“I don't think the impact of the Assembly will be limited to the Assembly”: An evaluation of the University of Westminster Climate Assembly 2026

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I. Introduction

This report provides an evaluation of the University of Westminster Climate Assembly (UWCA) that was held in early 2026. The UWCA is citizen’s assembly in a higher education setting in the UK to bring together students, academics, professional services and contractors selected by democratic lottery to learn, deliberate and make recommendations on climate action. The recommendations and more extensive details of the assembly can be found at https://blog.westminster.ac.uk/uwca/.

This evaluation report was funded by the University of Westminster Students-as-Researchers scheme. As the name suggests, students are at the heart of this work, analysing data from surveys, undertaking interviews, engaging in participant observation and synthesising their findings into this report. Other students have created case studies of a number of university assemblies across Europe on the global platform Participedia, captured photographic and drawn representations of the assembly in process and produced a film of the experience of participants in the assembly project. Examples of this work can be found on the assembly website and Participedia.

This report has five sections:

- Brief explanation of the how the UWCA worked
- Methodology of the evaluation
- Survey and interview evaluation
- Observation evaluation

- Brief response from an organiser's perspective

The report will also be available in more user-friendly graphic formats. See https://blog.westminster.ac.uk/uwca/evaluation/.

II. How did the UWCA work?

The UWCA is an example of a citizens' assembly. It had 42 members who met over 6 sessions to learn, deliberate and come to recommendations on how the University should take action on the climate crisis.

Organisers and funding

The UWCA was not commissioned by University of Westminster senior management. Rather it was the idea of Ro Spankie (Architecture + Cities) and Graham Smith (Social Sciences) who received £100,000 from the Quintin Hogg Trust to deliver the project over two years. They were joined by Yasmin Kulasi (Westminster Business School). Graham Smith was awarded £12K by the Students-as-Researchers scheme to support evaluation and research around the UWCA.

The core team appointed Sarah Allan, a professional deliberative facilitator, to lead the design and delivery of the assembly; Anwen Elias to lead liaison and onboarding of the Assembly Members; and the Sortition Foundation to support the selection of Members.

We estimate that around 200 people have engaged directly with the work of the UWCA as facilitators, witnesses, logistics, communications, advisory group, evaluation and research. See 'Who we are' on the UWCA website for a graphic representation of the wider UWCA community.

Recruitment

Assembly members were selected by democratic lottery – so that the UWCA looked like the wider university community and it was not just the most climate committed and engaged who took part.

Half of the assembly members were students. The other half were academics, professional service colleagues and contractors.

In the first step, invitations were sent out to all members of the university community. Students were contacted through Blackboard (our learning platform). Academics and professional services received an email invitation. Contractors (caterers, cleaners, security) were handed letters. Those who were interested in participating registered their details and some background information.

In the second step, 42 assembly members were randomly selected using stratified sampling to ensure that the final assembly resembled the wider university population in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability, attitude towards climate change, college (academics and students), directorate (professional services), year of study (students), level of seniority (academics and professional services).

Recruitment was supported by the Sortition Foundation.

Structure of sessions

Session 1 (4 hours). Introduction to the assembly and climate change

Session 2 (4 hours). Learning about university emissions and preparing for climate change. Selecting priority areas for further work.

Session 3 (6 hours). Learning about teaching and professional development; research and knowledge exchange; community and culture. Selecting priority areas for further work.

Session 4 (4 hours). Deliberating on emissions from ICT and AI (topic chosen by assembly members). Drafting recommendations.

Session 5 (6 hours). Deliberating on teaching and professional development and community and culture (topics chosen by assembly members). Drafting recommendations.

Session 6 (4 hours). Confirming recommendations

Launch of recommendations

While the UWCA was not formally commissioned by the University, senior management has been very supportive of the initiative.

The Vice Chancellor and two of the Deputy Vice Chancellors were present when the UWCA Recommendations were launched on Earth Day, 22 April 2026

The Sustainable Development Goals Coordinating Group has taken on the responsibility of monitoring the implementation of the UWCA Recommendations

The Vice Chancellor has committed to bring the Assembly back together on Earth Day 2027 to review progress.

III. Methodology of the evaluation

A mixed methods approach was adopted to inform the evaluation, ensuring that a wide range of perspectives and experiences were gathered from those involved across the

whole assembly project – not just assembly members. The methods used are described below.

Survey

In the final assembly session, 20 assembly members completed a short survey encompassing a mix of closed and open questions about their experience of the assembly.

Speech Bubble Feedback

At the end of the last session of the assembly, 30 members were invited to fill in two speech bubbles, answering two questions: "think about what it's been like to take part in the assembly" and "think about what could happen at our university, now that the assembly sessions are coming to an end. What do you hope happens next?"

Interviews

Interviews were conducted by two members of the research team with individuals involved across the whole assembly. The breakdown of those interviewed was as follows:

- Assembly member – student: 3
- Assembly member – professional services: 5
- Assembly member – academic: 2
- Facilitator – student: 2
- Team lead (spoke at the assembly and will be responsible for responding to recommendations): 3
- Organiser: 2

The interviews explored themes related to the participants' role in the assembly, their experiences of group dynamics, dealing with disagreements and future actions from the assembly.

Observation

Two members of the research team conducted a non-participant observation of the assembly through all 6 sessions. Organisers informed members that observers were present, and they wore blue lanyards to indicate their status. The observation was guided by predetermined themes of participation, power, processes, idea generation and the alignment with intentions. The observations were focused on both plenary sessions of the assembly and when members worked in smaller groups. Whilst care was taken to record observations accurately and without privileging particular events or perspectives, the position of researchers as non-participant observers means that the

reflections should be understood as necessarily partial and situated, rather than as an objective account of the assemblies.

IV. Survey and Interview Evaluation

By Hannah Fabian (PhD Researcher) and Krystal Douglas-Dodd (Impact and Evaluation Officer - Centre for Education and Teaching Innovation). Data analysis of surveys undertaken by Michelle Mohaimen (Undergraduate Student)

i. Introduction

The evaluation is divided into two sections. Initially, we reflect on the positive experiences of the assembly process. Then we present areas where the perspectives of respondents suggest some room for improvement that should be considered for future assemblies.

The sections are structured chronologically, focusing on different aspects of the assembly processes from the beginning (the organisation prior to the assembly meetings), middle (during the assembly meetings) and end (what happens after the assembly).

ii. Positive Reflections

Data from the survey showed that members rated their experience of the assembly very positively (4.25/5) and definitely enjoyed being part of the assembly (4.8/5).

<u>Beginning</u>

Recruitment Process/ Willingness to commit time to participation

Members acknowledged that the assembly required a lot of their time, but as this was communicated well through the recruitment process, their expectations were set and they were happy to take part in the six sessions:

"I did think it was quite a big commitment, so I didn't sign up for it straight away, but I had more of a think about it and I thought not only was it something I was interested in, but I thought it would be a good opportunity to meet, to network" (Assembly Member, Professional Services)

"the e-mail I got confirming everything, all the communication was really good, I then became more excited about being part of it because I realised the depth of it… I think it spurred me on more because… I knew it was quite a big commitment, I think realising that yes, it was a big commitment, but that's not being done lightly…" (Assembly Member, Professional Services)

"Timings wise, I felt like it was fine. Yeah, I don't feel like it dragged on too much. Yeah, I don't. I don't mind really about time." (Assembly Member, Student)

Participation across the University

A prevalent theme across the evaluation process, was that members valued the novel opportunity to interact and work with other members from across the whole university. Both members and organisers acknowledged that the assembly's diversity was representative of the wider student and staff body at the university.

"Gaining more diverse perspectives from people in different courses, academic subjects, and other university functions, and other cultures. Made the most of our uni's diversity." (Assembly Member, Student)

"But anyway, but then afterwards I thought, no, actually, that's one of the great things about this assembly, that people who are not massively motivated by the issues around climate change have still spent those six sessions hearing about it, talking to other people about it." (Assembly Member, Academic)

"*Meeting people from all walks of life and social backgrounds and discovering commonalities regarding climate change"* (Assembly Member, Academic)

"Meeting a wider cross-section of staff and (brilliant) students" (Assembly Member, Unknown Background)

*"It has been very empowering to meet so many individuals who are keen about interdisciplinary events towards climate action allowing us to break away from our 'silos' which separate us." (*Assembly Member, Academic*)*

"*The main takeaway for me was…getting the opportunity to spend time with students, actually, because my role doesn't interact with undergrads at all. I don't come into any contact with them"* (Assembly Member, Professional)

"I really enjoyed meeting people from across the university. I think it was a really rare opportunity in that regard…You know, there was a security guard there. They were people from the university's publishing house. They were people working in like the wider university admin. I also appreciate that I got to speak to people who are directly on the sustainability team." (Assembly Member, Student)

Training student (and staff) facilitators

Integrating staff and students into the facilitation of the assembly was acknowledged and appreciated by members and organisers.

"The facilitators were great. And I was very patient. And I understand that for a lot of the facilitators, especially the young ones, they hadn't done it before and it was nerve-wracking for them" (Assembly Member, Academic)

"the facilitators were skilled, and I know some of the facilitators were students, and it was evident that they were doing a really good job and, you know, with an amazing variety of people as well. So, yeah, it was an impressive thing to witness." (Team Lead, Professional Services)

*"I always had a different facilitator and they were from very different backgrounds. And so every time I had my day with a facilitator, it was a unique experience. And the facilitators brought their perspective, whether they were students, whether they were teachers from the business school. Yeah, it was all good." (*Assembly Member, Academic)

"I'm constantly impressed by our students. I think that they, yeah, really, we attract very special people to this institution. But it also gives you some hope for the future, because it means if students can be confident in that space, maybe we can do it again." (Team Lead, Professional Services)

Middle

Space

Members and other participants valued the opportunity to visit the different university campuses for each of the assembly sessions.

"*it was good that you organised it in different campuses. So, because it's not only that students don't travel between the campuses, but our staff members don't do it either. So just to see different campuses and feel what the university is about."* (Assembly Member, Professional Services)

"*I thought it was good that we were going through different campuses, seeing different parts of the buildings, especially the architecture studios in Marylebone. That was really nice because I know a lot of us hadn't been there before as members. And yeah, and it's a good opportunity to see different campuses."* (Assembly Member, Professional Services)

"*The only one thing was some of the places are a bit too far away. So, yeah, it did take me a good two-hour journey to make it there….but I enjoyed the aspect of trying to see the different campuses"* (Assembly Member, Student)

Ensuring Voice

Both members and facilitators acknowledged the influence of pre-existing hierarchies that reflect wider university structures and that may have impacted on the confidence of some members to contribute. However, efforts and rules were in place to reduce these influences; participants acknowledged that the assembly felt like a safe space, where facilitators and other peers encouraged members to share their ideas. This was

particularly valued by members of the assembly who described themselves as typically more withdrawn within group settings.

"I did have to facilitate quite strongly at one point where a professional services person was very, very quiet and not being really, not really being given a voice. And yeah, I sensed that there was, that that was a kind of hierarchical thing." (Facilitator, Student)

"I mean, I think if you wanted to contribute, you had the opportunity to do that. I think it's true to say, and this was my experience alone, it's true to say that some people were there, some people were more engaged than others, but everyone had the opportunity to participate for sure." (Assembly Member, Professional)

"*The whole design of the assembly was to eliminate power dynamics and make everybody equal... I didn't see any like uneven or unfair power dynamics because the structure didn't allow for that."* Assembly Member, Academic)

"There were rules, for example, letting everyone speak. And then there were rules, for example, if someone's like making a viewpoint, then respecting that. And, if you don't agree with it, then there's a way of doing it, not being disrespectful... And the facilitators made sure to ensure those rules were implemented." (Assembly Member, Student)

"I suppose it was only I noticed that the students had to be specifically encouraged to say things, most of them, not all of them, but most of them. That was the only thing I noticed really. But mostly that was done quite well, so quite often someone else in the group. would say specifically to the students in the group, what do you think about that" (Assembly Member, Academic)

"I think everyone was trying to be very comfortable, trying to get people to come out of their shells, which I really liked, because I usually stay in my shell. But getting that opportunity to...be put on the spot, but not in a bad way was very important to kind of get that opinion out or see what other people who are quiet would say. No, I appreciate it" (Assembly Member, Student)

"*But there are times where so many people are more opinionated that it overpowers, and I guess shadows other people. So one time I had the facilitator... But she helped me kind of get my point across and kind of put a stop to the, I guess, opinionated people."* (Assembly Member, Student)

"the facilitator made notes on, you know, maybe these can be recommendations for these topics, for example, and he made sure like everyone was heard, like, you know, both staff and students were heard and there was no like bias. So I feel like they kind of handled the situation well." (Assembly Member, Student)

"*So like their viewpoints were kind of, you know, not the same. But of course, it was like still respectful, like, as was said, like they were still listening to each other's viewpoints, giving their views."* (Assembly Member, Student)

End

Wider impacts to taking part

Participants shared many wider benefits they gained from being part of the assembly.

"Awareness of the consequences of climate change. The whole assembly sessions changed my life habit. I'm getting more attentive in saving energy and environmentally friendly" (Assembly Member, Unknown Background)

"I thought it [the assembly] *would sort of help me improve that and improve my teaching and maybe give me access to new information or new ways of looking at this situation* {climate change}*, just because I've been looking at it my way with nobody else's help."* (Assembly Member, Academic)

"Everything was a learning experience and also dealing with people who I would never normally deal with in my regular life. So it was all positive, yes." (Assembly Member, Academic)

"at the beginning, I was quite curious about sustainability, climate action, but I didn't know that much about it…after the climate assembly ended, I felt more motivated and more interested in making an impact myself… I want to learn more… I actually want to do something as well now to help with climate action in the future." (Assembly Member, Student)

Sense of ownership

Participants valued that their ideas, formed through collaboration with fellow staff and students, had the potential to make a difference to university processes.

"I'd say I wanted to mainly participate because I wanted my voice to be like heard. Because in general, you know, you don't get this opportunity where as a student, your voice gets heard and people actually want to hear your viewpoints." (Assembly Member, Student)

"And I think the strength in the assembly is the very fact that it is a way of bringing together people who may not be directly involved in decisions that could impact not just them, but the institution as a whole." (Team Lead, Professional Services)

Implementable recommendations

The survey showed that members "expected the assembly's recommendations to lead to meaningful changes in the way the university takes action on climate change" (4.45/5).

Interviewees expected that the final recommendations could be feasibly incorporated into the university, acknowledging that bureaucracy may slow down the process of adoption. They hope the momentum from the assembly continues, to ensure that the recommendations are adopted.

*"... It's not the case that the assembly has generated a load of unrealisable, idealistic things that can't be implemented. The reverse is true, actually. They're very practical, achievable wins and I think they will be wins" (*Team Lead, Professional Services)

"I hope that our university takes meaningful action and works on climate change action thoroughly" (Assembly Member, Student*)*

*"it was good to keep momentum going, to form something like a forum that continues to look at university activities and politics, and to make recommendations" (*Assembly Member, Professional Services)

"Well, I hope it continues. I think that would be the biggest. win really, because the implementation of the recommendations, the recommendations are just the beginning....the really hard work starts now with the implementation." (Assembly Member, Professional Services)

"I hope that assembly recommendations receive positive feedback from the wider university community. I also hope that the university will empower staff and students to continue with the work that assembly focused on" (Assembly Member, Unknown Background)

Future use of assemblies

Members agreed that "citizens' assemblies are an effective way of engaging the university community in decision making" (4.5/5).

Both assembly members and organisers valued the assembly and hoped that similar opportunities for deliberation would be created in the future; whether this is for discussions around the climate or other topics. Participants also shared that they hoped the assembly methodology would be adopted by other institutions.

"I mean, maybe to repeat it as a climate assembly, maybe to use the assembly as a space of process through which to inform other areas of the institution's activity and priorities. Yeah, I think to me, it has proved its worth as a democratic device.....I hope that this assembly will be repeated in some form and I think that it will also help us consider other means by which we might democratise the institution. So to give all of the members of our learning communities more agency, more abilities to make decisions, to empower them in various ways. So I don't think the impact of the Assembly will be limited to the Assembly" (Team Lead, Academic)

*"That all of this doesn't stop here, this way of negotiation and conversation has to continue! I hope that this new way (at least for me) of talking, can be implemented into a structure that then can be matched with any topic assigned to it" (*Assembly Member, Professional Services)

*"I think we should encourage others to get involved and contribute their ideas towards this. We could also collaborate with other specialists and universities to share ideas. Spread the message to all university campuses so our message is heard" (*Assembly Member, Academic)

iii. Room for Improvement: Considerations for Future Assemblies

<u>Beginning</u>

Make sure spaces are suitable

Although participants enjoyed travelling to different campuses, they added that considerations need to be made for which venues are chosen.

"*Venue, not that Regent's Hall, because it's so hot , the sound is hypnotizing. It's so weird. Just not that hall. But I really like the idea of making them in different campuses, because this might be, for some staff especially, this might be the only reason why they ever go to other campuses."* (Assembly Member, Professional Services)

"we had to move rooms because all groups were in one room and you just and they had people videoing in video links in and you just couldn't hear anything. So though it was a bit kind of disrupted by like physically having to move from one space to another" (Facilitator, Student, with reference to Marylebone Campus)

"we were in that quite small room that backed onto the lift shaft and that was just unbearable…just being able to kind of go to a different space was so much better." (Assembly Member, Professional Services, with reference to Harrow Campus)

"And speaking to the point about some of the rooms not being fit for purpose, I think, you know, it can kind of get a bit some of like the Fyvie Hall, the location, for example, can get a bit noisy and quite claustrophobic." (Assembly Member, Professional Services)

Improving administrative processes

Both organisers and facilitators shared frustrations around administrative issues, in particular, payment:

"*All the researchers, all the facilitators, all logistics people, I think we probably got 50 or 60 people being paid, maybe more than that. And we as like people who are really time*

deficient and quite senior members of staff were having to do all that work because we weren't able to ask students to do that because it's not, you're not allowed to do that. That's madness, absolute madness" (Organiser)

"running citizens assemblies has a lot of admin attached to it and it has a lot of admin in a university context too." (Organiser)

"it took us a very, very long time to get out of the uni, how people could be paid" (Organiser)

"I think the payment would be one of the biggest issues for facilitators" (Facilitator, Student)

Middle

Improve facilitator confidence and capability

Members of the assembly found that sometimes the facilitators lacked the skills to encourage discussion and conversation, potentially due to a lack in confidence or experience.

"It was a learning experience for the facilitators as well, but on occasionally that meant that it slightly impeded the group dynamics and what the group is doing." (Assembly member, Academic)

"I think more of the facilitators don't know what they were doing. They were given that book...When it's people who don't know what they're doing, they're going to ask questions to facilitators. And I understand that. But I think the instructions on the booklet should have been a bit more clearer." (Assembly Member, Student)

"But some of the facilitators were, and I don't mean this negatively, they were just young and inexperienced and they weren't able to know how to pull information out of people, which is extremely hard." (Assembly Member, Academic)

"But once or twice I felt the facilitators were a bit out of their depth.... kind of managing the group really and getting it going, you know, getting it going" (Assembly Member, Academic)

Organisers and facilitators agreed that extra training throughout the assembly may have improved facilitator confidence.

"I would say in terms of a mismatch, from the training and the actual experience of facilitating was what we did in each session, like what I facilitated was quite different, to the training that we got in terms of actual facilitation and kind of condensing the information. I wasn't that clear in my session what I was meant to be condensing in terms of information." (Facilitator, Student)

"I understand why there wasn't that much time for the facilitation training. I would probably look to reconvene the facilitators about halfway through the assembly to do a bit of a, to do one extra session on kind of what they've done and prepare them more for the recommendation writing phase of the assembly." (Organiser)

More flexibility in agenda and discussions

Participants perceived that they had enough information to make good decisions (4.3/5) but shared that they sometimes found the assembly design a little rigid. Questions were raised around the initial agenda and structure which limited the ability to discuss anything other than pre-selected topics.

"So what became clear in the first meeting was that a lot of work had been done already to delimit what we were doing, what we were doing over the course of the meetings, the assemblies. And it meant that some of the things that I knew going into it, I was most interested in talking about and exploring wouldn't be possible... I wanted to know about the university's investments and whether it has investments in fossil fuels. And there was nowhere that that could be. I did ask it in discussion, and I brought it up, but... the things that we were choosing between had already been set up" (Assembly Member, Academic)

"Well, I suppose that we would be setting the agenda, whereas the agenda had already really been set in terms of the areas that we were discussing....No, not at all, not at all an explanation of where they came from." (Assembly Member, Academic)

"I think in a way we could have had less like PowerPoint slides and maybe less of a super structured environment and more of like some more time to talk about things." (Assembly Member, Student)

"sometimes we'd get to a point where we'd have a really interesting point in the discussion where like, at least I felt like I was almost getting to a point where I could change someone's mind or we were sort of reaching instances. And then the facilitator was like, all right, now we have to move on to the next thing." ((Assembly Member, Professional Services)

One participant added that the structure of the assembly resulted in radical and novel ideas being lost:

"think the recommendations got diluted. I think the first three weeks were fantastic to generate ideas, but what we ended up with was too filtered. And I think the radical ideas, the more original ideas, I think they disappeared when people started having conversations and people getting involved. I think it killed some really interesting ways of thinking." (Assembly Member, Academic)

Make the most of the time

Some members found that the sessions sometimes felt rushed with too much information to discuss within the session timeframe. The organisers also agreed that the timing could have been adjusted to be more effective, suggesting changing some of the scheduling.

"*So with more time, you can always do more. I think we ended up doing the voting after session 6 rather than during session 6. And I think we should have planned to do that from the start, that we had maximum use of the time in session 6." (*Organiser)

"quite rigidly timetabled and the in the room organizers did their best to keep to that timetable, it still felt quite rushed at times and quite occasionally, I'm not going to say this is true of the whole thing, but occasionally it felt kind of a bit chaotic. And I think that's because of just trying to just kind of get so much stuff done." (Assembly Member, Professional Services)

*"And it was quite ambitious to try and do as much as we did in those six sessions. And I don't know whether that's, there's obviously a sweet spot really in terms of time available, resourcing available, amount you want to cover. They always seem to be quite, there always seem to be quite, there was always a point in each session where things were getting kind of rushed." (*Assembly Member, Professional Services)

"First three sessions could be more time efficient" (Assembly Member, check – No.43)

"I would liked more time to do more in-depth work with some subjects." (Assembly Member, Unknown Background)

Adjustments to the assembly design (activities)

Members and organisers commented that some of the chosen activities were not received positively by all members:

"I think some of the exercises were juvenile. I felt like a child sometimes. I felt… I think…Yeah, I just think some of the activities were juvenile and I think they could have done them differently." (Assembly Member, Academic)

"I also think that a session where they were just sort of talking about what the university has done was just a lot of, you know, lecture slides and people sort of repeating a lot of like corporate environmental stuff. And I didn't necessarily find it very useful. I thought that we could have used that session for more discussion" (Member, Student)

"Some of the ways we gave information I didn't think worked particularly well. I think some of them did and some of them didn't. Some of them worked for some things, not for others." (Organiser)

Engaging key stakeholders

Members suggested that they would have valued the integration of more guest speakers into the design of the assembly, as this was an aspect they particularly enjoyed.

"For me, the biggest highlight was the interactions with likeminded colleagues and students from various disciplines and levels. Hearing from our sustainability team and experts from the Manchester Met has also been very memorable" (Assembly Member, Academic)

"*bringing in maybe more guest speakers…but maybe just having some more at the end as well, just to like, or just the same ones, just to like, you know, ask them about how else the university can improve climate action."* (Assembly Member, Student)

Participants across the assembly also noted that key stakeholders should play a more active role in the planning, delivery and future direction of the assembly and its' recommendations.

"I hope that we can take advantage of those people (guest speakers) coming and have more interaction with them so we can implement more things at our university." (Assembly Member, Academic)

"*Well, I guess the only other thing would be maybe a conversation with, before the launch of the recommendations, maybe a conversation with the teams most impacted and that probably is the Sustainability team and then the ISSR or sort of IT team."* (Team Lead, Professional Services)

"what would have been…a much better, faster and more impactful process and also help build impact for the assembly… would have been to involve the sustainability team and others more directly in the design… to tap into their knowledge… It should start with talking to people internally, whether it's bringing them together or talking to individuals or a mixture…. It will be a lot faster, a lot more accurate, will engage people much earlier in the creation of the assembly." (Organiser)

End

Improve transparency over recommendation writing

Participants, both assembly members and witnesses, were at times confused around the final recommendations; asking for a clearer explanation on how they were formed.

"*What were the recommendations for me to the sessions and how did they feed into that final report? I would struggle to articulate that"* (Assembly Member, Professional Services)

"there was a point sort of part way through the meetings when I kind of lost track a bit of what it was we were meant to be talking about, not the wider issues, but you know, with that end of meeting and we decide on this or that. And somehow my recollection never quite met up with what we ended up talking about in the next meeting or the meeting after. And I'm aware that it wasn't a linear process I do understand that. But I'm not quite sure that the things we thought we were recommending earlier on, we kind of ever kind of came back to." (Assembly Member, Professional Services)

"But there was that disconnect between the bit we did in the room and then what happened subsequently…how did they actually come up with the recommendations that they came up with?" (Speaker, Professional Services)

More focus on follow-up

Additionally, members added that they would have liked more transparency on how the recommendations will be weaved into university processes.

"What would be nice would be if the kind of the, I'm not quite, is it the environmental sustainability people…but it would be nice if there was just like a visible response to the citizens assembly and the findings by, you know, further increasing the funding to that group." (Assembly Member, Professional Services)

"I wish they already showed us more on like how those things are going to be incorporated with the university." (Member, Student)

"I hope we get some sort of update either as a newsletter or as a talk on what has changed in our university after the assembly comes to an end" (Member, Student)

*"I hope for more visible evidence from this assembly and multiple more assembly's like such to get more recommendations within the future" (*Member, Student)

"Some feedback, accountability and actions regarding: Climate assembly's recommendations" (Member, Academic)

Some participants expressed concerns on how easily this will be done or communicated.

*"I think the difficulty is going to be, how do you integrate it with what's already going on? Has it become an embedded part, if you like, of that whole area of what is the university, what does the university stand for in relation to sustainability?" (*Speaker/Team Lead)

*"You've got to find the space to work out how to embed the new source of information or advice and discussion, and find the time you have to embed it and then genuinely embed it." (*Speaker/Team Lead)

*"But I also recognise that we're also going to come across up against limited resources, competing issues, competing claims on resources, competing claims on people's times. What's really important to me is that those recommendations are taken seriously and either they're adopted, they're modified in some way, or they're rejected, but the Assembly members and the wider community know why." (*Organiser)

*"There is enough support behind this initiative that we could definitely get the ball rolling. I don't know to what extent that's actually going to happen or how long it'll take." (*Member, Student)

V. Observation

By Ed Hadfield (PhD Researcher), Shenai Jorgia Fiore (Undergraduate Student)

Structured activities

The climate assembly sessions were highly structured. The sessions often began with the lead-facilitator providing assembly members with information about the agenda, which would then be followed by the smaller group and facilitator-directed activities and discussions. Members also took part in voting activities such as adding dots to topics on display, putting their hands up and online voting. Whilst there was a high degree of structure throughout the assemblies, members were given some freedom to choose their own groups and discuss the topics that were of most interest to them. In the activities that required more physical input such as moving around the room, members were often allowed to choose the extent to which they got involved.

The organisers acknowledged that they were providing members with a lot of information in the earlier sessions and as the assemblies proceeded members became more active. There were occasional instances when members appeared unclear about the processes, needed to ask for clarification, and needed more time to complete some of the activities. In some cases, this was accommodated, however on other occasions members appeared to be rushed.

Inclusivity and diversity

Promoting inclusion across all members, including staff, students, academics, and external stakeholders, was a crucial aim of the assembly. There was a concerted effort made to ensure that the assemblies were accommodating, which was emphasised by the lead facilitator at the start of each session, reminding the assembly that discrimination would not be tolerated. Critical but respectful communication was encouraged between members, emphasising the importance of respecting different experiences and viewpoints, which was reflected in the conversation guidelines that had been co-created with the assembly members.

The Vice Chancellor who had been invited to speak at the first and last assembly sessions, reinforced the importance of diversity, equality and empowerment, emphasising the institution's non-hierarchical structure, and a willingness to consider feedback and implement assembly recommendations.

Member engagement

Most members appeared engaged through the assembly, with visible signs of enjoyment during some of the activities. The atmosphere ranged from calm and reflective to lively and energetic. When organisers, facilitators or experts spoke, members appeared focused and participated in the conversations. In the reflective activities, members wrote on post it notes, booklets and added to flipcharts.

Members also took part in group discussions throughout the sessions, though some members spoke more than others. At times, facilitators were able to engage with quieter individuals and encourage them to contribute. Occasionally, one or two members appeared to be sitting outside of the main group circle, and some appeared to be on their phones, looking around the room or fidgeting. Nevertheless, members appeared to enjoy the small group discussions with most visibly members and some laughter. The volume in the room often grew noticeably louder during this small group discussions. Overall, these smaller group activities appeared to generate the most engagement, with a wider range of people speaking.

Experts and institutional actors

Experts were integrated into the assemblies in the form of Q&As and as roving experts. During the Q&As, members asked questions on a range of topics i.e., the reliability of climate projections, AI, unequal impacts of climate change and health impacts. At times there appeared to be a potential power imbalance between the expert speakers and assembly members, where, during the Q&As, the experts gave *their* opinion on what the university should be doing. This could be interpreted as directing members towards certain preferences however, this tension is somewhat inherent to the assembly model, where assembly members interact with experts. Whilst these Q&As were taking place, members appeared attentive.

During some of the small group discussions, roving experts were called over to the groups for the members to ask them questions. Groups occasionally had to wait for some time for a roving expert to join them, which in some cases held up their discussions. When they joined a group, members were able to ask questions and have follow up conversations. This appeared to be a less hierarchical way of interacting with experts because it allowed for a more discursive interaction.

Conclusion

Overall, the University of Westminster Climate Assembly was observed to be an inclusive and participatory space, designed to account for the structural hierarchies within which it was situated. Whilst such designs cannot fully escape these hierarchies, the assembly provided forums for discursive interaction between assembly members, expert speakers and the university. Increasing the opportunities for assembly members to set the agenda and choose the activities and groups they participate in could be a means for further democratising future assemblies. In addition, further use of small group activities and roving experts could also help increase participation in discussions between members and expert speakers.

VI. Brief reflections from an organiser's perspective

Graham Smith (Emeritus Professor)

The aim in this final section is to offer critical reflections on aspects of the UWCA through insights on the context within which we were working and the implications of strategic choices that were made. Many of our comments relate to issues raised earlier in this evaluation report; others reflect our direct experience. We hope that our reflections will prove useful for anyone who follow in our footsteps. We plan to work with the international UNIDELIB (Deliberating Universities) Network to develop a toolkit for other universities that are planning to organise assemblies.

We are appreciative of the positive comments from assembly members and other participants in the assembly project. The UWCA is without doubt a major highlight of our academic careers and we hope that its ramifications will be felt for years to come. We are grateful to our students and colleagues who gave so much of themselves in the delivery of the Assembly.

Time and space. A major constraint that we faced was the short time scale in which the assembly had to be delivered and the spaces available for the assembly sessions. While we had budget to employ an experienced design and facilitation lead (Sarah Allan) to undertake specific tasks, our own time was limited because of existing commitments to the university. That meant that the design and facilitation lead had to take on more tasks than expected – and we were not always available to support her fully in her work. In any future iteration, it is critical that staff are given dedicated time to deliver projects of this scale and complexity.

We were restricted as to the times we could organise the assembly because of other activities of the university (e.g. Open Days). We would have liked a longer first session to help us get through agenda prioritisation quicker (more below) and for the assembly

timetable to have more space between some sessions, especially during the recommendation writing phase (more below).

We wanted to make sure the UWCA visited the different university campuses as not all Assembly Members were aware of the different estates, but this meant that at times the rooms that we used were not well suited for Assembly activities.

Recruitment. We were delighted that so many students and colleagues were willing to give up 28 hours to participate as Assembly Members. In total over 300 students and colleagues put their names forward for the pool from which the assembly was selected. The vast majority of volunteers were students. This is because we were able to incentivise their participation through an honorarium – also available to part-time teaching staff and contractors. We had no similar incentive for full-time academic or professional service colleagues who thus volunteered in smaller numbers. We did not have time (or authority) to ensure that the assembly could be part of their formal workload (some managers were happy to give colleagues time in lieu, others less so). In future iterations, we need to ensure that colleagues have relevant incentives built into workload models.

Agenda setting. Some assembly members felt that the Assembly design constrained the potential agenda of the assembly. The degree to which organisers set the agenda of an assembly involves a difficult balance between deciding a topic in advance and giving free reign to assembly members. Our choice was to give Members background information across a range of university activities that have direct impact in the climate crisis before they made their choice as to which specific areas to work on in more depth to produce recommendations. The issues we selected were those areas where the university has significant greenhouse gas emissions, its preparation for adaptation, teaching, research and wider culture. While this is a broad spectrum of issues, we recognise our approach had two impacts. First, we did not provide enough space for other issues to emerge more organically. Second, half of the assembly sessions focused on selecting topics which left less space for deeper learning, deliberation and recommendation writing (more below).

Facilitation. Most citizens' assemblies use professional facilitators as it is a challenging set of practices. We wanted to give our students and colleagues the opportunity to learn and practice facilitation skills to build the capacity for facilitation across the university community. This had two implications. First, the time of our design and facilitation lead to dedicate to training and capacity building was limited and took place before the assembly began. If we had time and budget, we would have had a further training session during the assembly itself so that students and colleagues could reflect together after having practiced facilitation. Second, professional facilitators would have been more efficient in completing tasks in the constrained time – in particular,

supporting recommendation writing is a difficult process that arguably required more capacity building for our facilitation team.

Development of recommendations. The time available for recommendation writing was limited (because of earlier decisions we made about agenda-setting – see above) and the final sessions were very close to each other which meant we were not able to involve Assembly Members between sessions in collating ideas and working on drafts. It was the responsibility of the design and facilitation lead to do this work between sessions.

The lack of time between sessions also meant that it was difficult to get detailed feedback from relevant stakeholders and teams across the university on draft recommendations in their areas of competence and responsibility.

In future iterations, more time between assembly sessions would allow the creation of an assembly writing group that could take more responsibility for working on drafts between sessions and for more structured feedback from key stakeholders on emerging themes.

Follow-up. We are delighted that the SDG Coordinating Group has taken on responsibility for overseeing the response to and implementation of recommendations. We had intended to involve the assembly members in a structured discussion on how they wanted to work after the formal assembly had ended – for example, taking on implementation and oversight roles. But the time in the final session was too limited.

The assembly also ended close to the end of the semester, which meant that the undergraduate student members were less available (initially because of final coursework deadlines and then the summer break). We hope to re-engage motivated members and other project participants in the new academic year - we have some QHT funds to support student-centred projects around the implementation of recommendations.

In future iterations, we will ensure that post-assembly engagement is built into the design more explicitly.

Administration. The QHT funding source does not allow spend on administrators to support processes like payment of students – or allow transfer of funds to an external partner to distribute payments. Too much of the organisers' times was often focused on basic administrative tasks. This is a waste of resources and led to frustration amongst some participants as payments were delayed. We strongly recommend that QHT allows spend on administration to free up organisers for more creative work.