



What do you want from ALDinHE?

Kate Coulson
BPP University, UK

Presentation abstract

The ALDinHE Steering Group establishes and leads the work of the association on behalf of its members. There are currently 17 members, which include Working Group Chairs, members without portfolio, the Chair, Deputy Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. Our strategy prioritises transparency, communication, and co-creation with the community. This mini keynote was an opportunity to discuss the ALDinHE strategy as well as share views, opinions, and thoughts about what ALDinHE does well, what it might improve, and things it could start doing. Nothing was off the mini keynote table – we wanted to hear from you!

Questions:

- 1) What does ALDinHE do well? (Do you want more of this?)
- 2) What could ALDinHE do better?
- 3) What should be on ALDinHE's To Do List?

Keywords: learning development; association of learning development in higher education; ALDinHE; strategy; community; communication .

Community response

I feel the ALDinHE ship is in safe hands with Maddy and Kate - and I can't wait to see how far they take the ship onto its next destination.

A fantastic community response highlighted the positive impact and influence it has had, and continues to have, on one individual's (and others!) professional life and development:

It [ALDinHE] is a phenomenal organisation, and has been the backbone of my whole career. It is a space where I have strong professional connections and friendships. It is an organisation that feels like home.

It was great to make relatively new members in the room, leading to some conversation around how approachable ALDinHE is. To be fair - from the experience in the room it was a ringing endorsement, and multiple people across the conference shared how welcoming they had found ALDinHE.

As well as evoking these positive feelings, the mini keynote also inspired reflection and introspection for one attendee:

I really enjoyed this discussion around ALDinHE as an organisation, and Kate and Maddy facilitated an honest and open dialogue around what could be next. It gave me the opportunity to reflect on my relationship with ALDinHE, which really started with the 2013 conference in Plymouth; with Greenwich representing my 10th conference. This background is important, as I can see how much ALDinHE has developed and professionalised over this time. I've seen the launch of numerous communities of practice, formal professional recognition (Certified Practitioner [CEP]/Certified Leading Practitioner [CeLP] - now ALDinHE Fellow/Senior Fellow), the expansion of the journal from one issue a year to four (well - five this year!), a fantastic new website, a mentoring programme, awards, and much, much more. ALDinHE might be almost unrecognisable in the scale of provision compared to where it was over a decade ago.

Another response from the community discussed the changing nature, size and number of groups that make up the inner-workings of ALDinHE and the advantages and disadvantages this can bring:

One thing I fed back is the overwhelming number of groups - while wonderful - it is sometimes a little hard to know where to start. I can't believe there isn't some overlap between the groups, and I am sure from the perspective of new members it is all a bit much. Then again, it is also a symbol of how many people want to get involved - and can that be a bad thing? I enjoyed Kate's reflections on this - that in wanting a smaller steering group, she had pushback from Sandra Sinfield - that actually ALDinHE should have more - and it does! This is important because ALDinHE is run by volunteers, a fact I perhaps overlooked in my call for a more streamlined structure.

However, the biggest response for one individual after attending the mini keynote focused on the future of ALDinHE. Particularly, in thinking about how the association can navigate and face current and future challenges that learning developers are experiencing as individuals and learning development is experiencing as a profession.

ALDinHE needs to take that final step towards professionalisation. It needs to be an organisation with similar status to SEDA (Staff and Educational Development Association) and ALT (Association for Learning Technology). For that, ALDinHE should be a registered charity and company, with a managing director, CEO or other executive in charge. That is a whole different ballgame... and something a lot more money is needed for. But, I think the time has come for ALDinHE to take those final steps. In doing so, it is going to have to generate more money.

ALDinHE is probably one of the best value organisations there is. But that 'value' does limit the funding that can be raised. Most organisations charge for their professional recognition schemes, for example. I sometimes worry that offering professional development for free within memberships undervalues it. If we are to value that recognition, should we not be willing to pay? A payment that helps ALDinHE keep doing the awesome things it does. It is also more than money. Awarding formal postnominals for recognition also raises the profile of learning development, and CeP/CeLP was always hard to decipher. I was thrilled to hear of the rebranding to Fellow and Senior Fellow the day following this mini keynote.

'Professionalisation' aside, I think the biggest and most urgent thing ALDinHE must do is advocate. Higher education is undoubtedly under attack. The financial constraints the sector is operating within are extremely damaging - and so far, the solution is an inward attack, with institutions forced to make internal savings to remain solvent. I fear that these cuts are having a detrimental impact on learning development (and educational development for that matter). In a context of tight budgets, learning development risks being a 'nice to have' rather than a 'must' - something all the more concerning in a context of continued widening participation where incoming students need the support more than ever. ALDinHE needs to lead a rallying cry for the defence of learning development. Moreover, I have a bigger concern. From discussions with colleagues across the conference, I heard of numerous people taking voluntary leavers' packages. While this does not involve a compulsory redundancy, it does, in effect, label the post redundant, and as such, I have seen multiple instances where a higher-banded learning developer is being replaced by a lower-banded intern, support assistant or peer-scheme. While not coordinated, while not purposeful, while not even intentional - learning development is indeed under attack. ALDinHE must be advocating at the highest levels to make sure we make the case for the support learning development offers. This might mean collaborations with other sector bodies like Advance HE and JISC, but fundamentally, it also requires direct action with the Office for Students and other government bodies. As a vehicle for social justice, I think ALDinHE can argue all students should have a right to the experiences concentered in our values - and in the age of AI, learning as a concept is more important than ever before. Learning development should have a seat at the very highest levels right now (and perhaps we need more partnership with neurosciences to make the case for learning).

Next steps and additional questions

The future of learning development and learning developers has been a regular conversation in more recent meetings of JLDHE's Reading Club. These discussions have

been prompted by papers that have discussed, analysed and reflected upon technological changes (such as Generative AI) and changes in third-space roles, particularly where previously separate roles have been merged into new, combined job roles. Therefore, it is particularly relevant that ALDinHE as an organisation is also beginning to think about its future as an organisation, and our shared future as a profession. How does the Steering Group plan to continue these conversations with the wider ALDinHE and LD community?

A recent opinion piece published in JLDHE's Third Space in HE Special Edition, by Morley and Grayson (2025), argued that third-space professional associations, such as ALDinHE, the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP) and the UK Advising and Tutoring Association (UKAT), should look for more opportunities to collaborate and work together to support the whole spectrum of third-space practitioners. Is such increased collaboration with other professional associations something that the Steering Group would consider? Similarly, in relation to the point raised above about potentially raising more funds and becoming a registered charity, are there any learnings ALDinHE can take from other associations like SEDA and ALT?

Author's reflection

As the new Chair of ALDinHE (2025 onwards), I am keen to ensure that I am visible and accessible to our community and all members, so this mini keynote was the start of that approach. Giving the community an opportunity to comment on the current ALDinHE strategy and approach is really important as ALDinHE is representing members' views, needs and interests. I feel strongly that we need to do this more frequently and also close the feedback loop by reporting back in relation to feedback and ideas suggested/received.

I didn't expect huge numbers to attend the session, but I welcomed a few colleagues - some who have consistently engaged with ALDinHE over many years and others who are new to the conference and the association. This was fantastic as it is important to listen to a wide variety of voices. The feedback and variety of discussions was really interesting and helpful; most comments and views mirrored other conversations I have had across the community, so that was comforting to know we are on the right lines in terms of our development and projects. The strongest theme to emerge was the need for an Advocacy Group or Project; especially in light of significant staffing changes across UK HEIs in 2025

and beyond. This is now an urgent matter for the Steering Group and will be acted on by the end of 2025.

Thanks to all who attended - hearing positive and constructive feedback is very important for ALDinHE's continued development and enhancement.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the contributors who shared their reflections and enriched our insight into this conference presentation and its impact on the audience. Special thanks go to Lee Fallin from the University of Hull.

The community response was edited by Craig Morley, who captured the key themes of the community discussion.

References

Morley, C., and Grayson, N. (2025) 'Harnessing the power of professional associations to unite the third-space community', *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, 33. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.47408/jldhe.vi33.1273>

Author details

Kate Coulson is an associate dean and associate professor of Educational Practice at BPP University. In her role within the Education Services directorate, she works internationally across the BPP Group with responsibility for Learning and Teaching Enhancement and the Library Service. She is a National Teaching Fellow (NTF) and a winner of the Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (CATE). Her research interests focus on the impact of Learning Development, student resilience and enhancing student outcomes. Kate is the Chair of the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education and represents ALDinHE on the International Consortium of Academic Language and Learning Developers steering group.

Licence

©2025 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>. Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education (JLDHE) is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE).