

# MAKING UEA FIT FOR A CLIMATE CHANGED FUTURE?



»»» **4 VISIONS OF WHERE WE  
SHOULD BE HEADING**

**UEA People's Assembly  
Spring - Summer 2024**



# Table of Contents

**The climate change challenge**

**1**

**Problem diagnosis: What previous UEA People's Assembly participants said**

**1**

**Introducing four future visions**

**2**

- **The Sustainable Business**
- **The Responsive & Equitable University**
- **The People's Green University**
- **The Post-Capitalist HE Sector**

**Six common principles to help make UEA fit for a climate changed future**

**8**

**Vision appraisal**

**9**

**Proposed vision appraisal criteria**

**9**

# »»» The climate change challenge

**Making universities fit for a climate-changed future is one of the greatest challenges of our time.**

Higher Education (HE) institutions are increasingly being challenged to show leadership in responding to the climate and biodiversity crises. Technological and infrastructural changes attempt to “green” university campuses remain the focus of attention. However, addressing the climate and biodiversity crises will require substantial additional changes in how universities operate and the priorities they set. **All of this implies significant social and institutional change.**

Yet, not enough attention is given to the multiple and different futures which are possible for us, nor to the social implications of the changes proposed. In particular, the role of university communities in helping to deliver a sustainable future does not typically feature in relevant discussions. However, staff, students and local communities are already attempting to address these challenges on their own terms, and can play an important role in achieving a sustainable future for the sector.

## Problem Diagnosis: What previous UEA People’s Assembly participants said

The UEA might be a leader in its research on climate change and sustainability, but there are significant shortcomings and a lack of ambition in its sustainability practice.

1

Sustainability and climate change on campus appear to be dealt with in a piecemeal, uncoordinated manner.

2

Despite several institutional initiatives, actions, and regulations aiming to help ensure that the UEA is sustainable in its practice, these activities are under-resourced.

3

Current efforts are mainly focused on renovating the ageing building stock of the UEA campus and this means that the social, cultural, and behavioural aspects of the issue are often sidelined.

4

Whilst the UEA community already engages in multiple productive ways with climate change and sustainability, there is a general lack of institutional support for such actions.

5

Institutional governance for sustainability is highly problematic. There is a general lack of transparency and communication, and a lack of responsiveness to what the UEA community wants, needs, and thinks.

6

# Introducing four future visions

This booklet lays out **four different visions for making the UEA fit for a climate changed future**. The first of these visions (i.e. the *Sustainable Business* vision) is the result of a review of UEA's current sustainability practices and of the official future vision statements of the institution. Three further visions (i.e. the *Responsive & Equitable University*, the *People's Green University*, and the *Post-capitalist HE Sector* visions) were created by a diverse group of students, staff, and members of the local community participating in a **People's Assembly in Spring 2024** that was organised by the UKERC Public Engagement Observatory, the UEA Biodiversity & Climate Action Network (BCAN), and Faculty for a Future (F4F). They have been developed from extensive deliberation over the nature of the climate change challenge, the hoped-for futures of the institution, and the role of UEA's community in delivering these futures.

Against a backdrop of future visioning that primarily focuses on technological and infrastructural change and on emissions reduction, in each of these visions the role of the UEA community and broader environmental, social, and economic concerns have been considered extensively. They include different forms of institutional governance and roles for the community, and are informed by different assumptions around the role(s) of universities.

Ultimately, the purpose of opening up broader environmental, social, and economic concerns in these visions is to ask:

## WHAT SORT OF FUTURE DO WE WANT FOR THE UEA?



LEAST RADICAL

Smaller scope of interventions,  
working within existing structures



MOST RADICAL

Larger scope of interventions,  
working beyond existing structures

# »»» The four future visions

[vision overview]



	The Sustainable Business	The Responsive & Equitable University	The People's Green University	The Post-Capitalist HE Sector
<b>Key aims</b>	Delivering a financially and environmentally sustainable business	Developing an inclusive, responsive, and equitable university that leads the way in reimagining a climate-changed future	Collaborative action to help deliver a truly green, ethical, and democratic university	Transforming the HE sector into the blueprint of a society organised around radical post-capitalist/degrowth ideals to decisively address the polycrisis
<b>Scope of interventions</b>	Gradual adjustments aligning with UEA's current operating model, with improved processes, systems, policies, and structures	Gradual yet ambitious interventions across all areas of UEA's activity, with substantial adjustments to pre-existing organisational structures	Ambitious and radical interventions implemented rapidly across all areas of UEA's activity, with major changes across decision-making structures	Radical (inter)national mobilisations and interventions, promoting urgent and decisive change across the HE sector - beyond "piecemeal fixes"
<b>Approach to governance</b>	Top-down, with some input from expert researchers and consultants	Participatory/consultative	Distributed and collaborative	Radically new governance system - on the basis of grassroots deliberative democracy ideals
<b>Role of the UEA community</b>	Consulted publics supporting top-down decision-making	Mainly consulted publics, occasionally supported to develop their own solutions	Collaborators - an integral part of at least some institutional decision-making processes	(Inter)nationally connected activists - an integral part of reinventing and managing the education sector
<b>Key resource requirements</b>	Financial	Well-resourced institutional departments	Collaborative partnerships	Mass student and staff mobilisation - nationally coordinated local action

# >>> The Sustainable Business

**A pragmatic vision for the future where the UEA becomes an effective, financially efficient, and sustainable organisation capable of navigating the future.**

Alongside becoming ever more **agile to adapt** to the changing financial realities, the UEA will establish itself as a **leader** in developing a new **sustainable operational model**. At the heart of this vision is becoming more **business-minded, efficient** with resources, and improving operational delivery. We will be **socially responsible and sustainable** through activities that enhance the prospects of our people and those in the communities we serve. Our operating model will be **aligned with our research and innovation**, with the institution drawing directly on insights from the groundbreaking interdisciplinary research it produces.

*We can continue to do different!*

[vision statement]

Overall vision radicality score: 1/4 ★★☆☆

## Key aims

Solving the challenges of our world by working together to deliver a new sustainable business model for higher education institutions.

## Actions for addressing climate change

Developing a financially, environmentally, and socially sustainable business model that ensures efficient resource use and improved quality of operational delivery.  
Drawing directly on state-of-the-art interdisciplinary research from across the university to inform the development of a new operating model and related activities.  
Embedding the UN Sustainable Development Goals in all operations of the university.  
Completing ambitious renovations and retrofitting projects to reduce energy consumption.

## Scope of interventions

Pragmatic adjustments that aim to work with the existing structures of the university.  
Gradual shift, with some aims being addressed imminently.  
No need for systemic change beyond the institution - aligning with a general societal shift to sustainable business.

## Approach to governance

Top-down, with some input from expert researchers.  
Whilst key institutional stakeholders are still the main decision-makers at the university, they regularly draw on (research) expertise from across the university and beyond to inform sustainability practice.

## Role of the UEA community

Relevant researchers and academics more actively involved in decision-making to ensure insights from groundbreaking interdisciplinary research shape organisational practice.  
Majority of UEA community involved in decision-making on occasion, when invited to express their views in consultations/ surveys.

## Main resource requirements

Financially efficient institutional departments and committees responsible for delivering a new sustainable business model.

# »»» The Responsive & Equitable University



**An ambitious yet pragmatic vision of an inclusive, responsive, and equitable university employing a participatory approach to climate change governance, that leads the way in reimagining a climate-changed future.**

We envision an inclusive community where diversity thrives, addressing climate change by **reimagining education and research** to responsibly lead the way in addressing the challenges of climate change with **imagination, collaboration, and a commitment to sustainability**. In delivering this vision of a **climate-conscious** and responsive university, operational change, education and research re-orientation, communication, accountability, transparency, engagement, and participation are key.  
*We can be and do different!*

[vision statement]

Overall vision radicality score: 2/4 ★★☆☆

## Key aims

Turning UEA into an inclusive, responsive, and equitable university that leads the way in reimagining a climate-changed future

## Actions for addressing climate change

Addressing both direct and indirect carbon emissions by employing different technologies, services, and behaviour-change initiatives to help turn UEA into a net-zero university. Embedding sustainability in teaching across the university, with all students being able to both learn the basics of climate change and sustainability, and to undertake relevant research across all subject disciplines to help ensure they are empowered to live and work in a climate-changed world.

Ongoing information-provision and communication to ensure the institution can be held accountable for addressing climate change, and to raise student and staff awareness of how they could help address the climate crisis.

Embedding environmental sustainability in all institutional operations.

Actively supporting students and staff to deliver their own sustainability projects and innovative research to address the climate crisis.

## Scope of interventions

Ambitious yet pragmatic local interventions across all areas of activity of the university (operations, decision-making, teaching, research, engagement, etc.), with substantial adjustments to pre-existing organisational structures.

Gradual shift, with some aims being addressed imminently.

Limited need for systemic change beyond the institution.

## Approach to governance

Employing a participatory governance model.

Whilst key institutional stakeholders are still the main decision-makers at the university, they are in a better position to respond to the needs and priorities of the UEA community, as students and staff are systematically engaged in consultations, deliberations, and public dialogue processes about the future.

## Role of the UEA community

More actively involved in decision-making as consulted publics who are invited to express their views, and supported to develop their own solutions when these align with top-down institutional aims.

Actively supportive of the transition through individual and (some) community action.

## Main resource requirements

Well-resourced institutional departments and committees that would be responsible for delivering net zero and for supporting community action for sustainability.

# »»» The People's Green University

An ambitious vision for the future where the institution provides distributed leadership to enable the UEA community to co-exist in harmony with nature and each other.

UEA will centre its entire community towards a core societal mission of ongoing **collaboration** to achieve sustainability, promote biodiversity, reduce the environmental impact of all its operations, and shift to ethical practices. In delivering this vision of a **democratic, green, and ethical university, ambitious and radical interventions** across the university are necessitated to enable **participatory governance**, community mobilisation, communication, transparency, ongoing education for sustainability, and operational and cultural change.  
*UEA can be better, we just need to try together!*

[vision statement]

Overall vision radicality score: 3/4 ★★☆☆

## Key aims

Collaborative action to help deliver a truly and fully green, ethical, and democratic university.

## Key actions for addressing climate change

Addressing both direct and indirect carbon emissions by divesting from Barclays and fossil-fuel companies, and by investing in different technologies, services, and behaviour-change initiatives to help turn UEA into a university with a green reputation.  
Drawing directly on state-of-the-art research conducted to address the climate crisis.  
Introducing mandatory interdisciplinary climate education across all Schools, with a focus on the political, social and cultural dimensions of the problem, and oriented towards uncovering solutions to the climate crisis with critical optimism.  
Enabling and scaffolding further self-education on climate issues.  
Embedding environmental and social sustainability and justice considerations in all operations of the university (e.g. introducing fossil-free careers and a local, ethical and plant-based university policy, changing procurement and hiring criteria, etc.).  
Actively supporting community action for sustainability, and assigning student and staff sustainability champions leading by example and promoting behavioural and cultural change.

## Scope of interventions

Ambitious and radical local interventions that aim to reconfigure organisational and decision-making structures across the university.  
Moderately rapid shift, with some aims being addressed imminently.  
Some need for systemic change beyond the university to ensure changes are compatible with regulations across the Higher Education sector.

## Role of the UEA community

Directly involved in decision-making as partners.  
Actively supportive of the transition through collective action – facilitated institutionally by incentivising and supporting, and through the development of “third spaces” where the UEA community can creatively engage with climate change and sustainability on their own terms.

## Approach to governance

Employing a distributed governance model.  
Whilst key institutional stakeholders and committees remain in power, students and staff are directly and formally involved in decision-making – both through ongoing participation in consultations, opinion surveys, deliberation and public dialogue process, and through the formalisation of roles giving direct power to the UEA community (e.g. through appointing a student VC or giving working groups powers to enact change).

## Main resource requirements

Collaborative partnerships – capitalising on and actively supporting pre-existing student and staff engagements with climate change and sustainability.



# »»» The Post-Capitalist HE Sector

A radical vision of a future where *all* university communities lead the way in taking immediate, decisive, and radical action and act as blueprints for how society at large should respond to the climate and ecological crises.

This is a vision for the future involving the **radical** and **complete overhaul** of the entire Higher Education (HE) sector to **equitably redistribute decision-making power**, fully and truly embed sustainability in all operations and activities, align with key **degrowth principles**, and reflect the severity of the situation we face. As we have little trust in existing decision-making structures, the only option for working towards this future of climate stabilisation is **nationally coordinated local action from the grassroots**.

*We need system change, not climate change!*

[vision statement]

Overall vision radicality score: 4/4 ★★★★★

## Key aims

Transforming the Higher Education sector into the blueprint of a society organised around radical post-capitalist/ degrowth ideals to decisively address the polycrisis.

## Key actions for addressing climate change

Abandoning the neoliberal, profit-oriented business model of the Higher Education sector by embedding climate stabilisation, degrowth, and community wellbeing principles in all operations of the sector.

Focusing research on addressing the polycrisis on a global level.

Introducing free mandatory interdisciplinary climate education for everyone, including the local community, with a focus on the political, social and cultural dimensions of the problem, and oriented towards uncovering solutions to the climate crisis with critical optimism.

Creative grassroots action and experimentation to address the polycrisis in innovative and socio-culturally appropriate manners.

Committing to net zero direct and indirect emissions across all institutions.

Investing in local renewable energy generation.

## Scope of interventions

Extensive and radical systemic change across the Higher Education sector and across all operations of local institutions.

Urgent, immediate and decisive action – beyond piecemeal fixes to a system that is broken.

## Approach to governance

Employing a radical bottom-up governance model. Everyone is directly involved in decision-making, and power is distributed across the whole community.

Existing institutional roles and committees are replaced by self-organising students, collectives of elected staff and members of the local community who make decisions on the basis of direct democracy principles.

## Role of the UEA community

(Inter)nationally connected activists – an integral part of reinventing HE through direct action, protest, and activism.

Directly involved in all decision-making in the future.

## Main resource requirements

Mass student, staff, and community mobilisation culminating in nationally coordinated local action to overturn the HE system as we know it.



# Six common principles to help make UEA fit for a climate changed future

**Whilst diverse and competing, all future visions are ambitious and comprehensive and are informed by six common underlying principles.**

1

## **Leadership**

Universities should reinvent themselves as leaders in sustainability practice, addressing the interlinked challenges of the climate and ecological crisis.

2

## **Embedding sustainability practice**

Drastic changes are needed across the board to help make UEA fit for a climate-changed future. Sustainability should be embedded and prioritised in everything the UEA does (teaching, operations, research, outreach, decision-making, strategy, etc.)

3

## **Properly resourcing sustainability practice**

Business-as-usual will not help us make UEA fit for a climate-changed world. Significantly more resources and effort should be invested to help make UEA fit for a climate-changed future.

4

## **Addressing both the social and technological aspects of the challenge**

The challenge of making UEA fit for a climate-changed world should be seen as a socio-technical one, and not just as a technological one. Technological and infrastructural interventions alone simply will not cultivate the scale of changes needed.

5

## **Capitalising on existing actions**

Pre-existing staff, student, and stakeholder engagements with climate change at the UEA and beyond can and should form the basis for delivering a sustainable university.

6

## **Governing more collaboratively for sustainability**

New governance models are required to help address the climate challenge whilst being responsive to what members of the UEA community want, need, think, and do. Decision-making should be more democratic and transparent and the UEA community should have more of a say in what the institution does.

# »»» Vision appraisal

As part of the People's Assembly process, the four diverse visions for making UEA fit for a climate changed future will be evaluated using the **Deliberative Mapping** methodology, an established deliberative method that helps appraise alternative courses of action in complex and contested issues.

The process is designed to demonstrate how support for a proposed course of action is weighed against different economic, social, ethical, or other criteria. Deliberative mapping therefore opens up a problem to show a whole range of possible answers. Specifically, the method engages participants in a multi-criteria analysis process that sees them: a) **frame the issue** under consideration, b) **characterise a set of criteria** against which to appraise those options, and c) **score the performance** of the options against those criteria under optimistic and pessimistic assumptions.

The method has been developed and applied across a wide range of complex and contested issues, including how to address radioactive waste disposal, climate change, and energy transitions.

## Proposed vision appraisal criteria <<<

1

### **Leadership:**

How likely is it that this vision would help HE institutions like the UEA show leadership in addressing climate change?

2

### **Embedding sustainability:**

How likely is it that this vision would help ensure that sustainability is embedded in everything the UEA does?

3

### **Resource availability/distribution:**

How likely is it that the UEA would have enough resource to deliver this vision?

4

### **Socio-technical change:**

How likely is it that this vision would help adequately address the socio-technical aspects of the challenge?

5

### **Capitalising on existing actions:**

How likely is it that this vision would capitalise on existing engagements with climate change and sustainability?

6

### **Governance:**

How likely is it that (pre)existing governance arrangements would support delivery of this vision?



**Assembly organising team:**

Phedeas Stephanides  
Elliot Honeybun-Arnolda  
Olivia Thompson  
Reethu Vadakkumpurath Raveendran  
Marina Nicolaidou  
Sean Irving  
Jason Chilvers  
Helen Pallett

**Further information:**

Phedeas Stephanides  
([p.stephanides@uea.ac.uk](mailto:p.stephanides@uea.ac.uk))

**Ethics approval:**

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