Introduction

This submission shares insights from two pieces of recent work carried out by SOIF and our partners:

1. **A National Strategy for the Next Generations (NSxNG):** a joint initiative with a coalition of civil society organisations, aiming to show how the national security apparatus and traditional approaches to developing national strategy can be rewired to make them more resilient and prepared for a fast-changing 21st Century environment. We published the findings from our pilot last year in a longer report, which offers more detail on much of the material covered below.¹

2. **Features of effective systemic foresight in governments around the world:** a research project with GO-Science focused on how to ensure a sustainable, effective system of strategic foresight within a government to support policy decisions, based on 8 international case studies.²

For space, we will not summarise why this work is important here – the committee already recognises that urgent reform of the national security apparatus is needed (for more on the context the UK government is operating in and the need to do things differently, see pages 3-4 of the NSxNG pilot report). Instead, we will focus on some of the key ideas that have come through from our work, and especially the NSxNG programme. We believe that change along the lines we set out will not only help establish effective structures to prepare for further future emergencies, but will transform the UK government’s ability to plan for and shape the future of the country in a way that brings the public and all parts of society along with it.

Background on NSxNG

The NSxNG programme rests on three main premises which underpin our recommendations:

- **National Security is best seen as a ‘whole-of-nation’ issue,** in terms of linking up foreign and domestic policy areas and apparatuses. Technology, health, migration, data, education and reputation connect what happens at home to abroad, and are critically important for our posture and position overseas.

- **Strategic confidence and a proactive global posture require a longer time horizon.** National security planning needs to look out at least 25 years (or a generation). Looking ahead only 5-10 years is tempting at a time of high turbulence and uncertainty, but encourages linear thinking (people are tempted to forecast continuation, or worsening, of the current situation) and makes it harder for


² Report due to be published May 2021.
policymakers to think genuinely differently. Considering a longer time horizon and exploring alternative scenarios opens up more optimistic dynamics and opportunities.

- **Harnessing the creative input and energy of citizens is not a nice-to-have but a must-have in uncertain times.** The British people are a key part of our national resilience. Effective policy posture in the face of turbulence requires government to lead in a networked approach (as a “systems steward”) rather than in a top-down mode, in order to harness the insights from people’s lived experience into policy development and implementation.

After a successful programme of engagement with senior officials, parliamentarians and over 500 young people from across the country (supported by a network of more than 100 organisations and led by a delivery group of 15), our report on the NSxNG pilot programme recommended that the Integrated Review be seen as the beginning of a *five-year National Strategy journey to build a new national narrative and supporting governance apparatus*. It picked out three key areas where progress is necessary to sustain this journey:

A. **Political consensus around public dialogue, with our political leaders committed to the outputs of such a dialogue.**

B. **An independent public dialogue on National Strategy that is well-designed and conducted, to build public consensus by giving people influence.**

C. **A national security apparatus that is orientated to support whole-of-government, agile and future-facing national strategy, and that encourages stewardship of future generations’ wellbeing.**

We focus here on the third pillar, since it is the most relevant to this inquiry, but progress in the other two areas is also critical.

**Recommendations**

We have identified seven priority recommendations to support effective planning and preparation for the future across the national security apparatus and government more broadly, drawing primarily on our NSxNG pilot but also reflecting findings from our GO-Science work: ³

1. **Set new obligations on Ministers and civil service to act for the long-term.**
   Designate Select Committees and other independent oversight bodies (such as an ombudsman or Future Generations Commissioner) to scrutinise HMG on this basis. These bodies (and departments themselves) should pre-emptively evaluate major

policy decisions and proposed legislation for long-term and intergenerational impact – SOIF and Gulbenkian have developed an Intergenerational Fairness Assessment Framework to support this, currently being piloted with the APPG for Future Generations. The government should also give the proposed Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission a long-term brief, including working out new oversight mechanisms to represent Future Generations.

2. **Reorient the Treasury to ensure that Spending Reviews and other major spending decisions reflect these obligations to act for the long term.** The Treasury’s fiscal rules and spending mechanisms should be reformed to support long-run investments, prevention spending and long-term value for money, with a stronger consideration also given to the second order effects of spending decisions. Evaluating proposed projects or programmes for long-term impact is not enough – the Treasury should use its levers to encourage the rest of government to look long-term in order to determine where to invest and focus in the first place.

3. **Mandate a policy centre in the Cabinet Office** to gather insights from foresight work across government and translate them for policymaking at a senior level, identifying short-term policy implications and holding ministries to account for action. This centre should commission cross-government reference scenarios out to 2045 developed by external experts and through public participation, surface senior leaders’ planning assumptions, identify implications and commission deep-dive studies from the excellent strategy, foresight and analytical communities across government.

4. **Incorporate notions of “stewardship” and “wellbeing of future generations” into the purpose and mission of civil service.** The policy profession should lead on developing a participatory long-term policymaking guide for the Civil Service, recognising successful endeavours and innovations across the public sector and beyond. These principles should also be incorporated into the Green and Magenta books.

5. **Build skills and capability.** Futures techniques should be recognised as a critical tool for effective policymaking and included in the training curriculum for policymakers across government, with more support given to existing institutions and teams with long-term and cross-cutting perspectives – including those within departments and NDPBs, MOD’s DCDC, GO-Science, UKRI, and the Government Foresight Network. Efforts also need to be made to radically improve the teaching of strategic thinking skills (and associated leadership, whole-system analysis, iterative learning

---

4 [https://soif.org.uk/igf/](https://soif.org.uk/igf/)

through implementation) to civil servants, Ministers and MPs, with progress rewarded in HR Learning & Development, hiring and performance decisions.

6. **Support the civil service to involve the public, and support civic education.** Ensure each policy area has incentives for reaching out to inclusive platforms to engage young people – and local communities and religious groups, among others – from across all of the UK to debate, discuss and decide important issues. Support the UK public (including businesses, citizens, diaspora, universities) to develop the necessary skills to participate in these deliberative processes and think effectively about the future. Building the skills for national resilience and dialogue is a whole of society effort.

7. **Use tech with care.** Harness the power of big data carefully in engaging with the future. Technical mechanisms, like forecasting tournaments and algorithms, can be effective solutions for technical problems but are ineffective solutions to democratic problems.

*7 May 2021*