



INDEPENDENT
HIGHER
EDUCATION

STRATEGY 2021-24





INTRODUCTION

The world today is not how anyone imagined it would be. While the UK has found itself in times of change and uncertainty for over five years now, nothing could have prepared us for how much and how quickly the contours of our lives could shift in response to a global health emergency. Against this strange backdrop, one might be forgiven for finding futility in the plans and strategies of humankind. But it also provides the perfect opportunity to reconsider what is important, to challenge our own assumptions, and revisit our first principles.

While as individuals we cannot expect to control the world around us, and even societies struggle to match the power of nature untamed, there will always be things we care about that can give meaning to our lives, and none more so than helping others to make the best of theirs. Education is the central pillar of civilisation, and an educated people will be more resilient and more able to respond to whatever the fates throw their way. In our small way, Independent Higher Education aspires to be a positive force in promoting education for everyone, and in expressing the values we wish to see reflected in the world. This Strategy sets out how we intend to deliver on this aspiration over the next three years, whatever they may bring.

Alexander Proudfoot
Chief Executive

Dr Roxanne Stockwell
Chair

October 2021



ABOUT INDEPENDENT HIGHER EDUCATION

Independent Higher Education (IHE) is the UK membership organisation and national representative body for independent providers of higher education, professional training and pathways. Each of these three elements is essential to our understanding of the UK's post-18 (or 'tertiary') education sector, and many of our members integrate all three into their provision, but we also use 'higher education' as shorthand for the full spectrum. We do not consider the binary division of higher education and further education to be relevant to the skills and knowledge needed in the 21st century or the varied pathways we each travel through a lifetime of learning.

Our members include some of the boldest innovators in higher education today, alongside some of the original pioneers in their fields. Often embedded within their industry, these institutions are driven by their vocation to cast wide the net of opportunity, while helping to drive up the standard of skills and knowledge across new and evolving professions. Our members are independent in their approach and in the path that they follow, but they choose to integrate themselves into a community of practice and to be highly responsive to the changing needs of learners, employers, professional bodies and other organisations with whom they collaborate.



OUR VALUES

IHE's work is shaped by a set of core values, which we see as being common to our members and which we believe are to the benefit of students and learners of all ages, backgrounds and needs, as well as to the general benefit of the UK economy and of society as a whole.

These five values are:

- **Diversity**
recognising that the choices and aspirations of students are best promoted by supporting the distinctive nature of providers within a diverse ecosystem of provision
- **Flexibility**
recognising that individual students have complex lives and varied needs which may shape how they can access and participate in learning, requiring flexibility in provision
- **Innovation**
recognising that technological progress and economic change require education to undergo continual review, renewal and improvement in how it is designed and delivered
- **Student focus**
recognising that the most important part in any education is played by the person who is learning, and their needs and interests must be kept at the heart of a provider's mission
- **Collaboration**
recognising that higher education has the most potential to improve the lives of students by working closely in collaboration with the industries and communities they care about

OUR MISSION

IHE's central mission is to promote the values of diversity, flexibility, innovation, student focus and collaboration within UK higher education. We do so primarily by advising, supporting and promoting the higher education institutions in our membership, all of whom in joining sign up to these values and commit themselves to putting them into practice.

OUR 5 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR 2021-24

1. **LEADERSHIP, TRUST AND IMPACT**
2. **INNOVATION AND INVESTMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION**
3. **ATTRACTING, DEVELOPING AND RETAINING STAFF IN THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR**
4. **INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AND MARKET DEVELOPMENT**
5. **COLLABORATION AND SHARED SERVICES**

1 LEADERSHIP, TRUST AND IMPACT

Since our launch in 2016 and our first strategy in 2018, IHE has grown in size, stature and influence, with over 60 institutions now comprising the most diverse membership of any higher education representative body, and a seat at the table whenever government or its regulatory bodies consider the issues of importance to higher education providers and their students.

The majority of IHE members in England are now formally regulated by the new independent regulator for higher education, the Office for Students. We welcome the steady maturing of a principles-based regulatory framework which focuses on the quality of education provided and the outcomes achieved by students, irrespective of the provider's history or corporate form.

A framework which gives students and the public the confidence that their investment in education is safe, but still encourages diversity, distinction and innovation, is one in which independent providers can thrive. It relies upon trust, and autonomy earned through voluntary enhancement, so our first priority is to continue to build this confidence in IHE and our members through a focus on governance, transparency and the active promotion of good practice.

WE WILL

strengthen the effective governance and management of independent providers, by

- promoting the IHE Code of Governance to our members and new providers
- developing detailed practical guidance to support widespread adoption of the Code
- providing better access to high-quality training, consultancy and advice on governance and management challenges

enhance the transparency and accountability of IHE to its members and the public, by

- completing the final stage of our constitutional review and issuing a summary report
- publishing a comprehensive governance framework, including a Handbook with our rules and an accessible guide to the rights and responsibilities of membership
- publishing an Annual Report from 2022 on our finances, activities and impact

maximise the impact and influence of our work, and the recognition of our members, by

- growing public support for IHE members with a strategic communications campaign
- taking a strategic approach to our data and evidence gathering and the stories we tell
- making more clear the links between our core values, our policy goals and our services

2 INNOVATION AND INVESTMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The events of 2020 dropped a decade's worth of challenge and change into a single year for society, our culture and the way in which we work, relax, connect and learn. Across the UK's higher education sector, any reluctance to embrace online and blended forms of learning was swept away by the tides of necessity, and many of the new approaches adopted during this crisis will be here to stay, or will further evolve to meet the new expectations of students.

The flexibility of learning that independent providers already offer will prove invaluable for meeting the diverse needs of people who live longer, learn longer, and lead increasingly complex and mobile lives. Institutions which are smaller, more agile, and can respond to educational and technological change will be those at the vanguard of this lifelong learning mission.

While technology will continue to make the world more connected, and to seem smaller than ever, many of the skills sought by those who wish to change or progress in their careers are still best taught in person with hands-on access to specialist tools and equipment. The place where people learn still matters, and so opportunities for specialist higher education and cutting-edge training must be spread widely to unlock the potential of learners all across the UK. This sense of place and the connections between our members, their industries and communities will help guide IHE's work in promoting investment, growth and innovation over the next three years.

WE WILL

promote investment in and the expansion of new provision across all UK regions, by

- advocating for economic policies which encourage more investment in higher education, and for the enhanced collection and publication of data to demonstrate its value
- working with national and local governments, business and the third sector to identify opportunities and encourage new investment and enterprise
- connecting IHE members and new providers with potential partners and investors

support the UK's competitiveness in the global economy, by

- helping members understand and respond with agility to emerging labour market needs
- raising awareness of the role of specialist institutions in supporting economic growth in critical industries, and advocating policies to promote this role
- helping regulatory bodies to avoid setting conditions which could stifle market entry, innovation or less traditional models of provision

give students access to the widest possible range of innovative, flexible and tailored learning options, by

- advocating policies to promote flexible lifelong participation in higher education and professional training, including digital, blended, modular and short course provision
- ensuring IHE membership and support services remain accessible to the full diversity of the independent tertiary sector
- raising the importance of the local accessibility of flexible and specialist provision

3 ATTRACTING, DEVELOPING AND RETAINING STAFF IN THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR

The independent higher education sector is an exciting and dynamic space in which to work, with an entrepreneurial streak driving real innovations in how the business of learning is done. Career progression can be rapid, with talented individuals benefitting from a collaborative and hands-on approach which gives them the opportunity to learn widely across varied roles.

It is also a sector comprising predominantly SMEs, with a lean workforce helping to keep overheads low and institutions nimble. Departments and teams are often smaller than you would find in a traditional university, and independent providers cannot always compete on salary with much larger institutions when recruiting for some professionals in high demand.

Finding the right talent for those roles critical to helping an institution pursue its mission in the changing UK HE landscape has never been more important, so IHE will be making the recruitment, retention and professional development of staff one of its strategic priorities, and we will engage members and partners in the task of transforming our offer in this area.

WE WILL

work to improve the pipeline of talent into the sector, by

- promoting awareness of the roles, careers and benefits available in IHE members
- attracting more qualified staff into the sector through a jobs board and public events
- expanding our training offer to better support entry-level and graduate career paths

support the professional development of IHE leaders and certain specialist roles, by

- identifying roles in high demand and those with the most urgent training needs
- working with members and partners to develop structured training programmes
- improving, expanding and delivering new training as capacity and demand allows

empower staff to fulfil leadership, governance and community roles within IHE, by

- enhancing the support, induction and training we offer to staff taking on such roles
- working with partners to expand the opportunities to represent IHE externally
- exploring a framework for recognising the CPD hours of representing IHE

4 INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AND MARKET DEVELOPMENT

While the whole world has faced the same elemental challenges over the last two years, the response of national governments has made us more aware than ever of physical distance and the borders which our sector in particular has become so used to crossing. Now, as concern for public health turns from coronaviruses to carbon emissions, the UK must grapple with the equal weight of global cooperation and global competition in shaping our economic future.

IHE members and new providers can add something new to the offer that UK education makes to the world, which has proven so popular for decades now. The natural advantages of flexible models and a focus on innovation are only magnified in such an unpredictable world, while the UK can realise great value in trading on its new pioneers of technology and digital learning.

IHE will continue to work with government, the sector and parliamentarians in order to help the UK to pivot to these more flexible models, and to expand the specialist vocational education and professional training which is most urgently needed by many of the world's fastest-growing economies. In doing so, we will work to ensure that more opportunities are made available to SME providers, as well as to the larger and more established institutions, and we will help our members to build their presence across a wider range of international markets.

WE WILL

work to promote IHE's values within the UK's international education offer, by

- placing the student journey at the heart of an enhanced international education strategy
- raising the prominence of technical education and professional training within UK exports
- focusing on innovation and flexible learning with the APPG for International Students

build our international profile, intelligence and capability, by

- using our global networks to help monitor and maintain the UK's competitive advantage
- establishing closer relationships with IHE's counterpart organisations in other countries
- exploring member opportunities for international collaboration and exchange

enhance the support we offer members to unlock new markets for growth, by

- working with government and sector partners to improve access to UK and international market analysis
- connecting individual members with specific international market opportunities
- advocating for more targeted government support for SMEs new to exporting education

5

COLLABORATION AND SHARED SERVICES

IHE is an association of members at its core, and as a community it grows in numbers, strength and friendship every year. A competitive spirit helps to raise standards for the people who learn and the people who work in our institutions, but there is a recognition also of the commonality of our experiences, and of the aspirations and occasional frustrations that we all share.

In each of the five years since IHE's launch, we have added new networks and forums in order to offer more regular opportunities for members to share, and to learn from each other and from experts in their fields. Moving all meetings online by necessity in 2020 has made them more accessible than ever and set a new paradigm for how we connect and collaborate with others.

The Many Hands project which launched in 2021 with the financial support of the OfS and the government heralds a new era of collaboration between our members, delivering a shared service to support student mental health which would not be possible for one provider alone to achieve. Over the next three years, we will build on this as a model for other areas in which a shared service could add real value to the offer that our members can make to their students.

WE WILL

build a platform and operating model for offering shared services to members, by

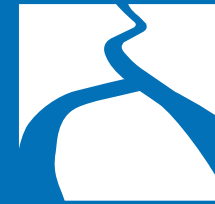
- creating a shared service in student mental health through the Many Hands project
- engaging members to identify other priority areas for collaboration or a shared service
- creating a volunteer pool of staff to offer externality in appeals and similar processes

ensure members and new providers can access high-quality outsourced services, by

- growing IHE's consultancy offer for start-ups, scale-ups and regulatory milestones
- identifying core functions that SMEs and start-ups find difficult to cover internally
- working with partners to deliver interim and backstop services to meet these needs

explore new opportunities for high-value collaborative projects and campaigns, by

- establishing relationships with representative organisations in different industries
- identifying common interests and campaign goals shared by IHE members and others
- supporting members and partners to pursue opportunities for collaboration, collective innovation and knowledge exchange



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