



**INDEPENDENT
HIGHER
EDUCATION**

IHE AT 15

**Celebrating 15 years of
impact, influence and
support for the independent
higher education sector**



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1. INTRODUCTION

It has been a huge year for IHE. We have expanded our team, launched a brand new website, engaged in hundreds of hours of government and regulator meetings and events and welcomed ten new members, thereby further diversifying our community in the areas of design, theatre, motorsport, film, management, counselling and psychotherapy, education for students with learning difficulties and widening access to mature students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. As our network continues to grow, the work we do to support and represent members and their interests grows with it.

One thing that often surprises people who are new to the concept of a representative body for small and specialist providers is how, despite the vast array of subject areas and innovative delivery models employed by our members, they have so much in common. All are operating in a regulatory context which wasn't designed for them, they often have small staff teams, difficulty accessing professional networks. They have the same questions about student support, student recruitment, international markets and quality assurance. We know – because they regularly tell us – that IHE is a lifeline for our members, whether they're accessing our support directly or taking advantage of relationships we've helped them build to help them overcome challenges in collaboration with each other.

As we move into the final year of our current strategic plan, we want to take this opportunity to reflect on these successes in the context of our journey to this point: things have changed dramatically over the last 15 years, both in terms of the HE context and IHE's size, shape and strategy. Further, we are well on track for meeting our aspiration of representing 100 members by 2025 and we know that this means we need to reflect not only on our successes, but also on the next phase of our development; what we deliver and how we do it, how we maintain and strengthen our partnerships, how we hone our support for members – particularly in the devolved nations, how we empower and connect them to collaborate more organically.

We invite you to celebrate the impact that our collective work is having on the independent HE sector, while also starting to consider all the possibilities of an exciting future for IHE.

While this report focuses on our work from 2022 to 2023, it is presented alongside a celebration of 15 years of incredibly hard work from our small but mighty team of dedicated professionals. Over the past year our team has analysed and responded to policy developments, met with senior officials, held roundtables, published reports, and engaged in collaborative initiatives with the wider HE sector. IHE remains multifaceted in our representation of members, covering or leading on broad policy areas including:

- DfE proposals on Lifelong Learning and HE Reform
- OfS consultation on quality and standards
- HESA and Jisc merger and ongoing data requirements
- Home Office Remote Learning Policy
- Supporting other sector membership bodies to create more inclusive offers, to the benefit of IHE members

- Gathering and disseminating knowledge on the UK/global market position in international education
- Providing the secretariat for All Party Parliamentary Group for International Students

With that in mind, this report represents just a snapshot of the work we do on behalf of and alongside our members.

We are so proud of the sheer volume and breadth of work that IHE is able to deliver despite our diminutive size, and of the positive, collective impact we are making – matching as best we can the incredible positive impact that our members make in the lives of their students and in the thriving of their communities and their industries.



Alex Proudfoot
Chief Executive



James Pitman
Chair of the Board



Dr Roxanne Stockwell
Chair of the Board,
2018-23

“At the heart of the higher education reforms that I implemented in government in 2015-18 was a drive to expand the range of provision available to students – enhancing the diversity and flexibility of learning opportunities, while harnessing the innovation and energy that new providers bring to a sector which benefits immeasurably from both.

Whether we were tackling the broken validation system or realising the potential of accelerated degrees, I knew as Universities Minister that I could rely on Alex, Joy and the IHE team to offer fresh thinking, bold ideas and compelling evidence for change. Independent providers and challenger institutions in the UK could not ask for better champions than IHE.” Lord Jo Johnson, Universities Minister, 2015-18 and 2019

2. OUR MISSION AND VALUES

MISSION

IHE is the formal representative body for independent providers of higher education, professional training and pathways in the UK. We ensure that the voice of independent providers is heard and the interests of their students are protected when government, regulators and others make decisions which affect their lives and their learning. Our representative role is underpinned by a mission to promote a specific set of values and we achieve this by advising, supporting and promoting the institutions in our membership, all of whom are committed to putting these values into practice.

VALUES

Our work is shaped by a set of core values, which we share with our members and which we collectively believe are of benefit to students and learners of all ages, backgrounds and needs, as well as to the general benefit of the UK economy and society as a whole. Our members sign up to these values and are committed to practicing them alongside us.

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.

3. THE FIRST 15 YEARS

Independent Higher Education has come a long way since the seeds from which it grew were planted. We want to preface our first ever annual report with that context, not only to share a snippet of our history, but to pay tribute to the people who helped to shape the organisation and its work today.

THE EARLY YEARS

Picture the scene: It's 2007. The Home Office and Ofsted are speaking at a meeting in which a potential change to the student visa system is introduced. It is proposed that student visas would now only be granted to those applying via a 'listed body', an archaic register that no one could quite work out who was responsible for, nor how an institution might go about being added. Effectively though, this would have put a dividing line between international students who would be encouraged to apply to traditional universities and those who would be banned from choosing from between hundreds of thriving independent colleges. This could be disastrous for the independent sector, putting the sustainability of large numbers of providers at risk – and not for the last time.

Sue Hindley, then Principal of EThames Graduate School, a well-respected college offering a mix of vocational and top-up degrees, was present at the meeting. Angry with the patent unfairness in the Home Office proposals, Sue made an impassioned speech to the panel. Other college leaders approached her to thank her for her contribution and some suggested a collaboration to oppose the changes that may be needed.

During a discussion over coffee with Stephen Vickers, then CEO of the British Accreditation Council for Independent Further and Higher Education (BAC), and Brink Gardner from Blake Hall College, the BAC Accredited Colleges Association (BACA) was born. Its first meeting was arranged in July 2007 to discuss the potential for collective action by independent colleges to push for equal standing in the sector, and as news travelled the association grew quickly.

Another early member was Simon Cleaver (West London College and British Study Centres) who had also long believed that a representative body was required which would properly represent the interests of private colleges and enable high-level lobbying and representation. Simon introduced the group to Tony Millns, then CEO of English UK, who shared this view and wanted to be involved. With his background as a chartered director, Tony helped organise the group into something formal, produced its Articles of Association and helped to develop rules for membership and affiliation fees. By July 2008, plans for the association were formalised, and a company was registered on 30 September 2008 with the new name of Study UK, reflecting the close ties with English UK. Sue Hindley was its first Chair.

“We realised that the independent FE/HE sector was much wider than you might expect, ranging from high level cookery colleges to independent theological colleges. There was a sector unrepresented by any national body and it was my view that high level representation is more efficiently done through an organisation, rather than each institution trying to do it on its own. In order to be taken seriously as a representative body, you need an incorporated association of some status and inclusivity in the sector. That was why the governance and continuity aspect became quickly important. We wanted to be taken seriously.” Tony Millns, former CEO, English UK

While its early work was about challenging this specific student visa issue, as the membership grew, so did the concerns – and the workload. In 2008 Study UK recruited its first manager. Alex Proudfoot, now IHE’s CEO, was the third person to take on this role in November 2011. Having helped to support the fledgling association in its earliest days as in his role as BAC’s Communications Manager, Alex had a keen sense of how important it was for this sector to have effective representation, and a clear vision for what the organisation could become. He set about making it a reality. Study UK began hosting meetings and conferences, while continuing its lobbying and influencing work with government. It was offered positions on boards and committees at the Home Office and UKCISA, became formally recognised by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) – thanks in no small part to the support of Nick Hillman, then Chief of Staff to the Universities Minister David Willetts – and began providing training and support for members on a variety of topics.

“It has been wonderful to see Independent Higher Education mature and grow over the past 15 years. It was characteristically astute for the organisation to seek ‘representative body’ status, meaning it cannot be ignored in the corridors of power. As higher education continues to expand and grow, provision needs to become more diverse, to reflect the diversity of students, and IHE has been and will remain absolutely central to that goal.” Nick Hillman, Director, HEPI

“In the very early days we were all competitors, but it was strange how any notion of competition went out of the window when we were engaged with a shared challenge and a common issue. We worked really hard to form what became Study UK and eventually we became formally recognised by government as the official representative body for independent colleges. We had seats at the tables where big decisions were being made, we provided training and legal advice on ever-changing immigration rules, later adding training sessions on other practical elements of running a college.” Sue Hindley, founding Chair of the Board

The issues that Study UK lobbied around became wide-ranging, but there was a second objective of raising standards in the sector and highlighting good practice. In the years that followed, student visas continued to be scrutinised by government and the media, as did the professionalism of private colleges in the UK. Study UK engaged with this problem, challenged it, and provided a vehicle for illustrating that the private college market in the UK was abound with excellence. Rigorous membership criteria set a dividing line – Study UK was not for just anyone. Members had to meet a standard of professional requirements and commitments; a standard which persists today at IHE.

“In the end, you felt proud to have created a membership organisation that raised the profile of the sector and gave us a stronger collective voice to government, and also provided valuable support to its members in lots of practical ways.”

Sue Hindley, founding Chair of the Board

FROM STUDY UK TO IHE:

THE NEXT PHASE OF REPRESENTATION IN THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR

As Study UK continued to grow and embed itself within the higher education sector, further changes were looming, as the Coalition Government formed in 2010 started to develop new funding and regulatory policy in response to the Browne Review. The introduction of higher tuition fees in England in 2012 began to put independent providers on a more competitive footing domestically with publicly funded universities, a change which was strengthened by the extension of the student loans regime to ‘alternative providers’ whose courses were designated by BIS. At the very same time, however, the Home Office under its new political leadership went in the opposite direction, introducing new rules which explicitly disadvantaged independent HE providers, while squeezing the availability of student visas across the whole sector in the interests of reducing immigration. A level playing field felt further away than ever.

At that time, Paul Kirkham was Chief Executive of the Institute of Contemporary Music Performance, a small and specialist provider of HE to students of popular music. He had become frustrated with the lack of acknowledgement, respect and access that came with the ‘alternative providers’ label that was often used to describe specialist independent providers at that time. The lack of recognition and government interest in such institutions, which were becoming increasingly popular with students and which provided a real alternative to more traditional routes through HE, meant that there was no level playing field, no access to funding schemes and no transparent, consistent regulation. Seeking a way to challenge this unfairness, he joined Study UK and got involved in the executive body.

Paul and Alex Proudfoot jointly developed the idea for the organisation to publish a Manifesto, which would present a vision for fairness and diversity in HE in which independent providers were afforded a status equal to that of their often larger, more traditional counterparts. This should include access to funding and proper and equal regulation. Study UK jumped at the opportunity to articulate its distinctive world view for a wider audience and did so with enormous success, producing a radical document that became a powerful lobbying tool. Most

of the proposals in the 2015 Manifesto were adopted by the Conservative government soon after the general election that year, thanks to the strong support of Jo Johnson as Universities Minister. Years later, a Manifesto which seemed radical and disruptive at the time now feels visionary, as almost every one of the recommendations have now been implemented and the ideas absorbed into the mainstream of higher education policy. It also became the foundational document of Study UK's relaunch in 2016 under its new identity and branding as Independent Higher Education (IHE).

"Study UK started to evolve at this time, we lobbied hard for changes that were in the manifesto and this is where the rebrand to Independent Higher Education came from. Among other things we finally got equality of treatment and an independent regulator for the sector in the OfS, which isn't perfect, but it levelled the playing field. Suddenly your corporate form, size and shape became irrelevant. We were HE providers like everyone else. It enabled access to the funding, recognition and respect that more traditional HE providers had enjoyed for generations." Paul Kirkham, former Member of the Board

The changes this lobbying work brought about helped to ensure that independent providers were treated respectfully and equally, and that further space was created for their voices to be heard on multiple issues at government level. Taking such a striking approach to lobbying and influencing work helped to open up a new direction for the organisation, drawing to a close an era in which its fortunes could seem to rise and fall with the whims of the Home Office, and recasting itself as the pioneers of a wider domestic reform agenda, the champions of innovation, and the formal representative body for independent providers.

"IHE became, and still is, an important and respected lobbying group. It became a body which represented those who previously had no representation and has been instrumental in the development of progressive and important regulatory changes, such as the Higher Education and Research Act in 2017."

Paul Kirkham, former Member of the Board



THE MATURING OF IHE

Over the years that followed, with a new vision and focus, IHE continued to grow and mature into the organisation we know today. None of the successes of the past decade would have been possible without the incredibly hard-working and dedicated team of staff who have gone above and beyond to deliver what has become an essential service of representation and support for our members. Their belief in the mission of IHE is tangible. But just as important has been the calibre of individuals we have been able to persuade to volunteer their time freely and generously to our Boards and committees, and in the last five years IHE has taken great strides in transforming its own governance to ensure it operates at a level of transparency, accountability and effectiveness befitting its profile and influence today.

Dr Roxanne Stockwell, who joined the IHE board in 2017 and became chair in 2018, speaks with great pride at having witnessed (and been part of) a great evolution during this time, in terms of the maturity of IHE as an organisation and in the context of continued changes in the HE sector. These factors changed the needs of small and independent providers, while creating space for new ones to emerge.

“IHE is a thriving ecosystem of providers that are different to the more traditional ones, doing new and interesting things. The support IHE gives to new and existing providers helps them understand how to fit into the boxes, despite not being box shaped.”

Dr Roxanne Stockwell, Chair of the Board, 2018-23

IHE has provided stability, support and guidance to new and existing independent providers from the start, and this has continued in more recent years during this time of change and expansion. In particular, we have supported members to navigate the changes brought about by the Higher Education and Research Act (HERA) 2017. Among other major changes, HERA created a new regulatory framework and established the Office for Students, bringing significant opportunity in the sector, but also many challenges.

“HERA brought with it a lot of big changes in HE in the UK, which was partly behind the recent increase in membership, as the new rules were very different. The idea was to make the sector more open to new providers, but the bureaucracy was actually quite complex. IHE has helped members to navigate that, and continues to do so, while maintaining influence in the sector. We are a recognised part of the landscape and playing an important role in the UK higher education ecosystem.”

Dr Roxanne Stockwell, Chair of the Board, 2018-23

IHE's growth in recent years has resulted in an ever-richer tapestry of qualifications and specialisms, as well as delivery modes, support needs and ambitions among our members. For example, some are interested in the international market while others are more interested in attracting domestic students, and some members wish to achieve degree awarding powers while others never wish to do so. Being able to understand those perspectives and communicate them to policy makers has become a real strength of IHE as it has matured over time.

“When we wanted to join the Office for Students, as a small provider we found we needed both expertise and externality to guide our strategy. IHE offered professional advice, tailored to our needs. Joining IHE gives you access to a huge wealth of information, a huge wealth of training at every policy level.”

Rory Curley, CEO, Central Film School

4. IHE TEAM

STAFF TEAM



Alex Proudfoot
Chief Executive



Gemma Green
Director of
External Relations



Joy Elliott-Bowman
Director of Policy and
Development



Natalie Kubicki
Director of Operations



Jane Southgate
Head of Partnerships



Anna Gibbs
Communications and
Marketing Officer



Penny Tzivitzi
Events and Operations
Officer



Angela Halston
Senior Policy and
Engagement Officer



Anna Mathews
Senior Policy and
Engagement Officer



Sophie McCarthy
Policy and Engagement
Officer

IHE BOARD



James Pitman
Chair
Managing Director,
UK and Europe, Study
Group



Professor Phil Deans
Vice Chair
President and Vice
Chancellor, Richmond
American University London



Dr Roxanne Stockwell
Chair of the Board,
2018-23



Sharona Friedman
President, Global
Institute of Sport



Colin Castelino
Finance Director, Le
Cordon Bleu London



Andrew Boggs
University Secretary,
Royal Holloway,
University of London



Claire O'Leary
Director of External
Relations and
Partnerships, College of
Medicine and Dentistry



David Howell
CEO, MetFilm School



Dr Janet Rose
Principal, Norland
College



Peter Sharpe
Independent Student
Board Member



Rachel Nicholson
Head of Institution,
Academy of Live
Technology

IHE FORMALISES THE STUDENT ADVISORY BOARD, CHAIRED BY OUR SECOND STUDENT BOARD MEMBER

In 2021, IHE became the first HE representative body in the UK to include a full student member on the board – and still the only one today. We are serious about creating diversity of choice and sector-leading experiences for students, so this felt like an obvious next step for us.

Our first independent student board member was Sophie McCarthy, whose phenomenal work on behalf of the IHE board has enabled us to centre student experience in our policy development work, both externally at sector events and internally as chair of the new Student Advisory Board. Formally established in 2023, the Student Advisory Board exists to ensure that IHE's decision making is always in the best interests of students at member institutions. This year it fed into policy discussions relating to cost of living, academic partnership provision and mental health support. In spring 2023 the SAB submitted evidence to the APPG for Students Inquiry on the student cost of living crisis.

Sophie managed to raise the profile of independent HE providers on a national level through her representations, and having made waves with her candour as a panel member at last year's annual conference, she was invited to write a comment piece for Wonkhe regarding the shortcomings of the OfS regulatory approach and its impact on students of independent providers. Having an independent student board member has helped take IHE – and the wider sector – in new directions and we are incredibly grateful to Sophie for her support and hard work. So grateful that we had to offer her a job! She is now settling in as the newest member of our policy team.

In July 2023 Peter Sharpe was appointed as our new independent student board member for a two-year term. We are delighted to be working with him and excited to build upon our already sector-leading approach to centring the student experience in our work.



5. OUR MEMBERS

IHE's 77 members (and counting) are providers with wide ranging interests, from religious and theological education, to animation and video game design; from health, nutrition and dentistry to culinary arts, food and wine; from visual, performing and technical arts to childcare and early years education. IHE members deliver flexibly, supporting industry training and widening participation, study abroad opportunities and specialist education. Our members are part of a growing number of specialist providers who are changing the UK Higher Education landscape and creating a compelling alternative for students.

IHE members represent a diversity of subject areas and delivery models, as well as themselves having student populations which are diverse and often distinct to those in the wider HE sector. Staff teams may be significantly smaller than those in larger, more traditional institutions, and have entirely different interests to those of the broader sector when it comes to government policy. They may be at different stages of their development within the sector, or simply not have the time, resources or connections to keep up with the noise in an ever-changing HE landscape.

IHE exists to provide a coherent voice to these institutions, to amplify that voice in the sector and to provide opportunities for those institutions and their communities to learn, develop, network and succeed.

"We found the conversation that we had with members of staff at IHE absolutely fundamental in achieving degree awarding powers. For me as the head of an institution, being able to partner with someone like IHE, with their wealth of resources and experience, has been absolutely vital."

Rev. Prof. Philip McCormack, Principal, Spurgeon's College

Growing our membership is really important to us. A broader membership ensures we better understand the diverse needs of the independent sector, and further share our knowledge and expertise. Creating community and collaboration is to the benefit of our institutions, and to our students.

From July 2022 to July 2023 IHE gained 10 new members:

- Laine Theatre Arts
- London Churchill College
- Metanoia Institute
- National Design Academy
- National Motorsport Academy
- Raindance Film School
- Ruskin Mill Trust
- S P Jain London School of Management
- The Counselling Foundation
- Waltham International College

"We joined IHE in 2023 to connect with like-minded providers and be part of a community that genuinely understands the realities we face as a small, specialist institution and we haven't been disappointed. Colleagues across the organisation have engaged with IHE and found real benefit in the opportunities it offers. It's given us space to explore challenges, stay close to policy developments, and feel less isolated in a complex sector. In a system that too often centres large, traditional universities, the role of high-quality alternative provision is critical, and IHE gives that space legitimacy, voice, and influence. At a pivotal time for Metanoia, as we work towards securing Degree Awarding Powers, the reassurance and perspective IHE provides has been especially welcome. The team are thoughtful, responsive, and really understand how to support members to use their distinctiveness well. For us, it's been a timely and genuinely valuable source of support."

Dr Hannah Friend, CEO, Metanoia Institute

"Finding our way to IHE and in particular Joy has been immensely beneficial in our search for a university partner. Joy is a fount of knowledge and has been generous in sharing that and guiding us through the world of higher education and the types of partnership available. IHE have also introduced us to other new members who are slightly further on in the process and able to share their experience. I think they provide an invaluable service for small providers such as ourselves, so that we can make the next step confident in our direction and knowing that we are joining a strong established community of education providers with a shared ambition."

Karen Carter, Director of Training, The Counselling Foundation

To enquire about joining IHE contact info@ihe.ac.uk



6. 2022-23 AT A GLANCE

✓ Formally established our Student Advisory Board, bringing depth and increasing representation of students across IHE's governance. The SAB is already informing IHE's policy work on issues including cost of living, academic partnership provision and mental health support.

✓ Brought together 1223 attendees at IHE events, including specialist network and forum meetings, policy webinars, Launchpad events and training sessions.

✓ Facilitated meetings of 11 networks and forums covering a variety of common interest areas, e.g. Access & Participation, Finance, Immigration, Marketing & Recruitment, Student Services and more. This past year we re-introduced annual in-person meetings to enhance networking opportunities.

✓ Impact on mental health: launched the CREATE initiative to support the creating and development of mental health strategies, and concluded and began review of the OfS-funded 'Many Hands' project - a peer-to-peer mentoring service benefiting 90 student mentees.

✓ Facilitated 19 sector-facing policy events including roundtables and consultation events, ensuring members' voices are heard at a regulatory/government policy level, including matters relating to OfS, NSS, HE statistics, the lifelong learning entitlement, harassment and sexual misconduct, quality assurance and more.

✓ Submitted 28,000 words in responses to 7 OfS consultations.

✓ Represented members' views at 117 meetings with key stakeholders including DfE, the Home Office, the Department for Business and Trade, OfS, QAA, the Houses of Parliament and the House of Lords.

✓ Following IHE lobbying, OfS published indicative timescales for registration process for the first time, enabling our members to be better prepared and illustrating IHE's ability to influence the sector.

✓ Held a roundtable with QAA following its decision to resign as the Designated Quality Body, which was attended by over 50 colleagues from IHE member institutions, enabling members to understand how the decision impacts them, especially if undergoing or planning to undergo QAA review.

✓ Became a vital voice on the new Jisc Data Collection and Statistics oversight board, following its merger with the Higher Education Statistics Agency.

✓ Successfully lobbied for a change to OfS's communications and engagement with providers, resulting in personalised contacts for providers and increased visits by senior OfS staff to IHE members as part of a wider programme of visits to regulated providers.



7. POLICY AND ENGAGEMENT

IHE's policy work is highly respected by members and sector partners for the high volume and outstanding quality of work we are able to produce, despite our small size. Through the expertise of our team we have been able to make tangible changes to policy which have a direct impact on our members institutions.

We also support members with day-to-day queries, provide information and advice, broker relationships between members to enable collaboration, and so much more. The following is a snapshot of the work that IHE delivers in this area – it simply wouldn't be possible to include it all in this report.

“Since 2017 we have benefited enormously from the influence and expertise of IHE. The Royal Academy of Dance is proud to be a member of such a dynamic organisation, and to champion IHE’s mission, strategy and values for independent providers of higher education.”

Dr Michelle Groves, Director of Education, Royal Academy of Dance

“Joining IHE has been one of the best decisions we have made. IHE has been amazing in their support of our journey as a newly registered provider and has been a sounding board and a critical friend. They have created the opportunity for networks that allowed staff across the board to interact and grow the depth of their understanding of the regulatory expectations and the changes in the educational landscape across all functional levels. They are supportive and kind but will ask the uncomfortable questions when needed. They are truly an organisation that adds value to their members and gives their members a voice.” **Surein Rheeder, Principal, Waltham International College**

IMPACTS IN THE SECTOR

Over the last year IHE's policy work has included:

- Held 117+ meetings with government and sector agencies
- Attended 10 policy consultation events and roundtable meetings (including six relating to changes proposed by OfS alone)
- Delivered 9 updates, briefings and good practice sharing activities in the sector

NOVEMBER 2022: ROUNDTABLE WITH DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION: LIFELONG LOAN ENTITLEMENT (LLE)

IHE held a roundtable, attended by a group of IHE members and 15 members of DfE's LLE team to share a sample of members already offering modular qualifications or short courses which could become modularised. This session supported DfE's policy development of the new LLE model while also ensuring that the needs and experiences of IHE members were being considered at the highest level. By working directly with our members, we were able to demonstrate the existing experience within the independent sector in delivering flexible higher education and effect real world changes to ensure the policy reflects professional delivery contexts.

AUTUMN 2022: COST OF LIVING

IHE began raising concerns about the impact of the rising cost of living on the ability for our member institutions to attract and retain students as far back as March 2022, with housing shortages posing a particular problem. As a result of our representations, the DfE launched a research project in the autumn, investigating the impact of the cost of living crisis on both students and providers. Working with the DfE we produced case studies of six members which are being considered by other bodies and the OfS held a roundtable on the issue, chaired by John Blake, the Director for Fair Access and Participation. These case studies were fed into work by DfE which led to an increase in student maintenance funding announced in January 2023.

ENHANCING THE UK'S INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION STRATEGY (IES)

From January through June 2023, IHE's CEO Alex Proudfoot chaired the sector sub-group meetings of the UK Government's Education Sector Advisory Group (ESAG), the high-level collection of expert education representatives convened to advise Ministers from the Department for Education and the Department for Business and Trade on how best to maximise the UK's export earnings from education. Alex used this opportunity to make the case for diversifying the UK's education exports, recognising that future growth of the sector would rely upon meeting the evolving education and training needs of a far more diverse set of countries, markets and customers – be they individual learners, foreign governments or employers and industry bodies in the global economy.

These arguments were well received by officials and Ministers from both the key government departments responsible for the IES, who recognised the shifting picture of international demand, the achievements of the higher education sector in meeting its student number target ahead of schedule, and the importance of diversification in achieving a balanced mix of exports and a sustainable future for international education in the UK. Two key actions to be taken forward later in the year were a greater prioritisation of skills, technical and vocational education within the IES, and the first ever action plan for supporting more education SMEs to export.

IHE EXPERTISE ON A NATIONAL STAGE

IHE policy expertise brings the challenges and innovations of IHE members to national policy discussions and we are often called upon to serve as experts on national taskforces, working groups and workshops. IHE staff were members of the following groups in 2022-23:

- British Council Higher Education Sector Group (HESG)
- Data to support international HE Workshop (Jisc and Department for Education)
- Education Advisory Group (Home Office)
- Education Exports Data Quarterly Workshop (Department for Business and Trade/ Department for Education, ONS)
- Education Sector Advisory Group (Department for Business and Trade/Department for Education)
- Education Sector Group (UKVI)
- HE/FE Care experienced Taskforce
- Higher education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce (Department for Education)
- International Student Employability Group (UKCISA)
- LLE Provider Working Group (Department for Education)
- NSS Review External Advisory Group (Office for Students)
- UKCISA Strategic Advisory Group (UKCISA)
- UKCISA Board of Trustees
- UK Standing Committee for Quality Assurance (Sector-led)

DAY-TO-DAY ADVICE AND DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT FOR MEMBERS:

Over the last year IHE's member advice and development work has included:

- Arranging mentoring for a member with new admissions staff.
- Connecting four members seeking new validation arrangements to other IHE members with experience of specific validators. This supported members to be successful in their approaches to validators and through the institutional approval process.
- Brought together members using specific data systems to support managing the changes required to meet the new Data Futures student data submission.

At IHE we are proud of the one to one support we offer our members, and the member communities we build. Every IHE member is unique, and as with many SMEs, have experience to offer and expertise they need.

Over the past year IHE has organised member conversations on making the most of student data platforms, using third party support for student wellbeing, improving student engagement in blended learning models, creating inclusive student policies, supporting emerging research communities, opening new campuses overseas, and many more.

“During our application to the Office for Students we really appreciated both IHE’s expertise and external perspectives to support and guide our strategy. IHE offered professional advice that was always tailored to our needs. We benefited from their detailed and thorough understanding of this policy area.”

Andy Palmer, Managing Director, Oxford International Education Group

IHE policy staff work closely with members to bring national initiatives to life, allowing independent providers to take advantage of changes to the regulatory and funding systems. Over the past year IHE policy staff have held over 75 meetings with individual members to provide specialist knowledge of new opportunities or tackle specific challenges.

CASE STUDIES

Opening a new campus overseas: As a well-known name within their industry, an IHE member was contacted by industry representatives from Overseas to explore expanding their delivery into a new market. In doing so they encountered challenges in the quality assurance processes that were unique to providers without their own Degree Awarding Powers. IHE contacted the small IHE community of members operating within that jurisdiction to share their experience of navigating the quality assurance processes to enable the member to move forward in opening their new campus.

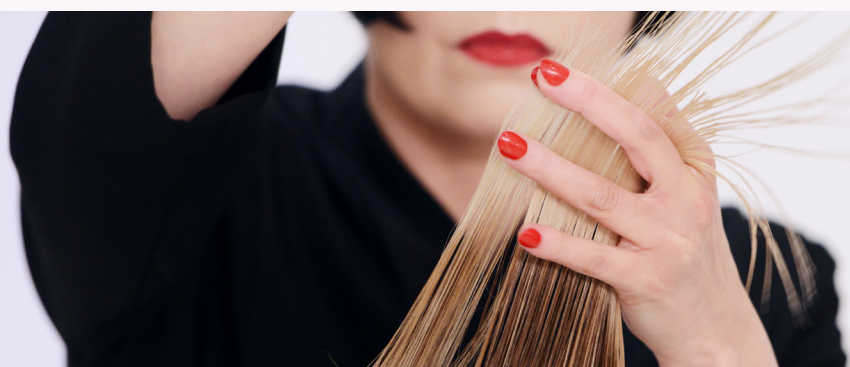
Making the most of new policies: IHE policy staff meet with the senior leadership team of an IHE member to deliver bespoke guidance on how they could take advantage of the proposed new level 4/5 and modular funding available through the Lifelong Learning Entitlement.

Supporting good governance: IHE policy staff presented to the Board of an IHE member on new challenges facing governing bodies including new regulatory conditions from the Office for Students and addressing common risks raised by validating universities.

Preparing for change: IHE policy staff delivered a short session to the senior leadership team of an IHE member concerned about the changes to Foundation year funding. The presentation clarified the rules of the reform and outlined possible opportunities for innovation from other new policy proposals.

“IHE have been wonderfully supportive over the years, whether that’s putting us in touch with our local MP to raise particular issues of concern, whether it’s been helping us with our international developments and giving us sound advice on how to go about tackling the international market...IHE have always been a wonderful source of advice and help.”

Will Gibbs, Managing Director, KLC School of Design (2006 – 2021)



8. EXTERNAL RELATIONS

This year has been a time of significant change, with growth in the number of independent providers occurring against a backdrop of wide-ranging fundamental change to the way Higher Education is overseen and regulated.

We have had to forge and broker strong relationships with key stakeholders quickly, be that with new ministers, or with stakeholders within new regulatory bodies. IHE's external relations work has been extremely demanding, but incredibly exciting, for both our teams and our members. While change presents challenge, we are jumping on opportunities to shape that change to the benefit of our members. At all turns it is becoming clear that IHE is regarded within the sector as a body with something to offer: our reputation is preceding us.

We've also been looking internally: we have grown our team, we have rebranded with a fresh, modern and more impactful logo and launched a brand new website, consulted members on what they need from the external face of IHE and, given the exciting growth in the sector, become ever closer to meeting our target of 100 members by 2025. It's time, therefore, to begin thinking about what the future looks like for how we operate.

JULY 2023: NEW WEBSITE LAUNCH

The launch of our new website this year was the culmination of months of hard work symbolic of a real turning point for IHE. Replacing our old website which was not fit for our ambitious purpose, the new site was accompanied by a major brand refresh, reintroducing IHE and its members to the world as a transformative force in UK higher education.

The new site enables us more effectively to spotlight our tireless work supporting members, to share more of our policy perspectives and insights with the world, and to be the foundation for ambitious plans for growth, all the while ensuring that our members are represented in the best possible way to external stakeholders of every type. It will be an invaluable tool for communicating the work of IHE in a professional way, distilling and clarifying our offer, and providing a platform through which that will continue to be refined as our new strategy is developed.

"What I've consistently found with IHE is that it punches above its weight."

Gordon Sweeney, Director of Strategy and Partnerships, ACM



9. LEARNING AND NETWORKING

OUR LARGEST EVER ANNUAL CONFERENCE – TUESDAY 18 OCTOBER 2022

As the only conference tailored specifically to the needs and interests of independent HE providers, the event brings members together to network, discuss key challenges and opportunities, reflect on progress and look forward to the coming year in the context of changes and developments in the wider sector and political landscape.

Over 200 attendees joined us – our largest attendance to date – with main hall plenaries also made available to an online audience for the first time. There were sessions covering an array of subjects, including:

- The turbulent political context and where this could take our sector.
- ‘Levelling Up’ – exploring the power of specialist provision and its potential for impact in our communities and for students.
- The new OfS approach to regulation, including Susan Lapworth’s first speech after her confirmation as CEO.
- International students: developing recruitment strategies and improving student experience.
- The need for better validation process for academic partnerships.
- Developing a model for access, participation and success within the independent HE sector.
- Student mental health and wellbeing.

The growing size of the conference is indicative of a strengthening of IHE’s networks and the value that our members place on the collaboration and learning that we facilitate. We are therefore scaling up to a larger venue for 2023, enabling us to better accommodate our growing number of delegates and exhibitors.

THE RETURN OF THE IHE AWARDS

The IHE Awards enable us to acknowledge and celebrate the vast amounts of outstanding work that is going on in the independent HE sector, while also providing us with insights into excellent practice which we can then use to drive standards across our membership, or identify pockets of activity on which multiple members may be able to collaborate. Following a pandemic-driven hiatus, we were delighted to relaunch the awards for 2022.

Nine awards were presented, celebrating outstanding delivery, collaboration and international education, as well as a focus on student success, staff development and outstanding contributions to the IHE community.

The IHE Awards shine a very useful light on what is important to members and their students. Through the award responses we were able to drive forward some of our work with government and sector bodies on student support, gaining insight from several member initiatives outlined in their award submissions. For example programmes specifically supporting international students were shared with DfE teams working with the Student Support Champion to encourage more work in this area.

LAUNCHPAD AND CONSULTANCY SERVICES

Launchpad and Launchpad Accelerate are IHE's tailored services for new providers in their start-up phase and for existing providers who are new to the regulated HE sector and its processes. Utilising a subscription model, we offer expert advice, access to a large repository of resources and timely updates on important sector developments. Launchpad Accelerate is a fast-track service supporting providers who wish to apply for OfS registration within the next six months.

In 2022/2023 new launchpad sessions included eligibility for OfS, access and participation planning, financial sustainability, a variety of resources to support applications for degree awarding powers, and the continuation of our 'Meet the Sector' series with contributions from Advance HE and others. Resources developed under the programme's banner are available to IHE members free of charge.

This year we supported four new Launchpad subscribers and have received applications from a further two providers. We also offer a bespoke consultancy service for providers who need more help in achieving their developmental goals, including Degree Awarding Powers, support for TEF, and gaining visa licences.



10. SUCCESS IN COLLABORATION

KNOWLEDGE-SHARING AND NETWORKING EVENTS

In line with our strategic aim to provide opportunities for collaboration and shared services, IHE hosts and/or facilitates a huge number of events as part of our day-to-day approach. In the year to July 2023, IHE hosted 1223 attendees at over 70 learning, networking or knowledge-sharing events:

- 31 network and forum meetings
- 19 policy, consultation and update webinars
- 9 Launchpad events
- 11 other training sessions
- 5 in person events

The vast majority of our events are delivered free of charge to members, but provide untold value in terms of skills, knowledge and capacity building.

Our Member-Led Networks and Forums Covered:

- Access and Participation
- Heads of Finance
- Heads of Institution
- Immigration Compliance
- Marketing & Recruitment
- Admissions
- Quality Managers
- Research & Innovation
- Student Services
- Human Resources
- International Education
- Student Data
- Degree Awarding Powers

The growing impact of these groups is a great source of pride for IHE and our members, some of which have been able to make an impact on government and agency policy development, ensuring that the voice of independent providers is heard.

- Representatives from the Student Data Forum worked with HESA/Jisc on their Provider Forum as the new model for collecting student data, Data Futures, was rolled out.
- Research & Innovation Network contributed to Research England's Knowledge Exchange funding review and were recognised in the report.
- The Immigration Compliance Network (ICN) provided visa and BRP error data to improve UKVI processing of student visa applications.
- Admissions' Managers Network and the Marketing and Recruitment Network provided evidence on the current recruitment cycle to IHE's CEO ahead of his meeting with Robert Halfon, the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education.

“Being a close-knit, small community at Richmond, it’s these wider networks like IHE which really offer us an opportunity to learn from one another and navigate some of the challenges that come from being on the smaller side.” Dr Alex Harden-Way, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs, Richmond American University London

MANY HANDS PROJECT

Summer 2023 marked the end of our two year OfS funded ‘Many Hands’ project, a collaboration led by IHE in partnership with seven IHE member institutions, providing peer mentoring for students to enable early intervention support for their mental health and wellbeing. The project was targeted at students from Black, Asian or ethnic minorities and/or students studying a creative subject at one of the partner institutions.

As well as providing a mechanism for students to seek support from other students, the collaborative approach also addressed the barriers faced by smaller institutions in providing scalable support to students. It enabled partners to draw on the skills and resources of other institutions and created a broader pool of student mentors to draw upon, aiming to enable students to be matched with people they can relate to, even if they are studying elsewhere.

The project also created a new avenue for professional experience opportunities to students, with the project evaluation report finding that mentors increased transferrable skills and levels of employability. The website for the project was designed and built by BA/BSc (Hons) Web Development students from SAE Institute.

The project evaluation identified the positive impact on mentees who engaged in sustained mentoring relationships, and the incredibly beneficial impacts of becoming a mentor as a way to create belonging and develop skills. Among other themes, mentees appreciated having a mentor who could relate to their life experiences, available with a flexible mode of delivery in a range of communication channels. From an initial target of 50 mentors and 120 mentees, 56 and 90 registered interest respectively. Sustained relationships were established between 19 mentors and 36 mentees.

Project participants have benefited from train-the-trainer mental health literacy courses, to be rolled out to the wider membership. Following the completion of the project and evaluation, Regent College have adapted the mentoring scheme into a student-designed social model, launched for academic year 2023-24.

Learnings from student peer mentoring will be shared with the IHE community through webinars on engaging students in mentoring schemes, and how to set up a peer mentoring service. IHE will take forward the benefits of mentoring via schemes which are under development for staff.

Beyond these tangible impacts, the staff involved in this first OfS collaborative funded project exclusively for small, specialist providers have benefited enormously from being part of a community. This allowed them to support each other, while broadening perspectives and knowledge of other parts of the sector and student demographics.

"This project is letting us all draw on our strengths, share best practice and pool our resources, all for the benefit of the students."

Cornelia Okello, Chief Operating Officer, ACM

THE 'CREATE' INITIATIVE

At the start of 2023 we partnered with the Charlie Waller Trust to launch a pilot initiative of bespoke training sessions for IHE members, which aimed to support members in the creation or development of evidence-based mental health strategies, built on a whole institution approach.

The Charlie Waller Trust designed the training to enable application of the CREATE toolkit – designed to provide strategies to assist participants develop a mental health strategy that works in line with a shared set of principles.

OTHER TRAINING SESSIONS AND WEBINARS

Examples of the training we delivered or facilitated this year include:

GOOD PRACTICE AND CPD SESSIONS

- Consumer Markets Authority (CMA) guidance for Higher Education staff
- How To CREATE A Mental Health Strategy That Works – series of 4 workshops
- Education Agent Management Masterclass
- Staff recruitment and retention: top tips for pension provision
- Drug Harm Reduction – a pilot for independent providers
- Maximising applicant conversions

PARTNER WEBINARS

- B3sixty: Challenging toxic cultures - the role of Investigative Review
- Ellucian student record system users – Update session for IHE members
- Eversheds Sutherland: HR and legal update for HE providers
- Pensions for Higher Education
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) in professional services



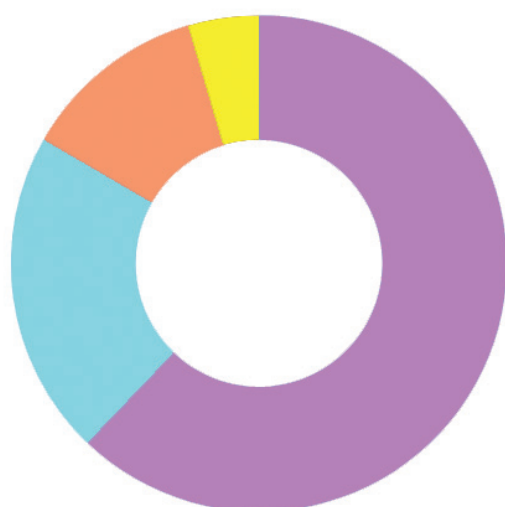
11. FINANCES

INCOME	2022
IHE member subscriptions	£ 308,763
Consultancy and development	£ 105,409
Events	£ 59,954
Commercial partnerships	£ 22,640
TOTAL INCOME	£ 496,766

EXPENDITURE	2022
Staff	£ 317,597
Consultancy costs	£ 63,041
Events costs	£ 34,280
Operational costs	£ 59,623
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£ 474,530

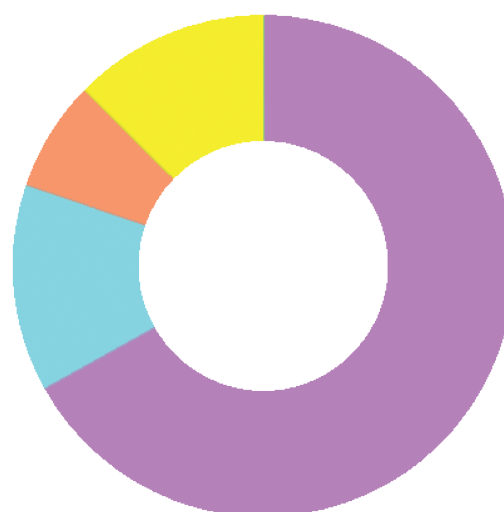
TOTAL MARGIN	£ 22,224
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INCOME



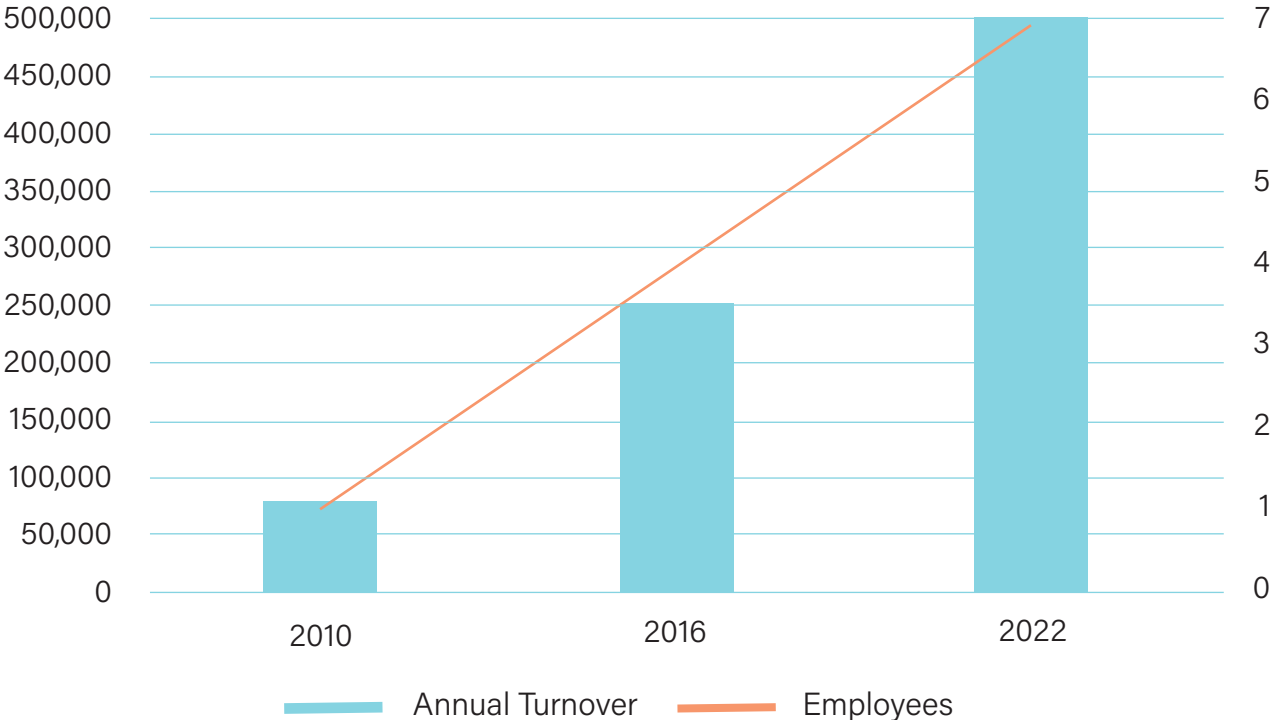
- IHE Member Subscriptions
- Consultancy and Development
- Events
- Commercial Partnerships

EXPENDITURE



- Staff
- Consultancy Costs
- Event Costs
- Operational Costs

GROWTH 2008 - 2022



	ANNUAL TURNOVER	EMPLOYEES
2010	79,039	1
2016	249,842	4
2022	498,404	7





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