

UNIVERSITY OF  
WINCHESTER

# THE VALUE OF A DEGREE

WHAT DO GEN Z EXPECT FROM THEIR UNIVERSITY?

**A thought piece from Professor Joy Carter, CBE, DL,  
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# Introduction

Covid-19 has profoundly disrupted every aspect of our lives – employment chances, health, and education will be scarred for a generation. As well as dealing with countless cases of human tragedy, our institutions now face challenges that for many could be existential.

It is crucial we all play our part to address these challenges, many of which will ripple throughout all our communities for months and maybe years to come.

Yet, at the same time, we must not lose focus on existing challenges. Indeed, in my more reflective times I wonder whether our experiences in 2020 feel like a grim dress rehearsal for some of the global challenges on the horizon. Population growth, increasing use of artificial intelligence, global economic shift to emerging economies, and more. And perhaps the most important and urgent – the climate and ecological crisis.

My argument here is that we need to broaden our thinking about how we prepare and educate future generations for meeting and mastering the challenges ahead.

This starts by understanding the people who come through our doors. Of course, these come from all ages and backgrounds. But the majority of people who make up our student bodies come from the so-called Generation Z (Gen Z) – those born between roughly 1995 and 2010, and who are aged between 10 and 25 as I write this. To understand how Gen Z view universities and the wider world, Winchester commissioned polling and research company Public First to work with YouthSight to explore attitudes of our future students – those currently aged between 16 and 18 who definitely express an intention to go to university – to help shape Winchester's thinking and guide the university through a period of extraordinary change in society. We asked them before the Covid pandemic hit. But we are publishing it today as we believe this forms a helpful baseline of the values and responses that

run deep in Gen Z and therefore brings great value in understanding – and therefore helping to shape – young people's opinions.

## WHAT DID WE FIND?

We found a generation of young people desperately concerned about the future of the planet, and about our health service. We found they are worried that the government, and others including universities, were not doing enough about it. And we found that while students are still choosing to go to university for relatively traditional reasons, the values of an institution were a significant driver in student choice between universities.

As leaders in education and research, universities are in a unique position to be catalysts for real and lasting change. I believe the best way to respond to this renewed challenge is returning to the fundamental values of higher education (HE), values that for the University of Winchester are summed up in our mission to be a 'beacon for educational excellence, sustainability and social justice'.

To uncover and address the challenges of the future we must recognise the scale of the issues. We must find the time – and the attention of our senior teams – to think more purposefully about what the role of universities is in responding to Gen Z. This should include:

- Think much more outwardly.
- Embrace transdisciplinary work much more fully.
- Modernise performance metrics.
- Improve community engagement.

The higher education sector has been prone to look in upon itself far too much. Covid-19 makes this untenable, setting us a challenge to look much more outwardly in new, urgent, and different ways. This note explores each of the changes above in detail.

# Section 1: Looking beyond the immediate Covid-19 impact on UK universities

Covid-19 has tested universities like nothing in recent living memory. As well as dealing with countless cases of human tragedy, our institutions face existential challenges.

In just a few short months our priorities have been rearranged across the board in reaction to the pandemic. Research priorities have pivoted towards new treatments, vaccines, and paving routes towards normality. Online and virtual communication has become the primary contact method of students and staff. The movement of students around the globe is significantly altered – perhaps for many years. The short-term effects have tested our virtual infrastructure as we adapt to a higher proportion of remote learning.

The immediate impact has affected our ability to recruit and forecast accurately how many students will attend university across the country this year. The most recent figures show applicant numbers holding but changes to travel and uncertainty around student visas may still lead to a significant decrease in the number of international students coming to the UK. The potential drop in admissions and other factors have made the overall financial situation much more challenging for all institutions. Question marks over what the student experience will be this year are still being resolved urgently.

Universities have risen to the challenge and demonstrated their value to society and local communities in a time of crisis. HE institutions are at the forefront of providing equipment to the NHS, developing vaccines, treatments, and assisting schools or colleges transitioning to online learning. The acceleration in medical research has been faster than anyone thought possible. Even before

Covid-19 was declared a pandemic, university researchers across the globe set up partnerships with governments and pharmaceutical companies to fight the virus. And we are already seeing results.

But this report is not about Covid-19. It is important we continue to play our part in tackling the virus, but without losing sight of major issues that are still there regardless of the pandemic. We must make the changes which have been discussed for too long without the scale of action required.

The planet and everything living on it face huge and immediate challenges. I briefly mention some of these in the section that follows.

## ACCELERATING CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Since records began in 1850, seventeen of the eighteen hottest years have occurred since 2000<sup>1</sup>. Humanity stands at the edge of a precipice. If we do not urgently address the climate and ecological crisis, the very future of all life and the planet is in question. We cannot move fast enough, or go far enough, in our efforts to mitigate, and prepare for, the worst of climate change.

This challenge is so huge that it would be a mistake to claim that universities hold the solution. It will require nothing less than a change to the way of life – possibly even 'a deep adaptation'<sup>2</sup> – for humanity.

I believe we need to take inspiration from the deep adaptation movement, initiated by the work of academic Prof. Jem Bendell, that society needs to urgently prepare itself for the worst possible

<sup>1</sup>WMO, 2020, WMO confirms 2019 as second hottest year on record, [online] Available at [public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/wmo-confirms-2019-second-hottest-year-record](https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/wmo-confirms-2019-second-hottest-year-record) (Accessed July 2020)

<sup>2</sup>Bendell, J., 2018. Deep adaptation: A map for navigating climate tragedy.

outcomes of climate change. Prof. Bendell's work is based around three layers of deep adaptation: restoration of cultural values centred on respect for nature; building a society more resilient to the climate crisis; and relinquishing that which worsens the climate crisis.

Many universities have already responded to the need to become more sustainable. Institutions have made practical changes to how they run – switching to greener energy, reducing energy output, and encouraging sustainable habits in staff and students.

Now is the time to redouble these efforts and focus on adapting society to the climate and ecological crisis. As leaders in education and research, universities are in a unique position to recognise that the world is changing in the most profound way, leverage expertise, and make significant scientific advances in the global response. How institutions operate, conduct research, engage with the community, and educate their students are catalysts for real and lasting change. The Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education Students and Leaders, of which I am a co-Chair, was launched in November 2019 to drastically increase the contribution of universities and colleges in the fight against climate change. And a student-led group – Student Organising for Sustainability UK (SOS) – is doing excellent work too. Individual institutions need to prioritise their response more than ever.

#### **RAPID ADOPTION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND BIOTECHNOLOGY**

Artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, biotechnology, big data, and the 'internet of things' are combining to rapidly change jobs, industry, and society in ways that we can only begin to imagine. We are experiencing a transformation of the workforce that will match, even exceed, the agrarian, industrial, and digital revolutions in its scope. The 4th Industrial Revolution is already happening- we must embrace and adapt.

The OECD predicts that 14 per cent of jobs are automatable and a further 32 per cent will be changed<sup>1</sup>. PwC research suggests that by 2030, 30 per cent of jobs could be at risk<sup>2</sup>. The 2018 CBI Education and Skills Annual Report found significant evidence for the pace of change in the labour market, with 60 per cent of businesses reporting that the introduction of new technologies required retraining of employees to take up new posts<sup>3</sup>.

It is increasingly clear that we are not just talking about manual, factory jobs – intellectually intensive and highly paid jobs are just as vulnerable. Earlier this year, the journalists and editorial team that curated the Yahoo homepage were replaced by an algorithm. AI could also replace huge parts of the finance, accountancy, and banking sector.

Just as transformative, large-scale breakthroughs in biotechnology, where biology and technology combine, have the potential to drastically improve quality of life for millions. Indeed, this could be a potential 5th industrial revolution in the making. Nevertheless, this will cause a dramatic upheaval in jobs, resource demands, and agricultural systems. Biotechnology also brings into sharp focus a range of ethical and philosophical questions.

Universities must also be at the forefront of this revolution with creative, pro-active transdisciplinary research and teaching.

An increasingly global and interconnected world presents new challenges - particularly with the backdrop of global human population shifts. Within this context, we also need to focus on how we are addressing equality, diversity and inclusivity, both within the fabric of our own institutions but also more widely within society. This has always been important but has been particularly highlighted following the murder of George Floyd and the recognition of the need for faster and greater change to become anti-racist institutions.

As centres of excellence for teaching and research, universities have a duty to equip students with an

education that not only prepares them to work in a rapidly changing world, but also to add value to society by helping solve global problems.

It can be a struggle for universities to find the time to grapple with global challenges as the role of the Vice Chancellors and senior teams is often taken up with day-to-day challenges of running a complex organisation. When we have time to think more broadly, we often go to UK, or even England, specific issues – what will the future of UK higher education look like possible changes

in fee regimes, new qualifications, international recruitment, and much more? How do we better address student mental health and wellbeing? What are the University Minister's latest priorities? Is our funding model sustainable?

These short-term challenges are, of course, hugely important. But if any part of the economy and society can, and should, think how best to address the wider global challenges, it is universities. This should be done in the context of the students and communities that our institutions serve.

<sup>1</sup> OECD., 2019. OECD Employment Outlook 2019: The future of work. OECD Publishing.

<sup>2</sup> Hawksworth, J., Berriman, R. and Goel, S., 2018. Will robots really steal our jobs? An international analysis of the potential long term impact of automation. PricewaterhouseCoopers, pwc. co. uk/economics, access, 13.

<sup>3</sup> CBI, 2018, Educating For the Modern World, CBI,



# Section 2: What Gen Z expect from universities

To properly prepare students for the global challenges we must broaden our understanding of those coming into our campus's. We need to understand what drives them and what they are expecting from universities.

Most of our future students will be made up of the so-called Generation Z – those born between 1995 and 2010 - aged between 10 and 25. To help us understand our future students we commissioned polling and research company Public First to work with YouthSight to assess attitudes towards the wider world and universities from those currently aged between 16 and 18 who definitely expressed an intention to go to university.

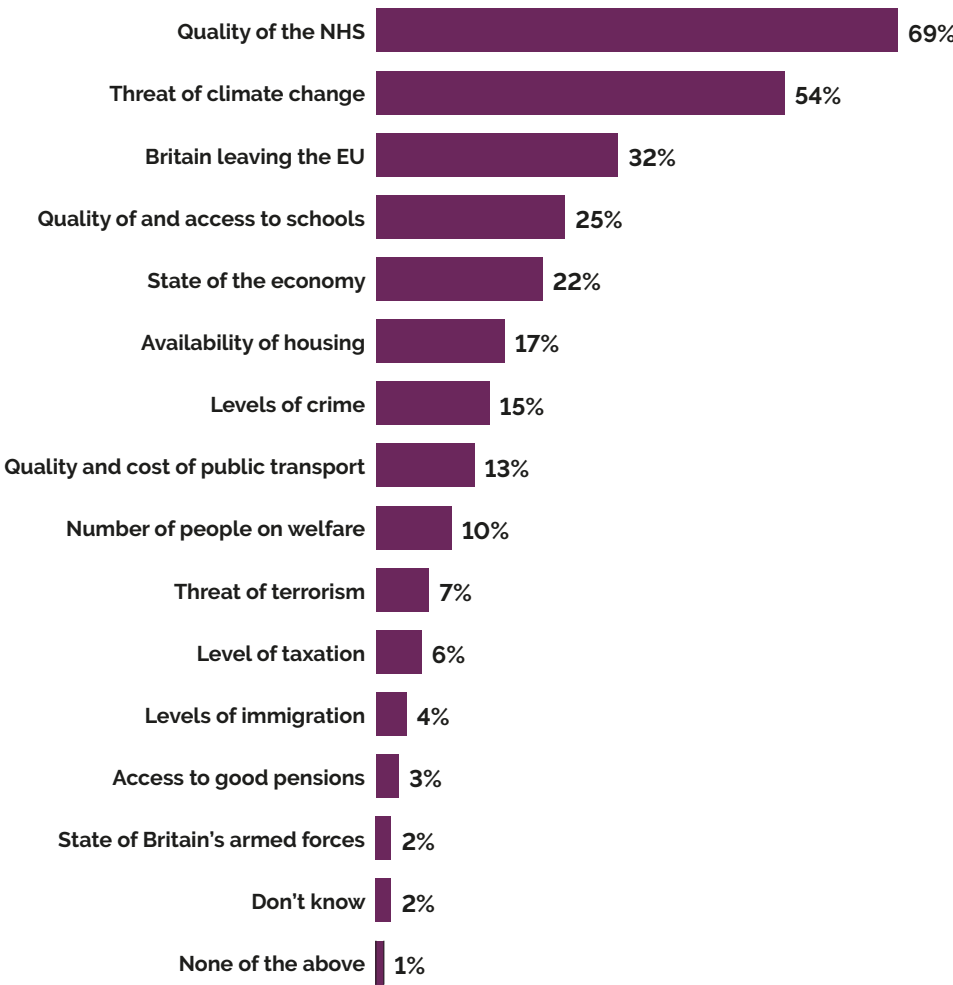
We asked them these questions before the Covid-19 pandemic hit. But we are publishing it today because we do not know yet whether the turbulence, we are seeing is permanent, or temporary. We think there is great value in understanding – and therefore helping to shape – young people's opinion, and to understand the values that mould them and their decisions.

***We think there is great value in understanding – and therefore helping to shape – young people's opinion, and to understand the values that mould them and their decisions.***

This new polling illustrated three themes around Generation Z's values and provides a very helpful pointer as to how the higher education sector might respond.



“Which do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time?”



**Finding 1: Students are most concerned about two issues - the quality of care in the NHS and the climate crisis – and the majority don't think the UK government is addressing it to their satisfaction**

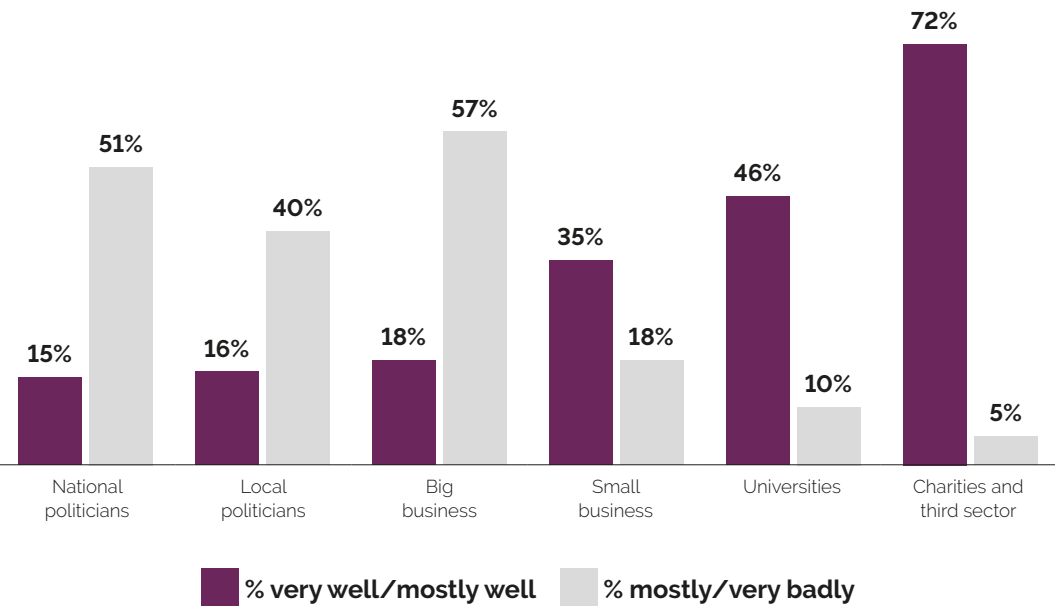
These two concerns significantly outstripped all other issues. In our poll, 69 per cent identified the quality of care in the NHS as most important while 54 per cent identified the climate crisis.

Perhaps surprisingly, issues which the media and politicians tell us are the chief concerns for Gen Z – Britain leaving the EU or the provision of housing – do not seem to so important. Only 32 per cent were concerned about Britain leaving the EU and less than a quarter were concerned with the availability of homes.

When asked about society's handling of these issues that concern them most, the majority of Gen Z are deeply worried by the government's approach to climate change, with 51 per cent believing that it was being handled mostly or very badly. However, more positively, they are happier about what universities are doing on the same issue. 46 per cent say universities are handling it mostly or very well, a score only beaten by the charity sector.



How well do you think the following institutions are doing in addressing the issue of climate change?

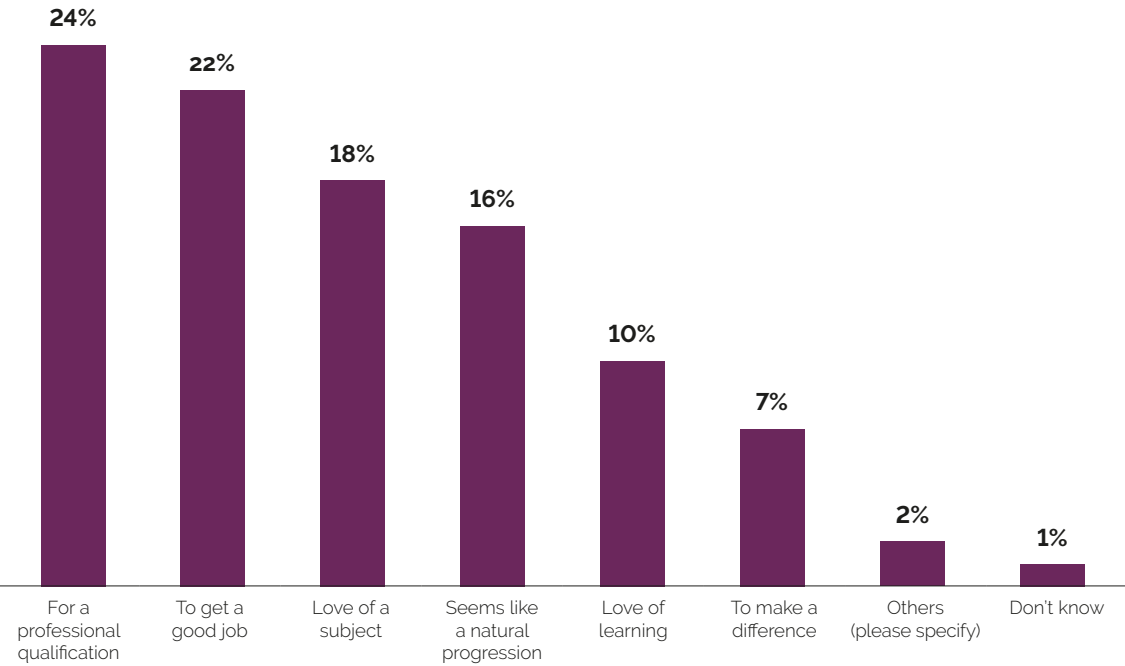


Finding 2: Students' motivation to go to university does not appear to differ from past generations

Young people still see a university education as a path to a good job in the future. In our poll 24 per cent said their motivation was for a professional qualification, while 22 per cent felt it was to get a

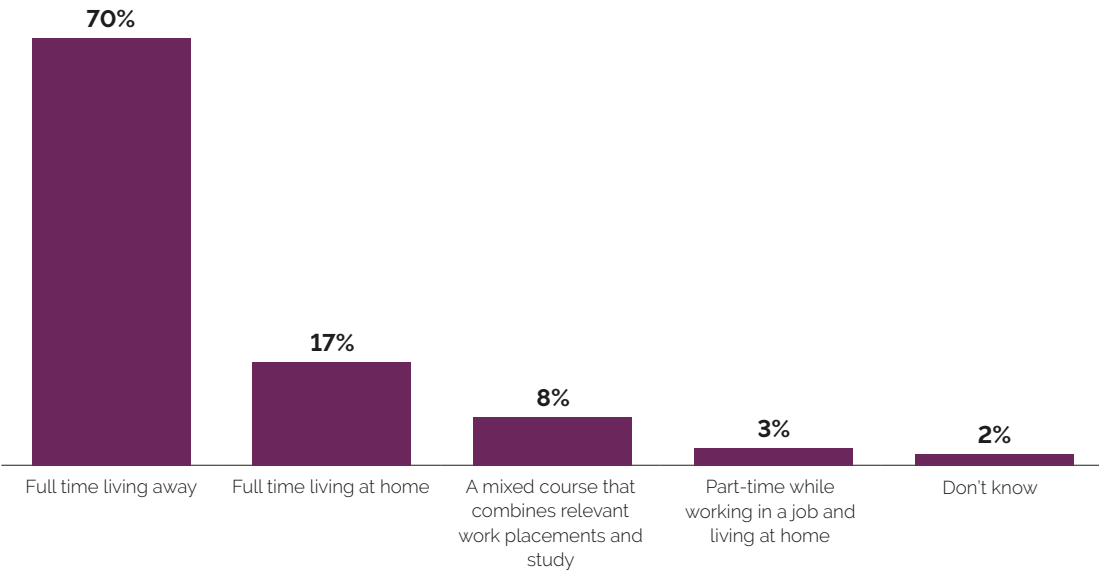
good job that motivated their undergraduate study, while love of a subject was not far behind on 18 per cent.

What is your main motivation for wanting to go to university?



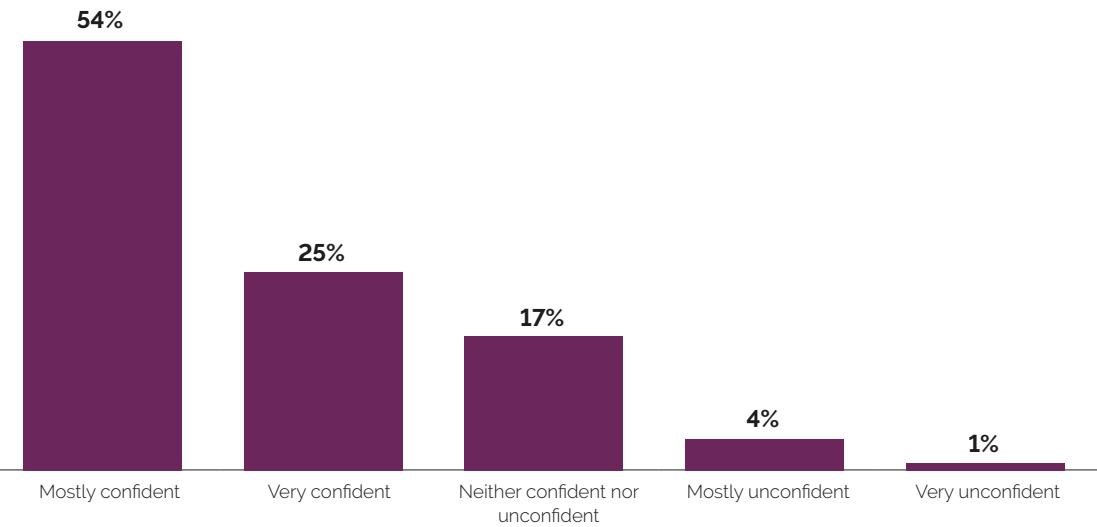
Students are also still attracted to a traditional model of higher education, with remote learning (pre-Covid, at least) seen as less attractive.

What method of studying at university do you think would suit you best?

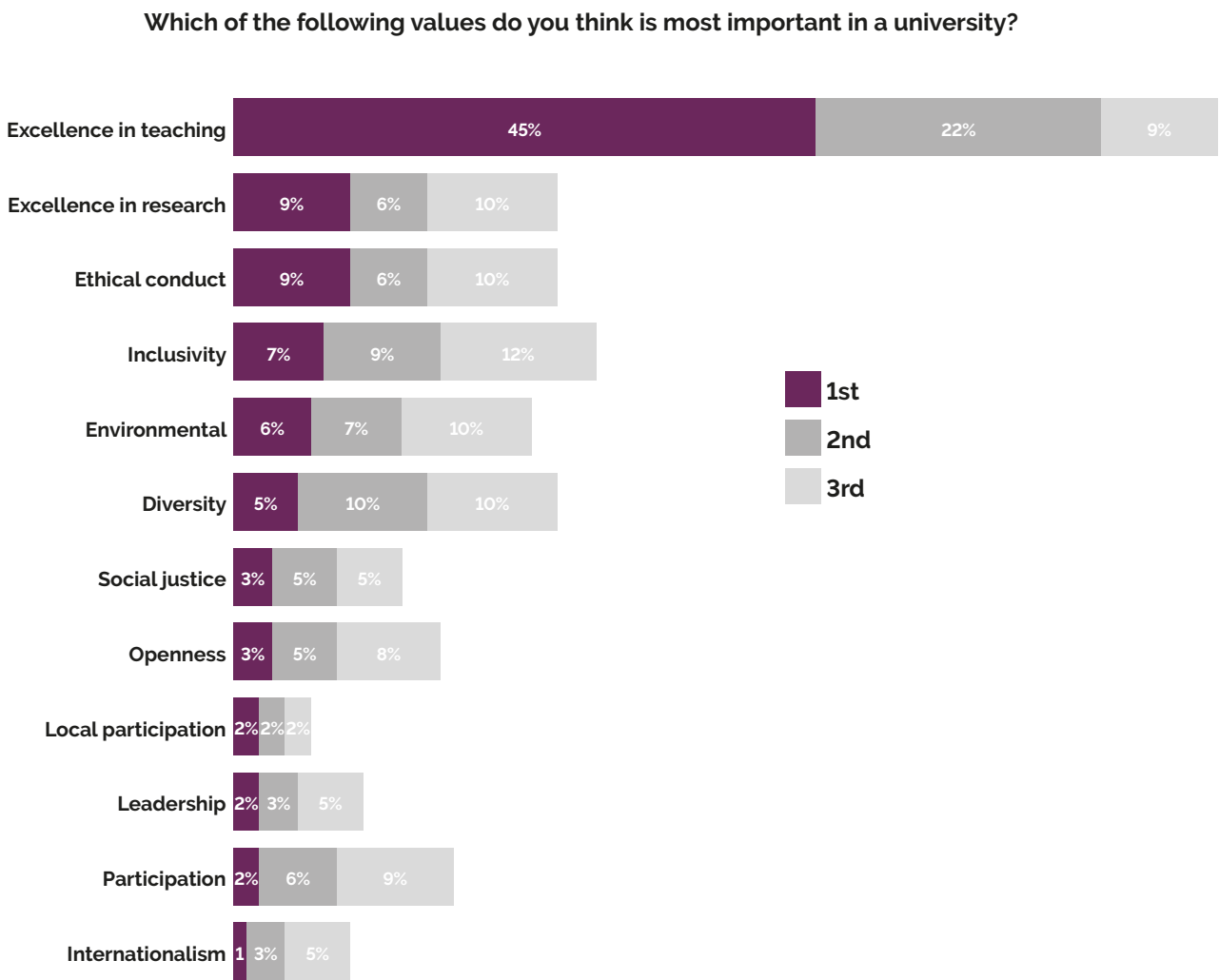


Despite most of Gen Z growing up during the 2008 financial crash and surrounded by gloomy economic headlines, students remain optimistic about securing a job post-university, with 79 per cent stated they were very or mostly confident of securing a job on leaving full-time education.

How confident are you that you will secure a good job when you leave formal education?



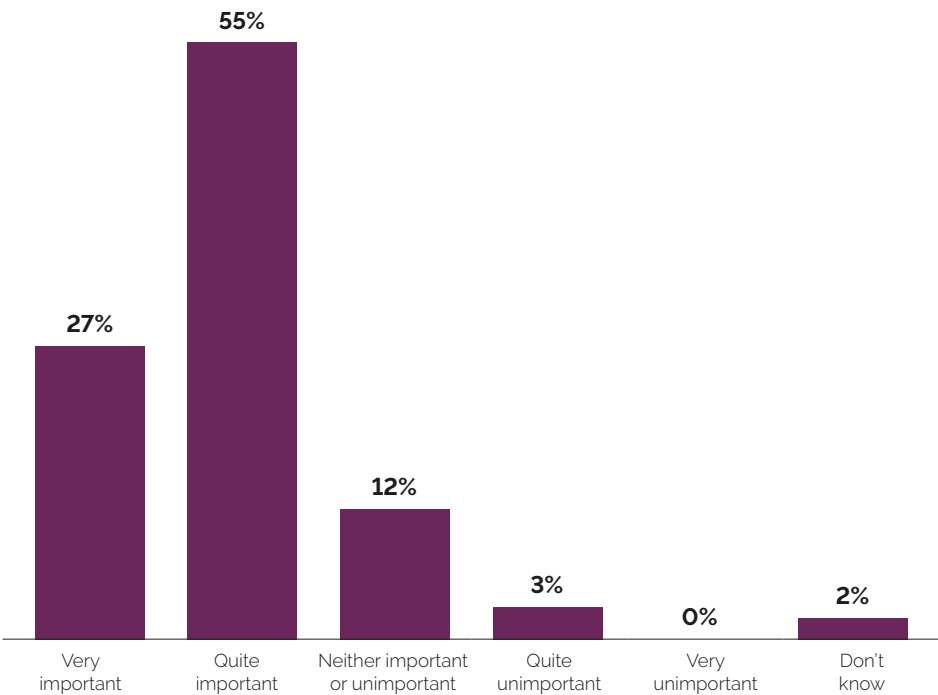
Excellence in teaching quality was seen as the most important factor for Gen Z when asked about values of a university in general.



Finding 3: But when choosing which university to study at, a major factor was the institution's 'values'

While students' reasons for pursuing a university career may align with those of previous generations<sup>1</sup>, their thinking when picking where to go for themselves does diverge. The stated values and perceived values of the institution are key – with 82 per cent saying it was very important or quite important to them.

How important are the stated and perceived values of a university in determining which institutions you have applied to or will apply to?

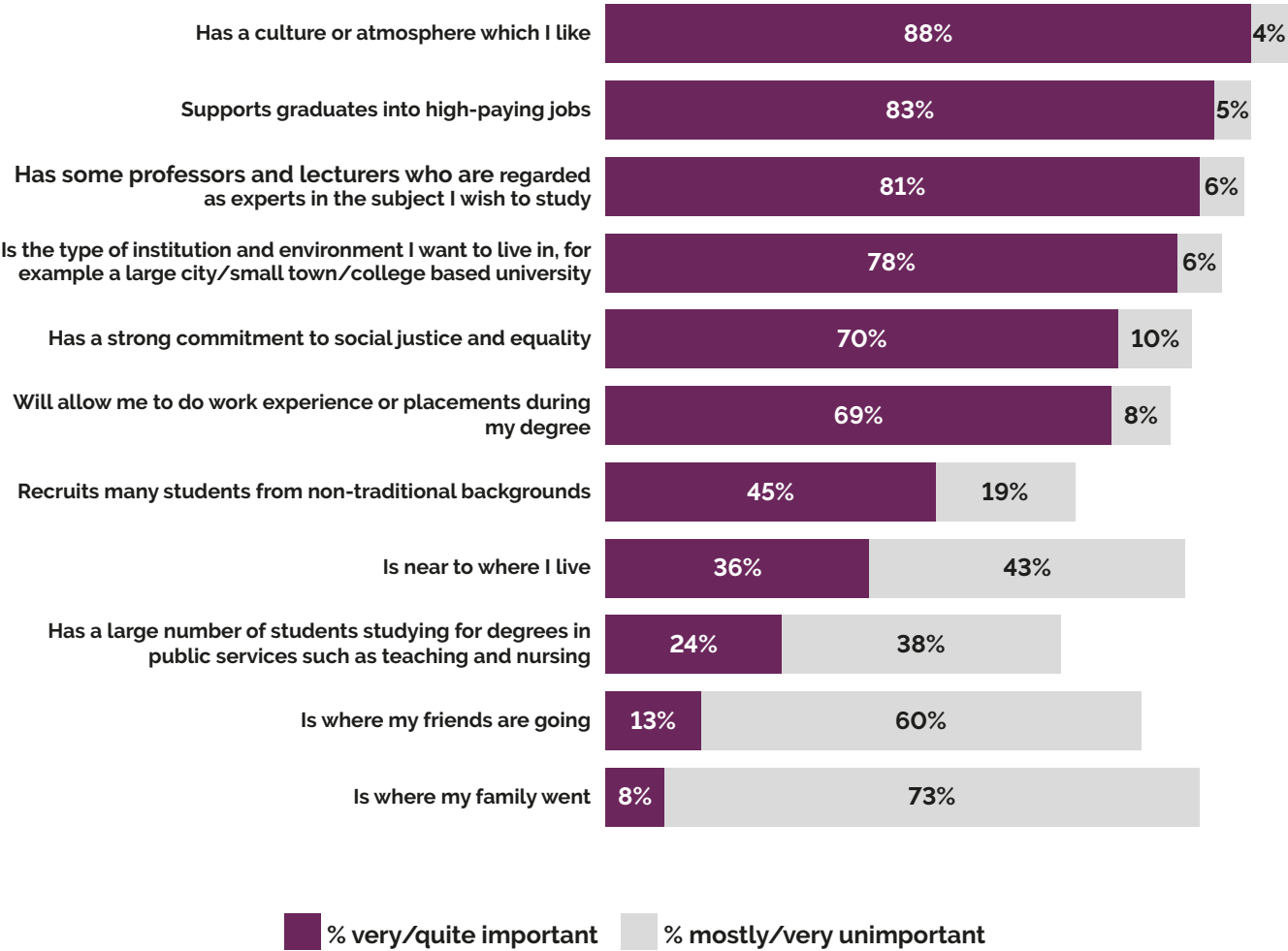


In addition, some 88 per cent of students said that the culture and atmosphere of a university was most important, while 70 per cent valued a commitment to social justice when making their choice.

<sup>1</sup> Cote, J.M., 2013. Generational Differences In Motivation to Attend College.



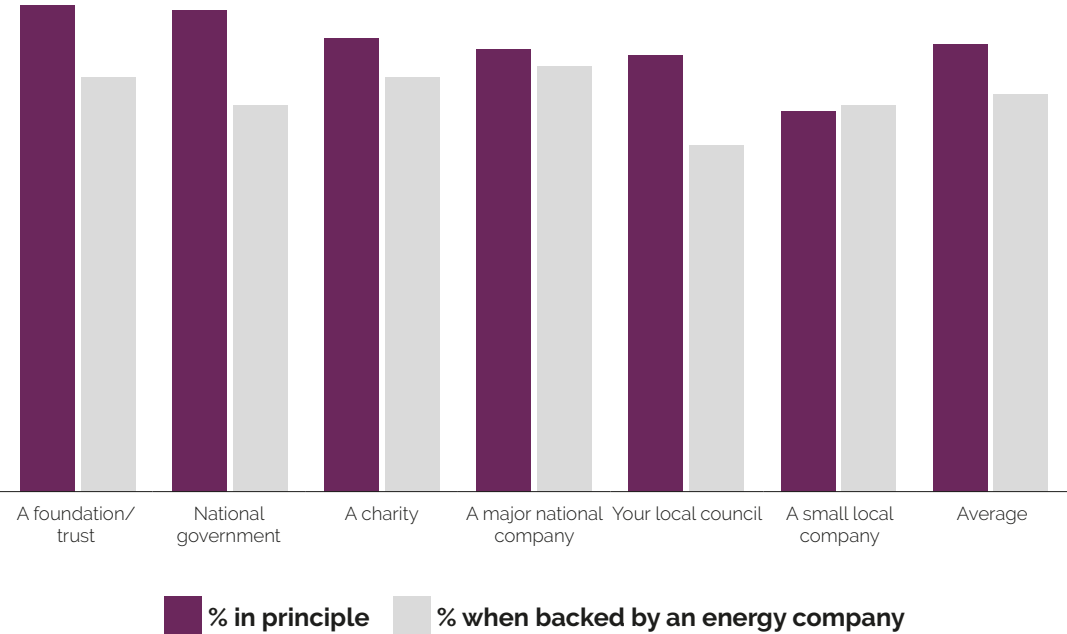
How important each of these features of a university is to you when deciding where to go and study



To test the importance of values further, we asked participants to ascribe a monetary value to values. This was done by asking about a scenario where various named organisations offered to give the respondent a grant to cover their rent and living expenses for every year at university, how likely would they be to accept such a grant. Positive answers ranged from 87 per cent to 68 per cent. Participants were then asked if their response would change if it became clear that the grant was funded by a large energy company. The energy company is used as a substitute for money that

potentially contradicts their values, coming from a sector for which many of the respondents raised concern, given their views on climate change. It showed a significant proportion of students prepared to turn down free money if compromised their values. The average positive response rate dropped 9 percentage points, and by 11 per cent in total. In other words, 1 in 9 students would turn down free money for their living costs – around £50,000 – if it came from a source that contradicted their values.

Proportion of students who would accept a grant during their studies from these organisations, before and after being clear it was funded by a large energy company



This is one indicator that Gen Z are values driven, and this affects their behaviour – not least, in where and why they want to study.

Listening to values driven by students informs everything that takes place at Winchester. We believe our work with students needs to fit with the motivation and drivers for Gen Z. This isn't as simple as slavishly following student's values. University is also, of course, about constructively challenging, and growing students. As a result, Winchester's philosophy can be divided into two parts:

**Nurture:** Winchester is a supportive, caring, and safe place to study. Students are supported to flourish, are encouraged to help others, and empowered to make a difference in the world. We seek to nurture a love and value for all life and the planet in all students. We are committed to

working globally to ensure equality and justice for all. Everyone is welcome here. Staff and students learn to value and appreciate others, whoever they are and whatever their background.

**Challenge:** Winchester wants to ensure students do not stick to a set of opinions but view the world with a critical eye and seek out evidence. In a world increasingly focussed on 'fake news' and disinformation this will be more important than ever. We want students to challenge convention with compassion and stand up for what they believe to be true. They are supported to fight for integrity and justice in a world of compromises and prejudice.

To deliver on what Gen Z want, all universities must think whether as institutions they are becoming more outward looking in the education provided. Being a proactive and determined as a sector to broaden the horizons of those we teach will be critical.

Universities, including Winchester, still have a long way to go to make these values a reality. The next section sets out thoughts on how this might be achieved.



# Section 3: How can we challenge ourselves to address the challenges of the future and respond to Gen Z?

This chapter posits four broad changes which universities need to consider. Some are within an institution's control. Others require action on behalf of government. But together, they are pre-requisites for making HE in the 21st century work best for Gen Z while, addressing the global challenges around us.

**Change 1:** Think more outwardly. As universities, it is easy to be cowed by the restrictions which are placed on us – whether that's funding restrictions, legislation, or it's perception of public and political opinion.

Yet, there is so much that is really within our own collective power to change. Whether that's who we admit, what we research, how we as leaders spend our time, how we engage with businesses, charities, and our local community, or what our values are. Universities need to look more to communities, whether these are local, national, or global. We need to genuinely consider how we are improving and adding value to society beyond the limits of our campuses. Values need to be woven into all parts of university. Civic thought and work are not an add on, but a core function of our role. We are not institutions limited to niche or small-scale research, but bastions of knowledge who should be leading and educating all parts of society. We therefore welcome the work of the Civic Universities Commission and the subsequent creation of the Civic Universities Network.

**Universities must lead those value driven debates within our institutions and outside them as well.**

Reflected in the Public First polling, Gen Z is hungry to learn at a university whose focus and campus life is based on stated and perceived

values. This generation are looking to institutions to champion the values which they think matter most to the future of society. Universities must lead those value driven debates within our institutions and outside them as well.

**Change 2:** Make broader links between subject disciplines. For too long, barriers have existed between subjects, limiting the potential for transdisciplinary research and teaching. Leaving science to scientists, engineering to engineers, and finance to economists is the wrong approach. Any scientific challenge is also social and economic one – no subject is a silo. Taking that approach restricts the potential to deliver change, innovation, and the bold solutions needed to meet global challenges. We need to take bold steps to developing a trans-disciplinary approach to what we do.

Our institutions are hubs of knowledge that can uncover life-changing solutions to global challenges and prepare graduates. Yet, we too easily fall into the trap of defining research and teaching fields along strict lines. This can limit our understanding of the subject or issues at hand. Above all, this can mean academia can end up being silent in debates while we attempt to maintain the status quo of distinct disciplines. It is therefore important to answer the question, how can we appeal to a generation so in tune with questions of tomorrow when we are content to cling onto the past when tackling big issues?

Two examples demonstrate how universities can fall into this trap:

- The climate crisis affects everything: economies, markets, education, and people's mental health and wellbeing.
- AI and automation raise questions wider than science on ethics and free speech as they

become central to how our society functions and the role of humans in a virtual world powered by AI. In the past 12 months, we have seen AI creep further into significant parts of our lives, including the democratic process and government. As this continues, ethical considerations and trust will become more and more relevant.

The need for a society that is strong in liberal humanities and arts education is therefore clear. This is why a 'modern liberal arts' degree has been introduced at Winchester - the first university in England to do so. This was in part driven by places like Silicon Valley specifically looking for graduates with a more rounded experience, – tech companies' favoured graduates are liberal art students – and the need to disseminate this thinking into our universities<sup>1</sup>. Whether it's in how faculties are structured, who is promoted into senior academic roles, what is bid for from research councils and other funders, or how institutions lead the way on research, we need to prioritise transdisciplinary excellence.

**Change 3:** Modernise performance metrics. We need a constructive point of view on how we measure success not solely based on existing metrics. Gen Z's views are clear in the Public First's polling, showing not only their expectation that institutions should define and defend their values, but also the need for high quality teaching. The current performance metrics have constructed an unintuitive system that doesn't communicate to students either of these priorities.

To address this, universities must develop and share rigorously and independently assessed case studies that bring to life what lies behind the statistics.

On research excellence, universities should explicitly use research firepower to inform and influence government policy by demonstrating more clearly how university research is fundamental to solving the climate and ecological crisis, driving the economy, shaping education policy, and developing community cohesion. If the

government is sincere about wanting to 'level up' across the UK, research can play a significant part in how we do this effectively.

We need to learn how to 'speak with one voice' on a number of key issues.

We should also be proactive in suggesting what meaningful performance metrics should be. Public First's polling suggests that students want to know what we do with their money – and so does government. We cannot be immune from accountability. So, if we want to adapt a metric such as the Research Excellent Framework (REF), we need to say what should replace it. If we don't like Teaching Excellent Framework (TEF), we need to recognise that teaching excellence is important to Gen Z, and we need to establish metrics that are both intuitive for students and meaningful for policy makers.

**Change 4:** Improve community engagement. Gen Z has a clear commitment to social justice that universities cannot chose to ignore. Part of our response must be to redouble our role as civic institutions in towns and communities across the UK, but we must also work to improve our ability to speak with a unified voice on key national and global issues. An example here would be moving faster and more deeply to address issues of race and racism within our own institutions and society more widely. Together, we must demonstrate and evidence how universities are a major lever of social justice and engine of prosperity – including through support of apprenticeships and further education. We need to lead these debates, not wait to be asked or put on the defensive. We need to engage in issues which are not just about us as institutions, but in which we have world leading expertise.

Winchester certainly hasn't fully answered all of these critiques. Far from it. But we are, and always have been, deeply driven to mould an institution that fits around these priorities. Our values are centred on creating a community committed to making a difference, and passionate about seeing individuals and communities flourish. We do this through our three guiding values:

<sup>1</sup>Financial Times, 2017, How Silicon Valley learnt to love the liberal arts, [www.ft.com/content/bfe61952-be91-11e7-9836-b25f8adaa111](https://www.ft.com/content/bfe61952-be91-11e7-9836-b25f8adaa111)

First, we **foster a compassionate and supportive environment** in which to learn and work. Staff and students are supported to flourish, encouraged to help others, and empowered to make a difference in the world. We seek to challenge and nurture in all staff and students a love and value for all life and the planet. Staff and students are given the freedom to change the world for the better, challenge convention with compassion, and stand up for what they believe.

Second, we **value the individual**. We are passionate about seeing individuals flourish at Winchester. The dignity and wellbeing of students is elemental to our work, as are their opinions and views. All of life's rich tapestry is welcome here. Staff and students learn to value and appreciate others, whoever they are, whatever their background, or political views. Freedom of debate and speech is critical.

Finally, we **celebrate and encourage spirituality**. We celebrate our Christian foundations while welcoming people of all faiths and none. In a world in which religion is often associated with exclusivity and anti-intellectualism, we seek to model ways of being religious which are inclusive and intellectually robust. We believe that everyone expresses their spirituality through a unique collage of values, disciplines, and practices. In work and study at Winchester there is a chance to experience and reflect on creativity, beauty, and compassion.

We try to ensure that the commitment to these values is enshrined into all we do and helps to help draw out potential in students – something that is common across our fellow Cathedrals Group universities.

## PUTTING THESE VALUES INTO PRACTICE

We have established an **Interdisciplinary Values Studies Institute** that enables student and staff from the university's departments to work together on fundamental questions about ethics, politics, art, religion, and education. Our new **Faculty for Health and Wellbeing** is similarly modelled on these values with a focus on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities, and society.

Civic action is at the heart of university life. The work of staff and students is not defined exclusively by what they achieve on campus but what they achieve in the community. All **students and staff are provided with multiple opportunities and encouraged to volunteer**. To take this a step further we are introducing a new module on eco-activism. This is designed to further student understanding on how they can influence change in society.

Our desire for students to seek out interdisciplinary opportunities was the driving force behind the decision that we should **become one of the first universities in the country to offer Liberal Arts**. The course gives more flexibility than in most academic disciplines and works in an interdisciplinary way. It allows students to engage with ideas spanning humanities, the social and natural sciences, and the arts. The course has been widely commended, including praise from the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Rowen Williams, and ranked highly for student satisfaction. Our longer-term plan is to establish Winchester as a seat for Liberal Arts education in Europe. Similar innovation can be found in our education faculty, where trainee teachers will become among the world's first United Nations-accredited Climate Change Teachers. Students cover a range of topics including climate change science, gender and environment, children and climate change, cities and climate change, and human health. Indeed, we have become one of the most highly sought-after universities for teacher education in the country, with Ofsted rating our primary and secondary teaching training 'outstanding' and consistently high rankings in league tables.

Further to this, Winchester is already leading the way in climate change education. We have **embedded sustainability across all of our courses**, inspiring students and staff to engage with the issue. We are also proud to hold **NUS Responsible Futures Accreditation**, a certification of the whole university's commitment to social responsibility and sustainability, spanning the formal and informal curriculum. We encourage all universities to seek accreditation too.

Our **UN PRME Champion status** for mainstreaming sustainability across the university is particularly important to us. Our next step is to open an Institute for Environmental and Social Justice.

## Conclusion

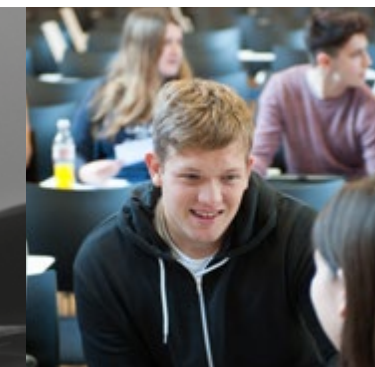
If the work we have done at Winchester in evolving our philosophy – together with the research we have undertaken into the motivations of Gen Z – has taught us anything, it is that we, and the HE sector as a whole, needs to further uncover, embrace, and celebrate our values more than ever.

The world is changing at a staggering pace, and no one understands that better than the students we have on campus now and those that we hope will soon join us.

The era of HE being driven by a narrow set of metrics must surely be coming to a close. As universities, we need to think more about what success means in the long term and what it means to be a truly outward-facing institution.

The HE sector has also looked in upon itself too much, only becoming genuinely animated when faced with challenges that directly affected our interests. Of course, these challenges have not gone away, but society, and therefore universities, are now staring down the barrel of serious global challenges that we can no longer afford to ignore.

Universities have never had a more important role to play. Let's stand up and lead.











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