

IHE Annual Conference 2025 Agenda

Wednesday 26 November 2025 | Royal College of Physicians

TIME	AGENDA
09:00 – 10:00	Registration, refreshments and exhibition
10:00 – 10:10	<p>Welcome</p> <p><i>James Pitman, Chair of the Board, Independent Higher Education</i></p> <p><i>Cheryl Watson, VP Education, TechnologyOne (Platinum Sponsor)</i></p>
10:10 – 10:25	<p>Chief Executive's address</p> <p><i>Alex Proudfoot, Chief Executive, Independent Higher Education</i></p>
10:25 – 10:55	<p>A strategy for tertiary education and skills</p> <p><i>Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith, Minister for Skills</i></p> <p><i>in conversation with</i></p> <p><i>Alex Proudfoot, Chief Executive, Independent Higher Education</i></p>
10:55 – 11:45	<p>Creative tech and industrial strategy: future skills for a revolutionary present</p> <p>Speakers: <i>Phil Smith CBE, Chair, Skills England; Sir Peter Bazalgette, Industry Co-Chair, Creative Industries Council; Anne Morrison, Chair, Escape Studios; Dr Patrina Law, Lifelong Learning Lead, The RSA</i></p> <p>Chair: <i>Joy Elliott-Bowman, Director of Policy and Development, Independent Higher Education</i></p>
11:45 – 12:15	Refreshments, networking and exhibition
12:15 – 13:15	<p>Systems and sandboxes: regulating for innovation, collaboration and growth</p> <p>Speakers: <i>Professor Ellen Hazelkorn, Joint Managing Partner, BH Associates; Professor Edward Peck CBE, Chair, Office for Students</i></p> <p>Chair: <i>Alex Proudfoot, Chief Executive, Independent Higher Education</i></p>
13:15 – 14:15	Lunch, networking and exhibition

Breakout session 1

1A – LLE: the field of dreams?

If you build it, they will come - but only if they know it's there. The Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) promises to transform access to flexible, modular learning across a lifetime, but its success depends on more than just policy design. This session will consider what England should learn from international approaches to adult learning entitlements and how we can harness existing platforms within the UK to leverage employer and learner engagement. There is distance left to travel before we reach our field of dreams on some of the big questions such as credit transfer – are providers ready, what are the practical steps the sector needs to take?

Speakers: *Dr Adam Saunders, Director, Oxford Data Technologies Limited; Helena Vine, Lead Policy Officer (England), The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education; Neil Mosley, Director, Neil Mosley Consulting; Ada Zakrzewska, Labour Market Economist, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*

Chair: *Mary Curnock Cook CBE, Chair, Dyson Institute of Engineering and Technology*

1B – Competition or collaboration?

Our panel will explore what student choice means to students in the current context and how their perceptions and needs are evolving as providers are responding to intensifying financial pressures and the risk of a shrinking sector. Institutions are facing a strategic crossroads – should they compete to differentiate, or collaborate to share resources? How can student choice be protected in each approach?

Speakers: *Cheryl Watson, VP Education, TechnologyOne; Sam Sanders, Head of Education, Skills & Productivity, KPMG UK; Ben Jordan, Director of Strategy, UCAS; Liam Earney, Managing Director of Higher Education and Research, Jisc; Steffan Davies, Chief Executive Officer, AD Education UK, and IHE Board Member*

Chair: *Sharona Friedman, President & CEO, Global Institute of Sport, and IHE Board Member*

1C – Freedom of Speech in 21st century higher education

Higher education today looks nothing like it did in 1986, when universities were first told to "take steps to ensure freedom of speech within the law." The 2023 Act and new regulation in England gave the opportunity to update that duty, to place it in today's higher education context. But has it really kept pace with the changing nature of higher education?

How can freedom of speech be protected and promoted in a sector increasingly shaped by student choice, employer partnerships, and digital learning? We will explore how this vital principle can be made meaningful and practical for the higher education landscape of today.

Speakers: *Dr Arif Ahmed MBE, Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom, Office for Students; Professor Beverly Gibbs, Director, Dyson Institute of Engineering and Technology; Dr Peter Rae, Vice Principal (Academic Quality), Nazarene Theological College*

Chair: *Joy Elliott-Bowman, Director of Policy and Development, Independent Higher Education*

1D – Looking beyond recruitment: risks to student completion and success

In a context of growing pressure on institution's finances, not recruiting enough students isn't the only risk – providers also need to keep students, and support their success once they are 'in'. Panel will explore risks to students completing and succeeding in their studies, as well as some of the solutions to this. It will consider the responsibilities of institutions, as well as boundaries to what they can do.

Speakers: *Jane Harris, Co-Director of Student Welfare and Support Services and Head of Counselling, University of Oxford; Vivi Friedgut, Founder and CEO, Blackbullion; Dr Nasser Siabi OBE, CEO, Microlink; Dr Peter Kay, Associate Dean of Academic Engagement and Partnership, TEDI-London*

Chair: *Musa Raja, Independent Student Board Member and Chair of the Student Advisory Board, IHE*

15:05 – 15:35 Refreshments, networking and exhibition

15:35 – 16:25 Breakout session 2

2A – AI in higher education: who wins, who loses?

As AI becomes a ubiquitous part of the HE experience, this session will consider who will benefit and who may be left behind. For students who have the knowledge and confidence to use it, in providers with the bandwidth and budget to enable it, they are benefiting from personalised learning and automated tutoring. But are low-income, underrepresented, or digitally excluded students gaining or losing ground as AI tools enter the classroom, and does this risk widening the awarding gap? The panel will also consider whether staff face their own barriers in access to upskilling, or a lack of confidence in reshaping pedagogical practice, and the role of subject specialisms in equitable access.

Speakers: *Dr Eliza Kozman, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, TASO; Dr Ailsa Crum, Independent Consultant; Valentina Vlasova, Senior Lecturer and Programme Lead, OMNES Education Group; Dr Yanyan Li, Early-career Fellow, Institute of Advanced Study, University of Warwick; Meifang Zhuo, PhD Candidate, University of Warwick*

Chair: *Charlotte Blant, Founder and CEO, Tiro, and IHE Board Member*

2B – Whose culture? Building governance that fits

For independent higher education providers, designing a governance structure that truly fits remains a challenging question. Over the past year, IHE has worked with Members to explore what makes governance effective—and one theme has consistently stood out: culture. From mission and strategy to leadership, staff relations, innovation, and even conflict management, culture shapes the effectiveness of governance at every level.

This session will bring together sector voices to examine how organisational culture interacts with governance frameworks, and how providers can demonstrate to regulators that their approach is not only compliant but the right fit for their unique mission and context.

Speakers: *James Coe, Senior Partner and Director, Counterculture; Poppy Short, Partner, Mills & Reeve; Julia Roberts, Partner, GatenbySanderson; Dan Tinkler, Consultant, Governance and Strategic Transformation, Advance HE*

Chair: *Marion Lowe, Chief Executive Officer, SP Jain London School of Management, and IHE Board Member*

2C – Immigration White Paper unpacked: what the new BCA means for higher education providers

The Government's Immigration White Paper revealed a growing frustration with the education sector's role in reducing immigration risk. Ministers expressed concerns over whether international students are genuinely here to study and highlighted the influence of agents who market UK study as a pathway to migration rather than qualifications. Central to the proposals was a shift in the Basic Compliance Assessment (BCA) metrics, balanced by promises of closer collaboration between UKVI, the Home Office, and providers.

This session brings together experts in education and immigration to explore the implications of these proposals. Discussion will focus on how providers can strengthen compliance practices, and what support and tools are needed from Government and its agencies to rebuild trust and ensure a balanced system.

Speakers: *Nichola Carter, Partner, Keystone Law; Deepa Chadha, Policy Advisor, UK Council for International Student Affairs*

Chair: *Professor Phil Deans, President and Vice Chancellor, Richmond American University London, and Vice Chair of the IHE Board*

2D – Academic partnerships: evolution or revolution?

Academic partnerships are at a juncture where, to continue playing a key role in expanding access, there needs to be a new approach to meet the critics that are overlooking the achievements. With new rules anticipated on subcontracting and franchising this autumn, and the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) excluding these models from eligibility, what does this mean for the future of partnership delivery? The panel will consider how providers can respond, through innovation in their partnership approaches, so they can remain resilient and ready for what's next.

Speakers: *Mike Ratcliffe, Interim Senior Advisor: Regulatory & Compliance, University of the West of England; Dr Josh Patel, Senior Education & Policy Researcher, Edge Foundation; June Dennis, Executive Dean, LCK Academy*

Chair: *Rachel Nicholson, Head of Institution, Academy of Live Technology, and IHE Board Member*

16:30 – 17:20

Engines of the economy: UK regions open to the world

Speakers: *Abtisam Mohamed MP, Sheffield Central; Joan Concannon, Chief Reputation & Stakeholder Relations Officer, University of York; James Robson, Director, Oxford University Centre for Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance; Simon Nelson, Chief Executive Officer, QA Higher Education*

Chair: *Rt Hon Lord David Willetts, President, Resolution Foundation*

17:20 – 17:30

Closing remarks

17:30 – 20:00

Drinks reception

IHE Awards 2025

The programme is correct at the time of publishing and subject to change.

Visit the [IHE Annual Conference 2025](#) web page for further details.