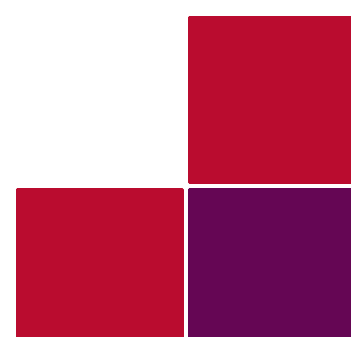


ANNUAL REPORT





Introduction

The UHR Annual Review is a moment to pause and reflect: to celebrate the achievements of the higher education people profession, and to consider the role UHR continues to play in supporting universities and their staff to build more inclusive, equitable and high-performing workplaces.

Last year, I wrote that I had never seen a more turbulent and challenging period for higher education - and those pressures have not eased. Legislative developments such as the Employment Rights Act, alongside evolving case law, regulation and debate around gender, equality and freedom of speech, have only increased the complexity of the landscape. In this environment, UHR's role has never been more important: equipping and supporting people professionals to navigate change with confidence, while continuing to deliver the essential, day-to-day work that keeps universities running.

Organisations that endure - and thrive - are those that stay true to their purpose while continually adapting to new realities. Over the past year, UHR has done exactly that: delivering consistently against its core objectives while evolving its offer to meet emerging needs.

Despite sector-wide challenges, UHR has continued to provide high-quality services for members - HE providers and their people and culture teams - while strengthening its position as a trusted partner within and beyond the sector. Our annual online Conference reached record levels of engagement, with more than 2,800 delegates joining live and many more accessing recordings and resources afterwards. Our in-person Summit for senior HR leaders, held in Liverpool in 2025 and Birmingham in 2026, remains a unique space for reflection, collaboration and forward thinking.

We have also enhanced our UHR Connects events in response to member feedback, creating more accessible, cost-effective opportunities for HR professionals to learn, connect and grow. Over 100 institutions contributed to our biennial HR Remit Survey, published in December 2025 - an invaluable benchmarking resource supporting data-informed decision-making at a time of constrained resources.

Our Special Interest Networks have grown to over 1,250 members, fostering collaboration and the sharing of good practice on pressing challenges. This year, the launch of the HR Business Partners' Network quickly demonstrated its value, becoming one of our most active and engaged communities. Alongside this, our established programmes - such as the UHR Awards, TrailBlazers and our Mentoring Framework - continue to support professional development, recognition and connection across the sector.

At the same time, we have introduced new initiatives designed to respond to current and future challenges. Our free, in-person AI workshops have brought colleagues together to tackle shared “wicked problems” and explore practical applications of emerging technologies. The ongoing Time to Transform series is encouraging senior HR leaders to think differently - looking beyond business-as-usual and beyond the sector itself to reimagine approaches to everything from pensions to organisational culture.

We have also launched UHR Knowledge Boards - real-time, collaborative spaces where members can share insights and resources on key themes such as AI, data and wellbeing. These reflect our commitment to strengthening data capability and supporting colleagues in navigating increasingly complex professional environments.

To support continued development, we provided every member institution with a £500 CPD voucher, ensuring that teams could access learning opportunities even as budgets tighten. Our fixed-term Projects and Research Officer has further strengthened our offer, providing valuable insight into sector practice, analysing data, and signposting resources to support our members’ evolving needs.



In January 2026, we published our strategic plan to 2030, setting a clear direction for the years ahead. Our goal remains unchanged: to improve people management in higher education through the development, connection and resourcing of people professionals. As part of this, we are deepening our commitment to improving representation and career progression for under-represented groups within the HR profession, combining data, evidence and lived experience to drive meaningful change.

Collaboration continues to be central to our impact. We work closely with partners including Universities UK, UCEA, Jisc and Advance HE, as well as with the CIPD, HPMA and PPMA through our Memorandum of Understanding - supporting the flow of knowledge, skills and people across sectors. Our work with Professional HE Services (PHES) colleagues also delivers tangible benefits for institutions.

The political and financial climate remains exceptionally challenging. But UHR will continue to stand alongside universities and their people teams - supporting them to act with integrity, professionalism and purpose. Because ultimately, this work is about people, education, and shaping a better future.

Helen Scott
UHR Executive Director



Message from the Chair of the UHR Executive

Celebrating All We've Achieved Together

As I reflect on the past year, I am struck by both the challenges our sector continues to face and the resilience, creativity, and generosity of the UHR community. Throughout the year, I have seen colleagues rise to these challenges with determination, finding innovative ways to support their people, lead organisational change, and strengthen their communities.



This is what makes UHR so special. We are more than a professional network; we are a community that learns from one another, shares openly, and supports each other through both opportunities and challenges. Over the past year, it has been a pleasure to see that community continue to grow and engage more deeply than ever before, with increasing participation across our events and networks.

There have been many highlights. The UHR Trailblazers programme has offered an inspiring glimpse into the future of our profession. This year's Conference welcomed more members than ever before – with over 2,800 members attending live, and our Senior Summit sold out, reflecting the strength of engagement across our community and the value members place on coming together. It has also been exciting to see UHR continue to push boundaries through initiatives such as Time to Transform and our emerging AI workshops, demonstrating our ambition to explore new ideas and equip our members for the future.

I am incredibly proud to have served as Chair of the UHR Executive for the past two years and, as I come to the end of my 11 years of involvement with the Executive, I do so with a great sense of gratitude. It has been a privilege to work alongside so many talented and committed people who give their time and expertise to support the sector.

Finally, I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the UHR staff team, whose hard work and dedication make everything we do possible. In particular, I want to recognise Helen, whose leadership has helped take UHR from strength to strength and whose vision and commitment continue to drive the organisation forward.

The achievements celebrated throughout this Annual Review belong to all of us, and I look forward to seeing what our community will accomplish together next.

Margaret Ayers

Chair of the UHR Executive

Chief People Officer at Canterbury Christ Church University

UHR Annual Conference 2026

Connection, Conversation and Community

Our annual conference remains a cornerstone of the UHR calendar, offering an inclusive space for members to hear fresh perspectives, exchange ideas and strengthen the sense of community that underpins our network.

From 12 to 14 May 2026, we welcomed members from institutions across the UK to the virtual conference. This year's event saw record-breaking participation, with 121 institutions registering to take part in a rich programme of professional development, thought-provoking discussion and shared learning. More members attended live than ever before, with over 2,800 joining the sessions in real time. Notably, 29% of members attending the conference were first-time attendees, demonstrating that we are continuing to reach new audiences and extend the impact of UHR across the sector.



2800
Attendees

“
Great that it's online so that HR professionals of all levels can attend and benefit
”

29%

New
Attendees

“
For someone new to HE getting access to this broad scope of hot topics has been excellent
”

As always, our Annual Conference brought together an exciting mix of voices from both within and beyond the higher education sector, ensuring delegates were challenged by new perspectives and inspired by ideas and lived experiences. From leadership and cultural intelligence to resilience and personal growth, this year's plenary speakers encouraged us to think differently about the opportunities and challenges facing people leadership in HE.



Ritika Wadhwa

Ritika brought a thought-provoking perspective on cultural intelligence and inclusive leadership, drawing on her extensive global experience to explore how leaders can better navigate complexity, difference and change in increasingly diverse organisations.

Stuart Baldwin

Stuart energised delegates with his engaging and practical approach to leadership, encouraging us to “Live BIG” by embracing optimism, confidence and purposeful action in both our professional and personal lives.



Nicolas Hamilton



Nicolas delivered a powerful and deeply personal keynote on resilience, determination and overcoming adversity, sharing how he defied expectations to build a career in elite motorsport and challenging delegates to rethink perceived limitations.

“

I felt incredibly energised and inspired by this session to make real changes in my life

”

Alongside our inspiring plenary sessions, the conference featured a rich programme of breakout sessions and specialist workshops, offering members fresh insights into some of the most pressing challenges and emerging opportunities facing HR teams. Some of the most popular sessions after the plenaries reflected priorities, with particularly strong engagement for topics such as *Organisational Change*, *AI*, *Employment Law*, *Employment Rights Act*, *Delivering Change and Transformation*, *Performance and Colleague Engagement*. The strong attendance across these sessions highlighted members' appetite for practical insight, strategic thinking and future-focused discussion as they navigate an increasingly complex sector.

“

The range of options/sessions to dial into over the days really is fantastic value for money, having structure to show the pathways in particular is amazing

”

One of the standout moments of the conference was, as always, the UHR Awards for Excellence in HR. Celebrating the incredible work taking place across our member institutions, the awards are a powerful reminder of the innovation, dedication and impact being delivered by HR teams. It is always inspiring to recognise both our winners and runners-up and to share in celebrating their achievements.

The virtual format continues to add huge value to the conference experience, making CPD accessible to people professionals across the UK. It also enables us to record sessions, ensuring valuable content remains available long after the conference has ended. With 76% of members planning to watch sessions on demand, and over 500 views already, it is encouraging to see members engaging with content around busy schedules, enabling learning to continue beyond the event.

“

I love the format of the conference and I thought the topics covered were pertinent and relevant to the sector and the challenges we face. I'm also really glad that recordings are available

”



Rated 4.2/5 Stars Overall

We are hugely grateful to our speakers, partners and member institutions whose support and contributions help make the conference such a valuable and rewarding experience for our community.

The UHR Awards for Excellence in HR

The UHR Awards 2026 celebrated the outstanding work taking place across the higher education sector, shining a light on the people, teams and initiatives making a real difference. This year's entries reflected the passion, creativity and dedication of HR professionals, all working to build stronger, more inclusive and people-centred institutions. We were inspired by the quality and impact of the submissions, and extend our sincere thanks to everyone who shared their work.

By celebrating these achievements, we not only recognise excellence but also inspire learning, collaboration and progress across our community.



“

Winning the award was a real honour and completely overwhelming – in all honesty I felt humbled just to be nominated. For me, the recognition is a reflection of the incredible team I am part of at Northumbria, I'm so lucky to work with such great colleagues and be involved in really interesting projects. It's the collaboration and willingness to support one another that really makes a difference, and is what makes working in this sector so rewarding.

”

HR Star 2026, Angela Carter at Northumbria University

The UHR Award Winners

Congratulations to the UHR Awards 2026 winners, representing:

- **Manchester Metropolitan University** - The UHR Award for Organisational Transformation, Effectiveness and Performance
- **De Montfort University** - The UHR Award for Culture Change and Organisational Development
- **University of Birmingham** - The UHR Award for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- **University of Manchester** - The UHR Award for Reward, Resourcing and Recruitment
- **University College London** - The UHR Award for Wellbeing
- **Aston University** - The UHR Award for Digital and Technological Innovation and Change
- **Manchester Metropolitan University** - The UHR Award for Exceptional HR
- **Angela Carter at Northumbria University** - The UHR Award for HR Star

Congratulations to our runners up, whose projects stood out across highly competitive fields:



Runners Up

Aston University (in 2 categories)
Manchester Metropolitan University
University of Birmingham
University of Salford (in 2 categories)
UWE Bristol

Shortlisted

Anglia Ruskin University
Aston University
Coventry University
De Montfort University
Edinburgh Napier University
King's College London
Loughborough University
Manchester Metropolitan University
Northumbria University
The University of Law
University College London
University of Birmingham
University of Bristol
University of Derby
University of Edinburgh

University of Hull
University of Manchester
University of Reading
University of Roehampton
University of Salford
UWE Bristol



The UHR Award for Organisational Transformation, Effectiveness and Performance

Manchester Metropolitan University

Empowering leaders, transforming education – a new innovative model

Centre for Learning Enhancement and Educational Development

Manchester Metropolitan University's Innovation Scholar Scheme is a sector-leading People and Organisational Development initiative transforming strategic educational change. Since 2023, it has empowered staff to lead innovation, strengthened leadership and collaboration, improved student outcomes, reduced awarding gaps, and positioned the university as a pioneer in inclusive, evidence-informed education.



The UHR Award for Culture Change and Organisational Development

De Montfort University

Leading and Managing at DMU - Embedding A Refreshed Approach to Empowering Excellence



People Services Team

This initiative introduced a new leadership and management framework to support our ambition of becoming an Empowering University. Co-created with senior stakeholders, it defined clear role expectations, behaviours, pay and performance processes, aligning leadership standards with recruitment, development, progression and organisational excellence across the full leadership lifecycle.

The UHR Award for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

University of Birmingham

Professional Services Leaders of Colour Programme

Equality Diversity and Inclusion Team

The Professional Services Leaders of Colour Programme is a sector-leading pilot supporting racially minoritised senior staff across regional universities. Designed to strengthen leadership, representation and peer support, it significantly improved confidence, belonging and career clarity, demonstrating the value of collaborative, inclusive approaches to developing diverse leadership in higher education.



The UHR Award for Reward, Resourcing and Recruitment

University of Manchester

Purple Place: a new home for Benefits and Recognition

Reward Team

Purple Place has transformed reward, benefits and recognition at the University of Manchester, creating a single platform supporting over 12,000 colleagues. With major increases in engagement, spending and peer recognition, it has strengthened colleague experience and demonstrated how innovation, collaboration and thoughtful design can drive meaningful cultural change.



The UHR Award for Wellbeing

University College London

UCL Mental Health Training for Student-Facing Staff

Workplace Health (Wellbeing)

Supporting the Supporters is a strategic mental health training initiative that strengthens staff wellbeing and student support. Rapidly adopted across the institution, it improved staff confidence, referral knowledge and safeguarding consistency. By building capability and resilience, it demonstrates how HR-led innovation can deliver measurable, sustainable impact at scale.



The UHR Award for Digital and Technological Innovation and Change

Aston University

One Aston Thrive: Employee Experience Platform

Human Resources and Organisational Development Department

One Aston Thrive is Aston University's inclusive digital platform for wellbeing, benefits and recognition. Achieving over 80% activation in four months, it improved access, boosted engagement, and delivered significant savings for colleagues and the university. It strengthens wellbeing, appreciation and belonging while supporting Aston's Great Place to Work ambition.



The UHR Award for Exceptional HR

Manchester Metropolitan University

Transforming Lives Together: Creating a great place to work

People and Organisational Development

Manchester Metropolitan University's People and Organisational Development transformation has reshaped colleague experience through innovative, data-driven initiatives spanning recruitment, development, wellbeing and inclusion. Strengthened by a sector-leading employee value proposition, it has improved engagement, representation and resilience, creating sustainable cultural change and a model for the wider sector.



The UHR Award for HR Star

Northumbria University

Angela Carter

Angela is an exceptional HR professional whose expertise, compassion and resilience make her a true HR Star. Trusted for her leadership through complex change, she combines professionalism with warmth, inspiring colleagues through her strength, integrity and generosity while shaping a positive, high-performing and deeply people-centred culture.

Continued Professional Development

Supporting Our Community Through Transformation

This year UHR's CPD programme required vision and creativity to support member institutions to continue to access high-quality opportunities at a time when the budgets allocated to training and development continued to be squeezed. To address the on-going challenge, we concluded that the amount of paid for activity would be limited whilst also introducing a £500 CPD voucher for every member institution. By doing so UHR remained committed to delivering accessible, high-quality learning opportunities that make a real difference.

A total of £67k was spent on the CPD voucher scheme, with the majority of institutions using the funding towards a team place at the Annual Conference. A further large group used the voucher for the Senior Summit with others spending on Connects, or single places on a handful of our other programmes.

Being mindful of budget sensitivity resulted in a few programs being offered in 2025/26 – Delivering Impact as an HR Administrator – with cost kept minimal on this programme as it is delivered online, largely by UHR staff, and the final face to face day was once again supported and sponsored by Mills and Reeve who generously hosted the session in their London offices. And, we ran Developing Confident Data Partners due to popular demand.

“

Very well organised, really relevant topics and an extremely welcoming, friendly and informed team, I look forward to future events

”

Being mindful of budget sensitivity resulted in a few programs being offered in 2025/26 – Delivering Impact as an HR Administrator – with cost kept minimal on this programme as it is delivered online, largely by UHR staff, and the final face to face day was once again supported and sponsored by Mills and Reeve who generously hosted the session in their London offices. And, we ran Developing Confident Data Partners due to popular demand.

We continued to respond to the needs of our members with the creation of an occasional series for HR Directors :“Time to Transform”. To date six events have resulted in over 200 places being booked by HR Directors and their equivalent with webinars addressing a range of topics such as the Radical Collaboration Playbook, the Future of Pensions, Strategic Workforce Planning and Addressing Change Vulnerability. KPMG, Mills and Reeve, People Puzzles, IES, Northumbria University and Dean Morley have all given their time for these webinars. The series continues with topics and speakers being brought to our senior members as the opportunities arise.

The Awards Showcase format proved a great success with over 400 places booked, an increase of 50 from 2024, across the fortnight of learning sessions delivered by our winner and runner up institutions. The success of the format will be repeated for our 2026 awards.

Wise Wednesdays once again gave a spotlight to employment law issues and our 9 legal partners ran sessions across nine weeks in the autumn, with an incredible 1520 places being booked over the programme. These sessions are recorded and placed on the website, so the reach continues to grow. Our legal partners continue to be one of the bedrocks of our activity – offering venues, supporting conference and the senior summit, and delivering engaging, knowledgeable, and thought-provoking sessions on a variety of topics throughout the year.

A third cohort of 16 delegates graduated from the TrailBlazers programme in February, and we remain grateful to Leatham Green and Oracle for supporting such an amazing, and challenging, programme that is helping leaders of the future really lean into their potential.

Finally, our place within PHES continues to bring value for CPD with access to the wide range of events delivered by other SIOs. We see many members engaging particularly with BUFDG and HESPA programmes and the ease with which this can be achieved through our one umbrella organisation is of real benefit to members, who can access webinars on global mobility, employment taxes, payroll, workforce planning and more.

This partnership also helps deliver Introduction to HE – an opportunity for all professional services staff new to HE, needing to grasp the complexities and political environment of HE, and the implications for operating and influencing effectively.



Naomi Holloway
CPD Manager

UHR Connects



Originally developed to ensure members continued to have opportunities to meet in person after our Annual Conference moved to an online format, UHR Connects has become an important part of our events programme in its own right. Combining practical learning with the benefits of face-to-face connection, these events bring colleagues together closer to home to explore sector challenges, hear expert insights, share good practice and build relationships with peers from across higher education.

“
The professional organisation was top notch and event was well structured. The selection of speakers was excellent.
”

In a year when both time and budgets have remained under pressure, it was particularly encouraging to see such strong engagement from members. Our North and South events reached full capacity, while our Scotland event was more popular than ever, achieving 96% capacity. This level of participation demonstrates the value members place on stepping away from their day-to-day roles to exchange ideas, learn from one another and strengthen their professional networks. The programme reflects our commitment to making high-quality development and networking opportunities accessible to all members, while minimising the need for extensive travel and overnight stays. Most importantly, Connects continues to foster the sense of community, collaboration and peer support that sits at the heart of UHR.

“
*Just a great big thank you.
We're new to UHR and I'll be recommending it among all my relevant networks and look forward to more in person events. It really was a great event, that I'm still buzzing about 2 days later.*
”

UHR TrailBlazers

Nurturing Talent Across the Sector

I cannot overstate the difference it has already made.



TrailBlazers continues to be one of the most inspiring parts of the UHR programme, shining a spotlight on the emerging talent shaping the future of HR in higher education. This year, we were delighted to welcome a new cohort of delegates, bringing together people practitioners from across the sector, all eager to learn, challenge themselves and grow as leaders. Their energy, curiosity and willingness to engage fully with the programme was incredibly impressive and served as a reminder that these are the future leaders who will help shape and transform our profession.

Over the course of the programme, delegates developed their confidence, broadened their perspectives and strengthened their leadership capability through honest reflection, challenging conversations and shared learning. It was inspiring to watch individuals grow in confidence and ambition, supporting one another while developing a clearer sense of the impact they want to have. TrailBlazers continues to demonstrate the importance of investing in future talent, and we are excited to see where this exceptional cohort goes next.

“

One thing I've taken away from the programme is that I can achieve whatever I want to achieve and I have the skills within me to do whatever I like, all I need to do is believe in myself.

”

The impact of TrailBlazers extends well beyond the event itself. Participants continue to stay connected through an active Microsoft Teams community, where they support one another and share opportunities for ongoing learning and development.

We are particularly proud to celebrate the following achievements from this year's cohort:

Senior HR Summit (June 2026)

Congratulations to Amy Mills (University of Leeds) and Sharna Piercy (University of the Arts London) on securing places.

CUPA Conference (October 2026)

Emma McDougall (University of Glasgow) will represent the cohort at this prestigious international event.

UHR Executive Co-Opted Place (2026-27)

Chloe Evans (University College London) has been appointed to the UHR Executive, further strengthening the TrailBlazers' voice in strategic decision-making.

As we look ahead to 2027, we are committed to creating even more opportunities for TrailBlazers and our wider membership to grow, connect and succeed. From expanding career exposure and involvement opportunities to celebrating excellence and delivering meaningful development, we are excited about what comes next—and we welcome your ideas at cpd@uhr.ac.uk.

“

Don't hesitate - do it! This was such an incredible and insightful course, without giving too much away it isn't a standard (boring) management course; it is reflective, insightful and most of all fun!

”

UHR Senior HR Summit

A Trusted Space for Senior Leadership

96%
would attend
again!

A MASSIVE thank you to the UHR team for creating such an engaging and informative event!!



Our Senior HR Summit took place in Liverpool once again and proved to be a standout event in the UHR calendar, bringing together over 100 senior leaders from across the sector for two days of dedicated learning, reflection and connection. At a time when higher education continues to face significant challenge and uncertainty, we believe it is more important than ever to create space for senior HR leaders to step away from day-to-day pressures, think strategically and explore bold, creative approaches to the issues facing institutions. The Summit provides a valuable opportunity not only to hear diverse perspectives and engage in thought-provoking discussion, but also to share experiences and ideas with peers who truly understand the complexity of senior leadership in HE.

It is always a pleasure to welcome so many returning delegates year after year, alongside first-time attendees. Seeing familiar faces return creates a genuine sense of community and friendship within the senior HR network and is testament to both the quality of the event and the trust members place in UHR to provide a safe, supportive and inspiring space for meaningful conversation. With 96% of delegates wanting to attend again and 94% feeling it offered value for money, we are proud to see the Summit continue to deliver an experience that members clearly value and look forward to returning to each year.

“

“Everything was brilliant. It was a great event. This was the best one I have attended so far. Really good sessions. Very well picked. And Helen was a great MC!”

”



“

“The sessions were clearly relevant and useful, with ample opportunity to collaborate and network.”

”

Julie Baxter

Activities and Events Officer



It's been a great year for events and other CPD offerings – particularly with the introduction of the £500 voucher for HEPs to use towards CPD activity.

We've seen continued strong support for the UHR Conference and Senior HR Summit in Liverpool and the team has delivered four in-person AI workshops (with 3 more later in 2026) and three in-person UHR Connects events across the UK – confirming our commitment to offer a diverse range of opportunities for all members.

It has been particularly rewarding to see so many familiar faces returning to our events, while also welcoming new members into the UHR community. The enthusiasm to engage is a reminder of the value our members place on connecting with peers and supporting one another and it's great to be an integral part of that.

UHR AI Workshops

Connecting, Collaborating and Navigating AI Together

*“—
thought provoking, inspiring and motivating
—”*



Rated 4.8/5 Stars Overall

When a member suggested we create space for people professionals to explore AI together, we knew we had something worth building. What began as a great idea from within our community has grown into a workshop series we're genuinely proud of, and the response has been remarkable.

So far, we've delivered four workshops across Bristol, Edinburgh, Nottingham and Bolton, welcoming over 150 members through the doors. Each event has been free to attend, hosted generously by a member institution, and co-facilitated by colleagues from within our network - and we're incredibly grateful to everyone who has made that possible. A highlight at every session has been hearing from a local expert speaker, giving us insight into AI application that's both cutting-edge and grounded in the HE context we all know.

Emma Brookes
Strategic Projects and Research
Manager



The real power of these workshops, though, lies in what happens in the room. Delegates have come together to:

- Maximise opportunities by sharing what's already working across institutions
- Identify barriers honestly and without judgement
- Problem-solve collectively to find practical, low-cost enablers

*“—
Excellent, 10 star review. Would highly recommend and
makes me realise some change/action within my control.
—”*

“
The group activities and networking are great to see what others are doing, while the expert speaker and facilitator-led session provide the direction and context - great day - you get a mix of both!
”

The feedback has been extraordinary! An average rating of 4.8 out of 5, with delegates saying they would be 96% likely to recommend the event to a colleague. Everyone joins a dedicated Teams site afterwards, keeping the conversation and collaboration going long after the day ends. Alongside this, our [UHR Knowledge Board on AI in HR](#) (a dynamic Padlet bringing together resources, thought pieces and practical tools) continues to grow as a living reference point for members navigating AI adoption. With [York](#) and two [London](#) sessions still to come in September, we're excited to keep going!

96% would recommend to a colleague!

Understanding AI Adoption in HR

Insights from UHR research

AI has become a key focus in supporting HR within Higher Education. To explore this further, I completed two surveys this year: AI in HR in HE and Use of AI Transcription for HR Processes. Both highlight that the sector is in a transitional phase, recognising AI's potential and beginning to integrate it into HR practices.

The findings also emphasise that AI should be used as a support tool rather than a replacement for human judgement, with human review remaining essential, echoed by guidance from legal experts. Conversations in UHR AI workshops further show that People teams are approaching AI with curiosity and a readiness to act, aiming to stay competitive while ensuring its responsible and effective use.

Garima Somani

Projects and Research Officer



UHR Remit Survey 2025

Understanding the Changing Shape of HR in Higher Education

In 2025 we undertook our third HR Remit Survey and received over 100 responses from member HEIs. As well as being a fantastic resource for members, the survey allows us at UHR to better understand the size and shape of HR in the HE sector, as well as providing insight into the challenges facing people teams.

This year, our analysis showed that the average size of people teams had decreased by around 5% since 2023, and the average reported budget had decreased by around 20% in the same period. Participants told us that the main driver for change in the last five years had been 'systems, processes and automation' and predicted that the biggest challenge facing HR in HE would be the same. Over 9 in 10 of the HR leaders completing the survey highlighted concerns about wellbeing in their teams, with workload being the biggest current issue for managers.

At UHR we've responded to the themes raised in the survey by increasing our activities and resources around managing change, with our Transformation Tuesdays and Time to Transform webinar series, as well as highlighting HEIs leading the way in digital developments through our Awards Showcase. Our AI workshops have started to equip members with valuable skills and have enabled them to find support and share good practice. We're planning a series of webinars on mental health and wellbeing in the HR community for later in the year, after our inaugural session for [University Mental Health Day](#) was so popular. We'll continue to build on this work going into 2026/27, as the pace of change in the sector shows no signs of slowing.

Sophie Crouchman
Strategic Projects and Research Manager



UHR Networks

The Power of Peer Connection

Our specialist networks continue to go from strength to strength, providing invaluable spaces for members to connect, share knowledge and support one another through the evolving challenges facing higher education. Over the past year, engagement across our networks has grown significantly, with attendance increasing by 25%, to approximately 1,250 participants. This growth reflects not only the value members place on these communities, but also the depth of collaboration and peer support taking place within them.

As the higher education landscape continues to evolve, so too must our networks. This year, we introduced new networks in response to emerging areas of interest and member demand, while also phasing out some less active groups to ensure our offering remains relevant and focused on the topics that matter most to members. This ongoing evolution enables us to remain responsive to the changing needs of our community.

“
Joining the sector in May, I have found the support of this group invaluable. Thank you, everyone.
”

UHR Mentoring

Guidance, growth and connection

Our mentoring programme continues to be a valued benefit for members, creating meaningful connections and supporting professional growth across the community. We are delighted to offer this programme at no additional cost and would encourage even more people professionals to take advantage of the opportunity.

Mentoring offers clear benefits for everyone involved, with both mentors and mentees gaining valuable insights, fresh perspectives and opportunities for development. We also recognise that time is precious, which is why the programme is designed to be flexible, allowing members to decide how and when meetings take place, as well as whether they would like to be matched again when a partnership comes to an end. If you or your team would like to find out more, we would be pleased to hear from you.



UHR Communications

Connecting Members to What Matters

In a sector where change happens quickly and time is always at a premium, providing members with timely, relevant information remains a key priority. Our weekly newsletter the Rapid Round-Up (RRU) continues to be one of the most valued ways we support members, bringing together the latest sector news, developments, events, resources, research and practical tools in one place. Rather than adding to the volume of information people receive, we aim to act as a trusted filter, signposting members to the content that matters most. You can sign up to the newsletter in your UHR account.

“
The RRU is an incredible provision from UHR!
It's the perfect blend of informative but straight forward – consistently telling me exactly what I need to know, without including too much to make reading it time consuming. It's broken down into sections, so has something for everyone, and I frequently find myself sharing articles from it with my HR team... I would really recommend that everyone signs up.
”

Alongside this, our termly newsletters provide a forward look at the months ahead, highlighting key events, development opportunities and activities across the UHR community. These updates help members plan ahead and make the most of their membership throughout the year. We know that inboxes are already crowded, so we remain committed to keeping our communications purposeful and focused on what members need to know. By prioritising quality over quantity, we aim to ensure every message provides genuine value to our community.

Our LinkedIn presence also plays an important role in how we connect and engage with our community. Through the platform, we share timely updates, celebrate member and partner achievements, and highlight the innovative work happening across the sector. We value LinkedIn as a space to build relationships and stay connected - come and join us if you haven't already.



Emma Walton-Pond
Communications Officer




UHR Governance



UHR continues to thrive as part of the PHES (Professional Higher Education Services Ltd) family of specialist organisations. Through PHES, we benefit from essential back-office support - including IT, payroll, and membership services, enabling us to operate more efficiently and focus our efforts where they matter most. Under this umbrella we group and collaborate with other higher education specialist organisations including ACOP (Accommodation Code of Practice), AUDE (the Association for University Directors of Estates), AULP (the Association of University Legal Practitioners), BUFDG (the British Universities Finance Directors Group), CHEIA (the Council of Higher Education External Auditors), CUBO (the Council of Universities Business Officers association), HESPA (Higher Education Strategic Planners Association) and SCHOMS: technology enriched community (Standing Conference of Heads of Media Services). These close connections not only enhance the relevance of our resources and events but also ensure that UHR members gain valuable perspectives from across the wider higher education landscape.

Our core staff team remains a small one, currently comprising nine staff with a total of 5.3FTE, including a one-year fixed-term colleague. This team is made up of Helen Scott (Executive Director, 0.6FTE), Emma Brookes and Sophie Crouchman (Strategic Projects and Research Managers, both 1FTE), Naomi Holloway (CPD Manager, 0.2FTE), Julie Baxter (Activities and Events Officer, 0.6FTE), Emma Walton-Pond (Communications Officer, 0.5FTE), Garima Somani (Projects and Research Officer, 1FTE fixed term) and Jemma Biernat and Ruth Turner (Membership Officers, 0.2 FTE each).



Finance

In the year ending 31 July 2025, UHR returned a surplus of c.£38k which has been used to deliver the services previously described, and a loss of c.£90k is forecast for the year ending 31 July 2026 (against a budgeted loss of c.£139k), due to the provision of the £500 CPD voucher for each member HEP and the employment of a fixed term Projects and Research Officer. A deficit budget has again been set from 1 August 2026, forecasting a loss of c.£57k – this is carefully considered, and due to using reserves to fund activities, and only minimally raising subscriptions at a time of financial challenge for the sector. At the Annual General Meeting on 13 May 2026 a subscription increase of c.3.4% was agreed (in practice, costing £15 - £70 more per annum for each HEP). In reaching this decision the Executive was acutely aware of the financial pressures on UHR's member institutions; however, we believe that UHR has never been more valuable or essential to Chief People Officers, HR Directors and their teams, or to the sector, and that UHR membership remains excellent value for money.



UHR Executive Committee

CHAIR

Margaret Ayers (Canterbury Christ Church University)

VICE CHAIRS

Louise Edwards-Holland (Nottingham Trent University)

Ian Wright (University of Sheffield)

TREASURER

Eilidh Fraser (Abertay University)

OTHER MEMBERS

Regional and devolved nations group Chairs

Carolann Begbie (Edinburgh Napier University) – Scotland Chair

Sian Cushion (Swansea University) – Wales Chair

Julie-Ann Brooks (University of Gloucestershire) – South West Chair

Sharon Germaine-Cox (University of Greater Manchester) – North West Chair

Rachael Millhouse (University of York) – North East Chair

Magi Hoppitt (Coventry University) – Midlands Chair

Louise Lester (Queen Mary University of London) – M25 Chair

Claire Rolstone (University of Reading) – South Chair

Nationally elected representatives

Donna Dalrymple (University College London) to 30/09/2026

Pamela Flynn (Manchester Metropolitan University) to 30/09/2028

Damian McAlister (Ulster University) 30/09/2028

Chizoma Okaro (University of Hertfordshire) to 30/09/2028

Co-opted representatives

Lisa Bryant (University of Brighton) to 31/08/2026

Special thanks to those that have left their positions on the Executive committee during this period including Joanne Race, Gordon Scott, Richard Brooks, Sarah Setchell, Pete Gibbs and Dean Morley.



Universities Human Resources

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