

# MISSION TO THE FUTURE

HOW AND WHY UK POLITICS MUST EMBRACE LONG-TERMISM



Briefing note for parliamentarians | May 2025

**SUMMARY:** A new [report](#) by the [Fairness Foundation](#) looks at why we need long-termism in UK politics and how to achieve it, drawing on international case studies and assessing how to overcome barriers to change. It recommends establishing a Future Generations Commissioner and launching a National Dialogue on the Future. [Browse the report online](#) | [Read the PDF version](#)

## Summary

UK politics is focused on short-term crises, at the expense of thinking about and acting on long-term problems. Among other things, this is a barrier to building a fairer society, undermining opportunity and growth and damaging our democracy and our society more broadly. Thinking and acting in the long term is possible, as the Welsh government has proven over the last decade, and brings multiple benefits. Many of today's thorniest political problems in the UK would have been ameliorated, if not averted, had previous government paid more attention to long term issues. There are a range of institutional, systemic and psychological barriers to thinking and acting in the long term, but there are also many practical solutions that can help to overcome those barriers.

## Why we need long-termism

We believe that the government is overestimating the political and economic risks of focusing on the long term, while underestimating the benefits. The costs of short-termism are significant, and undermine the government's missions, as well as damaging our democracy and weakening social cohesion:

- Economic stagnation due to underinvestment in infrastructure and wasted talent
- Widening inequalities and reduced opportunity and societal resilience
- Environmental degradation and missed net zero targets
- Political disengagement and weakened trust in institutions

Short-term political thinking creates a negative feedback loop, raising levels of inequality, which increases societal vulnerability to shocks, which exacerbates the severity of immediate crises, which increases the pressure for quick fixes, which undermines the prospects for thinking and acting in the long term.

## How to reorientate UK politics towards the long term

We have identified three barriers to effective long-term thinking in government:

- The machinery of government lacks the leadership, skills, and capacity for long-term policymaking
- The public is not engaged in long-term policy design
- Psychological barriers make it difficult to prioritise future generations' interests

The Welsh [Wellbeing of Future Generations Act](#) (2015) addresses these issues by placing a statutory duty on government and public sector bodies to improve the long-term social, economic, cultural, and environmental wellbeing of Wales. In the UK context we make two recommendations for immediate action, learning from Wales: appointing a Future Generations Commissioner, and launching a National Dialogue on the Future.

## Suggested parliamentary questions

- To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what consideration has been given to the appointment of a Future Generations Commissioner to lead on intergenerational fairness and sustainable development.
- To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office whether the civil service has the necessary culture, skills and training to ensure that policy advice and implementation pays due regard to long-term considerations.
- To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether she has had any recent discussions with Cabinet colleagues on the merits of expanding the provisions of the 'Wellbeing of Future Generations' Act beyond Wales.

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