# UEA

## Recommendations for making UEA fit for a climate-changed future

# People's Assembly

University of East Anglia

UK–RC
Public Engagement Observatory

BCAN

Faculty for a Future

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# ≫ **Executive summary**

- This report provides an overview of the process and recommendations emerging from a People's Assembly process undertaken in spring-summer 2024 for making the UEA fit for a climate-changed future. It brings forward voices from across the UEA and the surrounding community, documenting visions and recommendations for a more sustainable future.

- The UEA People's Assembly forms an integral part of Faculty for a Future's People Powered Universities project. Co-organised and co-facilitated by the UEA Biodiversity & Climate Action Network (BCAN) and the Public Engagement Observatory of the UK Energy Research Centre (UKERC), the People's Assembly brought together 35 individuals from across the UEA and the local community to openly deliberate over three assembly sessions on the future of the UEA.

- The Assembly differed significantly from other deliberative processes:
  - Unlike similar processes initiated by stakeholders with decision-making power, this People's Assembly emerged from the grassroots. As a collective we had the power to shape the agenda, to openly frame problems, and develop visions without being constrained by institutional views and priorities.
  - Whilst most assemblies start with the assumption that publics lack knowledge and will only engage with problems such as climate change when invited to deliberate, we started by acknowledging the multiple existing engagements with such issues.
  - Accordingly, the Assembly also put novel methodologies for mapping diverse forms of public engagement developed by UKERC's Observatory into practice to best account for how we are already engaging with climate change.

- The Assembly helped uncover how climate change and sustainability are issues of particular concern for the UEA community. Alongside multiple formal, professional engagements with climate change, we documented diverse citizen-led forms of engagement with these issues, including activism and protest, consumer, citizen and community-action groups and routine everyday engagements and actions. A number of citizen-led cases see UEA and local publics working despite-yet-beyond institutional modes of thinking and doing, debating energy and climate change issues, developing alternative visions of sustainable futures, bringing forward alternative public concerns, and challenging existing policies. These engagements reveal both our desire to help address problems associated with climate change, and our collective dissatisfaction with how the UEA as an institution has responded thus far to climate change.

- Six key shortcomings in UEA's current sustainability practice were identified:
  - There are significant shortcomings and a lack of ambition in UEA's sustainability practice and governance.
  - Sustainability and climate change on campus are dealt with in a piecemeal and uncoordinated manner.
  - Sustainability-related activities are majorly under-resourced.
  - Current efforts are mainly focused on renovating UEA's ageing building stock and on reducing emissions, at the cost of neglecting the social, cultural, and behavioural aspects of the issue.
  - Whilst the UEA community already engages in multiple productive ways with climate change on its own terms, there is a general lack of institutional support for such actions.
  - Institutional governance for climate and environmental 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

- Against a backdrop of dissatisfaction with UEA's sustainability practice, participants of the second assembly session put forth four competing visions for UEA's future:
  - The Sustainable Business
  - The Responsive and Equitable University
  - The People's Green University
  - The Post-Capitalist Higher Education Sector

- 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 in times of climate breakdown.

- The visions were then systematically appraised in a final session by the participants to inform the development of a commonly agreed vision for UEA's future.



- The vision appraisal criteria included:
  - Embedding sustainability;
  - Social responsibility;
  - Societal responsiveness;
  - Effective governance;
  - Leadership;
  - Resource availability.

- Following systematic appraisal of all future visions, the assembly participants were overwhelmingly supportive of the People's Green University vision as this was seen as being appropriately ambitious, reasonably pragmatic, and effective. Conversely, less ambitious visions of the future, such as the Sustainable Business and the Responsive & Equitable University visions were generally criticised by assembly participants for failing to adequately address the urgency of the climate crisis in a decisive and sustainable manner.

- Taken together, these appraisals point to the collective desire to transform the UEA into a university that establishes itself not just as a leader in sustainability practice.

- Accordingly, six core overarching recommendations have been put forth by assembly participants:
  - We need to go significantly beyond business-as-usual.
  - Social and environmental sustainability should be embedding and prioritised in all UEA activities
  - Sustainability practice should be properly resourced.
  - More collaboratively governance for sustainability is need to address a democratic deficit.
  - Creative ways of capitalising on and supporting further community action for sustainability should be prioritised.
  - The challenge of making UEA fit for a climate-changed future is a systemic one. We cannot rely on incremental changes and need coordinated action across different areas and scales.

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

Higher Education (HE) institutions such as the UEA are increasingly being challenged to show leadership in responding to the climate and biodiversity crises. Sustainability has, accordingly, emerged as a key sectoral priority, with UEA's Strategy 2030 testifying to the need for *'working together sustainably' (see: assets.uea.ac.uk/f/185167/x/7b57440949/uea_strategy_2030.pdf*.).

Technological and infrastructural changes attempting 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 quite significant social and institutional changes. 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, and university communities themselves tend to have very limited - if any - formal roles in transforming universities for a climate-changed future.

Nonetheless, 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. Alongside many grassroots social movements, sustainability-related student societies, diverse forms of academic activism, and multiple activities initiated by university staff and students to reduce our planetary impacts, university people's assemblies deliberating about sustainability have gained increasing relevance and prominence over the past few years.

Amongst others, as part of the **People Powered Universities** project initiated by Faculty for a Future (F4F), a number of UK universities, including the UEA, are already experimenting with such inclusive deliberative spaces and making them a reality.



## The UEA People's Assembly

The UEA People's Assembly, organised in Spring-Summer 2024 forms an integral part of F4F's People Powered Universities project (see: facultyforafuture.org/people-powered-universities). Co-organised and co-facilitated by the UEA Biodiversity & Climate Action Network (BCAN), and the Public Engagement Observatory of the UK Energy Research Centre (UKERC), the People's Assembly brought together a total of 35 individuals from across the UEA and the local community to openly deliberate for over 8 hours over three assembly sessions on the future of the UEA.

This report:
- Details UEA People's Assembly process and methods;
- Brings forward voices from across the UEA and the surrounding community, documenting visions and recommendations for making UEA fit for a climate-changed future put forth in the People's Assembly;
- Presents a participant evaluation of the process.

# The People's Assembly process

In the spirit of collective experimentation, the People's Assembly differed significantly from other deliberative processes:

- Unlike similar, institution-led processes, this People's Assembly emerged from the grassroots, without involving institutional actors with decision-making power in its organisation. This meant that we, as a collective, had the power to shape the agenda, to openly frame problems, and develop visions without being constrained by institutional views and priorities.

- Most assemblies start with the assumption that publics lack knowledge and often only engage with problems like climate change when invited into formal deliberation spaces. However, we started by acknowledging that publics already engage with such issues in multiple and diverse ways. Accordingly, the Assembly also put novel methodologies for mapping diverse forms of public engagement developed by UKERC's Public Engagement Observatory into practice to best account for how we are already engaging with climate change. Practically, this involved:
    - i. Conducting preparatory mappings of public engagement with climate change ahead of the Assembly to inform participant recruitment. In place of attempting to recruit a representative sample of the UEA and surrounding community based on standard demographic characteristics such as age and gender, as is typically the case, preparatory work saw the organising committee trying to map pre-existing community engagements with these issues, and prioritising inviting participants who would represent different groupings and activities in this area.
    - ii. Running a focused participatory mapping session at the start of the assembly (session 1) to allow for the subsequent development of proposals and recommendations that are both reflective of the challenges faced in existing engagements and to capitalise on these existing actions, thinking and engagement into the future rather than reinventing the wheel (session 2).
    - iii. Drawing on these mappings and on a range of associated problem framings to openly and critically appraise different proposals and develop collectively-agreed recommendations for making UEA fit for a climate-changed future in a manner reflective of the participants' concerns and hopes for the future (session 3).

- Finally, whilst most assemblies have a fixed endpoint when they provide recommendations to institutional actors and cease to operate, we see this assembly as the starting point of our collective exploration of how to make UEA fit for a climate-changed future. Alongside developing a set of recommendations documented in this report, we also aim to catalyse and inspire action through working groups collaboratively taking forward actions to deliver our collective visions for making UEA fit for a climate-changed future.
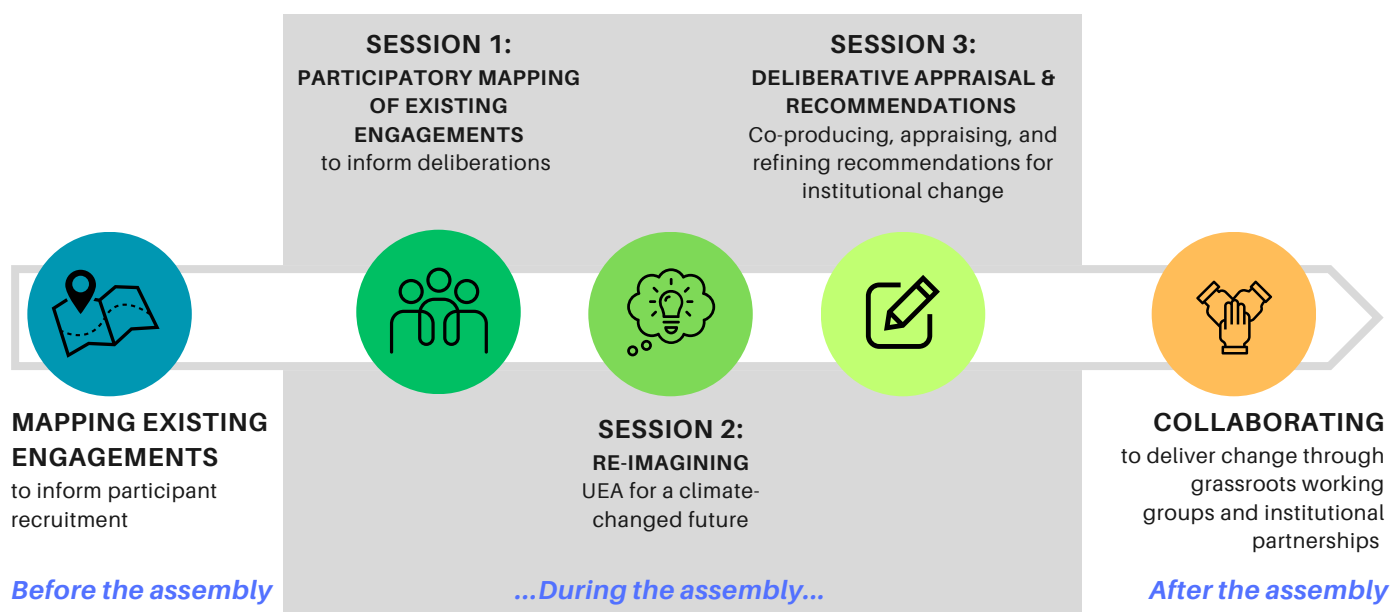


**SESSION 1:**
**PARTICIPATORY MAPPING OF EXISTING ENGAGEMENTS**
to inform deliberations

**SESSION 3:**
**DELIBERATIVE APPRAISAL & RECOMMENDATIONS**
Co-producing, appraising, and refining recommendations for institutional change

**MAPPING EXISTING ENGAGEMENTS**
to inform participant recruitment

**SESSION 2:**
**RE-IMAGINING**
UEA for a climate-changed future

**COLLABORATING**
to deliver change through grassroots working groups and institutional partnerships

*Before the assembly*          *...During the assembly...*          *After the assembly*

**Figure 1: The People's Assembly process**

# Mapping current public engagements with climate change

**During the first People's Assembly session, participants spent 2 hours working in 4 breakout groups to uncover how all of us engage in many different and productive ways with climate change.**

As shown below, the collective explorations uncovered that the engagements of the UEA and local community with climate change are numerous and highly diverse, ranging from those that are led by institutions to those that are citizen-led, and from engagements that are about expressing public views to those that are more action oriented. In total, we collected evidence on at least 178 different examples of public engagement with climate change at the UEA and across the local area.
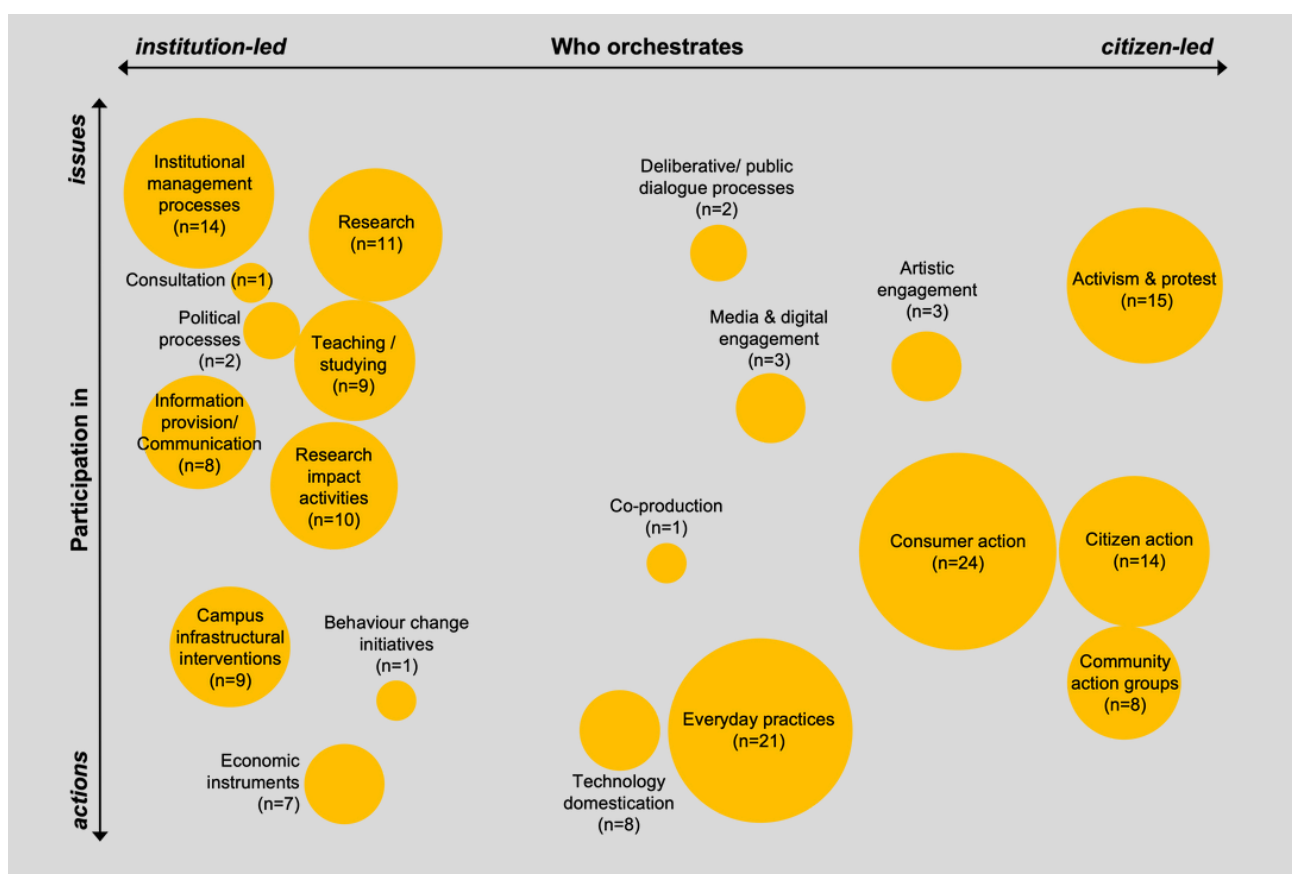


**Figure 2: A mapping of cases of public engagement around climate change at the UEA and surround area (n= 178 cases)**

Alongside multiple formal, professional engagements with climate change, uninvited, citizen-led forms of participation on the left-hand side of this figure, including activism and protest, consumer, citizen and community-action groups and routine everyday engagements and actions were dominant and widespread. A number of citizen-led cases see UEA and local publics working despite-yet-beyond institutional modes of thinking and doing, debating energy and climate change issues, developing alternative visions of sustainable futures, bringing forward alternative public concerns, and challenging existing policies.

**These engagements reveal both our desire to help address problems associated with climate change, and our collective dissatisfaction with how the UEA as an institution has responded thus far to the challenges of climate change.** For a common underlying rationale for many of these engagements was the pressing need to *address the gaps in what the university is or should be doing' (participant 1, group 2).*

# »» Problem diagnosis:

**In spite of multiple current engagements with climate change point to how we are already collectively trying to address climate-related issues, participants of the first assembly session felt that UEA has wider untapped potential to decisively address climate change.**

**This is particularly the case in light of the relatively narrow institutional focus on direct emissions reduction that fails to address the multiple different dimension of the climate problem and additional areas of concern and impact the assembly participants prioritised.**

**Six key shortcomings were identified:**

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 reducing direct and indirect emissions, with the social, cultural, and behavioural aspects of the issue being sidelined. **4**

Whilst the UEA community already engages in multiple productive ways with climate change and sustainability on its own terms, there is a general lack of institutional support for such actions. **5**
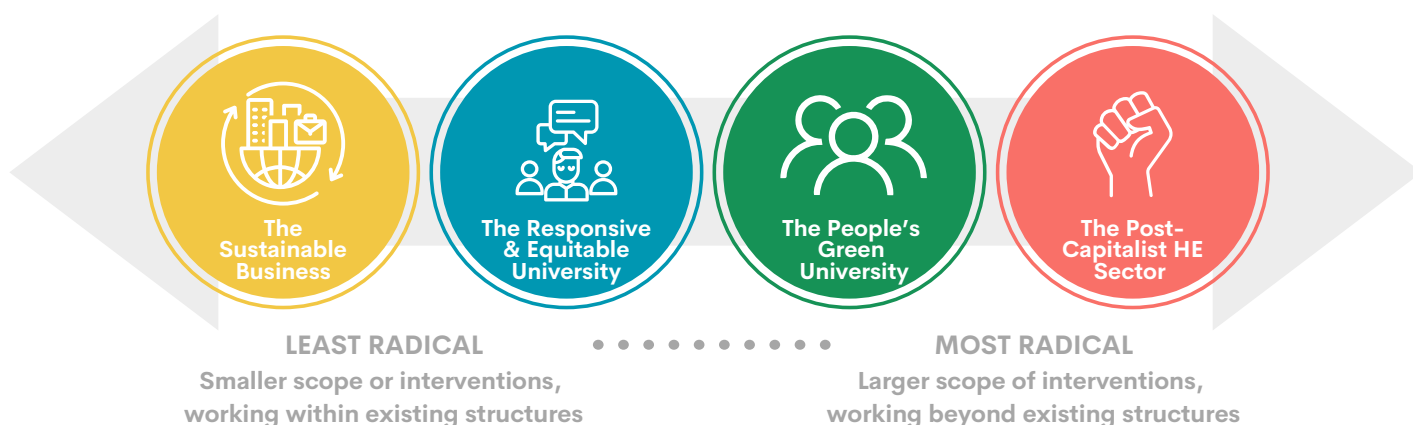
Institutional governance for sustainability is highly problematic. There is a general lack of transparency and communication, and a lack of responsiveness to what the UEA community wants, needs, and thinks. **6**

# »» Diverse visions for the future

**Against a backdrop of dissatisfaction with UEA's sustainability practice, participants of the second assembly session put forth four competing visions for UEA's future.** 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 was to ask: **What sort of future do we want for the UEA?**



**The Sustainable Business**

**The Responsive & Equitable University**

**The People's Green University**

**The Post-Capitalist HE Sector**

**LEAST RADICAL**
Smaller scope or interventions, working within existing structures

**MOST RADICAL**
Larger scope of interventions, working beyond existing structures

# The four future visions
[see Appendix 1 for details]

| | The Sustainable Business | The Responsive & Equitable University | The People's Green University | The Post-Capitalist HE Sector |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Key aims** | 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, and social justice ideals to decisively address the polycrisis |
| **Scope of interventions** | 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" |
| **Approach to governance** | 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 |
| **Role of the UEA community** | Consulted publics supporting top-down decision-making | Mainly consulted publics, occassionally 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 |
| **Key resource requirements** | Financial | Well-resourced institutional departments | Collaborative partnerships | Mass student and staff mobilisation – nationally coordinated local action |

# ≫ Vision appraisal process

As part of the third, and final session of the People's Assembly, the four diverse visions for making UEA fit for a climate changed future developed by the assembly participants were systematically appraised in the third People's Assembly session to help identify the relative merits and shortcomings of each vision.

This deliberative appraisal process was designed to demonstrate how support for a proposed course of action was weighed against different economic, social, ethical or other criteria that shape the worlds in which we would like to live.
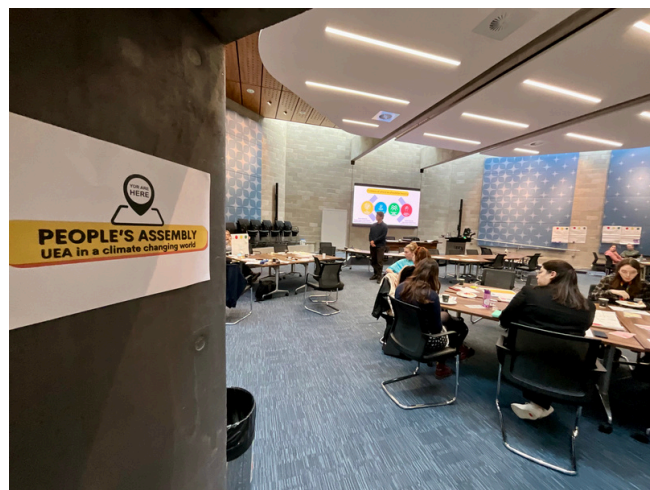
Specifically, the method engaged participants in a multi-criteria analysis process that saw them:
- **Frame the problem** of making UEA fit for a climate-changed future in a way that is reflective of their own concerns and hopes for the future;
- **Characterise a set of criteria** against which to appraise those options for the future; and
- **Systematically appraise the performance** of the different options for the future.against those criteria using a basic, 3-point appraisal scale.

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# ≫ Commonly agreed vision appraisal criteria

**1** **Embedding sustainability:**
How likely is it that this vision will help ensure sustainability is embedded in everything the UEA does?

**2** **Social responsibility:**
How likely is it that this vision will help ensure that the UEA addresses the social and not just the technical aspects of the climate challenge?

**3** **Societal responsiveness:**
How likely is it that this vision will be responsive to and capitalise on existing engagement with climate change and sustainability?

**4** **Effective governance:**
How likely is it that this vision will offer effective governance for sustainability?

**5** **Leadership:**
How likely is it that the UEA will demonstrate leadership in addressing the climate crisis under this vision?

**6** **Resource availability:**
How likely is it that we will have enough resource to deliver this vision for the future?

Following systematic appraisal of all future visions, the assembly participants overwhelmingly supported the People's Green University vision. This was seen as being appropriately ambitious, reasonably pragmatic, and effective.

**VISION**

| Appraisal criterion | Sustainable Business | The Responsive & Equitable University | The People's Green University | The Post-Capitalist HE Sector |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Embedding sustainability** | Sustainability risks being overlooked. | Improved sustainability performance, with expected advancements across all areas of activity. | Sustainability truly and fully embedded across UEA's activities. | Good overall sustainability performance, with some concern over the extent to which all members of the community will prioritise action. |
| **Social responsibility** | The social dimensions of the challenge risk being overlooked. | Enhanced understanding of the social dimensions of climate change. | Social dimensions and implications prioritised. | Some concern over the capacity of the community to prioritise social considerations. |
| **Societal responsiveness** | Top-down decision-making risks overlooking public needs and wants. | More scope for societal responsiveness, albeit of a continued commitment to too-down decision-making. | Significant scope for the UEA community to shape decision-making and practices. | Some concern over capacity to respond to everyone's needs and wants. |
| **Effective governance** | No anticipation of push-back from those with decision-making power, but uncertainty over the extent to which the challenge can be managed effectively. | Some yet limited scope for improved sustainability governance, as power is still concentrated in the hands of stakeholders who haven't adequately addressed the challenge to date. | Uncertainty over the extent to which the benefits of responsive and participatory governance will outweigh practical and logistical challenges. | Widespread concern over a potentially "chaotic" approach to distributed decision-making. |
| **Leadership** | UEA failing to establish itself as a leader in sustainability practice. | Concerns over the extent to which the UEA would be doing enough to address the climate crisis. | Anticipated to transform UEA into a leader in sustainability practice. | Some concern over the extent to which UEA can lead a post-capitalist HE sector. |
| **Resource availability** | Limited financial resources given UEA's financial state. | Limited financial resources to support even the smallest of changes. | Resource limitations expected to undermine the vision's transformatory potential. | General concern over the capacity for effective and enduring grassroots mobilisation. |
| **Overall appraisal** | **An achievable yet unsustainable vision of the future.** | **A significant improvement to business-as-usual that still falls short of adequately addressing the problem.** | **Largely seen as the ideal vision for the future, balancing ambition and pragmatism.** | **A desirable yet utopic and uncertain vision for the future.** |

**Key:**  🔴 *Poor overall performance*   🟡 *Average overall performance*   🟢 *Good overall performance*

In spite of key uncertainties identified with regards to the potential performance of the vision when appraised against some appraisal criteria (see Appendix 2 for details), the People's Green University was seen by most participants as "the ideal vision for the future that helps make sustainability the key pillar of UEA's operations and image" (participant 4, group 4); "an ambitious yet pragmatic vision" (participant 5, group 4), that "strikes the right balance between addressing all dimensions of the climate crisis decisively and democratising decision-making whilst acknowledging limits to action and capacity for change" (participant 3, group 1).

Alongside helping to meaningfully embed sustainability in everything the UEA does, a key strength of the vision was the ability to "capitalise on different pre-existing knowledges, expertise, and engagements to deliver solutions that actually work for the community" (participant 4, group 1) and, subsequently, turn "UEA into the prototype for a green university" (participant 3, group 2). This is in sharp contrast to more radical visions, such as the Post-Capitalist HE Sector vision, that were deemed "desirable in principle yet inoperable in practice" (participant 2, group 1) given the significantly larger scale and more radical scope of the changes proposed making them a "utopic and unrealistic" (participant 3, group 2).

Conversely, less ambitious visions of the future, such as the Sustainable Business and the Responsive & Equitable University visions were generally criticised by assembly participants for failing to adequately address the urgency of the climate crisis in a decisive manner:

- Whilst evidently the most easily achievable visions for the future, the Sustainable Business was seen by many participants as a vision that is synonymous to "corporate greenwashing, with sustainability only used as an empty buzzword" (participant 1, group 3), as "complete and utter bullshit" (participant 5, group 3), with the "UEA not living up to challenge of establishing itself as a world-leader in [sustainability] practice and not just in [sustainability] research" (participant 2, group 1). Amongst others, assembly participants expressed overwhelming concern over a vision that will inevitably prioritise the economic wellbeing of the institution (and, thus, student recruitment), over its environmental and social performance.

- Similarly, whilst the Responsive & Equitable University vision was seen by most participants as a "reasonably pragmatic vision for the future" (participant 3, group 3) that "could be delivered rather easily, without much change in what we do and how we make decisions" (participant 5, group 1), the fact that this vision is only marginally different to business-as-usual led the majority of participants to express concern over the "risk of change without any real change" (participant 6, group 1); over a vision that is "not ambitious enough to effectively change how we deal with climate change" (participant 5, group 4). Indicatively, whilst ideas of equity and responsiveness are embedded in this vision, multiple participants were sceptical as to whether "an institution that is still managed in a top-down manner can actually be more participatory and responsive" (participant 1, group 1); whether "participation will always be constrained and decision-makers will just engage with the community to gain acceptance and justify their choices and policies" (participant 1, group 3); as to whether "leadership will listen and consult people without actually responding to public demands in practice" (participant 2, group 4).

**Taken together, these appraisals point to the collective desire to move significantly beyond business-as-usual and transform the UEA into a university that establishes itself not just as a leader in climate-related research, but also in institutional practice and wider social transformation to address the climate crisis.**

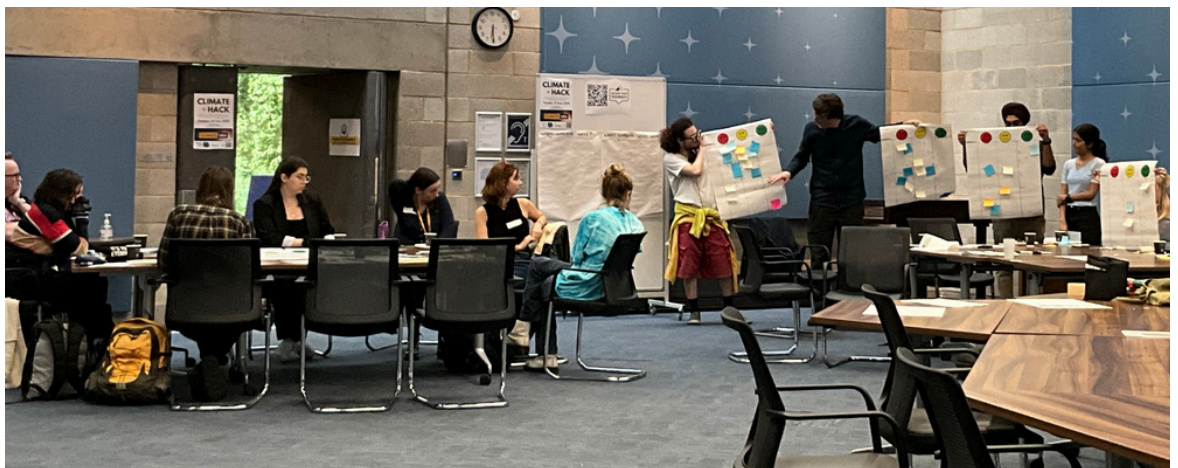# How can we make UEA fit for a climate-changed future?

## Overarching participant recommendations:

Whilst the People's Green University vision was generally favoured by most participants, there wasn't overall consensus on how exactly we should go about making UEA fit for a climate-changed future.

Yet, in spite of notable differences in opinions, preferences, and appraisals, recorded discussions between all participants of UEA's People's Assembly uncover **six common key recommendations** that ought to guide UEA's sustainability practice into the future in developing new sustainability policies and practice:

**1** We need to go significantly beyond business-as-usual. The UEA should demonstrate **leadership** in its sustainability practice.

**2** Climate change is a multi-faceted crisis. Going beyond business-as-usual should involve embedding and prioritising **sustainability** in all UEA activities, and addressing both the **social and technological** aspects of the challenge

**3** Sustainability practice should be properly **resourced** irrespective of the preferred vision. Even the least ambitious of the visions proposed depend on significantly more resource being directed towards sustainability practice.

**4** There is a pressing need to govern more **collaboratively** for sustainability to address a democratic deficit. This involves creating space for ongoing creative engagement with climate change and approaches to dealing with it.

**5** Creative ways of capitalising on and supporting further **community action for sustainability** should be prioritises as these can form one of the key building blocks of a university that is fit for a climate-changed future.

**6** The challenge of making UEA fit for a climate-changed future is a **systemic** one. We cannot rely on incremental changes, and need coordinated action across different areas and scales.

# APPENDIX 1:

**Four visions for making UEA fit for a climate-changed future**
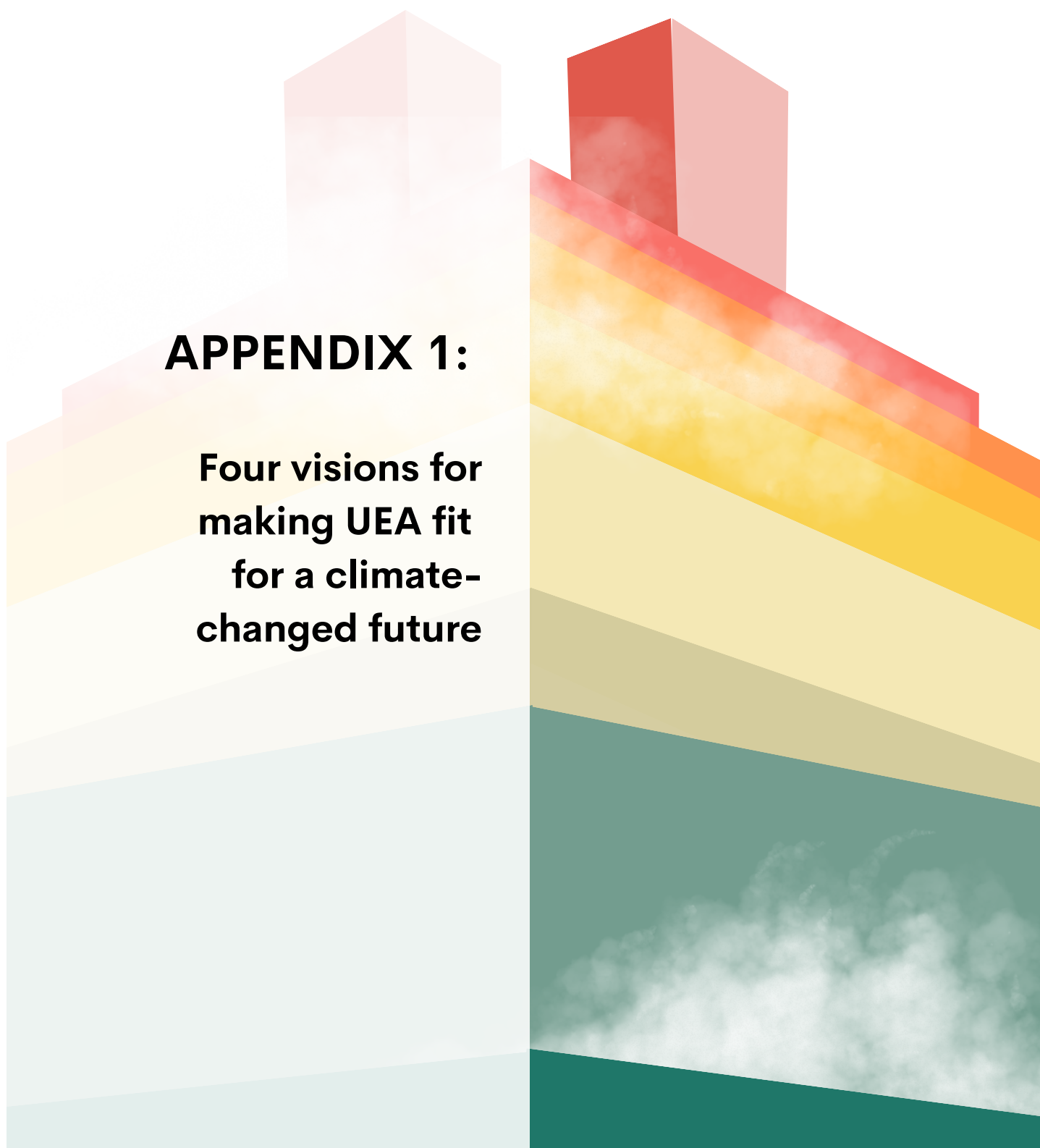
**A pragmatic vision for the future where the UEA becomes an effective, financially efficient, and sustainable organisation capable of navigating the future.**

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.<br>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.<br>Embedding the UN Sustainable Development Goals in all operations of the university.<br>Completing ambitious renovations and retrofitting projects to reduce energy consumption. |
| **Scope of interventions** | Pragmatic adjustments that aim to work within the existing structures of the university.<br>Gradual shift, with some aims being addressed imminently.<br>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 and consultants.<br>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.<br>Majority of UEA community involved in decision-making on occassion, 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. |

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

**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.<br>Drawing directly on state-of-the-art research to address the climate crisis.<br>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.<br>Enabling and scaffolding further self-education on climate issues.<br>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.).<br>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.<br>Moderately rapid shift, with some aims being addressed imminently.<br>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/working groups/networks/core constituents.<br>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.<br>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 power to enact change). |
| **Main resource requirements** | Collaborative partnerships – capitalising on and actively supporting pre-existing student and staff engagements with climate change and sustainability, and involving distribution of decision-making power to enact changes |

**A radical vision of a future where *all* universities and their 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 **social justice, degrowth, and post-capitalist principles**, and reflect the severity of the situation we collectively 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, and social justice 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, social justice, and community wellbeing principles in all operations of the sector.<br>Focusing research on addressing the polycrisis on a global level.<br>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.<br>Creative grassroots action and experimentation to address the polycrisis in innovative and socio-culturally appropriate manners.<br>Committing to net zero direct and indirect emissions across all institutions.<br>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.<br>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.<br>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.<br>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. |

# APPENDIX 2:

## Vision Appraisals
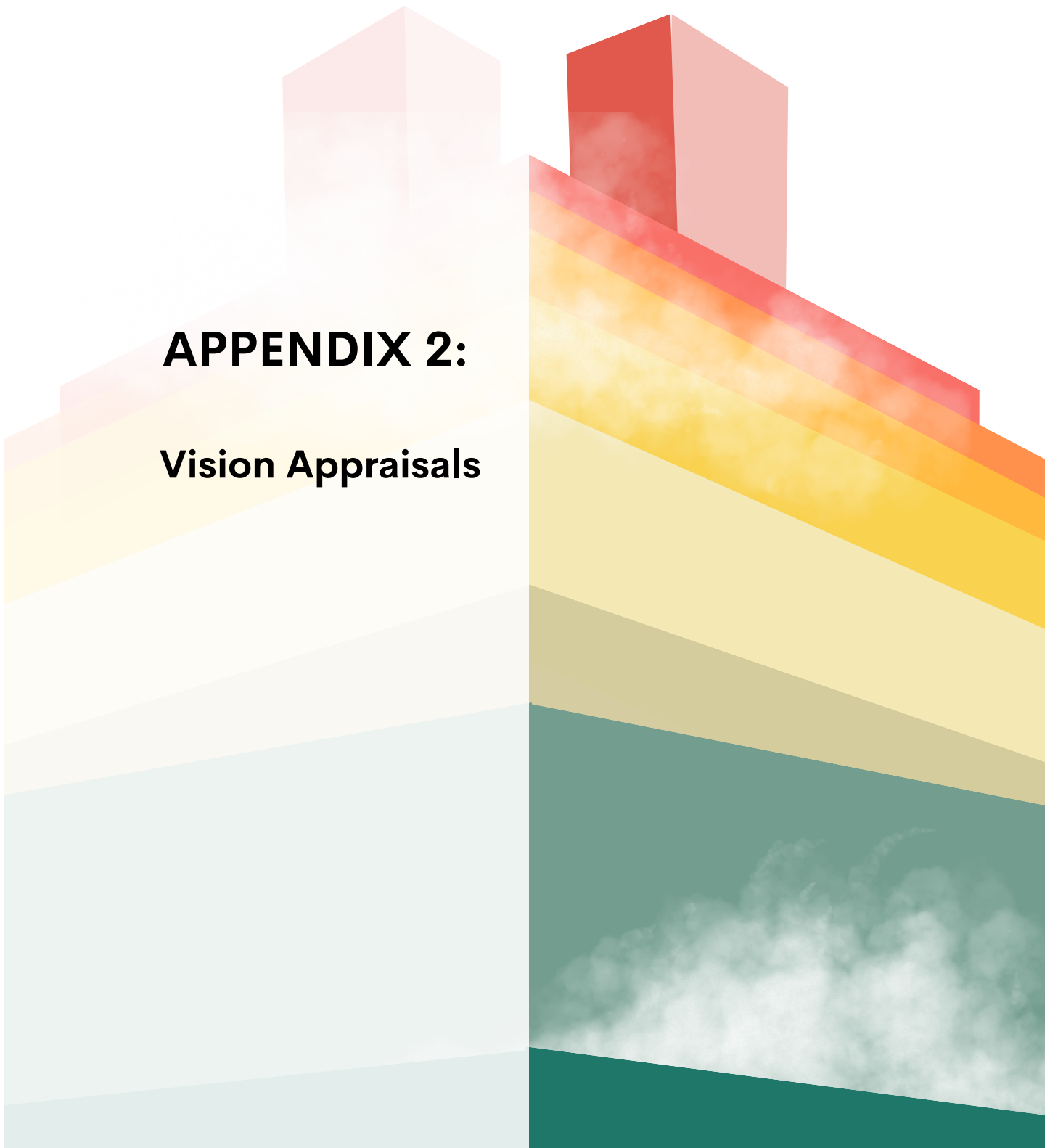
**How likely is it that this vision will help make UEA fit fo a climate-changed future?**

■ Unlikely   ■ Neither likely nor unlikely   ■ Likely



Number of participants

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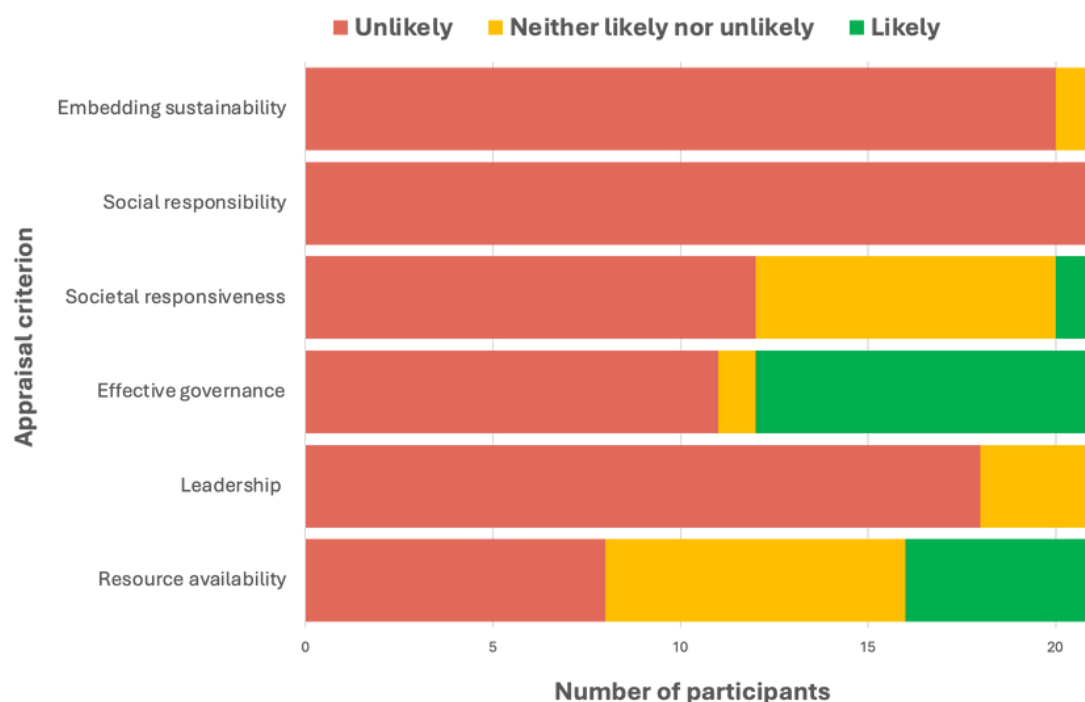
## 👍 Perceived strengths of vision

- Generally discussed as the most achievable vision for the future, as an important first step in becoming more sustainable as an institution.

- UEA seen by some to "have the resources necessary to deliver the vision as it just involves minor improvements to what's happening already" (participant 2, group 3), "capitalising on and furthering some of the great work and research already conducted at the UEA" (participant 1, group 4).

- Given alignment with business-as-usual, some participants believed that climate change challenges and institutional changes could be governed effectively, without much need to go through a lengthy process of institutional realignment.

## 👎 Perceived shortcomings of vision

Seen by many as a vision that is synonymous to "corporate greenwashing, with sustainability only used as an empty buzzword" (participant 1, group 3), as "complete and utter bullshit" (participant 5, group 3), with the "UEA not living up to challenge of establishing itself as a world-leader in [sustainability] practice and not just in [sustainability] research" (participant 2, group 1). Specifically, the majority of participants expressed serious concern over:

- A vision that will inevitably prioritise the economic wellbeing of the institution (and, thus, student recruitment), over its environmental and social performance.
- The lack of ambition and an approach to addressing the problem that is too focused on the present, and without dealing in any way with the systemic nature of the challenge.
- The lack of interest in capitalising on pre-existing productive staff and student engagements with sustainability and climate change.
- The lack of leadership in addressing the challenge when compared against other institutions.
- The potential continued focus on building retrofits and new technologies and the inevitable sidelining of the social dimensions of the problem.
- The continued concentration of power in the hands of a small number of stakeholders that have, to date, not been able to address the challenge effectively.
- Given UEA's financial situation, even this unambitious vision was believed to be challenging, with not enough resources perceived as being available to make even the smallest of changes.

# Participant appraisal of the Responsive & Equitable University vision

**How likely is it that this vision will help make UEA fit for a climate-changed future?**
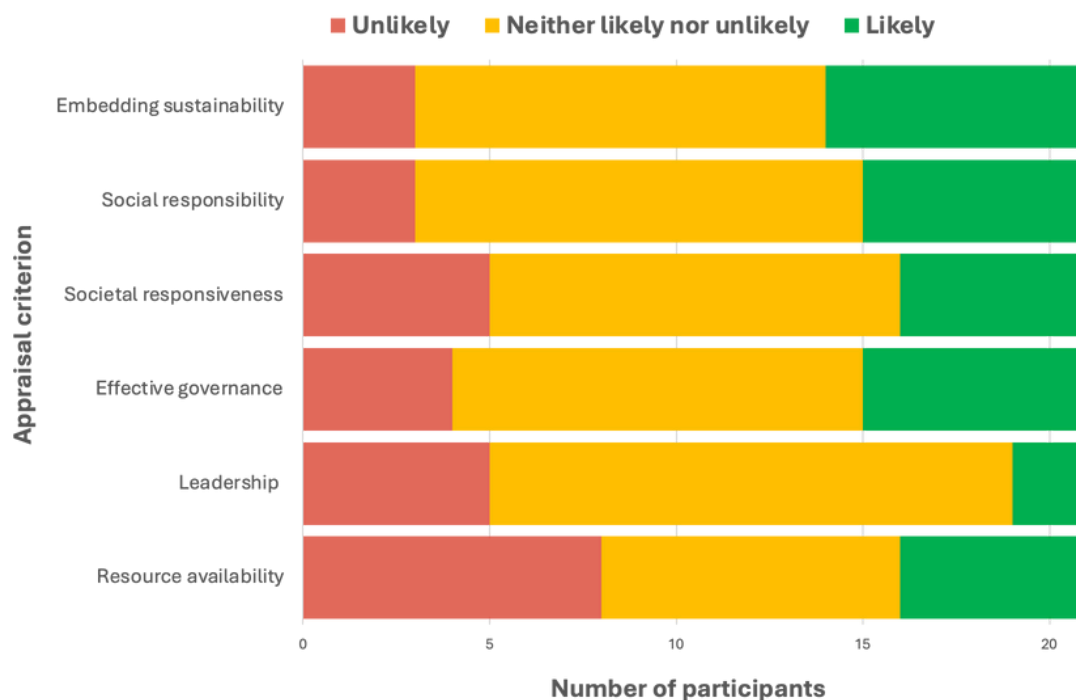


## Perceived strengths of vision

- Seen by most participants as a "reasonably pragmatic vision for the future" (participant 3, group 3) that "could be delivered rather easily, without much change in what we do and how we make decisions" (participant 5, group 1).

- Generally see by participants as "a significant improvement to business-as-usual" (participant 3, group 4), with important progress made towards addressing the climate change challenge by embedding sustainability in everything the UEA does, and becoming more socially responsible.

- Noteworthy shift towards a more open approach to decision-making, expected by some to help deliver a future where grassroots mobilisation for sustainability will be supported to flourish,
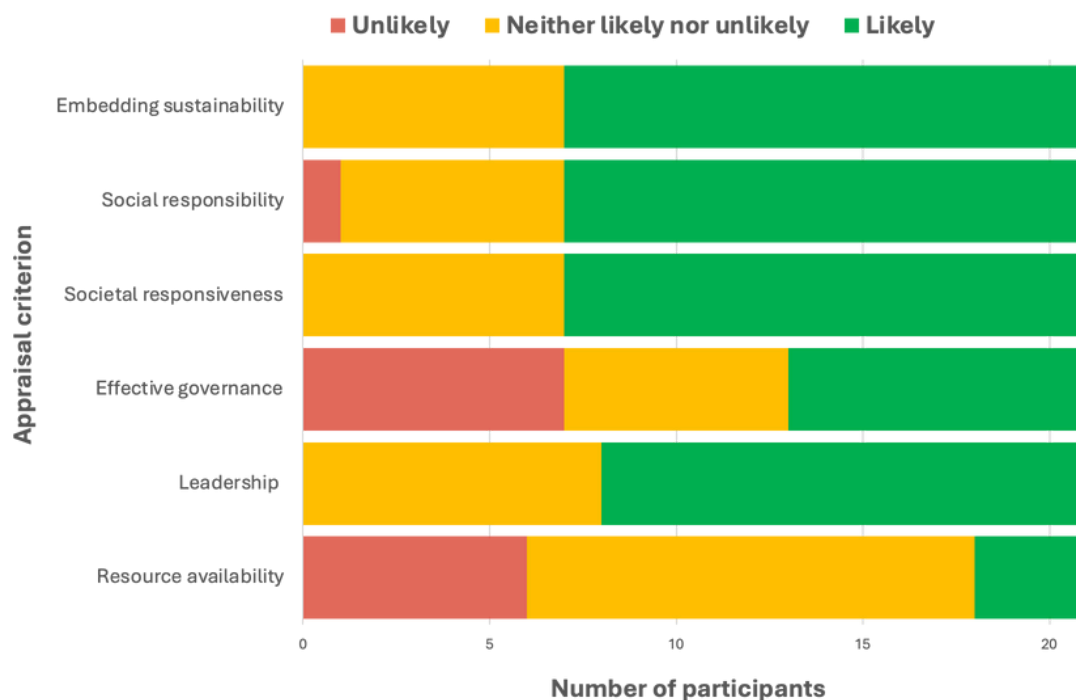
## Perceived shortcomings of vision

Given that this vision is only marginally different to business-as-usual, the majority of participants expressed concern over the "risk of change without any real change" (participant 6, group 1), over a vision that is "not radical enough to change how we deal with climate change" (participant 5, group 4). Specifically:

- There was some concern that the pragmatic local interventions to promote sustainability under this vision risk "not adequately embedding and prioritising sustainability in everything the UEA does" (participant 5, group 3), "especially in the case of social issues and concerns that might be overlooked in favour of just introducing new low carbon technologies" (participant 3, group 3).

- Whilst ideas of equity and responsiveness are embedded in this vision, multiple participants were sceptical as to whether "an institution that is still managed in a top-down manner can actually be more participatory and responsive" (participant 1, group 1); whether "participation will always be constrained and decision-makers will just engage with the community to gain acceptance and justify their choices and policies" (participant 1, group 3); as to whether "leadership will listen and consult people without actually responding to public demands in practice" (participant 2, group 4).

- Given the gravity of the climate crisis there was some concern as to whether "the UEA would actually be doing enough - leading the way - under this vision" (participant 2, group 4).

- Given the significant financial constraints of the university, there was considerable doubt as to whether the institution would be able to deliver even such marginal changes.

## How likely is it that this vision will help make UEA fit for a climate-changed future?

**Legend:** ■ Unlikely  ■ Neither likely nor unlikely  ■ Likely



Y-axis: Appraisal criterion
- Embedding sustainability
- Social responsibility
- Societal responsiveness
- Effective governance
- Leadership
- Resource availability

X-axis: Number of participants (0, 5, 10, 15, 20)

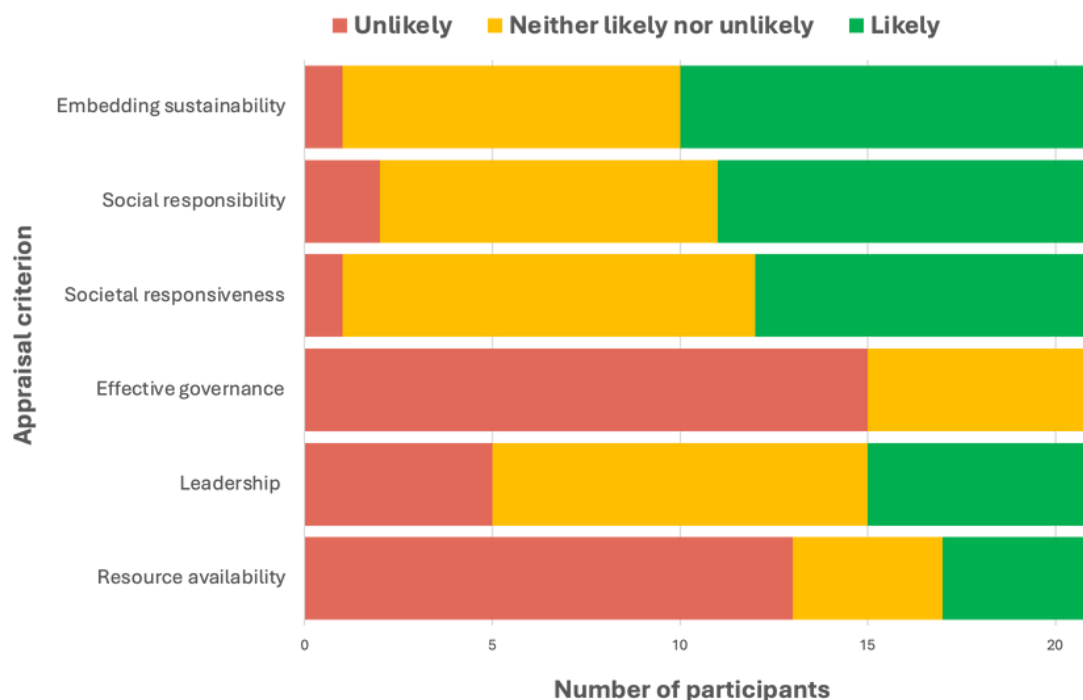## 👍 Perceived strengths of vision

- Seen by most participants as "the ideal vision for the future that helps make sustainability the key pillar of UEA's operations and image" (participant 4, group 4); "an ambitious yet pragmatic vision" (participant 5, group 4), that "strikes the right balance between addressing all dimensions of the climate crisis decisively and democratising decision-making whilst acknowledging limits to action and capacity for change" (participant 3, group 1).

- Believed to "capitalise on different knowledges and expertise to deliver solutions that actually work for the community" (participant 4, group 1) and turn "UEA into the prototype for a green university" (participant 3, group 2).

## 👎 Perceived shortcomings of vision

·Given the scale and scope of the changes proposed, numerous participants identified key uncertainties with regards to the potential performance of the vision when appraised against most criteria. e.g.:

- There was some concern over the extent to which the entire community of a people's university would prioritise sustainability and decisive action to address the climate crisis.

- There was some concern as to whether the social dimensions and implications of a climate-changed future would be adequately addressed given that significant amount of time and effort would be directed at institutional-level change, as exemplified by discussions over "whether we'll change the institution but still leave behind some individuals" (participant 1, group 3).

- There was widespread concern over the availability of resources to deliver the vision.

- There was some concern over "the extent to which pre-existing governance and decision-making structures and arrangements would be able to adapt to the demands of this vision and govern a people's green university effectively" (participant 3, group 2), and over a distributed governance model that "might prove too inefficient, slow, disjointed, risky, and chaotic" when put into practice (participant 1, group 1).

# Participant appraisal of the Post-Capitalist Higher Education Sector vision

**How likely is it that this vision will help make UEA fit for a climate-changed future?**



## Perceived strengths of vision

- Given the perceived inability of a neoliberal higher education sector to effectively address the urgency of the climate crisis, this vision was seen by some participants as an ambitious vision that "promises to truly and fully deliver an environmentally and socially sustainable and equitable university" (participant 4, group 4).

- Pre-existing engagements and activist mobilisations around climate change at both the local and national level expected to help lay the groundworks for.a transition towards a post-capitalist future.

- High-levels of ongoing community engagement in decision-making expected to help deliver effective local solutions that are fit-for-purpose and reflective of the needs, wants, and priorities of the UEA community.

## Perceived shortcomings of vision

- Given the scale and scope of the changes proposed, the majority of participants saw this as a "utopic, unrealistic vision" (participant 3, group 2) or even as "a chaotic vision for the future" (participant 5, group 4) that is "desirable in principle yet inoperable in practice" (participant 2, group 1), with radical, system-level change deemed "highly uncertain" (participant 4, group 1).

- Majority of participants expecting significant pushback from key stakeholders across the HE sector, with no institutional support towards realising aspects of the vision.

- There was general concern over the extent to which the entire HE community would support radical sustainability ideals and decisive action to address the climate crisis, thus making decision-making for sustainability challenging, and undermining the overall transformative potential of the vision.

- Reliant on intensive ground work at the grassroots, with no real evidence of the broader climate movement being that powerful to support mobilisation at this specific moment in time.

- Irrespective of significant challenges, a number of assembly participants still saw this is an ideal vision for the future and expressed interest in exploring options for direct action to help realise at least some parts of the vision,

# APPENDIX 3:

## Participant Appraisal of the People's Assembly

# Participant Evaluation
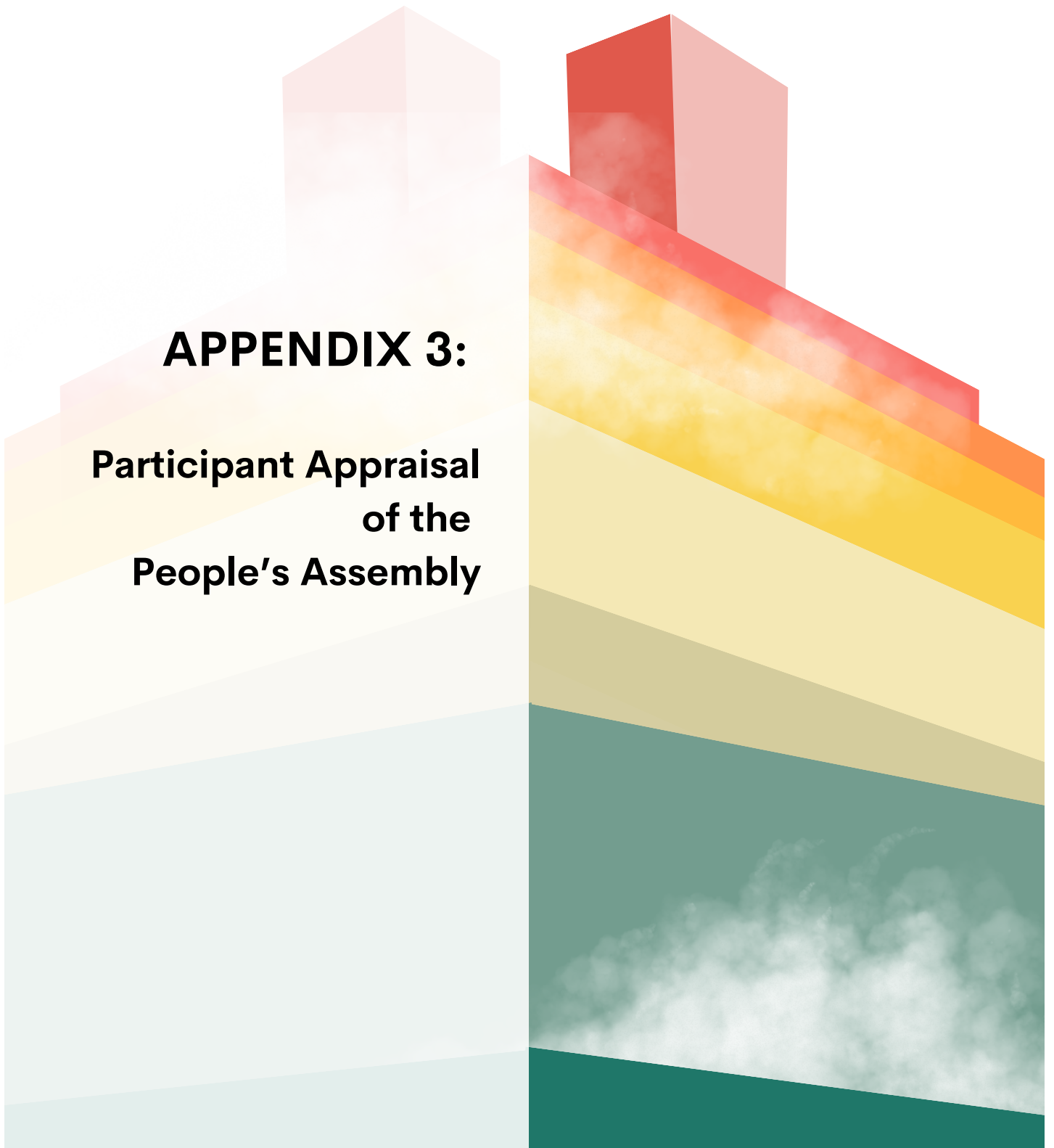
**In this section, we summarise how participants themselves evaluated the People's Assembly.**

The summary below points to:
- The benefits of conducting an assembly in this way, with all participants giving a high evaluation score,
- Some challenges that are typical of deliberative practice, and
- An omnipresent concern around ensuring that the UEA responds to a process that was not led by the institution.

**Overall participant appraisal score**

### Summary of participant reflections around the People's Assembly:

**Theme 1: Representative and inclusive**
- Relatively diverse participants, including UEA staff and students from across different Schools, and some members of the surrounding local community.
- Some concern over self-selection bias, with the majority of participants being directly interested in and active in sustainability fora.
- Difficulty ensuring everyone interested, especially relevant stakeholders, participated in all sessions.

**Theme 2: Fair deliberation**
- Generally well facilitated, with individuals being able to participate in a largely fair and structured way, irrespective of the role in the institution and background expertise.
- Some participants, including institutional stakeholders, dominating discussions on occasion.

**Theme 3: Access to resources**
- Summary presentations and information booklets seen as a valuable resource by many.
- Time constraints an important issue for some, especially those eager to develop concrete action plans.
- Appetite for additional focused information from relevant stakeholders on the UEA context.
- Remuneration discussed by some as an approach for increasing participation and interest.

**Learning**
- Some signs of enhanced learning for participants.

**Summary of participant reflections around the People's Assembly (continued):**

### Openness and transparency

- Adequately defined focus and question, with some participants praising the openness of the question framing, and others eager to have a more focused and structured discussion.
- Some uncertainty over purpose and next steps, especially with regards to how the process relates to institutional decision-making.

### Reflexive and responsive to exclusions

- Open problem framing, reinforced by participatory mapping activities commended by participants.
- Difficulties responding to participant exclusions, including stakeholders, noted by the majority of participants.

### Diverse and systemic

- Paying attention to other diverse public engagements in process design - helping ensure that at least some
- Attempt to sensitise deliberations to wider landscape of public engagements - helping develop visions for the future that are reflexive of and capitalise on pre-existing engagements and opportunities.

### Impactful

- Demonstrating the benefits of deliberation to stakeholders, with those present commenting on how the assembly raised awareness of issues and perspectives that are typically overlooked.
- Mobilising and inspiring diverse participants to form action-oriented working groups.
- Generating broader momentum for mobilisation, with some participants joining UEA BCAN, or becoming involved in other related activities they learnt about from their peers.
- Some institutional interest in collaborations and in improving sustainability practice.
- Serious concerns over the longer-term institutional impacts of the assembly given that this was a citizen-led and not an institution-led process.

# People's Assembly Organisers

**The UK Energy Research Centre's (UKERC) Public Engagement Observatory**
The Observatory aims to develop new approaches for mapping diverse forms of societal engagement with energy and climate change to generate openly accessible evidence about public participation on an ongoing basis. Through a series of collaborative experiments with partners, the Observatory is actively exploring how new approaches to mapping diverse forms of public engagement can make a difference in practice to energy and climate-related decisions, innovations and new forms of deliberation and participation.

**Website:** ukerc-observatory.ac.uk
**X/ Twitter:** @UKERC_Engage

**UEA Biodiversity and Climate Action Network (BCAN)**
The UEA BCAN is an independent network of staff and students who want to contribute to addressing the biodiversity and climate change emergencies. It aims to build a community that actively works towards creating a positive, just, and progressive future both on campus and beyond.

**Website:** linktr.ee/ueabcan

**Faculty for a Future (F4F)**
F4F is an informal national network of academics and students that exists to coalesce the energy for change in academia, share insights from a fast-growing community of academics transforming their own work now, and build momentum for a systemic reorienting of academia's role, inside or – if necessary – outside of existing structures. As a movement, F4F wants to unite in the pursuit of a shared vision for all life to thrive equally on a finite and unprecedentedly unstable planet. F4F are currently working with their first cohort of universities to run inclusive deliberative assemblies in their universities.

**Website:** facultyforafuture.org/
**X/ Twitter:** @faculty_future

University of East Anglia

UK=RC
Public Engagement Observatory

BCAN

Faculty for a Future