



Future HE Professionals

The Future of Work

The AUA has a heritage of 60 years *connecting and developing higher education professionals* in support of UK higher education.

Looking ahead to the next phase in AUA's development, this report is one output from a collaborative project led by AUA during 2019-20: **Future HE Professionals**.

The project included background research, a sector-wide survey which attracted more than 2000 responses, and wide-ranging stakeholder consultation. Overall project aims were to:

- Identify future development needs – the skills and attributes to equip professional services for the changing future of HE
- Understand how professional services roles are developing in the context of a changing HE sector
- Support the continued success of UK higher education.

Future HE Professionals was commissioned and directed by the AUA Board of Trustees. Project delivery was supported by AUA Consulting.

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The Future of Work

This summary report is based on a more detailed research paper commissioned as part of AUA's Future HE Professionals project.

In the research we highlight recent studies on the future of work and consider how the findings might impact higher education - particularly HE professional services.

Consistent messages emerge about the megatrends that will impact on the nature of work over the next decade, as summarised below:

1. **Technology** - Rapid advances in technological innovation such as automation, AI and robotics will continue to transform the world of work. Up to 50% of all jobs in the UK are forecast to be affected in some way by automation. 'Super-jobs' will leverage the productivity and efficiency gains arising when people work effectively with technology. Automating routine tasks will free people up to perform higher value tasks and these will become more significant and require higher-level skills such as

innovation, design and creativity. Technology is also changing the need for physical workspace - spaces of the future will be equipped with digital tools to enable people to work in the ways that best suit individuals and business. There are related implications for organisational structures as bureaucracy and hierarchy is replaced with teams built around action, quick response, flexible resources and accountability.

2. **Demographics** - The world's population is ageing and education is one of the sectors with the largest number of employees aged 50+. Due to low birth rates across Europe over the last decades, there will be fewer young people entering the workforce in the next ten years, and post-Brexit immigration policy may also have an impact. People will be economically active for 60-70 years. There will be three or four generations in the workplace.
3. **Gig Economy** - The rising trend in movement away from traditional employment contracts to zero-hours contracts and a gig economy is set to continue and grow in prevalence. This may imply a shift to organisations having fewer employees and more freelance and contract workers. The definition of 'employment' in this new world of work may differ from our current understanding and new categories of workers may emerge.
4. **Inequality** - There has been a sharp rise in income and wealth inequality and the UK now is ranked the fifth most unequal country in Europe. Organisations are becoming more aware of the contributions they make to inequality through the way they operate externally in the marketplace and internally in the workplace. Whilst widening participation remains high on the policy agenda, there is still a great deal of work to be done to respond adequately to the needs of the excluded and disadvantaged.
5. **Sustainability** - Resource scarcity and climate change remain major factors of concern to organisations. Organisations will be judged on their investment, commitment and performance impact in this area by both prospective students and prospective employees. This goes beyond traditional 'corporate social responsibility'; it implies meaningful engagement with the external environment. It brings meaning back into the workplace and into work itself - a humanistic focus which enables individuals to understand their identity in the workforce.

Potential implications for HE professionals

1. It seems likely that new technologies will affect large numbers of staff in the 'non-academic workforce' (using HESA categorisation) namely 'professional occupations' and 'administrative and secretarial occupations'. These two groups have experienced the highest growth in headcount in the last five years and together form 53% of the total sector 'non-academic' staff in 2017-18.
2. The skills required of HE professionals will change, with more emphasis on judgement and decision making, fluency of ideas, active learning, learning strategies and 'originality' ability. The strongest growth in demand will be for technological skills, social and emotional skills. Some skills will be less in demand, in particular basic cognitive skills and basic data input. There will be increased individual responsibility for skills development, self-management, personal agility and

resilience. ‘Portability’ of skills will be important to facilitate working across specialist knowledge boundaries. There will be a new emphasis on lifelong learning for workers. A shift to more cross-functional and team-based work will require higher levels of interpersonal competence and confidence.

3. There are implications for leadership, with greater emphasis on creating a sense of belonging, creating meaning in work, being empathic and able to influence – a more humanistic focus implying respect for who people are, both their uniqueness and their talents rather than for the type of role they hold or the perceived status of their role. There will be increased workforce diversity both culturally and generationally in the next decade. Alongside this will be the challenges of integrating non-human labour realised through automation, AI and algorithmic processing.
4. There is the potential for a reduction in middle management roles as organisational processes are redefined and automation and AI take over some tasks. This could create a new set of middle-skill jobs in a so-called ‘hourglass shaped, two tier labour market’ with a decline of traditional roles in the middle of the skills and earning range to be replaced by new jobs with different entry routes and skills requirements.
5. The implications of future work patterns on student education content/design/delivery and employability will impact on HE professionals alongside academic staff. Re-skilling will be a priority, and this will require a shift in mind-set. A quotation from research by PWC stands out:

‘The secret for a bright future seems to be to lie in flexibility and in the ability to reinvent yourself. Think about yourself as a bundle of skills and capabilities, not a defined role or profession.’

Will the concept of a career as we perceive it today endure in the longer term? Could the changes ahead strengthen the role of HE professional bodies in providing a sense of identity and supporting learning and development.



This report has been produced by **AUA Consulting**. AUA Consulting is about improving HE professional services practice and developing professional services performance.

It is a consulting practice that is ‘of the sector for the sector’ – our consultants are practitioners in higher education administration and management. For clients this means we combine the benefits of an external perspective with sector specific expertise.

Any financial surplus derived from AUA Consulting is reinvested to support the AUA’s charitable objectives – connecting and developing HE professionals – for the benefit of our members in support of the HE sector.

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