



SCHOOL OF
INTERNATIONAL
FUTURES

#NSxNG

A National Strategy for the Next Generations

**PILOT PROGRAMME
REPORT**



Foreword

“ Foreign policy is an area where we haven’t traditionally been connected to what the public wants and needs... We need a balance between participatory government and understanding what the public and future generations want — and government being able to make the decisions and the tough/unpopular choices. Fusing those two things together is a big cultural change that everyone needs to get used to.”

(FORMER FCO PRINCIPAL PRIVATE SECRETARY, NSxNG WORKSHOP)

National Strategy for the Next Generations

Over June-October 2020, SOIF convened a group of partner organisations to conduct a pilot programme to explore the potential for a new way of making national strategy for the UK. One that is more participative, future-focused and historically-informed.

This was our ‘proof-of-concept’ pilot to test how a different, more participative approach to developing national strategy can be done, and to explore the kind of results, insights and experiences it yields - for Government and for citizens.

This paper summarises key insights from the process, with a view to supporting those within HMG working on national strategy issues, including the Integrated Review, public engagement, civil service reform and machinery of government. It builds on the interim paper to HMG, submitted in September (at Annex XIII). We are already in conversation about this approach with ‘early adopters’ (those supporting innovation in this area) in No.10, Cabinet Office, FCDO and MOD among others. This paper aims to support that continuing exchange.

It is written by the School of International Futures (SOIF). It includes input from our delivery partners; however, responsibility for the final product, editorial decisions and any errors is SOIF’s alone.

Terms used in this paper

We use the following abbreviations: NSxNG (National Strategy for the Next Generations); Citizens’ Assembly (for the Citizens’ Assembly tester session); workshops (Agora youth workshops); survey (public online survey). Quotations are (unless otherwise indicated) from our citizen/public participation programme of activities (survey, workshop or Citizens’ Assembly).

About the coalition

The NSxNG coalition is run by SOIF and supported by our delivery partners. It believes that a future national strategy should:

- Represent the interests of future generations
- Be participative, and support citizens to have a voice in national futures
- Build a more meaningful, united and plausible national narrative
- Draw on past, present and future insights

Our mission is to give the UK’s next generations a central role in shaping our country’s future place in the world. We believe we must consider the lessons of history, listen to the diverse voices of the present, imagine the world our grandchildren will inhabit and act as stewards of their future. We aim to surface new and ambitious ideas for the UK’s future global role through a systematic programme that explores future national strategy by putting the views of the future leaders and citizens of 2045 front and centre.

Core delivery partners

Our core delivery partners include:

- the Democratic Society
- the APPG for Future Generations
- Today for Tomorrow
- the University of Cambridge Centre for the Study of Existential Risk
- Agora
- Restless Development
- Shout Out UK
- RUSI
- Kings College London’s Grand Strategy Centre.

Together with the wider NSxNG coalition, we bring diverse expertise in national security, strategy, complex systems, applied history, technology, foresight, participation and deliberation.

Executive Summary

Context for our pilot and the path ahead

How can a more agile, future-focused and participative approach to national strategy equip the UK to weather the challenges of the 21st century?

This paper presents the findings from a four-month pilot (or ‘proof of concept’) bringing together experts and young people in the UK to explore an approach to National Strategy that looks out a generation with next generation voices.

The three tenets of our approach are foresight, applied history and public participation. In this ‘proof-of-concept’, we sought to show how strategic foresight and public participation can supply the insights and orientation from which a new national strategy and new national narrative can be built.

🗨️ **This programme is emphasising exactly the right things: we need a new national strategy, including a new national story – separating ourselves from the facile analogies drawn from our past.** 🗨️

(FORMER FCO PERMANENT UNDER SECRETARY)

The 2020 Integrated Review (IR) of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy provided the catalyst for the pilot. Brexit presents the UK with an opportunity to think and act differently and ambitiously – and COVID-19 gives the country an imperative to do so. Given the compressed timings for the Integrated Review, this pilot was conducted by NSxNG delivery partners in a voluntary capacity. We used a series of participative processes, including a Citizens’ Assembly test session.

The pilot has caught a wave of interest and appetite to do things differently both across the national strategy community, and from citizens.

We see the Integrated Review as the start of a journey over the next five years to build a National Strategy that reorients the UK, defines our new ‘strategic personality’, and improves our resilience and agility. That journey must be based on citizen engagement (building the ‘connective tissue’ between Government and public in this traditionally closed area of strategy-making) and exploring the fluid future in a hopeful, exploratory way.

For the UK to go forward boldly as a country, we need cross-generational consensus that provides a clear and legitimate basis for the UK’s international role. Our planned work in 2021 can provide the first year of citizen input to this participatory process. We want to help government to develop a more meaningful, united and plausible national narrative and strategy, fit for an uncertain future; to reflect the interests of

next and future generations; and to be participative, giving citizens more of a voice in national futures.

We and our partners in the NSxNG coalition are united by a vision for a more agile, future-focused and participative approach to National Strategy. We will now run a full programme to model how to put this approach into practice through 2022, building on the appetite, methodology and insights from our pilot.

Why now: The UK is at a point of systemic transformation

In our discussions, both experts in our networks and citizens in our participatory formats recognised that the next 25 years will bring changes in our external environment that will impact the UK significantly: from environmental and ecosystemic impacts, to emerging technology, shifting demography and value shifts that will have impact nationally as well as globally.

Our leadership will be under increasing pressure to demonstrate impact and influence in addressing ongoing global challenges: poverty, development, peacekeeping, hybrid conflict social justice, biodiversity, human rights, governing emerging technology – the list goes on.

Government cannot navigate these emerging pressures and uncertain expectations in isolation, or by focusing only on the short term. Only a long-term strategic horizon and citizen engagement will support a resilient national strategy for this complex environment.

🗨️ **Plan ahead by at least two generations. Aiding the current generation by sacrificing future generations will doom the UK from a global strategic standpoint.** 🗨️

(18-24 YEAR-OLD SURVEY RESPONDENT)

Meanwhile, our participants’ strong message to HMG was that they see the UK’s global influence as declining and our ability to shape the environment diminishing. Yet our country’s leadership will need to address future global challenges, particularly where they impact on the UK.

A wider definition of security is needed that looks beyond traditional security domains, and takes a systems perspective to look beyond symptoms such as populism to understand the underlying drivers and their interconnections. If our national security paradigm is expanding to be more centred on human security; if our national resilience and security depends ever more on the people (whether in terms of public health, innovation, cyber threats, disinformation, polarised discourse), then the people need to be onside.

Experts will remain best placed to inform public deliberation, and detailed considerations around resources and capabilities, but a continuing engagement with the views of the UK public should inform the parameters, broad principles, and overall direction of UK foreign policy. That is our clear recommendation (see section IV).

We need to explore future perspectives in order to understand the UK's future role in the world. But critically also to understand what the UK can do now to prepare for and shape the future. Action needs to be taken today: our participants emphasised in particular building new alliances, sustaining existing relationships through hard work, getting ahead of resource scarcity, improving preparedness for extreme risks, shoring up the supply chain and transitioning to a green economy before we're forced into it.

Being on the front foot in planning for the long-term can be hard, when confronted by major strategic shocks such as COVID that dominate the short-term horizon and will have long-term implications. But even if you don't see 2020 as a turning-point globally, our process brought out a strong message from citizens (our participants) that the UK cannot afford to sit and wait for 20-30 years to allow an attrition of its current global position.

Three premises can help us navigate beyond the short-term:

- **National Security Strategy is best seen as Whole-of-Nation Strategy**, in terms of linking up foreign and domestic policy issues and apparatus. Technology, health, migration, data, reputation connect what happens at home to abroad, and are critically important for our posture and position overseas. Effectively linking the two requires both a whole-of-government approach (Whitehall departments) and local engagement (in communities). See section IV for public views on this.
- **Strategic confidence and a proactive global posture require a longer time horizon.** We need to look out at least 25 years (or a generation). Looking ahead only 5-10 years, say to 2030 - whilst tempting at a time of high turbulence and uncertainty - makes it harder for policymakers to think genuinely differently: to explore our future environment, the opportunities/threats there, and how we respond. Considering our future on a longer time horizon and exploring alternative scenarios opens up more optimistic dynamics and opportunities. A shorter time horizon encourages linear thinking (people are tempted to forecast continuation, or worsening, of the current situation).
- **Harnessing the creative input and energy of citizens is not a nice-to-have but a must-have in uncertain times.** The British people are a key part of our national resilience. Effective policy posture in the face of turbulence requires Government to lead in a networked approach (as a "systems steward") rather than in a top-down mode, in order to harness the insights from people's lived experience into policy development and implementation. This will require moving beyond the artificial divide of foreign and domestic policy that did not make sense to our participants.

Building a prosperous, fair and socially just future is the global challenge of our time. There is a role for every country to play in securing this, and the UK will need to determine its own contribution. Our pilot process underlined that people are really keen to contribute to shaping their country's future in the wider world - and that they are committed, across the spectrum, to seeing the UK act as a force for good, with a strongly values-based overseas policy and a stewardship role in shaping multilateral governance to support a better world (including planning for a post-Sustainable Development Goals framework).

The voice of the next generation: possible building blocks for a future national narrative.

Five key messages emerged from the pilot.

- **It's time for an honest reassessment - perhaps a 'managed, relative decline'.** This emphasis on tackling head-on the issue of relative decline underlines the urgent need to work on a new national narrative that can inspire pride and hope in our future role.
- **Make the hard choices - and reorient fast to survive.** Our work revealed an appetite for honest language and clear choice-making. Whatever choice is made about the UK's future role, our respondents underlined that the world is changing fast and the UK cannot afford decades agonising over its own role.
- **Keep putting values at the centre - acting as a force for good and steward for a rules-based system.** We heard a strong sense that values and multilateral engagement must remain at the core of what the UK contributes - but that we must also address the domestic issues that undermine our moral authority. Participants emphasised that the UK has a global role to play, covening others - or leading¹ - on climate change, social justice, welfare, challenging aggression, responsible innovation, mediating conflict, and disrupting the spread of corruption and misinformation. The UK can contribute to building a healthy, prosperous fair world, drawing on our skills and past achievements in bringing actors together around global issues and building multilateral cooperation frameworks.
- **Build the assets to support UK influencing, especially on innovation.** The UK has significant soft power levers, including through our networks, ideas, innovation and influence. A stronger role in 'innovation diplomacy' and building effective governance regimes should be supported by investing more in UK research, science and tech and building a strong base in innovation exports; improved social security; a 'green transition'; and doubling down on education.
- **Recognise we must put our own house in order domestically.** Participants stressed that our future global role would hinge on 'domestic' issues such as devolution, State of the Union, health, the economy, social security, social mobility, affordable housing.

¹ See Page 17.

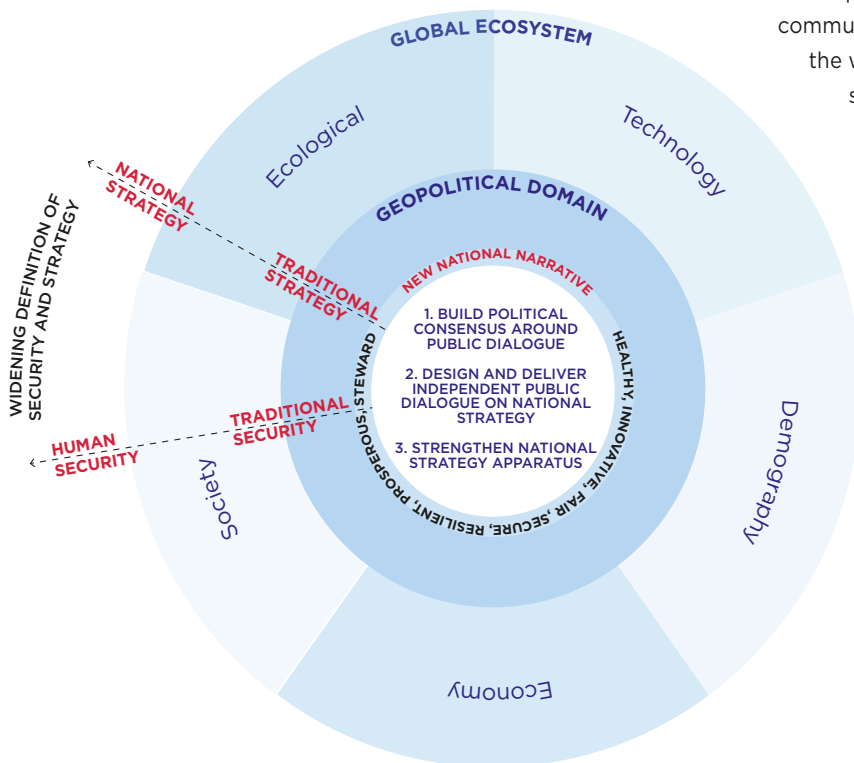
Recommendations

We recommend that the Integrated Review is the beginning of a five-year National Strategy journey to build a new national narrative and supporting governance apparatus, suitable for integrated, future-facing and agile national strategy and policymaking. Wider civil service reform programmes should support this journey, not least the FCDO merger, and the UK should leverage opportunities such as the G7 presidency, and planning for major events (for example, hosting COP26).

We see three key areas where progress is necessary to sustain this journey. The UK needs:

1. Political consensus around public dialogue with our political leaders committed to the outputs of such a dialogue. Without this it will be harder to sustain the journey.
2. An independent public dialogue on National Strategy that is well-designed and conducted. Political consensus around strategy needs public consensus, and dialogue is a critical tool for building public consensus by giving people influence.
3. National security apparatus that is orientated to support whole-of-government, agile and future-facing national strategy, and that encourages stewardship of future generations' wellbeing.

Recommendations and ideas for how this can be achieved are summarised below and in Section 5.



1. Build political consensus around public dialogue

- Bring political leaders, including next generation leaders, together to listen to public narratives that are optimistic but realistic
- Build a broad-based bipartisan understanding of the challenges and opportunities of the UK's 2045 operating environment
- Develop cross-party approaches and mechanisms for responding to citizens' proposals

2. Design and deliver an effective independent public dialogue on National Strategy

- Use leading practice in engagement, to design and build effective relationships with the public, individually as well as through existing networks and representatives of industry and civil society. Listen first, understand lived experiences and diverse public perspectives, and make time and space for deliberation and exchange.
- Connect public engagement to all national strategy programmes.² Use public participation to set high-level parameters, principles and direction.
- Move beyond polling to listen to and understand public perspectives, drawing on expert input and data alongside deliberation and other modes of participative engagement (for instance discussion kits, Citizens' Assemblies). Build associated capability and civic literacy, and incorporate international perspectives.
- Look specifically at how different generations and communities see the UK's past, present and future role in the world and how to give younger Britons a greater sense of national pride and role in our future national story.

Figure 1. Building a new national narrative and supporting governance apparatus suitable for integrated, future-facing and agile national strategy. In the centre are our three core recommendations. Surrounded by elements suggested by participants for a new national narrative. Nested around this is the geopolitical domain, the traditional focus of national strategy and security.

A wider definition of security is needed that looks beyond traditional security domains, to understand the underlying drivers and their interconnections, and expands our definition to include a stronger focus on human security.

² The 2019 Open Government Action Plan makes a commitment to public participation and states: "Due to the fast pace of technological change, it is essential to create flexible, open, inclusive structures for the citizens to engage in a dialogue with the government, civil society, academic experts, and businesses."

3. Strengthen national strategy apparatus

Public sector machinery that is currently oriented to national security strategy needs to become whole-of-government, agile and future-facing. It needs to encourage the active stewardship of future generations' wellbeing.

To achieve this, we recommend a focus on four outcomes:

3.1 Programmes, policy and regulation that reflect national strategy, future generations and existential risk

Build the obligation to consider future generations' wellbeing

- Set new obligations on Ministers to act for the long-term, and designate Select Committees and other oversight bodies (such as an ombudsman or Future Generations Commissioner) to scrutinise HMG on this basis
- Pre-emptively evaluate major policy decisions and proposed legislation (including in areas such as infrastructure and Research & Development) for long-term and intergenerational impact
- Learn from the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which is successfully encouraging more concern for the future in Welsh public bodies.

Widen national security scope and community to a concept of National Strategy across whole of government and beyond

Take previous integrated approaches (like Fusion and One HMG) much further into a truly cross-Whitehall strategic endeavour with incentives for genuine deep collaboration.

- Align domestic ministries (DfE, BEIS, HO, MOJ) and local authorities behind the UK's National Strategy given the communities, levers and assets they contribute.
- Align civil service reform efforts (including around relocation out of London, procurement and financing) to support this agenda, and reflect in design and implementation of big UK policy events like COP26 and complex policy decisions like deterrence.
- Harness the power of big data carefully in engaging with the future. Technical mechanisms, like forecasting tournaments and algorithms, can be effective solutions for technical problems but are ineffective solutions to democratic problems.
- The National Strategy should take a lead in ensuring that

(extreme) risk management improves globally by setting a risk budget and encouraging UK and international commitments to spend a target amount of GDP on risk prevention.

3.2 Incentives that drive behaviour and culture change to support citizen engagement through wider and more diverse processes

The scale of the task – to build a domestic dialogue/national conversation and relative consensus around the UK's role in the world – is significant. Many 'early adopters' in the key HMG institutions recognise this.

Recommendations to support this transition include:

- Incorporate notions of "stewardship" and "wellbeing of future generations" into purpose and mission of civil service.
- Develop a participatory long-term policy making guide for the Civil Service; incorporate principles into the Green and Magenta books; recognise successful endeavours and innovations across the public sector and beyond.
- Establish a presumption of listening first: understand the places where people exchange (and self-organise), the topics they raise, the language they use. Build upon an understanding of different communities' (including Generation Z) perspectives.
- Ensure each policy area has incentives for reaching out to inclusive platforms to engage young people – and local communities and religious groups among others – from across all of the UK to debate, discuss and decide important issues.

3.3 Capability and skills development within the national strategy community as well as wider civil service

- Broaden policymakers' use of Horizon Scanning and Foresight (including on science and technology) through supporting of departments' and NDPBs' own work as well as the Chief Scientific Advisers and GO-Science.
- Radically improve the teaching of strategic thinking skills (and associated leadership, whole-system analysis, iterative learning through implementation) to civil servants, Ministers and MPs. Reward progress in HR Learning & Development, hiring and performance decisions.
- Support the UK public (including businesses, citizens, diaspora, universities) and the excellent locally employed staff in embassies worldwide to build these skills. Building the skills for national resilience and dialogue is a whole of society effort.
- Empower young people through an improved civic education offer and fresh approaches to teaching perspectives on the UK's global history to understand the most effective pathways for change, to articulate themselves on the issues they care about, and to be resilient to misinformation.³

🗨️ **It is vital to upskill young people...those who will experience the effects of the new strategy throughout their lives...and build their knowledge and understanding of British democracy and Britain's role in the world.** 🗨️

(NSXNG YOUTH PARTNER)

³ For detailed recommendations on upskilling young people in political literacy and media literacy, see Annex X from Shout Out UK.

3.4 Review existing institutions, structures and processes to ensure they are future-oriented, agile and resilient.

- Reorient the Treasury and machinery of government (including NAO, Select Committees) around a long-term, systems approach with stronger consideration given to second order effects, and a new National Strategy Council that replaces the NSC.
- Strengthen the work of existing institutions and teams with long-term and cross-cutting perspectives, like MOD's DCDC, GO-Science (especially foresight team) and the Government Foresight network, UKRI and links with Universities
- Incorporate the functions and skills of long-term thinking, foresight and planning into the new FCDO and a re-energised and reformed diplomatic machine.
- Give the 'Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission' a long-term brief - including working out new oversight mechanisms to represent Future Generations.
- Establish effective risk institutions, for example a National Institute for Extreme Risks, an independent Chief Risk Officer (CRO) for HMG and associated unit to support departments and hold ministers to account for departmental risk response plans (for further ideas on risk management, see Annex VI).
- Drive international institutional innovation - explore bringing the representation of future generations into international organisations.

Contents

This paper starts by introducing the NSxNG approach, then presents headline findings across the issues we helped participants explore in our participative activities (online survey, workshops, Citizens' Assembly tester session, Grand Strategy seminars). The structure is as follows:

1 Approach

Overview of the NSxNG programme. What is distinctive about our approach to the development of national strategy. Including our focus on (i) strategic foresight, (ii) public participation and (iii) historical insight as indivisible aspects of national strategy development; and our emphasis on bringing a diverse public voice, in particular the voices of future generations, into the process of shaping our country's future place in the world.

2 The 2045 environment

A summary of what our participants highlighted as the key uncertainties, drivers, threats and opportunities for the UK to 2045; including climate change, new tech upsides/downsides, weakening of the state, rise of cross-border identities, and the importance of relational influence.

3 People's visions for the UK's role in 2045

A set of four contrasting visions: the positive (a motor of innovation, a middle-ranking convening power, the specialist state) and the negative (an unmanaged decline). Reflections on the importance of public emotion in thinking about national strategy and finding new sources of pride and hope.

4 Policy implications

High-level 'key messages to Government' that emerged from participants' contributions to our events.

5 Recommendations

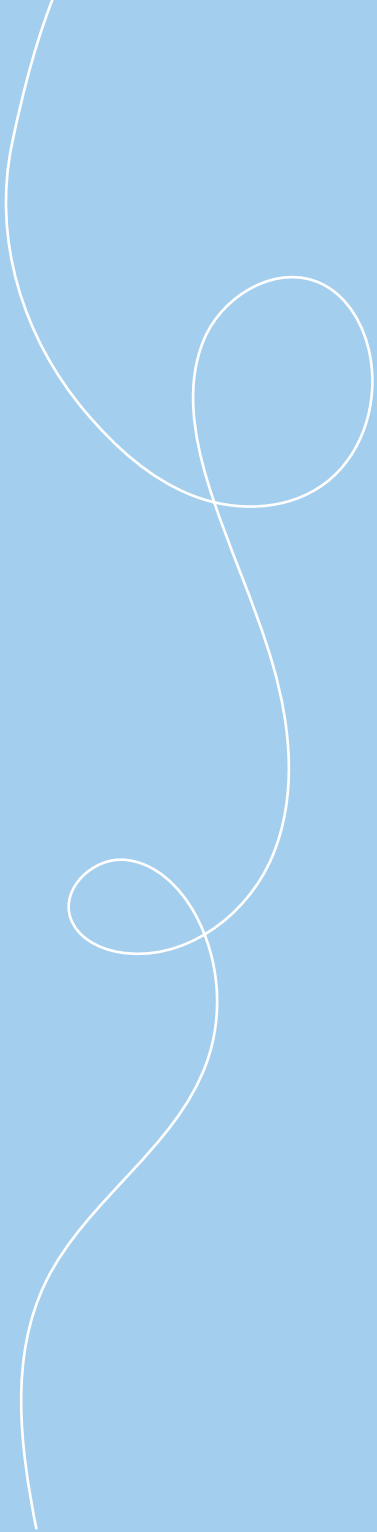
Policy and operational recommendations for building a more resilient, agile, future-focused and participative approach to national strategy, by supporting the civil service and political leaders in engaging the public in a moment of strategic refocus (or rebuilding 'a new strategic personality').

6 Continuing the NSxNG Journey in 2021

An outline for continuing the NSxNG journey in 2021, weaving together different forms of public engagement with expert evidence on historical and future trends. It will include outreach via networks together with a full Citizens' Assembly process, as well as activities with youth groups in our network to bring the debate on these issues to more young and under-represented voices.

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Annex IV:	Democratic Society Citizens' Assembly test report
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Annex XIII:	Interim report to HMG on NSxNG pilot programme, Sept 2020



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