



UHR Conference 2025

Online 13 - 15 May

#UHR25

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Beyond Pay: How Leading Universities Use Reward to Boost Engagement and Retention



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Reward Gateway | Edenred

The Higher Education workforce landscape

1

Workload & burnout

57% of university staff are unhappy about spending their career in higher education, and **88%** have no optimism for the future of the sector. (UCU)

2

Financial strain

More than a third of elite UK universities were compelled to enforce staff cuts in 2024, with severance spending rising by over 20%. (FT)

3

Retention pressures

In the 2022–23 academic year, **8.4%** of academic staff left their positions, marking a 15% increase from the previous year. (HESA)

4

Competition for talent

72% of HE HR leaders say attracting and retaining top talent is harder than five years ago. (Advance HE HR in HE Survey)



78% of people who frequently feel appreciated at work are motivated

...compared to only **37% of those who rarely/never feel appreciated.**

Reward Gateway | Edenred survey of 2,026 employees and 1,001 HR managers, Jan 2024



81% of UK employees
who rarely or never felt
appreciated considered
leaving their company in the
last 6 months

...compared to **only 40% of**
those who did feel
appreciated.

Reward Gateway | Edenred survey of 2,026
employees and 1,001 HR managers, Jan 2024

- **Only 10%**
of UK employees feel engaged at work.

**Gallup's State of the Global Workplace 2024 Report*

What keeps HR leaders in universities up at night?

High turnover
in early-career
roles

Pressure to
compete with
private sector
for talent

Stagnant pay
structures and
limited budget
for flexibility

Disconnected
communication
across
departments

Limited
visibility of
recognition
efforts

Beyond pay: A different approach is needed

Traditional model

Salary increases
Annual reviews
Long-service awards

Modern expectations

Continuous recognition
Personalisation
Wellbeing support
Inclusive rewards

The visibility problem in rewards

Poorly communicated
total reward packages

Staff unaware of
non-pay benefits like
wellbeing & recognition

Recognition lacks
consistency across teams or
departments

Rewards entitlements lost
in policy documents

Lack of personalisation

Missed opportunities in
onboarding

No holistic reward
statement

POLL - Option 1:

Which factor do you think most influences the effectiveness of reward programs at universities?

- Alignment with university values and goals
- Clear communication about available rewards
- Fairness and transparency in how rewards are distributed
- The variety of reward options available

POLL - Option 2:

What is the biggest barrier to the successful implementation of reward programmes in your institution?

- Limited resources or budget
- Lack of institutional support
- Staff perception of rewards being unfair or biased
- Resistance to change or traditional practices.

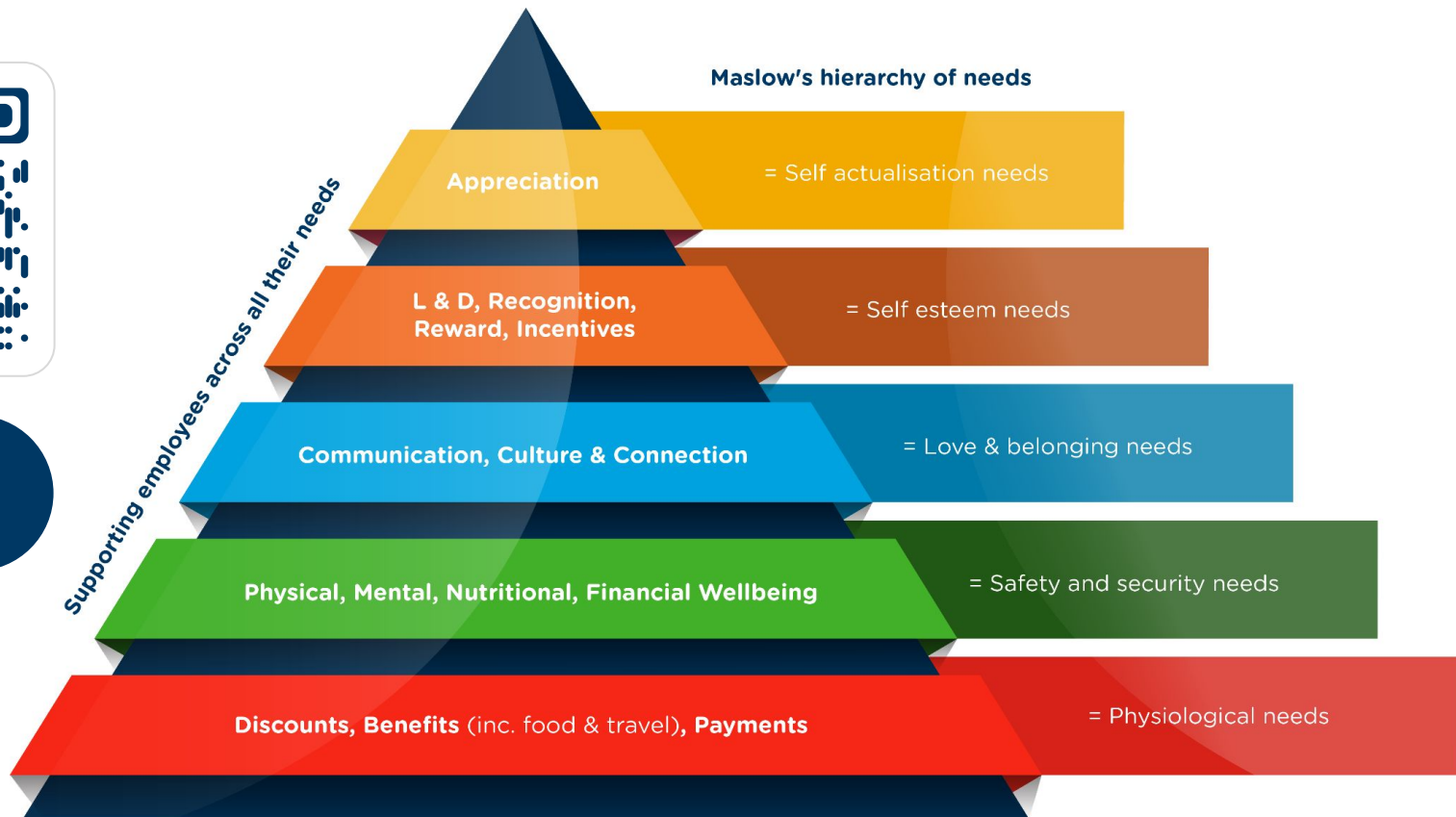


How do
we push
through?

The Total Employee Experience



Download
the EVC



Insights from our partnerships with universities



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Q&A





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