

**Essential Ingredients for a Sustainable Future –
Why do we need independent institutions, and how should they work for the long term?
28 – 29 April 2015, Cardiff, Wales**

Conference summary

The two day conference was organised by the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainable Futures, the [World Future Council](#), the [Welsh Government](#), [Cynnal Cymru](#) and the [Oxford Martin Programme on Human Rights for Future Generations](#). It was attended by leading thinkers, academics, lawyers, human rights specialists, civil society organisation representatives, senior UN officials, and youth representatives.

The event brought together representatives of national institutions established with mandates that relate to safeguarding the interests of future generations. The conference built on the inaugural network conference held in Budapest in April 2014, which was hosted by the Hungarian Ombudsman for Future Generations, with the World Future Council, in response to the UN Secretary General's report on "[Intergenerational Solidarity and Future Generations](#)". The Cardiff conference coincided with the sealing of the Welsh Government's [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#), which establishes an independent Future Generations Commissioner and puts in place a set of seven sustainable development goals for Wales and duties on public bodies in Wales to take into account the needs of future generations in what they do.

The programme and all event details are available [here](#) and [here](#).

Key messages

If we are going to tackle the long term global challenges we need to improve our governance for the long term so that decisions made today take into account the needs of future generations.

We hold the planet in trust; we must pass on the earth with its natural and cultural resources in at least as good a condition as we inherited.

We need to create values of responsibility, recognising the effects of what we do on future generations and foster such norms and values in current generations.

It is important that democratic structures, which are heavily dominated by limited timescales, incorporate institutional structures that can improve decision making for the long term.

There are increasing examples of such institutions being established at the national and regional level, demonstrating a variety of models, dependent on the different cultural and constitutional models of different countries.

Such structures are going to be critical if we are to take a longer term view and achieve the targets for the UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 and the 2050 climate change goals.

The principle of sustainable development underpins the role of the institutions, but the framing against the needs of future generations as a focus is more engaging and relevant.

It will be important for these institutions to be connected to share learning, but also there needs to be a focal point at UN level.

There is a strong case for institutions to be independent of the Government, with specific duties and powers. Key elements were identified:

Accessible

Competent and Credible (legitimate, transparent, independent, people have to trust an institution)

Effective (how it affects decision making)

Efficient (functioning efficiently and free from corruption)

Irrespective of the nature of the specific model, there are a number of common threads that contribute to the effectiveness of these institutions:

- Effective involvement and public engagement, including promoting participatory processes to help identify priority issues and to shape its work
- Access to and promotion of information on future trends
- Identify knowledge and institutional gaps on behalf of future generations
- Links to the democratic process to create a more informed electorate
- Established through legitimate means and processes
- Ability to receive citizen “complaints”
- Holding to account public bodies through independent review or audit
- Use of science based evidence
- Promotion of tools and political levers to overcome the complexities of short termism
- Linked to national constitutional human rights and decisions in the courts
- Advocating for and reporting progress on behalf of future generations
- Involving young people
- Focus on global impacts of national decisions
- A clear set of long term goals and measures of progress

The follow up to the conference will focus on:

- Building the network of institutions with mandates for future generations to share practice, and to promote these institutions to a broader audience
- Promoting the case for such institutions at the national level, including their role facilitating national commitments to the SDGs
- Encouraging UN member states to agree to establishing a focal point for future generations within the UN structure