AGENCY AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

Conference Theme:

Academic development, often referred to as educational development in some regions, is a field committed to bridge scholarship, practice, and policy to drive meaningful transformation in universities. At the core of this process lies the concept of *agency*, understood as the capacity to exert control over the actions, influence the environment and bring about change in our reality (Albert Bandura, 2001). In the context of academic development, agency is reflected in our role as change agents, influencing learning, teaching, and institutional strategies at multiple levels.

Building a strong professional identity is key to exercising agency. This includes balancing research and practice, responding to the evolving expectations of campus leaders, researchers, teachers, and students, and building credibility in diverse institutional settings. As both creators and facilitators of knowledge, academic developers assist study programme managers, teachers and students in enhancing learning experiences and fostering innovative practices that are based in evidence. *(Agency and Knowledge)*

Academic development centres navigate the strategic landscape of higher education, ensuring the work aligns with institutional priorities while responding to societal and systemic changes. This often places academic developers in dual roles: connecting senior leadership and teachers while balancing accountability and the freedom of intellectual exploration. These complexities call for strong communities of practice, interdisciplinary collaboration, and alliances within and beyond our institutions. *(Agency and Strategy)*

Finally, we play a crucial role in helping university teachers to empower students as active participants in their education. *Student agency* is understood as the capacity of students to influence their own lives and their environment through responsible decision-making and reflective action (OECD, 2024). Engaging students as partners in curriculum co-creation and learning innovation leads to more inclusive, relevant, and future-ready educational experiences. By fostering student agency, designing curricula that address real-world challenges, and adapting to emerging disruptions like artificial intelligence, we help shape a more dynamic and equitable higher education system. *(Agency and Students)*

The ICED 2026 Conference on "AGENCY AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT" invites us to explore this concept in depth to better understand the role of academic development centres and its academic and professional staff in transforming higher education.

<u>Subthemes:</u>

1. Agency and Knowledge: Advancing Epistemologies, Innovation and Scholarship

This track examines how academic developers **construct, share, and apply knowledge** in interdisciplinary and collaborative contexts. It highlights the scholarly foundations of academic development and explores how reflection and innovation drive advancements in teaching, learning, and institutional practices. The track also addresses the importance of digital transformation, sustainability, and inclusivity in higher education, emphasizing how these factors shape knowledge development and professional practice.

Topics include:

- The Scholarship of Academic Development as a recognised field of research.
- Innovative formats to generate, organise, and share knowledge.
- Interdisciplinary communities of practice, partnerships, and networks to promote epistemic agency.
- Frameworks and reflective practices to shape professional identities and foster epistemological growth.
- Critical examination on disruptions, such as artificial intelligence, and their impact on knowledge creation, curriculum development and student learning, from a sustainable and inclusive perspective.

2. Agency and Strategy: Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Organizational Transformation

This track explores the intentional, strategic actions of academic developers as **change agents and leaders** in teaching, learning, and curriculum enhancement across institutional and systemic levels. It examines their role in shaping teaching cultures, contributing to policy making, fostering alignment between curricula and institutional goals, and advancing organizational learning practices. The track also highlights strategies for building agile and responsive academic development units that can adapt to evolving educational needs and systemic challenges.

Topics include:

- Strategic initiatives to shape policies and programs for teaching, learning and curriculum enhancement, and especially the initial training for novice teachers.
- Effective strategies for collaboration across centres, faculties, and departments.
- Alignment of academic development initiatives with institutional policies and systemic priorities.
- Feedback, evaluation, and continuous improvement practices to foster sustainable organisational learning.
- Resilient academic development units to navigate systemic disruptions and societal shifts.

3. Agency and Students: Empowering Learners and Transforming Curriculum

This track examines the role of academic developers and teachers in **fostering learner agency and engagement** in undergraduate, postgraduate, and continuing education programmes to drive curriculum innovation and transformation. It explores how participatory approaches to curriculum design are promoted, as well as programmes fostering inclusivity and sustainability. It also reflects on the active role of students as co-creators of curricula and learning experiences.

Topics include:

- Student agency to enhance motivation, self-regulation, and engagement in learning.
- Support to academic staff and teachers to promote student agency.
- Partnerships between students and teachers to co-create meaningful and transformative learning experiences.
- Institutional collaboration between students, teachers, and academic leaders to enrich curriculum design.
- Design of competence-oriented, inclusive and sustainable curricula and university programmes that address societal and workforce needs.

Who Should Attend ICED26?

Academic development has traditionally focused on professional development of university teachers and teaching enhancement. However, as higher education becomes more complex, academic development centres are expanding their scope to include other functions such as curriculum design, teaching quality assessment, research on teaching and learning, or student support. Collaboration between different units and stakeholders within and beyond the university is also being strengthened.

At ICED26, we embrace the concept of *holistic academic development* (Sutherland, 2018), recognizing that academic developers support educators in their many roles—as teachers, researchers, leaders, entrepreneurs, community and industry liaisons, and more. They work alongside educational support staff, students, and researchers to enhance learning and foster institutional growth.

The conference brings together **Academic Developers & Educational Support Staff, Academic Leaders & Researchers, and Policy Makers in Higher Education:**

- Professionals working in centres for academic development or similarly defined as centres for teaching and learning in higher education.
- Staff involved in academic units such as quality assurance; evaluation of teaching quality; digital literacy; in libraries and learning resources, and learning analytics, data and research.
- Professionals working in student learning support: admissions and retention; diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), writing centres, career services and industry partnerships.
- Academics with leadership roles in previous units; leading study programs design, curriculum development or educational innovation.

- Researchers contributing to the advancement of academic development and general or disciplinary higher education studies.
- Policy-makers (professionals, researchers, and/or academics who design policies) on academic development and teaching quality in higher education, or academics who coordinate educational, staff and student enhancement policies, for example, in deanships or vice-rectorates.
- Decision-makers influencing institutional and national higher education agendas.

Languages and hybrid format:

Reflecting a commitment to diversity, the conference will be held in three languages—English, Spanish, and French—to engage a broad global audience.

Additionally, ICED26 will feature a hybrid format for keynotes and selected sessions, enabling both in-person and online participation. This approach ensures accessibility, promotes sustainability, and broadens participation from individuals across various contexts and locations.

Call for Contributions:

The conference invites a range of contribution formats including research papers, workshops, posters, symposium sessions, and ICED-Talks among others. All contributions will be focused on research and/or critical evaluations of academic development practice.

The suitability of submissions will be decided by an anonymous peer review process. More information will be soon available on our website. We look forward to another exciting conference and value the time you will spend on your submission; we look forward to reading about your work.

Important Dates:

- **1 April 2025.** Proposal submission opens.

- **15 September 2025.** Deadline for Submission of Proposals

- **15 December 2025.** Evaluation Results and Notifications of Acceptance

- **23 June 2026.** Pre-Conference

- **24-26 June 2026.** ICED26 Conference