

Mission to the Future



How and why UK politics
must embrace long-termism

Anita Sangha

7 May 2025

Contents

Executive summary	3
The costs of short-termism in UK politics	5
Embedding long-termism into government	7
The barriers to long-termism in UK politics	9
The solutions	11
Conclusion	12

About this report

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. This report looks at why we need long-termism in UK politics and how to achieve it. The online version is at fairnessfoundation.com/mission-to-the-future.

About the author

Anita Sangha is a Research Assistant at the Fairness Foundation. She recently completed her MSc in Social Cognition at University College London (UCL), and has a BA in Politics, Sociology and Eastern European Studies (UCL). She has previously worked and volunteered in the legal aid sector with Advice Services Alliance and Youth Access. Anita's research interests include the effects of socioeconomic inequality on moral judgement and decision making, determinants of moral concern for socially and temporally distant others, and perceptions of risk.

About the Fairness Foundation

The Fairness Foundation works to change the debate around fairness in order to build a fairer Britain. We are a registered charity (1044174). Our vision is a Britain where everyone has the 'fair necessities' (fair essentials, fair opportunities, fair rewards, fair exchange and fair treatment). We lack a shared vision of a good society, but we believe that we can build a consensus around the need to reduce all forms of inequality substantially, because today's unequal society is inherently unfair. We work to achieve this consensus by making three linked arguments to politicians and other decision-makers and influencers:

- Building and popularising a vision for a fairer Britain that can attract broad support (the *moral case*)
- Demonstrating that the public are more concerned about inequality and supportive of action by government to tackle it, and less divided in their views, than we think that they are (the *political case*)
- Showing that tackling inequality must be a national priority, by promoting evidence of the various ways in which different forms of inequality not only reinforce each other, but also undermine sustainable economic growth, social cohesion, democracy and action on net zero (the *policy case*)

Executive summary

At the core of long-term thinking is a recognition that we have obligations to those who will live with the consequences of our present actions. Future generations have legitimate claims to opportunities and resources, so current generations have a duty to anticipate and mitigate potential harms that decisions made today could impose upon those who follow. Without extending our moral consideration into the future, we risk prioritising immediate benefits over a more sustainable, resilient and fairer future. While the new government is broadly supportive of this goal, some of its decisions also appear short-sighted. In part this is due to the economic context, with the government arguing that it cannot afford to invest to the level that it would like in areas such as social housing, social security, and early years education.

We believe that the government is overestimating the political and economic risks of taking bolder action on embedding commitments to long-term thinking and tackling inequality within our political system. At the same time, they are underestimating the political, economic, social and environmental benefits of these commitments. The resulting failure to think and act in the long term makes our society more fragile and less resilient.

Some recent rhetoric and action by government nods in the direction of longer-term decision-making. These include the missions, increased investment in public services, a new longer-term industrial strategy, and investments in ‘growth sectors’. However, other decisions have highlighted how short-termism continues to dominate. The cuts to social security unveiled in the green paper on social security and in the spring statement in March 2025 demonstrate a failure to prioritise, or even to consider, the longer-term impacts on people’s wellbeing, economic growth, or public health.

This short-term approach to governance is by no means unique to the current Labour-led government. Their predecessors similarly struggled to embed long-term thinking across government effectively, introducing and revoking

reforms that aimed to develop these capacities over the last century. The lack of long-term thinking in UK politics has created deep, structural challenges that will take decades to address, while undermining public trust in the ability and willingness of politicians to act in their interests.

Short-termist policies have allowed inequalities to increase to such an extent that they pose a strategic risk to the UK. As we argued in our recent Wealth Gap Risk Register, increasing wealth inequality is damaging our society, economy, democracy, and environment. However, economic inequality is not yet recognised by the government as an underlying and cross-cutting risk to the country.

Without long-term thinking, we cannot uphold our moral commitments to intergenerational fairness. Fairness underpins Labour’s opportunity mission, which aims to give everyone the chance to realise their potential. Fairness has featured extensively in British political discourse over the decades, but a meaningful commitment to reducing unfair inequalities, including those that span across generations, has not followed suit. Internationally, the UK has endorsed several treaties that express a commitment to intergenerational fairness, including the UN Charter and the more recent UN Declaration on Future Generations, but substantive legislative commitments are mostly absent.

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

We lack a whole-of-society approach to societal resilience and wellbeing. Instead, leaders focus on ‘firefighting’ urgent problems, leaving them with less time and ability to address long-term,

complex policy problems, including inequalities. These inequalities in turn exacerbate the problem of short-term thinking, which undermines our collective ability to think and act in the long term.

Taking the necessary measures to break our political system out of this doom loop will take time. However, there are things that the government can do within this Parliamentary term to begin to embed long-term thinking and a commitment to reducing unfair inequalities into our political system. Some nations have already committed to developing effective political ecosystems that promote long-term thinking and advance intergenerationally fair outcomes for society. These measures have involved ensuring that leaders have the capacity to think long-term, engaging the public in envisioning desired futures, and supporting public sector bodies to implement policies that promote long-term societal wellbeing.

A notable example that address all three of these issues is the Welsh Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015), which places a statutory duty on government and public sector bodies to improve the long-term social, economic, cultural, and environmental wellbeing of Wales. The 10th anniversary of the Act fell on 29 April 2025, just months after the UN convened a Summit of the Future in September 2024. The Summit's Pact for the Future contained a Declaration on Future Generations, calling on world leaders to protect the rights and interests of future generations. It is time for the UK government to respond to that call.

We set out two recommendations for immediate action:

- A Future Generations Commissioner
- A National Dialogue on the Future

In this report, we outline the costs of short-termism, the benefits of long-termism in government, the barriers to embedding long-term thinking and action into our political system, and some practical policy solutions to overcome those barriers.

The costs of short-termism in UK politics

Short-termism and socio-economic inequality

Long-term thinking is a prerequisite to building a fairer society. Where political decisions have focused on immediate priorities, they have systematically undermined opportunity, economic growth, democracy, and social cohesion in the UK. Economically, short-termism results in underinvestment in infrastructure and missed opportunities for innovation. Environmentally, it delays action on climate change and depletes natural resources. Politically, it creates ineffective and incoherent policies, weakens institutions, and sidelines future generations from decisions that will affect them most.

As a result of high levels of inequality and deprivation in the UK, society has become more fragile: larger shares of the population are more vulnerable to the impact of hazards, such as pandemics or financial crises, and more exposed to potential harm. Their wealthier counterparts are more protected because they have greater coping capacity and less direct exposure to potential harm, but reduced societal resilience affects everyone to some degree.

As socio-economic inequalities and short-term pressures increase, our collective ability respond to these twin challenges democratically also deteriorates. This is because rampant socio-economic inequalities translate into deep political inequalities: people from lower income backgrounds are less likely to engage in politics compared to their wealthier counterparts. The IPPR found that homeowners are more likely to vote and believe voting matters compared to non-homeowners. Unsurprisingly, research has shown that policies tend to be more responsive to the interests of the wealthy. This is also in part due to the fact that wealthy elites can also exert more influence over broader narratives around particular issues in the media, shaping public and political opinions. These inequalities allow the political system to become distorted in favour of the wealthy, despite the long-term interests of society overall.

A short-term perspective on poverty and inequality in the UK misses the longer-term impacts, and their potential to compound and multiply societal risk going forward. When governments prioritise short-term political advantages over strategic long-term planning, they allow socio-economic inequalities to widen. This in turn weakens our society's resilience to various shocks, such as pandemics or financial crises.

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.

Long-termism and the missions

Short-term decisions have deepened inequalities and undermined the resilience of our economy, environment, justice system, and public health. This narrow perspective, focused exclusively on immediate outcomes, poses a significant barrier to achieving the government's missions, all of which depend fundamentally on long-term planning and commitment. Indeed, it is precisely the neglect of long-term thinking that has made these missions necessary. Unless Labour consciously embraces long-termism, its ambitious goals risk being compromised by transient priorities and short-term solutions, ultimately limiting the potential for lasting and meaningful change.

Growth

Short-term approaches have undermined living standards and led to economic stagnation. Research by the New Economic Foundation found that cuts in government funding between 2007/8 and 2019/20 cost the economy £100 billion, or £3,600 per family. Furthermore, the UK's persistent underinvestment in infrastructure has significantly hampered its economic growth prospects. The UK ranks below many of its OECD peers in infrastructure quality and investment

levels, particularly in transport, energy, and digital networks. Inadequate infrastructure contributes to regional inequalities, limits productivity gains, and deters private investment. Delays in upgrading critical infrastructure, such as rail and energy systems, increase business costs and reduce the UK's international competitiveness. As a result, the failure to commit to long-term projects, strategic infrastructure development continues to constrain the UK's ability to drive sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

Opportunity

While long-term thinking may have advanced access to opportunity in the early 2000s, short-term choices have wiped out this progress in the years since then. The decision to cut funding to Sure Start centres in 2010 is a clear example of this, with budgets for the programme decreasing by 73% over the next decade, despite the benefits of the centres to children's outcomes. Research by the IFS demonstrates these benefits clearly: children living within 2.5km of a centre performed almost a grade better in their GCSEs. The beneficial effects on educational outcomes are greatest for children from poorer backgrounds and non-white backgrounds. The programmes also reduced rates of youth crime, and could have potentially saved the government £500 million in spending on youth justice and social care had they been retained. They improved children's health outcomes to such an extent that this offset almost a third of the cost. Keeping the programmes and directing funding to children in greater need could have saved the government millions in spending, improved access to opportunities for children across the country, and allowed the current government to move faster and effectively towards the fairer society that it seeks to build.

Health

Long-term thinking about the impacts of austerity measures on socio-economic inequalities could have helped to prevent today's NHS crisis. Health inequalities are severe: the Health Foundation has found that 18% of people in the most deprived 10% of the population had bad or very bad health, compared to just 1.7% of those in the least deprived 10%. These inequalities are in part

driven by the coalition government's decision to make cuts to key public services, while failing to increase funding and investment for health and social care in the 2010s. With greater pressure on the social determinants of health due to rising poverty rates, and less access to quality health and social care, demand could never keep up with supply. This, coupled with a lack of strategic thinking about pandemic preparedness, fuelled the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. Indeed, the UK COVID-19 Inquiry pointed to an inflexible preparedness strategy; failures to learn from previous civil emergencies, and outdated policy documents, organisations and structures as drivers of failure to respond to the pandemic effectively. Long-term thinking could have prevented the rise in health inequalities, improved public health, and reduced pressures on the NHS.

Net zero

Long-term thinking could have accelerated progress on the net zero mission. Delays in investing in renewable energy were driven by short-term financial gains, and a lack of strategic thinking about the transition has blocked lower-income families from accessing heat pumps, a key part of our national net zero strategy. Consequently, we are underprepared for the climate crisis; the Climate Change Committee's latest report on climate risk facing the UK shows that there is a large gap between the level of risk and our level of preparedness. We have only just started to make progress on our national energy infrastructure, but previous failures to invest in national energy reserves and renewable energy have already adversely impacted the public by increasing energy prices in the face of geopolitical conflict. Long-term thinking about the barriers to achieving net zero could not only help the government to achieve the goals of the net zero mission, but could also ensure progress towards a just transition alongside economic growth.

Safer streets

Long-term thinking could have helped to avoid the current crisis in the prison system. Capital funding for the Ministry of Justice decreased by 70% over the 2010s, with the department one of the worst affected by austerity measures. These cuts have driven the current challenges with the

police force, prison system, and court backlogs. The [Prison Reform Trust](#) has argued that, given the increasing severity of sentences over the decades, prisons have had to cope with the increasing rate of people held in prison for longer

periods of time without adequate resources. This crisis has been underpinned by an absence of strategic, long-term thinking about the coping capacity of the prison system, alongside changes in sentencing.

Embedding long-termism into government

The benefits of thinking and acting in the long term

The Labour government has shown a commitment to thinking longer term and more strategically than its predecessors, but it needs to go further. The UK needs to adopt a more ambitious, whole-of-society approach to strategic thinking and intergenerational fairness.

Tackling unfair inequalities and thinking long-term in government is a key priority for the public. Our own polling has shown that 85% of the public are concerned about unfair inequalities in society, and 75% are concerned about income and wealth inequalities. People expect inequalities to get worse by 2029. The public largely feels that the UK is going in the wrong direction, particularly when it comes to the economy. The public is concerned about the negative impacts of wealth inequalities on our democracy, society, health, environment, and economy.

The School of International Futures produced [the Foresight Governance Prism](#) to distil the key components of a political ecosystem that enables long-term strategic thinking and advances intergenerationally fair outcomes for citizens. The prism has three dimensions:

- Improving the government's capacity to think strategically can help to secure progress on key policy priorities, reduce waste and duplication efforts of siloed futures thinking between departments by promoting knowledge sharing, and equip civil servants with the necessary skills and training to respond to the turbulent times we live in today
- Engaging the public in long-term policy-making can support the health of our democracy by promoting public participation

in decision-making and improving trust in government, while bringing together unique insights, experiences and expertise to address key policy issues

- Supporting public bodies (and entire sectors) to design and implement policies that advance national strategic goals and public wellbeing is key to delivering positive long-term outcomes

In combination, these three components constitute the necessary whole-of-society approach to resilience and fairness that is needed to build a fairer, more resilient Britain.

Embedding long-term thinking into politics: international case studies

Long-term thinking in politics has developed gradually through international frameworks and national initiatives over the past century. The UN Charter of 1945 established foundational principles for sustainable international cooperation, while the Brundtland Commission in 1987 formalised the concept of sustainable development, of meeting the needs of present generations without compromising our ability to do the same for future generations. Most recently, the UN Declaration on Future Generations in 2024 renewed these commitments, and soon a UN Special Envoy for Future Generations will support the Declaration's implementation.

There are several international examples that demonstrate that long-term strategic thinking can be integrated effectively into political institutions. Of course, these examples are specific to local histories, cultures, political systems, and geographies. While these examples cannot simply be directly replicated here in the UK, they can provide inspiration for UK political leaders as to how we could develop our own political ecosystem focused on the long term.

Wales: the Well-being of Future Generations Act

Wales provides an inspiring example through its Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015), addressing all three necessary dimensions of a long-term, fairer political ecosystem. Following devolution, the Welsh Government Act (1998) committed to the principle of sustainable development. This provided the foundation for the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, which took a commitment to promoting sustainable development and to delivering it going forward.

The Act placed a statutory duty on public bodies and the government to consider the long-term consequences of their decisions on future generations, and introduced the new role of the Future Generations Commissioner. The Commissioner holds public bodies and the government to account on their progress towards the goals of the Act, promotes its importance, and ensures active consideration of the interests of future generations.

The Act sets seven clear well-being goals for the government, the public and private sectors and the public to work towards, and five ways of working to achieve these. Public institutions can also measure progress using the Maturity Matrix, a framework designed by the Commissioner to help to implement the sustainable development principle, meaning that they have clear guidelines to work towards.

The Act recognises that achieving the 50 national indicators and 17 milestones will take time, hence the long-term timescales to achieve these by 2050. The latest impact report provides recommendations for the Welsh government and public sector bodies to build on initial successes and address gaps in implementation towards those milestones. Previous impact reports detail several successes of the Act:

- The Joint Nature Conservation Committee reported that Wales's global footprint has decreased
- Household consumption emissions have decreased by 21% between 2001 and 2019
- There has been a sustained increase in rates of volunteering since the pandemic, with 30% of the population engaged in some form of volunteering

- There has been a consistent increase in the number of adults participating in sports three times or more a week, reaching nearly 4 in 10 adults in 2021-22

As part of the design process for the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015), the Welsh government launched a national conversation to ask the public to help envision the future of Welsh society in 2050. The Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty launched a year-long dialogue which asked people to describe the Wales that they would like to leave behind for the children and grandchildren, including potential challenges, risks, and ways to solve long-term problems.

Prior to participation in the conversation, the public received factsheets on key issues to ensure that their engagement was meaningful and informed. Conversations took place both on and offline, making them more accessible to the public, and Futures Champions were also recruited to bring conversations to specific groups and communities. The results of the dialogue were used to identify shared values, perceived threats, and desirable outcomes for Wales, and ultimately shaped the Act's final wellbeing goals.

By developing future-oriented leadership capacities, engaging the public, and supporting public bodies to design and implement policies designed to promote national wellbeing, Wales has developed a strong ecosystemic approach to delivering intergenerationally fair policies over the long term. It is no surprise that the Act has received international recognition for these strengths, providing the foundation for the UN Declaration on Future Generations.

Singapore: the Centre for Strategic Futures

The Centre for Strategic Futures was set up in Singapore in 2009 as a think tank, and brought into the Prime Minister's Office in 2015. Building on decades of work to build Singapore's strategic capacities, the Centre helps to develop the anticipatory capacity of government by providing training in strategic foresight and risk management for public servants, undertaking foresight and futures work, and communicating findings to policymakers across government.

The Centre has developed sophisticated tools to engage in scenario planning, such as the [SP+ model](#), supporting a whole-of-government approach to strategic thinking. The framework comprises six stages: defining focus, environmental scanning, sensemaking, developing possible futures, designing strategies, and monitoring.

The process brings in expertise from a range of leaders, engages with complexity theory approaches to problem definition, and can involve a range of futures techniques, such as war gaming, back-casting, and conflict simulation.

The Centre also hosts [conferences](#) annually to discuss emerging issues, bringing together experts from across disciplines to share insights and best practices in strategic thinking. Futures Conversations provide a similar function for the civil service.

A key part of the [success](#) of the Centre is its closeness to the Prime Minister's Office, allowing for greater access to leadership and opportunities to share insights and influence policy. This position also provides a higher level of legitimacy to the Centre when working with the rest of

government, which is further boosted by having civil servants come to work in the Centre before being placed elsewhere in government and taking their new skills in anticipatory governance to other parts of the system.

New Zealand: the Public Services Act

Introduced during the pandemic, the New Zealand [Public Services Act \(2020\)](#) requires chief executives of government departments to produce [long-term insight briefings](#), detailing potential risks, opportunities, and long-term trajectories for relevant issues for each department. The reports cover a range of issues and are produced every three years. They take the style of 'think-pieces', allowing chief executives to be more creative and innovative in their reports. The reports also provide an opportunity to bring [key issues](#) to the government's attention, support cross-departmental collaboration, and embed long-term thinking within departments. Reports so far have discussed [public participation](#) in politics; the future of [business, work, and social and ecological wellbeing](#); [health](#); and [national security](#).

The barriers to long-termism in UK politics

Our political system is geared towards short-term thinking, in terms of problems, solutions, incentives and decisions. In his book [The Good Ancestor: A Radical Prescription for Long-Term Thinking](#), the philosopher Roman Krznaric identifies a number of barriers to long-term thinking:

- Human nature ("the inherent short-sightedness of our marshmallow brains")
- Outdated institutional designs (political systems geared to short time horizons)
- The power of vested interests in an economic system "bent on short-term gains"
- Insecurity in the here and now causing people to focus on immediate needs
- Insufficient sense of crisis (boiling frog syndrome)

We have identified three types of barriers to long-termism in UK politics: machinery of government, public participation and representation, and psychological barriers.

Machinery of government

In addition to a failure to maintain a [coherent strategy](#) from the centre, a key problem with the machinery of government is that the Treasury exerts [too much influence](#) over policy decisions. Combined with the dominance of 'Treasury brain' thinking, which prioritises short-term cost savings over longer-term benefits, this impedes progress on tackling structural, cross-cutting issues, including socio-economic inequalities. This is exacerbated by the fact that the Treasury sets budgets [bilaterally between departments](#), rather than by policy area or strategic directives, which

risks undermining action to tackle these sorts of cross-cutting issues.

The civil service lacks the necessary culture, skills, and training for long-term thinking. There is a lack of shared methodology, training, and teamwork across government that facilitates strategic and long-term thinking, creating skills gaps across government. The abolition of the National School for Government in 2012 removed an important resource for developing strategic thinking capabilities.

Public participation and representation

There is a lack of public dialogue or engagement in policy-making processes across the UK. Public dialogue is essential to long-term, intergenerationally fair policy design, as shown by the importance of Wales's national conversation on the future of the country and shaping of the wellbeing goals. Without meaningful public engagement, the public, and in particular younger generations, rarely have opportunities to have their interests represented, their experiences acknowledged, or their wishes translated into policy design and implementation. Consequently, the political system unfairly prioritises the interests of wealthy vested interests, and of older generations.

There is no clear mechanism for representing the rights and interests of younger and future generations in politics, severely blocking progress on intergenerationally fair policies. Unlike Wales and other countries, the UK does not have a process for systematically considering or evaluating policies in terms of their impact on future generations. The UK also has a higher minimum voting age than other nations; Scotland's voting age has been lowered to 16 and has been shown to increase turnout into adulthood, as young people become more engaged with the political system from a young age. Failures to engage young people in politics is particularly worrying given that research suggests that young people *do* want to engage with politics, but don't see politicians as valuing their views and interests. Research by UK Youth found that 88% of young people wanted to be involved in politics, but 90% of them do not believe that politicians prioritise their interests. The

Children's Commissioner finds similar results: only 22% of children believe that people who run the country listen to their views.

Psychological barriers

Several studies have shown the importance of intergenerational discounting tendencies and people's willingness to act on complex, long-term policy issues such as climate change. Research shows evidence of temporal discounting (undervaluing future outcomes) and social discounting (undervaluing outcomes that benefit others). Intergenerational discounting combines these tendencies, meaning that we discount the interests of future people and reduces the likelihood that we prioritise the interests of future generations. Where discounting rates are lower, people are more willing to act to protect the interests of future generations. These effects can be driven by several factors, including a reduced sense of responsibility to others, uncertainty about potential future outcomes, and perceived power asymmetries between people in the present and people in the future.

Socio-economic inequalities may exacerbate the tendency to focus on near-term outcomes over the long-term. Poverty forces people to prioritise meeting their immediate needs; long-term thinking about the future is more of a luxury when people have to choose between heating and eating to survive. Rates of poverty have only increased in recent years and may continue to grow, which is likely to impede people's capacity for long-term thinking and their ability to participate in future policy design.

Inequalities can also undermine consideration for others outside people's immediate social group, because of the effects of higher levels of inequality on social cohesion. Higher levels of inequality within a society are also associated with lower levels of trust, which can in turn decrease people's concern for more distant others. Moral concern becomes more restricted to close others, such as friends and family, while people outside of those groups are seen as less trustworthy or important. Poorer, more unequal societies may therefore be more susceptible to intergenerational discounting, which can undermine the collective sense of intergenerational fairness.

The solutions

Addressing the barriers to long-term thinking in UK politics requires a comprehensive approach that transforms how the government operates, engages the public, and works with other sectors of society.

Embedding long-term, strategic thinking within our political system effectively will take time, resources, and sustained political will. We cannot make all the necessary reforms by the end of the current Parliamentary term. However, we suggest two solutions to meaningfully start this process today. Enacting these now could demonstrate commitment to further reforms in the second term, and could begin to build the capacity and will within government to see these through.

Recommendation 1: A Future Generations Commissioner

A Future Generations Commissioner could provide leadership on intergenerational fairness and sustainable development across the UK government. The Commissioner could sit within an existing government department, most likely the Cabinet Office, or in an independent body, as in Wales. In either case, they should be able to engage with all departments, public sector bodies, and Number 10 to have both the necessary insight across issues and political legitimacy. The Commissioner could build on pre-existing research and work undertaken by the former [APPG for Future Generations](#).

The Commissioner would provide advice and support to the government and to public sector bodies on how to design and implement policies that protect the rights and interests of future generations and promote national wellbeing. To that end, the Commissioner could also undertake intergenerational impact assessments, which would involve evaluating the impacts of policy decisions on sustainable development and intergenerational fairness principles. Progress

could be evaluated using versions of frameworks such as the [Welsh Maturity Matrix](#), The School of International Futures and Gulbenkian Institute's [Intergenerational Fairness Assessment](#), or a new UK-specific framework that draws on wider national inputs.

The Commissioner could also support public engagement work, building partnerships with civil society groups and international partners including the UN Special Envoy on Future Generations.

Recommendation 2: A National Dialogue on the Future

Following the Welsh example, the UK government could consider plans to launch a national dialogue on the future. Wales ran a '[The Wales We Want](#)' national conversation in 2014 prior to the launch of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, inviting the public to think about what they would like to see in Wales by 2050, with findings directly feeding into the seven wellbeing goals addressed by the Act.

This dialogue could help to address the current lack of public participation in politics and rebuild lost trust to the extent that the dialogue is made accessible and the public's views and expertise are considered and integrated into decision-making. It would directly engage the public, both online and offline, asking them to reflect upon and design their desired future society. The dialogue would bring the public, civil society, and politicians together to consider long-term priority issues, and increase public engagement with politics more broadly. This approach could help to demonstrate to the public that they do have a stake in our political system, going some way to rebuilding trust in politics, and could help to promote intergenerational solidarity by considering the needs of present and future generations alike.

Conclusion

The challenges facing the UK require a fundamental shift in how we approach governance, policy-making, and societal resilience. Short-termism and growing socio-economic inequalities have created a vicious cycle that undermines our ability to address complex, long-term issues and threatens the wellbeing of both current and future generations.

By adopting a more strategic, long-term approach to governance that actively considers the interests of future generations and tackles socio-economic inequalities, we can break this cycle and create a fairer, more resilient society. This will require changes across government, greater public engagement, and collaboration with sectors and organisations throughout the UK.

There are several barriers to long-term thinking in UK politics: institutional barriers within the machinery of government; barriers related to public participation and representation; and psychological barriers that make it difficult to prioritise future generations' interests.

The recommendations outlined in this report provide a starting point for tackling these barriers and bringing about this transformation. They draw on international examples and research to suggest practical ways to embed long-termism and intergenerational fairness in UK politics. While these recommendations will need to be adapted to suit the UK's specific context, they offer a vision of a political system that works for everyone, now and in the future. Wales's Well-being of Future Generations Act is a positive example of embedding long-term thinking in governance. Had the UK adopted similar approaches, many current crises could have been ameliorated.

The time for action is now. As we face increasingly complex challenges, from climate change to technological disruption to growing inequality, we cannot afford to continue with business as usual. By taking bold steps to reform our approach to governance, we can create a better future for all.

The UK has the opportunity to be a global leader in promoting intergenerational fairness and long-term thinking. By seizing this opportunity, we can build a society that truly works for everyone, regardless of when they are born or what circumstances they are born into. This is not just a moral imperative but a practical necessity if we are to navigate the challenges of the 21st century successfully.



www.fairnessfoundation.com

mail@fairnessfoundation.com

Charity #1044174 | Company #02912767

Gunnery Works, 9-11 Gunnery Terrace, London SE18 6SW

All content published under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Licence (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)