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Beyond the present:

How to apply long-term thinking to reduce health inequalities

A resource for Wales and beyond containing methods and case studies.



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Foreword

The lives of some people in Wales, and across the world, are being cut short because of a lack of access to the essential building blocks needed for a healthy life. This includes a safe, warm, and dry place to live; a good education that can set us up to fulfil our potential; clean air to breathe and water to drink; enough money to make ends meet; and access to quality health and care services.

A lack of fair access to each of these building blocks causes health inequalities in our societies. For example, we know people living in the most deprived parts of Wales die earlier than those living in the least deprived areas – 6.3 years earlier on average for women and 7.5 years earlier on average for men.

This is something we can and must change in Wales and the world. Being able to live as happy and healthy a life as possible is a right we all share. No matter who we are. No matter where we live.

In Wales, we are lucky to have the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act – a groundbreaking piece of legislation that requires us to improve the social, environmental, cultural and economic well-being in everything we do. It empowers us to recognise all the factors affecting our health and well-being and see we all have our own part to play in building a healthier and more equal future.

Achieving this ambition requires a shift in our thinking. We must move on from only treating disease to promoting good health and preventing illness whenever we can. That is why we welcome this resource, which arms us with the methods and approaches we need to think and plan for

the long-term. Only by looking long-term can we identify and act on all the opportunities we have to protect and promote health and well-being, for current and future generations at the same time.

We are facing challenging times in Wales, with our healthcare services, wider public sector, and third sector under unprecedented strain. This makes it more important than ever, but also harder than ever, to balance managing the crises of today with preventing the crises of the future. But the tools and case studies shared in this resource help us to do just that. They also offer hope and solutions showing us what we can achieve when we work together, consider the bigger picture, and chart a path towards a more sustainable, healthier and more equal future for all.

We hope you find this resource both practical and inspiring. Please let us know what you achieve with it. Here in Wales, we would like to see public bodies and Public Service Boards using this resource to find new ways of thinking longer-term and to enhance their existing plans or projects, systems, and processes. From a global perspective, we look forward to seeing the impact of all our combined efforts to prioritise well-being and reduce health inequalities. Together we can ensure that the systems that protect and promote our health are sustainable in the long-term by acting today for better health tomorrow. **Cymru Can. We all can.**



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Introduction



Building a healthier and more equal future – the case for long-term thinking

Everyone deserves to live as healthy and happy a life as possible. However, in Wales and across the world we know not all of us are experiencing as good health and well-being as possible. This is because not everyone can access the essential building blocks needed to live well, such as healthy food, a warm home, and good healthcare services. For our children, not being able to access these building blocks can lead to poor health early in life, which usually persists or worsens into adulthood and old age.

But it does not have to be this way. We can change this and make sure every person in Wales and beyond has the chance to live a long and healthy life. Doing this requires us to focus more of our energy on preventing poor health. And to prevent something we need to look to the future and act today.

Looking to the long-term, we can see improving the health of our children is the key to unlocking better health for all in the future. We can also see we will face many external challenges and opportunities. One example is our changing climate, considered the most significant threat to health we will face this century. We are also living through a time of increasingly rapid technological development and shifting global political and population trends, with wide-ranging potential implications for health.

A long-term approach enables us to prevent potential harms and take advantage of opportunities to maximise health and well-being. Exploring how the future may unfold differently for different people is also necessary to ensure no one is left behind in our work towards a healthier and more equal future.



The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

We are lucky in Wales to have legislation that empowers and enables public bodies to prioritise well-being in everything they do.

The seven well-being goals set out in the Act mirror what we know to be the building blocks that underpin health, well-being and equality.

The Act also sets out five ways of working, including long-term thinking, as best practice for achieving the Wales we want.

What is long-term thinking?

Long-term

[ˌlɒŋ ˈtʃːm] way of working

In Wales, long-term thinking is defined in the [Well-being of Future Generations Act](#) as the importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to meet long term needs.

Dr Soumya Swaminathan, Chief Scientist at the World Health Organization, describes long-term thinking as:

“the ambition to position ourselves to be better prepared, to engage with challenges proactively, to respond better, to guide developments for the benefit of global public health and to throw light on areas that need more focus to move forward and catalyse innovation, especially in areas of need that are frequently neglected.”

Long-term thinking in a systematic way brings three key benefits:

- It builds **resilience** and **preparedness** for future developments we can see coming – helping us to **manage risk** and **take advantage of opportunities**;
- It improves **alertness** and **agility** so we can **adapt effectively** as the future evolves; and
- It develops **agency**, **brings people together**, and enables us to build a **shared vision for the future** to work towards.

There is a variety of **methods** we can use to help us take a long-term approach in our work and start answering questions like:

- How might the future unfold?
- What could the long-term consequences of this be?
- What can I do to achieve the future I want to see?

How can long-term thinking unlock better ways of working?

In Wales, we have adopted five ways of working to make better decisions. Long-term thinking is one. The other four are preventing problems occurring or getting worse, taking an integrated and collaborative approach, and involving people of all ages and diversity. In our experience, long-term thinking methods can bring all five ways of working together, making it a key step towards better decision-making.



Prevention: Long-term thinking methods enable us to explore future scenarios and trends so we can better anticipate risks and opportunities. By taking a long-term approach, we can develop strategies that promote early intervention and informed decision-making.



Integration: Long-term thinking is closely aligned to systems thinking, with the methods encouraging us to explore interdependencies.



Collaboration: Long-term thinking fosters inclusive processes that encourage active participation of various perspectives to develop a shared understanding of long-term goals, challenges, and implementation of solutions.



Involvement is integral to long-term thinking, with methods seeking to capture the insight and perspectives of various sectors, communities and individuals. In this resource we have identified where a method is particularly effective at delivering the other ways of working.

Who is this resource for and how can it help me?

Thinking long-term is something everyone can do – and everyone can get better at it. With this resource, we hope to enable and inspire all of us working to reduce health inequality in Wales and beyond to take a long-term perspective by:



Exploring methods that enable long-term thinking;

and



Sharing case studies of how they have been applied in Wales to help address health inequality.

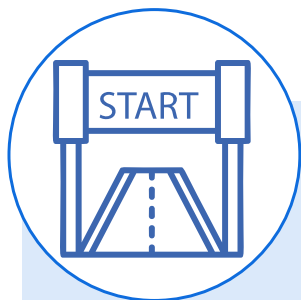
Thinking and planning for the long-term can enhance current projects and processes and improve the quality of the important decisions that drive our work every day.

We have designed this resource to align long-term thinking methods to four key decision-making stages we are all likely to encounter in our work to address health inequalities.

We encourage you to pick and choose what sections are interesting to you, using the hyperlinks to navigate between sections. For example, by clicking on a method you are interested in, you can skip straight to an overview of that method, with links to other useful toolkits, and example case studies of how the method has been used to help address health inequality in Wales.

It is important to note that although there are methods that support and enable us to think about the long-term, long-term thinking itself is a shift in mindset and the questions we ask ourselves.

The methods simply allow us the space and permission to think intentionally about the future.



Where should we start?

There are endless possibilities for how we can use, change, and combine the different methods in this resource. Here are some ideas for where we can try them out and gain confidence in using them.

1. Internal policies and team away days

Using a futures method to lead a team discussion can be a great way to have fun and learn new skills, while also bringing long-term thinking and considerations into the discussion.

2. When working on a new strategy or corporate plan

Using futures methods from the very start in strategic discussions can help us take an outcome-focused approach, led by our desired vision for the future.

3. Enhancing the risk assessment process

Many futures methods, such as horizon scanning, can help us take a more integrated approach to risk by exploring possible future scenarios, technological and societal trends, their drivers, interactions and potential consequences.

4. Involving people in our projects

Futures methods are a great way to involve people, especially young people, in complex topics and can be used as an alternative or in addition to more traditional methods like consultation.

5. In discussions with partners and stakeholders

Stakeholder workshops or discussions are a great place to try out futures methods as a way of co-creating with partners; helping everyone in the room to develop a shared understanding of where we are now, our vision for the future, and the actions needed to get there.



Top tips

Tips can be found in all the case studies in this resource. Here, we have collated the top 5 things to keep in mind when undertaking any futures method.

1. Long-term thinking should not be done in isolation

Long-term thinking and futures methods are there to help enhance existing processes and systems. They can be most effective when aligned with strategic plans and projects, and with the involvement of stakeholders and partners, rather than as a one-off exercise.

2. Always bring the future back to the present

Rooting futures exercises into the present is key to ensure they achieve the intended impact. We should always be thinking about what we are doing now and how this can affect our desired future. What are the concrete actions we can take? What do we need to do or to stop doing today to achieve our vision?

3. It does not have to be perfect

Tailor the exercise to the audience and to your need. The methods are there to help us work through our project or issue. We can change them, adjust them and fit them together as we like in order to meet our outcomes and purpose.

4. Do not be afraid to get creative

While futures methods are incredibly useful and can help improve our strategic process, they can also be a lot of fun! There is a variety of creative exercises that can be done to unlock people's imagination and to help transport them from the present into the future. You can experiment and see what works for you and your stakeholders.

5. Leverage uncertainty, rather than fearing it

Using futures methods will not help us predict the future, but it can help us to acknowledge and understand the role of uncertainty and, more importantly, how we can leverage that to drive our vision and objectives forward.

Methods



Methods for long-term thinking

In this section we explore what methods could be used to address health inequalities at four key decision-making stages we are likely familiar with in our work.

Click on each stage to find out more and discover the relevant long-term thinking methods.

1 Starting out

- What is happening in the world around us?
- What might this mean for health inequality and the work we may need to do?

(agenda & rationale)



2 Thinking things through

- What options do we have for addressing health inequalities, and how might they play out?
- What would be the best course of action?

(idea generation & formulation)



4 Taking action

- What do we need to prioritise to get where we want to go?
- How could external factors affect our plans?
- How can we bring people with us?

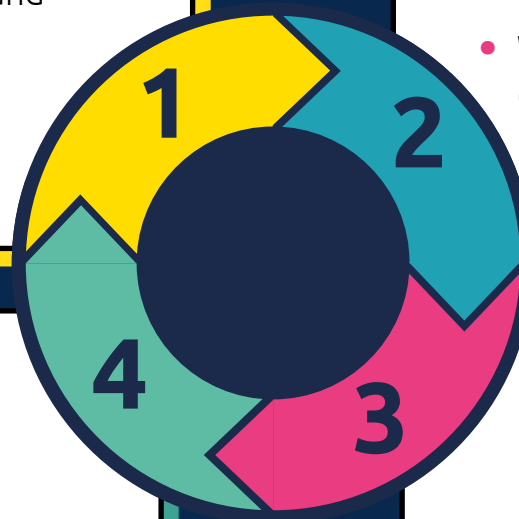
(implementation)



3 Making a plan

- What do we want to achieve?
- Who do we need to work with?
- What should we be watching out for?

(objective setting)



1 Starting out

This stage is about understanding the current landscape of health inequality, our issue of interest, and importantly, **how that might change in the future.**

This can also be called the 'agenda setting' or 'rationale development' phase.

At this stage it is helpful to explore questions such as:

- What is happening in the world around us?
- What changes can we expect to happen over time?
- What might these changes mean for health inequality?
- What might these changes mean for our work?
- Could these changes bring with them new risks or opportunities?



Methods to identify relevant trends:

- [Horizon scanning](#)
- [7 questions](#)
- [Modelling](#)
- [Futures triangle](#)
- [Futures wheel](#)

2 Thinking things through

This stage is about considering the various options we have for responding to an issue and how they may play out in the short and longer term. We are invited to look from different perspectives and consider different potential futures to identify the best course of action.

This can also be called the 'idea generation and formulation' phase.

At this stage it is helpful to explore questions such as:

- What options are available to us?
- What might this course of action lead to?
- Who could be impacted?
- What assumptions are we making?
- Who do we need to involve to better understand the potential implications?
- How could any potential negative impacts be prevented?



Methods to explore potential futures:

- [Axes of uncertainty](#)
- [Scenario planning](#)
- [Creative narratives](#)

3 Making a plan

This stage is about describing what future we want to achieve and developing a plan for how to get there. It involves identifying with whom we need to collaborate and thinking innovatively about how to overcome potential issues.

This can also be called the 'objective setting' phase.

At this stage, it is helpful to explore questions such as:

- What future vision aligns with our values and priorities?
- What steps can take us from where we are now to where we want to go?
- What is within our control and what is not?
- Who do we need to be working with?
- What risks or challenges could arise and how could we best overcome them?



Methods to generate a future vision:

- [Three horizons](#)
- [Scenario planning](#)
- [Creative narratives](#)

4 Taking action

This stage is about putting a plan in motion but being ready to adapt it along the way. It is about defining the immediate next steps but also sketching out the longer-term path to achieving the future we want to see.

This can also be called the 'implementation' phase.

At this stage it is helpful to explore questions such as:

- What are the first steps we need to take?
- What else do we need to prioritise?
- What changes will be necessary for our future vision to be realised?
- How might future trends help or hinder our plans?
- What other external factors may affect our plans?
- How can we involve and engage others to help achieve our vision for the future?



Methods to set a course for a desired future:

- [Backcasting](#)
- [Landscape futures](#)
- [Three horizons](#)



Horizon scanning

Looking for signs of change

What is it?

Horizon scanning is the systematic process of gathering information about emerging and potential future trends, issues, and disruptions, which could have an impact on organisations and communities.

It involves looking at a wide range of sources, such as news articles, scientific literature, and industry reports, to identify subtle and early signs of change, which may affect what happens in our area of interest in the future.

Horizon scanning helps us inform strategic planning, risk management, and innovation, and fosters a more proactive and forward-looking approach to decision-making.

How can it be applied to health inequalities?

Horizon scanning helps us to understand the potential future landscape and identify possible opportunities and threats. We can use this method to investigate how trends may affect health and well-being, either positively or negatively, and whether this could reduce or exacerbate health inequalities.



Case study:

[Identifying the mission areas for the new Future Generations Commissioner for Wales](#)

Need to know



Approach: This can be desk research, interviews or workshops (or a combination of approaches).



Who to involve: Senior leaders who can have insight into action, those with capacity to carry out scans, stakeholders who may hold insights.



Time required: Ranges from a couple of weeks for a one-off scan to an ongoing process throughout the lifetime of a project.



Outputs: A list of trends and innovations with analysis of how these may impact our area of interest.



Recommended toolkit: [Horizon Scanning guidance](#)

5 ways of working



Long-term: Can help us take a long-term view of how our area of interest may change over time and any critical uncertainties.



Prevention: Can help us identify potential risks and take preventative action.



Integration: Can enable us to systematically gather and integrate information that might impact on our organisation and work.



Collaboration/involvement: Can be widely participatory.



7 questions

Gathering insight into the future

What is it?

7 questions is an interview technique that uses open-ended questions to explore what about our area of interest is likely to change and why. The technique provides 7 question types we can adapt to gather insights from internal and external stakeholders on what they think is driving change, for better or worse. It can also provide initial thoughts on what action might be needed to bring about or ensure a more positive future.

It is a useful technique to use at the beginning of a project to help define the scope of the work and to identify areas of agreement or conflict that may need to be explored. The outputs of the interviews can be anonymised in reports and write-ups.

How can it be applied to health inequalities?

This technique can be used to gather views from experts on how they think issues relevant to health and well-being may change over time, what the potential implications for health inequalities might be, and what they think needs to change to create a more positive future.



Case study:

[Exploring what the housing system in Wales could and should look like](#)

Need to know



Approach: It can be used with individuals, in groups, or within a workshop – usually a conversation but could be adapted to a survey.



Who to involve: It is particularly useful for engaging senior and expert stakeholders in our field of interest.



Time required: Approximately 45 to 60 minutes per interview.



Outputs: Written up interviews, detailing different perspectives and a paper detailing key themes from the interviews.



Recommended toolkit: [The Futures Toolkit](#)

5 ways of working



Long-term: Helps us to start thinking about what the future could look like



Prevention: Allows an opportunity for experts to identify potential risks.



Integration: Helps us can gain and synthesise insight from multiple stakeholders to integrate different fields and perspectives.



Collaboration/involvement: Allows us to involve several experts and share back the findings to stimulate collaborative thinking.



Modelling

Using data to imagine the future

What is it?

Modelling involves using data and statistical modelling to investigate what the future could look like. This could be relatively straightforward – assuming the continuation of current trends in the long-term – or more complex, seeking to integrate how external factors could affect how the future unfolds.

By adjusting how many issues we explore at the same time, we can create simpler or more comprehensive predictions of a potential future.

How can it be applied to health inequalities?

Data modelling is a familiar exercise within health, where we often look at what we expect to happen to disease incidence, for example. In the context of reducing health inequalities, modelling can allow us to paint a picture of health and well-being into the future if the status quo remains and/or explore the potential impact of proposed interventions.



Case study:

[Using data to understand where Public Health Wales should focus its work](#)

Need to know



Approach: Desk analysis of data to extrapolate trends into the future.



Who to involve: Someone with expertise in data science and analysis.



Time required: Varied, depending on the complexity of the project.



Outputs: Likely to be graphs and charts (so good data visualisation is important) alongside analysis of implications.



Recommended toolkit: A toolkit for this has not yet been developed. You can contact Public Health Wales for more information.

5 ways of working



Long-term: Gives us a quantitative sense of what the future could look like.



Prevention: Can be used to prioritise areas of concern for action.



Integration: Can help us integrate projections of several different trends to create a more comprehensive imagining of the future.



Futures triangle

Linking the past and present to the future

What is it?

The futures triangle is used to identify possible and plausible futures shaped by three pushing and pulling dimensions (represented as corners of a triangle) - the push of the present; the pull of the future; and the weight of the past.

The method can help us explore the relationships and potential tensions between the three corners. Any change in one of the corners will have a ripple effect on the triangle, leading to a shift in the direction of the future.

The method can be used in individual or collaborative work to map the current landscape and allow desirable but plausible futures to take shape.

How can it be applied to health inequalities?

This method allows us to see how the past has brought us to the current situation of health inequality, how the present is keeping or shifting that, and what future we would like to create – all at the same time. Exploring the links and potential tensions helps us create a feasible path forward.



Case study:

[Engaging young people in thinking about the future in Wales](#)

[Exploring what the future may mean for the role and work of Welsh Government](#)

Need to know



Approach: On our own or as a workshop. It can be tailored for group working in-person and online.



Who to involve: Internal staff or external stakeholders who are familiar with the issues. It can also be used as an involvement tool.



Time required: This can be done quickly, in around an hour, or given more time, perhaps a 2-to-3-hour workshop.



Outputs: An annotated triangle capturing our understanding of the past, present, and future. We can build on this to develop scenarios.



Recommended toolkit: This [blog](#) from Futures Platform

5 ways of working



Long-term: Enables us to consider both short- and longer-term needs.



Prevention: Can help us learn from the past and present so we can avoid previous mistakes and prevent an undesirable future.



Integration: Integrates different perspectives – the original architects of a system, those operating now, and those with a future vision.



Collaboration/involvement: Can bring stakeholders together or be used in a participatory way to involve citizens and communities.



Futures wheel

Exploring long-term ripple effects

What is it?

The futures wheel can be used to consider the impacts of key future trends, strategies, events or issues. It can also help to map out the causalities and links between them to see how the situation could play out in the future.

The method maps the successive impacts created by a key trend or an important change or event. Rippling out from the original change, we can map up to three or four levels of potential impacts. This activity is great for identifying potential risks, unintended consequences, surprises, and opportunities – and how different impacts may interact with each other.

How can it be applied to health inequalities?

This method creates a structured way of considering how a trend or event could impact on health inequalities into the longer-term. It can unlock understanding of how different issues and impacts relate to each other or identify opportunities to mitigate risks or maximise benefits.



Case study:

[Preparing for the long-term implications of a new piece of environmental legislation in Wales](#)

Need to know



Approach: Workshop, ideally in-person, with a maximum of 6 people working on a wheel.



Who to involve: Policy and decision-makers, external stakeholders and subject matter experts.



Time required: Futures wheels can be completed quite quickly (45 to 90 minutes) making them well suited to breakout group exercises.



Outputs: A map of the potential impacts of an event or trend over a timescale of our choosing, showing connections and causalities.



Recommended toolkit: [The Futures Toolkit](#)

5 ways of working



Long-term: Invites us to look at how the future could take shape.



Prevention: Can help identify the causes of potential risks so mitigating action can be taken.



Integration: The method encourages us to look for links and connections between issues and developments and see the whole picture.



Collaboration/involvement: Great for bringing stakeholders together to develop a shared understanding of how an issue could develop long-term.



Axes of uncertainty

Investigating uncertainty

What is it?

The axes of uncertainty method allows us to explore big driving forces of change we do not know enough about - we call these critical uncertainties. It can help us define the uncertainties facing our area of work and the different potential ways they could develop.

We create an 'axis of uncertainty' by taking a critical uncertainty (usually identified from previous work, such as horizon scanning) and describing opposing ways it could play out (perhaps a positive and a negative). We can then take two of the most interesting 'axes' and overlap them. We can use this to develop four possible scenarios, where each one explores a combination of the opposing ways the two critical uncertainties could unfold.

How can it be applied to health inequalities?

This method is great for exploring the impact on health inequalities of things that are potentially important but where we are uncertain how they might play out. The scenarios are not predictions but can be used to get a handle on potential futures that would otherwise be difficult to imagine.



Case study:

[Developing a future fit water monitoring process for Wales](#)

Need to know



Approach: Best used as a workshop discussion following on from previous work that has identified potential drivers of change.



Who to involve: Interested stakeholders (internal or external). Works best in groups of 12 or more but can be smaller.



Time required: 90 minutes.



Outputs: A list of different 'axes of uncertainty' with priority ones identified. Two priority 'axes' can be used to create a scenario matrix.



Recommended toolkit: [The Futures Toolkit](#)

5 ways of working



Long-term: Can help us grapple with an uncertain future.



Prevention: Can be used to identify future risks.



Integration: Allows us to explore individual uncertainties and then combine them in scenarios to see how they interact with each other.



Collaboration/involvement: Effective as a workshop exercise and for developing consensus on priority issues for further investigation.



Scenario planning

Imagining different futures

What is it?

Scenarios are stories that explore different ways future uncertainties could play out. Dealing with uncertainty is one of the hardest parts of thinking and planning for the long-term, which makes scenarios particularly useful.

Scenarios are not about predicting the future – they are designed to bring uncertainties about future life to aid our thinking and provoke discussion.

Scenarios can be useful in themselves – exploring potential futures that could arise from different uncertain trends and how they interact with each other. But once we have them, they can also be used to ‘stress-test’ how a project or policy may need to develop or adapt for different possible futures, helping us and partner organisations to identify and plan for risks

How can it be applied to health inequalities?

When it is not clear how a trend or combination of trends may affect health or health inequalities, scenarios are a good way of mapping out the options. Scenarios can then be used to stress-test policy or strategy decisions and see how resilient they would be if different futures came to pass.



Case study:

[Co-creating a preferred vision for the future of the natural environment in Wales in 2050](#)

Need to know



Approach: Scenarios are best created as a group – a workshop or series of workshops with 8-12 people per group works well.



Who to involve: People interested in the issue area who want to explore the different possible futures we may need to engage with.



Time required: Creating basic scenarios can be done in a workshop. Developing and further using those is a longer project.



Outputs: Narratives or visual representations of possible futures which can be shared with others or used for stress-testing.



Recommended toolkit: [The Futures Toolkit](#). Also worth looking at how scenarios were used to inform [UK obesity policy making](#).

5 ways of working



Long-term: Can help make future uncertainties tangible to enable discussion.



Prevention: Can be used to identify risks or pitfalls in decision-making.



Integration: Can explore how different future uncertainties have the potential to interact with and shape each other.



Collaboration/involvement: Can help us engage communities and colleagues in discussions about the future and what choices to make.



Creative narratives

Telling stories about the future

What is it?

Here 'narratives' refer to a range of creative methods rooted in storytelling which can be used to get people thinking about the future. Engaging with the future necessarily requires the use of imagination. It can be easy to forget this when a lot of futures work involves data and trends, but unlocking people's imaginations is key to shifting our mindset to truly think long-term.

Example methods include writing letters or postcards to or from the future, asking people to create characters and explore how we might experience the future, or using visual or physical prompts to get people imaging potential futures – but feel free to play and invent your own!

How can it be applied to health inequalities?

Creative methods are particularly well-suited to involving communities and young people in conversations about the future. They can be great for gathering insight into what people think about health or health inequality issues, how we see our lives and well-being changing in the future, or what we think needs to be done to improve the status quo.



Case study:

[Defining a 100-year long-term strategy for the Welsh Centre for International Affairs](#)

[Understanding what communities hope and fear for in a future Wales with climate change](#)

Need to know



Approach: Letters/postcards can be done remotely. Character-led work is best in-person but can also be done in an online workshop.



Who to involve: We can involve anyone – from senior managers to local communities and rarely involved groups.



Time required: Varies depending on the method. Factor in time to prepare any prompts and time for any workshops.



Outputs: Includes narratives, pictures, or scenarios, often with a focus on how people's lives will look in the future.



Recommended toolkit: [Communities and Climate Change Methodology Report](#) and [video](#) are a good example.

5 ways of working



Long-term: Can unlock the imagination – a key mindset shift required for true engagement in long-term thinking.



Prevention: Can give a person-centred view of potential risks.



Integration: Can help to bring in diverse perspectives.



Collaboration/involvement: Effective and fun way of involving communities and citizens in thinking about the future.



Three horizons

Stepping towards a desired future

What is it?

The three horizons model is a structured way of thinking about where we are now (horizon 1), our preferred future (horizon 3), and what steps are happening already, or will need to happen, to bring about the future we would like to see (horizon 2).

The model can be used at a high-level, to give us quick insights, and then developed iteratively to explore each horizon in more depth. It can be a useful exercise at multiple stages of a project – to help diagnose current issues and agree why change is needed, to develop a shared vision for the future, or to start developing a transformational change plan.

How can it be applied to health inequalities?

There are many issues affecting health and health inequalities which can be explored using the three horizons model to understand what needs to change, where we want to get to, and how to get there. It can be applied to something specific, like trying to ensure equitable access to a certain health service, or bigger picture issues, such as health and housing.



Case study:

[Taking a long-term, systems approach to improving healthy weight in Wales](#)

[Developing a local, sustainable food strategy in Wales](#)

Need to know



Approach: A scalable workshop format. It is quick and easy to explain and understand, making it a great 'first time' futures exercise.



Who to involve: Anyone involved in making decisions about the future of the area in question. The more diverse perspectives, the better.



Time required: This is also scalable. Can be done in as little as an hour or developed over several sessions or as an away day.



Outputs: An annotated three horizons map, creating a picture of current state, desired future, and steps to achieve change.



Recommended toolkit: [Three Horizons Toolkit](#)

5 ways of working



Long-term: Helps us create a long-term vision based on an understanding of the present and what change is needed to move forward.



Prevention: Enables us to separate 'sticking plaster' solutions from steps that will form a path towards the desired future.



Integration: Helps bring the past and present into thinking about the future.



Collaboration/involvement: A fantastic, interactive way to bring people together.



Backcasting Mapping a path to the future

What is it?

Backcasting is a method which enables us to literally work backwards from our preferred future to the present and create a plan of action. It asks us to build a timeline, setting out key changes and milestones that would need to be achieved along the way. It also invites us to identify what is within our and our organisation's direct control and what we will need to influence or collaborate on.

This exercise is best used towards the end of a project, as it allows us to bring together the work we have done to envision a desired future and our understanding of external drivers of change to create a workable strategy.

How can it be applied to health inequalities?

It can be easy to imagine a future without health inequality but much harder to work out how to get there. Backcasting prompts us to carefully map out the path we need to follow to reach the future we want, identifying short-term goals we can act on and sign-posting where we need to involve others to make progress.



Case study:

[Creating a long-term plan for promoting well-being in a region of Wales](#)

Need to know



Approach: Workshop, ideally in-person, with 8-16 people using breakouts to ensure everyone can contribute.



Who to involve: People with a shared interest in achieving a future vision; from one organisation or bringing stakeholders together.



Time required: 4-5 hours divided over two workshops



Outputs: A timeline from the desired future back to the present, and from that an action plan of short- and medium-term steps.



Recommended toolkit: [Strategic Foresight Toolkit](#)

5 ways of working



Long-term: Helps us create a plan for achieving our long-term vision.



Prevention: Helps us identify and prepare for potential challenge.



Integration: Enables us to consider what actions we can take to reach our preferred future and integrate these with the actions of others.



Collaboration/involvement: A way to bring interested stakeholders together to agree and develop a shared plan of action.



Landscape futures

Journeying towards a future vision

What is it?

This model (also known as a Star-Mountain-Chessboard-Self) can help us tie long-term thinking to more traditional strategy models. It presents the future as a landscape that needs to be navigated. It aims to help ensure equal weight is given to our overarching aspiration and to what needs to be anticipated and acted on in the more immediate future.

The 'self' is us or our organisation. The 'star' represents our or our organisation's guiding values, vision and purpose. The 'mountain' is the strategic objective we want to achieve – something challenging but achievable in the medium-term. The 'chessboard' is the strategic landscape that will need to be traversed to reach the mountain. This is where external factors and tactics for overcoming challenges can be explored.

How can it be applied to health inequalities?

This method enables us to explore our or our organisation's role in reducing health inequalities, keeping an ultimate long-term vision in mind but with a focus on how to achieve key medium-term objectives.



Case study:

[Considering the future role and approach that a new educational body would need](#)

Need to know



Approach: A workshop is best, either online or in-person can work.



Who to involve: It can be done internally with our team only, or involving stakeholders we hope to work with.



Time required: It depends how deep we want the discussion to go. It can take a couple of hours, or we could spread through several days.



Outputs: Can be used to refine a vision or strategy for an organisation, or plan out tactics for more immediate goals.



Recommended toolkit: [Making the Future Visible](#)

5 ways of working



Long-term: Balances long-term vision with more immediate action.



Prevention: Anticipates potential obstacles to achieving our goal so action can be taken to prevent or mitigate them.



Integration: Helps us consolidate previous futures work and looking at our role as part of a bigger picture.



Collaboration/involvement: Can bring together interested stakeholders to focus on a medium-term goal and agree tactics.

Case Studies



Horizon Scanning

Identifying the mission areas for the new Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

The challenge

To identify the areas of work – ‘missions’ – for the new Future Generations Commissioner. We called the project ‘Our Future Focus’ and wanted the missions we chose to reflect the big challenges facing current and future generations in the long-term rather than short-term issues. We needed a way to prioritise from the start as almost anything could be relevant to this. We agreed a broad horizon scanning exercise could help with this.

The approach

We started by looking at the key, long-term megatrends operating globally. The breadth of the scan meant we did not go into depth on specific issues as traditional horizon scanning methodologies suggest. We focused on established trends and subrends rather than digging into weaker signals of change. We searched for published reports online and spoke to other stakeholders in Wales we knew to be doing futures work asking them to share relevant reports with us. Where the data existed, we checked how the trends we identified were playing out at a UK and Wales-wide level. The trends were thematised to allow us to easily communicate our findings and link them with issues arising from other aspects of the project.

Impact

Our horizon scanning findings informed the whole approach of the project. For example, we referred to the key trends identified in our stakeholder survey, which asked people to prioritise the trends they though were most important. We also used the trends to inform a futures triangle and a three horizons exercise, to further develop our long-term thinking and inform internal and external meetings and events.

The link to health inequality

The role of the Future Generations Commissioner was established to support the public sector in Wales to achieve 7 well-being goals: a Prosperous, Resilient, Healthier, Globally Responsible and More Equal Wales, with Cohesive Communities, Thriving Culture and Welsh language. There is significant overlap between these goals and what we know underpins health, well-being and equality in Wales. While this project was about identifying areas of focus for the Commissioner, a very similar approach could be taken to identify the key trends shaping health inequality and used to define priority work. As it was, Our Future Focus selected health, and particularly the wider drivers of poor health, as one of its mission areas, recognising its overlap with other important trends such as climate change, demographic change, and increasing socio-economic inequality.



Top tip

Do not let perfect be the enemy of good. Futures methods are there to help you and serve your needs, rather than being an end in and of itself. It is always possible to modify a methodology to fit the specific project or timescales. We did not do horizon scanning by the book, but we did gather useful insights that helped shape our priorities.



For more information

We published a [methodology report](#) alongside the strategy that came from the Our Future Focus project: [Cymru Can](#).



7 questions

Exploring what the housing system in Wales could and should look like



Comisiynydd
Cenedlaethau'r
Dyfodol
Cymru

Future
Generations
Commissioner
for Wales



GIG
CYMRU
NHS
WALES

Iechyd Cyhoeddus
Cymru
Public Health
Wales

The challenge

To explore with experts what the housing system in Wales could and should look like in the future. We wanted to explore the expectations, hopes, and fears for housing as a driver of well-being in Wales.

We also wanted to understand what they thought needed to change if housing was to support Wales in its ambition to achieve the goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act, which includes a Healthier and More Equal Wales.

The approach

We used a modified '7 questions' interview technique. We interviewed nine experts including representatives from housing policy, public health, housing development, and housing associations. We asked people to think ahead to 2050 (approximately 30 years into the future) and consider: what they thought the most important issues would be, what 'good' would look like, what the risks of not achieving their vision would be, what would need to change to get there, what we can learn from key events that brought us to where we are now, what the priority next steps should be, and what they would like to see happen if they had a 'magic wand'.

Impact

Themes were summarised in an insight pack that informed a two-day workshop with stakeholders on housing policy strategy in Wales. The findings also helped shape housing policy recommendations made by the Future Generations Commissioner in the 'Future Generations 2020' report.

The link to health inequality

The homes people live in have a large and wide-reaching impact on their health – this includes physical and mental health and well-being. Whether a home is warm, safe, and dry are critical factors. Not having these in place can lead to falls and accidents, respiratory conditions, and poor mental health. But true healthy housing is broader than this and should take account of whether a home is affordable, fit for purpose, enables people to access the services they need, or be part of a thriving community. A home also needs to continue to be healthy in the face of future challenges, such as climate change or an ageing population.



Top tip

Make sure the 7 questions are tailored to your topic and audience; record the interviews so you do not miss any insights.

We also made sure, after all the interviews were over, the participants each received a copy of the insight pack so they could see how other experts' views matched up with their own (or not!).



For more information

For more information, please see the [Future Generations Report Section on Housing](#) produced by the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner, which drew on the insight work.



Modeling

Using data to understand where Public Health Wales should focus its work

The challenge

To use a data-driven approach to understand where Public Health Wales should focus its work on improving the health and well-being of the people of Wales and reducing inequalities. We also wanted to explore how this could be done so that it reduces future pressure on the health and social care system. To do this, we needed to first understand the big picture of disease prevalence in Wales, using the best available data and analysis.

The approach

To identify what was important, our rapid overview dashboard was developed to provide timely data on population health and health inequalities in Wales, and track trends. Our excess mortality charts showed mortality from diabetes is growing. To understand this better, we analysed trends and risk factors for diabetes, and then modelled diabetes prevalence trends out to 2035/36. Our projections estimated in 10 years' time, if current trends continue, around 1 in 11 adults (17+ years old) will be living with diabetes in Wales, which is 48,000 more people than in 2021/22. Diabetes is risk factor for cardiovascular disease, and shares risk factors with other diseases such as respiratory disease and some cancers.

The impact

This stark picture of diabetes in Wales is driving our priorities. We are working with our partners across the system to bring together the evidence base for action to tackle diabetes and support people living with diabetes. This includes a focus on prevention. The ambition of the public health system is to build on existing programmes to 1) stop the increasing prevalence of Type 2 diabetes; and 2) have more people living well with diabetes as measured through a reduction in amputations and other diabetes pathways.

The link to health inequality

The risk of developing Type 2 diabetes, and the health complications that can follow, are not equal across the population. Living with unhealthy weight and obesity, not being physically active, and having an unhealthy diet are also risk factors for Type 2 diabetes. Data shows adults living in the poorest areas of Wales are almost **twice as likely to be physically inactive**, and **50% more likely to be living with obesity**. Other at risk population groups include those from Asian, Black African, or African Caribbean origin; those who are taking certain medicines; and those with high blood pressure.



Top tip

The top-down analytical approach allowed us to identify the big-ticket items for prevalence. Our striking chart showing the projected prevalence of diabetes over the next ten years then engaged senior leaders and helped to drive the focus on diabetes. Top tips:

- Analysts – think about the most important message you want your audience to go away with and make it as simple and clear as possible.
- Decision-makers – there is always too much to do. Taking a step back to look at the big picture data helps to crystalise priorities.



For more information

[Prevalence of disease – trends, projections, risk factors and actions](#)

[Diabetes prevalence – trends, risk factors, and 10-year projection](#)

[Public Health Wales – rapid overview dashboard](#)



Futures triangle

Engaging young people in thinking about the future in Wales



The challenge

To engage diverse young people from Pembrokeshire College in contributing to the Future Generations Commissioner's 'Our Future Focus' exercise, which sought to set the priorities for the new Commissioner's term. This required a group activity that could be delivered within 40-minute tutorial periods, or even briefer opportunities to engage a passing individual learner. The activity needed to grab attention and motivate participation; to give background information on the Well-being of Future Generations Act as existing awareness was low; and support sufficient understanding of the issues to be able to provide thoughtful feedback on the priorities.

The approach

We adapted the 'futures triangle' exercise to make it suitable for young people – keeping the approach informal, delivered with a sense of fun, and with minimal requirement to read a lot of text. We invited learners to 'Help Derek', creating a sense of intrigue – who is Derek? What does he want to know? We created a large eye-catching resource that contained all the relevant information, broke the exercise down into sections, colour-coded to aid understanding. We split learners into small groups (with fun team names) to encourage all to get involved, asked them to think of an issue important to them around which the questions were structured, and set an expectation all groups would need to provide feedback.

The impact

Over three 40-minute sessions and 30 minutes catching passers-by on campus, we engaged with 45 young people. This generated a wide range of pertinent issues and highly relevant suggestions on priorities. We were then able to analyse and prioritise their responses thematically in order to feed it into the Our Future Focus process.

The link to health inequality

There are two links to health inequalities. First the subject matter – the role of the Future Generations Commissioner is to support the public sector in Wales to achieve 7 well-being goals: a Prosperous, Resilient, Healthier, Globally Responsible and More Equal Wales, with Cohesive Communities, Thriving Culture and Welsh language. There is significant overlap between these well-being goals and what we know underpins health, well-being and equality in Wales. Second, it is well understood that to make progress on health inequalities, it is necessary to 'work with' rather than 'do to' communities. This example demonstrates how futures approaches can be a valuable tool for engaging and involving people, particularly young people.



Top tip

Ensure the chosen approach meets the needs of the target group in terms of accessibility and facilitation, and motivates them to participate. It proved effective to give participants choice on their subjects of interest and encourage them to start with positive thoughts on a desirable future rather than problems and barriers faced which could have demotivated participation.



For more information

More information about our work to encourage young people to engage with and have representation on town, city and community councils across Pembrokeshire can be found on our [CWBR Youth](#) project page.



Futures triangle

Exploring what the future may mean for the role and work of Welsh Government



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

The challenge

To think about what Wales may look like in the future and what this may mean for the work of Welsh Government and those who work within it.

The approach

We held a hybrid 'away day' using the Futures Triangle to facilitate group discussion. The questions put to the groups were:

The pull of the future:

- What future do we want to avoid? What are the possible images of Wales's future over the next 10 years? What is pulling us towards particular futures? Are there competing images of the future?

The push of the present:

- What trends are pushing us towards particular futures? What quantitative drivers and trends are changing the future?

The weight of the past:

- What is holding us back? What are the barriers to change? What are the deep structures that resist change?

The impact

We captured useful insights on how the future may impact our work and reflected on the opportunities identified to improve our ways of working. The Futures Triangle was welcomed as a new concept to many of the participants who felt they would find it a useful tool to facilitate other discussions.

The link to health inequality

The role governments can play in addressing health inequalities is significant. But the future poses both opportunities and challenges for how effectively governments may be able to make progress on this issue. For example, particularly in Wales, conversations about the devolution of additional power to the Welsh Government, or a retraction in what powers it can exercise, are important. The effectiveness of governments in reducing health inequalities is also affected by how they are perceived by the public; for example, trust, as well as what economic factors may affect their ability to finance interventions to address health inequalities – or not. The relative influence of governments over other players, such as charities, commercial organisations, or even social media networks, also has an effect on the role of government in reducing health inequality in the future.



Top tip

In hindsight, the exercise could have been improved by placing clearer parameters around the 'future' that was under consideration (i.e. for Wales in 10 years) and spending more time explaining this. We would also recommend building in sufficient time to discuss the outputs generated on the day to have a richer reflection of implications and next steps.



For more information

De Vito, L. (2023) [Foresight for sustainable development and well-being governance in Wales](#). This work has been supported by the Economic and Social Research Council, ESRC Policy Fellowship - Grant reference: ES/W008939/1.



Futures wheel

Preparing for the long-term implications of a new piece of environmental legislation in Wales



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

The challenge

To finalise preparations for the Environment (Air Quality and Soundscapes) (Wales) Bill. This included discussing the legislation in the context of potential future changes, identifying closer links to the well-being goals in the Well-being of Future Generations Act, and identifying opportunities for more integrated working with other departments.

The approach

In a hybrid workshop setting, the team used the Futures Wheel to imagine the first, second and third order consequences of the Bill coming into law, looking five years into the future. We discussed what had changed and what the potential risks and opportunities were. The team also used the Welsh Government's [Future Trends Report](#) to consider the impact of key trends on the successful implementation of the legislation and how the new legislation could contribute to accelerating or decelerating certain trends. We built on this work to develop three scenarios: a worse-than-expected, better-than-expected and a different-than-expected scenario.

The impact

From the scenarios, the team identified actions which could maximise the chances of moving closer to the better-than-expected scenario, while minimising the risks of falling into a worse-than-expected scenario. The different-than-expected scenario helped the team to identify new opportunities and risks that had not previously been considered and to see the bigger picture. The team also identified direct links between the new legislation and the Well-being of Future Generations Act and opportunities for cross-departmental working and shared goals and actions.

The link to health inequality

Exposure to air pollutants is linked with adverse health effects such as heart disease and stroke, respiratory disease and lung cancer. On average, air pollution reduces the life expectancy of every resident in the UK by [7–8 months](#) and is linked with 52, 500 deaths a year due to [nitrogen oxide](#) and [particulate matter](#). Although air quality in Wales is generally good, it varies locally, resulting in issues of environmental injustice and social and health inequalities. The policy responses to address poor air quality can also create or exacerbate inequalities. Long-term thinking can help consideration of how population health could reflect air pollution trends and the ways that different policy responses could play out in the short, medium and longer-term for different population groups.



Top tip

The futures wheel works well for online events as it has a straightforward, visual format people can add to using simple, digital platforms. If opting to run the session in hybrid, consider having one facilitator for online and one in the room, and allow time for collective discussion that brings the whole group together at the end to reflect.



For more information

De Vito, L. (2023) [Foresight for sustainable development and well-being governance in Wales](#). This work has been supported by the Economic and Social Research Council, ESRC Policy Fellowship - Grant reference: ES/W008939/1.



Axes of uncertainty

Developing a future fit water monitoring process for Wales

The challenge

To ensure our new water monitoring strategy was resilient to potential future changes and identify potential impacts on the work of the freshwater monitoring team in Natural Resources Wales. Initially, the scope of the work was broad and included trends affecting water quality, emerging technologies, freshwater ecology, and monitoring techniques. We used the STEEPLE framework to identify drivers shaping the future, and then discussed the level of uncertainty and potential impact of each in a driver mapping workshop. This allowed the group to narrow their focus. The future of remote sensing was identified as a topic that had both high levels of uncertainty and could have a significant impact on the freshwater monitoring team's work.

The approach

We decided to use axes of uncertainty and scenario planning to explore how the future of remote sensing might play out in Wales. In a workshop setting we developed 2 axes of uncertainty: one looking at the resources of the team and their ability to adopt new technologies, and the other at how the technology itself could develop and whether it would be possible to collect the data needed by the team in this way. The team used these two axes to develop 4 scenarios that described different possible futures. The team could then discuss how they would respond to each one.

The impact

The exercise gave the team space to discuss possible outcomes of different approaches in different situations. Going through each scenario, the team identified recommendations for the freshwater monitoring strategy that would make it more resilient to different futures, which were subsequently adopted into the strategy.

The link to health inequalities

Access to fresh, clean water is essential for good health and well-being. Contaminated water can lead to diseases, such as cancer or infections. Pollution of our rivers and seas can also negatively impact our ability to enjoy our natural landscapes for recreation. As a result, unequal access to clean and usable 'blue' spaces is one factor that can contribute to inequalities in mental and physical health and well-being in Wales. Around the world, tensions over unequal access to freshwater are growing, making it a trend that could create or worsen existing health inequalities.



Top tip

Having a neutral facilitator from outside the team helps make sure discussions are not biased in a particular direction. Generating several axes before choosing the ones you will use in a scenario also helps to ensure you find the most useful one for your team to explore.



For more information

More information about the work Natural Resources Wales are doing to reduce health inequalities, including action on water quality, is available on their [website](#). For more detail on this project and the use of futures approaches, you can contact Natural Resources Wales's Integrated Evidence Group.



Scenario planning

Co-creating a preferred vision for the future of the natural environment in Wales in 2050

The challenge

To co-create a preferred vision for the future of the natural environment in Wales in 2050. The goal was to develop a vision that represented the views of the people of Wales and key stakeholders. We named the project 'Nature and Us'. An important part of the project was determining how to best help the public imagine and explore different futures. We wanted participants to consider the pressures affecting the environment, how the way we live now will impact possible futures, and the trade-offs involved. The project was particularly challenging as it was delivered during the COVID-19 pandemic and was therefore done online - very different from more traditional scenario development, which usually involves a series of workshop discussions.

The approach

We used an existing set of environmental scenarios, developed by the [UK National Ecosystem Assessment](#), as a starting point, and built on these with topic experts to ensure the scenarios were plausible. We then created short films of each scenario and used these in workshop and webinar events to generate thought and discussion. We asked the audience prompting questions to help them consider what they liked or were concerned about in each scenario, and who the winners and losers were. This allowed exploration of different versions of the future, covering challenging topics such as diet, pollution, climate change, and how we grow food.

The impact

The qualitative feedback we received from the webinars and workshops was analysed alongside the results of other methods used as part of the visioning process, in order to form a final vision for the environment for Wales. This vision is now being used as a shared direction to encourage action for the environment.

The link to health inequalities

Access to and time spent in nature can bring significant mental and physical health and well-being benefits. For example, it can help us stay more physically active and can improve our mental resilience. Green spaces are also important for addressing the climate and nature emergencies and their potential health harms; for example, by offering enhanced protection from flooding. Unfortunately, not everyone in Wales currently enjoys the same access to the natural environment, with low income areas generally having less good quality green spaces. Projects like 'Nature and Us' can help people re-imagine the present and explore how access to nature can be made more equal.



Top tip

Ultimately, scenarios should explore plausible futures and help participants imagine what the future could look like, to inform their decision making. But doing this well is not an exact science – so do not be afraid to get creative!

If we want to effect change with the scenarios, it is essential those who can influence that change are part of the scenario development process.



For more information

More information about the project can be found on the [Nature and Us project page](#) or by contacting the team who led the work: integrated.evidence@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk



Creative narratives

Defining a 100-year long-term strategy for the Welsh Centre for International Affairs



The challenge

To create a long-term strategy for the Welsh Centre for International Affairs – our current 5-year strategy is coming to an end as we celebrate our 50th birthday. We decided the next strategy would be long-term in line with the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

We are creating a strategy looking forward the next 50 years.

The approach

At the time of writing, work is still ongoing, but the approach has been to experiment and adapt a range of futures tools and techniques with different audiences, co-created with colleagues. We have been inclined towards creative visioning tools over more technical tools. Favourites so far have been 100 year past and future headlines, visioning the future, and imaging future characters. We have also adapted stakeholder analysis tools so we are both mapping current stakeholders and capturing a dream stakeholder map. We are currently doing surveys to capture additional information. What has been really interesting has been how these techniques have enabled us to bring in voices from outside of Wales to contribute to the work.

The impact

It is a bit early to say, but so far, people have been hugely engaged in the activities and fed back that, in difficult times, using futures visioning in combination with reflecting on the past has brought hope and perspective, and created a sense of possibility. We also think staff and stakeholders have developed futures literacy skills that they will be able to carry forward into other projects and pieces of work.

The link to health inequalities

The Welsh Centre for International Affairs aims to support everyone in Wales to contribute to creating a fairer and more peaceful world. Ensuring everyone can access the things we need to live healthy and happy lives is an essential part of that and is reflected in the organisation's mission, vision, and strategy. The Welsh Centre for International Affairs' recent work includes supporting people in Wales to develop a sense of Global Citizenship as part of achieving the goal of a Globally Responsible Wales, as set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act. This recognises better health and well-being for Wales cannot be at the expense of the health and well-being of other nations; and reducing health inequality needs to be a global mission.



Top tip

Looking to the distant past feels like an essential part of looking far into the future. It can help us understand how we got to where we are, and seeing how far we have already travelled can inspire us to think about what we can achieve in the future.

Play with the tools so they work for you – futures thinking has massive potential for creativity and experimentation – there is no right and wrong.



For more information

For more information, get in touch with WCIA on www.wcia.org.uk



Creative narratives

Understanding what communities hope and fear for in a future Wales with climate change



Comisiynydd
Cenedlaethau'r
Dyfodol
Cymru
Future
Generations
Commissioner
for Wales



Iechyd Cyhoeddus
Cymru
Public Health
Wales

The challenge

To understand what communities in Wales hope and fear for in a future with climate change. We particularly wanted to understand the views of communities who have been less involved in conversations about climate change to date. We wanted the lessons from this project to inform the thinking and planning of Welsh Government and others, so that how we respond to the challenge of climate change in Wales protects and promotes the health and well-being of everyone, and leaves no one behind.

The approach

Public Health Wales and the Future Generations Commissioner's Office jointly commissioned futures experts, [FLiNT](#). Taking a co-production approach with stakeholders invested in the communities and issues we wanted to explore, we developed our initial [Communities and Climate Change in a Future Wales](#) project. We chose to use creative futures methods as an engaging and accessible way to enable communities to think about and share their views on what climate change could mean for them in the long-term. Techniques included character-led storytelling activities (a method pioneered by FLiNT), delivered in-person or online, and storytelling competitions where people, including children and young people, were invited to send a letter or postcard to the future. The outputs were then analysed to draw out key themes.

The impact

We produced a 'storybook' sharing the narratives and characters generated by participants and the key themes they highlighted. Based on this we published a paper setting out areas for policy action so that no one in Wales experiences unfair or disproportionate negative impacts from climate change. This was presented at [Wales Climate Week 2022](#) and shared with stakeholders. The materials have been used by Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and others to prompt further discussion.

The link to health inequalities

Climate change is recognised as the most significant threat to physical and mental health and well-being we will face this century. This is because the higher temperatures and more extreme weather events, like flooding, caused by climate change can have life threatening consequences. Some parts of Wales, and of the rest of the world, are at higher risk of experiencing the negative impacts of climate change. This means climate change has the potential to worsen existing health inequalities or create new ones. How we respond to climate change also runs this risk if the measures we put in place to adapt to or mitigate climate change make life unfairly difficult for those on low incomes or people who live with a disability, for example. Working with communities to better understand what climate change could mean for them, and how we respond to it, is essential if we are to chart a fair course through the multiple challenges climate change presents.



Top tip

Planning in enough time to do the creative methodologies justice – they can generate some very rich and enlightening findings. When planning online or in-person workshops with different community groups, we should be mindful of digital inequalities and language or cultural barriers by offering different ways to input and co-producing sessions with those you seek to engage.



For more information

The [storybook](#) and [policy paper](#) have more detail of what we learned. We also produced a [Methodology Report](#) to give hints and tips on how to adapt the methods we used, as well as suggestions for how to use the resources created in future workshops.



Three horizons

Taking a long-term, systems approach to improving healthy weight in Wales

The challenge

To explore and initiate a systems approach to planning to improve health and well-being. This is an important part of delivering on Welsh Government's '[Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales](#)' 10-year strategy (2019). The strategy acknowledges the complexity of how the environments we live and work in affect our health and promotes collaboration and involvement at all levels to harness the whole system in supporting people's health and well-being. Planning is one example of how decisions can shape the environment we live in and how this can impact our health and well-being in unintended ways. For example, some areas have multiple hot food takeaways and limited access to healthier foods, and these are often associated with higher rates of overweight and obesity.

The approach

Colleagues from Public Health Wales, Health Boards, national and regional planning teams, and others focused on planning and design were invited to a hybrid workshop. We wanted to understand the current planning system, including its strengths and weaknesses around planning for well-being, and to begin developing a vision of the planning system we want. The three horizons method was chosen to help participants develop a shared vision of the future, while acknowledging complexity and uncertainty. One workshop focused on the built environment, the other on planning decisions relating to the food environment.

The impact

Participants worked through Horizon 1 (the present); Horizon 3 (the future we want) and Horizon 2 (ideas and actions to help move towards Horizon 3). Information was gathered, collated, and themed for participants to assess different options for action and develop collective decision-making processes to support our longer-term vision. This participatory nature of the process also helped new relationships and networks form across professional communities.

The link to health inequalities

The COVID-19 pandemic was a clear example of how being overweight puts someone at a higher risk of death or complications than someone of a healthy weight. Indeed, being overweight is a risk factor for several conditions, from cancer, to stroke, to diabetes. Poor diet and a sedentary lifestyle are the main causes of overweight and obesity, but these factors are not always within an individual's control, being strongly shaped by where we live and what we may be able to afford to eat. For example, people living in the worst off parts of Wales are more likely to be overweight or obese. By tackling the health inequalities that make some of us more likely to become overweight or obese, we can also tackle the health inequalities that result from the increased risk of experiencing other mental and physical health conditions.



Top tip

At the outset, we should think about what we want to be able to do with the information gathered through the three horizons approach. This will help guide the collation and thematic analysis of the information afterwards and help structure the results to share with your stakeholders in a way that helps to set out next steps.



For more information

Our animation describing our whole systems approach to healthy weight can be found in [English](#) and [Welsh](#).



Three horizons

Developing a local, sustainable food strategy in Wales



The challenge

Food Vale is a partnership of dedicated individuals, community groups, organisations and businesses working together to build a thriving, healthy, and sustainable food system in the Vale. We wanted to gather input on a 5-year sustainable food strategy for the Vale of Glamorgan. We felt it was crucial for the strategy to not only consider relatively current needs but also the needs of future generations, and to embed this in a much longer-term, 100-year vision.

The approach

We held an in-person engagement event with key stakeholders from across the public, private, and voluntary sectors, as well as community representatives. The day began with presentations from local experts who were able to set the scene and get people thinking creatively and critically about the future. We wanted to understand what the current local food system looks like, what our vision for the future of food and farming in the Vale of Glamorgan might look like, and the different innovations which may (or may not) get us to this point. The three horizons framework was chosen to help participants develop a shared vision of the future of food and farming in the Vale, whilst acknowledging the complexity and uncertainty inherent in the context of the climate and nature emergency.

The impact

Over 60 people joined the event, and we were able to capture a rich array of perspectives. We are now in the process of organising these and shaping them into a first draft of our strategy, which will then go out for consultation.

The link to health inequalities

The food we eat makes a significant direct contribution to our health. It can also indirectly affect our health because of the impact our food choices can have on the planet. A food system that is both healthy to the individual and sustainable for the planet can reduce the health inequalities we know are driven by poor diets, and by exploitation of natural resources, such as air and water pollution.



Top tip

We found it helpful to have a facilitator for every breakout group to help guide discussions and make sure the key points are recorded. We felt the scene setting presentations were a really important part of what made the day successful. Invite experts and people working on the ground to share their understandings and experiences. And at the end of the event, assign time with the facilitators and reflect on the discussions and start drawing out key themes, while it is still fresh.



For more information

We published a blog summarising the day - [Citizens gather to discuss Our Food Horizon in the Vale of Glamorgan - Food Vale](#). There is also a [video](#) of the event available.



Backcasting/ Pre-mortem

Creating a long-term plan for promoting well-being in a region of Wales



The challenge

Public Services Boards were established by the Well-being of Future Generations Act to enable greater collaboration across a local area of issues that could promote well-being. We wanted to ensure the well-being plan being developed by Conwy & Denbighshire Public Services Board was resilient to future changes and create actions that could mitigate any potential issues that might arise.

The approach

We used a technique called 'pre-mortem' which is similar to backcasting, but focuses on a negative outcome, rather than a preferred future. In a workshop we looked at the Public Services Board's well-being plan and imagined a future five years from now (which is the length of the plan), where we had achieved nothing and failed to meet the objectives set out in the plan.

We then explored why that might be and came up with key areas that could result in things going wrong, such as lack of resource, lack of understanding and communication, or the influence of outside factors. Once we had generated these ideas of what went wrong, and why, we developed solutions and mitigations for each issue.

The impact

The solutions and mitigations developed in the workshop fed into the Public Services Board's actions for the delivery of the well-being plan. The workshop discussions helped the group consider the long-term, and work in the spirit of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

The link to health inequalities

In Wales, the Well-being of Future Generations Act serves as a vital driver towards reducing health inequalities by promoting collaborative action on their underlying causes. Conwy & Denbighshire Public Services Board's current well-being plan has a focus on making it a more equal place with less deprivation, with a focus on four themes: helping communities remain happier, healthier and more resilient in the face of challenges such as climate change and the cost of living crisis; promoting a flourishing economy with a skilled workforce; breaking down barriers for those with protected characteristics; and improving access to good quality housing. Progress on each of these issues will help reduce health inequalities in Conwy & Denbighshire.



Top tip

When organising the workshop, we tried to get a really varied group of individuals who have different expertise areas. This range of perspectives can really improve the quality of the discussion and help make sure we are not missing any key areas.



For more information

See the Conwy & Denbighshire Public Services Board's [local well-being plan \(2023-2028\)](#) for more detail on how it plans to create make Conwy & Denbighshire a more equal place with less deprivation. You can also [contact](#) Conwy & Denbighshire Public Services Board.



Landscape futures

Considering the future role and approach that a new educational body would need

The challenge

To think about the future role and approach that a new public sector organisation being created - the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research - could have. This was done to support Welsh Government's Skills, Lifelong Learning and Higher Education team.

The approach

Colleagues from the Future Generations Commissioner's Office facilitated a landscape futures session for a hybrid away day. We used breakout tables to discuss each of the elements and questions of the model in turn, which we had tailored to the discussion:

- **Star:** Why are we putting energy into this? How does this vision contribute to the Wales-wide vision under the Act? What organisational objectives does it support?
- **Mountain:** What outcomes do we want? How will we be operating differently in the future as a result? What changes will we see as a result?
- **Chessboard:** How will we get from our present state to our vision? What are the steps we need to take? Looking back, successfully from the future, how did we get here?
- **Self:** Why are we doing this now? What is the opportunity and how long does it last? What can we draw on that will help? What are the risks if we do nothing? What do we need to commit to make it work? What are the risks in commitment?

The impact

The team explored their ideas and understanding in relation to the future of the new organisation. They discussed both areas of joint agreement and understanding and identified where areas where further conversations needed to be had.

The link to health inequalities

The strategic vision for tertiary education set by Welsh Government involves creating a system where lifelong learning is accessible to all. Access to education and opportunities to develop new skills is an important building block for good health and well-being throughout life. It enables people to secure good jobs with fair wages, so that they can then afford the other essentials to live well, like healthy food and bill payments. By establishing the Commission from the outset as taking a long-term perspective, helps to ensure it will deliver on this strategic aim and help contribute to a more equal Wales.



Top tip

Do not be concerned with carrying out the method perfectly. Instead be creative and inspired to invent new approaches suited to get the best out of the discussions.

Landscape futures is usually used at the end of project, to join up information and ideas identified throughout the process. But here we adapted it so we could use it to help people consider their joint goals and explore what their future role might be.



For more information

There is more information about the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research in their [report](#) on the proposed Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill, which has since been [enacted into law](#).

You can also [contact](#) the Future Generations Commissioner's team.

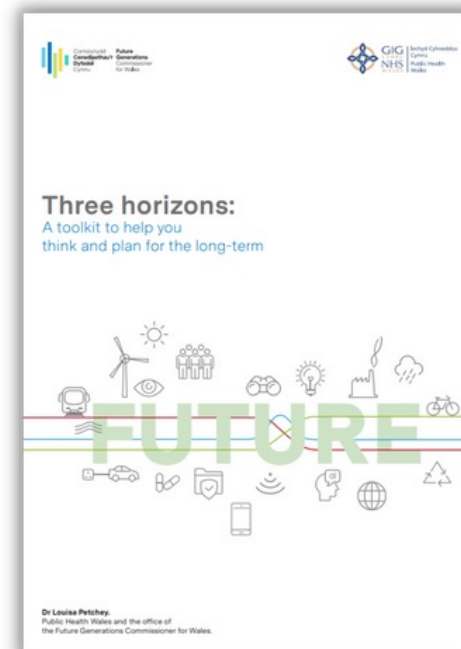
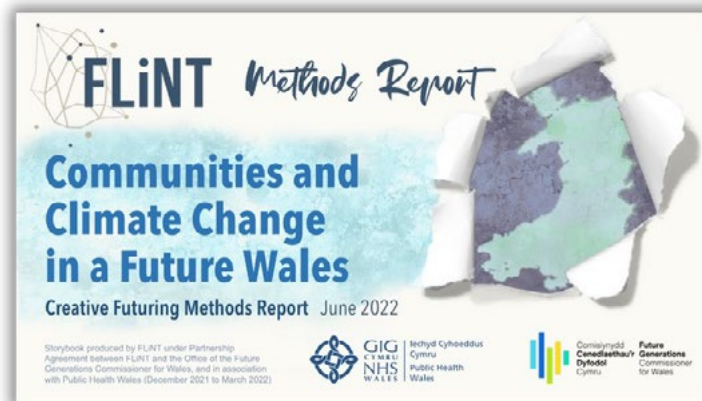
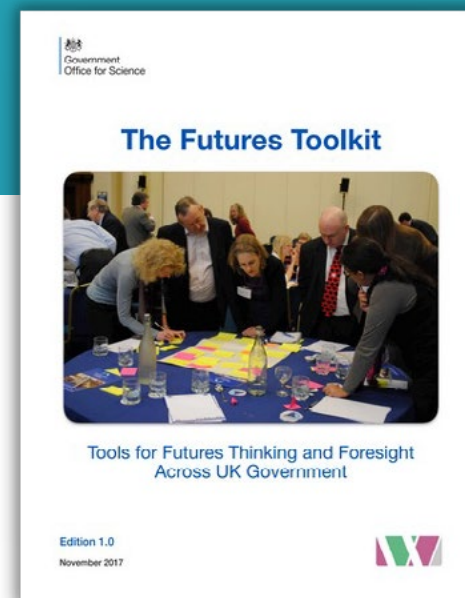
Resources



Further Resources

Toolkits

- The UK Government Office for Science: [Futures Toolkit](#)
- Public Health Wales and Future Generations Commissioner for Wales: [Three Horizons Toolkit – PHW / OFGC](#)
- Public Health Wales and Future Generations Commissioner for Wales: [Horizon Scanning Guide](#)
- Public Health Wales and Future Generations Commissioner for Wales: [Communities and climate change](#)
- Public Health Wales: [Video on systems thinking](#)
- Futures Platform: [blog on the Futures Triangle](#)
- The UK Government Office for Science: [Tackling Obesity: Future Choices – Visualising the Future: Scenarios to 2050](#)
- Save the Children: [Strategic Foresight Toolkit](#)
- Hardin Tibbs: [Making the future visible](#)



Further resources

Case studies

- Future Generations Commissioner for Wales: [Cymru Can: Methodology Report](#)
- Future Generations Commissioner for Wales: [Future Generations Report 2020: Housing section](#)
- Public Health Wales: [Prevalence of disease – trends, projections, risk factors and actions](#)
- Public Health Wales: [Diabetes prevalence – trends, risk factors, and 10-year projection](#)
- Public Health Wales: [Wales Public Health Rapid Overview Dashboard](#)
- Welsh Government: [Foresight for sustainable development and well-being governance in Wales](#)
- Planed: [CWBR Youth](#)
- Natural Resources Wales: [Health Inequalities](#)
- Natural Resources Wales: [Nature and Us](#)
- Public Health Wales and Future Generations Commissioner for Wales: [Communities and Climate Change Storybook](#)
- [Healthy Wealth Healthy You video](#)
- Food Vale: [Citizens gather to discuss Our Food Horizon in the Vale of Glamorgan](#)

People and organisations doing some long-term thinking in Wales

Thinking about the future can be hard in the beginning, especially if you try to do it on your own. So, here are some other Welsh organisations who are trying to think long-term and test new approaches that you can contact for more information or to test your ideas.



FUTURE STEWARDS

The home of 3 Horizons resources. They also offer in-depth training on 3 Horizons.



Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru Natural Resources Wales

A number of their staff are trained up on 3 Horizons. They offer support to Public Services Boards on long-term thinking. They often like to try out new methods for foresight.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Welsh Government's Sustainable Futures team produces the Future Trends Report every 5 years and can provide support in relation to using this.



Futures Group

An informal group where representatives of organisations with an interest in long-term thinking get together regularly to update each other on what they are doing and test new ideas related to long-term thinking.

Contact the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner if you want to know more.



Comisiynydd
Cenedlaethau'r
Dyfodol
Cymru

**Future
Generations
Commissioner
for Wales**

The office can provide advice, share resource, does training and can link you up to the Futures Group. A number of staff are trained up on different methods and they often like to try out new things in the long-term thinking space.



GIG
CYMRU
NHS
WALES

Iechyd Cyhoeddus
Cymru
Public Health
Wales

Public Health Wales have worked with the Office of The Future Generations Commissioner on a number of long-term thinking projects. A number of their staff are trained up on 3 Horizons.



WCVA have undertaken long-term thinking projects in relation to the voluntary sector and have produced a toolkit on different methodologies.