



dixon walter

# New Year

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Christmas may have been and gone and the temperature has plunged, but at Dixon Walter we're still celebrating as this month marks our 10-Year Anniversary!!

This month marks a significant milestone for Dixon Walter, the executive recruitment firm renowned for its specialisation in higher education. Over the past decade, the firm—led by Mike Dixon and Alan Walter—has become a trusted partner to universities, facilitating transformative leadership appointments that have shaped the future of academia and contributed to wider societal progress.

# Talent Acquisition

More challenging than ever?

As the higher education landscape evolves, so do the challenges and opportunities in talent acquisition.

From navigating a competitive job market to leveraging technology in recruitment, HR professionals in our sector are adapting to new trends that redefine how we attract and retain top talent. Universities are facing turbulent times. With mounting financial pressures, many institutions are implementing cost-cutting measures, including redundancies and recruitment freezes. These steps, though often necessary, come with significant challenges as universities strive to maintain quality, meet strategic objectives, and uphold their reputations. Yet, amid the belt-tightening, some roles remain non-negotiable—senior leadership positions that are integral to navigating these very challenges.

In this edition of our newsletter we examine the rise of interim appointments in response to the recruitment challenges, the future of international student recruitment and the latest articles to hit the press.



# Celebrating

## A Decade of Excellence: Dixon Walter's 10-Year Anniversary



[Meet our team >](#)

[Read about our values >](#)

### A Journey of Expertise and Innovation

Established in 2015, Dixon Walter was founded with a clear vision: to deliver bespoke, high-quality recruitment services tailored to the higher education sector. Building on a foundation of over two decades of recruitment expertise, Mike Dixon and Alan Walter created a consultancy that seamlessly combined deep sector insight with a commitment to personalised service.

From the outset, Dixon Walter set itself apart by understanding the intricate demands of higher education leadership. The firm's innovative approach, focused on identifying candidates with not only the right experience but also the strategic vision and cultural fit, quickly earned it a reputation for excellence. Over the years, Dixon Walter has received consistent praise from clients and candidates alike for its personal, knowledgeable service and the genuine care and expertise it brings to every assignment.

As the firm has grown, it has carefully welcomed trusted, experienced colleagues into its team, building a family of professionals who share its values and dedication to the sector.

### Building Partnerships and Driving Impact

Over the past decade, Dixon Walter has forged lasting partnerships with a wide array of institutions, from small specialist colleges to globally renowned universities. Each engagement has been grounded in trust, discretion, and a shared goal of securing leadership that drives institutional success.

The firm's portfolio spans a broad spectrum of senior roles, encompassing both academic leadership and professional services across all mission groups. Dixon Walter has also played an active role in advancing diversity and inclusivity in higher education leadership, fostering greater equity at the highest levels of governance.

### Adapting to Change

The higher education landscape has undergone significant change over the past decade. From funding pressures and shifting student expectations to digital transformation and global competition, institutional priorities have continually evolved.

In this challenging and often unpredictable environment, Dixon Walter has remained a steadfast partner, offering expert guidance rooted in knowledge, experience, and genuine commitment to the sector. Whether navigating the pressures of an evolving political climate or responding to emerging trends in sustainability, equality, and innovation, the firm's proactive and informed approach has ensured its clients remain well-equipped for the future.



# Reflections

## On a Decade of Success



“So much has changed in the sector over the last ten years, but one constant has been the need for complete authenticity in all our dealings with both clients and candidates. It is something we are really proud of and look for in the feedback we receive”

Mike Dixon

As Dixon Walter celebrates its 10th anniversary, it provides an opportunity to reflect on the firm’s achievements over the past decade.

Key highlights include:

- **Expanding Influence:** Establishing a strong presence across the UK and beyond, while maintaining the boutique feel of a consultancy deeply invested in each client’s success.
- **Fostering Community:** Building lasting relationships within the higher education sector and contributing to leadership discussions through thought leadership, events, and insights.
- **Driving Excellence:** Playing a pivotal role in the appointment of leaders who have gone on to achieve significant successes for their institutions.



# Looking to the Future



“One of the keys to our success in the last ten years has been our ability to adapt our services to reflect the new and varied challenges faced by the sector. Continually asking the question, how do we best add value to a recruitment process; and because of our close relationships with our clients and candidates we are able to understand the real issues that face universities and identify the best senior talent able to navigate through these turbulent times.”

Alan Walter

The 10th anniversary is not only a celebration of the past but also a moment to look ahead. Dixon Walter remains dedicated to its mission of helping higher education institutions thrive through exceptional leadership.

As the sector grapples with new challenges—including the rise of artificial intelligence, demographic shifts affecting student numbers, and the urgency of global sustainability goals—Dixon Walter is committed to supporting clients and candidates with the same dedication, expertise, and innovative thinking that have defined its first decade.



## Gratitude and Thanks

Dixon Walter’s success over the past 10 years would not have been possible without the trust and collaboration of its clients, candidates, and colleagues. The firm extends its heartfelt thanks to everyone who has been part of its journey and looks forward to continuing to serve the higher education community in the years to come.

Here’s to the next decade of transformative leadership and meaningful partnerships!!



# In case you Missed it?

## Report on Diversity in Governing Bodies

At the back end of last year Advance HE released a report on diversity in governing bodies, revealing some (slow) progress in improving the diversity of HE boards. HEPI covers why it matters.

[Read the Advanced HE Report here >](#)

[Read the HEPI Article here >](#)

## New Podcast: Doing Leadership Differently

Advance HE have launched a new podcast: Doing Leadership Differently – considering what doing leadership could mean for those tasked with stewarding higher education institutes through fast-shifting worlds.

[Read about the Podcast here >](#)

## A new era of collaboration between universities to transform the sector and drive efficiency

Universities UK has appointed Sir Nigel Carrington, former Vice Chancellor at University of the Arts London and international Mergers & Acquisitions lawyer, as the Chair of its Taskforce on Efficiency and Transformation in Higher Education. “Universities are clear on their shared responsibility with government to put the sector in the strongest possible position to support the needs of the country, and the Taskforce is evidence they are prepared to think radically to tackle the challenges they face”.

[Read the Article here >](#)

## ‘Well the assumption is...’ Conversations with women leaders in estates and facilities

AUDE have published a fascinating article titled **‘Well the assumption is...’ Conversations with women leaders in estates and facilities**. The report writes about the experiences of women in estates. An open brief, steered by conversations and real-life experiences.

This may well be an uncomfortable read for some but what an important light to shine on the EDI inequalities within the space. Well done AUDE!

The Estates and Facilities function is at the heart of operational efficiency and innovation in higher education and the leaders at the helm must reflect the diverse communities to which they serve.



# Bridging the Gap:

## The Rise of Interim Placements in Higher Education Leadership

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As executive recruiters specialising in higher education, we've witnessed a fascinating shift in recent months: the growing reliance on interim placements to fill critical leadership roles.

This trend has been particularly pronounced over the last six months, as declining international student numbers have put significant financial pressure on institutions and the cost of living also having a detrimental impact on domestic student numbers. These economic challenges, coupled with an ever-changing landscape, underscore the adaptability of the sector and the critical need for skilled leadership during these turbulent times.

The higher education sector in the UK has faced a perfect storm in recent months. A decline in international student enrolments—attributable to factors such as post-pandemic recovery, shifting visa policies, and increased competition from other countries—has created significant budgetary shortfalls for many institutions. With international students often contributing disproportionately to tuition revenue, their reduced numbers have placed financial strain on universities already grappling with tight margins.

Leadership transitions, often a source of disruption, have become even more challenging against this backdrop. The urgency to maintain stability and steer through financial uncertainty has made interim leadership an increasingly attractive option. Interim leaders can bring seasoned expertise and focus on immediate priorities without the long-term commitments or expectations tied to permanent appointments. We've also seen many leaders make the move to "acting up" to avoid institutional costs; this creates a gap below and often an overburdening of staff which can result in burnout. Many seasoned leaders are making the switch to consultancy work which offers greater flexibility, variation and a work-life balance which, since the pandemic, carries much higher importance with candidates when seeking new opportunities.



## Why Interim Placements Are on the Rise

The financial pressures and operational challenges of the past six months have driven a notable increase in demand for interim leaders in higher education. Key factors include:

1. **Urgency Amid Financial Instability:** With shrinking budgets, institutions need leaders who can make tough decisions quickly. Interim appointments provide the necessary agility to stabilise operations while longer-term strategies are developed.
2. **Time Constraints in Searches:** Financial pressures make it critical to avoid leadership vacuums. Identifying the right permanent leader can take months, especially for roles requiring extensive stakeholder engagement. An interim appointment ensures continuity and buys time for a thorough search.
3. **Access to Experienced Talent:** Interim leaders, often retired or semi-retired professionals, bring a wealth of experience and the ability to address pressing challenges like restructuring budgets or identifying alternative revenue streams.
4. **Freedom to Act:** Interim leaders are uniquely positioned to tackle immediate financial challenges, such as reviewing operational efficiencies or diversifying revenue sources, without the constraints or political ramifications faced by permanent leaders.

## The Impact on Institutions

While interim leadership offers vital support during times of crisis, its increasing prevalence raises important questions about institutional strategy and resilience. The heavy reliance on interims can indicate gaps in succession planning or an over-dependence on short-term fixes for systemic issues.

To ensure interim placements have the greatest impact, institutions must:

- **Define Clear Objectives:** Interim leaders should be tasked with specific goals, such as stabilising finances, addressing enrolment challenges, or laying the groundwork for strategic pivots.
- **Communicate Transparently:** Governing boards and executive teams must clearly articulate why an interim leader has been appointed and how they will address the current financial pressures. This transparency builds trust among stakeholders.
- **Invest in Long-Term Resilience:** Institutions should use the breathing space provided by interims to strengthen internal talent pipelines and develop strategies that reduce dependence on international tuition revenue.



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## What This Means for Executive Recruiters

For recruiters, the past six months have highlighted the critical importance of maintaining a robust network of experienced leaders ready to step in at short notice. Matching an interim leader is not just about addressing immediate needs—it's about positioning institutions to emerge stronger from their challenges. As recruiters, we must understand how interim appointments align with an institution's long-term trajectory and help design searches that ensure a smooth transition from interim to permanent leadership.

## Looking Ahead

As institutions continue to navigate the financial pressures brought on by declining international student numbers, the demand for interim leadership is likely to remain strong. These appointments provide a vital bridge, offering the time and expertise needed to stabilise operations and chart a course for recovery. However, they should be part of a broader strategy that includes diversifying revenue streams, improving operational efficiencies, and fostering leadership development.

Interim leadership, once seen as a stopgap measure, has become a critical strategic tool for higher education institutions facing financial challenges. It reflects the resilience and adaptability of the sector—and will undoubtedly shape its leadership landscape for the foreseeable future.

As the higher education sector continues to evolve, Dixon Walter remains committed to helping institutions navigate these changes with confidence. Let us help you find the interim leadership solutions you need to thrive in today's challenging environment.



# Is the future of international student recruitment looking up?

Signs of rebound in January intake for UK universities, with Nepal and Kenya developing as key markets, states Patrick Jack from Times Higher Education.

New figures from Enroly, a platform that supports universities in recruiting abroad, finds that the number of deposits made for the January intake is up 27 per cent on last year. It said that the “exciting” figures highlight the increasingly strategic importance of the January intake for UK universities, offering significant opportunities to engage with emerging markets and diversify recruitment efforts. Traditionally considered a secondary intake, Enroly said January was evolving into a “viable and attractive option for both students and institutions”.

“The data signals not only a recovery from previous challenges but also an opportunity to reposition January as a cornerstone of international recruitment efforts.

“This trend equally reinforces the resilience of the UK higher education sector and opens new avenues to strengthen its global position.”

[Read the full article here >](#)

## Feeling reflective?

As the new year begins, it's natural to feel reflective, taking stock of where you've been and where you'd like to go. It's a time for fresh starts, renewed ambitions, and the courage to consider new opportunities that align with your aspirations. Whether you're exploring new professional challenges or simply seeking guidance on the next step in your career journey, Dixon Walter is here to support you. With our expertise in identifying and nurturing talent, we're ready to help you navigate your ambitions and turn your potential into achievement this year.

Here's to a happy, successful and healthy 2025!!!

