

# TRANSFORMING THE ESTATES AND FACILITIES LANDSCAPE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The dynamic landscape of higher education places great importance on effective Estates and Facilities management to create environments where academic excellence and student experience flourishes. Leaders in this field face the challenges of overseeing capital development projects, adapting to evolving campus needs, and embracing post-Covid work patterns. They must integrate digital and physical strategies while advancing sustainability objectives.

In recent years, activity within Estates and Facilities management in higher education has significantly increased, driven by post-pandemic retirements and subsequent role shifts. Similar trends are evident in other sectors, such as the NHS, which has influenced the availability of top-tier talent for senior roles.

Despite robust hiring momentum at the Director level, the talent pool at the Deputy level has yet to fully mature to meet demand and attracting senior leaders in this demanding environment has become more challenging. Institutions often look to candidates outside the higher education (HE) sector to bring fresh perspectives and new expertise.

- ❖ The decline in student numbers. Domestically, fewer university-age individuals and a drop in international students, driven by geopolitical tensions and stricter visa regulations, have significantly impacted university budgets.
- ❖ Achieving net zero carbon emissions adds a financial burden, requiring substantial investment in infrastructure and energy efficiency at a time when universities are already financially strained.
- ❖ With the rise of remote and hybrid learning, many universities are left with costly, underutilised facilities. We are seeing considerable pressure from senior leaders to get staff and students back onto campus wherever possible.
- ❖ The increasing blending of spending on technology and traditional estate capital.

# Key Themes in Estates

## The focus has shifted

The focus has shifted from grand capital ventures to a nimble, innovative, and imaginative utilisation of university spaces, especially post-pandemic. The rise of hybrid work and teaching models has prompted a re-evaluation of the necessity and usage of physical campuses, while sustainability and the net-zero agenda loom large.

In this landscape, fresh thinking and a more adaptable approach to customer-centric estate and campus services are imperative. While universities have adapted, many commercial entities have already conceptualised their spatial needs, birthing various new business models. Hence, there's considerable merit in considering individuals from outside the university sphere to infuse modern perspectives. Yet, it's vital to acknowledge that the demands of universities, particularly in teaching and research, are distinctive. A genuine understanding of this uniqueness remains paramount.

Moreover, the escalating expectations of fee-paying students have sharpened the focus on the quality of physical resources, spanning from top-tier student accommodation akin to high-end hotels to state-of-the-art research and teaching facilities. Given the significance of student ratings like NSS (National Student Survey) and other quality benchmarks, the spotlight on the physical estate has never been more intense.

Navigating financial pressures has become increasingly complex, significantly impacting the ability of university senior management to achieve more with less. The challenges confronting Estates and Facilities Directors today are markedly distinct from those encountered by their counterparts even just five years ago.



# Diversity

## The need for greater diversity in estates management

In case you missed it...

"Well the assumption is...  
Conversations with women  
leaders in estates and  
facilities", AUDE report

[Download here](#)

**Diversity within estates leadership in UK higher education remains a pressing issue**, as the sector has historically struggled to reflect the broad demographics of the communities and student populations it serves. Estates teams often lack representation from women, ethnic minorities, and individuals from other underrepresented groups in senior leadership positions. This lack of diversity can result in a narrower range of perspectives, ideas, and approaches, which are crucial for addressing the complex challenges faced by modern universities.

### Reports from organisations like AUDE

have highlighted these gaps, pointing to the need for cultural and structural change to create more equitable opportunities within the profession. Barriers such as limited access to leadership development, unconscious bias in recruitment processes, and a lack of visible role models contribute to this underrepresentation.

Increasing diversity within estates leadership is not just a moral imperative but a strategic necessity, as it fosters more inclusive decision-making and ensures that campus environments meet the needs of all stakeholders.

### At Dixon Walter, we are deeply committed to this vision.

We place EDI at the heart of our recruitment processes, ensuring that it is integrated at every stage.

To support this commitment, we can offer several tools designed to promote diversity and inclusion, ensuring that our approach aligns with the sector's best practices and contributes to the development of inclusive leadership within higher education estates.



# Shaping the Future

## of Estates and Facilities in HE

---



“We understand the multifaceted demands of Estates and Facilities leadership. Whether it’s enhancing operational efficiency, implementing sustainable practices, or delivering major infrastructure projects, the leaders we place are driving significant impact across their institutions.”

Mike Dixon

The Estates and Facilities function is at the heart of operational efficiency and innovation in higher education. From ensuring the sustainability of campus operations to leading on ambitious capital development projects, senior leaders in this field influence how universities deliver their strategic objectives. Dixon Walter’s expertise in recruiting these critical roles ensures that institutions are equipped with visionary leaders capable of addressing the sector’s challenges.

Check out the AUDE Summer School; a programme designed to nurture emerging talent in higher education estates and facilities management.  
[CLICK HERE TO FIND OUT MORE](#)



# An Outstanding Track Record

---

Whilst we continue to work on several roles within the sector, in the past year, we have made successful appointments at several universities, each with its distinct campus environments. From modern facilities to historic landmarks, we have honed our expertise in diverse settings.

These successes underscore Dixon Walter's understanding of the unique requirements of higher education and its ability to identify leaders who align with institutional visions.

## In the past 18 months alone, our track record includes:

<b>Anglia Ruskin</b>	Director of Estates and Facilities
<b>Durham</b>	Interim Director of Estates and Facilities
<b>Exeter</b>	Director of Estates
<b>Glasgow Caledonian</b>	Director of Estates and Facilities
<b>Hull</b>	Director of Estate Development and Operations Director of Facility Services and Sustainability
<b>Lancaster</b>	Director of Estates & Campus Services
<b>UCLAN</b>	Executive Director of Estates
<b>Leicester</b>	Director of Estates & Campus Services
<b>Liverpool</b>	Group Director – Property & Campus Services
<b>Manchester</b>	Chief Property Officer
<b>Newcastle</b>	Director of Estates and Facilities
<b>Sheffield</b>	Director of Estates & Facilities Management



# Driving Forward

## Strategic Transformation

Dixon Walter's expertise goes beyond filling vacancies. The firm takes a consultative approach, partnering closely with institutions to understand their strategic priorities. This commitment to understanding an organisation's culture, goals, and challenges ensures the recruitment process identifies candidates who bring both technical expertise and the leadership qualities necessary to inspire and innovate.

“Our work is about more than recruitment,” says Mike Dixon. “It’s about enabling transformation. The Estates and Facilities landscape in higher education is dynamic, and we’re proud to support our clients in navigating this complexity by finding the leaders who will shape the future.”

### A Partner for the Future

As universities face increasing pressures from sustainability imperatives, technological advancements, and the demand for more resilient infrastructure, Dixon Walter continues to be at the forefront of addressing these challenges. With a focus on quality, innovation, EDI and collaboration, the firm is poised to remain a key player in higher education senior recruitment.

In a sector where the stakes are high, Dixon Walter's outstanding record in Estates and Facilities appointments is a testament to its commitment to excellence and its ability to drive forward meaningful change. Institutions seeking visionary leadership to propel their Estates and Facilities functions can rely on Dixon Walter to deliver results that truly make a difference.



# What did our Clients and Candidates say about us in 2024?

