

THE FUTURE OF LIFELONG AND EXECUTIVE EDUCATION 2026

Insights for business schools and universities



Introduction

Many universities and business schools are trying to grow their lifelong learning and executive education offer. For some, lifelong learning offers a new income stream when others are in decline, others are seeking to build on a continuing education offer that has been around for decades but needs refreshing, while some are reacting to the demand for new skills among those already working.

Whatever the drivers, making lifelong learning central to a university or business school strategy is not easy, even when there is a well developed executive education offer. In the past 15 years, CarringtonCrisp has published a series of reports on the developing marketplace for lifelong learning, working with leading universities and business schools around the world to help them grow their offer.

In January 2026, CarringtonCrisp will launch a new study, 'The future of lifelong and executive education: strategies for success'. The study will be built around surveys of 10,000 learners and 1,000 employers globally, along with employer and provider interviews, and leveraging the extensive market knowledge developed by CarringtonCrisp.

The study will answer key questions:

- What will demand for lifelong learning look like in the future?
- How will technology impact learning demand and deliver learning?
- What will be the barriers to successfully delivering lifelong learning in universities and business schools?
- What subjects will be in demand among learners and employers?

Participating universities and business schools will receive detailed data, analysis and reporting on the future of lifelong and executive education, both globally and for their institution. Reports will provide actionable insights to help universities and business schools change, build and grow their lifelong and executive education offer.

The market for lifelong and executive education

In an uncertain world, data can provide valuable insights for universities and business schools looking to innovate, to change their business model and meet employer and learner demand. In previous studies, CarringtonCrisp found:

A market where individuals expect to change jobs more frequently, driving demand for learning. Yet a recognition that where employers invest in employee learning and development, those same individuals are likely to stay longer, becoming more loyal to their employer.

Universities struggling with legacy systems and lacking the flexibility to take new approaches to learning delivery. Employers believing that universities only offer degrees and are out of touch with the reality faced by employers in their businesses and organisations.

Both individuals and employers considering international providers, universities and private companies, to help them learn the skills they need, whether that's face-to-face or online. Often the demand for learning is short bursts to top-up skills and introduce new subjects, but degrees still have a place, albeit less and less delivered in a continuous linear format.

Learning journeys are seen as the future, customised to meet employer and individual needs, zigzagging across a lifetime.

And all of this was two years ago. With the rapid evolution of AI, the future of lifelong and executive education is changing faster than ever.

How the study works

In January 2026, CarringtonCrisp will examine the latest development in lifelong and executive education, probably the most rapidly evolving and dynamic markets for higher education. With pressure on budgets and the search for new models to sustain universities, lifelong and executive education are taking a central role in tertiary provision. But are universities and business schools ready?

The scope of the study will bring together four perspectives:

- employers,
- individual learners,
- universities/business schools, and
- market innovation, trends and best practice.

The study will be global in nature and will involve desk research, interviews and online surveys.

Desk research will assess market trends in executive education and lifelong learning markets around the world. Insights will be gathered on new providers entering the market, new approaches to learning, innovation and best practice across lifelong and executive education.

Interviews will be conducted with participating universities and business schools to understand their perspectives on the changing marketplace.

In addition, 40 leading employers around the world will be interviewed to gain insights on what business wants and needs to support learning and development, and what role they foresee for universities and business schools.

Online surveys will be conducted with 10,000 individual learners and 1,000 employers spread around 40 countries.

Among the questions to be addressed in the study are:

- How is work changing?
- What skills will be prioritised by employers and employees? Will leadership still be in demand? Is AI the top priority?
- What is driving corporate learning and development?
- Where will face-to-face, blended and online provision sit in the marketplace?
- Will there be a greater focus on shorter, cheaper approaches to learning?
- Who will want a degree and how will it be delivered?
- Will microcredentials and digital badges be recognised by learners and employers?
- How will employers choose partners to deliver learning and development for their staff?
- What part will technology play in learning? How will AI change learning?
- Where is the sweet spot for universities and business schools to build effective and successful lifelong and executive education offers?
- What will learners expect beyond their formal courses?
- Will employers prefer new market entrants, consultants or technology-led providers?
- What part will cost, customisation and impact play in their choice of learning providers?
- What are the new models for lifelong and executive education provision – subscription, flexible, global, partnered, looping or all of these and more?

How to take part

Universities taking part will pay £12,500 (+VAT where applicable) receiving a report across the breadth of their offer. Individual business schools can take part for £8500 (+VAT where applicable) receiving a report just on business school provision. Reports will include:

- A comprehensive report covering all aspects of the research
- Insights on the specific positioning of their university/business school in the executive education and lifelong learning marketplaces
- Comprehensive data sets detailing the findings from the total survey sample and splits based on a variety of metrics
- Individual presentations of the findings and a virtual group presentation for all those participating

Reports will provide actionable insights to develop lifelong and executive education offers. Participants will gain understanding of employer and learner expectations, as well as the nature of the growing market competition and how best to position their offer.

Research and surveys will take place from mid-January 2026 over a three-month period. Schools will receive initial reports in May 2026 with full reporting to follow in June 2026.

For more information on how your university and/or business school can participate in The future of lifelong and executive education 2026, please contact us by email at info@carringtoncrisp.com