

Reflections on AI and Professional Development: Insights from the M25 Consortium Annual Conference 2026

Introduction

Navigating the evolving higher education landscape demands bringing together emerging technologies and the support people need to drive our services. Attending the M25 Consortium Annual Conference 2026 was a great opportunity to explore this and learn from colleagues who are leading and engaging in a broad range of successful sector-wide initiatives. Across the day, I explored a rich variety of forward-thinking topics that reflected a shared commitment to building more sustainable, inclusive, and community-centred service environments.

Among these wide-ranging discussions, artificial intelligence (AI) governance and professional development stood out as two key areas I particularly wish to reflect on. These topics directly intersect with my strategic work on AI adaptation, technology-enhanced learning (TEL) initiatives, staff development, and coaching at the University of Greenwich, which is now part of the LASE (London and South East) University Group.

Artificial Intelligence

While AI introduces profound operational possibilities, it also presents significant challenges. As it transforms academic, research, and operational workflows, equipping staff and students with information and AI literacy becomes essential for helping them adapt effectively in an age of rapid technological change.

In addition to operational efficiency, AI adoption carries notable risks regarding security, system vulnerability, transparency, and accountability. A major focus across the sector is addressing the impact of mis- and disinformation. Information literacy initiatives are expanding to include tailored AI guidance and dedicated toolkits designed to help users navigate complex digital ecosystems and identify reliable resources. Furthermore, the strategic integration of AI and digital infrastructure must account for digital equity and environmental sustainability. Managing digital environments sustainably, including reviewing cloud storage, data preservation policies, and digital footprint frameworks, links day-to-day data management directly to institutional sustainability goals.

In my role spearheading strategic TEL initiatives and managing institutional responses to generative AI (GenAI) at the University of Greenwich, these insights strongly reinforce our ongoing efforts. Benchmarking our approaches against consortium practices validates our focus on AI ethics, digital pedagogy, and GenAI governance. Incorporating sector-wide findings into our TEL Community of Practice, professional development sessions, and institutional AI guidance ensures our central technology team and library staff provide robust, ethically grounded support to over 20,000 students and 2,000 staff.

Professional Development

A central theme of the conference was celebrating staff achievements and fostering sustainable, fair learning pathways for all colleagues across large, diverse directorates. It has been rewarding to learn from the ways structured professional development can build confidence, leadership, and community. Incorporating structured mentorship schemes, where senior leaders or training professionals mentor early-career staff, provides invaluable peer support and cross-departmental networking.

Promoting widespread participation in continuing professional development (CPD) requires strategic planning, detailed training needs analysis, inclusive design, and accessible practice. Examples of this in practice include providing flexible delivery options to ensure reach, utilising blended or recorded e-learning, and hosting dedicated annual staff development events to prioritise staff growth. With a background in occupational psychology, I see immense value in how training needs analyses (TNAs) are used to drive tailored learning programmes, helping to foster a supportive environment where staff feel empowered at every stage of their career.

These learning models align directly with my remit at Greenwich, where I deliver training, mentor colleagues, and embed coaching for TEL professional development to support staff in navigating digital transformation and enhancing their TEL capabilities. Operating at the intersection of central TEL strategy and library service delivery, I am committed to advancing digital competence and supporting staff towards formal professional recognition. Applying these structured, inclusive approaches coupled with tailored coaching allows us to turn institutional change into shared success, aligning with the conference ethos of bringing "sunshine through the rain."

Conclusion

The insights gained from the M25 Annual Conference underscore that technology and staff empowerment must progress hand in hand. By grounding AI governance in digital literacy and ethics, and by building flexible, supportive professional development pathways through coaching and mentoring, central teams and library services can help staff and students become resilient, adaptable, and empowered during challenging times.