# Engaged Futures Summary

A summary of the Engaged Futures consultation outputs, following consultation with the Engaged Futures Group and the Engaged Futures Catalysts (230 participants in the network; 14 consultation events and 13 catalyst host conversations.)

Statements presented in section 1, are the same as those presented in section 2. Section 2 has sorted the statements into key focal points, whereas section 1 has presented them with no ordering. If you are short on time, I would review section 2 instead of section 1.

Contents

[Engaged Futures Summary 1](#_Toc201617599)

[Introduction 2](#_Toc201617600)

[Section 1: Horizon 1 and Horizon 3 map 2](#_Toc201617601)

[Section 2: Grouping of the H1 and H3 summary statements 4](#_Toc201617602)

[1. How universities are inclusive across all aspects of their work and identity 4](#_Toc201617603)

[2. Research teaching and learning re-imagined 4](#_Toc201617604)

[3. What a university is and what it stands for 5](#_Toc201617605)

[4. What universities are like to work with and for 5](#_Toc201617606)

[5. How universities are funded and resourced 6](#_Toc201617607)

[Narrative summary 6](#_Toc201617608)

[H1: current challenges 6](#_Toc201617609)

[H3: envisioned future 7](#_Toc201617610)

[Values contrasts 8](#_Toc201617611)

[Next steps 8](#_Toc201617612)

## Introduction

Aim: To effect change in how universities and research organisations support inclusive knowledge creation and use.

How: by using a three horizon methodology working with catalysts within the outside the HE system.

Overarching question: How does the UK higher education sector need to transform to be more purposefully engaged with, and inclusive of, the communities, society and planet it serves, in a context of major social and environmental challenges and change?

Progress to date

2 Engaged Futures group workshops (one in person, one online)

Over 230 catalysts recruited

14 NCCPE led consultations from small workshops to large in-person events

13 catalyst hosted conversations – bringing in more diverse perspectives e.g. working with African diaspora parents

Synthesis of all data submitted to date to provide H1 H3 map, values constrasts, and a list of over 140 H2+ organisations, which we have reviewed to provide a shortlist for reflection at the next workshop

## Section 1: Horizon 1 and Horizon 3 map

This is a diagram showing the three horizons. H1 is the current horizon, which becomes less prevalent over time; H3 is the desired future, that gets more prevalent over time; and H2 is the horizon of disruption and innovation which creates a space of transition between the two horizons.

#### The diagram is populated by a series of circular post-its. Those on the left are coloured purple, and represent horizon 1 and contain the following statements:

Public and community engagement is under-valued and under-resourced across HE and its funding

HEI processes are bureaucratic, inefficient, siloed and rigid

Elitist and exclusive models of academia with a narrow view of what counts as valid knowledge

A disjointed educational system from school, to further education, to life-long learning

Persistent inequalities, HE perpetuates historic legacies of hierarchy and exclusion. Efforts to address systemic racism and exclusion have not led to meaningful change

Working in the HE sector is often stressful, unhealthy, precarious and frustrating

Lack of inspiring shared vision, societal purpose and accountability for HE that fully harnesses students' and staff's engagement and passion

HE is commodified, instrumentalised and homogenised, with cash-strapped HEIs in competition rather than collaboration

The impulse towards digitisation devalues relational, lived experience and engaged approaches and knowledges

HEI Funding models often short term and competitive, limiting meaningful societal engagement

Absent, broken or extractive relationships between the knowledge creation activities undertake in HE and wider communities

#### The ones on the right are green, and are summary statements relating to horizon 3:

Collaboration across disciplines, faculties, departments and with external organisations including universities is the norm

HE is porous, inclusive and integrated within local places and communities, with open, vibrant spaces (physical and online) that enable connection

The roles of funders are radically revised as convenors, enablers, and collaborators

HEIs are agile, proactive, adaptive and adventurous, with a more experimental approach that learns from mistakes

The HE sector is a healthy and attractive place to work for and with - that cares for people's wellbeing and values their strengths

Engagement and a strong societal purpose are central to HE culture, with equitable power-sharing across university partnerships and collaborations

Diversity is celebrated, and all forms of knowledge are valued. Power is shared fairly across partnerships, and everyone—students, staff, and communities—is recognised as a contributor and leader.

Education is holistic and reconnects learners heads, hearts and hands

A transformed research culture where knowledge is open-access and accepted in all its diverse forms, people and AI enhance each other, and there is time and space for deeper collective thinking, imagination, curiosity and learning

HE is inclusive, accessible and adaptable throughout people's lives and for all abilities, backgrounds and life stages, resulting in a diverse student and staff body

HEIs are proactively addressing historical injustices including systemic racism and exclusion and creating more inclusive and respectful ways of working

Universities are resourced in a long-term way that values and encourages slow research, risk-taking and collaboration

HE is independent from big business and harmful industries

Universities are easy to access, with effective systems in place to enable external organisations to develop and work with them.

## Section 2: Grouping of the H1 and H3 summary statements

We grouped the summary statements into five different group. Please note the summary statements are the same as the ones above, but they are categorised into the five groups as follows:

### 1. How universities are inclusive across all aspects of their work and identity

Unlike the other sections, this section contains the overall summary for the H1 and H3 descriptions, and a note on the centrality of inclusion to this work.

H1 summary: A transactional, rigid and exclusionary HE sector that perpetuates hierarchies and exclusion and fundamentally under-values engagement

H3 summary: A relational, agile and fully engaged HE sector that enables belonging for all and diverse forms of learning

Note: At the heart of all our consultations was a sense of addressing the systemic exclusionary foundations and practices of the HE sector and transforming this to being institutionally inclusive for staff, students, communities and all those who they work with and alongside.

Inclusion is therefore the animating principle behind all aspects of the consultation - and is reflected across all of the strands below, including the following:

**H1**

**HE perpetuates historic legacies of inequality, hierarchy and exclusion.** Investments in addressing systemic racism, ableism and exclusion have not led to meaningful change.

**H3**

**HEIs are proactively addressing historical and systemic injustices and their impacts,** creating more inclusive and respectful ways of working. They are agile, proactive, adaptive and adventurous, with a humble approach to learning from others.

### 2. Research teaching and learning re-imagined

H1

Elitist and exclusive models of academia with a narrow view of what counts as valid knowledge

Absent, broken or extractive relationships between knowledge generation and wider communities

The impulse towards digitisation devalues relational, lived experience and engaged approaches and knowledges

A disjointed educational system from school, to further education, to life-long learning

H3

A transformed research culture where knowledge is open-access and accepted in all its diverse forms, people and AI enhance each other, and there is time and space for deeper collective thinking, imagination, curiosity and learning

A relational, agile and fully engaged HE sector that enables belonging for all and diverse forms of learning

Education is holistic and reconnects learners heads, hearts and hands

HE is inclusive, accessible and adaptable throughout people's lives and for all abilities and walks of life, resulting in a diverse student and staff body

### 3. What a university is and what it stands for

H1

Lack of inspiring shared vision, societal purpose and accountability for HE that fully harnesses students' and staff's engagement and passion

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| --- |
| Persistent inequalities, HE perpetuates historic legacies of hierarchy and exclusion. Efforts to address systemic racism and exclusion have not led to meaningful change |

|  |
| --- |
| Public and community engagement is under-valued and under-resourced across HE and its funding |

H3

Engagement and a strong societal purpose are central to HE culture, with equitable power-sharing across university partnerships and collaborations

HE is porous, inclusive and integrated within local places and communities, with open, vibrant spaces (physical and online) that enable connection

HEIs are proactively addressing historical injustices including systemic racism and exclusion and creating more inclusive and respectful ways of working

Collaboration across disciplines, faculties, departments and with external organisations including universities is the norm

### 4. What universities are like to work with and for

H1

HEI processes are bureaucratic, inefficient, siloed and rigid

Working in the HE sector is often stressful, unhealthy, precarious and frustrating

H3

The HE sector is a healthy and attractive place to work for and with - that cares for people's wellbeing and values their strengths

HEIs are agile, proactive, adaptive and adventurous, with a more experimental approach that learns from mistakes

Diversity is celebrated, and all forms of knowledge are valued. Power is shared fairly across partnerships, and everyone—students, staff, and communities—is recognised as a contributor and leader.

Universities are easy to access, with effective systems in place to enable external organisations to develop and work with them.

### 5. How universities are funded and resourced

H1

HEI Funding models often short term and competitive, limiting meaningful societal engagement

HE is commodified, instrumentalised and homogenised, with cash-strapped HEIs in competition rather than collaboration

H3

The roles of funders are radically revised as convenors, enablers, and collaborators

Universities are resourced in a long-term way that values and encourages slow research, risk-taking and collaboration

HE is independent from big business and harmful industries

## Narrative summary

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| --- |
| Includes a narrative description of the H1 and H3 summary. H1: current challenges |

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| --- |
| **H1 summary: A transactional, rigid and exclusionary HE sector that perpetuates hierarchies and fundamentally under-values engagement**  **HE lacks an inspiring shared vision and a clear sense of societal purpose and accountability**. It operates within a fragmented educational system that disconnects school, further education and lifelong learning and often fails to connect with learners’ experiences or aspirations.  **Societal, Public and Community Engagement is fundamentally under-valued and under-resourced**. Short-termism and rigid funding criteria limit project development and enduring partnerships, and hamper community power and voice. Academic success, funding and career progression are shaped by narrow academic criteria rather than meaningful societal contribution. These issues contribute to absent, broken and extractive relationships with communities.  **HE perpetuates historic legacies of inequality, hierarchy and exclusion.** Elitist models dominate, with a narrow view of what counts as valid knowledge. Investments in addressing systemic racism, ableism and exclusion have not led to meaningful change. Perceptions of the Oxbridge model or Russell Group as the gold standard overshadows the contributions other universities.  **Financially, HEIs are trapped in unsustainable, marketised funding models**, competing for students and resources rather than collaborating for the public good. Institutions are often seen as profit-driven, rather than student- and community-centred.  **HEI processes are bureaucratic, inefficient, siloed and rigid**, with high risk aversion. Systems are complex and unfit for purpose, with reactive rather than proactive HE leadership. Disconnection between departments, disciplines, and professional services wastes time and talent.  **Working in the HE sector is often stressful, unhealthy and precarious**. Casual contracts, overwork, exclusionary practices, and high turnover erode stability and prevent the building of trust and collaboration. The creativity and commitment of many staff remain under-used and under-supported H3: envisioned future |

**Summary: A relational, agile and fully engaged HE sector that enables belonging for all and diverse forms of learning**

**Societal Engagement and a strong public purpose are central to HE culture,** with equitable power-sharing across university partnerships and collaborations. Engagement is embedded in teaching, learning, research, and career progression with well-supported engagement roles. Universities contribute to a National Knowledge Service that addresses real-world needs and creates a sense of pride in what universities do.

**HEIs are proactively addressing historical and systemic injustices and their impacts,** creating more inclusive and respectful ways of working. They are agile, proactive, adaptive and adventurous, with a humble approach to learning from others.

**HE is porous, inclusive and integrated within local places and communities**, with open, vibrant spaces (online and in-person) that foster connection. HE is accessible and adaptable for all abilities, backgrounds and life stages resulting in a diverse student and staff body. Education is holistic and reconnects learners’ heads, hearts and hands.

**Knowledge-building and academic practice is approached in a much more open, collaborative and inclusive way.** All knowledge is open-access and accepted in all its diverse forms. People and AI enhance each other's work, and there is time and space for deep collective thinking, imagination, curiosity and learning. Collaboration across disciplines, services, skills, faculties, departments, universities, and external organisations is the norm. Research is sustainably resourced, with HE independent from big business and harmful industries, and guided by public good principles.

**The HE sector is now a healthy place to work for and with** that welcomes diversity, cares for people's wellbeing and values their strengths. Policies and services to support access (e.g. childcare, disabled student support) are strongly integrated into HE, and everyone in the sector is recognised as a leader in their own right.

**This is enabled by a radical revision of HE's funding and resourcing model,** enabling long-term investment in universities to enable sustained work with communities. Funders play a convening role, ensuring societal needs contribute to decision-making, and valuing all those who contribute to knowledge creation and use.

## Values contrasts

These horizons are underpinned by a set of values contrasts that capture the difference between the two horizons.

The value pairs that have emerged from the consultation are as follows:

H1 Validator, gatekeeper vs H3 connector

H1 Exclusive vs H3 belonging

H1 transactional vs H3 collaborative

H1 canonical vs H3 interdisciplinary and integrative

H1 tanker (difficult to change direction) vs H3 Flotilla (agile and flexible)

## Next steps

You can view the diagrams described in this document on the Mural here: [Engaged Futures pre-WS2 Three Horizons findings summary • Ioan Fazey](https://app.mural.co/t/ioanfazey1799/m/ioanfazey1799/1750172599691/657ada8982838b48a63a256824c55a46f73eafb1).

Please complete the review (link) before (date), which enables us to capture unique insights and perspectives of Engaged Futures Group participants and prepare well for the July event.

We look forward to seeing you soon at the event in July. If you have any questions do get in contact with me or Alison Wright nccpecatalysts@uwe.ac.uk