

DISCUSSION PAPER 3 -What is Required?

The Guiding Principles & Agenda for place-based evidence in public policy

Overcoming this fragmentation and rebalancing the nation needs policies and programmes which are informed and monitored by an evidence base about the scale and nature of the challenges. Overseeing the extent of the challenges is another matter. There is a need for a fresh approach to decision-making which provides an integrated, consistent and sustained approach to the evidence and analysis used by the national policy community. This is in part related to the limitations on those traditionally responsible to undertake this role. However, it goes beyond a question of resources.

Whilst there are some bodies operating in this policy area, there are none which hold the combination of attributes that it is considered that an **NISS** should hold. A focus is essential on: spatial opportunities and impacts; providing robust evidence an independence of thought and reporting; and the continuing support of decision makers of all allegiances. This needs to be earned through a solid track record of innovative, grounded, accountable, reliable and implementable thinking and reporting.

As the Common Futures Prospectus has shown, there are a range of studies and debates around this issue and there is the need for an independent body to enable collaborative working which engenders an environment in which positive behavioural change is welcome. There is a need to see a separation of powers in the classic sense, namely those who make the decisions should not be judge and jury on the quality of their decisions. This is a particularly important means to establishing impartiality, since the data we use in public policy is itself “rarely *untouched by human-minds*”(D. Lievesley 2017).

The principles within which a **NISS** can operate draw on the thinking in 2009 of Dr Gail Cardew, now the Royal Institution Professor of Science, Culture and Society and its Director of Science and Education. They relate to professional standards and operating processes and are summarised below.

Professional Standards: it needs to be of the highest-level scientific thinking, synthesis and analysis achieved by collaborations driven by mutual and societal benefit, with a capacity to examine the root cause of wicked problems through detailed analysis. At its heart, it must be evidence-based garnered from an appropriately authoritative source of disciplines and fields. This needs it to have the following qualities.

- **Professional Rigour:** subject to professional scrutiny to ensure that there is a continuous challenge of its purpose and usefulness in what may become a crowded space for all kinds of well-intentioned but futile endeavour. This will need to be designed and managed in such a way that the tendency to be “Open” never gets reversed through fear of competition or having to be perfect to be worthy of debate.
- **Global:** Global problems will usually compound the complexity of local problems and therefore seem ‘too difficult’ to be solved. This is particularly true because there is such diversity in the size, strength and influence of individual nations and those with whom they cluster for peer-group purposes. Starting where other institutes stop is much needed - and this may be a possible differentiating factor of a **NISS**.
- **Convergent:** a ‘joined-up’ and convergent thinking, not just with the usual subjects who lend themselves to convergence but by an ‘Open’ philosophy to attract the traditionally non-convergent disciplines. This in particular needs to recognise that the changes required in society need to face up to the major behavioural and attitudinal issues that block progress

or determine outcomes (as opposed to hard facts). The Brexit referendum highlights this. There is therefore a need for the evidence base to not solely rely on 'hard' data about social and economic conditions (circumstances and systems) but also the use of such data as '[lay knowledge](#)' which uses experiential in policy making. Techniques can be developed to can be developed, for example, to translate national attitudinal behavioural information into their policy implications.

Operating Processes: It needs to balance being focussed and robust whilst practice-based, with outputs that are informed by and fed back into practical needs and approaches. This requires it to be:

- **Strategic:** given the scale and complexity of issues the focus must be through the lens of national significance.
- **Inclusive & Interactive:** The overall culture of the **NISS** should be consultative and open and aim to identify and reach out to new audiences and partners to ensure that it is as diverse as practicable but not become a talking shop for those who wish to converse amongst themselves. The **NISS** would reach out and engage in public dialogue and with potential collaborators for a free flow of information.
- **Practice Informed:** Experiential learning has long been recognised as a highly efficient system of learning for many people, and benefits from a culture that is not risk-averse but rather is informed by the experience of risk.
- **Safeguarded independence:** its organisational arrangements need to ensure that it is not subject to short term commercial or political pressures.

The Agenda?

The **NISS remit** would be to advance knowledge with a special emphasis on spatial implications for the benefit of the public concerning the economic and social effects and influence of existing and proposed public policy interventions:

- Providing a means to study these on a non-political basis;
- through discussion, exchange and dissemination of information and knowledge;
- evaluation of policy options in terms of their place-based impacts;
- considering the impact of the interventions in the United Kingdom or elsewhere in the world.

The paradigms within which **NISS** would work (see Appendix for illustration and detail) are set out in principle as: Bringing fresh thinking to framing solutions to the challenges faced in rebalancing the nation;

- Bringing fresh methodological approaches for Knowledge, Evidence and Testing;
- Learning from the past to think for the future;
- Co-production to deliver partnership, trust and risk sharing;
- Testing the ethics of evidentiary procedures;
- Proving insight into the spatial impacts of sectoral policies.

This would help to create a more efficient system in which science and its funding are justified and conducted; linked to the verification of policy in spatial science; improve methods and efficacy of public involvement in a science based approach; and enhance the way physical and social science can inform public policy and public understanding of spatial futures issues

Outputs: The **NISS** outputs would be achieved as follows:

- Establish and maintain up-to-date capacities in order to undertake analysis of the causes and consequences of economic, social and environmental spatial change;
- Evaluate and report on the impact of departmental policies, programmes and targets;
- Assess the potential long-term sustainability impacts of trends and interventions;
- Produce a regular State of the Nation report and an annual national development balance sheet, in terms of its remit, with a related risk report.

Illustrative Projects: There is some initial discussion in the Appendix to this paper about the contribution that a **NISS** could make to the drawing up of a spatial framework for England and for the UK and the future of land policy. Whatever the outcomes of such thinking, there are a range of projects – with the list below being purely illustrative – that would fulfil the draft objective for the **NISS** set out above. An intention is to set standards in strategic and evidence-based study and to make available findings whenever practicable. Illustrative projects might include:

- climate change implications (particularly time-scales) for settlement and infrastructure in Britain, and likely effects on investment and insurance markets;
- potential implications of international demographic shifts in terms of their differential impacts within the UK;
- post fossil fuel scenarios for global manufacturing activity and transport;
- the impacts of water and food shortage scenarios;
- conducting an audit of the range of strategies of the stakeholders connected with the Spatial Futures proposition with the purpose of identifying gaps, and juxtapositions where much professional “cross-ruffing” is probable and proven notwithstanding potential conflicts;
- developing scenarios and forecasts illustrating spatial futures and their implications;
- examining how physical and social science is generated, communicated and applied in relation to the definition of problems in spatial futures, and to their possible solution.

Appendix - ILLUSTRATIVE PARADIGMS

The following notes seek to illustrate the new paradigms that need to be developed in the approach to public policy. Many of these are individually promoted but they represent the need to promote a new collective culture in public policy.

1. *Bring Fresh thinking when framing solutions to the challenges faced in rebalancing the nation*

- The need to examine and change the paradigms within which people frame both the identification of problems and, importantly, the range of solutions now available for assessment;
- The need to challenge and, in all probability, abandon mind-sets which have served their purpose but no longer qualify as being evidence-based;
- The need to bring thinking that has been regarded as ‘alternative’ or ‘marginal’ into the main body of thinking and to promote and provoke a volume of new thinking which may (or may not) be validated in suitable environments such as the ISS;
- Establish a more holistic view of the interrelated nature of issues to ensure that issues are forensically interrogated, analysed and understood;
- The ultimate recognition that problems and issues – and, therefore, their solutions – transcend national, continental and international boundaries (whilst bearing in mind EU new-think);
- demonstrating that a problem shared, if managed equitably by co-venturing, is likely to enable a win:win outcome.

2. *To bring fresh approaches to Knowledge, Evidence and Testing*

- The need for a higher level of knowledge and understanding and the need to respect a more exhaustive range of types of knowledge – itself a possible area for study by an ISS;
- The need to re-appraise where evidence and understanding is yet to be found and to engage with the professional elites in such a way that, although they may have been found wanting, their contribution is not lost through hubris and reputations “refreshed” or reappraised;
- The need to develop new tools for examining the relationship between cause and effect – which is often far more complex than current analysis suggests;
- The need to establish philosophical space for open thinking linked to similar space for verifying ideas where trial and error is not just permitted but encouraged;
- The need to create a dynamic system /platform for joining theory and practice, abstraction and practical action;
- A re-evaluation of ways in which the benefits of development are fully assessed;
- The development of new tools and techniques with which to make forecasts without having to resort to inexplicable “black-box” modelling practices until they are truly explicable;
- A growing imperative to weigh up the balance between environmental, economic and social goals in a more scientific way.

3. *Learning from the past to think for the future*

- The need to build-in historically sound knowledge from the past into current thinking thereby squeezing nostrums out of otherwise sloppy debate;
- The recognition of the necessity to develop ways of future-proofing current ideas and thinking;
- The requirement also to ‘future-proof’ schemes and policies by building a good-natured camaraderie into scientific research where collaboration begets the development of human nature;

- An even greater awareness of the impact of current decisions on future generations and accordingly providing the evidence enabling the media to report without distorting perceptions – in a way pioneered by the Science Media Centre, born at the Royal Institution.
4. *Co-production to deliver partnership, trust and share risk*
- Complementing the work of other related bodies and institutes;
 - By focusing on land and geography, identify the need to work through partnerships, joint ventures, co-ventures and alliances to avoid silo mentalities and ‘expert’ behaviours that can be so aloof as to be misunderstood and oft mistrusted;
 - furthermore, there is an allied need to look at the nature of trust itself and in creating an environment in which good behaviours are noticed, publicly applauded and valued;
 - A recognition that a definition of assets and resources needs to be extended for completeness to include not just the parties to an agreement but to include all relevant stakeholders;
 - Even stakeholder analysis is in its infancy and, given time, will provide more accuracy to decision making.
5. *Testing the ethics of professionalism*
- The need to adopt new moral and ethical codes that reflects societal realities and their strategic implications;
 - The duty of care required of all concerned with spatial futures may only be of the highest order. Anything less is a dereliction of duty.
6. *The spatial impacts of sectoral policies*
- An acceptance that – despite the global nature of the crisis – the spatial impact of policies may be as (or more) important as their sectoral impact.