



DIES FORUM 2026

Higher Education Institutions in Transformation: Shaping Future Skills in the Age of AI

ONLINE EVENT
5 AND 12 NOVEMBER
HOSTED BY UNIVERSITY OF POTSDAM

Call for Proposals
DEADLINE: 27 JULY 2026

INTRODUCTION

The DIES Forum is meant to bring together alumni from DIES training courses and DIES National Multiplication Trainings to share views and perspectives on current developments in higher education institutions as well as to exchange practices and discuss pressing issues in the dynamic field of higher education management from an inter-regional perspective.

The Forum is hosted by University of Potsdam and carried out in cooperation with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), and the German partner institutions which are implementing training courses in the DIES Programme, i.e., Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg, Leibniz University Hannover, Saarland University, and University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück.

Alumni from Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia will be invited to join this event, making it a unique opportunity to exchange between different higher education areas and world regions.

The DIES Forum 2026 will offer two events, each connected to the main theme. It will be held live over **Zoom** on **5 and 12 November** between 13:30-16:00 (Central European Time).

MAIN THEME OF THE DIES FORUM 2026

In today's rapidly evolving environment shaped by artificial intelligence (AI), changing labour market demands, and broader societal transformations, the demands to knowledge and skills acquired through formal education are undergoing significant shifts. From early debates on lifelong learning in the 1980s (Aspin & Chapman 2000) to more recent discussions on AI literacy and the question of which skills will remain uniquely valuable for humans in an era of large language models, machine learning and automation, concerns about the future relevance of human competencies have become increasingly prominent. The recent emergence of AI has brought the concept of "future skills", along with related competency frameworks, back to the centre of international education and policy debates. These developments raise important questions about how Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can prepare students and graduates for increasingly uncertain futures.

The model of the Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft defines future skills as "action-oriented competences that will be particularly important in a changing world..." (Stifterverband, 2026). These include fundamental skills such as critical thinking and communication, transformative skills such as innovation and sustainability competence, community-oriented skills such as responsibility and accountability, and digital skills such as AI literacy and data literacy at a broader level, and specialist skills at the expert level.

For HEIs, responding to these developments means rethink not only *what* students should learn, but also *how* teaching, learning, and assessment are designed and delivered, and *how* the institutions themselves can adapt to changing technological, societal, and labour market demands. Although debates on student-centred learning, competency-based education, lifelong learning, and employability are well established, AI pushes universities to move beyond adapting existing practices. It is reshaping how students access information, produce knowledge, and demonstrate learning. At the same time, AI is transforming institutional operations more broadly: from academic administration and personnel management to student admissions, financial planning, and governance. In this sense, it is not simply a pedagogical concern, but touches the organisation and management of HEIs as a whole.

This opens up a set of pressing questions: How can AI be integrated into higher learning in ways that preserve academic integrity and sustain students' curiosity, judgement, and creativity? How should universities reconsider their structures and organisation as AI becomes part of their daily practice? And what is the value of a university degree in an age where AI can provide access to knowledge and learning support that was once exclusive to universities? These questions reflect broader discussions in international higher education policy on digital transformation and future skills development, and require HEIs to rethink their strategies, policies and practices in response to the realities of the AI era.

It is against this backdrop that the 2026 DIES Forum, “**Higher Education Institutions in Transformation: Shaping Future Skills in the Age of AI**” invites alumni from across continents to engage in an open dialogue on these pressing questions. The Forum offers a unique space to reflect on shared experiences, learn from one another, and explore how HEIs can prepare graduates and professionals for evolving labour market and societal needs as well as their own management, development and positioning under these circumstances.

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Alumni from all fields of higher education management are invited to contribute to the Forum. The Forum provides a platform to share completed or ongoing initiatives in higher education management, focusing on case presentation, research results, lessons learnt, and possible transferability to other institutions or contexts. The Forum is not intended for academic paper submission or funding applications.

Proposals for Case Presentations

Alumni are invited to submit proposals that address institutional strategies, experiences, and innovations related to the development of skills in the age of AI. Submissions should be grounded in institutional practices and reflect lessons learnt, challenges encountered, and emerging solutions relevant to diverse regional contexts.

Contributions are welcome across the following **thematic streams**:

1. **Building future skills for students and graduates** This track explores how HEIs are transforming curricula and learning experiences to prepare students and graduates for changing labour market demands. Contributions are welcome on competency-based education, employability strategies, and innovations in teaching and learning.
2. **Staff development and leadership initiatives** This track addresses how HEIs are strengthening academic and administrative capacities in a changing environment. Contributions may cover leadership development, strategies for managing institutional change, and approaches to support staff development--- whether driven by AI, shifting student needs, or broader organisational transformations.
3. **Artificial intelligence and digital transformation in higher education institutions** This track explores how HEIs are navigating the opportunities and challenges of AI and digital change in academic practices, institutional operations, and governance. Contributions may address responsible AI use, ethical frameworks, or context-specific adaptations.
4. **Lifelong learning, continuing education and flexible learning pathways**: This track highlights how HEIs are widening access and supporting continuous skills development beyond traditional degree structures. Contributions may address flexible learning or recognition of prior learning.

The selected case presentations will be presented on Forum Day 1 and Day 2 in parallel sessions, including an input of about 20 minutes and a Q&A session of 25 minutes.

General Submission Guidelines for Proposals

Proposals for the Forum should

- be written in English,
- include a case summary of up to 800 words.

Kindly note that proposals may be submitted by one or up to three contributors representing the same or collaborating institutions.

APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCEDURE

All proposals need to be submitted to the University of Potsdam via an online platform per link <https://www.dies-nmt.org/s/Forum26/en.html>. The submission deadline is **27 July 2026, 18:00 CET**. The proposals will be reviewed by the Programme Committee of the DIES Forum which includes representatives from the University of Potsdam, the DAAD and the HRK as well as the participating DIES training courses. Notification of acceptance will be communicated at the end of August.

Review Criteria

- **Relevance and Innovation**
The proposed case aligns with the main theme of the Forum and offers a relevant, insightful, or innovative example. It demonstrates critical thinking and includes an analytical perspective beyond descriptive reporting.
- **Clarity and Coherence**
The proposal is clearly written, logically structured, and easy to follow. It communicates objectives, context, and outcomes in a focused and coherent manner.
- **Sustainability and Transferability**
The case reflects on its long-term impact, institutional sustainability, or potential for adaptation in other contexts or settings.

IMPORTANT DATES

Activity	Date in 2026
Deadline for submission of proposals	27 July
Notification of acceptance	End August
Forum registration	Early October
Forum dates	5 and 12 November

For questions, please contact nmt@uni-potsdam.de. We look forward to receiving your inspiring proposals!