



Annual Conference 2026

*Building a better future - radical ideas
and innovations for sharing*

October 21 & 22 | Hartpury University

Day 1: Wednesday 21 October

Optional for early arrivals

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| 12.00 - 12.45 | Registration and lunch for early arrivals
Ground floor Atrium, University Learning Hub (ULH) |
| 12.45 - 14.00 | Campus tours - animal, agriculture, sport
Meeting point: Entrance, University Learning Hub |
| 14.00 - 14.30 | Coach transfer to Leonardo Hotel, Cheltenham
Meeting point: Entrance, University Learning Hub |
| 14.30 - 15.20 | Hotel check-in
Leonardo Hotel, Cheltenham |
| 15:20 - 16:00 | Hotel transfer to Hartpury University
Meeting point: Reception, Leonardo Hotel, Cheltenham |
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| 15.30 - 16.00 | Registration and refreshments
Ground floor Atrium, University Learning Hub (ULH) |
| 16.00 - 16.15 | Welcome to GuildHE Annual Conference
Main Room ULH001
Professor Ken Sloan , Chair of GuildHE and Vice-Chancellor,
Harper Adams University
Professor Andy Collop , Vice-Chancellor, Executive Principal
and CEO, Hartpury University and Hartpury College |
| 16.15 - 16.50 | Opening keynote from the Skills Minister
Main Room ULH001
Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith , Minister of State for Skills,
Department for Education
The Skills Minister will share the Government's priorities for
higher education, skills and the future of work. |
| 17.00 - 18.30 | Drinks reception and equine demonstration
Bar, Equine Arena |
| 18.30 - 18.45 | GuildHE Chair's reflections
Feed Room, Equine Arena
Professor Ken Sloan , Chair of GuildHE and Vice-Chancellor,
Harper Adams University |
| 18.45 - 20.45 | Conference dinner
Feed Room, Equine Arena |
| 21.15 - 21.45 | Coach transfer to Leonardo Hotel, Cheltenham
Meeting point: Equine Arena Carpark |

Day 2: Thursday 22 October

- 08.15 - 08.45 **Hotel transfer to Hartpury University**
Meeting point: Reception, Leonardo Hotel, Cheltenham
- 08.30 - 09.35 **Registration and refreshments**
Ground floor Atrium, University Learning Hub (ULH)
- 09.00 - 09.30 **GuildHE Members' Annual General Meeting (Members only)**
Main Room ULH001
Professor Ken Sloan, Chair of GuildHE and Vice-Chancellor, Harper Adams University
Dr Brooke Storer-Church, Chief Executive Officer, GuildHE
- 09.35 - 10.00 **Chair's welcome and CEO's reflections**
Main Room ULH001
Chair: Professor Ken Sloan, Chair of GuildHE and Vice-Chancellor, Harper Adams University
Dr Brooke Storer-Church, Chief Executive Officer, GuildHE
- 10.00 - 10.40 **In conversation with Public First**
Main Room ULH001
Jess Lister, Director (Education), Public First
Dr Brooke Storer-Church, Chief Executive Officer, GuildHE
This conversational session explores our shifting political landscape, public attitudes to HE, how policy is formed and how these can inform the sector's choices ahead.
- 10.45 - 11.30 **Refreshment break**
Ground floor Atrium, University Learning Hub (ULH)
- 11.35 - 12.35 **Breakout sessions (choose from one of three sessions)**
- ① **Higher Education 2040: the future of higher education and financial sustainability**
ULH101A (First floor, University Learning Hub)
Ewan Robertson, Principal, Cairneagle Limited
Explore how pressures might affect the shape and size of the sector by 2040 and what choices institutions need to make now to be prepared for the future.

Day 2: Thursday 22 October

11.35 - 12.35

2

What does good collaboration look like? A collaborative sandbox session

ULH101B (First floor, University Learning Hub)

Professor Huw Morris, Honorary Professor of Tertiary Education, UCL Institute of Education

This collaborative session will consider what makes partnerships successful, thinking critically about when collaboration adds genuine value.

3

The importance of leaders to successful digital strategy: reflections from Jisc's 2026 HE sector digital maturity assessment

Main Room ULH001

Professor Lawrie Phipps, Interim Director of HE Insight, Jisc

Sarah Knight, Director, Digital Leadership and Transformation, Jisc

Drawing on Jisc's 2026 HE sector digital maturity assessment and research into students' digital experiences, explore the leadership conditions that help digital transformation succeed.

12.35 - 13.35

Lunch and networking

Ground floor Atrium, University Learning Hub (ULH)

13.35 - 14.20

Keynote: Strategic perspectives from the OfS

Main Room ULH001

Polly Payne, (Joint) Chief Executive Officer, Office for Students (OfS)

This keynote will lay out the OfS's strategic priorities on quality, student experience and support, and sector resilience, clarifying their expectations of providers as the OfS develops its approach to quality assessment, including the revised TEF.

14.20 - 15.20

Panel: Adaptive leadership – what is needed for a strategic response to sector transformation?

Main Room ULH001

Chair: Olivier Robert-Murphy, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer, BIMM University and GuildHE Board Member

Professor John Blake, Director, The Post-18 Project

Tessa Harrison, Director, Tessa Harrison Executive Coach Ltd.

Professor Claire Taylor, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, Plymouth Marjon University

This panel brings together a range of perspectives to consider how the sector can rethink established approaches, how leaders can navigate uncertainty and difficult strategic choices and what it takes to bring people with them through change.

15.30 - 16.30

Breakout sessions (choose from one of three sessions)

4

Freedom of speech: compliance, culture and keeping your institutional identity

ULH101A (First floor, University Learning Hub)

Joanna Forbes, Legal Director, Shakespeare Martineau

Dr Paul Greatrix, Director of Higher Education Consultancy, Shakespeare Martineau

Examine the new freedom of speech landscape, including the revised Regulatory Advice 24, lessons from the Sussex case, the OfS complaints scheme and forthcoming guidance on the duty to promote freedom of speech.

5

Coaching fishbowl: Executive coaching in action across the leadership journey

ULH101B (First floor, University Learning Hub)

Tessa Harrison, Director, Tessa Harrison Executive Coach Ltd.

Observe executive coaching in action through this interactive fishbowl session, where volunteers at different stages of the leadership journey will each take part in a live coaching conversation focused on a current leadership challenge.

6

What is higher education for? Re-imagining the higher education sector

Main Room ULH001

Sarah Cowan, Head of Policy (Higher Education and Research), British Academy

Explore the future functions of universities, identifying which are essential, important or optional for universities as we look to building a better future, while reflecting on institutional mission, place and purpose.

16.35 - 17.20

Keynote: Future jobs roadmap – engaging with sector-wide initiatives for skills, employability and the future of higher education

Main Room ULH001

Tom Lewis, Policy Adviser, Universities UK

This keynote provides an overview of the Future Jobs Roadmap, including its recommendations and the evidence underpinning the work, and HE's role in responding to changing employer needs.

17.20 - 17.30

Chair's closing remarks

Main Room ULH001

Professor Ken Sloan, Chair of GuildHE and Vice-Chancellor, Harper Adams University

17.30

Annual Conference 2026 closes

17.45 - 18.15

Coach transfers to Gloucester train station

Meeting point: Reception, University Learning Hub