



# A proposal – House of Lords Committee for Future Generations

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A frequent criticism of the political process in the UK and around the world is that it is too preoccupied with short-term considerations. There will always be short-term pressures from, for example, the electorate and markets. These are an important part of a functioning democracy. But many of the most important challenges of our time are long-term. These challenges include the implications of new and emerging technologies, pensions and social care provision, infrastructure, inter-generational standards of living and employment opportunities, as well as environmental concerns.

The House of Lords Liaison Committee is reviewing the structure and function of committees. **We propose that the House of Lords creates a Committee for Future Generations, to bring ‘long-term thinking’ more systematically into the workings of Parliament.**

The House of Lords has always provided a partial counter-balance to the excessive focus on the short-term, because it is relatively insulated from electoral cycles and can take a longer-term perspective. The continuity that it represents stretches back into the nation’s past but also forwards into the future and a concern for the generations to come.

We believe that this ability to consider the long term could be strengthened through a Committee for Future Generations that is charged with reviewing future challenges, as well as scrutinising existing and proposed legislation for its long-term impact.

The problem of ‘short-termism’ in politics was explored in detail by the international Oxford Martin Commission for Future Generations in its 2013 report, [Now for the Long Term](#). The Commission recommended investing in “innovative institutions... independent of the short-term pressures facing governments of the day but appropriately accountable to the political system in question.” Such institutions “should be charged with conducting systematic reviews and analysis of longer-term issues.”

There are several examples of political institutions and arrangements that address the long term (see [www.fdsd.org/ways-forward/political-institutions-and-policy-making/](http://www.fdsd.org/ways-forward/political-institutions-and-policy-making/) for further details). The one that is most like our proposal is the Committee for the Future that forms part of the Finnish Parliament. Other countries have established Commissioners or Ombudsmen for Future Generations. Hungary has the longest established ombudsman; Wales has the most recent one, established under the Well-being of Future Generations

(Wales) Act 2015. Within Whitehall, the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit used to play a role in long-term thinking, while the Government Office for Science's Foresight Projects has a horizon-scanning and future planning function. There are also examples of long-term planning in the private sector, including the well-known scenario approach by Shell. Organisations such as McKinsey and the Economist Intelligence Unit are much in demand for the advice and insight they can provide on long-term trends. Experience from these various institutions would inform the workings of the House of Lords Committee for Future Generations.

## Functions of the Committee for Future Generations

We envisage three functions for the Committee:

- (1) The Committee should be able to select, from current and draft legislation, bills that it would scrutinise with a long-term perspective, considering the impact on future generations, and then suggest amendments to protect future generations' interests. These amendments would then be considered by the House at Committee Stage.
- (2) The Committee should also conduct its own reviews, in the manner of a select committee inquiry. It should focus on topics that it believes are not being properly addressed elsewhere in Parliament. Again, it would provide a long-term perspective and consider the interests of future generations.
- (3) The Committee should produce an annual report on long-term trends, with recommendations for how Parliament and Government should respond, in terms of both policies and processes for investigation, assessment and decision making. This report would be debated in both Houses of Parliament.

In undertaking these functions, the Committee for Future Generations would be well placed to instigate much needed public engagement and national conversations on critical issues with long-term impacts that are fundamental to creating a post-Brexit vision for the UK.

## Composition

The Committee's membership should be determined in the same way as any other committee of the House. As well as political balance, the Committee should also include a balance of expertise.

## Timings

We propose that the Liaison Committee incorporate the Committee for Future Generations into forthcoming recommendations for revising the House of Lords committee structures.

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