



"Where Leaders of Higher Education Meet"
Since 2013

Global Challenges, Local Impact:

Higher Education's Role in Shaping a Resilient Future

14-16
April, 2026

Kempinski Central
Avenue, Dubai - UAE



Center for Learning Innovations &
Customized Knowledge Solutions

FORUM ORGANIZER



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Overview

The **7th Edition of the MENA Higher Education Leadership Forum (MENA-HELFF)** will be held in the vibrant city of **Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from April 14–16, 2026**. Taking place under the timely theme **“Global Challenges, Local Impact: Higher Education’s Role in Shaping a Resilient Future,”** this edition comes at a defining moment for the global higher education sector.

Launched in 2013 as a biennial gathering, MENA-HELFF has grown into one of the most prominent international platforms dedicated to higher education leadership. With participation from over 60 countries in previous editions, the Forum provides a truly global and cross-regional space for dialogue, critical reflection, strategic collaboration, and the exchange of best practices. It is not just an event you attend—it is a platform you help shape.

The 2026 edition holds particular significance, as universities and higher education systems across the world confront a rapidly evolving landscape marked by technological disruption, changing learner expectations, sustainability imperatives, workforce realignment, and growing demands for relevance, inclusion, and resilience. Against this backdrop, MENA-HELFF 2026 will serve as a strategic convening space where leaders come together to collectively reimagine the role of higher education and co-develop solutions with lasting impact both locally and globally.

This global gathering is expected to welcome **250–300 higher education leaders, senior policymakers, industry partners, and international experts representing more than 50 countries.**

Over the course of three dynamic days, the Forum will feature keynote addresses by global thought leaders, engaging panel discussions, strategic debates, and fireside chats, as well as pre-forum workshops, targeted focus groups, and institutional case studies aligned with the Forum’s central theme and sub-themes. In addition, participants will have access to a dedicated exhibition space showcasing cutting-edge services, tools, and technologies from selected partners that support and enhance the higher education sector. The program also offers ample networking opportunities, designed to foster meaningful dialogue, peer exchange, and long-term collaboration.

A major highlight of the Forum will be the announcement of the **winners of the 5th Cycle of the Zairi International Awards for Excellence in Higher Education**. Open to institutions worldwide, the Awards recognize outstanding institutional innovation, leadership, and impact, reinforcing the Forum’s commitment to celebrating and amplifying excellence across diverse higher education systems.



40+

INSTITUTIONAL CASE STUDIES ACROSS 6 PARALLEL TRACKS

04

WORKSHOPS



FOCUS GROUPS



PANEL DISCUSSIONS



THE ZAIRI INTERNATIONAL AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION



KEYNOTE ADDRESSES



FIRESIDE CHATS



+300
Participants

+200
HEIs &
Organizations

+60
Speakers/
Panelists

+50
Countries

Forum Objectives



Building on the insights from previous editions and in response to the rapid transformations shaping higher education, the 7th MENA Higher Education Leadership Forum aims to

1

Analyze Global Disruptions and Institutional Resilience

Reflect on the disruptive forces impacting higher education—including climate change, digital transformation, economic volatility, shifting workforce demands, and geopolitical instability—and identify strategies to enhance institutional agility, sustainability, and resilience.

2

Redefine the Role of the Engaged University

Explore how universities can revisit their purpose to serve the common good, contribute to sustainability efforts, and foster meaningful community engagement through lifelong learning, social responsibility, and civic partnerships.

3

Align Higher Education with Future Workforce Needs

Examine the skills and competencies required in the evolving job market and discuss how HEIs can redesign curricula, enhance the student experience, and integrate skilling, reskilling, and upskilling models to support knowledge-based economies.

4

Leverage Digital Transformation and Innovation in Higher Education

Investigate how HEIs can harness AI, automation, and digital tools to enhance teaching, learning, and institutional efficiency, while promoting creativity, innovation, and problem-solving to address pressing socio-economic and environmental challenges.

5

Showcase Global Best Practices and Institutional Transformation

Provide a platform for sharing successful case studies and innovative strategies from universities worldwide, highlighting how institutions are adapting to change and driving positive transformation across governance, pedagogy, research, and engagement.

6

Strengthen University-Industry-Government Collaboration

Examine how higher education institutions, industry leaders, and policymakers can work together to foster strategic partnerships, drive research and innovation, and contribute to national and regional socio-economic development.

Why Join the 7th MENA-HELF(2026)?



A Premier Leadership Platform for Higher Education: The MENA-HELF has established itself as a leading global platform for higher education leadership in the region, bringing together university presidents, policymakers, and sector influencers from over 50 countries.



Confront Global Challenges with Locally Grounded Solutions: The 2026 Forum centers on the theme “*Global Challenges, Local Impact: Higher Education's Role in Shaping a Resilient Future*,” offering a platform for higher education leaders to explore how institutions can translate global disruptions into contextually relevant strategies that drive resilience, equity, and long-term societal impact.



Showcase and Learn from Global Best Practices: Through institutional case studies, high-level panels, and strategic roundtables, the Forum offers a rich platform to share success stories, policy insights, and transformative models from around the world.



Build Strategic Partnerships and Expand Your Network: Connect with fellow higher education leaders, quality assurance bodies, EdTech innovators, and regional and international organizations through the multiple networking opportunities the Forum provides.



Exhibit, Promote, and Position Your Institution or Services: Benefit from dedicated exhibition space to showcase your university's achievements, projects, or services to a global audience. The Forum also includes branding opportunities for partners, sponsors, and exhibitors looking to increase visibility in the MENA and global higher education landscape.

Target Audience

We invite leaders and decision makers within Higher Education from across the globe to join us, including

- Senior Administrators including Chancellors, Presidents, Rectors, Provosts, Vice Chancellors and Deans of Colleges.
- Members of governing bodies of Universities & Colleges.
- Higher Education Policy Makers.
- Representatives from Ministries of Higher Education, Accreditation Agencies, National Research Foundations, etc.
- Representatives from NGOs and IGOs concerned with Higher Education.
- Researchers.



Some of the Confirmed 7th MENA HELF Speakers



Prof. Francisco Marmolejo

Higher Education
President, Qatar
Foundation, Qatar



HE Prof. Amr Ezzat Salama

Secretary General of the
Association of Arab
Universities, Jordan



Dr. Fanta Aw

Executive Director and
CEO, Association of
International Educators
(NAFSA), USA



Mr. Bakhtiyor Yuldashev

Acting Rector, New
Uzbekistan University,
Uzbekistan



Prof. Dr. Agron Bajraktari

Rector, University of
Applied Sciences in Ferizaj
(UASF), Kosovo



Dr. Tod Laursen

Chancellor, American
University of Sharjah
(AUS), UAE



Dr. Karim Seghir

Chancellor, Ajman
university, UAE



Prof. Ahmed Alraeesi

Vice Chancellor, UAE
University, UAE



Prof. Ghassan Aouad

Chancellor, Abu Dhabi
University, UAE



Prof. Dr. Abdulrahman Alsughayir

President, AlMaarefa
University, KSA



Prof. Bassam Alameddine

President, American
University of Ras Al
Khaimah (AURAK), UAE



Prof. Hassan Abdalla

Provost, University of East
London, UK



Dr. Wafa Almansoori

Interim President and
Provost, American
University of Bahrain
(AUBH), Bahrain



Mr. Nick Davis

President, Middle East &
Africa, THE (Times Higher
Education)



Dr. Ashwin Fernandes

Executive Director - Africa,
Middle East & South Asia
QS Quacquarelli Symonds

Some of the Confirmed 7th MENA HELF Speakers



**Prof. Yusra
Mouzughi**

Provost, University of
Birmingham, UAE



**Dr. Julie Furst-
Bowe**

Vice President for
Academic Affairs,
Arkansas Tech University,
USA



**Dr. Elizabeth
Soliday-Nauai**

President, ISASS Dean,
Swiss School of
Management, Spain



**Prof. Maurits van
Rooijen**

Chief Academic Officer,
Global University Systems,
UK



**Prof. Gauri Dutt
Sharma**

Vice Chancellor, University
of Science and Technology
Meghalaya (USTM), India &
Former President,
Association of Indian
Universities (AIU)



**Prof. Salim bin
Hamood Al-Harthi**

Deputy Vice-Chancellor,
Academic Affairs and
Community Service, Sultan
Qaboos University, Oman



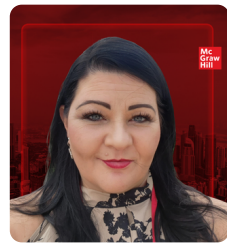
Morwenna Crago

Sr. Director, Marketing,
Product & Sales
Enablement, Higher
Education – McGraw Hill
International



**Dr. Georgeta
Auktor**

Head of Strategy and
Development & University
Development & Management
Lead, TUM International
(TUMint), Germany



Madelein Meiring

Higher Education Academic
Excellence Advisor,
McGraw Hill International



Dr. Habib Fardoun

Executive Committee
Member IREG Observatory
on Academic Ranking and
Excellence, Belgium and
Principle Consultant QS
Quacquarelli Symonds



Fiona Lennoxsmith

Head of Leadership,
Governance &
Management, Advance HE

Be Part of the 7th MENA HELF!



Become a Sponsor

Be part of this prestigious global gathering by becoming a sponsor of the 7th MENA-HELF. Showcase your commitment to higher education transformation and position your brand before influential decision-makers from around the world.



Exhibit at the Forum

Limited early bird exhibition slots are now available! Don't miss the chance to showcase your innovative solutions, services, or technologies to a high-level audience of university leaders, policymakers, and partners from 50+ countries.

Early bird Deadline to Secure an Exhibition Space
September 1st, 2025



Present your Institutional Case Study

We invite universities and institutions to contribute to the forum's program by submitting institutional case studies aligned with the Forum's theme or sub-themes. Take advantage of discounted presenter rates and ensure your case is submitted before the deadline

Extended Abstract Submission Deadline
November 15, 2025



Actively Participate

Secure your spot early! Benefit from early bird registration rates and join hundreds of global higher education leaders in shaping the future of the sector. Spaces are limited.

Early Bird Registration Fee

(Prior to 30/11/2025)

AED 2,500*



FORUM ORGANIZER

Forum Structure (14th April 2026)

Morning Pre-forum Workshops

09:00-12:30

Workshop 1
Institutionalizing technology transfer at universities.

Facilitator

Dr. Georgeta Auktor, Head of Strategy and Development & University Development & Management Lead, TUM International (TUMint), Germany

Co-organized with:  TUM International GmbH
The University Company

Workshop 2

Driving Impact and Excellence: Strategic Approaches to University Rankings and Global Visibility

Facilitator

- **Dr Ashwin Fernandes**, Executive Director, QS Quacquarelli Symonds
- **Dr Habib Fardoun**, Principal Consultant, QS Quacquarelli Symonds

Co-organized with: 

Afternoon Pre-forum Workshops

14:30-15:30

Workshop 3
Futureproofing Graduates: Skills, Employability, and Industry Collaboration

Facilitator

Madelein Meiring, Higher Education Academic Excellence Advisor, McGraw Hill

Co-organized with: 

Workshop 4

Leadership Framework for MENA Higher Education: Building adaptive leadership capacity to navigate global challenges while creating meaningful local impact

Facilitator

Fiona Lennoxsmith, Head of Leadership, Governance & Management, Advance HE

Co-organized with: 

My deepest gratitude to Dr. Narimane Hadj Hamou, CEO of CLICKS, for having organized the 6th MENA Higher Education Leadership Forum, an event that defied an unprecedented storm in Dubai and turned out to be a great success. The forum's theme, Towards a New Generation of Engaged Universities: The Need to Act, Adapt, and Transform, touched upon the transformation that we are witnessing in the higher education sector across constructive roundtables, keynote speeches, and spontaneous dialogues. The discussions about upskilling the workforce, embracing technology, and fostering innovation were thoughtful and inspiring. The emphasis on empowering students engagement resonated deeply with my personal academic ethos.

PROF. DR. BASSAM ALAMEDDINE

President and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Gulf University for Science and Technology, Kuwait

Day 2 (15th April 2026)

09:00–09:45	Forum Main Opening and Awards Ceremony					
Morning Plenary Session						
09:45-10:25	Keynote Address 1					
10:30–11:30	Panel Discussion 1 Bridging Boundaries: Building a Collaborative Ecosystem for Workforce Readiness and Social Impact					
	Moderator	Prof. Yusra Mouzughy, Provost, University of Birmingham, UAE				
	Panelists	- Prof. Bassam Alameddine, President, American University of Ras Al Khaimah (AURAK), UAE - Dr. Karim Seghir, Chancellor, Ajman university, UAE - Mr. Bakhtiyor Yuldashev, Director, National Agency for Education Quality Assurance under the Presidential Administration, Uzbekistan - Morwenna Crago, Sr. Director, Marketing, Product & Sales Enablement, Higher Education – McGraw Hill International - TBC				
11:50–12:30	Keynote Address 2 Beyond Degrees: Universities as Drivers of a Resilient Future Prof. Francisco Marmolejo, Higher Education President, Qatar Foundation, Qatar					
12:30-13:30	Panel Discussion 2 Thriving in Disruption: Ethical Leadership and Digital Innovation in Higher Education					
	Moderator	Prof. Ghassan Aouad, Chancellor, Abu Dhabi University, UAE				
	Panelists	- Prof. Dr. Agron Bajraktari, Rector, University of Applied Sciences in Ferizaj (UASF), Kosovo - Dr. Tod Laursen, Chancellor, American University of Sharjah (AUS), UAE - Prof. Ahmed Alraeesi, Vice Chancellor, UAE University, UAE - TBC - TBC				
Parallel Institutional Case Study Presentations						
14:30–17:30	Track 1 Embedding Sustainability and Societal Responsibility in Higher Education	Track 2 Strengthening University-Industry-Government Partnerships for Workforce Readiness	Track 3 Advancing Digital Transformation and AI- Driven Innovation	Track 4 Fostering Global Engagement and Social Impact	Track 5 Bridging Higher Education and Employability	Track 6 Strengthening Leadership and Governance for Institutional Resilience

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the 6th MENA Higher Education Leadership Forum last week. It was an honor to be part of such a distinguished group of educators and leaders, and I am grateful for the opportunity to share my insights and experiences. The organization of the forum was exceptional, and I was impressed by the thoughtfulness and attention to detail that went into every aspect of the event. Along with the other sessions titled "Embracing Technology in Learning and Teaching: Rethinking Pedagogy for the Digital Age," was timely and relevant, and the quality of discussions and programs was outstanding. I was particularly impressed by the caliber of the panel discussions and the thought-provoking presentations. The opportunity to engage with other educators and leaders on this important topic was invaluable, and I left the forum feeling inspired and energized. Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in this outstanding event, and I look forward to continuing to collaborate with CLICKS in the future.

PROF. KHALED ASSALEH

Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs, Ajman University, UAE

Day 3 (16th April 2026)

09:00–09:40	Keynote Address 3		
09:40–10:10	Fireside Chat Shaping Resilient Futures: Rhetoric or Reality? Higher Education’s Real-World Impact		
10:10–11:10	Debate Are Traditional Universities Becoming Obsolete in the Face of Digital Education and AI?		
	Moderator Nick Davis, President, Middle East & Africa, THE (Times Higher Education) Panelists - Prof. Maurits van Rooijen, Chief Academic Officer, Global University Systems, UK - Prof. Hassan Abdalla, Provost, University of East London, UK - TBC - TBC		
12:30–13:10	Keynote Address 4		
Parallel Focus Groups (Requires Registration)			
14:10–15:30	Focus Group (1) Accelerating Research and Innovation: Strategies for Impact	Focus Group (2) Industry-Academia Partnerships for Local Development	Focus Group (3) Strengthening Higher Education Systems through Regional Collaboration
15:50- 16:50	Panel Discussion 3 Reinventing Governance: Agility, Innovation, and Institutional Resilience Moderator Dr. Ashwin Fernandes, Executive Director - Africa, Middle East & South Asia, QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) Panelists - Prof. Dr. Abdulrahman Alsughayir, President, AlMaarefa University, KSA - Dr. Elizabeth Soliday-Nauí, President, ISASS Dean, Swiss School of Management, Spain - Dr. Julie Furst-Bowe, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Arkansas Tech University, USA - Dr. Wafa Almansoori, Interim President and Provost, American University of Bahrain (AUBH), Bahrain - Prof. Salim bin Hamood Al-Harathi, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic Affairs and Community Service, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman		
16:50–17:10	Closing Remarks, Key Insights and Future Directions		

The MENA-HELF 2024 Conference connected leading university administrators and faculty to share their perspectives and ideas to cope with the many challenges facing the academy. The presentations, keynotes and discussions allowed for a rich exchange of ideas and sharing of valuable perspectives from around the world.

DR. M. NAUMAN FAROOQI

President and Vice Chancellor, St. Thomas University, Canada

Registration Fees

Registration Fees for the Forum (excludes workshops)

	Individual Registration		Group Registration	
	Early Bird Registration (Prior to 30/11/2025)	Regular Registration	Early Bird Registration-3 & above Participants (Prior to 30/11/2025)	Regular Group Registration-3 & above Participants
AMOUNT IN AED	AED 2,500*	AED 2,900*	AED 2300*/Participant	AED 2500*/Participant
AMOUNT IN US\$	USD 681*	USD 790*	USD 626* / Participant	USD 681* / Participant

*All fees are subject to 5% VAT

Registration Fees for the Pre-Forum Workshops (14th April, 2026)

	Fee for Forum Participants	Fee for Non-Forum Participants
AMOUNT IN AED	AED 500*/Participant	AED 600*/Participant
AMOUNT IN US\$	USD 136*/Participant	USD 163*/Participant

*All fees are subject to 5% VAT

It was my great pleasure to join the 6th MENA Higher Education Forum that has already become an efficient platform to discuss current trends and challenges of higher education. We got a chance to hear diverse perspectives of distinguished university leaders and esteemed higher education experts from different corners of the World. We discussed very important global, regional and national challenges of higher education, and we learned about the best practices to address those challenges. We did our best to contribute to the success of the Forum by presenting the perspectives of the International Association of Universities (IAU) and Mingachevir State University (Azerbaijan). Our big thanks and sincere congratulations go to all organisers, partners and sponsors of the Forum. We will be looking forward to join the next Forum in Dubai, UAE.

DR. SHAHIN V. BAYRAMOV

Rector, Mingachevir State University, Azerbaijan Board Member, International Association of Universities (IAU)

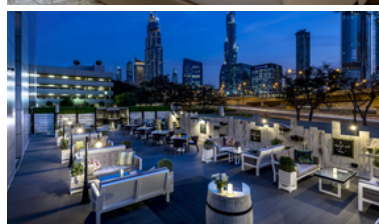
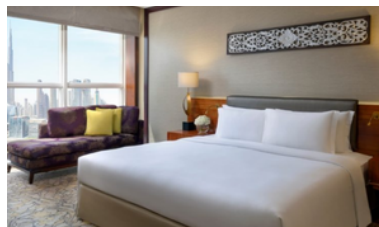
Venue

Kempinski Central Avenue, Dubai, UAE (Formerly the Address Dubai Mall)

Located at the heart of trendy Downtown Dubai, overlooking the world's tallest tower, Burj Khalifa, and attached to The Dubai Mall, one of the largest shopping and entertainment destinations in the world, Kempinski Central Avenue (Formerly the Address Dubai Mall) will be home to the upcoming MENA Higher Education Leadership Forum. Elegant and chic, this glamorous hotel offers guests a unique blend of traditional Arab hospitality in the most contemporary and cosmopolitan environment. Participants may enjoy dining in of the numerous restaurants available or just walk to the mall, Burj Khalifa, Dubai Boulevard or enjoy the beautiful musical fountains.



Special Hotel Rates at the Dusit Thani, Dubai



**Rate in AED Single Occupancy
(Bed & Breakfast)**

AED 850 NETT

**Rate in AED Double Occupancy
(Bed & breakfast)**

AED 920 NETT

Contact for Hotel Booking

Mr. Hany Taha

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Main Organizer



Center for Learning Innovations &
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Your Partner for Innovation and Excellence



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