully address the lived realities of diverse communities. These fragmented approaches also drive institutional inefficiencies at a time of increasing financial headwinds for many universities.

Real life is not siloed. Students and staff experience their identities and their challenges as interconnected, intersecting and shifting with context. Institutions therefore need approaches that recognise complexity rather than simplify it. That means moving beyond reactive compliance and towards adopting whole institution thinking, where inclusion is not a project or department but a shared strategic endeavour. Crucially, it means investing in the workforce and creating structures that help people work collaboratively rather than in parallel.

Because no matter how well designed a system is, its impact ultimately depends on people. Developing a workforce with the capability, confidence, and cultural dexterity to navigate complexity is no longer optional. Today’s inclusion work requires staff who can not only build inclusive environments but also create spaces for cohesion, collaborative problem-solving and respectful dialogue across difference. With global events – from conflicts to geopolitical tensions – sharpening divisions and raising stakes within university communities, the ability to hold constructive, tolerant conversations is becoming a critical institutional competency.

Staff need the skills, the confidence, and the collaborative spaces to put inclusive policy into practice. They need opportunities to learn from peers, to share innovation across departments, and to build relationships that bridge the invisible boundaries of institutional structures. Without this, polarisation grows, trust erodes and progress slows.

This is where Advance HE's new [Inclusive Institutions Framework \(IIF\)](#) offers a transformative opportunity. Designed to help institutions strengthen both their structures and their people, the IIF supports up to ten institutions at a time, working together as a learning cohort along a shared pathway. The model blends strategic alignment with deep peer support: regular one-to-one engagement with institutional inclusion leads, structured opportunities for reflection and review, and facilitated knowledge exchange across participating institutions.

Importantly, the Framework encourages inclusion leads to collaborate beyond their usual spheres – engaging colleagues in governance, access and participation, facilities, HR, student services and beyond.

This reinforces the idea that inclusion is not the responsibility of one team, but the collective endeavour of the entire institution. When systems and people develop together, inclusion becomes more coherent, impactful and sustainable. Institutions are better equipped to navigate uncertainty, respond to emerging challenges, and advance their long-term ambitions with clarity and confidence.

Workforce development is the bridge that turns intention into institutional impact – and the Inclusive Institutions Framework is here to help universities cross it.



[Find out more about the Inclusive Institutions Framework](#)

Inclusion as infrastructure

How workforce development can build trust, resilience and confidence in uncertain times

David Bass, Director of Inclusion and Governance, Advance HE



Universities across Advance HE's global membership are navigating an era of intense public scrutiny, strong financial headwinds, fast-moving regulatory shifts and deeply contested societal debates. Against this backdrop, workforce development should enable institutions to respond in more agile, effective ways. We have often spotlighted the innovation and performance benefits of diversity—benefits that are real and well-evidenced. Yet a critical, under-recognised dividend of inclusive workforce development is its role in fostering trust, resilience and adaptability—the very capabilities institutions need to steer confidently through transformation and public controversy.

Start with first principles: a clear, consistent rights framework

Inclusion works when anchored in a transparent framework of rights that applies to everyone and its application is not seen as politically motivated or ideologically biased. In higher education, that means explicitly upholding protection from harassment and discrimination alongside freedom of speech and academic freedom, within the particular national legal context in which a provider operates. In England, for example, strengthened free-speech duties came into force in 2025, with the Office for Students empowered to investigate and levy penalties where lawful speech is not protected; these sit alongside regulatory duties to prevent harassment and sexual misconduct. Together, they create both opportunity and accountability for institutions to promote open debate and protect all staff and students from unlawful conduct.

Consistency matters. When rights, responsibilities and boundaries are clearly spelled out and consistently applied, leaders and managers across an institution can more easily take decisions that are proportionate and defensible—especially when the external environment is volatile, politicised or fast-changing.

From principle to practice: inclusion as strategic capability

Once the architecture of rights and protections is clear, leaders can then link workforce development to strategy with confidence, prioritising resources, evidencing proportionality, and avoiding both over-reach and paralysis. Universities can set targeted, ambitious actions—from structured opportunities for specific under-represented groups of staff, to inclusive leadership training and capacity-building for managers who must implement difficult institutional decisions or navigate competing rights at pace. Crucially, such a framework protects lawful dissent: colleagues who disagree with decisions or workforce development priorities should still feel able to voice their views within the law, preserving free speech and strengthening institutional trust.

'A critical, under-recognised dividend of inclusive workforce development is its role in building trust, resilience and adaptability.'



Case study 1: Antisemitism, free expression and institutional confidence (Australia)

The Bondi Beach terrorist attack on 14 December 2025 – which targeted a Jewish Hanukkah event and killed 15 people – prompted Australia’s Parliament to fast-track the Combatting Antisemitism, Hate and Extremism laws in January 2026., aiming to further criminalise hateful conduct, expand powers to allow for cancellation or refusal of visas and set up a national firearms buyback scheme.

In parallel, Australian universities have become a focal point for how antisemitism is addressed on campus. Universities Australia in 2025 adopted a common antisemitism definition across 39 institutions, while a federal report by Special Envoy Jillian Segal recommended funding consequences for universities that fail to protect Jewish students – measures the government has since signalled through regulator powers and a 2026 university “report card.”

Free speech and academic freedom remain important considerations and central priorities for Australian universities. Rigidly applied definitions risk conflating legitimate criticism of Israel with antisemitism, potentially chilling academic debate and protest.

But the murders at Bondi Beach have prompted reconsideration of the interaction between freedom of speech and the potential for harm, not just in Australia but in other jurisdictions as well. These concerns highlight the need for universities to develop clearer approaches (such as recently at Monash) aligned to legal standards – protecting Jewish staff and students robustly while safeguarding lawful protest and speech.

What this means for workforce development: Leaders, managers and case handlers must be equipped to distinguish protected expression from unlawful harassment, to investigate impartially, and to communicate decisions against the rights framework. Training should embed scenario-based judgment (e.g., balancing safety and dignity of Jewish staff/students with rights to protest), use consistent procedures, and evidence proportionality. This is not about “picking a side”; it is about building institutional confidence that the same rules apply to everyone – thereby actively and explicitly addressing the risk of antisemitism, but also reducing polarisation and increasing trust.

Case Study 2: For Women Scotland, single-sex spaces and UK Employment Tribunals

The UK Supreme Court’s decision in For Women Scotland (FWS) confirmed that, for the Equality Act 2010, “sex” means biological sex. That point of law is now clear. What is not clear – and what matters greatly for universities as employers – is how far the logic of that ruling extends into other legal regimes that govern day-to-day workplace arrangements, especially toilets and changing facilities for employees.

Subsequent commentary and updates have stressed that key interpretive questions remain – including whether “men” and “women” in those regulations should now be read as biological sex. Compounding this uncertainty, recent Employment Tribunal outcomes have diverged on complaints linked to these questions and on access to single-sex spaces at work. Universities are therefore operating in a deeply unsettled legal environment. Taken together, that variability means confidence in any policy or predicting the outcome of any given claim is inherently difficult for HEIs, even when policies and decisions have been developed and taken in good faith and supported by legal advice.

What should HEIs do now? What does this mean for workforce development? In this context, the priority is less about landing on a single, permanent answer and more about building decision-making confidence through process:

- **Proactive consultation:** Equip managers to facilitate and staff to navigate impartial and tolerant conversations. Engage early with affected staff groups (including women’s networks, trans/non binary staff, faith groups, unions, and health & safety reps) when considering facilities arrangements. Record who was consulted, the issues raised, and how concerns were addressed.
- **Clear justification:** Ensure managers and staff understand the institution’s remit and their own delegated authority in implementing policy and making decisions, including the identification of legitimate aims and an understanding of proportionality. For any facilities configuration, document the legitimate aims (privacy, dignity, safeguarding, compliance with regulations, document needs of users, impact of any exclusions, etc.) and why any approach is proportionate given your specific context, estate and workforce profile.

- **Responsive complaint handling:** Ensure staff are equipped to promptly and impartially handle concerns. The institution should be responsive to any colleague who experiences arrangements as discriminatory or dignity impairing—whether related to gender reassignment, sex, religion or belief (including gender critical beliefs), or disability. Provide route maps for informal resolution and formal escalation, with consistent remedies.
- **Iterate and evidence:** Support all staff to understand the rationale and importance of monitoring and evaluation of interventions and policies. Monitor usage, incidents and satisfaction data; review at set intervals; and be ready to adjust where impacts on particular groups emerge. Keep an auditable trail of options considered and the reasons for decisions.



Ultimately, what enables universities to be reasonable and tolerant in what can feel like an impossible context is the architecture of a clear, consistently applied framework of rights. In complex organisations like universities with sometimes thousands of staff members, if your community can see that protections from harassment and discrimination are clearly and consistently considered and that decisions are proportionate, evidence-based and reviewable, then trust increases – even where views fundamentally differ. This rights-based infrastructure doesn't remove all risk in a fluid legal landscape, but it does make institutional choices more defensible and more human, while keeping space for lawful disagreement and dignified work for all.

'Inclusion is not simply about who is in the room; it is the infrastructure that keeps universities functioning confidently when the ground moves beneath them.'



Leading through uncertainty: inclusion as institutional backbone

The common thread across the two case studies is not a single “right” policy choice. Rather, it is the discipline of applying a rights-based framework consistently and impartially; linking institutional focus and investment to strategy and regulatory context; and equipping leaders and managers to act consistently and take proportionate decisions. This approach:

- **Builds trust:** staff and students see that rules are clear and applied fairly, regardless of identity or belief.
- **Increases resilience:** institutions are better able to withstand media storms and regulatory scrutiny because decisions are evidence-based and well-documented, and inconsistent decisions by managers across complex institutions are minimised.
- **Enables adaptability:** as law and guidance shift, policies can evolve without the organisation losing its bearings or grounding in its mission, strategy or values.

Inclusion is not simply about who is in the room; it is the infrastructure that keeps universities functioning confidently when the ground moves beneath them. If we invest in that infrastructure – principles, policies, leadership capability and culture – our institutions will be better placed to deliver on their academic missions and societal responsibilities, even in the most uncertain of times.

Is every discipline just a subset of AI?

A call for pedagogical justifications for AI and assessment



Jeffrey Vernon, Faculty Senior Tutor in Medicine, Imperial College London



What do students learn when they use AI? I must have attended at least 20 seminars on AI in higher education. Some of you were there at the same time. I still keep going in the hope of meeting a good use case for AI. I mean a pedagogical justification. Not the argument from careers (“employers want students to learn this”) or the argument from inevitability (“the students use it anyway, so let’s incorporate it into their assessments”).

Instructors frequently advocate an approach to assessment I call ‘review the output’. Students are asked to provide a prompt to the LLM and scrutinise the response. If the output is not satisfactory, the student may enter a new or refined prompt, iterating until the task or part-task is completed. In this way, students become progressively better skilled at coaching the AI to produce a desired output.

What do students actually learn by doing this? Colleagues offer a defence of this iterative prompting in terms of critique. The students have to assess the reliability of the output before trying again. In matching what they read with what they know already, and in checking the AI claims with other sources, they can converge after a few trials to an acceptable answer to the assignment. At the same time, they learn about the syntax of prompting.

Where’s the human in the loop?

Here, though, is the problem. The student who uses an LLM obtains an output without necessarily doing any of the upstream brainwork. Consider a review, essay or chapter type task. At the first attempt, the student could paste the entire unamended problem statement or question into the dialog box. Between the input and the output, no human intelligence is called for.

Indeed, the architecture of a language model prevents us, even in principle, from looking under the lid to reconstruct the decision-making steps of the machine. The LLM is a predictive text engine.

‘You’ve got to be better than AI if your degree is going to mean anything.’

It does no kind of interpretation of the question, source selection, inspection of claims, quality assessment of data or conclusions, weighing up of the pros and cons, or synthesising the findings into a definitive conclusion. Are we reconciled to the idea that academic work will consist henceforth of students assembling strings of automated text? Are all disciplines going to become a subset of prompt engineering?

Don't pull up the ladder

Another common use case for AI is short cuts to problem solving in subjects like computing, chemistry, engineering, languages. Students who take the short cuts are losing the satisfactions of thinking out loud, making false starts and learning how to do proof, mechanism, translation. Completing the exercise becomes decoupled from learning the craft. All the while, paying fees to be deskilled.

Employers and the powerful will run rings around graduates with degrees in proofreading auto-text; graduates who cannot present or produce materials in their own voice with their own arguments, and who rely on a chatbot for answers to factual questions.



Is AI making students less critical thinkers?

Dr Elizabeth Kaplunov, Senior Lecturer in Health and Athina Ntasioti, Lecturer in Health at Regent College London, explore whether generative AI tools are helping or hindering students' ability to think critically.

Why use the oven, when you can use the microwave? Here's the problem: your employer already has a microwave. You've got to be better than AI if your degree is going to mean anything.

The human IS the loop

What do we do better than AI? In what way do human and artificial intelligence differ? The answers to these questions will inform our design of assessment. The human brain is not a predictive text machine. Unlike a chatbot, humans form mental models of the world. A small child, watching its parent putting a toy into a box, understands that the toy is under the lid. The child does not expect the toy to emerge from a different box, or to walk through the door under its own power.

This 'intuitive physics' is a simple example of a mental model; the child's representation of objects or concepts, the rules they obey, the relations between them, how the relations change through time, and the predictions and beliefs we have about them. AI does a poor job of assessments that rely on students' capacity to develop or use their mental models.

Here are three examples of assessment activities which, I claim, will work in any university discipline, at any level from first year to postgraduate. All activities can be adapted as individual or team tasks; work with or without external constraints, resources, clients, role players; can be delivered under stringent or relaxed timing and lead to outputs or artifacts or toolkits in any medium.



Scenario or simulation

Ask the student(s) to justify a choice between three or more imperfect alternatives that you supply. The alternatives might be courses of action, explanations, diagnoses, predictions, hard choices. For more advanced students, supply data or stimulus materials in different media and ask them to frame the problem – what kind of a scenario is it, what standpoint do the different actors adopt, and what are their approaches to dealing with it?

Integrated case study (ICS)

Similar to the scenario but beginning with data and sources in different types and formats, which students must evaluate before proposing a reasoned recommendation or prediction. The data may include counterfactuals ('The UK voted to remain in the EU in 2016') or hypotheticals. Students might work with a specified brief; or an open-ended question; or they can develop their own brief given the data before them.

Teaching and Learning Conference 2026: Success by Design: The Future of Learning Now

Join us in Sheffield, 30 June – 2 July, with educators from around the world as we explore innovative practice, share research, and shape the future of higher education.

Work backwards

Here is the OUTCOME, data set, diagnosis, consequence, verdict, conclusion, site report or recommendation. What led to this outcome? Over what time scale? What factors were involved? What was the trigger for this report or situation? Students may be told the constraints you want them to work under or they may be allowed to set their own.

Mental models underlie expert behaviours

In every discipline, from the most cerebral to the most embodied – from theology and dead languages and history of art, to dance and nursing and civil engineering – the experts approach problems through their mental models. This insight can guide the design of assessments that develop students' own expert behaviours, emphasise human indispensability and bring satisfactions that AI can never provide.

'What do we do better than AI? In what way do human and artificial intelligence differ? The answers to these questions will inform our design of assessment.'

Thriving as an academic leader



Survival skills for a sector in constant change

Hannah Fromageau, Senior Consultant, Leadership & Management at Advance HE

Higher education is not just changing – it is shifting under our feet. This is not news to us. As Alistair Jarvis, Advance HE's Chief Executive highlights in the Talking Transformation podcast, "...change and transformation is business as usual now."

Nature's editorial in the HE special issue in September summed the situation up as: "...arguably the most pivotal moment in the history of universities. As so often before, they must reinvent themselves to survive."

As Senior Consultant in Leadership and Management at Advance HE, I have the privilege of working alongside and supporting higher education institutions and research institutes who are weathering the constant storms of ongoing change. Successful higher education leaders lead well in complexity. In this context, HE leaders need to make sense of uncertainty and support their teams to adapt, thrive and grow.

In this piece, I bring together concepts from colleagues across the sector who have responded to what they think key survival skills are, and I suggest that these skills connect directly to three big areas that matter for everyone in higher education leadership today: change preparedness, resilience, and being deliberately developmental.

Change preparedness: turning uncertainty into shared purpose

Change is constant whether it is curriculum shifts, evolving student demographics, AI-driven disruption, workforce changes or restructures. But being "ready for change" is not simply waiting for it to happen. Leaders who prepare for change often spend time scanning and anticipating issues, they communicate why change matters and involve people meaningfully in that change.

Advance HE's work on leadership highlights the importance of aligning change with values and purpose so that it becomes something people can engage with. As Dr Mark Wong, Senior Lecturer and Head of Social and Urban Policy at the University of Glasgow, recently described: "Like in a global pandemic or natural disaster, preparedness is absolutely key to respond competently, humanely, and ultimately to enable survival and people's wellbeing."

Resilience: creating the conditions for organisations to sustain themselves

Resilience is often spoken about as something individual, but with so many higher education institutions facing structural challenges no one leader could resolve these issues single-handedly.



Professor Miranda Horvath from the University of Suffolk speaks to us about her experience of the Strategic Leadership Programme. Click on the video to watch.

But leaders do have positions to influence resilience not just through their own behaviour but through the systems and expectations set. Leaders and teams working well together tend to set clear priorities, establish trust, share difficulties and use challenges as opportunities.

Maslach and Leiter's more recent work stresses that resilience is not something we build alone but when leaders work to model transparency, compassion and healthy boundaries they go some way in creating the conditions where people recover and collaborate even in high-pressure environments.

Being deliberately developmental: building growth into everyday work

In Advance HE's Talking Transformation podcast, Leanne de Main, Dean of Birmingham City University Business School, describes the value of taking a developmental and proactive approach to change: "This theory of being deliberately developmental is actively going out there and seeking the things that aren't working."

Kegan and Lahey's concept of the Deliberately Developmental Organisation offers a useful model emphasising that development is not intermittent but threads through everyday practice. Deliberately developmental leaders can create cultures where development is part of how work is done by building forward-looking feedback into regular work, encouraging reflection and open discussion, helping people stretch into new responsibilities and integrating learning as part of everyday work.



This aligns strongly with the [Professional Standards Framework](#) principles and Advance HE's commitment to reflective, inclusive leadership.

Bringing it all together

When higher education leaders combine change capability, resilience-building and developmental leadership, the result is a confident, future-focused leadership culture. Leaders become more centred and strategic. Teams become more open and adaptive. Institutions are better positioned to navigate the unpredictable nature of the sector. This isn't simply a leadership style but a sustainable way of working in a system that demands constant learning, collaboration and reflection.

References

[Framework for Leading in Higher Education](#) | Advance HE

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Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (2022). *The Burnout Challenge*. Harvard University Press. Nature, Editorial, Universities are — and must continue to be — a force for good, 24 September 2025



Host Dr Charles Knight is joined by Alistair Jarvis, Advance HE Chief Executive and Leanne de Main, Dean at Birmingham City University Business School, to discuss transformation in changing times. Click the image to listen.

Member Benefits 2025-26

As part of our ongoing commitment to keeping you informed and inspired, here's a snapshot of what opportunities are coming up and how you can continue to make the most of your Advance HE membership.

What's coming up

- **Executives at the Leading Edge**: A monthly, member-exclusive online series for senior higher education leaders. Each two-hour session offers practical strategies, global insights and peer learning with Vice-Chancellors, Executive Directors and other sector leaders.
- **(Re)Designing Higher Education**: This programme supports innovative approaches to teaching and learning, promoting experimentation and collaborative design across pedagogy, assessment, learning environments and the student experience. The next event on 18 March explores Workforce Development.
- **Elevate MENA**: A tailored development series addressing shifting student expectations, AI integration and national priorities.
 - **5 February**: Spotlight 2 – Enhancing curricula to align with national visions
 - **13 May**: Spotlight 3 – Embedding AI in learning, teaching and assessment
- **Elevate Ireland**: Support for professional recognition and sharing innovative practice aligned to the Professional Standards Framework. Spotlight session 2, on 19 February, explores the role of Global Citizenship Education in promoting student enablement and learner development within Initial Teacher Education.
- **Elevate Australasia**: Advancing educational excellence and student success across Australasia, this tailored teaching support programme connects educators with peers who share their challenges and passion for transforming learning experiences.
- **Educational Transformation – Change Academy**: Final call for applications to Cohort 3 (deadline 4 February). This six-month virtual programme supports senior teaching leaders and cross-functional teams to drive institution-wide change, from curriculum redesign to inclusive pedagogy. Cohort 3 is scheduled for institutions across South East Asia and Australasia, making participation accessible across the region.
- **Funding opportunities**: The Innovative Impact Grants, which support small, specialist, independent and college-based HE members from within the UK, has just launched. Global Impact Grants, an opportunity for international members to share success stories about higher education projects, will be launching on 4 February.

And there's more to come.

There will be further Member Benefits released throughout the 2025-26 academic year, with more ways for you to get involved.

Spotlight on practice and impact

Securing educational excellence in higher education at a time of change

An insight report from Wonkhe for Advance HE based on roundtable discussions involving institutional leaders, Principal Fellows and student representatives.

Supporting the development of unified and strategic Boards capable of delivering transformation

At the Advance HE Governance Conference 2025, Professor Cara Aitchison, Chair of the Board of the Scottish Funding Council, shared nine lessons designed to shape governance improvement.

Professional Standards Framework 2023 now available in Thai

The translated framework will encourage more staff across Thailand to engage with it and recognise their teaching against global standards.

Academic excellence, sector recognition and equity: why Advance HE fellowships matter

Senior Fellow Dr Pratibha Ram, King's Business School, examines the role and impact of Advance HE fellowships on education- and teaching-focused careers.

Tipping point: striking the balance of student and staff success

Professor Lisa Taylor from the University of East Anglia argues that the focus on student success needs to be balanced with staff success.

Embedding AI into the curriculum

Michael Jones, Lecturer in Writing and Communications at Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan, reflects on how his research into students' navigation of the ethics of AI in academic writing has informed his teaching practice.

AI and the future of student teamwork: collaboration or collusion?

Folashade Akinmolayan Taiwo, Director of the Centre for Research in Engineering and Materials Education, SEMS (QMUL), explores how AI is reshaping student teamwork and collaboration in higher education.

Generative AI resilient assessment: supporting the PGTA workforce

Dr Laura Kelly, Associate Professor in Criminal Justice at the University of Birmingham, reflects on the broader implications of Gen AI-resilient assessment strategies with reference to current scholarship and her own large group teaching in the social sciences.

EduMark AI: rethinking assessment and feedback with ethical AI

Dr Deepshikha, Queen Mary University of London, shares how EduMark AI is transforming assessment by improving feedback quality, consistency and educator workload efficiency.

Contact us

Email: enquiries@advance-he.ac.uk

Our purpose is to help higher education transform lives by realising the potential of its people.

Advance HE is a member-led charity of and for the sector that works with partners across the globe to improve higher education for staff, students and society.

Our three strategic goals support the priorities of our members and of the higher education sector:

- Enhance confidence and trust in HE
- Address systemic inequalities and advance education to meet the evolving needs of students and society
- Support the work of our members and the HE sector.

We are experts in higher education, with a particular focus on teaching and learning, governance, leadership development and equality, diversity and inclusion. We work with our network of global associates and partners, and with people, providers and systems around the world, to understand different contexts and challenges in the higher education sector, and to deliver solutions.

We deliver our support through a variety of channels, applying our expertise and sharing best practice. These include professional development programmes, events, fellowships, awards, surveys as well as consultancy and enhancement services.

In addition, our membership provides a range of research, knowledge and resources for members, as well as accreditation for teaching and learning and equality charters that aim to advance gender and race equality in higher education and research.



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