




## Guest Editorial

# Developing Sustainable, Innovative, and Agile Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Enis ELEZI<sup>1</sup>, Christopher BAMBER<sup>2</sup>, Alireza NAZARIAN<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Westminster, 35 Marylebone Rd., London NW1 5LS, UK;  E.Elezi@westminster.ac.uk

<sup>2</sup> Organisational Learning Centre (OLC), 66 Castle St., Heugh, Bolton BL2 1AE, UK;  cbamber@olceurope.com

<sup>3</sup> University of Westminster, 35 Marylebone Rd., London NW1 5LS, UK;  A.Nazarian@westminster.ac.uk

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**Abstract:** The guest editorial advances a synopsis of the Special Issue on Developing Sustainable, Innovative, and Agile Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It starts with the presentation of the overall framework for developing this special issue, arguing its topical opportunity. In this vein, the Covid-19 pandemic pointed to the imperative to evaluate the suitability of institutional models and systems to align them with the market and the inherent transformations. Giving credit to the complexity and dynamics of the HEIs ecosystems, a good comprehension of how sustainable HEIs can be properly developed claims for a holistic approach that covers issues around institutional governance and risk management, teaching and learning strategies, and student journey experience as the three fundamental concepts. Alongside, looking into innovation, leadership, organizational agility and performance comes forward as pivotal perspectives when addressing current challenges across sectors and industries.

**Keywords:** Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); sustainability; innovation; agility; leadership; knowledge; technology; performance.

## Overall framework

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) operate in a constantly changing landscape influenced by governmental policies, regulations, legal frameworks, technological advancements, and market competition (Crawford et al., 2022; Neuwirth et al., 2021; Bratianu, 2020). Such factors put pressure on student recruitment, institutional infrastructure, availability and accessibility of courses, operational costs, risk minimisation, and diversification of income streams. The Covid-19 pandemic emphasized the need to reassess the suitability of institutional models and systems to maintain coherence with the market and the observed demographic changes. Given the complexity of HEIs ecosystems, understanding how we develop sustainable HEIs requires a holistic approach that addresses issues around institutional governance and risk management, teaching and learning strategies, and student journey experience as the three fundamental concepts.

The role of technology is increasingly becoming more prominent in developing institutional competitive advantage and subsequently leading to sustainable management strategies (Mohamed Hashim et al. 2022; Breen et al., 2022; Bejinaru, 2019). Technological infrastructure is re-dimensioning the engagement between HEIs key

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stakeholders, including staff and students, in terms of learning content, accessibility of information and knowledge at module and course levels, assessment methods, and tuition and pastoral support. While technological advancements allow HEIs to internationalize their services and increase market accessibility, doing so contributes to a more competitive HE landscape. Therefore, governance and management teams in HEIs need to rethink their strategic and leadership approach in developing and leading sustainable establishments that synchronise technological advancements, institutional infrastructure, and staff capabilities and deliver high-quality student learning experiences. Maintaining harmony between student satisfaction, teaching quality standards, operational costs, and market diversification remains a strategic challenge that may require the board of governors within HEIs to take a more collaborative approach with counterparts. Seeking ways to establish collaborative initiatives between HEIs in managing risks and identifying areas of adding value to curricula development, teaching and learning practices, and student learning experience contribute to the enhancement of market competitiveness and leads to more sustainable HEIs (Crawford et al., 2022; O'Connor, 2022; Di Gerio et al., 2020).

HEIs are responsible for cultivating sustainable ecosystems by advocating for sustainable practices and integrating environmental considerations into their operations (Figueiró et al., 2022; Cai et al., 2020). Establishing reliable risk management systems is crucial in ensuring the welfare and security of staff and students; leadership's role cannot be overstated. Effective leadership is essential in creating an environment that prioritizes the needs and interests of learners. This approach ensures that students receive a quality education that prepares them to become responsible global citizens. In addition, HE leaders are responsible for promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion in curriculum design. This involves facilitating the inclusion of diverse perspectives and experiences and promoting academic excellence and social justice (Koutsouris et al., 2022; Reynante, 2022). By investing in effective leadership development, HEIs can create an environment that encourages faculty and staff to embrace these values and work towards providing students with high-quality education. Ultimately, the success of HEIs depends on the quality of leadership, and it is imperative that institutions prioritize leadership development to ensure that they meet the needs of their students and society as a whole.

HEIs provide the tools and resources for individuals to develop the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in today's fast-paced business environment by fostering a culture of creativity and collaboration (Elezi, 2021). Overall, HEIs play a critical role in driving innovation, competitive advantage, agility, and organisational performance, and are instrumental in shaping the HE leaders of tomorrow.

This special issue presents six articles that continue to build upon previous research and offer insightful perspectives into the concepts of leadership, curricula design, sustainable business ecosystems, enterprise-wide risk management systems, and innovation management for better institutional performance.

### **Articles in this special issue**

The first paper presented by Nishigandha Shinde and Christopher Bamber, titled '*The Role of Leadership in Promoting Student-Centred Teaching and Facilitating Learner's Responsible Behaviour*' explores the role of teachers in promoting student-centred teaching, focusing on the relationship between teachers and learners as leaders. The study shows that effective leadership and engagement by teachers positively impact learner behaviour in higher education classrooms, leading to increased participation and improved outcomes. The aim is to encourage responsible behaviour among learners and help them reach their full potential. The research is based on students' experiences in a UK private institution, and the findings may not apply to other contexts. The paper contributes to the literature on improving educational motivation and highlights the shared responsibility of teachers and students in promoting continuous learning.

The second paper by Enock Tinashe Tsapayi and Abneer E Samuel, titled '*Educational Leadership for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion in Curricula Design*' examines the role of leaders in promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion in UK HE education. Universities can improve graduate outcomes and prepare students for the global job market by ensuring inclusivity in curriculum design. The study used ethnographical research to investigate the effectiveness of implementing equality, diversity, and inclusion in curriculum design. Based on data collected over four years from one organization in the Northwest of England, the findings indicate that leaders are now working within standardised frameworks due to legislation. There has been significant progress in promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion, and leaders better understand its importance. This has the potential to sustain the UK higher education system and prepare students for success in the future.

The third paper presented by Bianca-Roxana Sălăgeanu (Șoldan) and Ruxandra Bejinaru titled '*Investigating Sustainable Business Ecosystems and the University Role: A Cluster Analysis*' examines the various factors, components, and critical aspects that contribute to establishing a successful and sustainable business ecosystem. The study aims to identify the most effective strategies for achieving this goal by conducting a thorough bibliometric analysis of significant publications. Objectives of this work included analysing trends from both theoretical and empirical perspectives, identifying the essential elements of a sustainable business environment, categorizing ecosystems into different types, presenting an updated understanding of the dynamic evolution of ecosystems and their components, and discussing the crucial role that universities play in facilitating technological and informational transfer to ensure sustainability.

The fourth article presented by Christopher Bamber titled '*Exploring Enterprise-Wide Risk Management Systems in Higher Education*' uses a case study to delve into enterprise-wide risk management in a private HEI in the UK, examining the evolution of processes towards enterprise-wide educational governance for sustainability. The study presents a mature adoption of a holistic approach to risk management, offering practical guidance for policymakers, governors, and senior management in HEIs. The research provides valuable lessons learned, a new roadmap for implementation, a thematic direction for governance, and six drivers for successfully implementing sustainable risk strategies.

The fifth article developed by Abneer E Samuel and Enock Tinashe Tsapayi, titled '*Navigating Psychological Crises in Leadership Transitions*' explores the psychological challenges that leaders and managers face when transitioning into new roles in private higher education institutions. The study examines the internal obstacles and adaptive measures during the transitional phase, focusing on the psychological dimensions. The findings offer valuable insights into practical strategies for managing leadership transitions, promoting smoother transitions, and providing adequate support to individuals in leadership roles during periods of organizational change.

Lastly, the sixth article presented by Loredana Jerdea, titled '*A Bibliometric Analysis of a Four-Construct Framework: Innovation Management, Competitive Advantage, Agility, and Organizational Performance*' explores the connections between innovation management, competitive advantage, agility, and organizational performance. Through bibliometric analysis using the VOSviewer visualization tool, the study provides an overview of potential research areas related to innovation management. The central premise is that every organisation must innovate its business model and adopt agile innovation management to stay competitive and achieve solid organizational performance. The research confirms the existence of compelling relationships between these constructs, supporting further exploration in this direction.

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