

A manifesto for higher education

INDEPENDENT
HIGHER
EDUCATION

2024

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

This is our blueprint for change.

This is our manifesto for higher education. This is our blueprint for change.

Education is the key to unlocking a fairer and more prosperous society, and a more resilient and agile economy – helping to achieve the long-term sustainable growth from which everyone benefits.

Today's interconnected world comes with interconnected risks, from the climate crisis to rising barriers against international trade. Widening access to education helps people everywhere to tackle these challenges together – driving innovation, harnessing technology, and responding to global problems with solutions both global and local.

The fundamentals of the UK are strong, but a renewed national mission can build on these strengths with significant productivity gains to realise an even more optimistic vision of the future. A vision made possible only by education – the best investment in its people that a Government can buy.

Realising the returns on this investment will require a strategic approach to conceive of a coherent but flexible system of not just higher but tertiary education. One designed not just to prepare young people for valuable careers but to support them throughout their lives with opportunities to acquire new skills and retrain in different roles as economic changes demand.

Independent higher education providers are ready.

A modern and diverse tertiary system which promotes innovation, excellence and flexibility is already within grasp. The Lifelong Learning Entitlement offers a foothold, and the next Government should take this step with confidence.

The prize is a system supporting both economic and social goals with a range of pathways for learners wherever they are; a system that is agile enough to meet long-term and emerging skills needs, and to respond to rapid labour market shifts; a system that creates strong links with employers and industry; and a system that offers multiple opportunities for adults to access education and training throughout their careers.

In this Manifesto we will show how Independent Higher Education, and the very special institutions in our membership, can play a pivotal part in delivering this system with its manifold benefits. We have a track record of doing just that.

Independent higher education providers work inside industries to promote excellence and opportunity; they collaborate with employers and partners to innovate and create; and they serve their local communities and students with dedication and care.

Independent higher education providers are ready to support a new vision for the UK of transformation, growth and prosperity.

Independent higher education providers are ready.

INDEPENDENT HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS ARE READY...

**...to deliver real choice and innovation
in a tertiary education system**

**...to support every student to succeed
in reaching their potential**

**...to power our leading industries with
cutting-edge provision**

**...to transform local opportunities
as agile partners in growth**

**...to promote the UK as a global hub
for education and training**

INDEPENDENT HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS ARE READY...

**...to deliver
real choice and
innovation in a
tertiary education
system**

Independent providers are pioneers in developing more flexible and student-centred approaches to higher education, whether this be intensive two-year degrees, fully stackable modules, or a choice of evening, weekend and block-release classes so that mature students can work while they retrain.

The funding system has traditionally erected barriers against such flexibility, and between the sector silos of further and higher education. Providers who try to bridge the gaps face a heavy burden of overlapping regulation.

The Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) offers us the chance to shift this paradigm and create flexible and innovative pathways through an emerging tertiary education system.

**...to deliver real choice and
innovation in a tertiary
education system**

THE NEXT GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

**1. Commit to the LLE as the foundation
for flexible learning through tertiary
education**

Today's economy, driven and disrupted by technology in equal measure, requires more upskilling and retraining than ever before.

The Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) should give every student the same loan to spend per credit, empowering them to choose the right size, level and intensity of learning, at the right time, from the provider which is right for them.

LLE should launch in 2026 with higher technical modules and short courses driving access to

industry-specific learning, adding Bachelor's degrees and modules in 2027. It should be extended again to Master's level in 2028.

To be a truly flexible framework for tertiary education, LLE should explicitly support pathways between apprenticeships and independent learning.

**...to deliver real choice and
innovation in a tertiary
education system**

THE NEXT GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

2. Task a Tertiary Education Commission with refocusing regulation on growth and innovation

Underpinning the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) as the foundation for post-18 learning will demand cooperation, convergence and efficiency from today's regulators of further and higher education.

A Tertiary Education Commission should be tasked with minimising inefficiencies and burden from overlapping regulatory processes. This requires a renewed focus on protecting the rights of students, promoting choice via data-rich information, advice and guidance, and facilitating their educational journeys through a tertiary system.

The limited resources of regulators should be prioritised for core functions like registering new providers, granting awarding powers, supporting effective partnerships, and only setting conditions which are proportionate and come with clear guidance.

Regulatory sandboxes should be extensively used to promote innovation and student choice.



THE NATIONAL MOTORSPORT ACADEMY (NMA)

The National Motorsport Academy offers the world's first online Motorsport Engineering degrees. Students learn at their own pace, choosing their start date and the way they progress through their course. NMA has a dual offer, with students able to take individual modules as professional technical courses, as well as full Bachelor's or Master's degrees. This model particularly appeals to those starting out in the industry, who can volunteer or work around their studies.

Students also join Team NMA, the Academy's own professional race team, as engineers for GT Cup racing weekends. A tutor leads the group as Race Engineer, while students work

with the drivers on every step of the process, from setting up the garage and unloading the truck, to the final moments of the race weekend. Students can be based all over the UK, coming together for real-life work experience directly through the Team NMA offer.

The National Motorsport Academy was founded by industry professionals who maintain those links. Their careers support includes job fairs at the Motorsport Industry Association's events and a partnership with one of the premier race staff recruitment websites. NMA keep their course fees low to be accessible to all students, with current UK fees only £6,900 per year.

INDEPENDENT HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS ARE READY...

...to support every student to succeed in reaching their potential

A clear focus on students is one of IHE's core values and is shared across the independent providers in our membership. As the first and only higher education representative body to welcome a student representative onto our Board, we are committed to placing the student interest at the centre of our policy work and proposals for reform.

The sheer diversity of the population who are learning with independent providers reminds us daily that there is no single type of student, but there are some common challenges they all face today that should be urgently addressed by the next Government.

**...to support every student
to succeed in reaching
their potential**

THE NEXT GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

3. Deliver a modern maintenance system that allows students to focus on their studies

Students have been amongst the most severely impacted by the cost of living crisis in the past two years, with inflation eroding the value of maintenance funds which have failed to keep pace.

Grants should be introduced for students who can't rely on surplus household income, while the amount of loans available should be restored to the level needed to cover basic living costs and then index-linked with inflation.

The same maintenance funding should be extended to students who learn online, as the age of campus-based education being the only delivery model has passed.

Adults who currently receive Universal Credit should be encouraged to upskill via the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) without losing their benefits.

**...to support every student
to succeed in reaching
their potential**

THE NEXT GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

4. Adopt a national strategy to support every student with their mental health and wellbeing

A mental health crisis has gripped the country since Covid-19, exacerbating pressures on health services and manifesting strongly not just in young people but in mature students too.

Independent providers are on the front line, admitting more students with disabilities, mental health issues and neurodivergence who value the immersive learning environments, smaller settings and flexibility of approach.

The new national strategy should recognise and address the diverse needs of different groups of students, including mature, part-time, international, online and work-based learners. It should create a framework for supporting transitions into and through tertiary education, and fund a national collaborative project for all students to access services, advice and information on a regional basis.



THE ENGINEERING & DESIGN INSTITUTE LONDON (TEDI-LONDON)

TEDI-London opened its doors in 2021, introducing a new model of engineering education designed to appeal to a more diverse cohort of students. Their first cohort was 50% women, unheard of in a traditional university engineering degree. They achieve this diversity through an innovative, industry-informed and project-based curriculum, replacing lectures with live industry projects and individualised support, a flexible approach made possible by their own New Degree Awarding Powers.

TEDI was formed by three global university founders, King's College London, Arizona State University and the University of New South Wales, who sought to create a more inclusive and adaptable engineering programme delivered through industry and community projects.

They tackle some of the biggest problems of our time, through a real-world lens, such as the UN's sustainable development goals.

Students are recruited from different educational backgrounds, as TEDI has no fixed subject requirements for entry. It's about more than technical brilliance, it's a combination of Attitude, Aptitude and Ability. Maths refresher courses are offered to those who have not studied it at a high level before. TEDI recruits students for their potential, not their past.

TEDI-London may be new but they are already having an impact by offering different approaches to supporting students and increasing diversity in one of the UK's most exclusive subjects.

INDEPENDENT HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS ARE READY...

**...to power our
leading industries
with cutting-edge
provision**

The UK is known the world over for its elite research-intensive universities, but it is also home to innovative and industry-leading technical education of equally high quality.

Across the country, independent providers work hand in glove with employers and industry experts to create immersive experiential learning environments. More flexible than an apprenticeship, more hands-on than most degrees, the cutting-edge programmes from these industry specialists offer unparalleled preparation for the world of work today.

With a simple bold reform to qualifications, and investment targeted to unlock productivity gains, specialist technical institutes can power UK industry for decades to come.

...to power our leading industries with cutting-edge provision

THE NEXT GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

5. Introduce Technical Education Awarding Powers to empower a new generation of specialist institutes to become beacons of industry excellence

UK university degrees became a gold standard not by Government diktat but through excellence in scholarship emerging from independent academic communities. Industry-driven technical institutes can become equivalent beacons of excellence through a simple and familiar formula: dependable funding; institutional autonomy; and the power to design, deliver and award qualifications with professional recognition.

Today, technical institutes face bureaucratic barriers if they wish to award their own qualifications, and relying on a partner university proves cumbersome and expensive. Once entrusted with these broad new awarding powers, specialist technical institutes embedded in their industries can be far more agile in spotting emerging trends and responding to the evolving needs of employers in the modern labour market.

...to power our leading industries with cutting-edge provision

THE NEXT GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

6. Create the conditions for investment in specialist technical education and training wherever it is needed

Talent is evenly distributed across the UK, but opportunity is not. Pockets of high-growth-potential industries are scattered across the country, but outside of London it is harder for employers to depend on a pipeline of skilled workers to power their growth.

A strengthened Unit for Future Skills should work with national, regional and local authorities to identify higher education cold spots and areas where specific industries would benefit from

specialist providers who can collaborate with employers to deliver the skills they need.

Regionally allocated UK prosperity funds should seed-fund industry-specific provision. Conditions on Innovate UK grants and public sector procurement should prioritise businesses which collaborate with tertiary education. Grant funding for specialist higher education provision should be targeted towards institutions looking to scale up and drive equality of opportunity into our leading industries.



THE ACADEMY OF LIVE TECHNOLOGY (ALT)

The Academy of Live Technology is an industry-led solution to a critical education and training need – education designed by the industry, embedded in the industry.

The Academy is based in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, on Production Park, Europe's first live events production community. Here, international SMEs use industry-leading talent, studios, and technology to produce and rehearse shows before they go on to entertain audiences worldwide.

The Academy was founded to address the lack of specialist education and training in entertainment production & technology. Since 2011 the Academy has partnered with the University of Bolton to offer 5

undergraduate and 4 postgraduate specialist vocational degrees to prepare new talent for careers in all aspects of live entertainment production, management and design.

Based in a region which is listed as being in the top 10% of social deprivation nationally, the Academy has partnered with Combined Authorities from West Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire & Hertfordshire to meet the challenge of the growing skills deficits by running local skills bootcamps between 5 and 12 weeks long, which develop local talent for the industry. These bootcamps are critical to addressing industry skills shortages and Production Park's plans for future growth and regional regeneration.

INDEPENDENT HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS ARE READY...

**...to transform
local opportunities
as agile partners
in growth**

Independent providers have extensive experience of working in partnership: with other higher education institutions, professional bodies, employers, local authorities and community groups.

Building from their specialist focus and entrepreneurial approach, they can respond with agility to the changing needs of the industry and the community in which they operate.

Everywhere that independent providers prosper, so too do the opportunities for more students from more backgrounds and with more diverse ambitions to participate in and benefit from tertiary education.

...to transform local
opportunities as agile
partners in growth

THE NEXT GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

7. Incentivise employers and employees together to invest in higher skills

A broader-based employer levy should fund Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) modules for continuing professional development as well as longer programmes and apprenticeships for entry into an industry.

This should encourage SMEs who predominate in sectors such as the creative industries, and who are put off by the inflexibility of the apprenticeship model, to invest in upskilling their staff through a modular approach.

Businesses should be granted a super-deduction on tax for investing funds into their employees' LLE accounts directly, and offer a salary sacrifice scheme for additional investment themselves.

Equivalent schemes should be available for the self-employed. An accompanying national entrepreneurship programme could be assembled from a range of specialist LLE modules.

...to transform local opportunities as agile partners in growth

THE NEXT GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

8. Create a new rapid response mechanism for addressing local skills shortages

The Immigration Skills Charge payable on Skilled Worker visas should be strengthened and all revenue generated should be ringfenced for a Rapid Response Skills Development Fund.

A national skills body should continually monitor employers' use of the visa route and other leading indicators of skills shortages around the country, and allocate funding to local skills delivery authorities to meet acute needs.

These new local funds should be made available via a bidding process which identifies providers

with the right specialist expertise to offer Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) modules, short courses and bootcamps for free to unemployed and underemployed local residents.

Industry-driven independent technical institutes are perfectly placed to adapt their existing specialist provision rapidly to meet the specific needs identified.



METFILM SCHOOL

MetFilm is an internationally renowned film school with partnerships across the film, television and media industry. With its headquarters in the storied Ealing Studios, MetFilm students are immersed in the industry from day one of their studies.

When Leeds City Council wanted to expand the film and television industry in Leeds, MetFilm was perfectly placed to meet local skills needs through their relationship with the local independent Prime Studios, next door to ITV. Working in partnership, they created a new campus within the state-of-the-art media production facility, playing a vital role in making Leeds an emerging northern hub for film and TV, with Channel 4 also moving their headquarters to the city.

Setting up a campus in Leeds has also led to more local collaborations to support skills development, including projects with Screen Yorkshire's Centre of Screen Excellence: West Yorkshire and with Leeds City Council.

MetFilm School's role in Leeds started simple, providing the specialised education needed as a catalyst to kick-start growth in a local industry with huge potential and the support of its local government. As experts in short, practical training in industry settings, MetFilm School has set an example for other independent providers to follow in delivering for towns and cities across the UK with an emerging industry ready for growth.

INDEPENDENT HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS ARE READY...

**...to promote the
UK as a global
hub for education
and training**

The UK is a world leader in education and skills, building on centuries of academic excellence and entrepreneurial spirit, and benefiting immeasurably from English being the lingua franca of international business. But with competitors everywhere in the global race for talent, we cannot be complacent.

The road to long-term sustainable growth in our education exports, with all the trade, investment and soft power this can generate, runs through continuous innovation and diversification.

We can leverage our natural strengths to expand both our markets and our supplier base by repositioning the UK as a modern hub of educational expertise, with technical and professional training sitting comfortably alongside more academic pathways.

... to promote the UK as
a global hub for education
and training

THE NEXT GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

9. Launch a new data-driven Global Education and Skills Strategy with an SME exports plan at its heart

Exporting education returns billions to our economy, investing in our institutions and communities. An Exports Data Taskforce should ensure that its full value is captured.

More sophisticated migration statistics are needed to track the temporary inflow and outflow of international students separately from economic and family migrants, to inform better policy and operational planning.

A new strategy should prioritise long-term sustainable growth, with regional plans to distribute

the benefits and pressures from international students across the UK.

An SME Export Plan will encourage more providers to export, with SME support services which embed a collaborative approach.

The full breadth of UK expertise should be recognised with a stronger focus on promoting technical and professional education.

... to promote the UK as
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and training

THE NEXT GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

10. Commit to a streamlined, consistent and competitive visa system

A transparent and dependable visa offer is critical to maintaining our global position. A simple, competitive student visa should be available to all adult students who choose the UK, streamlining rules to minimise administrative errors and granting all students the same privileges, including up to 25 hours of work per week.

A pathway visa should be introduced for friction-free progression through different courses and levels.

The Graduate route should be strengthened through the creation of a global employability strategy with regional plans, complemented by a Higher Technical Training route for newly qualified technicians to be fast-tracked into shortage roles in key industries.

A 10-year multi-entry visa should promote the UK as the home of lifelong global CPD.







RICHMOND AMERICAN UNIVERSITY LONDON

Richmond American University London is a small university offering dual UK and American degrees to students from around the globe. For UK students this represents a rare opportunity to attend a university with study abroad opportunities as part of its ethos and an international approach to its courses. The delivery model offers students greater choice than most, providing a liberal arts core where students are not required to decide their 'major' until the mid-point of the programme.

A broad range of majors and minors are offered in subjects from computer science and international sports management to psychology and international business. Service learning/volunteering and for-credit

internships are offered on every major, and the internship can be taken in the UK or overseas.

Richmond's international model puts them in a unique position to partner globally, with universities and colleges as well as with industries and community groups. Richmond offers a close-knit community with only 700 undergraduate and 200 postgraduate students, many of whom are international themselves and who help to expand and enrich the educational experience for their UK classmates. Like many specialist universities and colleges, their particular offer can only be delivered with the financial and cultural contribution of international students and international partners.

-  ihe.ac.uk
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