

# GuildHE Annual Report

2023/4

# Foreword

During 2023-24, GuildHE continued to be a strong advocate for the importance of distinctive and diverse institutions in the higher education sector, lobbying on our behalf, winning additional resources and supporting members in practical ways.

GuildHE has had an active and successful year, championing the issues that matter most to our members. The team's determined advocacy continues to make the case for a risk-based approach to regulation and we have welcomed, and engaged with, the renewed commitment to dialogue and openness demonstrated by the Office for Students (OfS) over the last year. In collaboration with Universities UK, GuildHE launched (and now co-chairs) a Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) Policy Group for the Department for Education to ensure more regular engagement with the HE sector, and specifically smaller or specialist institutions, on LLE policy development. The team established the Creative Education Coalition in partnership with others to develop a manifesto document which informed and influenced a number of pre-election policies in the run-up to July's general election. GuildHE negotiated changes to funding round criteria that then enabled three members to achieve Expanding Excellence in England (E3) awards in its second round; efforts complemented by GuildHE's support of institutions' applications by providing roundtables

with funders, triaging queries, and enabling peer-to-peer exchange.

Our network meetings have been busier than ever, ensuring staff across your institution are able to access key information, feed in to consultation responses and share practice across institutions. Feedback from members is overwhelmingly positive about the value of GuildHE networks. Following a brief review in the late summer, the team reorganised the network offer into 15 networks, four special interest groups and a series of institutional development workshops designed and delivered in response to member demand. GuildHE will continue to review and refresh this offer to ensure it evolves in line with your needs as members and in response to the external environment.

Our Annual Conference in 2023, hosted by Buckinghamshire New University, was an excellent event that provided opportunities for our members to meet and discuss issues and solutions. The keynote was delivered by Philippa Pickford in her first major speech in the role of Director of Regulation at the OfS. We also heard from sector leaders from Universities UK, AdvanceHE, Public First, the Council of Deans of Health, Research England, the National Centre Universities and Business, the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement, Wonkhe, Shakespeare Martineau, and, of course, our own

members. This event, alongside our quarterly Council meetings and fortnightly heads of institution online briefings, ensures that members are up-to-date on the key issues of the day.

Our impact continues to grow and to attract new members. This past year, we were delighted to welcome Arden University, the Federation of Drama Schools, Sparsholt College and University Centre, the University of Suffolk and MetFilm School into our community. We extended our offer to some of our existing members by welcoming LAMDA and Dyson Institute into GuildHE Research, too.

Finally, I'd like to thank GuildHE for supporting me as its Chair over the past three years. Working with the Executive Group, office team and members has been an incredibly rewarding experience. Not least, it was an honour to work alongside Gordon McKenzie, GuildHE's distinguished CEO since 2015, and to appoint Gordon's successor, Brooke Storer-Church, whom we were delighted to welcome as our new CEO in June.



I now look forward to handing the baton to Professor Ken Sloan, who will take over as Chair of the GuildHE Executive Group from November, and working with him, along with the rest of the Board, as we chart our path forward.

**Professor Anthony McClaran**  
**GuildHE Chair and Vice Chancellor,**  
**St Mary's University Twickenham**

GuildHE covers a broad range of institutions: experienced or new to the sector, very small or larger institutions, mixed-economy or higher education only, and all institutions are treated equally.

Dr Deborah James, Higher Education Policy Analyst,  
St Mary's University Twickenham

# A thank you from our CEO

At GuildHE, our mission is to advocate for our members as integral institutions in our higher education sector. We deliver our mission across a variety of activities including cross-sector advocacy and policy work, direct support for our members through networks, events, and other consultancy exercises, and institutional development work focused on specific events like TEF, Access and Participation Plans, or submitting applications for Degree Awarding Powers.

We work across a number of priorities each year, based on member feedback and what we see as required across the sector to protect the diversity and distinctiveness within it. Our work this past year can be viewed across three strategic aims:

- To provide thought leadership on issues of importance to our members in order to influence national policy and processes
- To shape policies and processes within the funding and regulatory landscape to reduce barriers and challenges experienced by diverse institutions
- To provide valuable policy insights and support to our members to underpin their missions to provide high-quality higher education

The past year has been a busy one and we have achieved a great deal of positive movement within the sector on behalf of our members. The House of Lords Industry and Regulator's review of OfS adopted all of our recommendations in its final report, specifically citing GuildHE views. Our positions on regulatory burden, clarity and legal definitions within the new OFS condition on harassment (E6) directly influenced OfS to take a more risk-based approach in its implementation, while our extensive lobbying and collaborative advocacy work behind the scenes helped deliver a pause in the implementation of the Free Speech Act. Persistently vocalising our concerns on the proposed revisions to the APP process resulted in OfS revising its expectations and timelines for delivery.

We make change happen. We launched (and now co-chair) an LLE Policy Group for DfE, in collaboration with UUK, to ensure more regular engagement with the HE sector on LLE policy development. We set up the Creative Education Coalition in partnership with others to develop a manifesto document which directly informed and influenced Labour, Liberal Democrat and Creative UK pre-election policies.

We published the Value of Creative Graduates policy report which was

referenced multiple times at the Labour Party Conference and shared with the Secretary of State for Education. Our efforts with other sector bodies to save the Graduate visa route were successful and led to GuildHE participation in a UUKi-led campaign to send positive messages out to key international recruitment markets.

We improve the system for our community. Through our ongoing lobbying and advocacy, including the publication of the Expertise in Action report, we have influenced Research England to commit to reviewing the efficacy of the HEIF formula and threshold. Doing so is in part the result of our ongoing efforts, combined with other bodies such as NCCPE, to secure the continuation of public and community engagement data collection in the HE Business and Community Interaction Survey (HE-BCI). Alongside this, we spearheaded advocacy for a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by our members in implementing the draft Open Access policy, resulting in Research England offering an alternative proposal aimed at reducing bureaucracy and financial burden.

As you will see throughout this report, our team has delivered an incredible amount during a rather tumultuous year. We have experienced a change in Government. Almost at the same time, GuildHE said goodbye to a cherished, long-standing CEO and hello to a new one. Changes in leadership always introduce some level of anxiety, but they also usher in new ideas and approaches, along with opportunities to reframe purpose.



And so we've been doing that work since June. We will continue to do the types of work you see throughout this report, but with a renewed sense of purpose and focus as we turn our attention to the future. Our members are at the heart of our work. Our challenge will be to ensure we're not only delivering the most appropriate level of support to you, but also creating the conditions in which you can discover, develop and enhance your own approaches to the challenges up ahead in order to maximise the valuable contributions you all make to students, the economy and our society.

Thank you so much for your time, for your challenge and for your engagement with our work – we couldn't do it without you. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with and learn from so many talented colleagues, and to lead this fantastic team in service to our members. I look forward to working with you in the years ahead.

**Dr Brooke Storer-Church**  
**Chief Executive Officer, GuildHE**



# Priority 1

To provide thought leadership on issues of importance to our members in order to influence national policy and processes

Core to our mission is advocating on behalf of our members to influence the funding, regulatory or policy environment. Advocacy requires a deep understanding of the current political climate and emergent issues affecting our members, both within and outwith the sector. It also provides a unique platform from which we can shape discussions that influence new policy developments or revisions of existing structures. To that end, we value our role as thought leaders and look forward to building on the work done over the past year.

This year we have:

- Launched the Value of Creative Graduates report to evidence the significant contribution they make across the country, both economically and culturally.
- Launched the report at the Creative Education Summit and showcased it at the Labour Conference Creative UK Pavilion. It has been well-received in the sector and has encouraged organisations such as the Creative PEC to undertake in-depth analysis of graduate outcome data.
- Co-founded the ArtsEssential Coalition. Designed to ensure creative skills are seen as vital to our economy and society, this coalition published a manifesto to restore creative education to schools, something the Secretary of State for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport has now committed to along with the Secretary of State for Education. This was helped by our successful lobbying of CreativeUK to list skills as the number one priority on their General Election Manifesto document.
- Authored the Expertise in Action report to highlight the transformative impact of capacity-building funding for knowledge exchange and innovation at smaller, specialist institutions. Direct engagement following on from this report with Chi Onwurah, Shadow Minister for Science, Research and Innovation, led to her asking a question in the House of Commons about reviewing the HEIF threshold and a subsequent commitment from Research England to review HEIF.
- Published a set of pre-election mini-manifestos on how our member institutions can deliver a new government's goals. These centred on teacher training, the creative economy, food security and climate change, the important role our members play in place, and in delivering the necessary skills to drive regional development and growth. In our main manifesto, we made seven recommendations to an incoming government to champion a diverse higher education sector. These were released intermittently between December 2023 - May 2024, with the headline manifesto being released just prior to the election. The impact of this will be seen over the term of the next government.

- Drove new perspectives into OfS thinking on the future of teaching grant funding through conversations with OFS colleagues and by producing blogs for the sector. GuildHE views on the funding cuts announced to the 2024-25 teaching grant were sought by The Guardian. We also produced a series of blogs to provide thought leadership to the sector.
- Participated in “sector voices” panels at the RAISE annual conference, at HE Professional conferences and at other events. GuildHE’s CEO joined a keynote panel at the Festival of HE, Wonkhe’s annual conference, in early autumn alongside Professor Chris Husbands, KPMG partner Justine Andrew, and MEDR Chair Julie Lydon, chaired by Alistair Jarvis, PVC, University of London.
- Published articles in WonkHE, Research Professional and HEPI on the value of diversity within the sector, and the need to bring fresh thinking to the table in light of the drive for efficiencies coming from Government now.

GuildHE’s leadership in sector response, liaison with government departments and other bodies, events, digests and intelligence save a huge amount of time and resource. The team delivers outstanding advocacy, collegiality, professionalism and support.

Professor Ken Sloan, Vice Chancellor and CEO,  
Harper Adams University

GuildHE's preparedness to speak up on the OfS and financial issues facing the sector has been particularly important.

Professor David Green, Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive,  
University of Worcester

GuildHE has consistently proven its strategic value through its services and above all, by the team.

Clare Connor, Chief Executive, The Place,  
London Contemporary Dance School

# Priority 2

To shape policies and processes within the funding and regulatory landscape to reduce barriers and challenges experienced by diverse institutions

Alongside responding to 17 government and sector consultations, the GuildHE team has been working across several strategically important areas to influence the shape of policies and processes within the sector that affect our members. Below we highlight a number of key areas in which we were able to deliver impactful results.

This year we have:

- Published a briefing on regulation and research that highlights the challenges our members face in the current system and the lack of joined-up working between the OfS and UKRI. In response to our efforts to improve regulation, the OfS has committed 'to continue to reset our relationship with the sector we regulate to improve the effectiveness of our work' which is welcome news.
- Actively lobbied for a review of OfS's process for awarding degree awarding powers to deliver a more efficient, transparent, risk-based and fit-for-purpose process. We hope to see the impact of that lobbying in this next operational year as OfS clarifies its strategic direction and focus following Sir David Behan's review of the regulator.
- Supported members' preparations for Data Futures and successfully lobbied HESA and OfS for deadline changes when the data portal proved problematic. We worked in collaboration with HESPA on data issues and created a new communication channel for our data professionals.
- Kicked off collaborative projects with academics from the universities of Oxford and Lancaster to look at the use of data in regulations and management. To future-proof regulatory data, GuildHE has also collaborated on a project with JISC, UUK, and the AoC on the future data needs of a tertiary LLE system.
- Contributed to HESA's major review of the Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey (HE-BCI) on behalf of our community. In response to our advocacy, HESA agreed to maintain public and community engagement data collection and committed to improving metrics. This ensures the ongoing recognition and measurement of these vital activities. Additionally, a sector-wide spin-outs census has been implemented to enhance understanding in this area.
- We negotiated changes to funding round criteria that then enabled three members to achieve Expanding Excellence in England (E3) awards in the second round. GuildHE also supported institutions' applications by providing roundtables with funders, triaging queries, and enabling peer-to-peer exchange focussing on avoiding pitfalls of applications made in round one.



- Improved engagement with UKRI and attended workshops about the future of research funding, making the case for inclusive practices that enable funding to be achieved by all types of institutions and researchers. We have hosted colleagues from The Funding Service and Better Simpler Funding Programme at UKRI, ensuring that the needs of smaller institutions are considered in funding policy development.
- Emphasised the potential burdens and advocated for a balanced approach to implementing the Free Speech Act. Our advocacy contributed to the incoming Labour Government's decision to pause the Act's implementation, reducing the regulatory burden on our members.
- Submitted regular written evidence to the Education Select Committee's inquiry on teacher recruitment and retention and wrote to the Minister about our concerns. This culminated in the publication of the GuildHE Teacher Education Manifesto in December to coincide with the Education Select Committee evidence session with the new Minister for Schools, for which many of the questions came directly from issues raised by GuildHE. The Labour Party's commitment to deliver 6,500 new teachers was a response to the work of TEAG and other sector organisations to highlight our concerns.
- Worked closely with Universities UK and CUC to develop a new governance framework to help senior leaders and governors identify and manage risk in franchised provision. This tool provided additional assurance to Ministers and officials that the sector is able to self-regulate a key area of risk to quality and standards in the sector. This action mitigated the initial inclinations for regulatory action suggested by the DfE.
- Ensured the Graduate Route was preserved by submitting evidence to MPs and Peers, government departments and the Migration Advisory Committee. We also ran a short research project on the scale of international programmes at GuildHE member institutions to build our evidence base.

**GuildHE's quality of campaigning, lobbying, thought leadership and information and intelligence gathering and sharing is very high.**

Professor Nick Braisby, Vice Chancellor,  
Buckinghamshire New University

**Membership extends the institution's visibility  
as a provider of higher education.**

Dr Andrew Gower, Principal and CEO,  
Morley College London

# Priority 3

To provide valuable policy insights and support to our members to underpin their missions to provide high-quality higher education

We host 15 networks and 4 special interest groups (SIGs). These networks and SIGs offer a space for our members' academic and professional services staff to connect, build a community of practice, and share experiences. We also use these channels to inform members of policy developments, promote best practices, and gather input to inform GuildHE's policy agenda. Each network and SIG has a group email through which members communicate with each other and we share policy updates, draft consultation responses and other relevant information.

This year we have:

- Hosted more than 45 network events to provide space for our members to engage peers working across a wide variety of institutional types.
- Launched our inaugural EDI symposium in October 2023, which was recorded and circulated to members.
- Curated a bespoke and affordable Leadership Programme for EDI and Widening Participation Practitioners, delivered by Inclusion Revolution. This work was developed specifically for GuildHE members with a focus on how members can deliver successful and transformational APPs, bringing a whole institution approach and connecting to wider organisational EDI strategies.
- Designed and hosted multiple writing workshops alongside providing a peer review processes for developing Access and Participation Plans. To enhance this work, we invited the OfS Director for Fair Access to attend a three-hour workshop in December 2023 to listen to members' challenges and opportunities within the new expectations.
- Secured greater support from TASO for providers with smaller student cohorts, and are looking forward to the publication of these new projects to better support the evaluation of outreach and student support activity.
- Introduced three EDI Lunchtime Learning sessions for all staff and students at our member institutions. These provide an opportunity to hear from professionals and those with lived experiences of discrimination or barriers to inclusivity and equality. They resulted in the articulation of positive steps to take to become better allies which could be shared across member institutions.
- Collaborated with Student Minds to advocate for a more flexible Mental Health charter and program, conducted research to understand our member's services, and produced a briefing on mental health inequalities. We also analysed the different charters and toolkits in the sector which helped us provide recommendations and support to our members through our student support network.

- Interviewed members for a blog scrutinising the motives of the DSA review, leading to increased policy attention on reasonable adjustments and inclusive design and also to public considerations of what this means for members delivering specialist, practical or high-intensity courses.
- Worked closely with Landex to highlight the importance of land-based education and its significance to tackling food security and the climate crisis. We jointly wrote to Ministers Halfon and Spencer, former Minister of State for Food, Farming and Fisheries to flag these issues. We will be picking up these interests with the new government.
- Championed the contribution of self-funded and part-time PGR students to the wider ecology of R&D. This has led to specific actions promised by UKRI to investigate access to part-time provision, and the conditions for students with disabilities, and children and caring responsibilities.
- Pioneered a sold-out Doctoral Festival held at University of Winchester, hosted a Creative Academic Writing retreat with sought after researcher-developer Dr Helen Kara, and designed and launched the Global Majority Network for PGR Students.
- Launched the Skills Network to create a community to share practice, surface challenges and discuss issues related to the technical education landscape including higher and degree apprenticeships, lifelong learning and employability. The network welcomed speakers from DfE and ESFA to discuss the barriers to access for apprentice funding support. This network was also consulted by DfE on policy developments via the LLE Provider Working Group, which GuildHE now co-chairs.
- Sought alignments in the concordats landscape to reduce bureaucratic burden and maximise effective use of datasets for multiple research culture purposes. GuildHE will remain on the KEC Advisory Group as it moves to Praxis Auril and will continue to engage with the review.
- Curated a successful joint event at the Wellcome Collection between the GHER Research Leads and the KE, Innovation and Place Network. We welcomed REF Director, Rebecca Fairbairn, to discuss the upcoming cycle, including the new People, Culture and Environment pilot. The event also included a workshop led by the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) focused on designing the future of the research and innovation system.

**GuildHE provides information and intelligence in a timely fashion and the opportunity to shape it.**

Professor Peter McCaffery, Vice Chancellor,  
Royal Agricultural University

# In focus: sector guardianship

As a formal representative body of the UK HE sector, GuildHE holds a number of responsibilities to the sector and organises activities to strengthen collaboration and collective policy insight.

As a Company Member of sector agencies including AdvanceHE, QAA, HESA, UCEA and Jisc, we appoint nominees and observers to their Boards, while our CEO sits on several of their Boards as well. We work closely with them to better understand the needs of the higher education sector and to undertake collaborative work.

The Teacher Education Advisory Group (TEAG), which we convene on behalf of GuildHE and UUK, continues to provide sector leadership and opportunities for policy influence over the teacher training system. We will look to extend this influence over this next year.

We have also published a number of new and updated sector wide publications which include:

- A Franchise Governance Framework
- Admissions Code of Practice
- University-owned Accommodation Code of Practice and governance approach
- QAA-funded research into international pathways

Over the past year, we have set up a group in collaboration with DfE and UUK on the implementation of the Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Act 2023. This enables the sector to work collaboratively with DfE on the future of the LLE policy.

GuildHE is a serious voice in the sector; well respected.

Professor Paul Gough, Vice Chancellor,  
Arts University Bournemouth

# Looking ahead

The autumn is always a busy time for those of us working in higher education, but it is also one which invites us to look ahead as the year draws to a close. The team recently agreed a set of four strategic objectives that will shape the work we do between now and next summer and then beyond.

Those objectives are:

<b>Objective 1</b>
<b>To grow and support our community to thrive in the 21st century</b>
<b>Objective 2</b>
<b>To strengthen GHE's voice and raise the profile of our members</b>
<b>Objective 3</b>
<b>To be bold advocates for and champions of a diverse sector</b>
<b>Objective 4</b>
<b>To enhance an equitable, innovative and purposeful organisation so that we can deliver positive and sustainable change on behalf of our members</b>

These will be reviewed next summer, in conversation with the Executive Group, to enable GuildHE to be agile, responsive and innovative in our approach to the needs of our members and our broader sector. Our focus will be squarely on raising our members' profiles, increasing GuildHE influence within the sector and Government, and deepening our capacity for thought leadership across the sector.

We will look to capitalise on the work undertaken ahead of and at the Labour Party Conference this year which put us in good stead to attend breakfast roundtables with Secretary of State for Education Bridget Philipson and Minister of State for Skills Jacqui Smith.

GuildHE's CEO also sat on a CreativeUK panel to discuss the value of creative graduates to the UK economy, alongside LIPA's Principal and CEO (and GuildHE Board member) Sean McNamara and Christoph Lindner, Principal, Royal College of Art.

Labour party conference social events, including a University Alliance dinner with Jacqui Smith to which our CEO was invited, rounded out an exceptional week of engagements that has yielded excellent relationship leads and helped raise GuildHE's profile amongst influencers across the tertiary landscape.

Just recently, GuildHE's CEO joined key sector speakers to discuss the fees increase, university efficiencies, and the outcome of the US election on a podcast for Wonkhe. We expect to pursue many more opportunities like these.

Going forward, collaboration is key. We'll look to facilitate and convene members (as well as those beyond) to address barriers and find new ways in which you might collaborate in the interest of your students or financial bottom lines. To that end, GuildHE and UUK are discussing now how joint activity in that space may help extend each organisation's influence and reach as we seek to support the sector.

We will be keen to embrace new thinking and remain open to challenge to ensure we're doing the best work we can with you in mind. To support that work, we look forward to launching a brand new GuildHE website in early 2025 and our LinkedIn is now a thriving channel of news, discussion and debate by key sector leaders with over 2,100 followers and growing fast, so stay tuned and stay in touch.

By your side,

Brooke and the GuildHE team

*The most valuable aspect of GuildHE from my perspective is the accessibility, expertise and support from colleagues within the organisation.*

*Professor Sean McNamara, Principal and CEO,  
The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts*

*As a very small institution, we don't have staff capacity to attend all OfS meetings or consultations. GuildHE helps us keep abreast of what is happening in the sector, focussed on what is important and to lobby on our behalf.*

*Niamh Dowling, Principal,  
Royal Academy of Dramatic Art*



## Public Benefit Statement

The Trustees have reviewed the activities of the Charity in the light of the guidance published by the Charity Commission on public benefit. The Trustees are satisfied that GuildHE's activities are for the public benefit. GuildHE provides public benefit to those planning to undertake, those undertaking and those with an interest in the outcomes of UK higher education as a consequence of the assistance it gives its members institutions. Through the direct advice, information and comment it provides into the public domain and into policy frameworks, it informs the public debate and raises public awareness of a range of educational and other professionally-based issues at subject level. By supporting the heads of institutions, it enables them to lead their charitable and educational organisations more effectively. As a consequence GuildHE has an impact on the delivery of higher education through good practice exchange and advice on policy. The organisations that GuildHE members lead provide a range of higher education opportunities to students from the UK and abroad; and they have public benefit impacts on the cultural, social and intellectual development of their communities.

GuildHE  
Woburn House  
20 Tavistock Square  
London  
WC1H 9HB

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0203 393 6134  
info@guildhe.ac.uk  
@guildhe

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Charity No. 1012218

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[www.guildhe.ac.uk](http://www.guildhe.ac.uk)

The logo for GuildHE, featuring the word "Guild" in white and "HE" in green, with a stylized green bar above the "E".

GuildHE