



“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 **7<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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**



**KEYNOTE ADDRESSES**



**FIRESIDE CHATS**



**PANEL DISCUSSIONS AND DEBATES**



**THE ZAIRI INTERNATIONAL AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION**



**+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 7<sup>th</sup> 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 7<sup>th</sup> 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 7<sup>th</sup> 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



**Dr. Mazen Hasna**

Chairman, National Committee for Qualifications and Academic Accreditation, Qatar



**Mr. Bakhtiyor Yuldashev**

Director, National Agency for Education Quality Assurance under the Presidential Administration, Uzbekistan



**Vicki Stott**

Chief Executive Officer, The Quality Assurance Agency, UK and President of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)



**Dr. Diana Abdulkarim Aljahromi**

Secretary-General, Higher Education Council, Bahrain



**Dr. Narimane Hadj-Hamou**

Chair, 7th MENA Higher Education Leadership Forum, Founder & CEO, CLICKS, UAE



**Ms. Diane Freiburger**

Managing Director, FIBAA, Germany



**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



**Dr. Havidán Rodríguez**

President, University at Albany - State University of New York, USA

## Some of the Confirmed 7<sup>th</sup> MENA HELF Speakers



**Prof. Dr. Abdulrahman Alsughayir**

President, AlMaarefa University, KSA



**Prof. Bassam Alameddine**

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



**Dr. Abdelaziz Hassanein Mohamed Saad Konsowa**

President, Alexandria University, Egypt



**Prof. Mubarak H. AlKhatnai**

Dean of Quality and Development, King Saud University, KSA



**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**

Vice President, Global, THE (Times Higher Education)



**Dr. Ashwin Fernandes**

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



**Prof. Yusra Mouzugh**

Provost, University of Birmingham, UAE



**Dr. Julie Furst-Bowe**

Vice President for Academic Affairs, Arkansas Tech University, USA



**Dr. Elizabeth Soliday-Nau**

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-Harhi**

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

## Some of the Confirmed 7<sup>th</sup> MENA HELF Speakers



**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 7<sup>th</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup>, 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 30, 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\***



Center for Learning Innovations & Customized Knowledge Solutions

**FORUM ORGANIZER**

## Forum Structure (14<sup>th</sup> 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:  TUMint  
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 (15<sup>th</sup> April 2026)

<b>09:00–09:45</b>	<b>Forum Main Opening and Awards Ceremony</b>					
<b>Morning Plenary Session</b>						
<b>09:45–10:25</b>	<b>Keynote Address 1</b>					
<b>10:30–11:30</b>	<p><b>Panel Discussion 1</b>  <b>Bridging Boundaries: Building a Collaborative Ecosystem for Workforce Readiness and Social Impact</b></p> <p><b>Moderator</b> Prof. Yusra Mouzoghi, Provost, University of Birmingham, UAE</p> <p><b>Panelists</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prof. Bassam Alameddine, President, American University of Ras Al Khaimah (AURAK), UAE</li> <li>• Dr. Karim Seghir, Chancellor, Ajman university, UAE</li> <li>• Morwenna Crago, Sr. Director, Marketing, Product &amp; Sales Enablement, Higher Education – McGraw Hill International</li> <li>• TBC</li> </ul>					
<b>11:50–12:30</b>	<p><b>Keynote Address 2</b>  <b>Beyond Degrees: Universities as Drivers of a Resilient Future</b>  <b>Prof. Francisco Marmolejo</b>, Higher Education President, Qatar Foundation, Qatar</p>					
<b>12:30–13:30</b>	<p><b>Panel Discussion 2</b>  <b>Thriving in Disruption: Ethical Leadership and Digital Innovation in Higher Education</b></p> <p><b>Moderator</b> Prof. Ghassan Aouad, Chancellor, Abu Dhabi University, UAE</p> <p><b>Panelists</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prof. Dr. Agron Bajraktari, Rector, University of Applied Sciences in Ferizaj (UASF), Kosovo</li> <li>• Dr. Tod Laursen, Chancellor, American University of Sharjah (AUS), UAE</li> <li>• Prof. Ahmed Alraeesi, Vice Chancellor, UAE University, UAE</li> <li>• Dr. Havidán Rodríguez, President, University at Albany - State University of New York, USA</li> <li>• Dr. Abdelaziz Hassanein Mohamed Saad Konsowa, President, Alexandria University, Egypt</li> </ul>					
<b>Parallel Institutional Case Study Presentations</b>						
<b>14:30–17:30</b>	<b>Track 1</b> <i>Embedding Sustainability and Societal Responsibility in Higher Education</i>	<b>Track 2</b> <i>Strengthening University-Industry-Government Partnerships for Workforce Readiness</i>	<b>Track 3</b> <i>Advancing Digital Transformation and AI-Driven Innovation</i>	<b>Track 4</b> <i>Fostering Global Engagement and Social Impact</i>	<b>Track 5</b> <i>Bridging Higher Education and Employability</i>	<b>Track 6</b> <i>Strengthening Leadership and Governance for Institutional Resilience</i>

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 (16<sup>th</sup> April 2026)

09:00–09:40	<b>Keynote Address 3</b>		
09:40–10:10	<b>Fireside Chat</b> <b>Shaping Resilient Futures: Rhetoric or Reality? Higher Education's Real-World Impact</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dr. Fanta Aw</b>, Executive Director and CEO, Association of International Educators (NAFSA), USA</li> </ul>		
10:10–11:10	<b>Debate</b> <b>Are Traditional Universities Becoming Obsolete in the Face of Digital Education and AI?</b> <p><b>Moderator</b> <b>Nick Davis</b>, Vice President, Global Sales, THE (Times Higher Education)</p> <p><b>Panelists</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Prof. Maurits van Rooijen</b>, Chief Academic Officer, Global University Systems, UK</li> <li>• <b>Prof. Hassan Abdalla</b>, Provost, University of East London, UK</li> <li>• TBC</li> </ul>		
12:30–13:30	<b>Panel Discussion 3</b> <b>Accreditation as a Catalyst for Innovation and Resilience: Safeguarding Trust, Equity, and Relevance</b> <p><b>Moderator</b> <b>Dr. Narimane Hadj-Hamou</b>, Chair, 7<sup>th</sup> MENA Higher Education Leadership Forum, Founder &amp; CEO, CLICKS, UAE</p> <p><b>Panelists</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dr. Mazen Hasna</b>, Chairman, National Committee for Qualifications and Academic Accreditation, Qatar</li> <li>• <b>Vicki Stott</b>, Chief Executive, The Quality Assurance Agency, UK and President of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)</li> <li>• <b>Mr. Bakhtiyor Yuldashev</b>, Director, National Agency for Education Quality Assurance under the Presidential Administration, Uzbekistan</li> <li>• <b>Dr. Diana Abdulkarim Al Jahromi</b>, Secretary-General, Higher Education Council, Bahrain</li> </ul>		
<b>Parallel Focus Groups (Requires Registration)</b>			
13:30–14:30	<b>Focus Group (1)</b> <b>Accelerating Research and Innovation: Strategies for Impact</b>	<b>Focus Group (2)</b> <b>Industry-Academia Partnerships for Local Development</b>	<b>Focus Group (3)</b> <b>Strengthening Higher Education Systems through Regional Collaboration</b> - <b>Prof. Mubarak H. AlKhatnai</b> , Dean of Quality and Development, King Saud University, KSA
16:10- 17:10	<b>Panel Discussion 4</b> <b>Reinventing Governance: Agility, Innovation, and Institutional Resilience</b> <p><b>Moderator</b> <b>Dr. Ashwin Fernandes</b>, Executive Director - Africa, Middle East &amp; South Asia, QS (Quacquarelli Symonds)</p> <p><b>Panelists</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Prof. Dr. Abdulrahman Alsughayir</b>, President, AlMaarefa University, KSA</li> <li>• <b>Dr. Elizabeth Soliday-Nai</b>, President, ISASS Dean, Swiss School of Management, Spain</li> <li>• <b>Dr. Julie Furst-Bowe</b>, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Arkansas Tech University, USA</li> <li>• <b>Dr. Wafa Almansoori</b>, Interim President and Provost, American University of Bahrain (AUBH), Bahrain</li> <li>• <b>Prof. Salim bin Hamood Al-Harathi</b>, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic Affairs and Community Service, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman</li> </ul>		
17:10-17:30	<b>Closing Remarks, Key Insights and Future Directions</b>		

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 (14<sup>th</sup> 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

 hany.taha@dusit.com



[inquiries@menahelf.com](mailto:inquiries@menahelf.com)



[www.menahelf.com](http://www.menahelf.com)

## Main Organizer



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