

AdvanceHE



Leadership in global higher education

Findings from a scoping study

—

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, we would like to thank the 109 individuals who shared their experiences and insights during the round tables – we were inspired and humbled to hear your candid accounts of leadership in contemporary higher education. We are particularly appreciative of those who came and shared their reflections at the dissemination and engagement events. We hope that we have done justice to your insights in this report and you feel the survey makes an important contribution to the sector.

Next, we would like to thank Advance HE for commissioning and funding the study. We are particularly grateful to Doug Parkin and Katy Outhart for their invaluable support in setting up and facilitating the round tables and dissemination and engagement events. We would also like to acknowledge the contribution of the wider Advance HE team, including Alison Johns, Tracy Bell-Reeves, Michael Parker, Ruth Wells, William Syms and Antony Smith for their help in recruiting participants and promoting the project through various channels, as well as Hannah Griffin-James and Jonathan Neves for their work developing the survey instrument.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the contribution of our colleague Professor Bruce Macfarlane who, while not directly involved in the round tables, played a significant role in framing them through the literature review he led at the outset of this project.

Foreword

Looking through this important and impressive report I am struck by both how much and how little we know about leadership in higher education (HE) and related organisations. We know an awful lot about why it matters and the difference good leadership can make, but we know a lot less about the factors and features that make it effective, particularly when the burdens of complexity weigh heavily.

A paradigm shift in leadership

Almost a year ago, Advance HE commissioned a scoping study to inform the development of a global leadership survey for higher education. At the centre of that study we placed a deceptively simple question, *What works for leadership in higher education?*

As this report makes clear, leadership always takes place in a context. And over the last three years that context has been extraordinary; a period in which humanity has been challenged in ways that go beyond normal conceptions of change. The Covid-19 pandemic, which came on so rapidly, caused a paradigm shift. As well as being an unparalleled public health crisis, Covid has triggered a cascade of social and economic transformations that are still unfolding. The consequences of some of these changes are impossible for even the most informed of observers to anticipate, from economic shockwaves through to how we run organisations and even the way we regard human development and education.

The time is now ripe to work collaboratively with the sector towards a stronger, more structured, evidence-informed and *useful* set of insights about leading and leadership in HE, based on systematically exploring the *‘What works for leadership in higher education?’* question.

A report in three parts

While this is a report in three parts, the authors acknowledge that the three thematic areas concerned are profoundly indivisible. These originated out of the literature review element of the study: firstly, the context in which people are working and leading; secondly, what that means for values and purpose in HE leadership; and thirdly, insights regarding the skills, competencies and behaviours (leadership qualities) that would enable or enhance effective HE leadership now and moving into the future.

The following short extracts from the report highlight these three areas and their interconnectedness:

- + Regarding **context** – “The HE landscape continually provides a complex and changing background against which understandings and experiences of leadership must be assessed. An ability to recognise and respond appropriately to contextual cues is a key requirement for HE leaders and organisations.”
- + Linking to **values** – “Values-based leadership is an ideal of HE leadership that is inhibited by ‘hard’ realities shaping what is and what is not possible for HE leaders and those they lead. The ability to deliver on values and purpose is inextricably shaped by personal context and work setting.”
- + And on **leadership qualities** – “The research has identified a series of [11] skills, competencies and behaviours that are believed to underpin ‘good’ leadership (both ethical and effective) within the current and emerging landscape of higher education... Being ‘authentic’, ‘collaborative’ and ‘credible’, were identified as hallmarks of good leadership.”

Particularly rewarding to me has been the holistic, whole community approach to understanding how people view leadership adopted throughout this study, bringing together colleagues from diverse roles and settings. This has stimulated a high quality of thinking and discussion and enabled us to develop what I believe will be a highly 'fit for purpose' global leadership survey for HE.

The players

I would like to pay particular thanks to the authors of this report for undertaking the scoping study:

- + Professor Richard Watermeyer, University of Bristol
- + Professor Richard Bolden, University of the West of England
- + Dr Cathryn Knight, University of Bristol (previously Swansea University)
- + Jonas Holm, Aarhus University.

I would also like to thank Professor Bruce Macfarlane (The Education University of Hong Kong) who played a significant role in leading the literature review at the outset of this project, and make special mention of Doug Parkin, Principal Adviser for Leadership and Management at Advance HE, who has led this work for us.

As a research team they, of course, brought a high level of skill and rigour to the research process. Just as importantly, they contributed fantastic facilitation skills working with sector colleagues to generate a powerful series of open discussions about contemporary HE leadership.

Our thanks must also go to all the sector colleagues who participated in the scoping study or expressed an interest in being involved. The 11 round table discussions at the heart of the study were extremely rich, open and insightful, and generated an extensive dataset for the research analysis. As a non-participating observer at one of the sessions, I was struck by the way personal leadership attributes were openly considered alongside the social and 'political' dimensions of *achieving influence*. As an intentional progression from the round tables, we hosted four online dissemination and engagement events, and thanks must also go to the colleagues who attended and participated in the live polling and other interactions.

What next?

This report is an extremely powerful resource in its own right, with significant observations regarding HE leadership in terms of context, values, purpose and effective leadership qualities. I commend it to everyone interested in the future of higher education leadership. I also exhort leaders at all levels, in formal or informal roles, to take part in the [Advance HE Global Leadership Survey for Higher Education](#).

Alison Johns

Chief Executive, Advance HE

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Executive summary

- 1 This scoping study was **commissioned by Advance HE to inform the development of a higher education (HE) leadership survey**, with the aim of investigating what works for leadership in higher education and related organisations. The timing of this study is particularly significant given turbulence in the sector caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the need for individuals and institutions around the world to reflect on what they have learnt and what they need to do next.
- 2 The scoping study began with a **review of existing theory and research on leadership in HE**. Drawing on a discovery search engine and a range of bibliographical databases, the review identified more than 250 relevant sources. Thematic analysis identified three main strands of work: **traditionalist** (focused on the cultural contexts of HE leadership), **reformist** (focused on values and purpose in HE leadership) and **pragmatist** (focused on skills and competencies of HE leaders).
- 3 From October to December 2021, **11 two-hour online round tables (RTs) took place to capture the perspectives and experiences of different HE populations**, including academic, professional services and executive/management staff, as well as a range of HE-associated bodies. Participants were selected to ensure demographic, disciplinary, professional, institutional and international diversity. **A total of 109 individuals from 94 organisations participated**. While the majority of participants were UK-based, round tables included representation from countries including Australia, Bahamas, Bahrain, Egypt, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Jamaica, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United Arab Emirates. Many UK participants also had international experience they brought to discussions.
- 4 From February to March 2022, **four dissemination and engagement (D&E) events were hosted to share emerging findings and to gather wider perspectives on the issues raised. A total of 145 people attended these sessions**. Following the RTs and before the D&E events the research team conducted a preliminary analysis of the transcripts and meeting text chats to identify key themes/issues raised by participants. This analysis was then further developed following the D&E events to identify patterns and trends between and within the different RT sessions.
- 5 Throughout the consultation it was difficult for participants to disassociate the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic from their appraisal of the general state of HE and its leadership. **The Covid-19 pandemic was recognised for having illuminated the effects of longstanding structural concerns**, such as marketisation and digitalisation, and for demonstrating the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) nature of HE systems around the world. While some participants noted that the pandemic had enabled positive change (for example, acquisition of new skills) it was also viewed as having exacerbated existing systemic inequalities.
- 6 Five key areas of **HE context – policy, society, funding, students and staff** – were identified as impacting perceptions, experiences and practices of leadership in contemporary HE. While the specifics of contextual issues and challenges vary between institutions and countries, there was strong agreement across the RTs that **global HE is in a period of significant contestation and change**.

- 7 The RT discussions surfaced a variety of **tensions and challenges** around the **social and economic mission** of higher education institutions (HEIs); work-based **autonomy and managerialism; competition and collaboration; structure and agency**; as well as **continuity and change**. Participants were unanimous in recognising the role of HEI leaders and managers in managing multiple (often competing) demands.
- 8 A **higher education value proposition** was conceived on the basis of HEIs established as a '**public good**', underpinned by a values commitment to **freedom of speech, inclusivity, social justice** and **social mobility**. Values-based leadership was understood as **human-centric**, driven by a commitment to empowering staff, safeguarding both their wellbeing and the wellbeing of the idea of the university as a public good.
- 9 Such a value proposition of HE was perceived to be undermined by processes of politicisation and other external pressures of marketisation and regulatory governance, and internal pressures of performance management. It was felt that HE leaders are **pulled in too many directions and forced to mediate competing interests** of different stakeholders. Unsympathetic government and a hostile policy environment (in the UK and Australia especially) were considered by many to be the greatest challenges facing HE leaders and an aspiration of *good* HE leadership.
- 10 RT participants discussed the need to develop a **values-based approach to HE leadership** that can respond to, and where needed push back against, internal and external demands. From these conversations it became clear that participants saw the ability of leaders to act as **custodians of core values of HE, while mobilising positive transformation and change**, as foundational to their credibility and legitimacy and their ability to exert social influence. Being '**authentic**', '**collaborative**' and '**credible**', were identified as hallmarks of good leadership.
- 11 Eleven thematic categories related to **effective leadership qualities in HE** were identified: **adaptable, analytical, authentic, collaborative, compassionate, creative, credible, decisive, digitally engaged, inclusive** and **self-reflective**. While the relative significance given to different aspects of leadership, and how they are enacted and sustained, will vary according to the specific context, there was widespread agreement that these qualities are common across all levels – individual, team, department, institution, country and the global HE sector.
- 12 **Values-based leadership** is an ideal of HE leadership that is **inhibited by 'hard' realities shaping what is and what is not possible for HE leaders** and those they lead. The ability to deliver on values and purpose is inextricably shaped by personal context (identity/role/experience) and work setting (organisation of work into departmental/institutional/sector structures). Appeasement of policy and prestige demands in HEIs was also highlighted for its influence in destabilising and potentially derailing an ambition of values-based leadership. The **complexity of the HE environment** suggests that rather than simply focusing on the qualities of **individual** leaders, attention needs to be given to the enablers of, and barriers towards, good leadership at **department, institution** and **sector** levels.

- 13 Overall, we were struck by the consistency of themes and issues raised across each of the RTs and the degree to which these were echoed in the feedback from D&E events. It was clear that **participants appreciated the time and space for structured and supportive discussions** with peers from other institutions and countries around the nature, purpose and impacts of leadership in HE. Such opportunities are fleetingly rare but incredibly important to enable people to process the speed and scale of change within the sector and the impact it is having on the nature and purpose(s) of leadership.
- 14 Based on this scoping study we propose a number of **recommendations that should be considered** when developing the Advance HE global leadership survey, including the need to: take a **contextualised** approach; explore **values and purpose**; collate **demographic profiling** data; engage with a **broad cross-section** of HE staff and stakeholders; secure responses from a **wide range of countries**; capture experiences of both **'being led' and 'leading others'**; consider **informal, emergent and bottom-up leadership**; capture evidence and experiences of **collective and collaborative leadership**; gather a combination of **quantitative and qualitative** indicators; and to produce a survey that is **quick and engaging** to complete.

1 Introduction

1.1 About this study

This study was commissioned by Advance HE to inform the development of a higher education (HE) leadership survey, with the aim of investigating what works for leadership in HE and related organisations. A research team led by Professor Richard Watermeyer at the University of Bristol used a mixed methods approach (outlined below) to capture a range of voices and perspectives on the issues.

The timing of this study is particularly significant given the turbulence caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the need for individuals and institutions around the world to reflect on what they have learnt and what they need to do next. The survey, due to be launched in September 2022, aims to generate a comparative overview of how leadership is perceived and experienced across the HE landscape¹. This report presents an overview of insights and findings from 11 round tables (RTs) and four dissemination and engagement (D&E) events. It is accompanied for use and reference within Advance HE by a separate literature review and outline survey template, the former of which informed the structure and discussion prompts used by the facilitators of the RTs.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 Literature review

The scoping study began with a review of existing theory and research on leadership in HE (Macfarlane et al, 2022). Drawing on a discovery search engine and a range of bibliographical databases, the review identified more than 250 papers, books and academic theses relevant to HE leadership that can be divided into three main strands, as illustrated in Figure 1.1.

Collectively, this literature represents important insights into the culture, values and competencies of HE leadership and provides an important knowledge base for this scoping study to support development of the Advance HE Global Leadership Survey.

1 This research is focused on the full range of HEIs, including public and private universities, research institutes, further education and other providers who deliver HE accredited programmes, HE support organisations, professional and funding bodies for HE, and trade unions.

Figure 1.1. Three strands of HE leadership literature



1.2.2 Round tables (RT)

From October to December 2021, 11 two-hour online round tables on the nature and purpose(s) of leadership in contemporary higher education were run. These were held online due to the continuing Covid-19 controls in place and to enable a broad and inclusive membership, including contributions from people around the world.

Each RT focused on the perspectives and experiences of different HE populations, as outlined in Figure 1.2. These covered a mix of academic, professional services and executive/management staff, as well as a range of HE-associated bodies. While students and policymakers are also important stakeholders, they were not included due to the difficulty in getting a balanced or representative sample.

The RT selection process followed an expression of interest approach and was based on a range of criteria, including social, disciplinary, professional, institutional and international diversity. Participants were recruited via targeted mailings from Advance HE and a series of promotional activities, including the publication of two blog posts and a video on the Advance HE website. Members of the research team also sent invitations to their own networks where possible.

Figure 1.2. Summary of RT groups



Expressions of interest were received from 222 individuals. They were shortlisted for invitation to a particular RT depending on (a) fit with category, (b) representation across a range of institutions, specialisms and countries (including international experience), and (c) to ensure diversity and inclusion of a range of demographic characteristics (including gender, ethnicity, age, disability and sexual orientation).

In total 109 individuals from 94 organisations participated in the RTs. From the outset an international perspective was a priority and members of the international HE community were engaged through targeted mailings and by hosting RT sessions at convenient times of day. While the majority of participants (81%) were UK-based, there was international representation from countries including Australia, Bahamas, Bahrain, Egypt, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Jamaica, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United Arab Emirates. Many UK participants had also worked overseas so could bring in examples and insights from their own experience. (See Box 1.1 for a summary of participant demographics).

RTs lasted two hours and were structured around the three thematic areas identified in the literature review, as follows:

- + Welcome, project overview and introductions (20 min)
- + **Context:** what are the main features of the HE landscape (structural, organisational, social, political, ideological, etc) that impact on leadership within your organisation, professional area and/or wider sector? (35 min)
- + Break (10 min)
- + **Values and purpose:** how do values and purpose shape leadership within your organisation, professional area and/or wider sector? (35 min)
- + **Skills, competencies and behaviours:** in an evolving HE landscape, what new or future leadership skills/competencies/behaviours are required within your organisation, professional area and/or wider sector? (15 min)
- + Thanks and close (5 min)

The same two members of the research team facilitated each RT, with support from the Advance HE team in hosting the online space and introducing the project. Care was taken to ensure that everyone had the opportunity to express their views in relation to each thematic area, with the chat box available for people to share additional thoughts/reflections in writing as the discussion progressed. Live closed caption transcripts were taken for all but one RT, where the transcription was made manually following the event. All RTs were video and audio recorded, and chat comments saved, to enable the research team to revisit discussions.

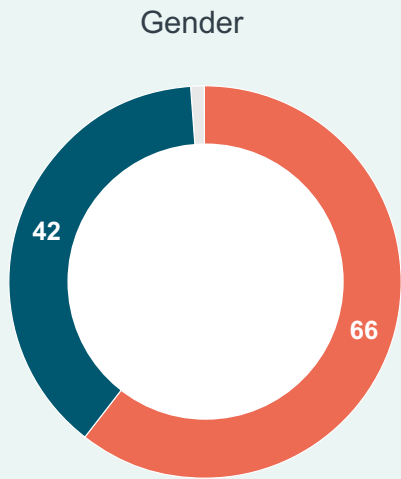
These conversations provided rich and revealing insights into a turbulent and changing HE landscape. It was humbling to hear the scale of the challenges faced by HE staff at all levels, and equally inspiring to witness their commitment to the social value and societal benefit of HE. The RTs were emotional, cathartic and energising – a moment for reflection within ever more crowded diaries, and an opportunity to listen and be heard by peers with compassion and empathy, as illustrated by the following quotes from two of the participants.

Can we do this every night? (Laughs) I can barely read my notes because I've scribbled so much down.

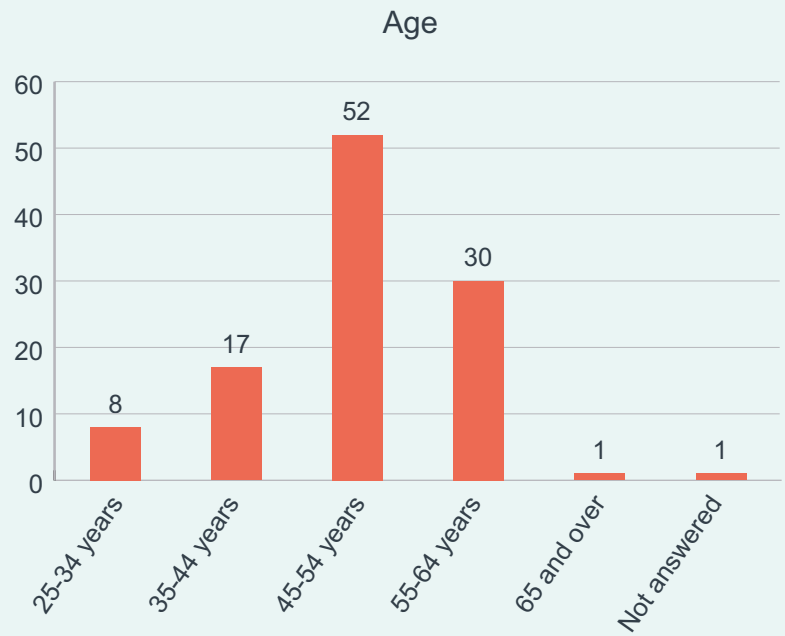
Yes [...] ...this is rather cathartic!

Senior Exec 2

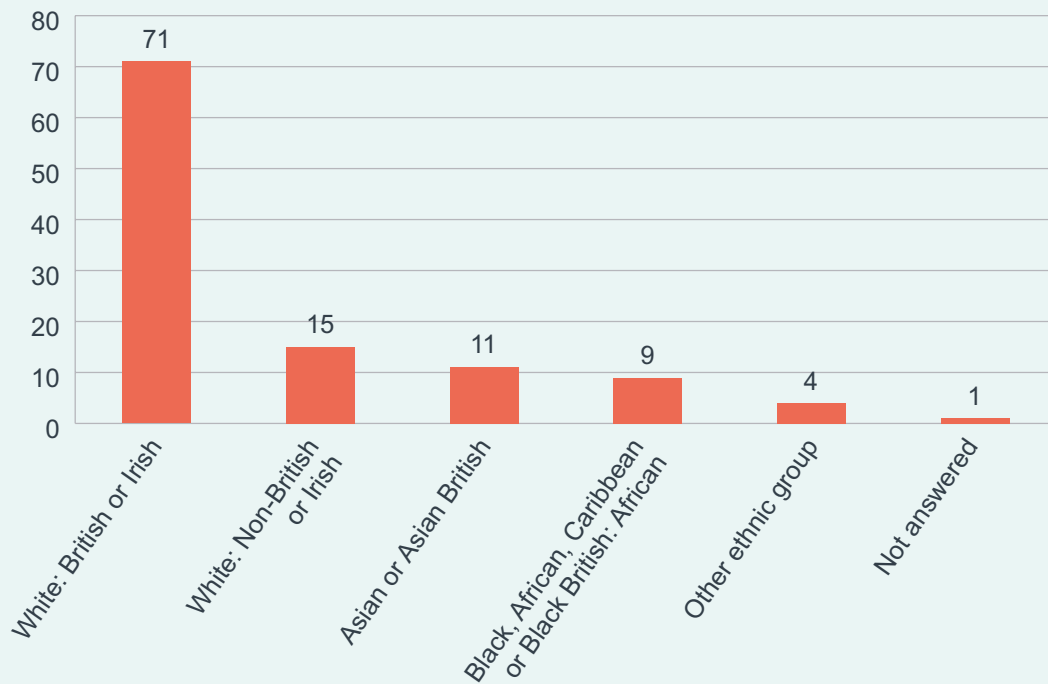
Box 1.1. Participant demographics



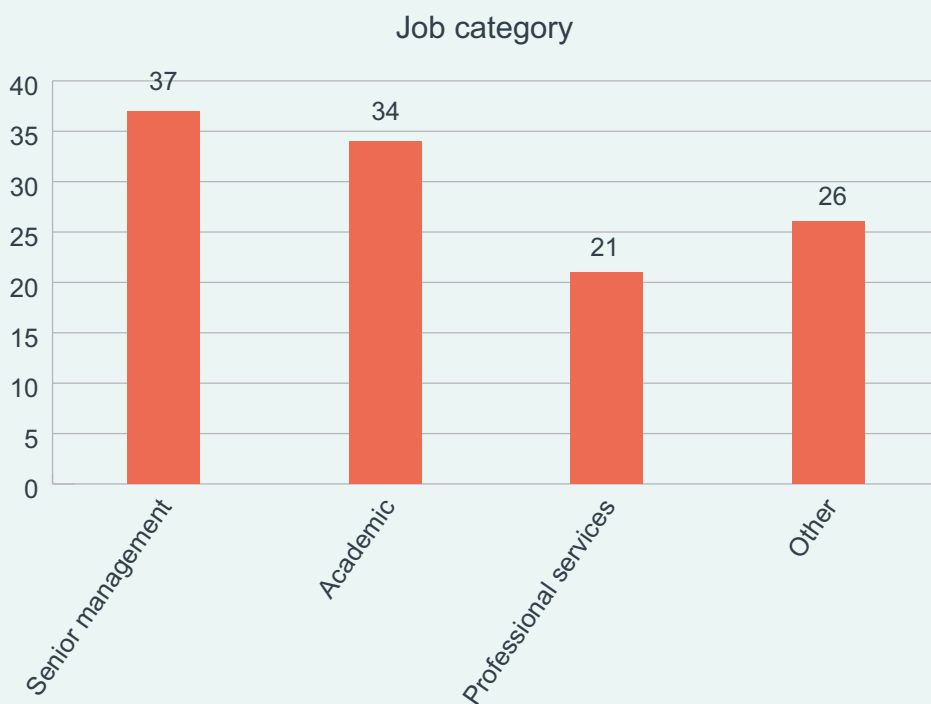
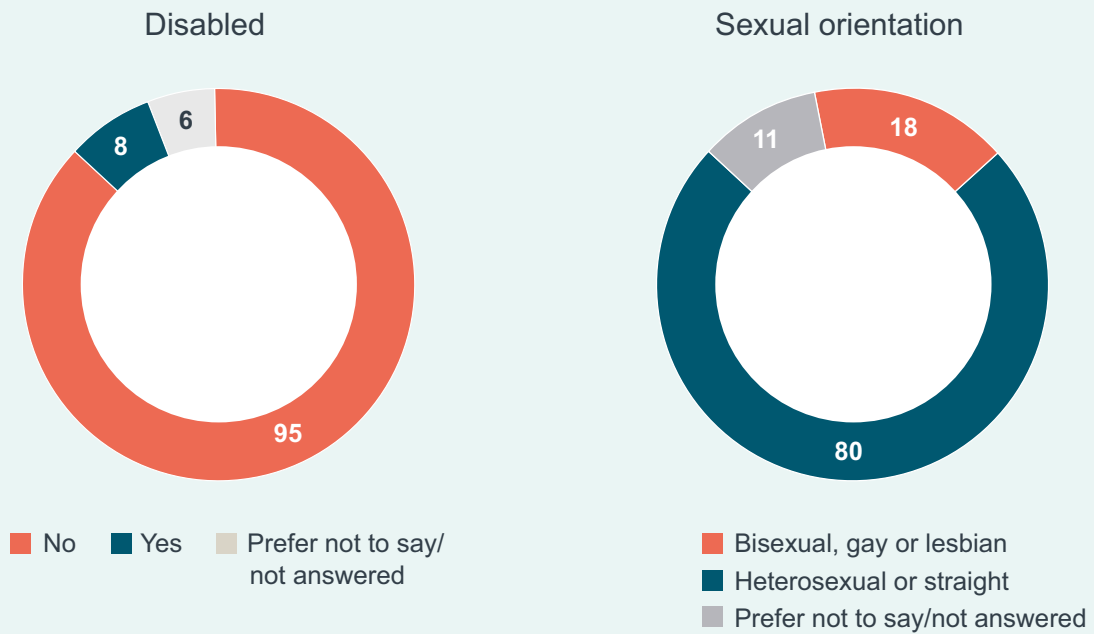
Female Male Prefer not to say



Ethnicity



Box 1.1. Participant demographics (continued)



1.2.3 Dissemination and engagement events (D&E)

Four D&E events were hosted in February and March 2022 to share emerging findings from the RTs and gather wider perspectives on the issues raised. A total of 145 people attended these sessions. These sessions were free of charge and open to all, with no restrictions on the profile of participants (other than an active engagement with higher education).

Events were run online and lasted 90 minutes, as follows:

- + Welcome and introduction (15 min)
- + Reflections from two RT participants (15 min)
- + Overview of findings on context (20 min)
- + Overview of findings on values and purpose (20 min)
- + Overview of findings on skills, competencies and behaviours (10 min)
- + Questions and discussion (10 min)

Following the RTs and before the D&E events the research team conducted a preliminary analysis of the transcripts and meeting text chats to identify key themes/issues raised by participants. This analysis was then further developed following the D&E events to look for patterns and trends between and within the different RT sessions, as outlined below.

1.2.4 Analysis and interpretation

Following the RTs and before the D&E events the research team conducted a preliminary analysis of the transcripts and meeting text chats to identify key themes/issues raised by participants. This analysis was then further developed following the D&E events to look for patterns and trends between and within the different RT sessions, as outlined below.

- 1 Transcripts divided between three members of the research team for initial coding.
- 2 Codes combined across the various RTs and allocated to different research team members for an initial thematic analysis in relation to (1) context, (2) values and purpose, and (3) skills, competencies and behaviours.
- 3 Summary of themes developed for each of the three areas and prepared for presentation at the D&E events.
- 4 Initial summaries presented at the D&E events, with follow-up questions using polling software to check the degree to which issues/themes resonated with participants.
- 5 RT transcripts independently reviewed and coded by a fourth member of the research team, looking, in particular, for patterns/trends within and between groups as well as illustrative quotes.

- 6 Synthesis of themes and illustrative quotes, as well as responses to the questions posed during the D&E events, to develop report content for each of the three main areas explored during the RTs.
- 7 Review, editing and cross-checking of themes and content in the report by all four members of the analysis team.
- 8 Finalisation of report with feedback from Advance HE.

The findings presented within this report are intended to provide a basis for the design of the Advance HE leadership survey rather than a comprehensive analysis of this large and complex dataset. We anticipate further analysis in due course to inform journal publications and supporting material for the Advance HE Global Leadership Survey and any related leadership framework that may be developed.

1.3 Report structure

The report is structured into three main chapters, incorporating insights from the RTs and D&E events in relation to (1) context, (2) values and purpose and (3) skills, competencies and behaviours of HE leadership. This is followed by a brief summary and set of recommendations for the Advance HE Global Leadership Survey.

2 Context

2.1 Overview

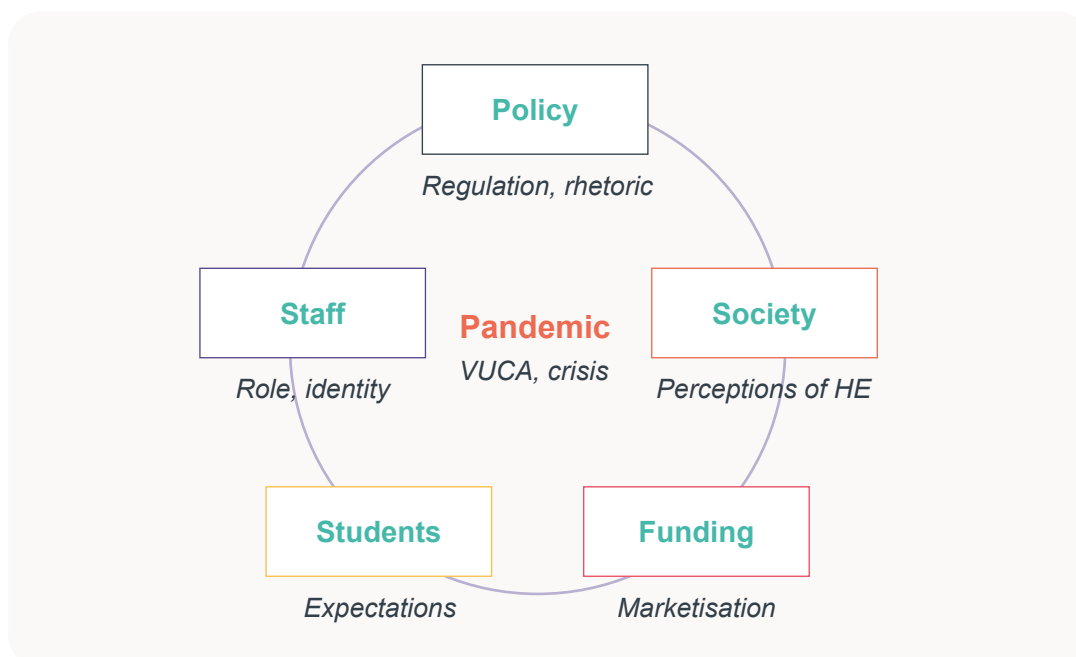
Following an overview of the project and brief round of participant introductions, each round table began by inviting participants to consider the following question:

What are the main features of the HE landscape (structural, organisational, social, political, ideological, etc) that impact on leadership within your organisation, professional area and/or wider sector?

Participants were invited to share their reflections in turn, focusing on issues of particular significance for their role, organisation, subject discipline, professional area, country/location, etc. Responses were both candid and illuminating, giving real insights into the contextual landscape of leadership and management within contemporary HE (and related organisations).

Unsurprisingly, the Covid-19 pandemic provided a backdrop to much of the conversation but, in most cases, participants moved beyond the immediate crisis response to consider how the pandemic has amplified a number of long-standing concerns within the sector. Issues of funding, workload, diversity and inclusion, sustainability, government policy, marketisation and the growth of hybrid and digital working were cited as key priorities and concerns impacting global HE. These could be broadly grouped into five thematic areas, as illustrated in Figure 2.1. Such concerns are not easily resolved, and their complex interdependencies highlight the difficulties of successfully navigating this shifting and uncertain terrain, as will be discussed later in this section.

Figure 2.1. Context: key themes



2.2 Impact of the pandemic

HE has been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, with institutions needing to respond rapidly to changing policies and practices around social distancing, self-isolation and other public health measures. This has happened in different ways and with different timings across countries and regions around the world, driven by differences in governmental and public health approaches. In the UK, for example, many institutions were required to transition from face-to-face to online teaching provision almost overnight as lockdowns were implemented. The return to face-to-face delivery has been almost as (if not more) challenging as institutions have adapted to changing restrictions at local and national levels and the difficulties of ensuring open and equitable access to learning while staff and students have needed to reduce transmission and self-isolate.

The pandemic response has highlighted the VUCA² (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) nature of the higher education landscape and the increasing demands on leadership, management and governance, as illustrated in the following quotes.

I feel we are in an environment of increasing complexity and pressure. With a need to make decisions, apparently more rapidly, a great deal of difficulty to find the space to make big strategic decisions in the way one would like to, a difficulty of getting consensus, openness and transparency, seem to be difficult things to do effectively, even if you try to do it, people don't believe you are necessarily doing it as openly as they think you should be doing it.

RT: Senior Exec 1

So, volatility I think really demands a different kind of leadership and that has been exacerbated by the pandemic. I've found that cracks and strengths that pre-existed have been thrown into sharper relief. It's not been caused by the pandemic but it's really exposed what's there and I think the consequence of then getting to the next normal... will be a mode of leadership which seeks to address those key themes, pay attention to those key audiences and actually get on the front foot of answering that question for society at large.

RT: Senior Exec 2

While responding to the pandemic has been highly challenging, several participants stressed the opportunities and potential it offers for positive change.

Although [Covid-19] has been a massive challenge to all of us in terms of leadership and demand, it accelerated lots of the positive change that was needed. Certainly, in my own institution, the level of staff engagement has absolutely skyrocketed while we've been working remotely, which is a little counterintuitive but a very positive thing.

RT: Senior Exec 1

2 The concept of VUCA was first used by the US Army War College (1987) to describe the post-Cold War landscape. It is now widely used in many contexts to describe the shifting and uncertain context in which most organisations now operate.

I think reflecting on the pandemic, that has been good in some ways, because it did enable more leaders to perhaps get involved and have a say, so I think actually for me in terms of leadership, that's actually started a journey which wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been there.

RT: Staff and OD Professionals

The demand for effective crisis management has been a significant aspect of the pandemic response and brought to the fore a range of skills, competencies and behaviours not previously given so much attention (see Chapter 4 for further details). However, a concern voiced by a number of RT participants is that, as the sector transitions out of the immediate crisis phase of the pandemic, institutions may fail to adapt accordingly, leaving in place systems and processes that were developed in haste, with insufficient attention to the potential long-term effects on the performance of individuals, groups and institutions across a full range of HE activities. It is well documented, for example, that through the pandemic teaching and learning activities were prioritised over research and engagement and there was a significant reduction in opportunities for travel and engagement internationally. Furthermore, there may well be adverse impacts for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) as certain groups bore more of the brunt of the added workload for teaching and learning than others.

From a UK perspective, I would say that crisis management is the new normal. After Covid, there is so much firefighting and rapid response that the volatility of the policy landscape, which has accelerated again, I would say, even in the last 12 months in the UK where we are starting to get more directives from ministers which never happened in my career before, and also the restructuring of the sector bodies and the government departments that govern higher education; meaning even where there are good supportive policies and there are, they are not let's say quite in sync with the other departments so a lot of actively managing that. I realise that I am talking more about management and governance than I am leadership, I think that one of the things as a sector that we have probably swung too far on is that we have probably too much time devoted now to management and governance as we are so enormously highly regulated.

RT: Senior Exec 1

In the UK that nurturing [for Early Career Academics] to progress seems completely absent other than the demands that are put upon us for teaching and for administration and all of these other roles that we have to fulfil. So, I found personally my personal experience is that yeah, the leadership in terms of teaching to me is pressure. We must keep these students enrolled, we must attract more students, we must keep the business going, whereas for my personal research anything that doesn't come with overhead costs is ignored, anything that isn't seen by the university to build their profile in terms of getting more students is ignored and so really I feel as though have moved from an academic atmosphere into a corporate atmosphere without realising that is what I was actually doing.

RT: Early Career Academics

I'll inject an Australian perspective [...] The big disruptor for us is the funding model that we have ended up with. [...] The good was the massive increase in diversity of learners coming to higher education, as has been the case in many places, and that means it takes us into the access agenda and also the diversity agenda, and if you follow that path down you get to a place where you're starting to talk about the value of higher education in terms of the diversity of graduates that it produces and also what those graduates want. [...] And the other side of the coin for Australian universities in particular, is the relentless push to grow and improve research output, and research output is not funded by government grants, it's underfunded to a really quite staggering extent which requires cross-subsidy from elsewhere in the university.

RT: Senior Exec 2

Several of the quotes above refer specifically to the UK. While similar issues were raised by participants in different countries, a number of regional and sectoral differences were noted, including:

- + the extended lockdown in Australia and New Zealand left them isolated, with no ability for staff/ students to travel in/out of the country
- + in regions such as the Caribbean and Middle East, cases of poor ICT infrastructure made the transition to online learning more challenging than where broadband internet access was stable and widespread
- + there are variations in the relative levels of bureaucracy and market orientation across different regions. This particularly relates to the role of sector bodies and regulators and can constrain the ability for institutions to innovate
- + sectors, such as the cultural and creative industries, that were particularly adversely impacted by the pandemic will require more time to recover than others – particularly in terms of external engagement and student employability.

2.3 The changing context of higher education

The RT discussions highlighted a significant degree of turbulence and change within HE. While the severity of this over the last two years could be attributed to the impact of the pandemic, in many cases, participants highlighted more fundamental issues that had been brought to the fore. Box 2.1 provides an extended extract from one of the RTs that illustrates this point. While UK-focused, it contains a range of broader concerns.

Box 2.1. Changing contexts of HE

I think the changing expectations on higher education have been quite significant recently, particularly moving away from some of those more traditional three-year undergraduate programmes and having to look at short courses, CPD, micro credentialling, all of the additional things that we do, that universities will be good at doing but aren't very well set up for doing, and it's going to require a huge amount of change not just to the way that we think about the curricula and the students but actually transformational change about how we manage that student journey through universities. That's a huge agenda for the next five years or so, probably.

I think there are increased constraints on funding. Higher education has always had limited levels of funding, but I think that's getting worse, and some of the rhetoric from the most recent government announcements about higher education is that is definitely starting to decrease, and with no increase in fees, we are very – we're not very inflation-safe, and staff costs continue to go up, whereas fees aren't, and although I think as universities staff we don't want students to have to pay increasing fees, we are also aware of the limitations of having a constrained pot of funding, and especially on the back of the Augar report with increased funding for further education coming from higher education, I think there should be increased funding across the board, but actually taking more away from higher education seems to be the message that is coming out, and that is really going to challenge universities.

I think the changing expectations of students is something that is probably bigger now than it ever has been. Post-pandemic, student expectations are completely different. What they expect us to be able to do as universities and the way that we should be supporting them and delivering their programmes is really very different now, and as well as the expectations, I think of the public, the government and media rhetoric over the past couple of years has been extremely limited to contact hours rather than student engagement, and really putting that pressure on what universities should be providing, and that we're not providing it because we're not doing a face-to-face session. We've lost that emphasis on universities really being about students having responsibility for their learning, and learning being about learning, rather than well, I need to go to 17 hours of lectures this week otherwise I'm not getting anything from the university. I think we've forgotten as a population, not necessarily as a university cohort, what reading for a degree really actually means, and what that looks like in the context of higher education.

RT1 – Deans and HODs

Participants stressed the impact of change in a number of interconnected areas, as illustrated in Figure 2.1 and summarised below.

2.3.1 Policy environment

Participants noted growing levels of regulation across the HE sector, many of which linked to shifting government policy and legislation. While in many countries individual HE institutions are largely autonomous, those that benefit from public funding are subject to regulation and inspection by bodies such as, to use the UK as an example, Ofsted, Office for Students (OfS), Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), etc, as well as rankings and standards, such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). In several countries it was perceived that government policy and rhetoric was increasingly critical of ‘traditional’ higher education, calling for greater accountability and delivery against the employability agenda. In the case of New Zealand (and other countries) this was combined with an agenda to ‘decolonise’ HE and meet the needs of indigenous (and other disadvantaged) populations.

I just wanted to make three points really from a New Zealand perspective. The first one is around the civic role and the purpose of universities, and I say specifically universities in the higher education landscape. We are being increasingly tested and challenged here in this country around what decolonisation looks like, what operating in an environment where we absolutely acknowledge the Treaty of Waitangi as our founding document, and we have a lot of demands on leaders across the sector and most palpably in the university sector around demonstrating what that really means. That goes to things like cultural competency and leadership, it goes to issues around what does sovereignty look like in terms of leadership structures and so on to decolonising the curriculum, but most potently the conversation is not just around the equity of access, it's around equity of outcomes, and we have a government that is driving very hard in that direction at the moment. It's the right agenda but the way in which they are going about it is brutal. So, our licence to operate in a dynamic post-colonial context has been very much tested and, in a space, where we are operating under a government which is absolutely enamoured with vocational education and has really just left the universities, all eight of us, to sort things out for ourselves; very little sympathy for the university sector.

RT: Senior Exec 2

2.3.2 Societal expectations

The policy environment (as outlined above) both shapes and is shaped by shifting societal perspectives on the nature and purpose(s) of higher education. The challenge of funding mass HE (see below) has been associated with a significant increase in student fees in many countries. This situation, combined with increased scrutiny by media and government on the public value of HE and student experiences and outcomes (which were impacted by the pandemic) has led to a more disparate set of opinions on leadership and management in and of the sector. While, in many regards, there has been a shift in public opinion about the value of specialist knowledge, the pandemic also fuelled an increased visibility of, and respect for, scientific expertise, with academics playing a key role in advising on public health policy and economic recovery, as well, of course, in the drive to develop vaccines. This has created a significant amount of ambivalence and increased expectations for HEIs to define their value and demonstrate impact.

I think there is a real volatility, certainly in the UK... around social perceptions of value and purpose and the relationship between a university or the sector and everyone else and I think that's been called fundamentally into question. It goes back to the age-old "What are universities for?" and I think we're coming around to that question again, partially ideologically driven in the UK through government pressures and everything that's going through the mill at the moment.

RT: Senior Exec 2

2.3.3 Funding mechanisms

With the rapid expansion of higher education around the world has come a significant set of questions and challenges around the funding of HE. The focus on securing external income and managing finances has driven an increasing professionalisation of HE leadership and management and multiplication of roles and responsibilities (see also next point). In many countries, students are expected to pay a significantly higher amount of money for their studies (via fees and loans) and HEIs have needed to develop marketing and student support systems accordingly. There are also significant challenges around the availability of funding for research, with an increasingly competitive landscape for bidding and increasing expectations within institutions for academics to secure external funds for their research. RT participants noted particular challenges around the funding mechanisms in Australia where there are tight controls in place around the cross-subsidy of research from teaching and learning.

The higher education sector in Australia is in something of a crisis, in my view at any rate, certainly a funding crisis.... The big disruptor for us is the funding model that we have ended up with. Now, I say 'ended up with' because it's the product of a lot of things, not least a desire to move to mass education and a desire to lift the research productivity of universities. And essentially the Australian government has stepped back from the additional funding that that would take and the burden of that cost was derived from an international student market, and when the pandemic hit and our borders slammed shut for two years nearly that has been a huge disruptor to higher education in Australia and it's exposed both the good and the bad.

RT: Senior Exec 2

2.3.4 Staff

Many of the points outlined so far demonstrate the need for professionalisation of structures and processes across all areas of HE. The last two decades have seen a huge increase in the proportion of professional service staff needed to deal with the administrative, financial, operational and other aspects of running a multi-million pound/dollar organisation³. The drive towards more applied, business-facing education has also promoted diversification of academic faculty, as has the recognised need to proactively enhance equality, diversity and inclusion. A diverse and changing student cohort, and shifting social expectations and norms, makes it increasingly urgent to ensure that staffing (at all levels) better reflects the communities that HE serves. While there is much evidence to support the benefits of a diverse workforce, it poses a challenge to leaders and HEIs around building and sustaining inclusive cultures that celebrate difference; embrace a plurality of perspectives; and develop an engaging sense of shared purpose across a community with diverse personal and professional interests and agendas.

... it's that kind of external landscape, whether it's business engagement, regional engagement, etc – one of the leadership challenges that I have is translating that internally to the academic community, to my professional service community, in the sense of all the different voices that are influencing what we are doing as an institution. You know, whether it's students as customers, whether it's as parents or guardians who are paying the tuition fee, whether it's policymakers constantly tinkering around the edges or doing radical overhauls, whether it's academic staff, it's businesses, etc, there's just so much noise around HE that influences what we can do, what we could do, what we should do ... for me it's the translation of that to get people to kind of coalesce around a vision and a purpose and it's fundamentally what is the vision and the purpose of higher education moving forwards.

RT: Senior Exec 2

3 Alongside this there has been an expansion of 'third space' professionals whose skills and expertise span both academic and professional service domains (Whitchurch, 2013).

2.3.5 Students

Another issue highlighted within the RTs is the changing nature of the student cohort itself. Student populations are highly diverse in many HE systems, with changing expectations about the ways in which they engage with higher education. The pandemic had a significant impact on student experience. A lasting legacy may be increased expectations for flexibility and choice in how, when and where students engage with course materials, including hybrid modes of delivery that allow for a combination of face-to-face, online and self-directed study. There has also been a shift in expectations around the nature of student support, including greater flexibility and sensitivity to the personal and emotional needs of students. Mental health and wellbeing are (or should be) key concerns for all HEIs and call for a more compassionate and caring approach to supporting students. The increased costs of HE have fuelled an increase in the proportion of students doing paid work alongside their studies. Changing expectations around ethics, inclusion and sustainability also inform the choice of course and university, which has a direct impact on HE providers.

I think one of the most important things is the student expectations that have changed, and they have changed significantly. What we termed “personalisation” pre-pandemic, personalising the curriculum was delivering an inclusive style, and dealing with specific learning styles and so on. We’ve personalised it to the nth degree during the pandemic. We were beaming ourselves into people’s homes, offering tutorials at all sorts of times in order to maintain business continuity. The expectations are really high, and universities are not resourced to deliver. We cannot operate in two modes. It comes down to the fact that we are redefining what a university is.

RT: Deans and HoDs

Table 2.1 provides a summary of the key changes impacting on HE as identified through the RT discussions. It describes the direction in which the influence of context on HEIs is moving. On the left are the factors of growing impact and on the right are factors of decreasing impact.

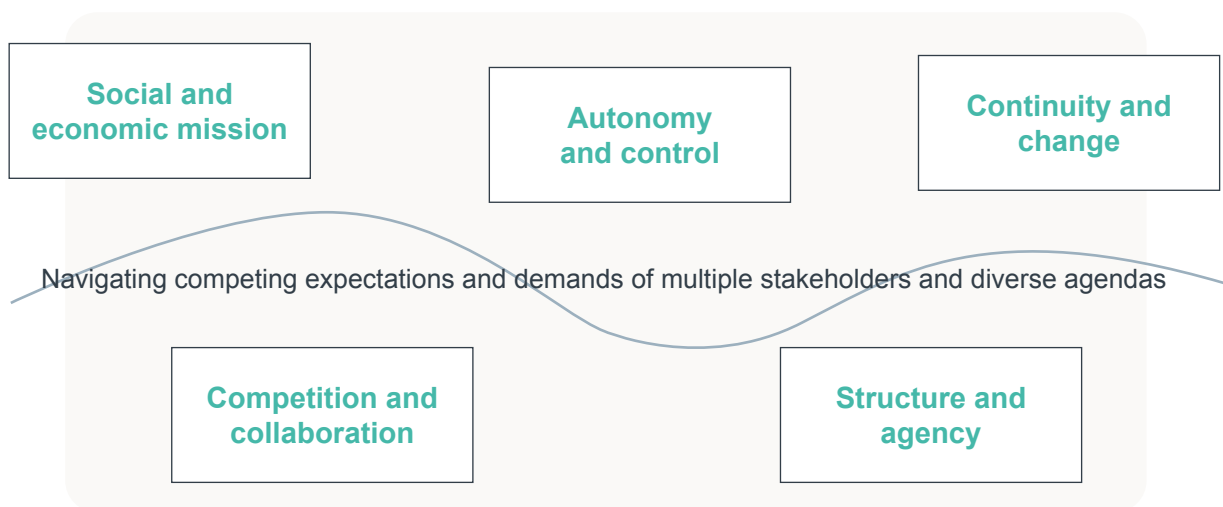
Table 2.1. The changing landscape of higher education

Intensification of...	Decline in...
Commercial agenda, marketisation	Levels of trust
Focus on financial performance	Sense of community
Staff workloads	Long-term strategic planning
Public and political scrutiny	Levels of administrative support
External metrics and regulation	Investment in IT infrastructure relative to need
Student expectations and demands	Perceived public value of HE
Use of digital technology	Funding for research
Crisis management, urgency	Mental health, wellbeing
Rate of change across sector	Ability to take risks
Demand for EDI	Willingness to take on leadership

2.4 Tensions and challenges

The issues outlined above highlight a range of competing expectations and demands on HEIs and the leaders, managers and other professionals working within them. This surfaces inherent tensions and challenges that must be navigated within contemporary higher education. Examples include tensions between the social and economic missions of HE; the need to collaborate while also often competing at the same time; the balance between individual and collective autonomy and control; the need for formal structures and processes, while also enabling localised agency and influence; and the tensions between continuity and change (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2. Tensions and challenges in higher education



At the moment, there is an interesting tension between collaboration and competition, so I think the way we're working across institutions, working with alternative providers, FE colleges, et cetera, trying to build integrated skills, reskilling, upskilling, life-long learning offer, moving away from such a focus on kind of 18 to 21 full-time undergraduate degrees, so doing all this other stuff what has been our core for a long time. So, all of that is going on, which only works through partnership working and cooperation. But at the same time, we are in an incredibly competitive environment where we are kind of slitting each other's throats at the same time, so I think that weird dichotomy we're living with all the time is a dominant feature of the experience at the moment, I would say.

RT: Deans and HODs

Higher education organisations are in a very challenging landscape politically, because we are getting very mixed messages from government about the importance of higher education, so we have had negative anti-intellectual, anti-university rhetoric coming from the government, while simultaneously getting these big announcements that we want the UK to be a big science superpower.

RT: Deans and HODs

None of these issues is readily resolvable but, rather, must be constantly navigated and negotiated among multiple stakeholders, often with competing agendas. This highlights the need for HE leaders and institutions to develop their capacity to cope with ambiguity and uncertainty, to be both adaptive and responsive but also strategic and forward-thinking. An alertness to contextual factors and an ability to adapt and respond accordingly are key aspects of leadership in a changing HE landscape. As the RT participants highlighted, the pandemic marks a turning point in global higher education, with real opportunities for learning and development – if we are able to learn the lessons and actively engage with the questions that are raised.

What we've seen... is this whole need for... how can we be agile and really responding to what is happening, straight now, but at the same time be someone who is looking ahead, at the same time as somebody who has that emotional intelligence to deal with not only their student population who is changing dramatically, but the needs of our staff and our whole pedagogy is changing? What do leaders need to do? How do they need to act? How do they need to be? What are the skills and the qualities that we have to have in our leaders in order to – and also, knowing that one person can do all of that, but also that kind of, and maybe – not core structures, but even like school structures within our own?

RT: Deans and HODs

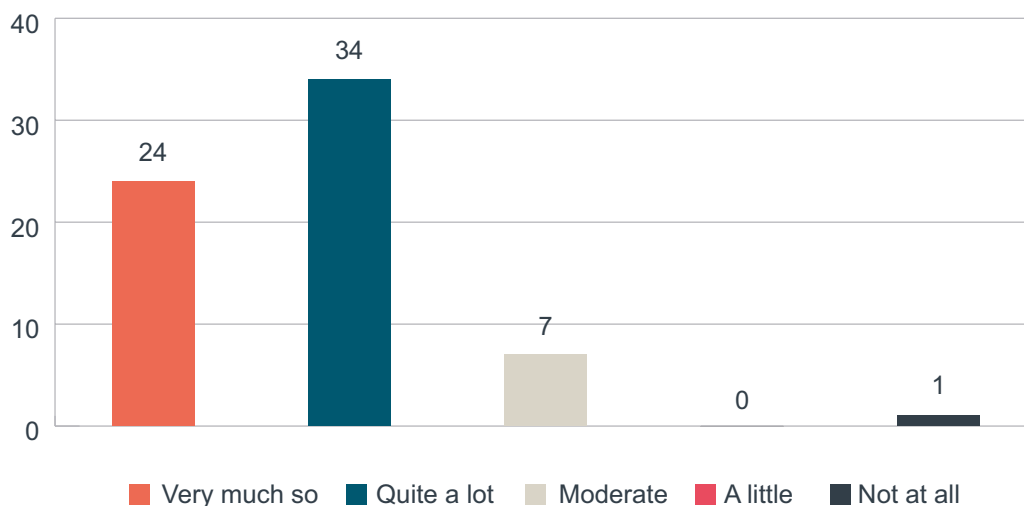
2.5 Reflections from the D&E events

A summary of the themes and issues outlined above was presented at the four dissemination and engagement events. Within each session three questions were posed to check the extent to which the issues identified around context resonated with participants.

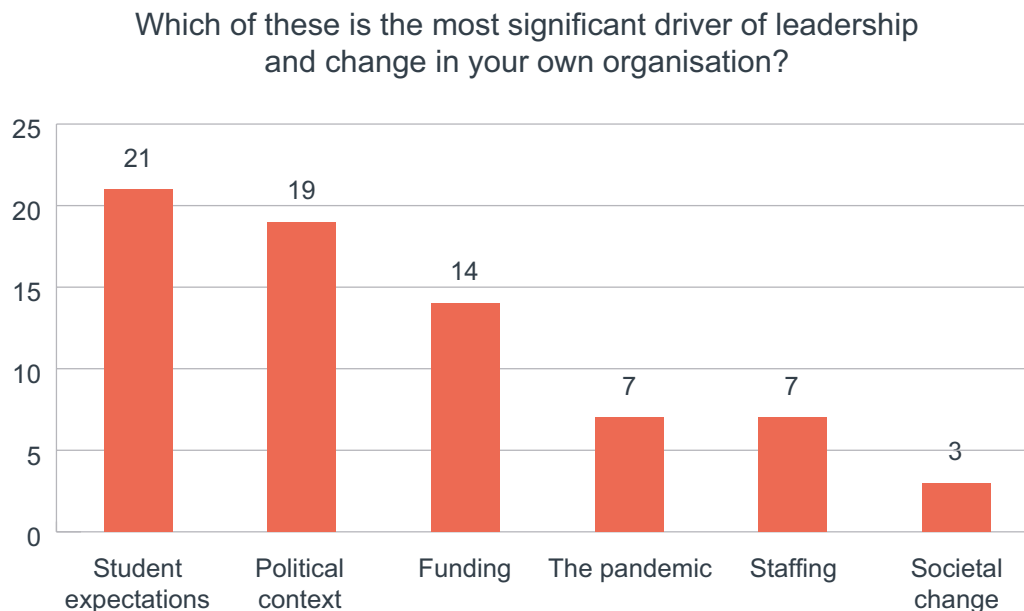
The first question for the section on context asked participants to indicate the extent to which findings reflected their own experiences of the current HE context. As Figure 2.3 indicates, the vast majority (88%) said ‘very much so’ or ‘quite a lot’, with the rest saying ‘moderate’ and just one respondent ‘not at all’.

Figure 2.3. Degree to which D&E participants recognise the findings on context

To what extent do these findings reflect your own experiences of the current HE context?



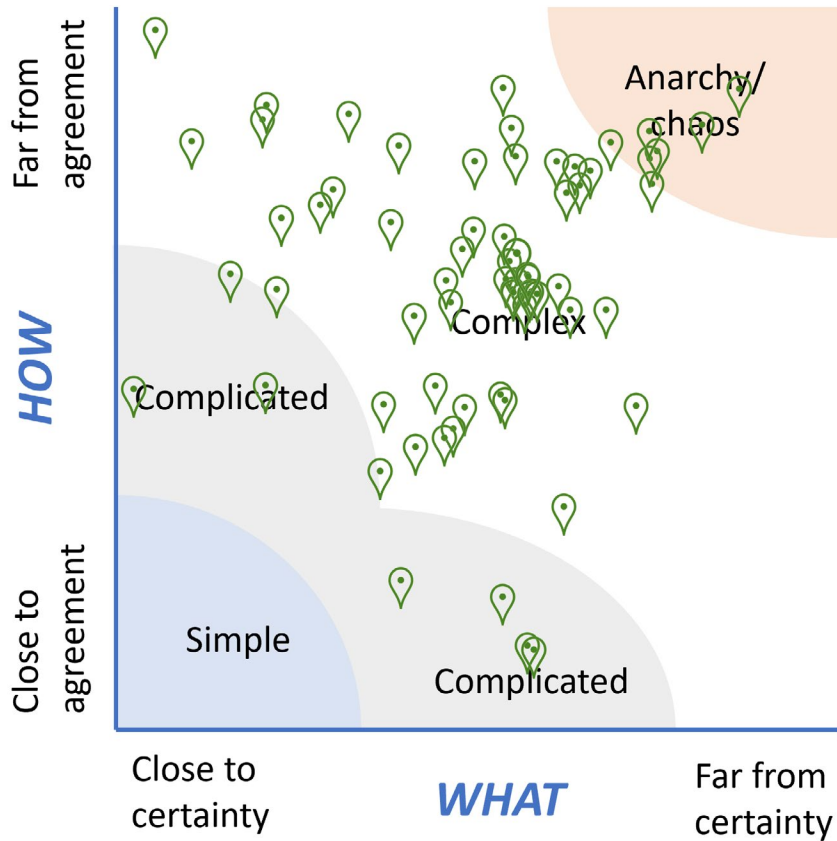
The second question asked participants to identify which of the six contextual areas identified through the RTs (as illustrated in Figure 2.1) is the most significant driver of leadership and change in their own organisation. As Figure 2.4 shows, there was a fair spread of responses, with student expectations and political context ranked highest, followed by funding, pandemic, staffing and societal change.

Figure 2.4. Main drivers of leadership and change

The final question asked participants to place a marker on the Stacey Complexity Model⁴ to indicate how they would characterise the kinds of leadership challenge they face most often at work. Collated responses from each of the D&E events are shown in Figure 2.5, from which it can be clearly seen that practically all participants identified themselves as facing ‘complex’ challenges, where there is both a moderate-high level of uncertainty about the nature of the issue as well as a moderate-high level of agreement on how to address it.

4 On this framework the X-axis refers to the degree of certainty around the issue/problem being faced while the Y-axis refers to the degree of agreement around how best to address it. Four domains are mapped out on the graph to indicate the relative complexity of the situation: simple (high certainty and agreement), complicated (moderate-high certainty and agreement), complex (low-moderate certainty and agreement) and anarchy/chaos (very low certainty or agreement). Different kinds of issues will require different kinds of management/leadership response (Stacey, 2002).

Figure 2.5. What kind of leadership challenge do you face most often?



To conclude, the HE landscape continually provides a complex and changing background against which understandings and experiences of leadership must be assessed. An ability to recognise and respond appropriately to contextual cues is a key requirement for HE leaders and organisations. RT participants suggested that we are at a key turning point in relation to factors including political and societal expectations, and funding systems, as well as staff and student experience. While these are not new issues in themselves the ways in which leaders and managers respond to them is seen as critical to the continued success (and to some extent survival) of the sector. In particular, the RTs highlight the need for HE leaders to navigate these complex challenges in order to meet the changing needs and expectations of a diverse set of stakeholders.

3 Values and purpose

3.1 Overview

In the second part of the round table events, discussion moved to a consideration by participants of the values and purpose of leadership in higher education. Round table participants were asked to consider one three-branched question:

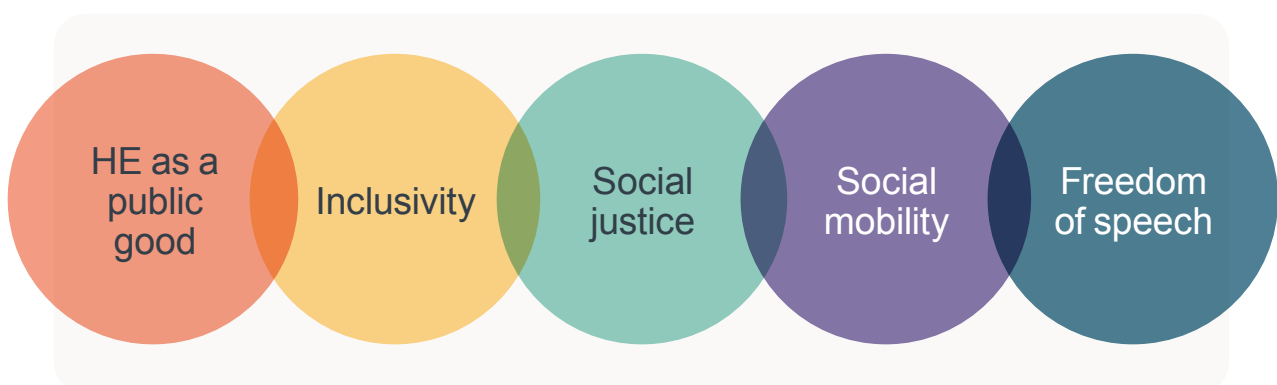
How do values and purpose shape leadership: within your organisation? within your professional area? within the sector as a whole?

The question generated seven thematic strands of discussion concerning what participants understood to be (i) the core values of higher education; (ii) how values of higher education are challenged; (iii) the purpose of leadership in higher education settings; (iv) what leaders *should* be focused on; (v) the *internal* challenges for values-based leadership; (vi) the *external* challenges for values-based leadership; (vii) strategies for embedding values-based leadership in higher education settings. This chapter reports on these seven points of discussion in turn.

3.2 Core values of higher education

Across the 11 RTs participants gravitated most frequently towards five core values indelibly associated with higher education. These ‘values’ might also be understood as the core aims and objectives of HE and the core condition for achieving these. Accordingly, HE is principally understood as a public good or a means to achieving the public good. HEIs in service to the public good are thus focused on enabling an inclusive society based on social justice and the common acquisition of social mobility, attained by operating as inclusive educational organisations where the critical and creative autonomy of students and staff is incentivised and protected.

Figure 3.1. Core values of higher education



3.3 How are values of higher education challenged?

Next, RT participants were asked to reflect on how they saw these core values of higher education challenged. Participants across all the RTs perceived destructive influences in the form primarily of external pressures on HEIs that were causing them to have to (re)rationalise their roles in ways often antagonistic to delivering ‘public good’.

Participants frequently identified the influence of government and the manner in which HEIs – as publicly funded institutions in many national contexts – are susceptible to the prevailing political context and the associated changes in HE policy. This can have a profound impact on the stability of the sector. HEIs were seen by participants to have been transformed – and were continuing to be transformed – via their appropriation and prioritisation by government as catalysts of economic development. They were accordingly viewed as objects of politicisation and market forces, mobilised in anticipatory fulfillment of a high-skills agenda. The politicisation of higher education in such a way was seen to not only narrow a values-based rationalisation of HEIs, but divert HEIs away from other, ostensibly less tangible and output-oriented (yet no less *valuable*) outcomes.

I feel there is a higher level that captures a lot of what falls out underneath and it's a restricted political discourse of what universities are, what they are supposed to be and what role they play in society.

RT: Professoriate

The privileging of an economic rationalisation of HE was also attributed to the proliferation of competitive behaviours within and between HEIs as they respond to the pressures of marketisation endemic in many country settings. Accordingly, HEIs were seen to have adopted business-like behaviours, which are affecting the resilience of ethical and moral values, as outlined in Section 3.2.

Participants identified the prevalence of public management discourse and the transition towards more managerialist forms of institutional governance as being the result of increasing marketisation within HE. This was attributed by participants as causing an obfuscation of values within the institution and changing the role profile of senior leaders, echoing themes from the literature review. HE leaders, as this report will show, were seen by participants to perform a very different set of task functions – and comprise a different skill repertoire and leadership outlook – to leadership archetypes aspired to within the model of the public university. Participants also highlighted a values-dissonance specific to what they perceived to be the incentivised *negative* behaviour of university and other HE leaders as institutional capitalists, versus their stewardship of the university as a public good organisation. As one member of a senior executive RT informed us:

We have a dissonance in values between what we reward (narcissism and what we call rampant ‘entitle-itis’) and what we value (service, selflessness and intellectual generosity).

RT: Senior Exec 2

Participants also considered that the valorisation of HEIs' economic contribution – habitually the return-on-investment made by students as high fee-paying consumers of higher education – is, as Walter McMahon (2017) has argued, highly shortsighted and fails to recognise that students are frequently desirous of the non-market and non-private benefits provided by participation in HE. Equally, our participants voiced their concerns with new forms of performance evaluation used within HEIs, which can result in both staff and students being denied autonomy, where datafication operates as a control technology and also, in some circumstances, potentially a means of commercial exploitation.

3.4 What is the purpose of leadership in HE?

Our participants then discussed what they saw as the purpose of leadership in the context of HE as complex and contested sites of work and education. Many of their views were shaped by the recent experience of the Covid-19 pandemic and what they understood as the role of university leaders in a particularly challenging environment. However, as indicated in Chapter 2, while the pandemic has unequivocally intensified stress-points within HEIs and thus consolidated a brand of leadership many equate with crisis management, many of the leadership challenges faced over the course of the last two years actually precede the global outbreak of Covid-19. Their views are as such not so much a direct derivative of pandemic conditions, or what we have elsewhere referred to as a 'pandemia' (Watermeyer et al, 2021), as confirmation of a recent, if prolonged, history of academic discontent, which this report will discuss further as challenges to values-based leadership. Despite what our participants view as deficiencies in current HE leadership, they highlight the facilitative role of leadership and how this might be further developed.

First and foremost, participants viewed the role of HE leadership as empowering staff, enabling them to act as leaders (informally and formally) ideally in a distributed fashion, that might aid inclusive and non-hierarchical community making – always a profound challenge in a work culture so heavily invested in the accumulation and performance of prestige:

Leadership is happening every day from all of us, no matter how senior we are.

RT: Professoriate

In such contexts, ensuring the wellbeing and resilience of staff and students ought to be a driving consideration for HE leadership. Yet while human-centric and democratic leadership was persistently advocated, participants acknowledged that senior leaders would sometimes have to make tough decisions that might be seen to conflict with an ethic of care:

Being a leader means that you absolutely need to get buy-in from people, and you want people to be collaborative, but you need to make those tough decisions.

RT: Deans and HoDs

Mitigating fallout and/or pre-empting staff discontent in response to unpopular and/or painful leadership decisions, especially during the pandemic, was seen to demand relational flair in building positivity and resilience within communities of HE staff:

It is trying to keep the positive energy, the vibes that need to be there, the resilience that we want to be happening with our teams.

RT: Deans and HoDs

It was also seen to demand getting among university staff by breaking with top-down and distanced leadership that can breed alienation, a sense of neglect and the institutional sectarianism of 'us and them':

We have a body of people sitting in and making managerial positions somewhat distanced from the issues we face on the ground, like student engagement and the equality of education.

RT: Deans and HoDs

Such relational and propitiatory flair was also positioned in reference to leaders acting as role models; authentic figureheads who could be related to, understood, perhaps even sympathised with. Role models in this context were not only conceived as individuals whose behaviour and achievements offer an exemplar for imitation but are respected individuals who share physical (and social/cultural) likeness with those they lead. The diversification of higher education leadership was unsurprisingly, therefore, claimed by participants as necessary to the cultivation of effective leadership, with those being led able to identify and find resemblance in those leading:

We need role models. As things are progressing, we're starting to see the legacy of EDI [equality and diversity initiatives] in that we're starting to see much more diversity in management . . . I mean with this thing of implicit bias; people are more likely to nurture people who remind them of themselves in some way. So, the more diversity we have in the higher up positions the easier it should be for everybody.

RT: Early Career Academics

The tribalism of leaders as role models was also found in participants expressing the view that HE leaders should serve as custodians of the values of HE. While this report has already alluded to leaders' custodianship of HEIs as a public good, participants' accounts furthered this aspirational ideal by highlighting how HE leaders can act as a bulwark against the intrusions and anxieties presented by HE's prestige and performance culture. As such, leaders were imagined as insulating staff (and students) and providing them a protective space where they might take the risks necessary to their creative and innovative endeavours and equally to learn, without penalty, from inevitable moments of failure. However, such a function was considered to be no small feat:

I think if I look at the universities, again, as a necessary space for innovation and creativity and moving things forward one thing that we need to battle with and manage as leaders towards an outcome is appetite for risk, both in our staff and students. And it seems we are increasingly struggling to find a space and a place for productive failure. You know, I try and fail every day, I really try and do, and I mean that positively so, but I know the risk aversion in our students... “Just show me what I need so I get the mark,” and the risk aversion of our staff is just “I need to get my mean module marks to X” is a result of that external thing. And I think it’s our job as leaders to put a bubble but a porous bubble . . . a porous bubble that welcomes in that world whilst protecting it and inculcating a systemic ability to be able to knowingly risk, and that’s really difficult, I’m struggling with that one.

RT: Senior Exec 2

This idea that HE leaders should be *enablers* of the creative and critical autonomy of staff – far removed from the inhibitive trappings of performance management – also found purchase within an aspiration of leaders in HE acting not only as role models and guardians but mentors for future generations of academic (and non-academic) talent. The role of HE leadership as such may be understood as building and maintaining a talent pipeline:

From my perspective as a professor the things I get most out of it are bringing on younger members of staff and bringing on the younger generation.

RT: Professoriate

Despite recognition of the higher purpose of HE, many of the RTs suggested that HE leaders often spend far more of their time focused on income generation, brand management and strategic positioning, than on the health, wellbeing and welfare of their staff.

3.5 What should HE leaders be focused on?

Having considered the *purpose* of leadership, RT participants discussed what they thought leaders should be focused on. First was a focus on the wellbeing of staff and student communities, as opposed to market-based concerns. Participants believed leadership should insulate and protect staff from the deleterious effects of a high-performance and high-demand work culture on cognitive and mental wellbeing. This was an aspirational function and some of the participants speculated it was already committed to by their institutional leaders:

I think perhaps our senior leadership are absorbing a lot of the wider stresses and defending lecturers’ time/motivation/mental capacity.

RT: Early Career Academics

Participants identified strong leadership with resolve and staying true to the values a leader might promulgate, regardless of the difficulty this might present in their negotiations with other individuals holding power, and despite the (personal and political) conveniences of compromise:

It is about authenticity. We're not going to survive unless we have leaders that have a set of values that are not just parroted because that is what the university says it is. They know what their own values are, I suppose, and they don't compromise on those in the face of political pressure or external pressure.

RT: Early Career Academics

Particularly in the UK, strong advocacy for higher education was considered to be challenging, but especially important, within what was perceived by participants to be a hostile policy environment, and a government agenda for HE that many regard as steering it away from the broadness of a public good role. Participants thus considered that HE leaders would have to strongly commit to and defend the underpinning values of the public university:

It's really important that leadership holds the principles of what education's for, about enlightenment of individuals, better lives for individuals and society, discovery, problem-solving and tolerance and inclusivity and all of those values. All of those values I think are absolutely the core.

RT: Senior Exec 2

However, it was recognised that where HEIs were now being pulled in so many different directions, the ability for university leaders to hold a long course was increasingly difficult:

There are too many pressures and leaders are succumbing to that.

RT: Early Career Academics

Notwithstanding, RT participants stressed the importance of having a long-term plan and articulating a clear sense of the value proposition of higher education, which is not just limited to narrow definitions of productive excellence, now and in the future:

Our leaders should have a vision. So, my question is are we looking forward to five and ten years or looking into the past . . . We seriously need to reflect on our value proposition. I don't think it's clearly defined or maybe I missed it. If we're really honest with ourselves I think we can improve that . . . So, what is the function of higher education in 10 or 20 years?

RT: Professoriate

In thinking through on the future, participants understood the importance of leadership responding to change brought about by technological innovation and particularly the transformation of education systems by digital tools. Digital leadership was proposed as a necessary aspect both to facilitating HEIs' digital transformation and safeguarding its communities through the process of such conversion. Digital leadership was anticipated as a responsibility and function not just of senior institutional leaders but all members of a university staff community. This view follows other assertions made by RT participants regarding the efficacy of a model of distributed (and democratic) leadership within HEIs. Nonetheless, it was held that a model of distributed digital leadership would take necessary impetus from senior leaders:

Everybody needs to be a digital leader. It is not just about the senior management . . . It is not about having a few people at the top to understand digital leadership and to put it in place. It applies to everybody but you have to get that from the top to make the spread.

RT: Trade Unions and HE Support Orgs

Participants discussed the need for HE leaders to openly recognise and respond to the impacts of new forms of work organisation introduced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, this included hybrid work arrangements that fuse campus-based and home-based work routines, which required adaptation and experimentation. These now need to be considered in the context of Covid recovery:

Alongside the ability to allow staff to work remotely, we have to think about supporting the staff mental health and physical wellbeing. Which is an important dimension of the leadership. The leaders showing that they understand what the staff are going through, to make themselves available to the technology to really show something of themselves. When going back to the office, the workplace for a bit of the week, and then working from home, that brings a stress and fatigue, mentally and physically to strain relationships.

RT: Trade Unions and HE Support Orgs

While much has been made of the Covid-19 pandemic as a platform for positive change and a 'great reset' (World Economic Forum, 2020) for civil society and its multitude of public organisations, RT participants discussed the extent to which the pandemic would continue to provide motivation for the positive transformation of HEIs and the sustainability of values-based leadership:

I think, on the minds of lots of vice-chancellors is: How do we sustain the pace of change if I have not got the excuse of a pandemic to do it with? That is the thing that I think that they will not say out loud but which is clearly on their minds.

RT: Trade Unions and HE Support Orgs

An authentic commitment to values-based leadership was also understood by participants as a rejection of the legacy and vanity projects that were identified as an historical indulgence of some senior HE leaders, and an equal commitment to exercising honesty and humility:

... leaders sharing the fact that they don't quite know where they are going.

RT: Trade Unions and HE Support Orgs

3.6 External challenges for values-based leadership in HE

RT participants referred back to discussion of the prevailing context of higher education in making consideration of how values-based leadership in HEIs is challenged. They drew on two major external factors they perceive to be extremely influential to how the role of HE is conceptualised and how leadership is mobilised.

The first factor relates to how HEIs operate in a prestige economy and how all members of their staff are, for the purpose of career progress and development, beholden to the accumulation of markers of esteem that typically relate to measures such as income or institutional performance in league tables. Leadership – and the conferment of formal leadership responsibilities – in HEIs is thus typically a consequence of success in generating institutional gains, far more than the articulation and performance of values:

The purpose of leadership and the values are impacted by the structures and the titles and statuses that we inhabit and which the sector requires us in a sense to inhabit as we move through it in leadership or increasingly senior leadership positions.

RT: Professional Service Leaders

The second factor is the external political context and a sense of governments being less than sympathetic and/or responsive to the demands and needs of the country's higher education sector. This sentiment was particularly acute among UK participants (81% of the total participants), one of whom described it as having a disempowering effect on senior university leaders, who were depicted as being denied the necessary social/political capital with which to lead their institutions meaningfully and, collectively, UK higher education:

We are in an exceptionally hostile political environment ... This is not a political situation that vice-chancellors have been in before. It is new territory, where they are not listened to, not being heard, pretending that they are heard, do not have significant influence, which is hard for them to navigate from a national leadership perspective.

RT: Trade Unions and HE Support Orgs

As mentioned earlier, the political environment was also perceived by participants to be pursuing an economically deterministic value formula for higher education – a value rationalisation of HE predicated principally on its contribution to employability. Participants described leaders as having to mediate an employability (and skills) agenda by maintaining their focus on the public good role of HEIs in providing an education that exceeds merely preparing graduates for employment. By focusing on what HEIs can do best – the cultivation of critical and creative minds – a high-skills and thus employability agenda would take care of itself:

The drive from government to demonstrate employability that's definitely not going to go away. So, it's up to us how we make it work in a way that we know is going produce the results we need. If we are producing creative, critical thinkers they will be employable. That's what we need to focus on.

RT: Professoriate

Participants also claimed that value determinations of higher education had become convoluted by myriad stakeholder claims. These complicated and made potentially controversial the notion of values-based leadership. Leaders were being forced to ask, for whom are they leading:

The big leadership tension is navigating a very messy landscape where there are so many different stakeholders, actors, whatever you want to call it, who have a different view of value, you know, lots of people who are making their own decisions around value, what they think is the value of higher education for them in their particular role, organisation, whatever it might be. So, you know, obviously government, regulators, students, employers, staff, academic partners, other partners, I mean, the list goes on and on and on and on. And I think we need to do a little bit of work just pausing and reflecting on that to understand that, you know, there are things that we just can't control as leaders because people are bringing those perspectives, and lived experiences as well, to the table in terms of how value has landed for them.

RT: Senior Exec 2

Higher education leaders were consequently viewed by RT participants as having to mediate competing notions of value, as for instance designated by students, employers, government and academics. They were finding themselves having to balance public good values against the target expectations of different stakeholders (see also Chapter 2):

You've got the research and teaching and financial viability of courses versus what we know needs to be done in terms of keeping disciplines alive . . . all these different pressures are the key element of leadership these days. And what became clear to me a few years back is that the onus was on me as somebody who could see what needed to be done versus what I was asked to be done and the onus was on me to balance those and appeal to the metrics collectors while keeping running the activities I knew we needed to keep running.

RT: Professoriate

Participants understood that, in such a context, senior HE leaders would need to be wily operators, able to make tough, strategic decisions that might be perceived as having an adverse impact on some staff. For some of the RT participants this related to a steeliness in actioning financial decisions that might conflict with the emotional investment made by leaders in their staff:

If you want to be a good successful leader, you know, at the high level, you have to, you know, demonstrate your ability to cut costs, and that will affect your empathy in terms of whether you care about workloads, whether you care about people being laid off, whether you care about mental health issues, high rates of depression among staff.

RT: Established Academics

In total, RT participants portrayed the challenge for higher education leaders in reconciling a values-based approach to (distributed and/or shared) leadership with external policy directives and commercial imperatives, that tended to reinforce a top-down approach to leadership as institutional management. One of our RT participants made the profound observation that while the governance of HEIs has undergone significant change, there has been no discernible effort to rethink, in tandem, the structure and process of leadership:

Interestingly, in leadership and structures of leadership in universities we still have a 19th-century model, largely, of organisational structure, so we still have a vertical... Now, we have to have an accountable officer, you know, the vice-chancellor is the person who signs the letters, signs the accounts, does that, I absolutely understand that, but it's quite interesting that we have I think as a sector been relatively resistant to or not reflected particularly critically on how the purposes of higher education which have shifted significantly and the demographics of our students which have shifted significantly over time have not been matched by a critical self-reflection on this layer and whether the portfolios are right, whether the statuses are right, whether the titles are right.

RT: Established Academics

3.7 Internal challenges for values-based leadership in HE

Having discussed what they saw as the external challenges of values-based leadership, RT participants articulated a series of internal factors perceived as disruptive. They discussed the prevalence of a gender bias in university leadership and the disproportionate representation of men in leadership roles, with obvious knock-on effects on leaders as representative role models. They also discussed governance structures that are too complex and staff resistance to leadership roles viewed as an interruption to career progression (unless where justified on the basis of a management career track).

In the latter context, participants also rationalised the formal demands of management as an encumbrance on effective leadership. It is from this perspective that the discussions observed a conflation of leadership with management, or rather how managerial duties – often quite mundane administrative functions – compile to subsume a focus on values-based leadership:

The key roles of the leaders are to organise the team, are to get things in place, to fulfil mandates and ensure that we're meeting criteria and things and that the things flow to time and it is less about that value based inspirational leadership and more about is everything covered? Does everyone know what they are doing? Are people deployed? Are people meeting their expectations? Are the student surveys done on time? Are the deadlines met? Is all the marking covered, and less about how do people feel, how are people engaging?

RT: Professional Service Leaders

Participants also spoke of the limitations placed on leadership by prescriptive rules; rules that reflect more often than not an obligation of leaders meeting 'the bottom line' stifling all other concerns and a capacity for leaders to exercise *moral* stewardship. This was observed in the context of HEIs in many countries with developed HE systems, operating within a highly competitive and funding deprived environment:

I find when rules are prescriptive people find it difficult to reflect on their own values, it's almost like people are working to rule. The rule says it needs to be done. It doesn't matter whether you agree or not. It's a case of I have to do it.

RT: Professional Service Leaders

The perceived inflexibility of leadership may, in such cases, be justified on the rigidity of 'rules' that leaders feel forced to comply with. Nevertheless, by being rule rather than values driven, participants pointed to conflict between staff and leaders and a trend towards the vilification of HE leadership, which they also acknowledged was frequently exacerbated by leadership challenges being poorly understood:

You feel sort of quite combatant most days that you are fighting with the leadership because they don't have your interests at heart and they probably can't have everyone's interests at heart, I don't know what they have at heart. They have a job to do, I'm not doing their job, I'm on the receiving end which is a different feeling and everyday experience.

RT: Early Career Academics

Negative characterisations – and misunderstandings – of leadership, were regarded as corrosive to working cultures. Broader conceptualisations of leadership not limited to formal senior positions and as top-down but universal to all campus roles were recommended:

We need a bottom-up approach. We talk about senior management not in a very positive way. So, it seems to be them and us. And that needs to change. Leadership is happening every day from all of us, no matter how senior we are.

RT: Professoriate

Finally, in returning again to the experience of the pandemic, RT participants spoke of how crisis conditions had changed academics' expectations about leadership and caused a move away from a preferred system of shared leadership to leadership as top-down instruction. While the report authors appreciate this finding in part, they also see it as potentially at odds with a recent literature that has critiqued how the pandemic has been used to centralise power within HEIs (Watermeyer et al, 2021):

I think we tried really hard within the pandemic to try and maintain some distributed leadership, and very much used kind of high-level principles, and empower people within specific areas, especially with disparate professional areas. And actually, we found that that was extremely difficult to do, that people wanted to be told what to do . . . As academics in general, we like autonomy, until it seems we are in a crisis situation, and when in a crisis situation, people like instructional leadership, and trying to negotiate those has been quite difficult.

RT: Senior Exec 2

3.8 Strategies for values-based leadership

Finally, RT participants articulated what they perceived as strategies towards better embedding values-based leadership within HEIs. They argued:

- + for a consultative/collaborative approach – bringing others into the conversation and taking a whole-community approach to help determine and define what it means to lead within the specifics of an institution's culture
- + that staff should be directly involved in recruitment of senior leaders to ensure institutional values alignment
- + that value statements, which while sometimes contrived, can facilitate a more joined-up approach to understanding and actioning leadership.

The last point here was, however, not unanimously shared among the RT participants, with some considering formal value statements as largely meaningless performative artefacts:

I find vision and value statements as superfluous, the University of "X" has vision statements ... one of them is openness, respect, inclusivity ... they all sort of, like, no one is going to say "no, we don't agree with that", they all merge into one. I just don't understand the point to them. They are just nice words that someone seems to have picked out of a thesaurus. It has not defined anything in a meaningful way, particularly not an operational level and I think very few leaders would disagree with them.

RT: Professional Services Leaders

3.9 Reflections from D&E events

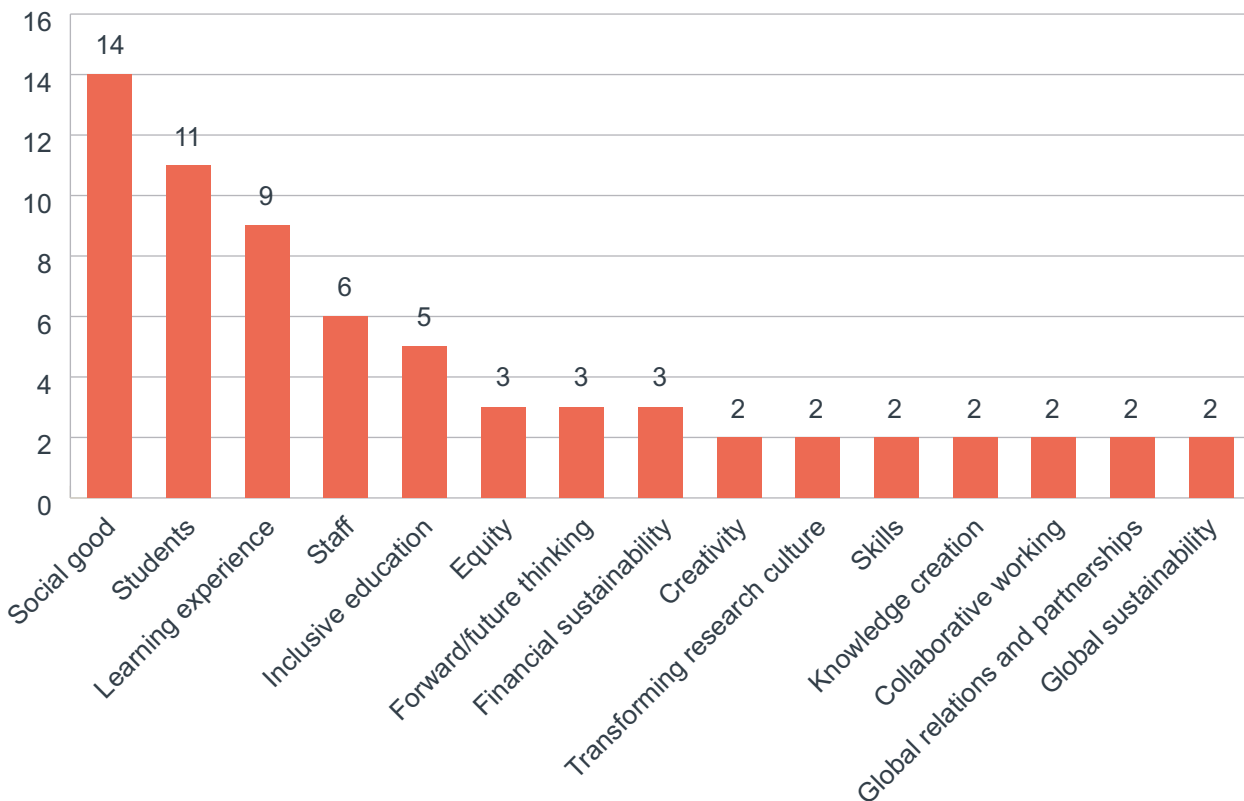
Within the dissemination and engagement events, attendees were asked to respond to three questions pertaining to values and purpose of HE leadership:

- 1 What do you think universities and other HE providers should be focused on most?
- 2 What is the number one priority for higher education leaders?
- 3 What is the number one challenge for higher education leaders?

Attendees were asked to provide single word or short sentence answers that were used to generate word-clouds. We have returned to the data to calculate frequency of terms used by attendees in responding to these questions and provide a sense of what they understood after being presented with the account of the round tables (as presented above).

In response to question 1 and what universities (and other HE providers) should be most focused on, attendees most often stated the *public/social good* (n=14). This was followed by *students* (n=11); *the learning experience* (n=9); and *staff* (n=6). Figure 3.2 presents other words chosen by attendees but only words that were chosen more than once (or as a minimum twice).

Figure 3.2. What do you think universities and other HE providers should focus on most?



In response to question 2 and what is the number one priority for university leaders, attendees most often stated *integrity* (n=9). This was followed by *equity* (n=5); and *students* (n=5). Figure 3.3 presents other words chosen by attendees but only words that were chosen more than once (or as a minimum twice).

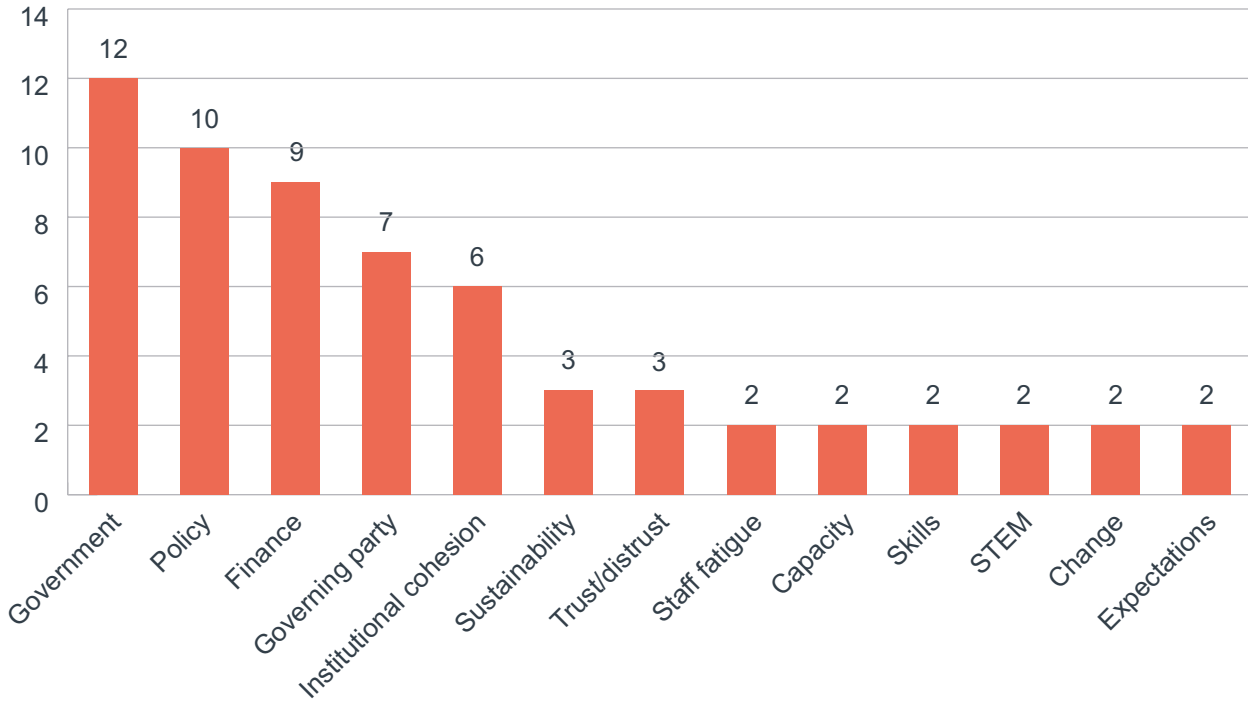
Figure 3.3. What is the number one priority for higher education leaders?



In response to question 3 and what is the number one challenge for higher education leaders, attendees most often stated *government* (n=12). This was followed by *policy* (n=10); *finance* (n=9) and *governing party*⁵ (n=7). Figure 3.4 presents other words chosen by attendees but only words that were chosen more than once (or as a minimum twice).

5 This comment refers specifically to perceptions of the current government in the UK.

Figure 3.4. What is the number one challenge for higher education leaders?



4 Skills, competencies and behaviours

4.1 Overview

We concluded each round table by inviting participants to discuss:

In an evolving HE landscape, what new or future leadership skills/competencies/behaviours are required within your organisation, professional area and/or wider sector?

Participants used both the discussion and the text chat to detail the skills, competencies and behaviours leaders should have. Participants listed these, as well as providing examples of where they were both present and lacking.

4.2 Leadership qualities

Participants in each round table provided several leadership characteristics that they believed are required within their organisation, professional area or wider sector. These fell into 11 thematic areas, which here we have termed 'leadership qualities'. Table 4.1 shows the theme and suggested skills, competencies and/or behaviours that made up this theme.

Table 4.1. Leadership qualities

Qualities	Skills, competencies, behaviours
Adaptable	Adaptability; flexibility; agility; recognising context and adapting style appropriately; ability to 'switch' between topics/meetings/groups; juggling multiple, competing demands; ability to 'switch' focus/maintain energy.
Analytical	Ability to 'translate' strategy into practice; rational; perceptive; inquiring; systematic.
Authentic	Authenticity; trustworthiness; transparency; candour; honesty.
Collaborative	Communication; empowering others; developing self-reflective capacity in teams; shared leadership; recognising and embracing talent; effective delegation; effective engagement; listening; perspective adeptness; talent development; mediation; getting 'buy-in' from staff; leading universities as collectives of people.
Compassionate	Emotional intelligence; humanity; ability to create psychological security; trust; kindness; empathetic; promoting reasonable boundaries for work/life balance; actively enabling wellbeing; patience; attentive listening; caring; mentoring and support; coaching; duty of care; mindfulness.
Creative	Entrepreneurship; think outside the box; creating space for creativity and innovation; ability to 'translate' strategy into practice.
Credible	Strength of purpose; integrity; track record.
Decisive	Proactive; change agents; analyst – decision-making; bold; risk taking; pragmatic; being willing to make difficult decisions where needed; courage.
Digitally engaged	Digital skills; creation, adoption, evaluation and evolution of digital infrastructure.
Inclusive	Respect diversity; understanding culture and context; building an inclusive environment; awareness of how leadership shapes and is influenced by diversity.
Self-reflective	Self-awareness; personal development; ability and commitment to learn; self-care; personal resilience; fallibility; ability to take criticism; humility; learning from mistakes; critical reflection; reflective; reflexive; embracing of failure and risk.

4.3 Leadership qualities in context

What became increasingly clear from the round tables was that these leadership qualities must be considered within each leader's context. When discussing the skills that a leader needs, a common theme was the ability to understand the culture and context:

Just understanding context and culture, I mean, it's very, very important. I'm talking about culture, whether it's the teaching, research or East versus West.

RT: Senior Exec 2

Many examples were provided that highlighted how the wider context of HE meant that, despite having many qualities of a good leader, the environment could nevertheless be a key challenge. For example, one participant stated:

I think that the challenge is how do you present kind of an authentic, compassionate, kind leadership style which recognises the moral framework that you're working in and the importance of scholarship, research, education, creating an environment in which people flourish and feel comfortable and want to work in and want to enter and stay in and have security at the same time as this constant bashing from outside of expectation?

RT: Senior Exec 2

Along with the wider constraints of the HE context, when discussing skills, competencies and behaviours, the culture within the institution was also deemed to be important:

So, we are in a transition point [in my institution] when we are thinking of a new strategy, having a more values-based culture and a real culture of trust within the organisation so there is a big shift. It is interesting to see this playing out in a transition point when there is a lot of change happening as well, for obvious reasons, externally and internally within the institution. So, we are at the beginning of the journey that many of you describe, so I think that values will be much more important in our work and that expectation for the leaders to model those as well as cross the institution.

RT: Senior Exec 1

Furthermore, compelling examples were provided of where good leadership was also made challenging by the team and departmental context that the leader was working within. An early career academic discussed that they had a student who was unable to leave their country due to a war, and they took a leadership role to ensure that this student could access their learning materials:

... we're now offering students online learning when they are in difficult situations. But this was something that I had to fight for and again it wasn't recognised, it was not appreciated. It was seen as me causing trouble. I got called bleeding heart [name] in staff meetings and was just met with basically aggression and this is due to the culture of overwork. People see anything outside of their basic tasks to just be incomprehensible because there is no time to do it and when this is brought up, we're told just do your job. If you were good enough you would be able to do it, so it is cultivating this toxic attitude where the actual ideas of the culture and the values of the university are impossible to uphold for anyone because we're just met with problems at every corner. It feels so difficult.

RT: Early Career Academics

While many of the comments referred to leaders in formal positions, there was recognition of the need to develop and nurture collective or shared leadership at all levels. Therefore, leadership across teams or departments was highlighted as important, particularly the need to delegate and draw on wider expertise:

Listen, listen, listen, listen, listen so that you are working collaboratively with your colleagues, respecting their expertise, wherever it falls, whether it's from a formal leader or an informal leader, and sharing the responsibility.

RT: Senior Exec 2

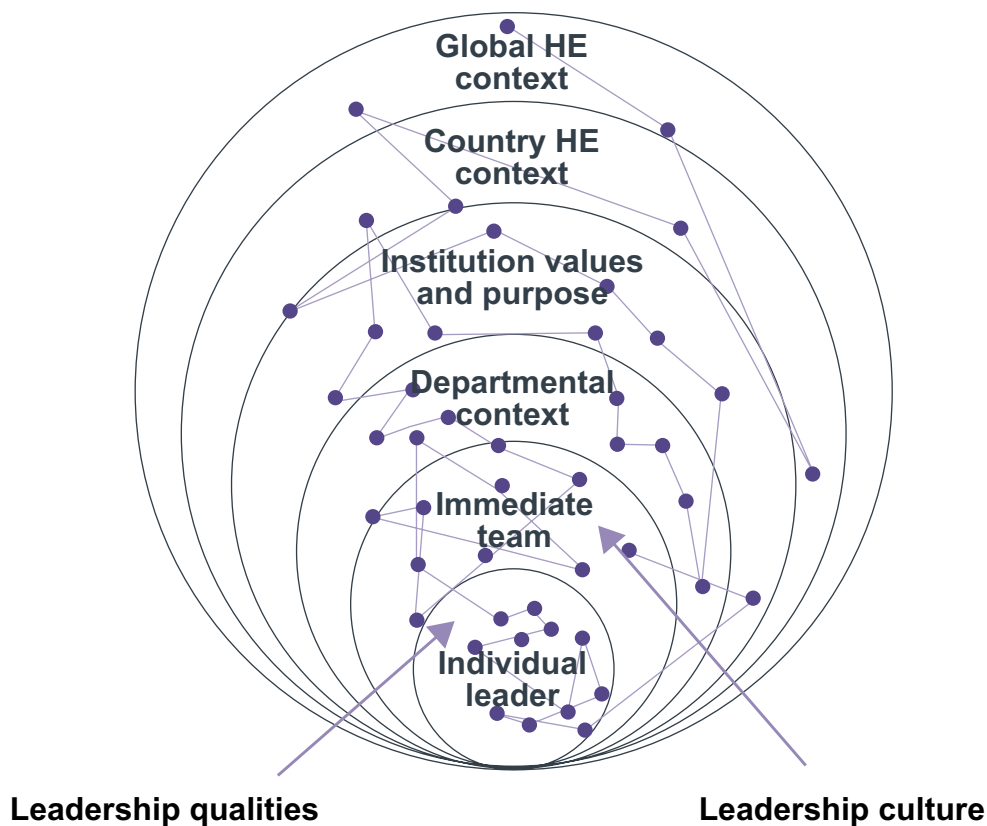
However, there was also acknowledgement that the team context may also prevent this:

You might not be able to delegate because your team are either absent, or absolutely at their limits.

RT: Deans and HoDs

Therefore, within the discussion of skills, competencies and behaviours, less focus was given to the individual capabilities, and more on the context that the leader operates within, be that the HE sector, institution or team context. It became clear from the discussions that it is not simply the case that holding the aforementioned ‘leadership qualities’ will result in good leadership, but rather that the individual leader operates within a complex, wider context that can both enable and prevent good leadership. Figure 4.1 presents the complex leadership cultural and contextual structure that must be considered to fully understand leadership in higher education. The figure emphasises that the interactions within and between the different levels may impact the individual leader, their leadership qualities and the leadership culture. Therefore, the leader and the HE context are interdependent. Thinking of leadership within this complex system allows us to understand that while there may not be a cause-and-effect relationship between a leader’s qualities and their leadership culture (and vice versa) we can seek to understand patterns which may shape good leadership, while acknowledging the complex environment that leaders are situated within. It therefore demonstrates the embeddedness of the multiple units of analysis that are explored in this report.

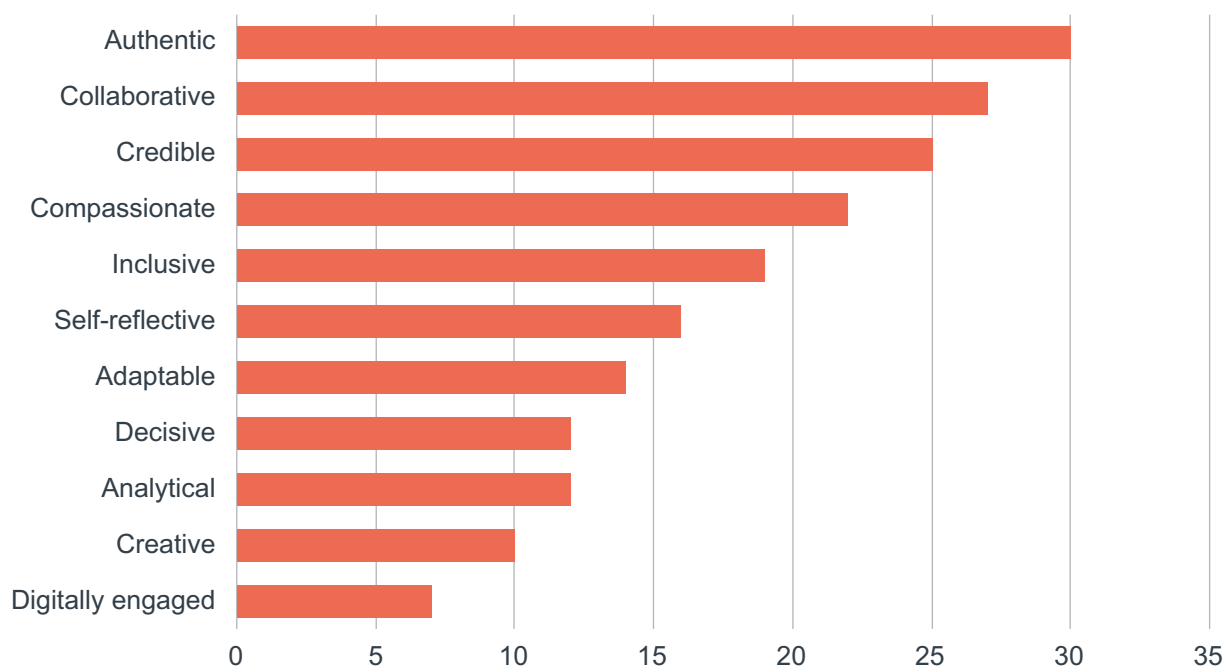
Figure 4.1. Complex leadership structure



4.4 Reflections from the D&E events

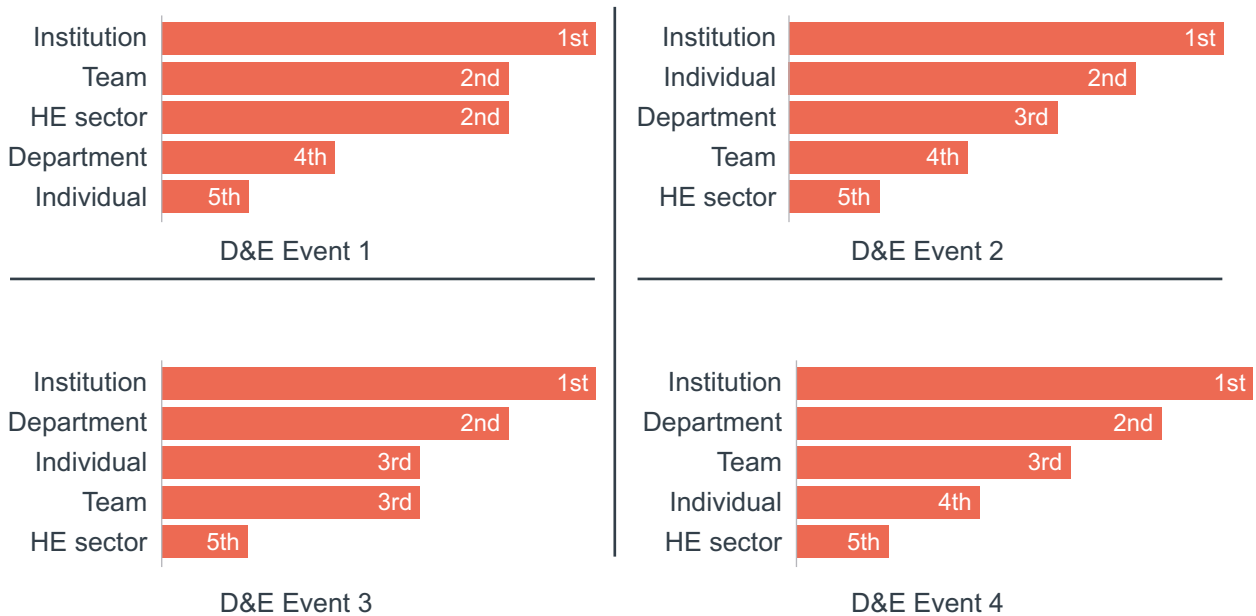
During the D&E events we presented the 11 qualities that had been identified and asked attendees “*which three do you believe are the most important leadership qualities in HE?*”. Figure 4.2 shows the combined total number of votes for each leadership quality across the four events. Attendees at the events voted for ‘authentic’, ‘collaborative’, ‘credible’ and ‘compassionate’ as the most important leadership qualities, with the fewest votes given to ‘digitally engaged’, ‘creative’, ‘analytical’ and ‘decisive’.

Figure 4.2. Most important leadership qualities in HE



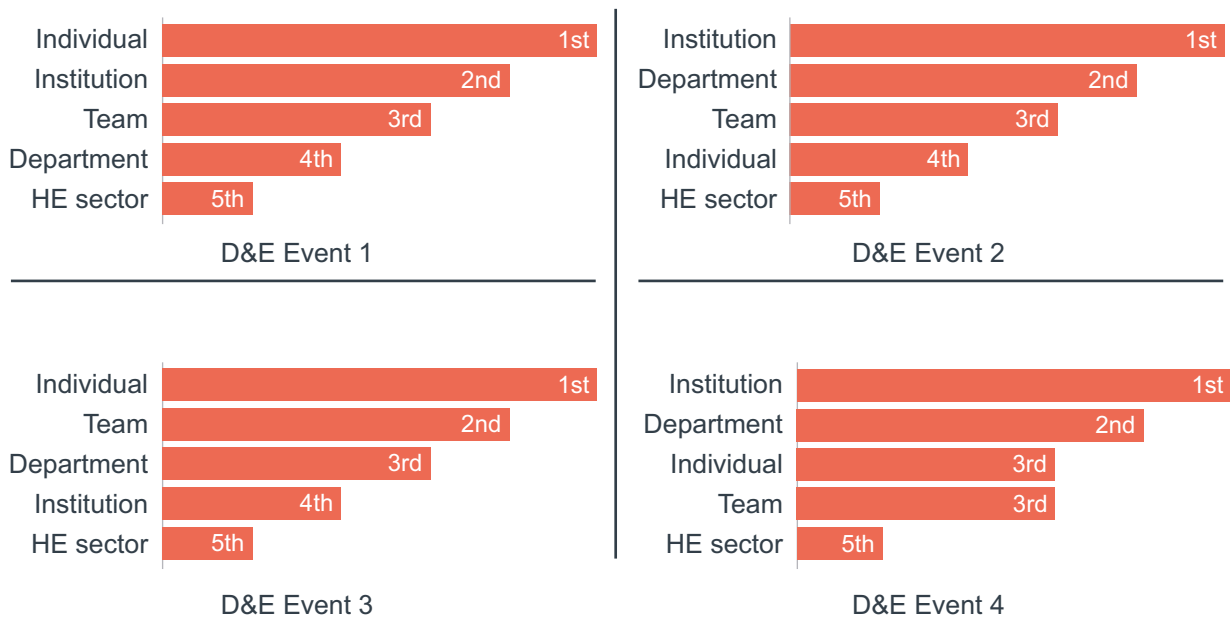
We also presented the idea of the multi-level nature of HE leadership (as illustrated in Figure 4.1) during the D&E events and asked attendees to consider ‘*at what level is good leadership most important?*’. Attendees were asked to rank ‘individual’, ‘team’, ‘department’, ‘institution’, ‘HE sector’ from the most to the least important. Figure 4.3 shows that ‘institution’ was consistently ranked as being the most important for good leadership.

Figure 4.3. At what level is good leadership most important?



We then asked, ‘*at what level is there greatest need for leadership development?*’. Attendees were given the same options and were tasked with ranking these again. Figure 4.4 shows that while two of the events placed the institution as having the greatest need for leadership development, two events said that the greatest need was at the individual level. The HE sector was consistently ranked as having the lowest level of need for leadership development.

Figure 4.4. At what level is there greatest need for leadership development?

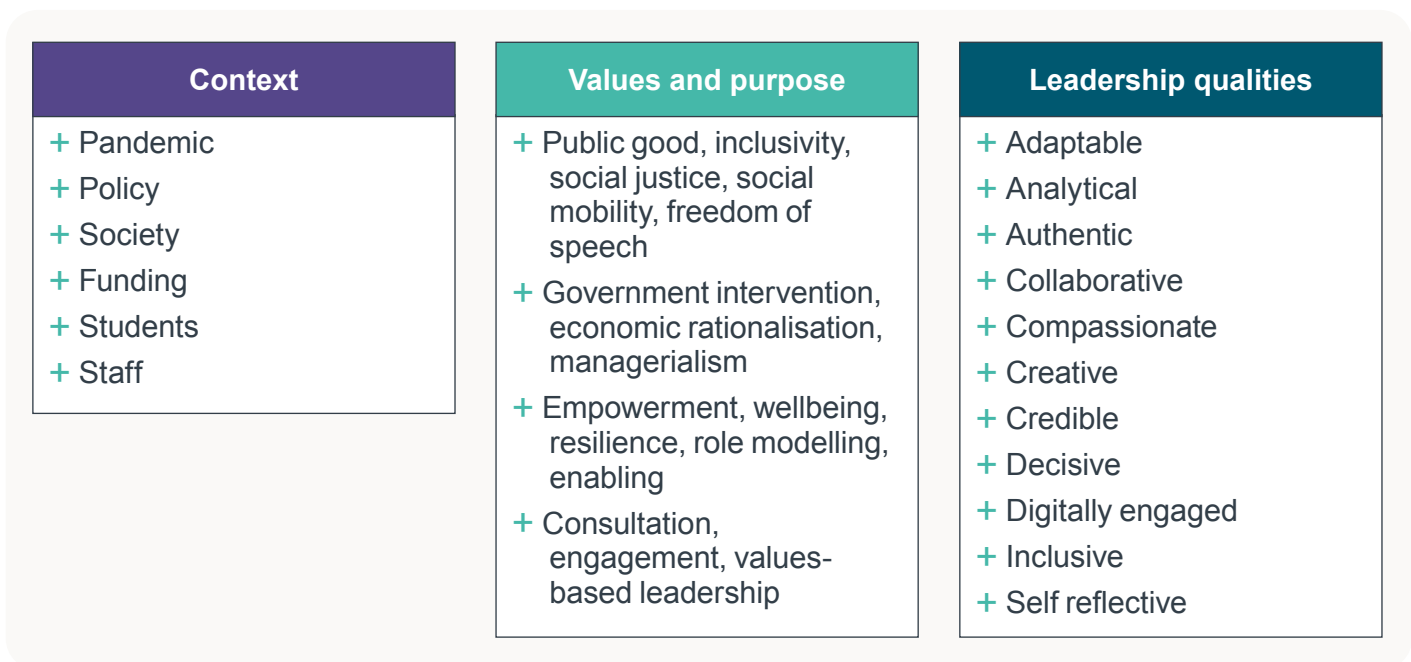


To conclude, when asked what skills, competencies and behaviours a good leader should have, common themes were to be: adaptable; analytical; authentic; collaborative; compassionate; creative; credible; decisive; digitally engaged; inclusive and self-reflective. However, what became clear within the discussion is the importance of considering how the context interacts with these leadership qualities. The complexity of the environment suggests that, rather than simply focusing on what qualities the individual leader should have, attention needs to be given to the enablers of, and barriers towards, good leadership in each individual’s context.

5 Summary and recommendations

This study was commissioned by Advance HE principally to inform the development of a higher education (HE) leadership survey. Through a qualitative approach, comprising 11 round tables (RT) with 109 staff from 94 HEIs from around the world, as well as four dissemination and engagement (D&E) events with a total of 145 participants, this research has highlighted a number of key themes, as illustrated in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1. Key themes from the research



Firstly, the research has demonstrated the significance of **context** in determining the focus and priorities of HE leadership and the way(s) in which this is perceived and experienced by a diverse range of stakeholders (including students, staff, policymakers, employers and the wider public/society). The RT discussions highlighted how the Covid-19 pandemic has laid bare a series of enduring tensions and challenges within the sector, including funding, regulation, governance and purpose. Such issues are not readily resolved – particularly where different stakeholders prioritise different agendas – and highlight the need for HEIs, and the leaders within them, to navigate competing expectations and demands. There was widespread agreement, both within the RTs and D&E events, that the current environment of HE is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) and that top-down, unilateral interventions are unlikely to be effective. Instead, HE leaders need to develop their capacity to collaborate, working with complexity and emergence to bring about the transformative change required within institutions and the wider sector. The Covid-19 pandemic, while hugely disruptive, has brought powerful insights into how HEIs can adapt and transform that may pave the way for the future.

Secondly, the research has provided insights into the **values and purpose** of higher education and the extent to which these underpin conceptions of what counts as ‘good’ leadership across the sector. It is suggested that traditional values of public good, inclusivity, social justice, social mobility and freedom of speech – while still held in high esteem by staff at all levels and in all professional areas – are perceived to be under-attack, undermined and devalued in the pursuit of competition for funding, prestige and an increasingly instrumental approach to assessing the value and contribution of higher education to the economy and society. RT participants discussed the need to develop a values-based approach to HE leadership that can respond to, and where needed push back against, internal and external drivers for change. From these conversations it became clear that participants saw the ability of HE leaders to act as custodians of core values of HE, while mobilising positive transformation and change, as foundational to their credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of colleagues and their ability to exert social influence.

Finally, the research has identified a series of **skills, competencies and behaviours** that are believed to underpin ‘good’ leadership (both ethical and effective) within the current and emerging landscape of higher education. These include the capacity for leaders (and leadership cultures more broadly) to be adaptable, analytical, authentic, collaborative, compassionate, creative, credible, decisive, digitally engaged, inclusive and self-reflective. Within this report we have termed these **leadership qualities**. While the relative significance given to different aspects of leadership, and how they are enacted and sustained, will vary according to the specific context, there was widespread agreement that these qualities are common across all levels – individual, team, department, institution, country and the global HE sector.

Overall, we were struck by the consistency of themes and issues raised across each of the RTs and the degree to which these were echoed in the feedback from D&E events. It was clear that participants appreciated the time and space for structured and supportive discussions with peers (from other institutions and countries) around the nature, purpose and impacts of leadership in higher education. Such opportunities are fleetingly rare but incredibly helpful to enable people to process the speed and scale of change within the sector and the impact it is having on the nature and purpose(s) of leadership.

Based on this analysis we note a number of recommendations that should be taken into consideration when developing the Advance HE Global Leadership Survey:

- 1 The need for a **contextualised approach** that recognises that different leadership skills, competencies and behaviours will be valued and/or effective in different settings and for different stakeholder populations.
- 2 The need to explore perceptions around the **values and purposes** underpinning higher education rather than imposing a set of pre-defined performance criteria.
- 3 The importance of capturing a range of **demographic profiling** data that enables comparative analysis across professional and personal characteristics, and of looking at intersectionality within data analysis and interpretation.

- 4 The challenge, yet value, of creating a survey that is suitable for a **broad cross-section** of higher education staff and stakeholders including those at varying stages in their careers, as well as across the full range of occupational and professional groups engaged in higher education.
- 5 The importance of capturing perspectives from a **wide range of countries** to enable appreciation of global trends, as well as national and regional variations.
- 6 The need to consider experiences of both **'being led' and 'leading others'**, given the interdependencies between leading and following in higher education.
- 7 The need to consider leadership beyond that enacted by the holders of formal leadership and management roles and responsibilities – i.e. **informal, emergent and bottom-up leadership**.
- 8 The importance of capturing evidence and experiences of **collective and collaborative leadership**, rather than assuming that it is always linked to a particular individual.
- 9 The need for a combination of **quantitative and qualitative** questions to capture comparative indicators as well as stories of lived experience.
- 10 A survey that is **quick and engaging to complete**, given the pressures and demands on people within the sector.

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Richard Watermeyer is Professor of Higher Education and Co-Director of the Centre for Higher Education Transformations at the University of Bristol. He is by training and orientation a sociologist of higher education with expertise related especially to academic praxis; institutional and research governance; scientific accountability and engagement; and higher education policy reform. His recent research has focused on the transformational impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on university communities around the world. He is currently deputy programme leader of an international study exploring the future of education and work in the context of global digitalisation and also a British Academy Mid-Career Fellow exploring new value propositions for engaged research with a particular focus on academic policy engagement. His recent books include *Competitive accountability in academic life: The struggle for social impact and public legitimacy* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar) and *The Impact Agenda: Controversies, consequences and challenges* (Bristol: Policy). He is the principal editor of the forthcoming *Handbook on Academic Freedom* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar).

Professor Richard Bolden

Richard Bolden is Professor of Leadership and Management and Director of Bristol Leadership and Change Centre at Bristol Business School, University of the West of England (UWE). His research explores the interface between individual and collective approaches to leadership and leadership development in sectors including higher education, health and social care and public services. He has led projects funded by the NHS Leadership Academy, Public Health England and Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (now Advance HE), among others, and has published widely on topics including distributed, shared and systems leadership; leadership paradoxes and complexity; cross-cultural leadership; and leadership and change.

Dr Cathryn Knight

Cathryn Knight is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology in Education at the University of Bristol, School of Education. She has extensive expertise in qualitative and quantitative research design and analysis and is currently involved in a range of national and international funded research projects. Her interest lies in the area of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and inclusive education. More recently her research has focused on the impact of Covid-19 on the education sector. Further areas of interest include teacher education, the Welsh education system and the use of secondary/administrative data in educational research.

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Jonas Holm is a PhD Fellow at the Department of Psychology and Behavioural Sciences, Aarhus University School of Business and Social Sciences. His research explores leadership and management in organisations with collective leadership structures. His work combines qualitative and quantitative methods such as participant observation, interviews and large-scale surveys. At Aarhus University he teaches work and organisational psychology on the Bachelor's and Master's Degree Programmes in Psychology and Economics and Business Administration.



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