

The Long Time Tools

Tools to cultivate
long-termism in institutions



The Long
Time
Project



Climate-KIC

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Introduction

This is a guide created by policymakers, for policymakers to enable us to integrate long-termism into our work. It contains a series of different tools for you to test out at work. We invite you to try using some of these tools over the next few months.

These tools are a practical way to start getting more long-term. The Covid-19 crisis is a stark reminder that we need to think about both the immediate future and the long-term future. From pandemics, to climate change, to biodiversity loss, to the societal implications of AI; we face a growing number of crises that have the potential to both endure for a long time and have long-term implications for our collective future. To neglect these existential risks, will be to fail both present and future generations. Philosopher Toby Ord writes that, "protection from existential risk is an intergenerational global public good."

Next generation policymaking needs to build in consideration for the next generations.

Yet taking the long-view is easier said than done when we are locked into short-termism by many of our institutional, legal and political structures and cultures. Whether that's electoral cycles demanding quick wins and short-term impact, quarterly reporting in business prioritising rapid returns over longer-term value, or a 24 hour news cycle that traps us in the immediate, the contexts we work in don't tend to favour long-termism. This is reinforced by our cognitive disposition towards short-termism via phenomena like present bias where we'd prefer to have less right now, over getting more later, and hyperbolic discounting, where we worry less about a threat the further into the future it is.

All this means that we will need to be very intentional if we are to evolve our institutions so that they enable us to have a thriving long-term future.

At [The Long Time Project](#), we're working with policymakers to explore practical ways to cultivate long-termism in institutions at a cultural and operational level. We're building on a growing body of work in this space. At a statutory level there are precedents such as Wales' Well-Being for Future Generations Act where public bodies have to report on their progress towards these objectives every year and make sure that "the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." At a municipal level, there's work like the Future Design project led by economist Tatsuyoshi Saijo who has developed methodologies where Japanese municipal policymakers put themselves into the shoes (and ceremonial robes) of citizens from 2060. We've hosted a series of workshops for policymakers where they co-designed new tools to support long-termism in their institutions. We've packaged those tools into this kit, to enable you to use them.

Bea Karol Burks & Ella Saltmarshe, August 2020

How to use this guide

Many of the most high profile examples of long-termism, such as the Well-Being of Future Generations Act and its Commissioner for Future Generations, focus on regulatory and legislative rights for future generations.

This is a highly effective way to ensure we consider the needs of those who are yet to be born and has already yielded tangible impact. However, it takes time, will and concerted effort to pass legislation—a responsibility beyond the scope of authority for many government institutions.

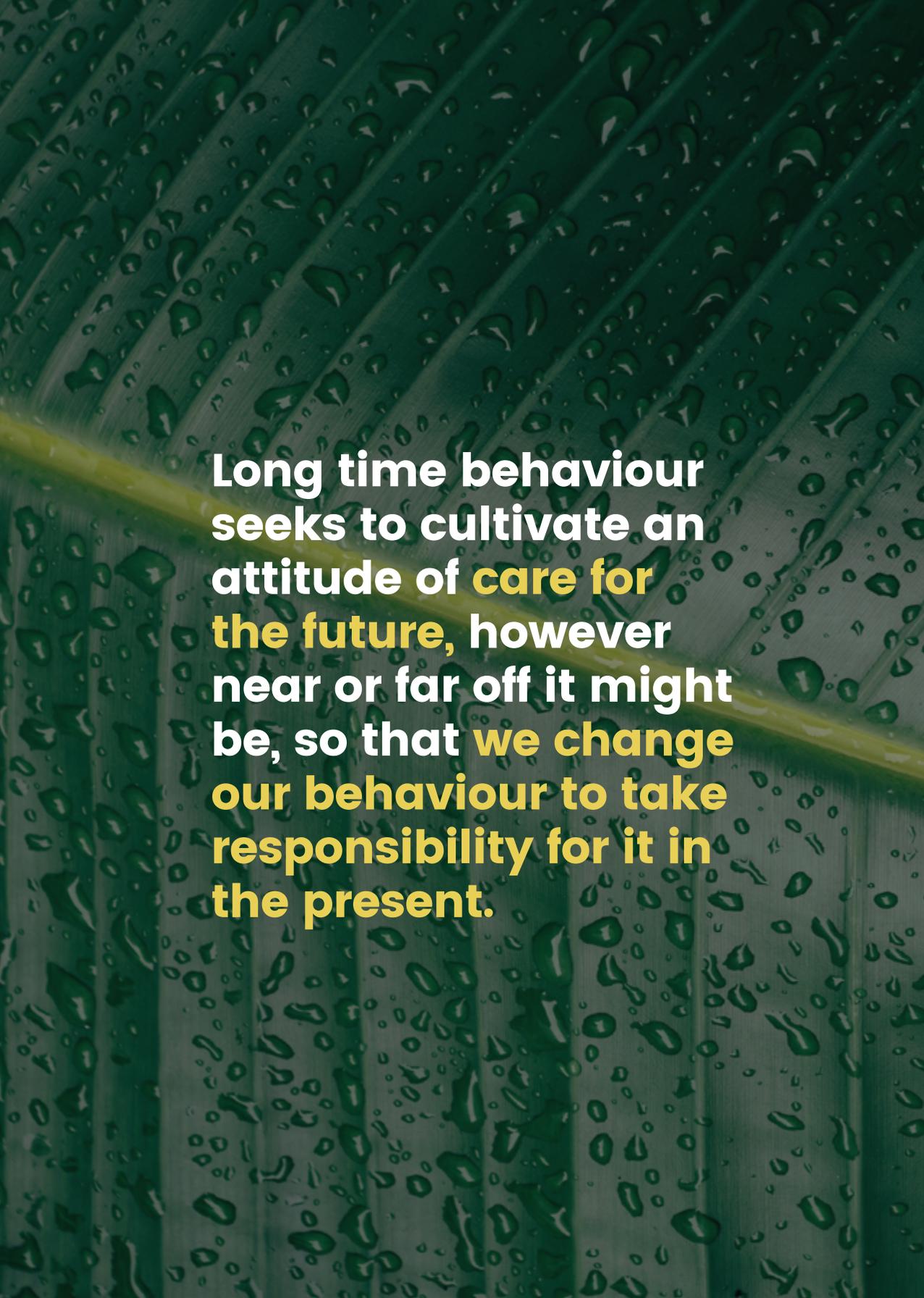
Thankfully, legislative change isn't the only way to bring long-termism into an organisation. To highlight the breadth of different ways long-termism can show up in organisation, we've created a model, Six Long Time Levers, adapted from *The Cultural Web* by Johnson and Scholes (1992). These levers include legislative and regulatory change alongside other operational factors. They also take into account the cultural influences within an organisation; the rituals and routines, stories and myths, symbols, and norms and behaviours that constitute organisational culture.

When considering the full breadth of levers for long-termism, it becomes clear that there are many more opportunities to introduce a long-term mindset into day-to-day work life than it may initially appear.

In our work at **The Long Time Project**, we make a distinction between long-termism and long-timism.

Long-termism: predicting, forecasting and planning for the future

Long-timism: cultivating an attitude of care for the world beyond our lifetimes



Long time behaviour seeks to cultivate an attitude of care for the future, however near or far off it might be, so that we change our behaviour to take responsibility for it in the present.

In its short history, much of the field of futures work has focused on forecasting, trendspotting and horizon scanning; the art of predicting and planning for probable futures. More recently, the focus has shifted to using speculative design as a way to explore possible futures and broaden the scope of what the future could hold.

This toolkit builds on that work by foregrounding another aspect of our relationship to the future: that of care. Regardless of how far off ‘the future’ might be—a few years or a few millennia—long time behaviour seeks to cultivate an attitude of care for the future, whatever that future might be, so that we change our behaviour in the present.

When using this toolkit, it might be most useful to start with considering and mapping where and how long-termism currently appears in your organisation. It’s likely that there are existing examples of long-term and long-time behaviour that could be more prominent. It’s also likely that there are some obvious gaps where new approaches could be introduced.

We’re presenting a set of tools that have been co-designed with policymakers from different levels of government from around the world. Some of the tools can be adopted informally and without structural changes. Others require broader organisational buy-in. We hope this offers a range of ways to be more long-term which can be adopted and adapted to the changing needs of different organisations.

Let us know how you get on, and whether you spot or design any other mechanisms for bringing long time behaviour into your place of work. We intend this toolkit to be the start of a body of work, not the definitive and comprehensive answer. We hope it will kick-start institutional innovation focused on the long term.

You can share feedback in this short [Google Form](#) or email us at hello@thelongtimeproject.org

Six long time levers: The model

We've created this model to help organisations consider the full scope and potential of long-termism. There are many places that long-termism can appear within organisations, affecting both cultural and operational functions. Different levers will be more effective and more appealing at different times and for different purposes.

Adapted from Johnson and Scholes, The Cultural Web (1992) and developed with Dark Matter Labs.



Ritual & Routine

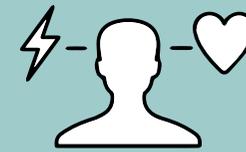
What role is there for long-term thinking in meetings, annual reviews, celebrating the completion of a project, work socials, summer or Christmas parties, financial year end, lunch times?



Regulatory Systems & Processes

Which regulatory processes (e.g. monitoring and measurement, employee remuneration) are aligned to long-termism? Which regulatory infrastructures can help to encourage long-termism (e.g. budgeting or election cycles, technology)?

Operational factors



Norms & Behaviours

Which norms and behaviours enable long-termism? What sort of power dynamics do the norms and behaviours encourage?



Power Structures

How do your organisational structures (reporting lines, team organisation etc.) support long-termism? Are these informal or formal structures? Are they hierarchical or flat?



Symbols

How is long-termism reflected in buildings and architecture, logos and graphics, statues or icons, mascots, famous landmarks or views, the style and tone of communications, gardens or green spaces?



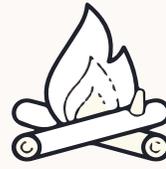
Stories & Myths

How does long-termism show up when you introduce the dept, council or area, famous or celebrated constituents, in newspaper headlines, important achievements or controversies?

Cultural factors

Tool index

1. Mapping Long-Termism
2. The Legacy Question
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4. Future Personas
5. Human Layers
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9. Long Time Questioning
10. Future Shadowing
11. The Museum of Tomorrow
12. Future Line
13. A New Take on Bring Your Child to Work



Ritual & Routine

Long Time Questioning
Acknowledging the Future

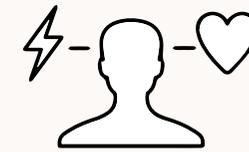
Child's Eye View



Regulatory Systems & Processes

Future Generations
Impact Assessment

Future Shadowing



Norms & Behaviours

The Legacy Question



Power Structures

Mapping Long-Termism



Symbols

Empty Chair
Future Personas
The Museum of Tomorrow



Stories & Myths

Future Line
Human Layers

A New Take on Bring
Your Child to Work

The tools

1. Mapping Long-Termism

A great place to start is by mapping existing examples of long-term behaviour in your organisation using the Six Long Time Levers model. This will help identify existing opportunities to build on and highlight gaps that you could fill with another tool from this kit. Use this template to think through the different aspects of operations and culture within your institution. You might also want to map the internal drivers of short-termism (eg. annual budgeting cycles) and the external drivers of short-termism (eg. public appetite).

You can run a workshop with other staff to do this. When we run these sessions we split them into four parts:

1. An immersive long-time experience (for example the Human Layers process listed below)
2. Mapping existing examples of long-termism -- in small groups, reporting back.



3. Mapping drivers of short-termism -- in small groups, reporting back.
4. Identifying areas ripe for cultivating long-termism -- in small groups, reporting back.

[Click here](#) to see the Miro-board setup we use.

You can extend this workshop into a co-design session by then getting participants to co-design new interventions for long-termism. This is the process we've used to develop many of the tools in this guide! We use this canvas to develop new tools.

Name your idea	It is a... <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input type="checkbox"/> Process <input type="checkbox"/> Ritual <input type="checkbox"/> Something else
Who will use it?	Describe, sketch or collage your idea
When and how will it be used?	
What would it take for it to be widely used?	

2. The Legacy Question



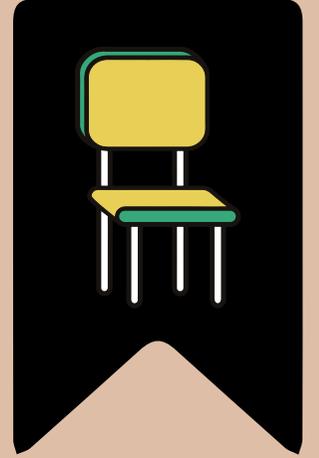
The Legacy Question is a tool which, in its most simplest form, is just that: asking someone *'What do you want your legacy for future generations to be?'*

While it applies to both our personal and professional lives, we've found it has particular resonance for people in public service due to the strong desire to make a difference that is generally embedded in this kind of work.

Here, we suggest four ways to apply the Legacy Question, but recognise there will be many more opportunities to introduce this idea.

- 1. Opportunistically:** Normalise the legacy mindset within your organisation by asking the legacy question of colleagues freely and regularly, and bringing it into conversations about team goals or project ambitions.
- 2. Formally, as part of the HR process:** Reserve 10 minutes in annual and mid-year reviews to reflect on legacy. This has multiple benefits as it encourages people to think ambitiously about what they might achieve and what impact it might have while also opening the door to helping them talk about their future, as well as the future of their work.
- 3. Operationally:** Building the question into the design phase of new projects.
- 4. Ritualistically:** As part of taking office or starting a new role. Local and national politicians could be encouraged to make a statement on their legacy as part of being sworn into office. Similarly, government employees could be prompted to consider their legacy upon joining or starting a new post.

3. The Empty Chair

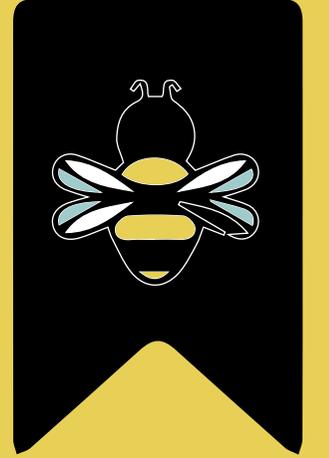


The Empty Chair for Future Generations draws on the tradition of the Children’s Fire, used by the indigenous peoples of North America.

1. At important meetings, particularly board meetings or cabinet meetings, there should always be an empty chair left for the present time’s children and those who have yet to be born.
2. The meeting’s leader should recognise the empty chair as representing the needs of future generations at the beginning of the meeting and encourage those present to refer to the empty chair when making any major decisions.

This tool helps those present to advocate on behalf of future generations and make sure their voice is present as part of important discussions. Another option would be to light a candle for future generations that serves the same function and burns throughout the meeting (though there may be issues getting this past health and safety building regulations!).

4. Future Personas: Citizen and Non-Human Needs

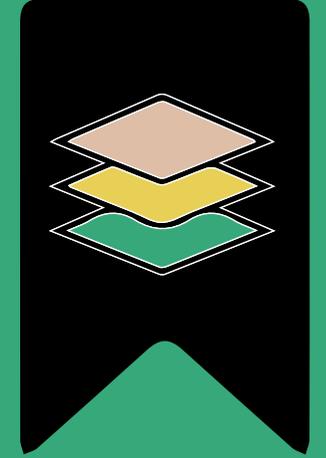


Personas are increasingly common in government as a way to prompt policymakers to consider different people's needs and viewpoints. Any set of personas should include a set of Future Personas as a way to provoke discussions about what future citizens might need from a service, and consider the needs of non-human entities such as natural assets.

To develop a set of Future Personas:

1. Look at demographic, work and lifestyle trends to build up a speculative picture of what future citizens might be like
2. Think about what jobs they do, how they live and what they care about
3. Consider non-human things that you want to make sure have a space in the future. This might include:
 - Bees or other insects
 - A tree or area of woodland
 - A river or lake
 - A population of birds
 - Geological or geographical landmarks
4. Develop personas for these non-human entities just like the future citizen ones, thinking about what they need to thrive
5. Document these personas in a way that is easily shareable and can be used to consider the implications of different policies on future citizens and the natural world.

5. Human Layers



This exercise is inspired by the work of deep ecologist, Joanna Macy. It enables participants to engage with seven generations through the lives of people they care about. We've developed it at the Long Time Project and often use it to kick off live and virtual events.

Here is a script for the exercise.

Exercise

Ideally to be done standing up, with eyes closed or lowered, and with cameras off if done remotely (which works - we've tried it several times!)

Present moment

Take a breath. Arrive. Feel the ground beneath your feet. Be present to this moment [give the date]. Bring to mind someone you feel warmly towards of your grandparent's age, they may or may not still be with us. Think of one of their qualities that evokes warmth in you, it could be their smile, something that made them laugh, their hands...

Step backwards one step

Step back in time and imagine that person at 40. How was that quality that evokes warmth present in them then? Take a moment to connect with them in the past.

Step backwards another step

Now step back in time again and imagine you are at that person's 9th birthday. How was that quality that evokes warmth in you, present in them then? What do they look like? What's their favourite food? Imagine who else is there. When is it? It could be in the 1920s or 30s, or earlier, or later? When is it? Where are they? Imagine you walk over to the window and for a moment turn your back on the party. What do you see outside of the window? What's the world like? How are people getting around? How are people communicating with each other? Now turn back into the room. Take a moment to drink in this birthday party of this person you have cared about and then take your leave.

Step forward one step

Now step forward through the generations

Forward another step

And again. You are back in the present [give the date]. Take a moment. Breathe deeply. Let go of that older person. Feel the ground under your feet. Take a big breath in. Now think of a small person you know who you feel warmly towards. Could be a child, grandchild, niece, or the offspring of friends. Think of one of their qualities that evokes warmth in you, it could be their smile, something that made them laugh, their hands...

Step forward one step

Now step forwards in time and imagine that person at 40. How is that quality that evokes warmth, present in them then? Take a moment to connect with them in the past.

Forward another step

It's now their 90th birthday. They are sitting around a table being celebrated by their friends and family. They are laughing. How is that quality that evokes warmth, present in them at 90? Does the same thing make them laugh? What do they look like? What food do they love? Stay in the warmth of the party.

When is it? It's probably around the end of the century, 2090, 2095. Imagine you walk over to the window, and for a moment turn your back on the party. What do you see outside of the window? What's the world like? How are people getting around? How are people communicating with each other? What does that world look like?

Now turn your attention back to the room. There's a framed picture of you on the table. That person you care about who is celebrating their 90th birthday, taps their glass and asks for everyone's attention. They raise their glass and toast you. They thank you for something you did that helped shape their world for the better. What are they toasting you for? Stay in that moment. Take a few deep breaths to connect to your legacy. Now take your leave.

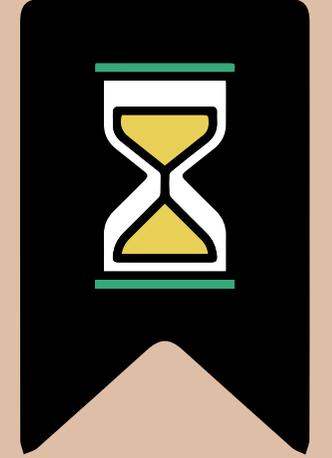
Back one step

Now step backwards one step through the generations.

Back one step

And another one to the present. Take a moment with your eyes shut to land back here. In the present moment [give the date] Take a deep breath. Slowly open your eyes. Keep them low at first to let them adjust. You've just time-travelled about 200 years and crossed 7 generations. How did that feel?

6. Future Generations Impact Assessment



The Future Generations Impact Assessment is a process to consider the impact of an initiative on children or those yet to be born.

While it lacks the ability to prevent or veto anything going ahead, it aims to make people more future-conscious, in a way similar to the way Equality Impact Assessments were introduced across the public sector in the UK.

A Future Generations Impact Assessment should be carried out at the beginning of a project or programme of work, with analysis being documented, circulated and discussed amongst those taking part in the work. Organisations already used to carrying out impact assessments could include future generations questions in their existing templates or forms as equality for future generations. Others may want to introduce an entirely new and separate process.

Suggested questions to ask as part of a Future Generations Impact Assessment:

What will the impact of this work be on people in 10 / 50 / 100 years time?

How will this impact biodiversity and the natural environment in 10 / 50 / 100 years time?

What will someone in the community say about this work in 10 / 50 / 100 years time?

Looking into the far future (100+ years), the impact of this work will be positive / negative because:

+

.....

-

.....

7. Acknowledging the Future



Acknowledging the Future is as simple as saying a short statement at the start of meetings or events to recognise future generations and those who have yet to be born. It borrows from Australia's Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country, where the country's colonial past is recognised and respects are paid to the Traditional Owners and ongoing custodians of the land, the Aboriginal peoples.

This simple ritual involves stating an easy to remember phrase that resonates with whatever context you work in. You can design your own or try out one of the following:

"Before we start, I'd like to acknowledge that the decisions we make in this room today may have implications into the future and far beyond the lifetime of this project, team or organisation. We make those decisions with that in mind."

"We recognise that the actions we take today have implications for tomorrow. We acknowledge and respect the needs of today's children and those yet to be born."

"As we start this work, we acknowledge the world that will exist beyond our lifetimes and the people, animals and nature that will thrive in it."

8. Child's Eye View

The Child's Eye View harnesses child-like thinking to help policymakers question the biases, assumptions and myths that guide their adult minds.

The Child's Eye View should be used at different stages of policy development to sense check decisions and challenge standard ways of thinking. It can be done as a team or individually, and should blend a mix of imagination, reflection and sharing or documenting responses. You can ask team members to bring a photo of a real child they know of a similar age to help ground the exercise in reality.

There are three main components:

Time

As someone who is five years old today, how will this policy affect me for the rest of my life?

When I'm a teenager?

When I'm 35?

When I'm 55?

When I'm 90?

Assumptions

What assumptions are baked into this policy that a five year-old wouldn't recognise?

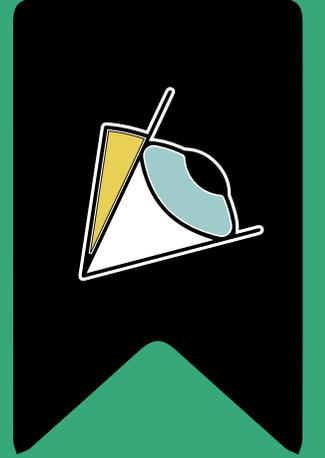
Why would I, as a five year-old, question them?

Are they useful or fair assumptions to make?

Practicalities

What constructs do I need to know as a five year-old to understand how this policy works?

How would I, as a five year-old, approach this problem differently?



9. Long Time Questioning



This is a reflective exercise that enables people to both reflect more deeply on the long-time and get to know each other. It is adapted from a tradition of Zen questioning and involves repeatedly asking the same question, each time new insights get revealed.

Possible questions:

- *Why does long-termism / long-timism matter to you?*
- *How does time feel to you?*
- *What helps you access the long-time?*

Invite participants to get into pairs. Lay the groundwork that this is a confidential interaction. The first participant asks the other the question, their role is then to actively listen. This is not a conversation, they shouldn't respond. The other participant answers the question. Initially invite them to free associate, to speak off the top of their heads. Allow silence. After five minutes swap roles. Repeat the whole exercise 2 or 3 times, always keeping with the same question.

10. Future Shadowing



In this process, you create a ‘shadow’ role from a specified time in the future, e.g. 75 or a 100 years. The shadow member from the future works alongside their present-day counterpart and advocates for future generations within a specific portfolio. Feel free to use imaginative processes to help someone ‘inhabit’ the future from which they are coming.

This could either be done for a short period of time as a ‘secondment from the future’, or in a more formal way as a Lead or Minister from the Future. Future Shadow Ministers could be voted in directly to portfolio roles, so they wouldn’t need party affiliation. Their decision making power wouldn’t be the same—they wouldn’t vote on political business—but they could have an important public role in holding the portfolio-holder to account.

11. The Museum of Tomorrow



The Museum of Tomorrow is a participatory tool to help groups of people think about the futures they want and bring them into the present through objects and artefacts.

How to make a Museum of Tomorrow:

1. *Assemble a diverse range of people to hold a discussion about the futures they would like to see.*
2. *Use a range of discursive, meditative and scenario-based exercises to develop a vision of this preferred future.*
3. *Identify objects and artefacts that tell the story of this future and illustrate its key features.*
4. *Work with artists and creatives to make these artefacts and display them in a prominent place where a wider group of people can respond to them.*

12. Future Line



Usually an organisation's timeline maps the past to the present day to show its history. This model, initially designed to be used in the main entrance to a workplace, starts in the far future and moves to the present day so that when you walk into your workplace you are primed to start creating that future.

Just like the historical timeline, it sets out milestones and achievements, but this time they stretch forward instead of back. Designing a future line can be done as a team exercise, which has the added benefit of immersing staff in organisational strategy, ambition, values and mission. It should be displayed in a prominent public place but doesn't need to be fixed or permanent so as to risk pinning organisations to specific milestones or dates: it is best used as a statement of ambition.

Some points to consider when developing your future timeline:

- *The core guiding mission or goal of the organisation/ department*
- *Short- to medium-term goals and strategy, which might be documented and published*
- *Longer-term ambitions, some of which may be assumed or unsaid*
- *Symbolic or actual milestones that illustrate movement towards the goal*
- *Positive spillover effects beyond the immediate scope of the organisation*

13. A New Take on Bring Your Child to Work



Lots of workplaces have some form of 'bring your child to work' days. Next time your organisation has one, use it as an opportunity to explore the long-term impact of your work on the world those children will grow up in.

Have a go at:

- *Explaining to them the impact of your work on the world today*
- *Explaining how your work will impact them when they're of working age*
- *Exploring what they think about the aims and ambitions of your work*
- *Getting their take on how they would approach some of the problems you're trying to solve*
- *Imagining what the same role or organisation might look like when they're of working age*

Acknowledgements

These tools were developed through a series of co-design sessions with people from different levels of government and different areas of policymaking from across the world. We're grateful to following people who were open and generous enough to discuss, design and test the framework and tools. We're confident that future generations will thank you for your efforts too.

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Javier Canas

James Oriel

Tanya McGuckian

Sarah McArthur

Thea Snow

Ruth Martin

Brenton Caffin

Tirso Camacho

Gokce Tuna

Jaakko Kuosmanen

Hannah Ormston

Cat Drew

Nicole Barling-Luke

Fiona McAdoo

Hannah Elliott

Jon Toy

Zia Ali

Jessie Teggin

Clair Ashurst-Bagshaw

Leonora Oppenheim

Christopher Jarratt

Indy Johar

Chloe Treger

Adam Purvis

Jonathan Lapalme

Linnéa Rönquist

Lucy Geoghegan

Ben Cavanagh

John Brodhead

Claire Seaborn

Anne White

Juan Azcarte

Fredrik Lindencrona

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Katrien Rycken

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Rachel Bruce

Matthew Short

Nicholas Meehan

States of Change

Camden Council

Kirklees Council

Surrey County Council

Bristol City Council

Doncaster Council

Design Council, UK

Carnegie UK Trust

UNDP

Environmental Protection

Authority, NZ

Centre for Public Impact

CityLab, City of Melbourne

Victorian Government

EIT Climate KIC

Dark Matter Labs

Queensland State

Government

Victoria Legal Aid, Melbourne

Institute for Sound and Music,

Berlin

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Development, UK

The Scottish Government

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Technology, Taiwan

Thank you

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