Summary of the Engagement Evaluations

Overall assessment

The engagement received consistently positive feedback. Of the **11 evaluation entries, six rated it "Excellent" and five rated it "Good,"** with no lower ratings. Two entries from Durban University of Technology are identical; treating these as a single response leaves 10 distinct evaluations, comprising six "Excellent" and four "Good" ratings. The findings therefore indicate strong satisfaction among those who submitted evaluations, although they should not be assumed to represent all attendees.

Motivations for attending

Respondents were primarily motivated by the relevance of the engagement to higher education's social responsibilities and the need for institutional change. Interests included the social compact between universities and society, sustainable development, student success, transformation, leadership, and community participation. Several responses reflected concern about inequality and the importance of involving communities meaningfully in university decision-making. Participants also sought fresh perspectives on how their own roles could contribute to the future of higher education.

Most valued aspects

The quality, relevance, and breadth of the speakers' contributions were central strengths. Respondents described the discussions as insightful, thought-provoking, timely, and grounded in the realities facing higher education. They appreciated the complementary perspectives across the engagement's three pillars and the speakers' responses to questions.

Substantively, participants valued the focus on institutional accountability to society, inclusive university–community partnerships, student challenges, access and success, and funding opportunities. The discussion's willingness to address difficult transformation issues—including the gap between existing policies and effective implementation—was particularly welcomed. One respondent also highlighted the recognition of Professor Gerwel's contribution to higher education transformation.

Delivery attracted positive comments about organisation, time management, moderation, transitions between speakers, and sound quality. Zoom captions were specifically valued by a respondent whose second language is English, demonstrating the importance of accessible participation.

Areas for improvement

Most respondents identified no least valuable aspect or gave no substantive criticism. Nevertheless, the evaluations highlighted opportunities for improvement.

One respondent noted that participants could ask questions through the chat but could not contribute their views directly, suggesting a need for more interactive discussion. Another missed consideration of artificial intelligence's impact on higher education. A further response raised leadership effectiveness in moving from stakeholder engagement to genuine partnerships for policy co-creation as an area of concern.

Suggested follow-up themes

Respondents proposed several directions for future engagements:

- **Partnerships and governance:** Reducing university bureaucracy, strengthening shared-value creation, developing public–private partnerships, and enabling meaningful community involvement.
- **Student access and funding:** Addressing the "missing middle" and barriers to student success.
- **Teaching quality and staff development:** Exploring how teaching quality affects student development and considering formal higher education qualifications for academic staff, including a Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education.
- **Policy and institutional change:** Connecting discussions to the revision of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF), institutional culture, and perspectives from different university types.
- **Technology and societal contribution:** Examining the relationship between artificial intelligence and higher education, research impact, and community engagement.

Conclusion

The evaluations suggest that the engagement provided a valuable platform for discussing higher education's social compact and transformation responsibilities. Future sessions could build on its strong content and facilitation by creating more opportunities for participant contributions and focusing on practical approaches to implementation, partnership-building, and student support.