

# Advance HE Applied Leadership Symposium 2026

28 April 2026, Virtual delivery

## Session abstracts

**Keynote, 09:35 – 10:05, Zoom 1**

### ***In Conversation: Leading in an AI Driven world***

*Binciya Salim, CEO at Wellington Education and Julia Marsh, Senior Associate Dean, Innovation and Transformation, London Business School*

**Parallel session 1, 10:10 – 11:10, Zoom 1**

### **Session 1.1a - Workshop**

#### **From Silos to Superheroes: Practical coalition building**

*Zak Liddell, Leigh Kilpert, University College London*

Ready to assemble your own team of superheroes? Universities run on many kinds of expertise. In this hands-on workshop, participants explore the strengths and weaknesses of “University Heroes” and real HE scenarios to practise assembling cross-boundary coalitions that make change stick. We’ll translate cultural capital (whose knowledge counts) and recontextualisation (how ideas become workable) into practical leadership moves, then stress-test them against live challenges like assessment strategies, retention and systems change. You’ll leave with a reusable framework, and a clear method for convening the right people at the right time across academic and PS roles.

### **Session 1.1b - Oral Presentation**

#### **Redesigning the MBChB HIV Curriculum: A Collaborative Project between Students and Staff at Edinburgh Medical School**

*Matthew Pirie, Eva Morrison, University of Edinburgh*

This collaborative project between University of Edinburgh staff and students redesigned the MBChB Year 1 HIV curriculum to better address the social and historical contexts of HIV and related health inequalities. Through auditing existing materials, gathering student feedback, and consulting with lecturers, the team developed a new booklet-based format incorporating interview videos with key actors to enhance engagement, diversify perspectives, and reduce reading burden. This presentation will share reflections and early insights from the curriculum development process, alongside initial feedback from the first cohort of students engaging with the redesigned materials, demonstrating that in some cases, less may be more.

## Parallel session 1, 10:10 – 11:10, Zoom 2

### Session 1.2a - Workshop

#### **Prometheus and the Fire of AI: Leading in the Grey Zone of Digital Transformation**

*Serraphina Robinson, The Third Voice*

Prometheus and the Fire of AI uses myth to give leaders a powerful, shared language for talking about intelligent technologies and change. Through a live “Zeus–Prometheus” spectrum, rapid small-group work and reflective prompts, participants surface real fears, name what must remain human, and identify where genuine revolution is overdue. They leave with a simple map of “Immutable Traditions” and “Revolution Zones”, plus a 30-day leadership commitment they can take back to their teams. This is not tech training; it is applied leadership practice in an age of intelligent fire.

### Session 1.2b - Oral Presentation

#### **Leading for the Future: Developing Future-Ready Leadership in Higher Education amidst Digital Transformation and AI Integration**

*Inga Olari, Regent College London*

This paper explores how digital transformation and artificial intelligence are reshaping leadership in higher education. It examines why traditional hierarchical models are no longer effective and argues for a shift towards transformational and distributed leadership. The study highlights key competencies required of future academic leaders, including digital literacy, strategic thinking, ethical decision-making and emotional intelligence. It also emphasises the role of leaders in fostering cultures of innovation, redesigning organisational structures and supporting sustainable change. By offering practical insights grounded in current research, this paper aims to support educators and institutional leaders seeking to lead confidently and effectively in an increasingly complex, technology-driven academic environment.

## Parallel session 2, 11:30 – 12:10, Zoom 1

### Session 2.1 – Workshop

#### **Leading With Purpose: Values and Practice in a Changing Higher Education Context**

*Rabeya Khatoun, Jo Rose, University of Bristol*

This 40-minute interactive online workshop will explore applied, values-led leadership through the lived experiences of senior leaders in a rapidly changing higher education context. Grounded in facilitators’ lived experiences and scholarship on distributed leadership, leadership-as-practice, and action learning, the session prioritises peer learning and reflective dialogue over prescriptive models. Participants will reflect on their own leadership practice, examining how different leadership

approaches are enacted and how leaders and systems can be empowered to respond to complexity and change. Using brief whole-group reflection and a facilitated small-group discussion, the session offers a supportive space for shared sense-making, insight, and practical takeaways.

### **Parallel session 2, 11:30 – 12:10, Zoom 2**

#### **Session 2.2 - Workshop**

#### **Promoting Women in Higher Education and the Transformative Potential in 'Feminising' Leadership Strategies**

*Anne-Marie Glover, Emma Foster, University of Birmingham*

Advance HE data highlights welcome trends in women's leadership in Higher Education. From an intersectional perspective, and in this context of a growing number of women in HE-leadership, our session explores the lived experiences and perceptions of HE women leaders. This interactive workshop, based on research conducted at the University of Birmingham and drawing on delegates' insights, will interrogate the gendered expectations linked to leadership. It will recognise the transformative potential of feminised leadership approaches and consider how reimaged leadership can challenge and shape organisational culture and facilitate meaningful change.

### **Parallel session 3, 12:55 – 13:35, Zoom 1**

#### **Session 3.1 – Workshop**

#### **A Complex Systems Leadership Lens on Transformational Change: Challenging the Status Quo in Higher Education**

*Sarah Wilson-Medhurst, Nikita Hari, University of Oxford*

This interactive workshop introduces a (complex) systems leadership lens, grounded in lived experience of leading change across institutional contexts. Participants will explore the knowledge, capabilities, attributes and often-invisible labour involved in challenging the status quo and reflect on how these align with Advance HE's Leadership Framework. Through dialogue and structured reflection, the session offers fresh perspectives on developing and supporting transformational leaders in today's complex higher education systems.

### **Parallel session 3, 12:55 – 13:35, Zoom 2**

#### **Session 3.2 – Workshop**

#### **Leading with Responsible AI: Inclusive Strategies for Full-Time and Flexible modes of Study in Higher Education in Oman**

*Ahmad Hosseini, Global College of Engineering and Technology*

How can higher education leaders use AI ethically while supporting increasingly diverse student populations? This interactive workshop explores Responsible AI as an inclusive leadership practice, focusing on the needs of both full-time students and working-study learners balancing employment and study. Drawing on applied leadership experience from GCET, Oman, participants will engage in scenario-based and co-creative activities to examine ethical AI use, inclusive assessment design, and leadership decision-making. Delegates will leave with a practical framework and transferable strategies to lead responsible, future-ready innovation in their own institutions.

#### **Parallel session 4, 13:40 – 14:20, Zoom 1**

##### **Session 4.2a - Oral Presentation**

##### **Leadership Without a Map: Decision-Making Amid Risk**

*Christopher Lewis, Jon Lees, Buckinghamshire New University*

Leadership Without a Map explores how senior leaders make high-stakes decisions in volatile higher education environments where clarity arrives too late to wait for it. Drawing on a fast-moving case from a complex partnership context, the session examines leadership in action under sustained scrutiny: clarifying authority, navigating risk, and acting decisively when formal frameworks fall short. The session highlights the critical role of trusted leadership networks, shared principles, and academic-professional collaboration in maintaining confidence, coherence, and resilience when the route forward is not yet fully visible.

##### **Session 4.2b - Oral Presentation**

##### **Amplifying Education Innovation Through Distributed Leadership: The Innovation Scholar Scheme as an Applied Model for Systemic Change**

*Mâir Bull, Fiona Saunders, Manchester Metropolitan University*

*As higher education institutions face accelerating change, increasing complexity, and growing expectations for meaningful social impact, it is becoming clear that traditional hierarchical leadership models are no longer sufficient to drive the deep, systemic transformation required. In response to this challenge, we have developed and implemented an effective and efficient institution-wide Innovation Scholar Scheme as an applied, evidence informed model of distributed leadership that actively cultivates the practices, structures and values needed to lead education innovation and transformation across Manchester Metropolitan University.*

#### **Parallel session 5, 14:30 – 15:30, Zoom 1**

##### **Session 5.1a - Oral Presentation**

##### **Courageous Collaboration: Developing Leaders in Higher Education**

*Melissa Holt-Brewster, Lisa Knight, Greg Thompson, Kerry Robinson, Kevin Flinn, Liverpool John Moores University*

Courageous Collaboration explores how Liverpool John Moores University is developing leaders to navigate uncertainty, complexity, and cultural change. This presentation introduces an internally designed, whole-system leadership programme that treats courage as a collective practice rather than an individual trait. Through

large-group interventions, action learning, and coaching, senior leaders engage in honest reflection, cross-boundary collaboration, and real-world problem-solving. Delivered by internal Business School experts, the programme builds institutional capacity from within, strengthening resilience, strategic alignment, and confidence to lead through ambiguity and transformation.

### **Session 5.1b - Oral Presentation**

#### **Professional Services Excellence Network - Nurturing Leadership Horizontally**

*Adele Browne, Dr Linda Sherwin, University of Warwick*

Three years in, with a 500+ membership, Warwick's Professional Services Excellence Network enables staff to exchange specialist skills and knowledge and stay informed and connected, together, to the political and economic context. Our popular annual events programme welcomes staff of any grade to participate in speaker-led sessions such as 'Who are our students?', 'Updates in H.E.' and 'Anything you ever wanted to ask about...', recognising the impacts of leadership at all levels and job satisfaction from being invited 'into the room'. Impacts we have measured include new connections, collaborative proposals, greater holistic thinking and decision-making, and members' increased confidence in themselves.

### **Session 5.1c - Oral Presentation**

#### **Co-Agency in Practice: Distributed Leadership for Belonging and Transformation**

*Minal Shingadia, Jen Maynard, BPP University*

BPP University's School of Technology works mainly online, so we bring tutors and coaches together to collaborate closely. These small, structured sessions help staff share ideas, solve problems, and take collective responsibility for improving the student experience. Using design thinking and co-design, teams create practical solutions based on real needs. This approach has led to simple but powerful improvements, such as clearer guidance for learners and better communication tools. The results are strong: student satisfaction, attainment, and retention have all increased. By working in genuine partnership, tutors and coaches build stronger relationships and drive positive, lasting change across the school.

## **Parallel session 5, 14:30 – 15:30, Zoom 2**

### **Session 5.2a - Oral Presentation**

#### **Strengthening normative leadership in higher education**

*David Beech, University of Salford*

This presentation proposes normative enhancements to the outer layer of the Framework for Leading in Higher Education. The aim is to ensure that in HE: i) leadership outcomes include a focus on citizenship, well-being and trust; ii)

leadership impact includes developing citizenship and trust; and, iii) the cultural context of leadership includes a focus on cultivating trust, and on normative governance motivation and corporate governance authority. Addressing neglect of these normative requirements – interest and values based behavioural standards – will strengthen the normative domain of leadership in higher education and thereby enhance the transmission and renewal of humanity’s biocultural heritage.

### **Session 5.2b - Oral Presentation**

#### **Leading in the grey zone: What Ofsted inspections of degree apprenticeships reveal about higher education leadership**

*Brian Culleton, University of Huddersfield*

This session explores what Ofsted inspections of degree apprenticeships reveal about leadership in higher education. Drawing on doctoral research across 19 universities, it uncovers how leadership silence and marginalised apprenticeship structures create a “grey zone” where staff carry institutional risk without adequate support. The presentation introduces institutional neglect as a leadership challenge that arises from absence and which leaves staff to manage invisible workload and emotional labour alone. Delegates will gain clear insights into how leaders can replace disengagement with presence and strengthen psychological safety.

### **Session 5.2c - Oral Presentation**

#### **Leading Service Excellence by Design: applied leadership for digital education in challenging times**

*Phil Vincent, University of Leeds*

How can leaders reshape professional services so they genuinely enable educational excellence, when money is tight and expectations are high?

This session shares a case study from the University of Leeds, where the Digital Education directorate has developed a 'Service Excellence by Design' approach to support curriculum transformation and student success. Drawing on my role as Head of Digital Education Enhancement and Design, I will reflect on leading across academic–professional boundaries, building a shared service catalogue, and using values-led design principles to do more with less while protecting quality and inclusion.

### **Parallel session 5, 14:30 – 15:30, Zoom 3**

### **Session 5.3a - Oral Presentation**

#### **A Global Majority Gaze: Whiteness in Leadership**

*Lace Jackson, The Open University*

This presentation draws on empirical research with 35 Global Majority Leaders of African, Caribbean and Infra-Saharan backgrounds (Keita, 2019), to challenge dominant notions of Whiteness in Leadership. Viewing pyramidal leadership

structures through a Global Majority gaze it reveals an organisational 'horror genre' (Jackson, 2023, 2024) shaped by experiences of self-isolation, unbelonging and 'organisation induced trauma and stress'. By centering counternarratives of Global Majority leadership practice, the presentation exposes how prevailing leadership norms marginalise these leaders. It invites delegates to reconsider and rehumanise leadership as a transformative societal practice aimed at collective healing and reclaiming more inclusive organisational futures.

### **Session 5.3b - Oral Presentation**

#### **Building Engagement: Applied Leadership in Student Teams**

*John Speakman, Kalina Nenova, Falmouth University*

How do student teams move from misalignment and disengagement to shared ownership, motivation, and sustained collaboration? This session explores engagement as a leadership responsibility rather than a student trait, drawing on applied practice from year-long undergraduate team projects. Integrating insights from engagement psychology, e-theory, and Agile leadership, the session demonstrates how leaders can create conditions that support autonomy, principled disagreement, and collective purpose. Through real-world examples and student artefacts, attendees will gain practical insight into leading engaged, self-regulating teams in complex learning environments.

### **Session 5.3c - Oral Presentation**

#### **Still, I Rise: A Mixed-Race Woman's Journey to Academic Senior Leadership in UK Higher Education**

*Dezita Taylor, Birmingham City University*

Still, I Rise: A Mixed-Race Woman's Journey to Academic Senior Leadership in UK Higher Education

This session shares an authentic leadership journey shaped by resilience, identity, and inclusion. Through lived experience, it explores navigating structural barriers, microaggressions, and imposter syndrome while leading transformational change in Higher Education. Attendees will gain insights into how authenticity, mentorship, and allyship can empower underrepresented leaders and foster inclusive cultures. Practical strategies for building future-ready leadership pipelines and advancing diversity will be highlighted. Join us for a thought-provoking discussion on why visibility matters and how lived experience can drive systemic change.

**Parallel session 6, 15:35 – 15:55, Zoom 1**

### **Session 6.1a - Lightning Talk**

#### **Motivational Interviewing for Leadership**

*Madeleine Nicholson, Wrexham University*

This session will explore Motivational Interviewing (MI), as one way of 'being' within leadership, that guides and transforms individuals, groups and organisations through change. Join me if you have never heard of MI before, already know about MI, or are highly skilled in MI. Everyone is welcome to come together in a collaborative conversation on MI for leadership.

## Session 6.1b - Lightning Talk

### **Applying Behavioural Science to Improve Collaborative Research Leadership and Management in UK Higher Education**

*Lucy Dang, Emma Francis, University College London*

Improving research culture is a growing priority in universities, with collaborative leadership recognised as a key area of focus within broader efforts to strengthen systemic, values-led change. This lightning talk explores how behavioural science can be used to identify the key behaviours, actors and influences shaping collaborative research leadership and management amongst new and emerging principal investigators who have the potential to lead a team. Drawing on interviews, we describe the development of a collaborative leadership programme to embed collaborative leadership practices. Preliminary findings from our mixed-method evaluation will be shared, highlighting how targeted collaborative leadership development can influence everyday research culture-related practices.

## Session 6.1c - Lightning Talk

### **Becoming Unstoppable: Purpose-Driven Leadership for a Future Transformed by AI**

*Patrick Mork, Patrick Mork LLC*

In an era defined by AI acceleration and continuous disruption, leaders must evolve beyond outdated models of toughness and hierarchical control. This session introduces a purpose-driven, human-centered framework for future-ready leadership based on Patrick Mork's 5 Resilience Pillars. Participants will gain practical strategies for leading transformation, fostering psychological safety, energizing teams, and navigating uncertainty with confidence. Combining lived experience, multicultural leadership insights, and executive coaching tools, this session equips leaders to create cultures that thrive—no matter how rapidly the future shifts.

**Parallel session 6, 15:35 – 15:55, Zoom 2**

## Session 6.2a - Thunderbolt

### **Title TBC**

*Dorothy Kamya, The Aga Khan University, Nairobi*

In global health education, particularly in the African context, accreditation is often framed as colonial, extractive, or culturally misaligned. This thunderbolt talk argues that accreditation is a mirror, not a menace: it reveals leadership choices, institutional cultures, and our tolerance for performative compliance. Drawing on lived experience from Africa's first ACGME-I accreditation of graduate medical education programmes, the talk shows how standards become burdensome only when treated as technical tasks.

With values-driven, relational, distributed leadership, our accreditation became a catalyst for faculty development, cultural alignment, and genuine quality improvement.

If accreditation standards feel threatening, it may be because they ask questions our leadership cultures have never had to answer before.

### **Session 6.2b - Thunderbolt**

#### **Lifelong Learning Entitlement: Entitling Change or Repeating Old Mistakes?**

*Harriet Dunbar-Morris, University of Oxford*

As higher education prepares for the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE), attention has focused on systems, funding, and modularisation. This Thunderbolt argues that the real leadership challenge lies in curriculum and assessment redesign. Drawing on lived experience as a senior academic leader, and at the start of a Visiting Fellowship in Lifelong Learning, this provocation explores whether the LLE genuinely enables pedagogic change or risks reinforcing existing practices. The session raises questions about assessment reform, academic culture, and how leaders work with uncertainty to enable meaningful, sustainable change.