

Introduction

There is growing agreement that in the current complex and uncertain environment, leadership based on fundamental values is the best way forward for universities. The importance of values has featured in various global, regional and national documents, including the Magna Charta Universitatum and the Ministerial Communiqué from the meeting of European Ministers 2024 in Tirana. The Magna Charta Observatory (MCO) introduced its Living Values project in 2018 to assist universities in identifying their values and living by them. <https://www.magna-charta.org/activities-and-projects/living-values>

The Living Values project and Guidelines have been progressively used by universities. Conferences in Japan, London, Bangladesh and elsewhere have generated considerable international interest. A MCO book entitled " The Social Responsibility and Responsiveness of Universities " is being produced based on action research depth case studies of six universities addressing different aspects of the application of values to concrete opportunities or crises, accompanied by illuminating underpinning conceptual frameworks and an analysis of good practice emerging from across the universities. The considerable evidence arising from the above will constitute significant resource material to underpin the programme, together with the extensive real life hands on experience of members of the programme team.

Leading with values at the core requires a different approach to leadership development. In 2020 Newcastle University in the UK, one of the Living Values pilot universities, developed an in-house 'Leading Through Values' programme which has now been taken by 300 leaders. Starting with the senior team, the 'Leading Through Values' programme is now adapted for senior, middle and junior levels of leadership.

To enable more universities to lead through values, and others to do so more successfully, the MCO has partnered with Newcastle University to deliver an international programme for university leaders on igniting and supporting values-based leadership in universities for academic leaders.

This programme forms part of the Observatory's institutional activities and is fully aligned with its mission to promote and support fundamental values in higher education.

Objectives

The objectives of the programme are:

- to enable a multi-national group of senior university leaders and leadership developers to learn more about the MCO's Living Values methodology and

form action groups to propagate the initiative across the international membership of MCO,

- to explore how values-based leadership can have real impact and deliver tangible benefits
- To enable leaders to embed their values into organisational practice while remaining sensitive to the unique settings of their university,
- to work with other senior leaders to co-create values-based leadership development content and processes for their own institution.

Learning Outcomes

Participants will understand the importance of culture and values, aligning institutional and individual values and what being a 'values-driven leader' looks like in practice. They will understand their organisation through a values lens, learn approaches and skills to put values-based leadership into practice and how values can be embedded in behaviours and processes. They will be able to discern how values approaches may be used appropriately in different organisational situations of steady state, ongoing strategic development and externally or internally generated crises.

Specifically, participants may undertake one or more of the following:

- Prepare a plan for identifying their university values and embedding them into the policies and process of the university
- Prepare a plan for updating their existing values set
- Develop a review process for understanding the impact of their current values activity on its initial (or emerging) goals
- Prepare a plan for reviewing their university's alignment with its existing values
- Check the impact of their current mechanisms for embedding their university values and plan for improvement and for the assignment

Participants

The programme is designed for senior leaders and senior leadership developers of universities that have signed the Magna Charta Universitatum. It is recommended that each university sends a team of two, one senior leader and one member of a team that supports change and leadership development, to aid implementation of values-based leadership in their institution.

The number of participants will be limited to 24.

The programme

The programme will encourage participants to explore the context and cultural challenges of their own universities, will use Action Learning/impact methods and will comprise the following elements. It will include evidence from the MCO's Living Values pilot institutions.

Two introductory webinars of 1.5 hours each at 1500 CET on dates to be determined

- Introduction to the programme and the Living Values methodology
- The nature of culture and values and preparation for the residential session

Participants are required to complete a pre-programme questionnaire by 14 September. A key part of this will be to provide an outline of particularly challenging areas in the development of their Initiative on which they would welcome assistance from other participants and tutors. This will inform the content of the programme. The questionnaire will be forwarded to those who register on the programme.

One 1.5-day residential session in Vilnius on 13 and 14 October 2026 with participative sessions including topics such as:

- Introduction to university contexts and challenges
- University cultures, strategies, structures, processes and behaviours
- What does a truly values-led university look like?
- How it can be achieved
- Giving life to our institutional values
- Aligning values and behaviours to achieve change in organisations
- Measuring success
- The scope and range of institutional values and their operating characteristics.
- Approaches and processes in the design of a Values profile
- Stages in the development of a Values Initiative
- Changes needed to facilitate and realise specific values in academic and administrative domains, education, research, HR, finance, third mission, etc
- Inhibiting factors and constraints
- Leadership roles at various levels to effect desired shifts
- The juxtaposition of Management by Values/Management by Objectives
- Sustainability and embedding of values once agreed and installed.
- Evaluation and next steps

Sessions will comprise plenary inputs and work in small groups.

A course dinner

Following this module, participants are invited to join the MCO's 2026 Anniversary on the theme of Beyond Resilience: universities as Active Value-Driven Agents in a Changing World in which there will be sessions relevant to Living Values.

Thereafter, action learning groups will meet virtually to share their learning and progress and provide support for each other in implementing developments to their values leadership and implementation.

A follow-up webinar of 2 hours for all participants (c 6 months after the residential)

Sharing experience and learning

What next?

Final in-person programme session in Bologna in September 2027.

Programme Team

The programme team

Emeritus Professor John Davies - MCO Ambassador and visiting Professor
University of Bath

Emeritus Professor John L. Davies has a career which includes senior institutional management and international research teaching and consultancy in over 66 countries, in the field of higher education management, latterly at the University of Bath, UK. He is a former Pro-Vice Chancellor at Anglia Ruskin University (Research and Knowledge Exchange) and at La Trobe University (Quality Assurance). He is currently active in HE consultancy specialising in all aspects of sustainable university development, including 10 Catholic universities, the pontifical system, OECD, EU, UNESCO, and the World Bank He has a long experience of setting up and working with national and international QA agencies. He is an Ambassador for the Magna Charta Observatory and contributes to its Living Values Project and research activities. He was a contributor to the national higher education development programmes in Kazakhstan in 2013 and 2023 and engaged with the Bolashak Leadership Programme for Kazakhstan based at University of Bath in 2021-22.

Professor Caroline Parker - MCO Ambassador and Professor at Glasgow
Caledonian University

Professor Caroline Parker has been Assistant Vice-Principal Values at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) and coordinator of its successful Values project for the past ten years. As leader of GCU's Values initiative Caroline developed and delivered a range of mechanisms for embedding the institutional Values within the organization starting with their Behaviours Framework, a tool now used to underpin a wide range of organisational activities from recruitment, induction, personal development, appraisal, team development and leadership training. In recent years she has worked on embedding the GCU Values within the universities Staff Engagement monitoring process, Rewards and Recognition policy and Academic Career Pathway and Promotions process.

Caroline has been an MCO Ambassador since 2018. She co-designed and co- led the successful 2017 GCU/MCO Workshop on Fundamental and Institutional Values in Practice; supported the development of the MCO Living Values support materials and has contributed to several of the MCO's Living Values practical guides. She is in the process of co-authoring an e-book on GCU's Values project experiences.

Karen McDowell - Head of Organisation Development- Newcastle University

Karen has worked in Organisation Development roles for over 30 years across the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors, undertaking roles across the spectrum of OD, including learning and development, engagement, strategic leadership development and transformational culture change. At Newcastle University, part of Karen's role is to enhance leadership and people management capability, building leadership practices that support the cultural shifts needed to achieve the University's future ambitions and vision. Before moving to Newcastle University, Karen was part of the senior people leadership team, enabling transformational and operational change across the British Red Cross. This work involved ensuring the charity was focused on relevant core activities, aligned to its values and fundamental principles, with humanistic leadership, as well as being structured for future success and sustainability in the context of financial challenges within the not-for-profit sector.

David Lock - MCO Secretary General

David Lock is Secretary-General of the Magna Charta Observatory and has led on the development and delivery of the MCO's strategy, the globalisation of the Observatory's work, and the development of the Living Values project, a self-evaluation instrument for university values. He facilitated the process of developing and launching the Magna Charta Universitatum 2020 and the development of the MCO's research initiative 'the responsive and responsible university'.

His varied career in international higher education and university leadership included eight years as Director of International Projects at the UK's Leadership Foundation for Higher Education. He was the founding Registrar and Acting Chief Executive of the British University in Dubai where he structured, built and then led the University.

David was Secretary to the University of Huddersfield and Registrar and Secretary to the University of Hull in the UK for a total of 14 years. A teacher and Chartered Secretary by background, David has served on a number of international bodies and undertaken a range of consultancy assignments including international development and leadership development programmes and UK HE governance projects.

Financial arrangements

Contribution

A participation contribution of €1,500 per person is requested to support the organisation and delivery of the programme. The Observatory operates on a non-profit basis, and the contribution is intended solely to cover organisational and programme-related costs. The contribution also includes participation in the MCO's 2026 Anniversary Event, for which the €800 contribution will be fully waived for up to two representatives per university attending the Living Values programme.

The contribution supports the costs associated with programme facilitation, materials, the programme dinner, and catering during the residential sessions in Vilnius. Participants are required to meet their own travel and accommodation costs. Advice will be given on nearby hotels.

Registration

To register, please complete the Application form from this link:

<https://forms.gle/DJQj8UmBiVtP1ENp9>

The closing date for registrations is 14 September 2026.

Additional Information

The Magna Charta Universitatum and MCU 2020 set out fundamental values and principles for higher education. Over 1000 universities have now signified their support for them and their intention to operate in accordance with them. <https://www.magna-charta.org>

The Magna Charta Observatory (MCO) has worked in various ways since 2000 to promote and protect these values. In 2018 it launched the Living Values project which was designed to enable universities to review their values, assess the extent to which they were 'owned' and being implemented and take action where there were differences between espousal and action. <https://www.magna-charta.org/activities-and-projects/living-values>

Newcastle University in the UK was one of the 16 universities which piloted the Living Values methodology. <https://www.ncl.ac.uk> It is committed to values-based leadership and found the Living Values project enabled it to have impact. It developed a training programme 'Leading Through Values' so that university leaders at different levels could put values to the fore in their role. It is now working with the MCO to provide a leadership development programme for those in, or aspiring to university leadership and those responsible for leadership training.

For more information, please contact MCO Secretary General David Lock on davidjohn.lock@unibo.it