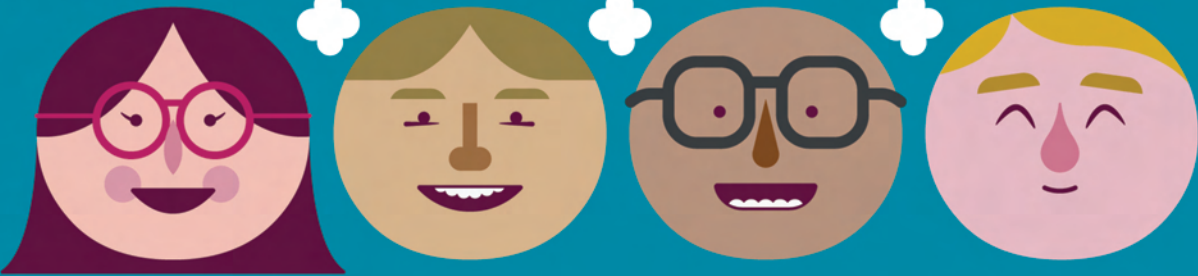


What is your vision for universities?



Starting a conversation about the future of our universities

This project, university_vision, is about starting a conversation to explore the issues and challenges facing universities in the future. We want to ask the big questions about how and where universities need to position themselves to deliver the knowledge, networks and communities our country needs.

It has been a dramatic few years for universities. There have been many debates, discussions and decisions but few have been led by the sector itself. University leaders and students have been consulted along the way but have not been in the driving seat.

As a result, we now have a sector that is unable to grow to meet demand and lacks clarity about how universities fit within the wider economic and social vision. Responding to current debates around fees and access limits us to the same conversations we have been having for the past ten years. We need to create a different paradigm for exploration, challenge and debate. Given the right vision and ambition universities will play a critical role in

shaping and transforming this country's future economy and society.

The project has been a big collaborative effort, involving experts from around the country. Together we have explored what possible futures might look like and what each might mean for universities. These challenging visions for our sector are not predictions, they are provocations to get us thinking about the social and economic role universities could play in our country's future.

We hope you will join us in the debate.

#visionHE



Steve West

Professor Steve West
Vice-Chancellor,
University of the West of England
Chair, University Alliance

A new narrative

The university_vision project has been about developing a set of scenarios to help change the narrative around the future of universities.

It is about challenging the concept of what universities are for and the shape that they will take in 2025 and beyond. To ensure the scenarios are as comprehensive as they can be we have designed the university_vision process to be inclusive and collaborative, stretching traditional scenario planning to include a large number of views and opinions through high-level workshops, one-to-one meetings and the use of social media.

Scenario planning is a valuable tool for understanding the factors that may affect the future, by exploring possibilities and interactions within different social, economic and political environments. It is not a process to predict the future, rather it is about identifying different and extreme scenarios that can better inform planning and development.

To understand the potential future environment universities might face we explored the major drivers of change that could affect them. The drivers were grouped under social, technological, economic, environmental and political themes.

From these drivers we selected the two that we saw as having the biggest impact on universities. These are: an economic driver, based on a contracting versus a growing economy, and; a social driver, exploring competitive versus collaborative natures. The drivers were then set on two axes upon which four scenarios were created in collaboration with vice-chancellors, academics, think tanks and business leaders.

The scenarios are credible and challenging, yet extreme portraits of the future: hypothetical possibilities, based on robust qualitative research, to challenge orthodox assumptions about the future.

university
_vision



uni_divide

Scenario A: Competitive Society & Contracting Economy

The broader outlook

The UK and Europe have continued to endure economic decline and government budgets can no longer justify funding or subsidising higher education.

Politics has polarised as the perpetual failure to deliver long-term solutions to economic woes has produced wider and more varied representation. As Europe is unable to provide tangible economic benefits, the UK has become increasingly protectionist and independent from the European Union. The most visible manifestation of this has been the curbing of inward EU migration.

High unemployment and a stalling of social mobility has increased the spectre of societal unrest. Median incomes have fallen, low civic engagement has persisted and fuel poverty has become a reality for a growing number of households.

Two tier university system

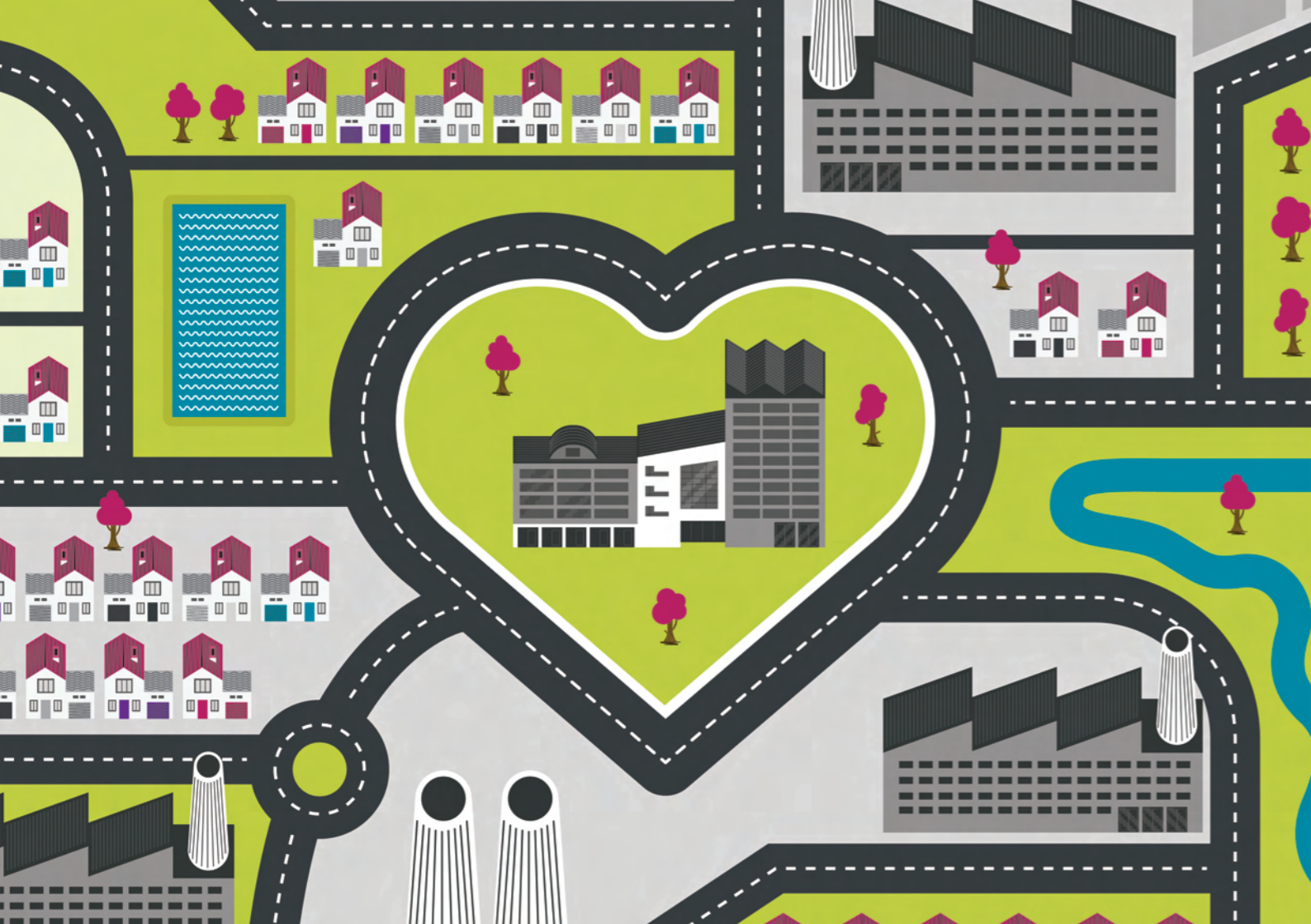
Universities have become entirely independently funded for teaching and research. Subsequently, the higher education sector has become increasingly hierarchical. Only a few universities can facilitate diverse student experiences and purely academic research. Most universities rely on partnerships with businesses that in turn become more deeply involved in designing courses, directing research and organising departments.

A small cluster of elite universities can draw funding from various sources, most visibly from their high fees and a quasi-monopoly on international students who, along with the much reduced domestic wealthy middle class, can afford the prohibitive prices and continue to crave 'old world' education.

There are fewer UK universities. Many universities merge, close or streamline their operations to become extensions of business' human resources or research and development arms. Some will develop strong international delivery arms with limited

function in the UK. Institutional functions have become increasingly utilitarian to service their funders and the breadth of degrees offered is reduced.





uni_public

Scenario B: Collaborative Society & Contracting Economy

The broader outlook

Consecutive governments have responded to continuing stagnation of the economy by creating an active industrial policy in collaboration with business and unions. This long term policy focusses on sustainability and enjoys a high degree of consensus across the political divide. The political situation is stable and there is high democratic involvement at local level.

The shift to localism has been accompanied by an emphasis on sustainable economies to prevent overstretch and exposure to the exogenous shocks of global markets.

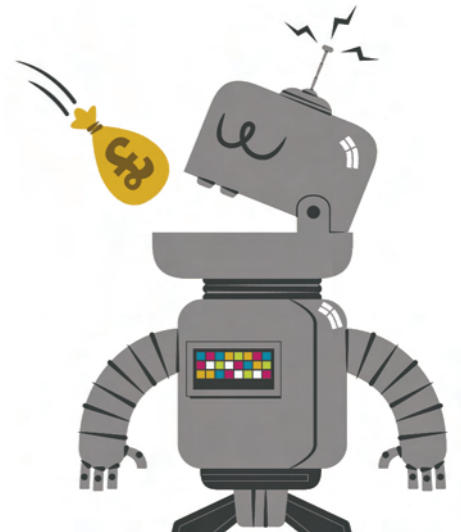
The consolidation of local economies has been driven by devolved regional assemblies where local private sector stakeholders share a platform with elected representatives and public sector leaders. Together they hone and shape funding allocations as well as decide on local skills systems. A major aim of regional assemblies has been to achieve self-sufficiency in terms of energy production and promoting local food production.

Universities as local community hubs

As part of the active industrial policy, universities are delivering courses dictated by initiatives set out by regional assemblies that vice-chancellors sit on. They are also funded by government to play a wider role in their community. With limited government resources, however, local post-secondary institutions have merged so that there is one per locality to deliver the required skills and activities.

The shape of the university sector is controlled by the local assemblies with one of each 'type' of university allowed in each region. Courses and student numbers are determined by the government's industrial policy, taking into consideration the long term needs of sectors and public services in that locality. This leads to a focus on delivering students trained for planned jobs. Much of this training is done in collaboration with their potential future employer. Similarly, the research agenda is focused on economic and social issues requiring a technological solution.

Universities are at the heart of their local communities. They provide residents with leisure services, evening classes, library access and technology use, which for many has become unaffordable.





uni_wifi

Scenario C: Collaborative Society & Growing Economy

The broader outlook

An expansion in innovation and creative industries, including digital and technology sectors, has delivered economic growth to complement the recovering financial services industry.

The exponential expansion of these sectors is contributing to cultural change enhancing worldwide understanding and collaboration. Government, business and individuals have a global outlook. Trade and environmental agreements contribute to a high degree of consensus on disparate issues.

Regulations are now more often sought and established at global institutions rather than within national jurisdictions.

Global Networks

Globally connected universities offering student-tailored courses are the norm. Prospective students hope to enter a network of international universities rather than a single institution. Networks have been formalised by universities creating global brands of alliances

that have supplanted the appeal of the individual institution.

These networks collaborate on everything from course design to research. Research collaboration is on a global scale with multi-disciplinary teams working on projects funded from multiple governments and business. Students from different universities within the same network can attend the same lecture in their own particular university theatres or at home whilst simultaneously holding a worldwide debate with their peers on the course content. Students expect to be able to move seamlessly between institutions throughout their studies and receive tutorials from their professors around the world.

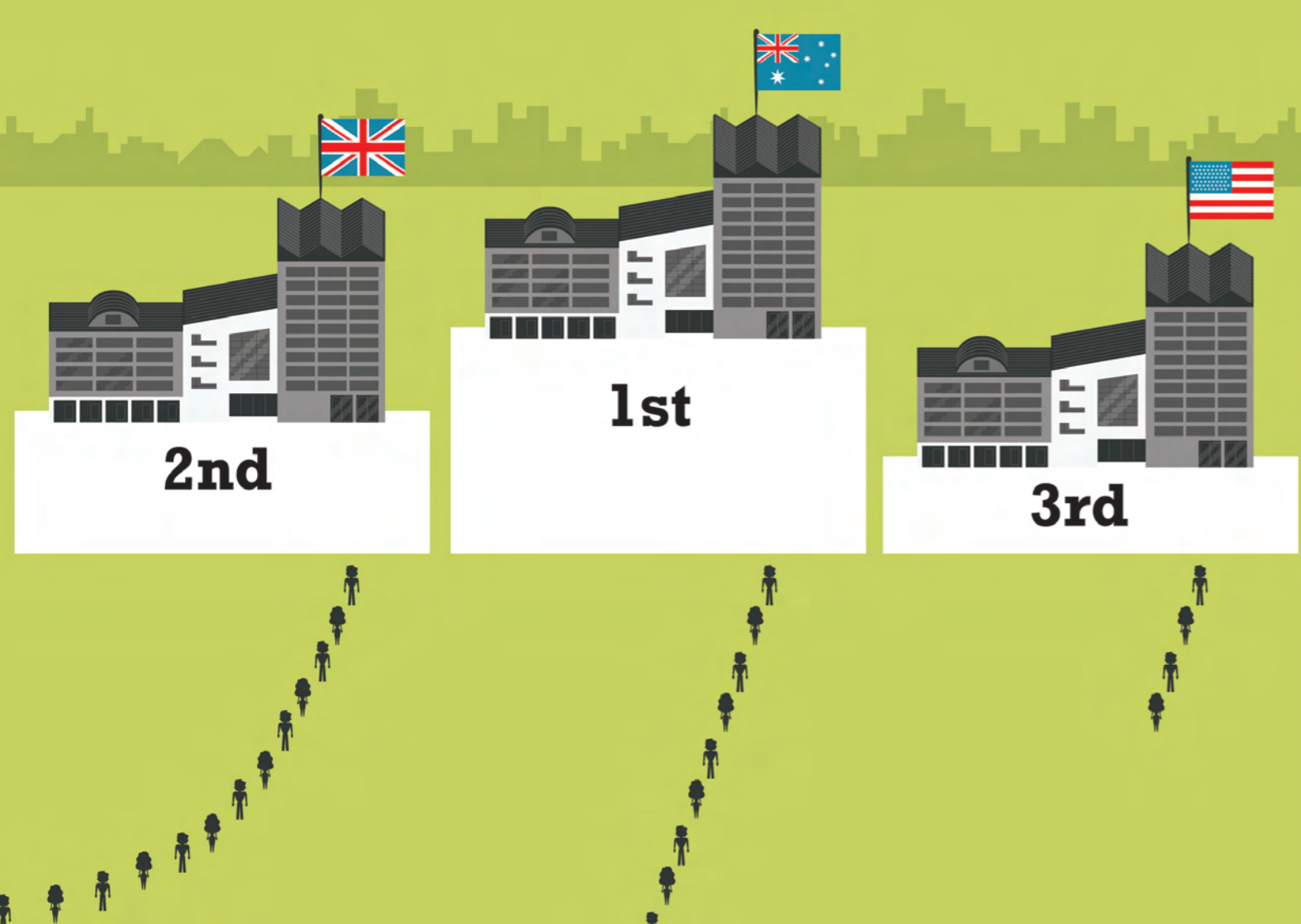
The innovative economy is demanding individuals with a high degree of understanding of an academic subject and also the skills to collaborate across professions. This has led to many mixed and post-graduate degrees. In conjunction with the high degree of personalisation demanded by students, university networks are able to bring the

strengths of departments together to provide the variety and specialisation required for research.

Technology savvy is essential to operate in the job market. This has conflated vocational and academic higher education. There is now a need to train staff to remain current with innovations in the market. This constant up-skilling has had the added effect of enhancing participation in higher education.

Those universities that are able to adapt and build international networks will flourish, with some early advantage for those with strong brands if they are able to build on this initial market advantage. New strong players will emerge. Universities that are locally-focussed or inward looking will struggle.





uni_market

Scenario D: Competitive Society & Growing Economy

The broader outlook

Widespread economic growth is restored and a reinvigorated market-centric approach has returned to dominate world affairs. The world's political and economic landscape has become increasingly characterised by competing global blocs. Economic growth is being driven by rapid technological advances and new high-tech industries. Higher education is an important gateway for creating the skills that enhance the competitiveness and productivity of each nation. The job market is highly reliant on the skills that are provided through higher education.

Global competition

Higher education is more than ever viewed as a strategic device to gain competitive advantage. The government has highly targeted investment in research and university places that will enable the UK to compete. Research funding becomes highly selective in terms of both quality and the direct economic impact of research.

The government targets some public funding to subsidise university places for the highest achieving school leavers but leaves the rest open to market competition. Given the very high demand for higher education, the majority of institutions derive nearly all of their funding from non-subsidised, student fees. Highly reputed courses, offering access to highly paid jobs, are able to charge the highest fees. Institutional brands will play a role but smaller, specialist, high-end providers will come into this highly-profitable market. Competition is now global as institutions from growth blocs feature in equal measure in world higher education rankings. English institutions and their international rivals are now competing for resources in the UK by building their best academics and research into global brands.

The most obvious manifestation of this transnational competition has been in the proliferation of overseas campuses. These overseas arms serve to attract funding in high

growth markets and appeal to prospective students with the promise of an enriching experience.

Conversely, elite overseas universities have set up campuses here. Universities have become increasingly specialist to enhance their appeal in this crowded and highly competitive higher education market. Universities are forced to narrow their focus to improve the quality of teaching and research, enhance their prospects of winning grants and attract the best students. Market forces ensure that those institutions that are not globally competitive fail.



university_vision is about starting a conversation to explore the issues and challenges facing universities in the future. We want to ask the big questions about how and where universities need to position themselves to deliver the knowledge, networks and communities our country needs.

university_vision has been a collaborative project led by University Alliance, an organisation that provides policy solutions and advocacy on behalf of 24 business-engaged universities.

Join us in a debate that will help shape universities and the success of our nation.

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www.unialliance.ac.uk



www.universityvision.org.uk