

**INDEPENDENT
HIGHER
EDUCATION**

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

ihe.ac.uk

**Independent Higher Education (IHE)
is the UK membership organisation
and national representative body
for independent providers of higher
education, professional training
and pathways.**

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Introduction

2025 was a pivotal year for IHE, marked by renewed ambition and growing influence across policy, regulation and public debate. Our achievements reflect a year of momentum and impact, delivered amid a complex and changing policy environment for both UK and international education.

The launch of our 2030 Strategy in January set the direction for the year ahead, providing renewed clarity of purpose for IHE and signalling our intent to drive sector-wide innovation over the next five years. Our membership continued to grow, with 11 new members joining IHE in 2025, enhancing the breadth of expertise within our community and increasing the impact of our collective representation. We also launched a new online platform, marking a step change in how members connect, collaborate and access our support. The return of the IHE Survey strengthened our evidence base, equipping us with timely insights and robust data to represent members' interests effectively.

Advocacy remained at the heart of our work and delivered tangible impact. Our submission to the Department for Education on Higher Education reform influenced debate at a critical moment, while the Government's Post 16 Education and Skills White Paper reflected several priorities long championed by IHE. Throughout the year we responded to multiple consultations, offering constructive challenge to policy makers. Against a backdrop of heightened public and political interest, we ensured our voice was prominent in national conversations about the value of higher education and continued to emphasise the sector's contribution to student choice, industry-aligned learning, and economic growth.

We remained focused on our long standing commitment to supporting our diverse network of members, from established providers to new entrants. Through an expanded programme of events, expert-led training sessions and practical resources, we supported institutions to navigate regulatory uncertainty, strengthen internal governance, and drive continuous improvement.

Across the UK, independent higher education is in the ascendant. This report captures the breadth of what we delivered in 2025 and demonstrates why, in an increasingly unpredictable political environment, IHE's role as a trusted and influential representative body is more critical than ever.



Alex Proudfoot
Chief Executive



James Pitman
Chair of the Board

2025 Highlights

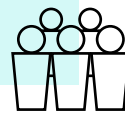
2025 was a standout year for IHE, with stronger engagement, wider influence and tangible impact across policy, regulation and public debate – all underpinned by a growing and increasingly diverse membership.

We set a bold new direction with our 2030 Strategy, transformed member engagement through a new online platform, and relaunched the IHE Survey, giving us the up-to-date evidence needed to champion the sector with authority.

Together, these achievements highlight a year of momentum and renewal – strengthening our foundations, amplifying our collective voice, and equipping us with tools and insights to support an ambitious programme of work into 2026 and beyond.



**Published our
2030 Strategy**



**Welcomed 11
new Members**



**Launched our
new online
platform**



**Return of the
IHE Survey**

2030 Strategy

An ambitious new chapter for IHE

We started 2025 with a bang. In January, we launched our strategy for growth, which sets a clear trajectory for the next five years.

Serving as a companion piece to our [2024 Manifesto](#), our 2030 Strategy reaffirms our commitment to shaping a policy environment in which our members can succeed, highlights new opportunities for local, national and international collaboration, and signals our intent to drive sector-wide innovation for the benefit of students and wider society.

In 2030, IHE will be known as:

- 1 A thriving and diverse community
- 2 A trusted and agile partner in growth
- 3 An influential voice in government and in public
- 4 An agent of innovation and continuous improvement
- 5 A leading proponent of international education and partnership
- 6 A champion of the student interest and student choice

[Read our 2030 Strategy](#)

“Our 2030 Strategy reflects the ambition of our members to play a pivotal role in a decade of national renewal in which education and skills have never been more central. We are building a stronger and more diverse ecosystem of providers who are ready to respond to the changing needs of industry, transform opportunities for students of all ages and backgrounds, and collaborate with innovators everywhere to drive up productivity.”

Alex Proudfoot, IHE Chief Executive

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2030 STRATEGY



The IHE Community, our new online platform

A step change in how we communicate with members

In February 2025 we launched the IHE Community, our new online platform, marking a major shift in how we communicate with members and how members access and engage with our content. In an era of information overload, the platform helps streamline IHE communications by bringing essential updates, resources and interactions into one organised, easy-to-navigate space.

On the IHE Community, members sign up to curated spaces that align with their interests and priorities, helping them quickly access tailored information that is directly relevant to their institutional and professional contexts. The platform has brought new opportunities for connection, peer-to-peer networking and collaboration across our diverse network of institutions.

Key features of the platform include:

- direct access to sector updates
- lively Network and Forum spaces
- integrated event registration functionality
- on-tap resources and training course modules

Additional features include a central News and Updates feed and a community notice board for sharing opportunities.

We are delighted with the enthusiastic response from members and the positive feedback received since launching the platform. We look forward to enhancing its functionality to support even greater member engagement in the future.

By the end of 2025:

987
SIGN-UPS

971
INDIVIDUAL
POSTS

17,719
POST VIEWS

Return of the IHE Survey

Building a comprehensive picture of the UK's independent higher education sector

Following a period of rapid growth for IHE, coupled with increased interest in the independent higher education sector, we reintroduced the IHE Survey in autumn 2025 after a hiatus of several years. The survey set out to build a detailed up-to-date picture of how the landscape has changed for independent providers in the new regulatory environment, and how recent transformation has affected student access, programme innovation and sector sustainability since the previous survey in 2019.

High-level early survey findings were shared at the IHE Annual Conference in November 2025:

- 91% of respondents identify as a small or medium-sized enterprise (SME), with over half having fewer than 300 students.
- 73% are registered with the Office for Students (OfS) with most of the remainder planning to apply.
- 78% report active partnerships with industry.

The insights gained have strengthened our immediate work, providing valuable evidence to draw on as we shape our policy priorities and represent members' interests to government and regulators.

New Members

A dynamic and diverse group of member institutions at the heart of our community

In 2025, we welcomed 11 new members, each bringing specialist expertise across a wide range of subject areas including engineering and technology, construction and the built

environment, sport, music and creative media, dance and musical theatre, theology, business and management, and social justice.

Joining us from regions across the UK, they are distinct in their missions and delivery models yet united by a shared commitment to delivering high-quality education to students of all ages and backgrounds.



We're proud to join Independent Higher Education as a new member. At ICMT, we believe in the power of immersive, industry-led training to prepare the next generation of musical theatre professionals. IHE's commitment to quality, innovation, and collaboration aligns perfectly with our mission to expand international pathways and champion original creative work. We look forward to contributing to this vibrant and forward-thinking community."

Kenneth Avery-Clark, Principal and Co-Founder, International College of Musical Theatre (ICMT)

New Members in 2025



[View our Member Directory](#)

“NMITE’s mission is to deliver innovative, student-centred education that equips students with the skills and resilience to thrive in industry and society. Becoming part of the IHE community strengthens this commitment, connecting us with like-minded providers, sharing best practice, and amplifying our voice in shaping the future of higher education.”

James Newby, President and Chief Executive, NMITE

Policy, Advocacy and Representation

Throughout the year, we engaged with policymakers to advocate for greater recognition of the diverse contexts in which independent providers operate, and for these to be more consistently reflected in higher education policy development.

2025 saw the publication of the Government's Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, with several proposals echoing priorities IHE has consistently championed.

As our membership has grown, so too has the breadth of our expertise and the impact of our representation. Through our engagement with government ministers and officials, detailed responses to consultations,

and insights drawn from active member networks, we have supported a clearer policy understanding of the role independent providers play in a more flexible, responsive and resilient higher education system.

Six policies to make higher education the engine of growth

In April, we published our submission to the Department for Education (DfE) on Higher Education reform, structured around six policy proposals to position the sector as a key driver of economic growth.

Our submission came at a pivotal moment, addressing the pressing need for reforms aligned with the Government's own priorities while recognising fiscal constraints and limited opportunities for substantial new funding. Our proposals were designed to help DfE prioritise its budget and focus spending on practical solutions that deliver the greatest benefit across all regions of the UK.

The six proposals were supported by clear evidence and practical examples drawn from across the IHE membership.

IHE's six policy proposals

1 Technical Education Awarding Powers to raise standards in cutting-edge provision

Proposing new powers to elevate standards in technical education and empower specialist institutes to deliver industry-recognised qualifications.

2 A Rapid Response Skills Fund to balance economic needs and migration

Redirecting underutilised funding to address local skills shortages swiftly, ensuring training aligns with economic needs and migration patterns.

3 Innovative online and blended learning to expand opportunity nationwide

Advocating for reforms to expand access to high-quality online and blended learning, particularly in cold spots.

4 A Lifelong Learning framework to empower a high-skilled and productive workforce

Pivoting modular learning to promote access to higher education, incentivise employer investment in skills, and boost productivity.

5 A strategy to make the UK the home of global professional learning

Positioning the UK as a hub for global professional training, diversifying our exports, and enhancing the international appeal of UK qualifications to students and employers.

6 Flexible tertiary education pathways to promote efficiency and student success

Creating a unified funding and credit transfer system to promote efficiency and student success across tertiary education.

Later in April, we held a private dinner with The Rt Hon Jacqui Smith, Minister for Skills, hosted by IHE Member Le Cordon Bleu in London. The event formed a key part of our strategy to ensure members' views remained central to discussions on higher education reform. The conversation was structured around our six policy proposals, with members making strong contributions to highlight the sector's role in supporting national priorities.

[Read our submission to DfE on Higher Education reform](#)

“Our six policies reflect IHE’s unwavering dedication to driving forward-thinking reforms that will not only enhance the quality and accessibility to higher education in the UK but also contribute significantly to our economic growth. These proposals are designed to create a more dynamic, responsive and inclusive higher education sector, ensuring that every pound spent is an investment in our nation’s future.”

Alex Proudfoot, IHE Chief Executive

In October, the Government published its long-awaited [Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper](#), with several key wins for IHE:

- The creation of new Higher Technical Awarding Powers, with proposals reflecting what we originally set out in our [2024 Manifesto](#) and our submission to DfE on Higher Education reform.
- Increasing student maintenance loans in line with inflation and the return of maintenance grants, albeit with plans to fund these from an International Student Levy. IHE has been a strong proponent of a modern maintenance system that ensures all students can afford to study.
- Proposals to support employer investment and partnership in skills delivery. These include linking employer funding to conditions of grant and public sector procurement and creating the conditions for investment from employers and industry, echoing priorities previously highlighted by IHE.
- The White Paper announced the creation of a new Access and Participation Task and Finish Group, with IHE Chief Executive Alex Proudfoot appointed to the group in November 2025. This will give independent providers a strong voice in developing practical, evidence-based proposals to widen participation in higher education.



We strongly welcome the Government's Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper. Its policies are bricks in the foundations of a unified tertiary education and skills system that can support the ambitions of learners of all ages to enhance their professional prospects while helping to grow our economy."

IHE response to Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, October 2025



Policy spotlight

Academic partnerships

Enhancing understanding of academic partnerships has remained a central focus of IHE's work in recent years. With heightened scrutiny and sustained media attention on franchising, this policy area stayed at the forefront of our agenda throughout 2025, building on the research we published in 2024.

At the start of the year, we joined forces with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), GuildHE, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA), and Universities UK (UUK) to host a series of sector

roundtable discussions on partnership provision, which explored risk management, governance, and regulatory oversight.

We held our inaugural Academic Partnerships Conference on 24 March 2025, welcoming 90 attendees from across the sector, including IHE Members, partner institutions, and representative bodies. The day focused on championing the value of high-quality partnerships, with stakeholder perspectives from across the sector and opportunities for teaching and awarding partners to network and build organic relationships. Following the conference, we published a blog, [Regulating partnership provision can help everyone](#), which reflected

on the success of the event and set out our proposals for the future regulation of partnership provision.

In April, we published [our response to the Department for Education \(DfE\) consultation on franchising in higher education](#). We expressed support for DfE's plans to bring more providers within the regulatory reach of the OfS but emphasised that this must not become a barrier to growth and innovation or limit student opportunity. We proposed a new category of registration, targeted on the elements of oversight most essential to protecting the student and public interest in partnership provision.

In October, we published [our response to the Office for Students \(OfS\) consultation on new requirements for oversight of subcontractual arrangements](#). We welcomed the regulator's focus on holding lead providers to account through robust due diligence and oversight, but cautioned that effective partnerships require healthy, collaborative relationships free from power

imbalances. We also highlighted concerns with conflicting definitions of 'subcontract' and 'franchise', referring to IHE's research from 2024 on a proposed typology.

Throughout the year, we helped improve understanding of the value that partnership provision brings, cautioning against broad-brush approaches to tackling pockets of bad practice that risk penalising high-quality providers who contribute significantly to the UK's economy and skills needs. With the support of members engaged in franchising and subcontracted delivery, we demonstrated the strengths and positive impact of these arrangements on learners and institutions.

At the end of the year, the Government announced its reforms to franchising in higher education. Our public response welcomed the decision not to ban franchised delivery but cautioned that the threshold for registration of 300 students had been set too low, citing concerns with the ability and capacity of the OfS to adapt its regulatory approach.



Policy spotlight

Governance

The Big Conversation: shaping the future of higher education governance

We partnered with Advance HE on The Big Conversation, a cross-sector initiative designed to spark a national conversation on the future of higher education governance, working alongside the Committee of University Chairs (CUC), Universities UK (UUK), GuildHE, and the Association of Heads of University Administration (AHUA). As part of the project, IHE led a session on the role of governance in fostering financial sustainability, ethical leadership and institutional resilience. Through this partnership we demonstrated our commitment to supporting the UK's

higher education governance community, fostering open and collaborative engagement with the challenges facing the sector.

> [Watch the IHE session and read the accompanying blog](#)

New IHE Governance Forum

In 2025 we established the IHE Governance Forum – a new member space dedicated to governance, leadership and regulation. The Forum was created to bring together members who support or serve on Boards and committees, individuals stepping into leadership roles in governance structures, and colleagues responsible for strengthening governance practice and regulatory reporting.

Initial conversations have explored a range of topics, including the composition and purpose of governing bodies, embedding oversight of mental health strategies into governance, and the new OfS initial conditions of registration (E7, E8 and E9).

Since the Forum's creation, IHE Members have also collaborated directly through the IHE Community, our new online platform, to share experiences and seek peer support on governance policy and practice.



Policy spotlight

Inclusive practice

Our 2030 Strategy commits us to championing the student interest and ensuring public policy reflects the diverse and evolving needs of all learners. We believe every student should be able to shape a higher education journey that fits their time, pace, and preferred environment.

We explored this further through two distinct but connected strands of work in 2025.

IHE Inclusive Practice Project

Our Inclusive Practice Project explored how IHE Members create environments that support students who are often underrepresented in traditional models. In partnership with 19 IHE Member institutions, we examined the motivations for using inclusive practice, its design and implementation, and the role of student engagement and partnership.

The report found that inclusivity is a defining strength of independent higher education provision, demonstrating how inclusive design offers genuine choice and leads to better outcomes.

We identified three distinctive characteristics of inclusive practice:

- **Strategic inclusive design:** inclusion embedded into the foundations and culture of a provider.
- **Personalised approach:** students' individual needs and circumstances as a starting point.
- **Focus on transitions:** a holistic approach to support through key stages of the student journey.

[Read the project report](#)

Supporting disabled students

As a project partner on a successful bid to the [OfS Equality in Higher Education Innovation Fund](#), led by IHE Member ASU London, we are exploring approaches to designing more inclusive models for assessment to better support disabled students. Working alongside partner organisations including Disabled Students UK and the National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP), the project aims to reduce reliance on reasonable adjustments and improve disabled students' experiences of higher education. The project runs until 2027, when a final report and new resources will be made available.

Responding to consultations

In 2025, we responded to 10 consultations reflecting a broad programme of regulatory reform, incorporating data and reporting requirements, franchising and subcontracting arrangements, governance and registration conditions, quality assurance, and approaches to widening access.

Below are snapshots from our submissions to the Office for Students (OfS) throughout the year.

OfS Strategy 2025 to 2030

We emphasised that the new strategy offered an important opportunity for the regulator to reset its relationship with the sector and called on OfS to prioritise innovation, investment and growth. We also urged the OfS to return to its core regulatory functions by reopening applications for registration, Degree Award Powers (DAPs), and University Title which were paused at the end of 2024.

We supported engagement with students during the consultation period, facilitating an opportunity for OfS to speak directly to the IHE Student Advisory Board – highlighting the importance of considering all student voices when shaping the strategic priorities that will define their experience of higher education.

Proposed reforms to OfS registration requirements

Our response addressed the introduction of two new OfS initial conditions of registration: Treating students fairly (C5) Effective governance (E7). We broadly welcomed the direction of the proposals, particularly the commitment to strengthening student protection. We also supported the shift toward a more practical approach to managing course, campus or provider closure, while calling for greater clarity in the associated requirements and guidance.

On governance, we welcomed the move to a more pragmatic and transparent approach, while emphasising the need for assessment methods that reflect the diversity of provider models and avoid unnecessary regulatory burden. Our views on the proposed overhaul of the registration process reflect our long-standing mission to create more proportionate and efficient routes into regulation for new providers.

OfS call for evidence on regional access partnerships

Our response welcomed the consideration of a new model for collaborative outreach, recognising the potential for partnerships between providers to address local skills needs and improve equality of opportunity. We supported a regional approach that aligns activity with industry demand and creates pathways into higher-level jobs for learners from all backgrounds.

We emphasised that any new model must reflect the evolving work of Skills England and be grounded in a shared understanding of diverse learner needs. Our submission also set out a vision for a successful regional model with the supporting governance structure required to deliver meaningful impact.

OfS future approach to quality regulation

Our response expressed support for a more integrated approach to quality regulation but highlighted concerns about how the proposals would operate in practice for smaller, specialist and partnership-based providers. We called for clear timelines for TEF assessments and welcomed the retention of the student submission, recommending that the OfS develop guidance for providers without student unions to help them support independent contributions.

➤ [Visit our website to read our consultation responses](#)

Events, training and resources

Delivering events and developing resources that help our members understand and respond to changing regulatory requirements and policy developments is central to our work. A key benefit of IHE membership is access to expert training and guidance when regulatory and policy changes demand swift action. We pride ourselves on providing proactive, high-quality support that enables members to navigate expectations with confidence, enhance their professional practice, and drive continuous improvement across their institutions.

In 2025, this commitment was reflected in a busy programme of 112 events across the year attended by 2,857 participants, demonstrating the scale of demand and the value members place on our support.

The following examples illustrate how we supported members and provided new opportunities for engagement throughout 2025.

Harassment and sexual misconduct

In anticipation of the new OfS Condition E6 on harassment and sexual misconduct coming into force on 1 August 2025, we delivered an extensive programme of support to help members prepare for new regulatory expectations.

From March to June, we ran a series of events developed in collaboration with three IHE Partner legal firms – Eversheds Sutherland, Bevan Brittan, and Shakespeare Martineau – and subject matter experts, The Consent Collective and Lime Culture. Across six sessions, we explored the key themes of managing compliance and risk, good practice in hearing and responding to disclosures

of sexual harassment, and institutional approaches to case management. The programme concluded with a two-day, in-depth Sexual Violence Liaison Officer (SVLO) training course.

We will continue to provide training, information and resources as members navigate this new area of regulation, building on these events and our 2024 resource *Approaches to addressing harassment and sexual misconduct*.

OfS support and guidance

In May we launched a comprehensive and ongoing programme of support designed to help members navigate requirements and processes in anticipation of the resumption by OfS of its key regulatory duties in August 2025, including the re-opening of applications for registration and Degree Awarding Powers (DAPs). Through timely insights, expert-led events and a curated set of resources we helped institutions understand new regulatory proposals and plan effectively. Members were supported through a suite of practical tools, including an OfS registration and DAPs flowchart, a timeline of key regulatory milestones, curated reading materials, and on-demand learning developed with IHE consultants and policy specialists.

We also established dedicated Peer Groups, curated for members at similar stages of the registration or DAPs journey to take part in guided discussions, share experiences and challenges, and identify solutions during a period of considerable uncertainty.

Inaugural Teaching and Learning Symposium

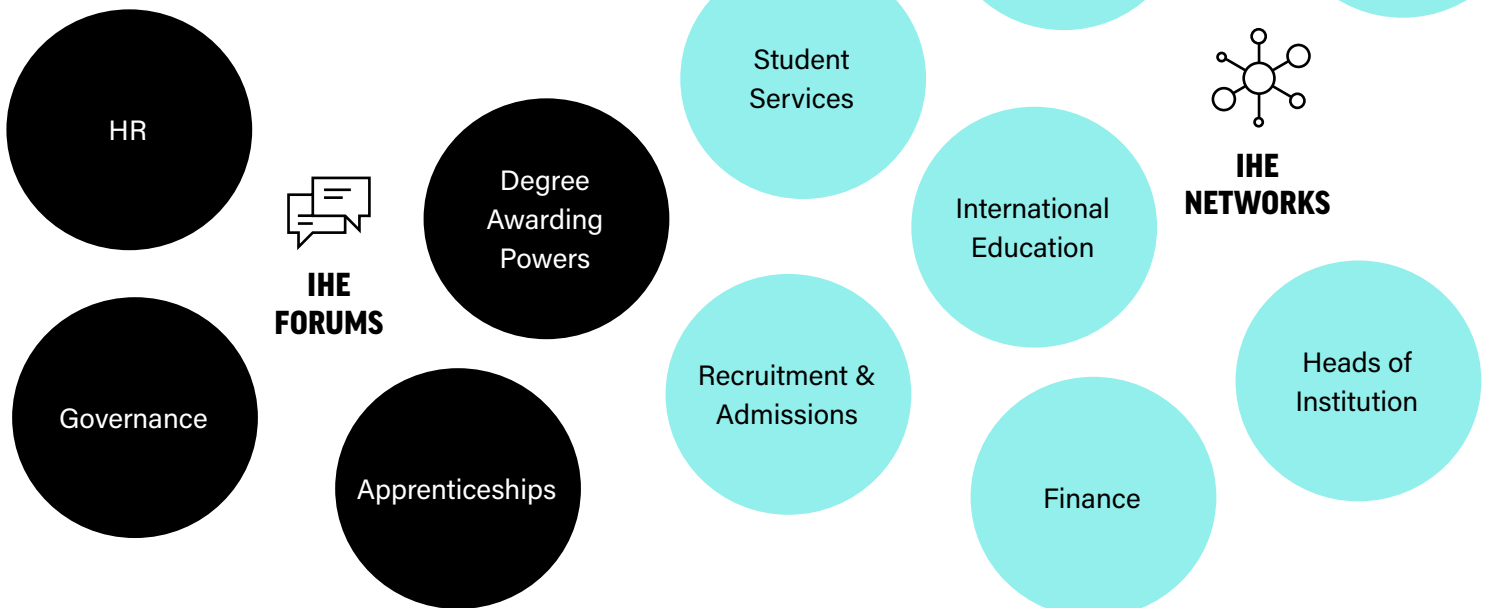
Over three days in September, we hosted our inaugural Teaching and Learning Symposium, an online showcase of expert insights and case studies from IHE Members and external speakers. The programme featured sessions on interdisciplinary practice, industry-aligned curriculum design, inclusive lifelong learning, and embedding wellbeing in the curriculum. The symposium received excellent feedback and will now form part of our annual events cycle, reflecting our commitment to supporting innovative teaching and learning and sharing emerging pedagogical practices across the sector.

Skills England roundtable

In October, 13 IHE Members met with Sir David Bell, Vice Chair of Skills England, for a roundtable discussion in Leeds. The event provided an opportunity to introduce IHE Members to the Board of Skills England and demonstrate how our community can contribute to the emerging Industrial Strategy and Skills England's priorities. The conversation was structured around the newly published Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, highlighting members' cutting-edge provision, innovative approaches to lifelong learning, and close alignment with employer needs.

Networks and Forums

Our Networks and Forums create structured opportunities for collaboration between IHE Members who share similar roles, interests or areas of specialist practice. Refreshed in 2025 to align with our strategic needs, they form a core pillar of member engagement and knowledge sharing on the IHE Community, our new online platform. With regular meetings throughout 2025, our Networks and Forums have continued to provide regular touchpoints for peer learning, discussion and collective problem-solving.





Forum spotlight

Apprenticeships Forum

Within a rapidly shifting apprenticeships landscape – marked by policy reforms, funding changes, and evolving employer expectations – we identified a clear need to provide members with more coordinated support and a stronger collective voice.

Launched in August 2025, the Apprenticeships Forum is open to all members delivering or exploring apprenticeship provision and offers a dedicated space to collectively interpret developments, discuss risks and opportunities, and shape IHE's policy engagement.

The first meeting focused on setting priorities for the year ahead and included contributions from the Department for Education (DfE), who provided key policy updates and responded to members' questions.

The Forum will continue to provide a structured space for members to discuss emerging changes, share practice, identify support needs and feed directly into IHE's policy and regulatory engagement on apprenticeships.



Network spotlight

Technology in Education Network

Our newly constituted Technology in Education Network (TiEN) met for the first time in February and explored a wide range of themes throughout 2025, including AI, digital skills for staff and students, online delivery, and learning technology.

A consistent thread across discussions was the rapid rise of AI: how emerging tools can support student learning, how institutions are adapting to enhance teaching and learning, how to build AI literacy among staff and students, and the opportunities and risks facing the sector as it works to keep pace with change.

The Network also launched a survey to map the digital tools and platforms currently in use across the IHE membership. This is an evolving resource with responses covering VLEs and online classrooms, video streaming, accessibility and assessment tools, AI detection software, business intelligence systems, and library management platforms. This is a valuable output which will be developed further to support our understanding of the current use of technology in education across independent providers, and to inform members' digital strategies and decision-making.

“The Technology in Education Network (TiEN) has created a useful space for members to test ideas against what is actually workable in their institutions. In 2025, conversations moved quickly beyond general interest in AI to more practical questions – where it genuinely helps teaching and student support, how to manage risks sensibly, and how to build staff confidence without overcomplicating things.

A real strength of TiEN has been the openness of members. People have been willing to share not just what’s working, but what isn’t fully in place yet, which is often where the most helpful insight comes from. The survey of platforms has also started to give a clearer picture of the technology landscape across IHE, helping members make more informed choices.

As Co-Chairs, we see TiEN’s value in bringing together institutions facing similar challenges and focusing on practical approaches that others can realistically adopt.”

Chris Baynard Smith (David Game Higher Education) and Matt Lingard (Tavistock Education and Training), Co-Chairs, Technology in Education Network

International Education

2025 was marked by a series of reactive policy decisions, including changes to visa compliance rules amid heightened political scrutiny of international student recruitment activity, with further restrictions on student mobility creating uncertainty across the sector.

In anticipation of a refreshed International Education Strategy, we continued to highlight the value of international education as a major UK export, the role of global partnerships in the UK's growth and prosperity, and the need to preserve our position as a welcoming destination for international students against a backdrop of growing geopolitical instability.

Responding to the Immigration White Paper

The most significant development in 2025 was the publication in May of the Government's long-anticipated Immigration White Paper, with its proposals – plans to introduce an International Student Levy to fund maintenance grants for domestic students and stricter metrics for the Basic Compliance Assessment (BCA) – shaping much of our policy activity over the following months. While the Graduate Route was ultimately retained – due in no small part to coordinated sector advocacy, which IHE was part of – the duration of the visa was reduced from 24 months to 18 months, presenting fresh challenges for the sector.

We met frequently with representative bodies and mission groups from across the sector to share insights and explore workable alternatives to the proposed International Student Levy. The final proposals included a full exemption for the first 220 international students – a significant concession that we lobbied extensively to secure – which will benefit both small providers and medium-sized institutions. We also continued to advocate for fair and proportionate BCA requirements and discretionary provisions, raising concerns about added risks and operational pressures the new metrics would place on smaller providers.

In **our response** to the publication in May of new migration statistics by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which showed large falls in migration to the UK to study, we drew attention to the risks of overcorrection – the likely outcome of adopting the stricter measures announced in the White Paper.

Wilton Park Dialogue – Education and the UK’s International Impact

In February, IHE Chief Executive, Alex Proudfoot, participated in a Wilton Park policy dialogue on the topic of education and the UK’s international impact. The event brought together civil servants from the Department for Education (DfE), Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and

Department for Business and Trade (DBT), and senior leaders from the education and skills sector. Alex set out three proposals centred on promoting the UK’s diverse ecosystem of provision, positioning the UK as the home of global professional learning, and supporting UK students to become the most globally employable graduates. Our participation offered an important channel to contribute ideas on how to strengthen the global impact of UK education ahead of the Government’s forthcoming refresh of the International Education Strategy.

IHE Global Connect Embassies Network

Our Global Connect Embassies Network, delivered in partnership with the London Education and Research Network (LEARN), was hosted in June by the High Commission of Malaysia in London. The event brought together IHE Members and embassy representatives from around the world to explore shared priorities and opportunities

for collaboration between diplomatic missions and the UK independent higher education sector. Delegates took part in lively discussions on topics including student mobility, government-funded programmes, and professional training, demonstrating a shared commitment to collaboration and widening global opportunity. The event reinforced IHE’s role in convening global partners and supporting members to expand their international reach.

[Read the event highlights](#)



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Alia Alias, Education Attaché, High Commission of Malaysia, London.





APPG
spotlight

APPG Inquiry – The UK’s Global Edge: Regional Impact and the Future of International Students

In May, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for International Students, for which IHE serves as secretariat, launched an inquiry into the regional impact of international students in the UK in response to mounting concerns about declining international student numbers and regional disparities.

The scope of the inquiry encompassed economic, social, and cultural contributions alongside pressures on accommodation, infrastructure, and local services. It drew on sector research and evidence gathered through roundtables with experts from the education sector and international students.

The final report, launched in parliament in September, sets out a series of recommendations for the Government, education providers and regional authorities and received coverage in Times Higher Education: [Local international education strategies ‘could fix skills gaps’](#)

Key recommendations:

- 1** Government should establish individual international education strategies within each of the devolved regions, aligned to national strategies for education, skills and migration.
- 2** Government should deliver detailed regional data covering students, their dependants, and post-study employment, distinguishing the temporary nature of student migration.
- 3** Universities, colleges, and schools should deepen regional collaboration to maximise the positive impact of international students.
- 4** To meet the needs of regional employers, the Graduate Route visa should remain unchanged.
- 5** Skills England should create a clear strategy to revive international education below degree level to boost funding for providers meeting regional skills needs and support regional growth.

[Download the inquiry report](#)

“International students are not merely visitors to our shores, but active contributors to economic growth, cultural enrichment, and innovation across every constituency in the United Kingdom ... The strategic importance of international education demands that it becomes a central pillar of regional planning, with coordinated approaches that align education, economic development, skills, and community integration policies to maximise the benefits for local areas”



Lord Karan Bilimoria and Abtisam Mohamed MP,
Co-Chairs of the APPG for International Students

Annual Conference

Our flagship event, the IHE Annual Conference, was held on 26 November 2025 at the Royal College of Physicians (RCP London) – the first of two years at a new conference venue.

More than 40 expert speakers and nearly 300 delegates joined us to hear policy insights and strategic analysis of sector trends, and to connect with senior leaders and specialists from across higher education. Delegates benefitted from expert perspectives, practical learning, and valuable networking opportunities to strengthen collaboration and partnerships across the sector.

Framed by the recent publication of the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper in October, this year's conference provided a timely opportunity to consider emerging opportunities for IHE Members aligned to the Government's priorities for tertiary education.

>

RCP London, our Annual Conference venue for 2025 and 2026.



Conference highlights

The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith, Minister for Skills, in conversation with Alex Proudfoot, IHE Chief Executive

Welcoming the Minister back to conference for a second consecutive year.

As the chief political architect of the blueprint for tertiary education, the Minister called on IHE Members to use the opportunity presented by the publication of the White Paper to showcase how independent providers are leading the way in equipping learners with essential industry-relevant skills. Throughout the discussion, the Minister offered clear recognition of the value, diversity and innovation IHE Members bring to the wider sector and the important contribution independent providers make to the breadth and quality of UK higher education.

▼
Alex Proudfoot,
IHE Chief Executive,
in conversation
with **Jacqui Smith,**
Minister for Skills.



Creative tech and industrial strategy: future skills for a revolutionary present

A panel discussion featuring Sir Peter Bazalgette, Co-Chair of the Creative Industries Council.

The panel explored how the creative industries and technology are driving demand for cutting-edge skills and the role independent providers can play in meeting these needs. Key discussion points included the importance of clearly defining and communicating routes into creative careers to students, engaging with the opportunities presented by LLE, and learning from international approaches.

Systems and Sandboxes: regulating for innovation, collaboration and growth

With Professor Ellen Hazelkorn, a leading expert in tertiary education policy, and Professor Edward Peck, Chair of the Office for Students (OfS).

This session explored how global economic, social and technological trends shape higher education policy alongside government priorities. Delegates heard recommendations for how the UK can learn from international systems to support institutions and students to thrive, and the importance of collaboration between independent and public sector providers. The session heard calls for greater recognition of mature learners and for metrics that reflect the specific contexts in which independent providers operate.



◀

Sir Peter Bazalgette,
Co-Chair of the
Creative Industries
Council.

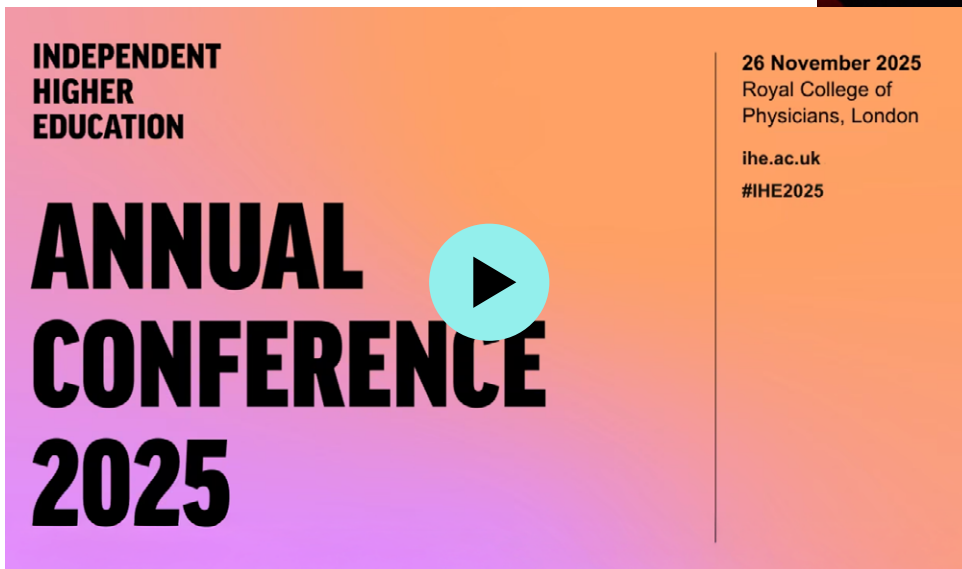
**Engines of the Economy:
UK regions open to the world**

Chaired by The Rt Hon Lord David Willetts,
President of the Resolution Foundation.

Our closing plenary explored higher education's role in driving regional economic growth and international engagement. Key themes arising from the discussion included the contribution of international students as economic and reputational assets,

collaboration between providers, employers and communities, and maximising the opportunities arising from devolution and regional skills planning. IHE Members were encouraged to continue to play an active role in shaping local delivery plans as part of regional strategies.

[Watch our conference highlights video](#)



INDEPENDENT
HIGHER
EDUCATION

**ANNUAL
CONFERENCE
2025**

26 November 2025
Royal College of
Physicians, London

ihe.ac.uk
#IHE2025

A video thumbnail for the Independent Higher Education Annual Conference 2025. The background is a gradient from orange to purple. On the left, the text 'INDEPENDENT HIGHER EDUCATION' is in white, and 'ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2025' is in large black letters. A play button icon is overlaid on the text. On the right, the date and location '26 November 2025 Royal College of Physicians, London' are listed, along with the website 'ihe.ac.uk' and the hashtag '#IHE2025'.



David Willetts,
President of the
Resolution Foundation.

“I’ve worked around the independent sector for years, but days like this sharpen your understanding of the challenges – and the opportunities. Independent Higher Education is well-placed to lead on skills, innovation and lifelong learning if the system lets it.”

Conference delegate

“I had a brilliant afternoon at the IHE conference, learning from some of the sector’s brightest brains, collaborating on new ideas.”

Conference delegate

IHE Awards

The IHE Awards are our annual opportunity to recognise the achievements of IHE Members and shine a spotlight on our thriving and growing community. The awards submissions we received in 2025 reflect the passion and dedication that drive our sector forward, capturing the breadth of educational opportunity that defines our community.

9

**AWARD
CATEGORIES**

63

NOMINATIONS





WINNER
EMPOWERING
STUDENT VOICE

ASU London

“A standout commitment to systemic innovation in student representation and compassionate co-production”



WINNER
OUTSTANDING
COLLABORATION

LCK Academy

“This is pioneering, innovative and inspiring work, underpinned by a mission to drive social change and widen access to higher education”



WINNER
INSPIRING
COURSE

ESCP Business School

“A groundbreaking approach to teaching that is exciting, empowering, and enabling”



WINNER
ADVANCING
INTERNATIONAL
EDUCATION

Global Institute of Sport

“A clear mission to enhance the international student experience, with impressive global reach”



WINNER
TECHNOLOGY
ENHANCED
LEARNING

SP Jain London School of Management

“Use of learner analytics is driving targeted interventions to improve outcomes and transform the student experience”



WINNER
SUPPORTING
STUDENT
SUCCESS

NMITE – New Model Institute for Technology & Engineering

“A standout commitment to delivering extensive individual and cohort-based student support, from enrolment to progression”



< Alex Proudfoot, IHE Chief Executive; Christie Beauchamp, winner of the 2025 Rising Star Award; James Pitman, Chair of the IHE Board.



**Christie Beauchamp,
Academic Registrar,
pointblank Music School**

“Christie shines for her collegial approach and commitment to the IHE community”



ION – Institute for Optimum Nutrition

“ION is a leading advocate for independent providers, representing what’s possible for the future of higher education”

> [Read more about our 2025 awards winners](#)



John Fairhurst

“John’s leadership and commitment to the cause has left a legacy of opportunity and excellence”



Awards spotlight

LCK Academy - winners of the IHE Award for Outstanding Collaboration

LCK Academy (LCKA) is a grassroots initiative founded in 2022 to meet the higher education needs identified by London's Community Kitchen (LCK), a charity tackling food poverty in the capital. Their partnership is a pioneering model of social collaboration, ensuring that every individual has equitable access to healthy food and affordable education, while increasing confidence, skills and knowledge in the community.

Students gain practical experience in food surplus logistics, culinary skills, and sustainable practices, with opportunities to engage in industry-led workshops and apply theory to real-world activities.

In November 2024, LCKA, LCK, the Fleet Street Quarter and Landsec launched the Urban Farmer Project, transforming unused City of London space into a zero-mile, no-soil food hub. This innovative collaboration addresses food waste, food poverty and climate change through sustainable urban farming techniques and the transformation of raw food surplus into nutritious meals. The project had a significant impact over the Christmas season, distributing over 20,000 meals to homeless people in London from food prepared in the Urban Farmer kitchen. It offers a replicable model for converting underused urban spaces into sustainable food hubs, bridging food production, education, and community engagement.

Awards judges praised LCKA's effective partnerships with employers, demonstrating how education and enterprise can unite to drive social change and address global challenges.

“We aim to empower the community while tackling food poverty, creating an inclusive environment where everyone can thrive. This project is a vital step toward fostering a sustainable future.”

Taz Khan MBE, Founder of London's Community Kitchen

External Relations

In 2025, IHE's voice was prominent in national debate, with sustained media coverage and high-profile stakeholder engagement demonstrating the reach and impact of our work.

Over the course of the year, we offered timely commentary and fresh insights, ensuring independent providers were represented in national conversations about higher education.

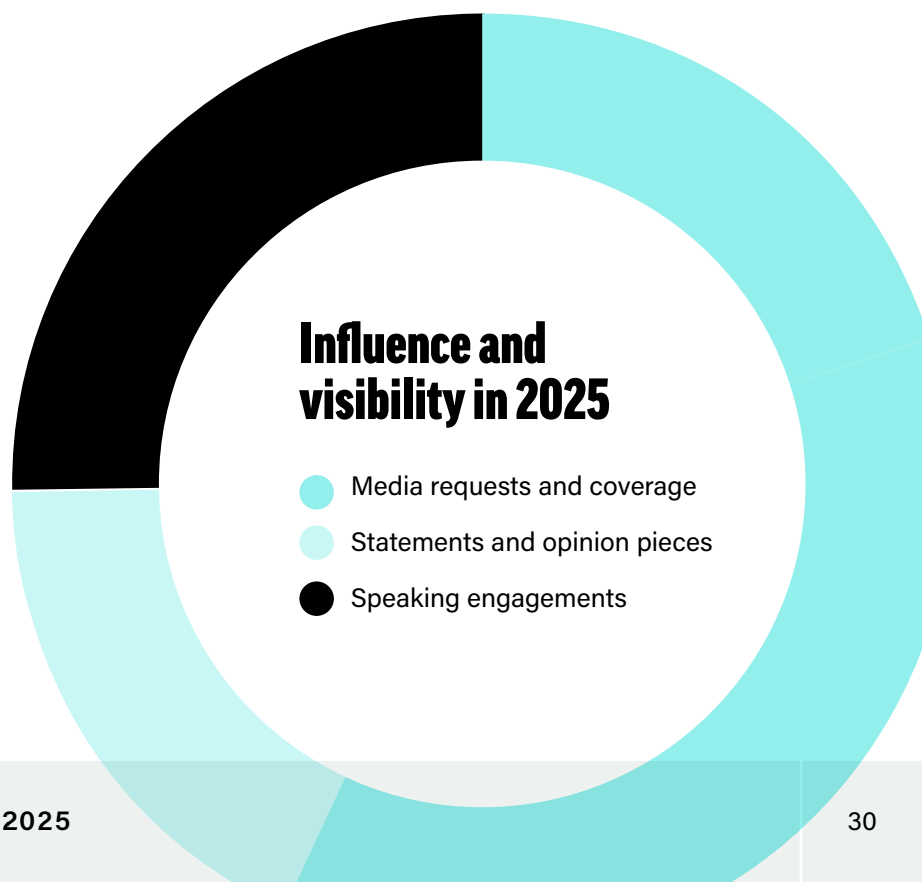
Across major reforms, our analysis, statements and media contributions helped shape public understanding of how policy changes affect students, institutions, and the wider sector. As the policy and regulatory

environment continued to evolve, demand for IHE's expert perspective rose sharply. The snapshot below illustrates the influence of our work across public debate, sector engagement, and parliamentary activity.

Website and social media

36k VISITORS TO THE IHE WEBSITE, AMASSING OVER 99K PAGE VIEWS

53% INCREASE IN OUR LINKEDIN FOLLOWERS



Trusted commentary

Over the year, we strengthened our position as a trusted, authoritative voice – providing constructive challenge to policy makers, offering practical solutions, and drawing on evidence grounded in the experiences of our diverse membership.

A leading voice in the debate on franchising

IHE played a prominent role in shaping the conversation around franchising at a time when a potential ban posed a very real threat. Our perspectives featured widely in sector debate: challenging proposals to implement blunt, sector-wide measures and showcasing IHE Members whose partnerships with awarding providers deliver significant benefits for local communities and the students they serve.

In May, IHE Members contributed to an in-depth **Times Higher Education feature** published amid growing concerns about the role of franchising in damaging the reputation of UK higher education. Their contributions helped reframe the narrative, bringing essential nuance to the public debate. The coverage reinforced IHE's position as an advocate for proportionate regulation which protects the sector's integrity, supports quality, and avoids penalising high-quality provision.

Welcoming the transformative potential of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE)

In July, the Department for Education (DfE) confirmed the policy details for the initial implementation of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE). Its focus on flexibility, credit-based funding and learner choice reflects many of the principles IHE has championed for over a decade, including portability, reduced regulatory burden and more coherent tertiary pathways. In our public statement we highlighted how LLE represents meaningful progress toward a system that supports innovative provision and better meets the needs of students, industry and the wider economy.

The impact of late-notice funding cuts on critical provision

In May, our response to DfE's allocation of Strategic Priorities Grant funding for 2025–2026 featured in a **[Times Higher Education article](#)** with contributions from IHE Members. We were vocal in raising our concerns, warning that the removal of funding for accelerated degree programmes and franchised provision created significant financial pressure for providers just weeks before the start of the academic year, leaving no time to adapt. We highlighted that these decisions would destabilise institutions, heightening the risk of course closures and the associated breach of students' consumer rights. We stressed that the funding cuts would most severely impact providers working hard to meet student demand for greater diversity, innovation and flexibility in their higher education.

“Today we are a step closer to achieving IHE's founding vision of a tertiary sector centred around students, in which academic and technical routes are integrated, journeys can be accelerated and decelerated, and individual learning goals are prioritised over the provider interest.”

IHE response to confirmed policy detail for LLE, July 2025



Member spotlight

Alex Sobel MP visits SAE Institute

In May, IHE Member SAE Institute welcomed Alex Sobel MP for Leeds Central and Headingley to its new Leeds campus. The development showcases SAE's investment in the city's creative and tech economy, demonstrating the role independent providers play in strengthening local skills pipelines and supporting industry-aligned innovation. The campus brings together SAE Institute and fellow IHE Member The Institute of Contemporary Music Performance (ICMP) to create a new creative and tech innovation hub in the heart of Leeds. Students benefit



Jenny Marzano, Chief Operating Officer, ICMP; **Alex Sobel MP** for Leeds Central and Headingley; **Steffan Davies**, Chief Executive Officer, AD Education UK – SAE Institute and ICMP.

from industry-grade facilities in purpose-built studios and dedicated support areas, informal learning spaces and communal social zones that foster belonging and connection. It stands as a strong example of how independent providers deliver high-quality, holistic learning environments that meet both regional and sector needs.

External engagement highlights

MAY

Royal Garden Party for Education and Skills

Senior IHE staff and representatives from IHE Member institutions enjoyed a day of celebration in the grounds of Buckingham Palace, offering a unique opportunity to reflect on the sector's collective efforts to improve lives through education.

JUNE

UCAS International Podcast

A guest appearance by IHE's Director of Policy and Development provided practical guidance on how prospective students can research courses and universities effectively to make informed decisions about studying in the UK.

SEPTEMBER

Times Higher Education Awards 2025

IHE Members featured in THE Awards shortlists, including three nominees in a new category for Specialist Institution of the Year: Dyson Institute of Engineering and Technology, NMITE, and Norland College. Norland were awarded Highly Commended, with judges praising their rigorous academic programmes and community engagement.

NOVEMBER

Education Select Committee Inquiry into Higher Education and Funding

Members of the IHE Board took part in roundtables chaired by Helen Hayes MP to discuss the risks of institutional insolvency and the impact of the Government's policy on international students. We submitted written evidence to the inquiry earlier in the year.

Partners and Supporters

We are grateful to IHE Partners and Supporters for the vital role they play in strengthening our work and supporting IHE Members through their insights, products and services.

Throughout 2025, their sector-specific expertise enabled us to provide timely, practical support in response to fast-moving policy and regulatory change. Whether contributing specialist knowledge, collaborating on research, delivering training or supporting IHE events, our Partners and Supporters broaden the support available to members and enhance our collective capacity to navigate change with confidence.



IHE Partners in 2025

 **AdvanceHE**



Bevan Brittan



coole insight ltd
Getting the right thing done

 **counterculture**



Experts in Education
and Admissions

**EVERSHEDS
SUTHERLAND**

 **harding** hub



JSS
SEARCH


Pinsent Masons



 **SHAKESPEAREMARTINEAU**

“We are proud to partner with Independent Higher Education to support the vital role of independent providers in the education sector. Being an IHE Partner has provided us with valuable opportunities to share expertise and engage directly with members through their networks, forums and events. This on-going collaboration enables us to continue tailoring our services to meet the evolving needs of members, supporting them in navigating legal and regulatory challenges with confidence.”

Helen Stead, Senior Clients and Markets Manager, Bevan Brittan LLP

IHE Supporters in 2025



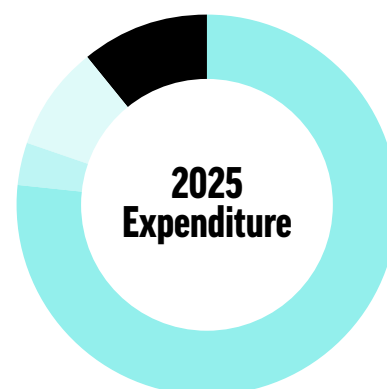
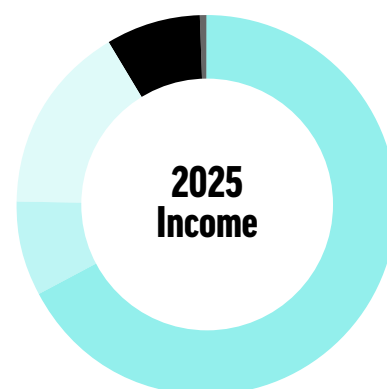
“Becoming an IHE Supporter in 2025 supercharged Alkhemy’s mission to deliver Independent Student Advice Hubs to small and specialist institutions. Access to IHE’s policy networks, events and specialist forums gave us critical intelligence on the context of independent providers, directly shaping our service model. This partnership matters because it helped equip us to now be able to provide students at these institutions with the professional, independent academic advice they urgently need but often can’t access. IHE’s vibrant community accelerated partnership discussions, positioning us to embed casework where internal teams can’t. It has been invaluable for credibility, insight, and impact.”

Ollie Kaspar-Hope, CEO, Alkhemy

Financial Review

Consolidated income and expenditure for the year, and our position at the end of the year, are summarised below.

Income	2025	2024
● IHE member subscriptions	£512,852.02	£425,222.39
● Consultancy and development	£62,372.48	£78,178.41
● Events	£122,797.44	£88,808.99
● Commercial partnerships	£59,923.23	£55,643.34
● Interest on reserves	£4,210.95	£3,530.14
Total income	£762,165.12	£651,383.27
Expenditure		
● Staff costs	£585,551.54	£471,188.13
● Consultancy costs	£26,535.15	£49,989.90
● Events costs	£67,973.04	£61,050.38
● Operational costs	£82,086.34	£67,070.12
Total expenditure	£762,146.07	£649,298.53
Margin	£19.05	£2,084.74



Our People

Board of Directors

We are grateful to the IHE Board for supporting our continued growth and strategic direction throughout 2025.



James Pitman
Chair of the Board
Study Group



Phil Deans
Vice Chair of the Board
Richmond American
University London



Charlton Berthoud
Honorary Treasurer
Institute for
Optimum Nutrition
(From Aug 2025)



Colin Castelino
Honorary Treasurer
Le Cordon Bleu
(Up to July 2025)



Andrew Boggs
Independent Board
Member
Royal Holloway,
University of London



Musa Raja
Independent Student
Board Member
The University
of Buckingham
(From Aug 2025)



Peter Sharpe
Independent Student
Board Member
College of
Legal Practice
(Up to July 2025)



Charlotte Blant
Board Member
TIRO
(From Aug 2025)



Marion Lowe
Board Member
SP Jain London
School of
Management



Rachel Nicholson
Board Member
Academy of Live
Technology



Rory Curley
Board Member
Central Film School
(From Aug 2025)



Sharona Friedman
Board Member
Global Institute
of Sport



Steffan Davies
Board Member
AD Education UK



Claire O'Leary
Board Member
British Academy
of Jewellery
(Up to Apr 2025)



Janet Rose
Board Member
Norland College
(Up to July 2025)

Colin Castelino stepped down as Honorary Treasurer on 31 July 2025 after completing two full terms on the IHE Board. We extend our sincere gratitude to Colin for his exemplary stewardship during a period of significant transformation.

In August, we welcomed Musa Raja, a student at The University of Buckingham, as our Independent Student Board Member and Chair of the Student Advisory Board.

“I am delighted to have joined the IHE Board as Independent Student Board Member. Ensuring the student voice is meaningfully represented in discussions about higher education is essential to shaping the decisions that will impact learners’ experiences. I look forward to working with the Student Advisory Board and fellow Board members to help influence policies that genuinely improve outcomes for students across independent providers”

Musa Raja, Independent Student Board Member

Staff Team

Senior Leadership Team



Alex Proudfoot
Chief Executive



Gemma Green
Director of External Relations



Joy Elliott-Bowman
Director of Policy and Development



Natalie Kubicki
Director of Membership and Operations

Membership & Operations Team



Natalja Williams
Membership and Services Manager
(From Mar 2025)



Penny Tzivitzi
Membership and Operations Officer



Michaela Hopkins
Head of Membership and Services
(Up to May 2025)

Policy Team



Angela Halston
Policy and
Engagement
Manager



Ellen Engstrom
Policy and
Engagement
Manager



Fiona Jones
Events and Training
Manager
(From June 2025)



Hannah Atkins
Policy and
Engagement
Manager
(From Sept 2025)



Maria Coello
Policy and
Engagement Officer
(From Mar 2025)



Lily Alimi
Policy and Public
Affairs Specialist
(Up to Nov 2025)



Uroosa Syed
Policy and
Engagement Officer
(Up to Feb 2025)

External Relations Team



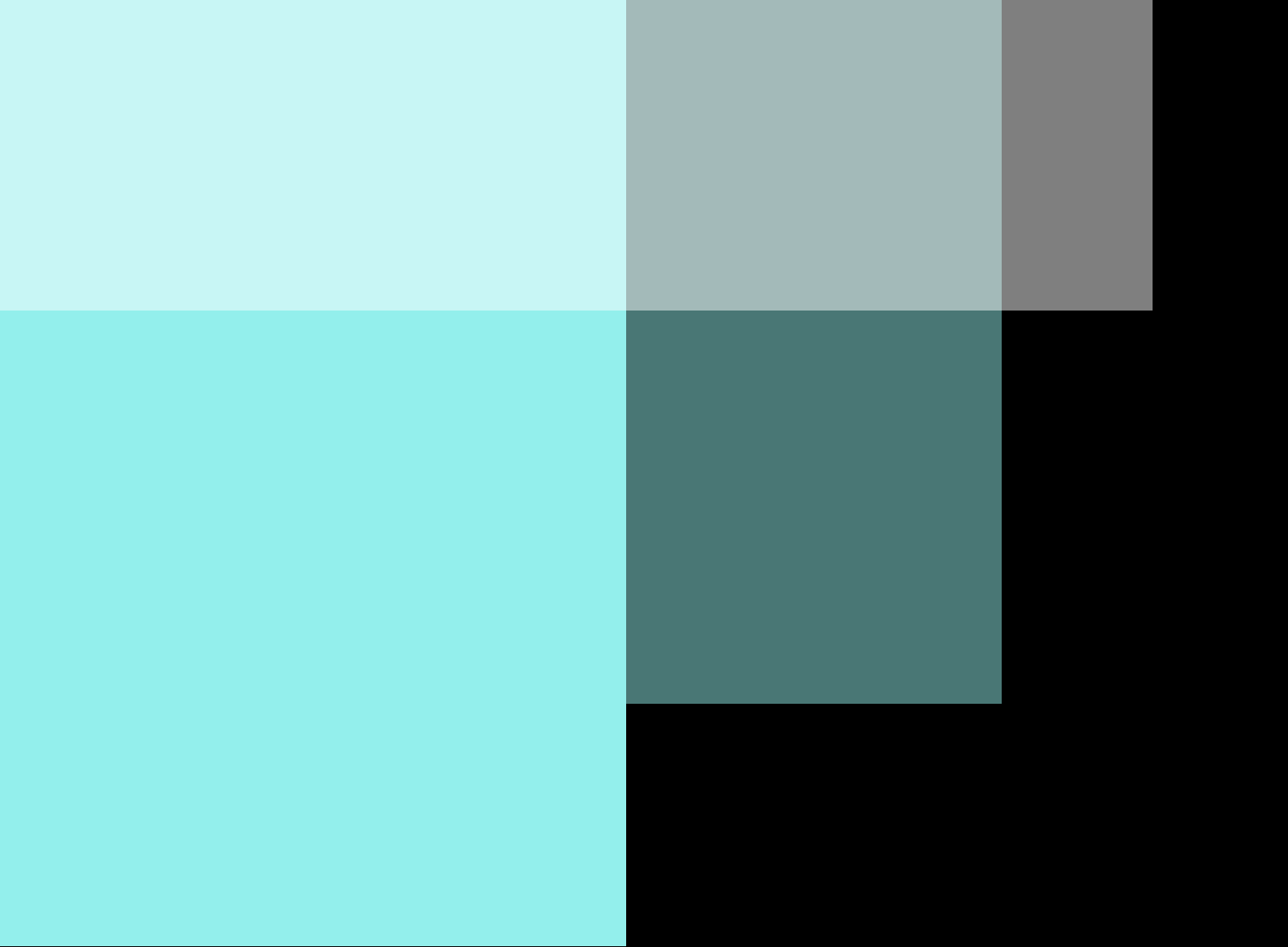
Georgina Norie
Communications and
Marketing Manager



Joanna Paul
Partnerships
Manager
(From Sept 2025)



Jane Southgate
Head of Partnerships
(Up to Aug 2025)



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