



Prospectus

Our work and offer, 2024-25

Policy Lab is a multidisciplinary unit at the heart of government, with 10 years' experience working on the UK's most high-profile policy challenges and a portfolio of 250+ projects.



Our mission is
to radically improve
policymaking through
design, innovation and
people-centred
approaches.

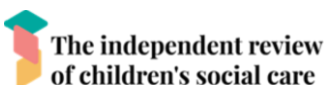


We work with a wide range of commissioners and partners

Since 2014, we have partnered with policy teams on hundreds of participatory and innovation-led projects. We have trained thousands of policy professionals in innovative approaches.

We have also involved many thousands of people outside of government in policy development, building trust and engagement.

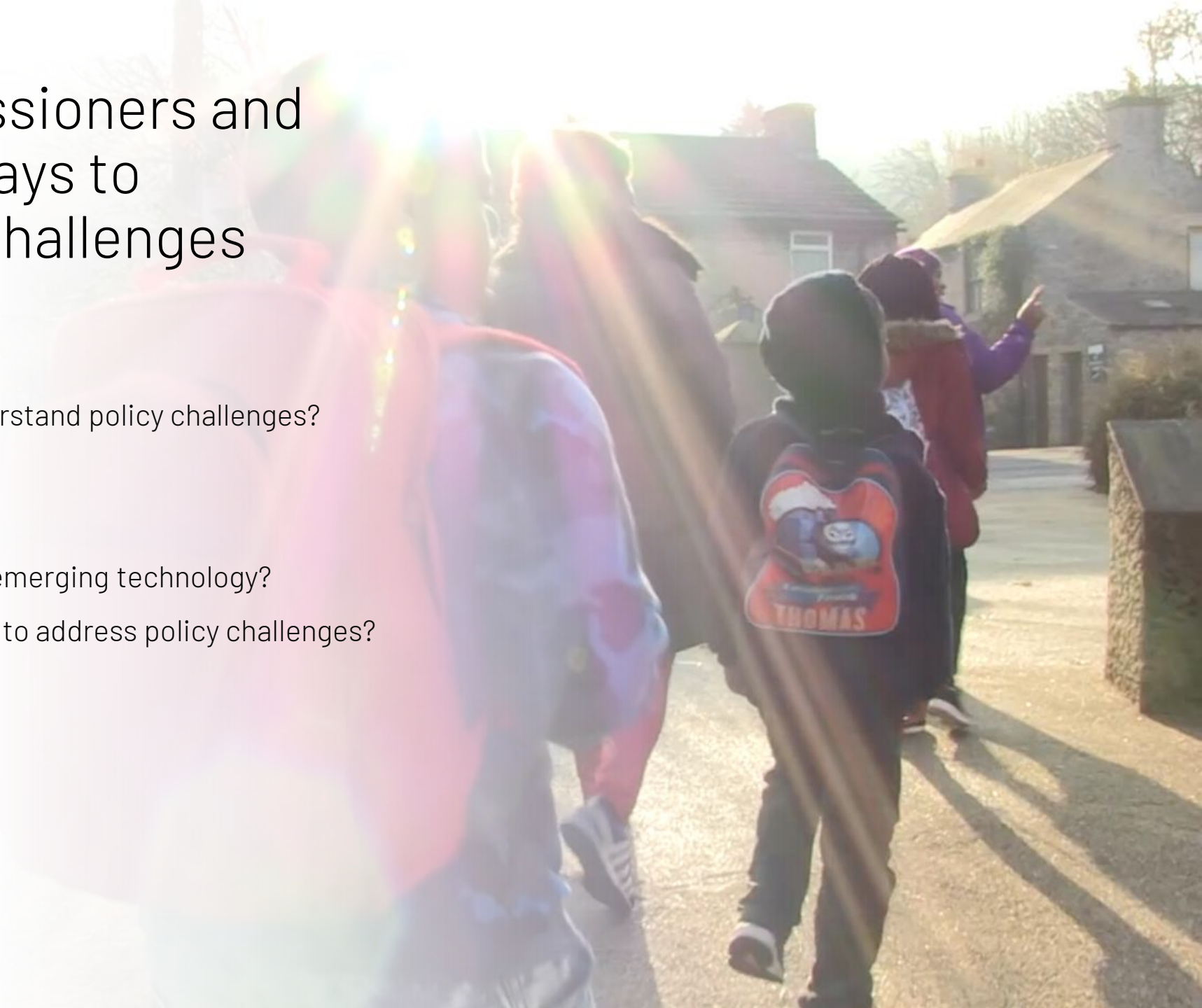
We work across central government departments, as well as local government and other public bodies in the UK and internationally.



We help our commissioners and partners find new ways to approach complex challenges

How can we...

- ... develop different insights to understand policy challenges?
- ... engage diverse perspectives?
- ... involve citizens in policy?
- ... imagine the future or respond to emerging technology?
- ... experiment with alternative ways to address policy challenges?
- ... find new ways of collaborating?
- ... enable system change?
- ... take a mission-led approach?



Our methods

Our approach is underpinned by openness, experimentation and the perspectives of people affected by policy.

Our suite of methods

We combine different methods to bring new insights and ideas to each policy challenge.

Since 2014, we have established the use of our **foundational methods** in government including user centred design, collective intelligence, systems design and film ethnography. Many of these concepts are now embedded in the [Policy Profession Standards](#).

In 2022 we published our [Design & Innovation Strategy](#), comprising **11 experimental policy methods** (see right). We have since tested six of these in live policy development, advancing understanding of how tech, data and participation can improve policy.

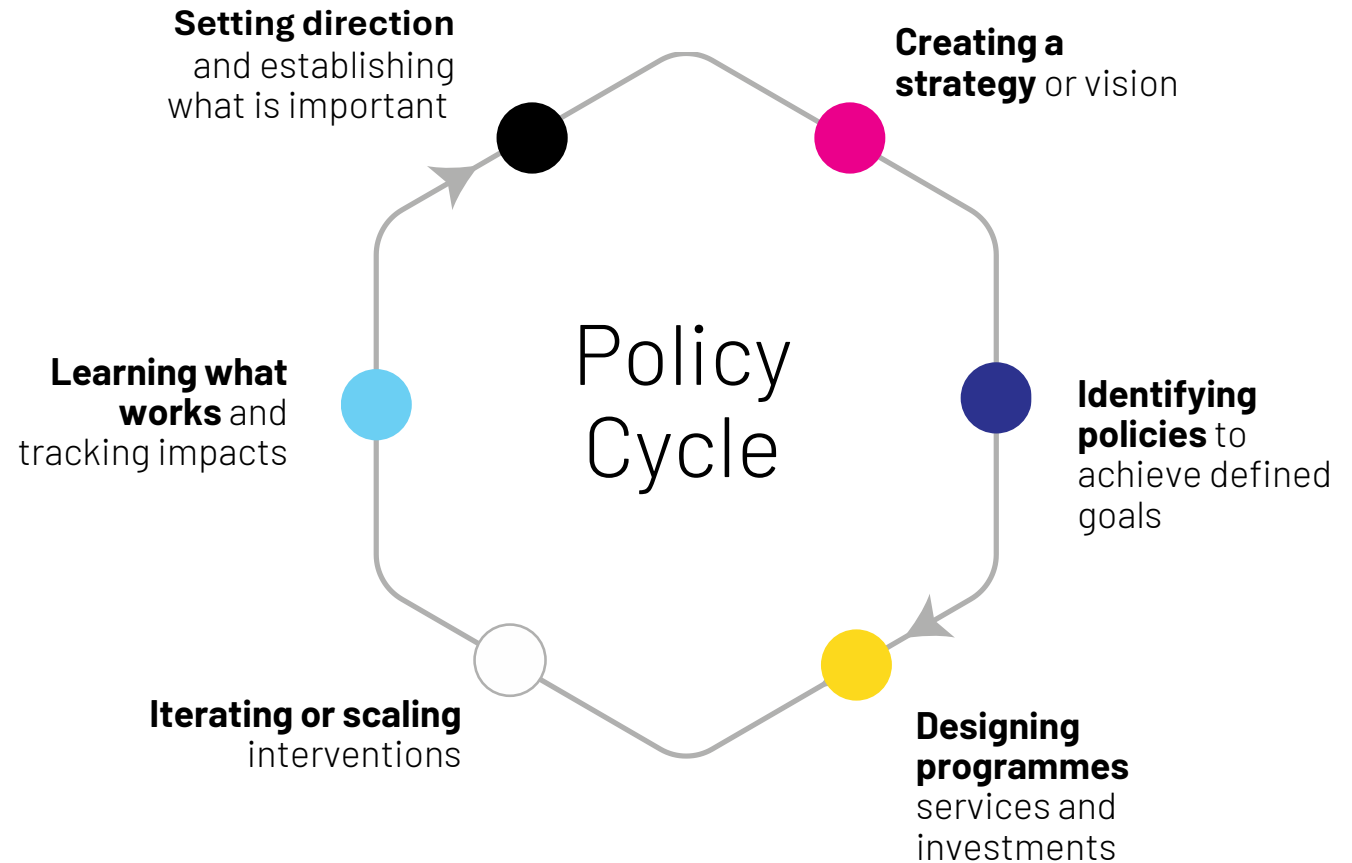


Innovation across the policy cycle

We work at all stages of the policy cycle, from defining a vision or strategy, developing and testing policy options, to addressing delivery challenges. Some of our methods are appropriate to specific stages. Others can be used at many points – connecting strategy, policy and delivery.

We work with commissioners to combine methods in bespoke ways, considering:

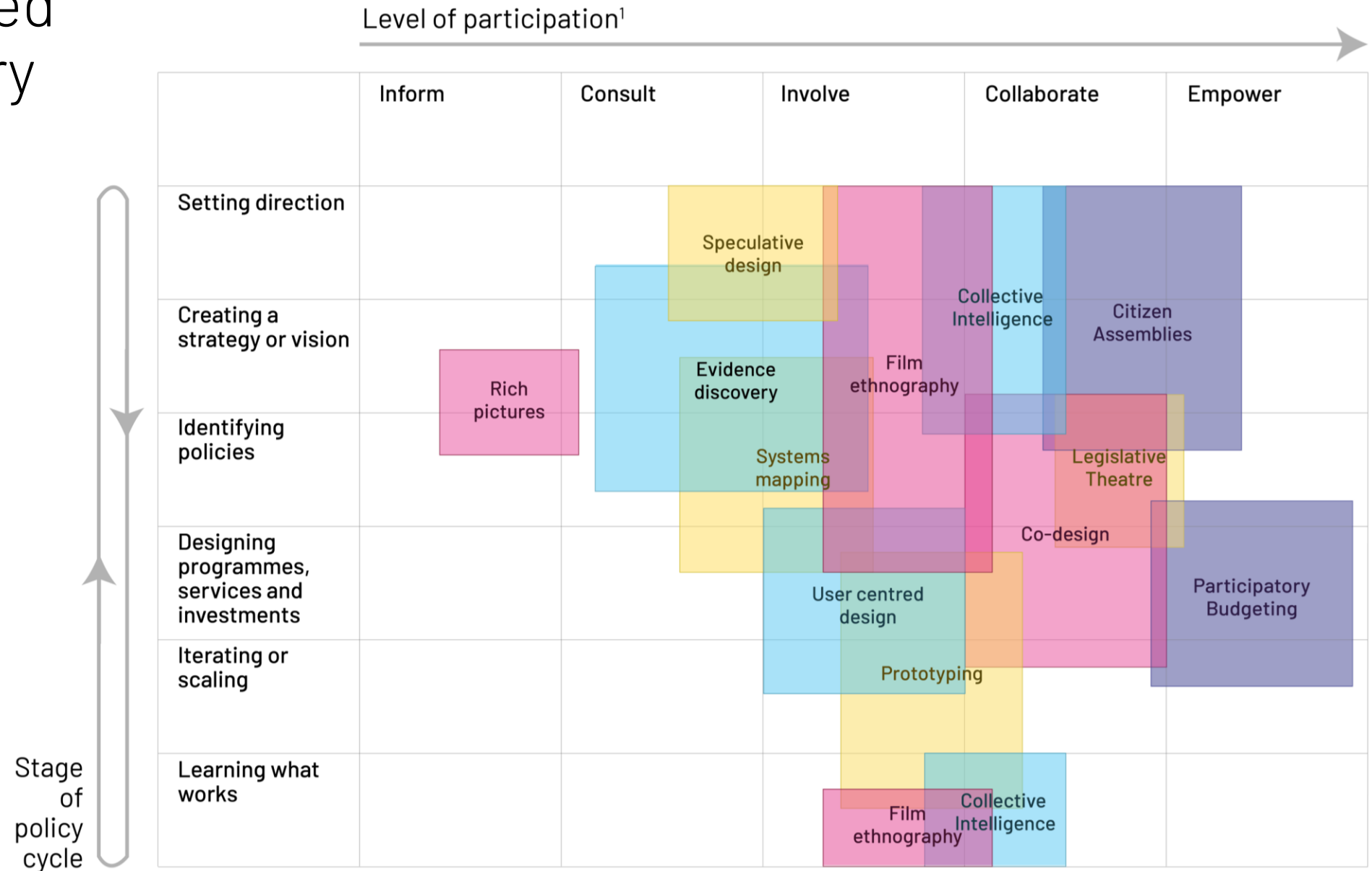
- Type of policy challenge
- Stage of the policy cycle
- Underlying complexity of the challenge
- How innovation and participation might enable impact



Selected policy design methods mapped to level of participation and stage of policy cycle

People-centred & participatory methods

Many of our methods enable citizens and stakeholders alike to contribute to policy in original, meaningful and impactful ways.



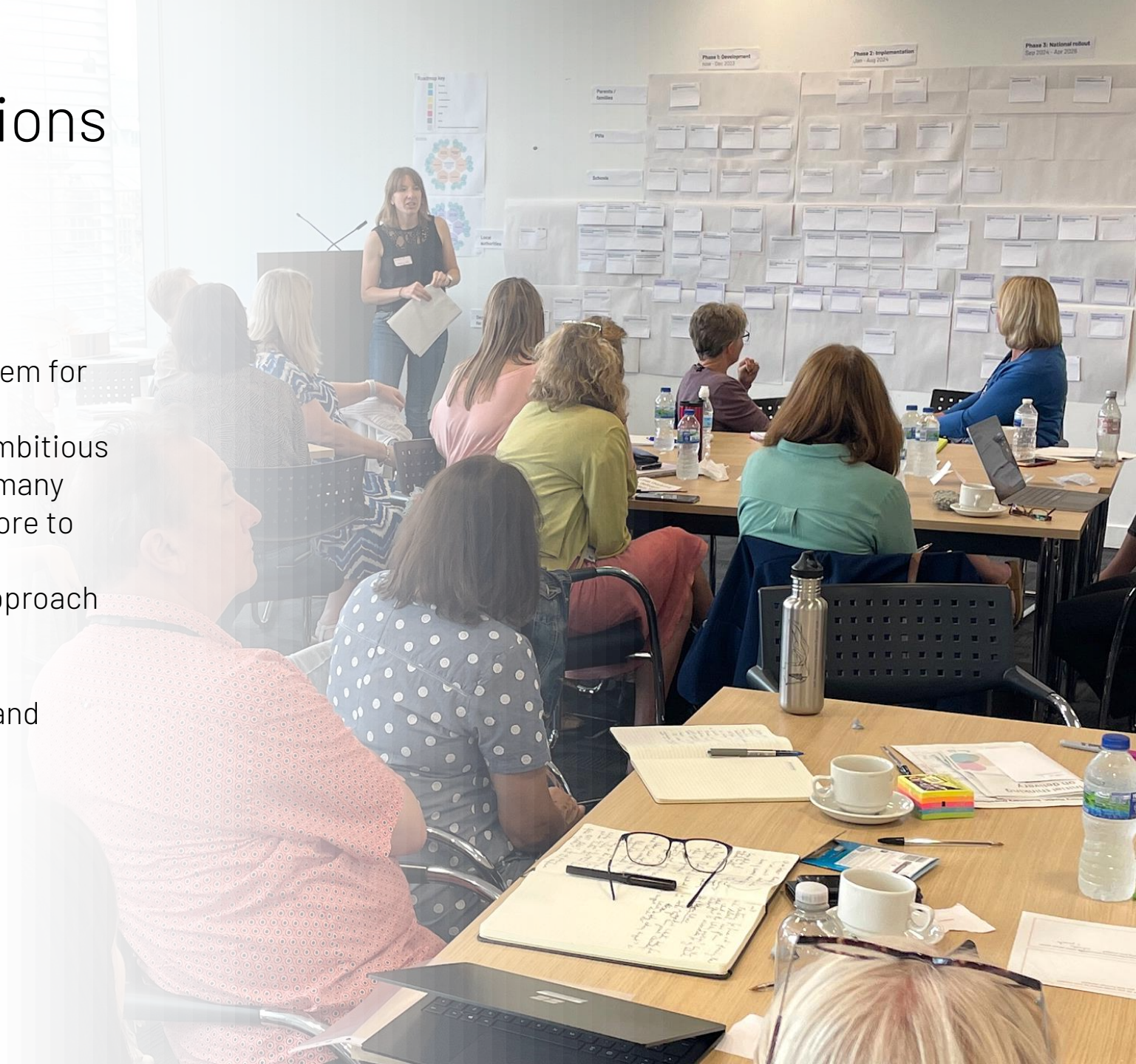
1. Adapted from the International Association for Public Participation; see https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pilars/Spectrum_8.5x1_Print.pdf

System change and missions

We can help teams to enable long-term systems change or to take a missions approach, using varied methods to:

- Understand current systems and reimagine them for the future
- Engage diverse evidence and voices so that ambitious goals can be delivered through the actions of many
- Make participatory and innovation practices core to identifying challenges and defining solutions
- Co-design new governance and a portfolios approach to realise change over time

*Our [Changing Futures](#) case study, pictured right and described below, shows this in practice.





*"Working with Policy Lab
has transformed our
approach to our policy
work"*

**Changing Futures commissioning
team, Ministry for Housing,
Communities and Local Government**

Our offer

We have tried and tested project models and are able to tailor these to the needs of our commissioners and partners.



Our offer

We collaborate with our commissioners and partners to scope participatory and innovation-led projects. We build bespoke proposals to meet business case requirements and have core ways of working which can be adapted to project needs, including:

- **Open access:** free self-directed training and tools
- **Capability building:** from 60-minute sessions to bespoke workshops
- **Policy catalyst:** short sprints to catalyse policy work
- **Policy development:** tailored projects in all stages of the policy cycle
- **Shifting policy systems:** cross-system projects aiming for transformational change
- **Partnerships:** unique collaborations with organisations and teams

Open access

Our online training offer and varied platforms enable open access to our work.

People-Centred Policy Design, course

Our free 'People-Centred Policy Design' course, commissioned by the Policy Profession Unit and hosted on the platform FutureLearn, introduces key concepts on policy innovation and shares in depth case studies from Policy Lab's portfolio.

Time: 5 weeks / 1-2h per week

Link: [People-Centred Policy Design](#)

Policy Lab blog & social media

We share learning, tools and insight about our projects and methods:

- Blog: <https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/>
- Twitter/X: [@PolicyLabUK](#)
- LinkedIn: [Policy Lab UK](#)



Capability building

Our introduction to policy innovation sessions demonstrate how innovation methods can be used in everyday work, as well as building a deeper understanding of when and how multidisciplinary specialists can help.

Time: 90 mins

We can also design bespoke training sessions and talks to meet specific needs, such as:

- Supporting teams or cross-government groups to apply innovation methods to address policy challenges
- Building deeper capability to adopt people-centred and innovation approaches

Time: 90 mins - half a day



Policy catalyst

Our **workshops and sprints** accelerate policy development by helping to set direction and agree what is important. This could include:

- Mapping existing evidence
- Creating systems maps to breakdown complexity
- Developing new insights to help define policy challenges
- Collaboratively generating ideas and agreeing priorities for action
- Defining how to involve citizens and stakeholders
- Co-designing policy ideas

Outputs: A slide deck and relevant visualisations to capture new insights and priorities. New contacts and connections formed through the 'policy catalyst' process.

Time: 1 week - 3 months



Policy development

Our **full projects** support policy development through multidisciplinary approaches. This could include:

- Building rich new insights about citizens, stakeholders and systems through people-centred methods such as film ethnography
- Generating ideas and solutions using approaches such as co-design, participatory futures, collective intelligence and serious games
- Imagining future possibilities using methods such as speculative design
- Developing and testing solutions before implementation

Outputs: Bespoke outputs may include; new insights in visual formats or films; policy concepts or prototype solutions, or an insights-based roadmap for implementation; and new relationships or consensus to support your direction.

Time: 4 months +



Shifting policy systems

Our **system change projects** work across policy systems to address complexity and achieve long-term outcomes. This could include:

- Collaborating with diverse voices across the system, from citizens and frontline workers to policy professionals
- Mapping current and future systems, including through lived experience insights
- Futures thinking and collective visioning to reimagine what is possible
- Co-designing models for enabling change, moving from understanding to solutions
- Building communities for learning and action, including lived experience groups

Outputs: Bespoke outputs may include a co-designed future vision, insights on system actors and levers in visual formats or films, a portfolio of possible solutions, or an insights-based roadmap for change and traction with a coalition of stakeholders.

Time: 4 months +



Partnerships

We partner with government, innovation and cultural organisations to connect diverse thinking and practices with policy. This gives policy professionals access to new capabilities and generates learning about harnessing different approaches in a policy context.

- Our collaboration with Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) has resulted in [MANIFEST](#), a groundbreaking programme exploring the potential of art in policy (MANIFEST artist Christopher Samuel, pictured right).
- Our work with the Policy Profession Unit has resulted in new learning products and innovation methods for policy professionals.
- Our partnership with the national security community has resulted in the creation of the National Security Policy and Research CoLab (N*).

Partnerships are designed hand-in-hand with organisations and teams inside and outside government.

Time: 4 months +





Our impact

Our varied portfolio demonstrates how we enable teams to achieve desired policy outcomes. We track impacts through a bespoke evaluation model.



Changing Futures, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (2022)

Using a mixed methods approach to shift policy systems.

Policy Lab partnered with MHCLG's [Changing Futures](#) programme to determine national government actions needed for flexible, person-centred care for people living with multiple disadvantage.

Our ambitious 9-month project engaged a cross-sector group to facilitate systems change. It brought to life new systems innovation practice through a mixed methods approach with lived experience at its centre. We collaboratively developed an understanding of the current system and co-designed a preferred future for multiple disadvantage services and policy - creating prototypes to achieve this future. We built a strong coalition across government and the wider sector, gaining senior support for the vision and prototypes. Our work was integral to Changing Futures' forward planning, informing further testing and implementation of interventions.

Impacts:

- Shifting perspectives and systems
- Giving agency to those outside of government
- Joining up work across silos



Windrush Review, Home Office (2020)

Amplifying first-hand accounts through personal testimonies from members of the Windrush generation to drive policy change.

Wendy Williams, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services and Review Chair, commissioned Policy Lab to help develop a series of policy recommendations rooted in the Windrush generation's lived experiences of the immigration system.

Using film ethnography, we created case studies featured in the [Windrush Lessons Learned Review](#), alongside a film that conveyed stories of those affected in their own voices. This approach ensured first-hand testimonies shaped the Review process, directly influencing Parliament, the Home Office, and public perception.

Impacts:

- Bringing together diverse stakeholder voices
- Improved understanding of the system
- Fostering empathy

*"Your work with the Review
has provided an object
lesson in the impact
ethnographic research can
have in promoting changes
to policy and, for that, you
have my sincere thanks"*

Wendy Williams, Review Chair



Sea Bass Fisheries Management Plan, Defra & Welsh Government (2023)

Engaging over 1,400 stakeholders in a mixed-method approach to co-design new fishing regulation.

Policy Lab partnered with the Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Welsh Government to facilitate a nationwide co-design process aimed at developing a new Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) for sea bass.

We deployed a mixed methods approach incorporating ethnography, collective intelligence, and serious gaming. This brought together diverse and often conflicting perspectives from individuals and interest groups to tackle the complex regulatory challenges in fisheries management. Engaging with over 1,400 stakeholders we collaboratively developed a set of solutions for managing sea bass, which directly informed the goals and actions of [the Bass FMP](#) (published 2023).

Impacts:

- Bringing together diverse stakeholder voices
- Increased transparency and trust
- Generating ideas and solutions

*"You opened up doors
and reached people that
we wouldn't have reached
before"*

**Commissioning team, Department for
Environment Food & Rural Affairs**

Collective Intelligence for defence, MOD(2023)

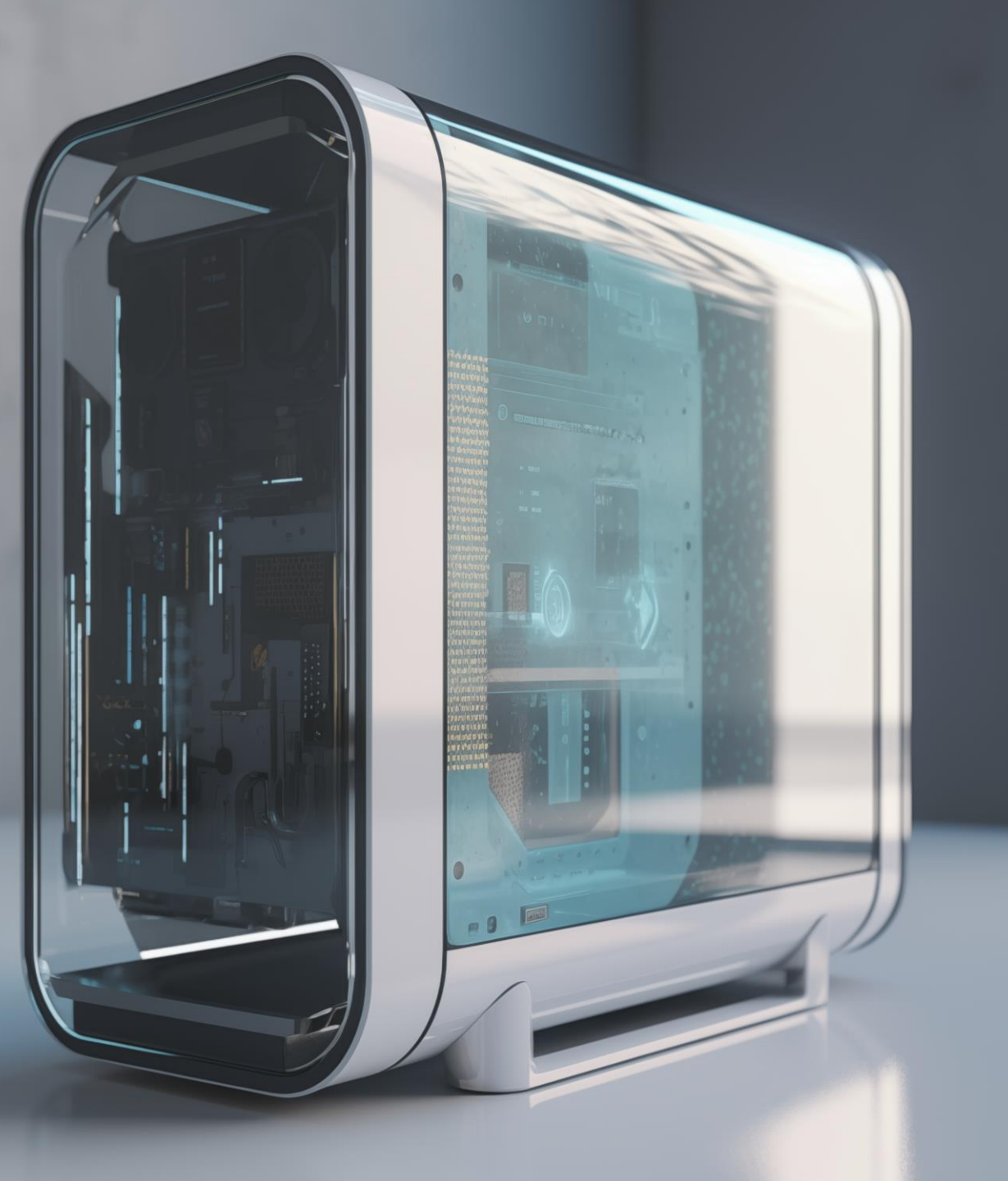
Using participatory methods and speculative design to inform defence strategy.

The UK's Ministry of Defence (MOD) recognises that governments face unprecedented challenges around preparation, deterrence and defence, which mean traditional approaches to strategy and policymaking need to be brought into the digital age, fully deploying digital and data technologies.

Working with MOD we blended our [online collective intelligence methodology](#) with our speculative design expertise (speculation pictured left) to draw out and develop new ideas from defence experts in civil, military and industry organisations. This has accelerated MOD's ability to reimagine what defence and deterrence look like in the digital age.

Impacts:

- Reimagining the problem
- Generating ideas and solutions
- Being ahead of the curve





Reimagining decision-making for the water system post 2043, Defra (2022)

Experimental methods to imagine possible futures through speculative design, moral imaginings and collective intelligence.

Policy Lab partnered with Defra Futures to identify and experiment with alternative ways that decisions could be made about the freshwater system in the future. The aim was to help policy professionals to explore new possibilities.

We ran a collective intelligence debate with c.200 members of the public, academics and policy professionals to surface new ideas. We explored how the public and policy professionals can use more-than-human perspectives in future decision-making. We also used speculative design to create prototypes, inviting 80 stakeholders to experience a range of possible futures in an exhibition (pictured left). Combined, these approaches provoked fresh conversations to inform longer-term thinking.

Impacts:

- Bringing together diverse stakeholder voices
- Being ahead of the curve
- Exploring possible futures

"Despite seeming radical and distant, these prototypes... represent options for the future of freshwater decision making and are sparking new forms of thinking and action"

Defra commissioner for the Water post-2043 project.



MANIFEST, Cross-government initiative, AHRC

Embedding artists into policy teams to explore the role of art in transforming policymaking approaches.

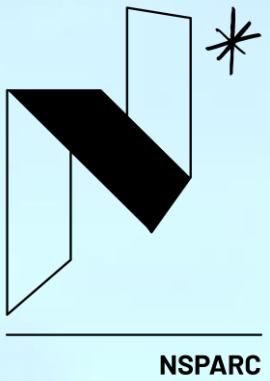
Policy Lab's [MANIFEST](#) programme embeds artists in teams to bring diverse forms of evidence and insight to policy development.

Evaluation of the first cohort shows that MANIFEST has significantly impacted policy professionals' thinking and methods. For example, Christopher Samuels' work influenced the Community Ownership Fund policy team's approach to lived experience research and accessibility. Dryden Goodwin's artistic contributions (pictured left) brought to life the human experience of multiple disadvantage, making a case for a holistic support to vulnerable individuals.

This art-policy collaboration has led to transformative insights, challenging traditional service models and fostering more inclusive, empathetic policymaking across government departments.

Impacts:

- Being ahead of the curve
- Shifting perspectives



National Security Policy & Research CoLab (N*)

Driving innovation through creative solutions, with government's national security community.

Originating from a partnership between Policy Lab and the National Security Secretariat, N* aims to foster diverse thinking and innovation in national security policy. N* is sponsored by the Office of the Chief Scientific Advisor for National Security and hosted by Policy Lab.

As a pioneer in innovation, N* employs varied methods to tackle real-life policy challenges, collaborating closely with national security colleagues through a project-based approach. This includes both established and experimental future methods.

In parallel to this, N* develops novel policymaking capabilities to experiment, enhance informed policy decisions, leverage emerging technologies for UK competitiveness, and promote liberal democracy.

Impacts:

- Bringing together diverse stakeholder voices
- Shifting perspectives
- Generating ideas and solutions

“N is about making the end-user central to our decision-making process, achieving results more quickly and efficiently, and securing better policy outcomes for our citizens”*

**Dr. Paul Killworth, Deputy Chief
Scientific Advisor for National
Security and the National Security
Innovation Champion**



Independent review of children's social care, Department for Education (2022)

Using film ethnography to spotlight and amplify family testimonies, to improve children's social care.

Policy Lab contributed to the [Independent review of children's social care](#) by exploring the broader family contexts of children involved with social services. Through film ethnography, we surfaced parents' and carers' first-hand accounts of the care system in an informative, empathic way - making a powerful case for change.

These insights were incorporated into the review, which received widespread publicity in the media and across central and local government. The compelling testimonies from families directly influenced the review's recommendation for government to invest £2 billion over five years in providing help for families.

Impacts:

- Bringing together diverse stakeholder voices
- Improved understanding of the system
- Fostering empathy

Speculative impacts of genomics on...

EDUCATION

We know that the genome is highly influential in education, contributing (alongside many environmental influences) to educational attainment or intelligence.

But we've not yet been able to identify many of the specific genes responsible for developing traits linked to high attainment.

However, genomic databases are currently being created which will rapidly drive our understanding of the genome.

Bigger and better databases will enable the identification of more genes linked to education and learning.

In the future, there may be the potential to use genomic analysis to predict someone's aptitude in certain subjects, or likelihood of attending university.

We already know that the genome is influential in the development of these traits:

Educational attainment
Educational achievement
Cognitive ability
Memory and reading
Language skills
Self-efficacy
Subject-specific ability

Three speculative vignettes

Example hypothetical scenario

A parent has had their child's genome analysed through a private company. It predicts that the child may have an aptitude for maths, but his exam results are poor. The parent complains that the child's ability is wasted at the school, and that the school is at fault for his exam results.



Create your own hypothetical scenario

Example 1: A parent has had their child's genome analysed through a private company. It predicts that the child may have an aptitude for maths, but his exam results are poor. The parent complains that the child's ability is wasted at the school, and that the school is at fault for his exam results.

Create your own hypothetical scenario

Example 2: A parent has had their child's genome analysed through a private company. It predicts that the child may have an aptitude for maths, but his exam results are poor. The parent complains that the child's ability is wasted at the school, and that the school is at fault for his exam results.

What are the policy implications?

Which departments, stakeholders and policies might be affected by these scenarios?

DCMS
DfE (all scenarios)
UCAS and Universities admissions teams
Parents and Children
DWP
Teachers
BEIS

Explain the potential impacts - in terms of both policy risks and opportunities?

Rate of industry and innovation...
Innovation...
Innovation...
Innovation...
Innovation...
Innovation...
Innovation...
Innovation...
Innovation...
Innovation...

What is the international dimension?

International...
International...
International...
International...
International...
International...
International...
International...
International...
International...

Speculative

SP

Bigger and better databases will enable the identification of more genes linked to education and learning.

In the future, there may be the potential to use genomic analysis to predict someone's aptitude in certain subjects, or likelihood of attending university.

Genomic data is already being created which will rapidly drive our understanding of the genome.

Three speculative vignettes

Example hypothetical scenario

A football club has identified a young talent to join the team. They are planning to use genomic analysis to predict the candidate's ability to develop their skills to the attention of the club.



What are the policy implications?

Which departments, stakeholders and policies might be affected by these scenarios?

DCMS
DfE (policy link to youth sport)
DHSC
DfE for impact on children in sport
Sports bodies and others
NHS/PH and other health bodies

Genomics beyond health, the Government Office for Science (2021)

Catalysing cross-government working on new insights from fast emerging genomics science.

To prepare government policies for rapid advancements in genomics, Policy Lab hosted a two-day remote policy sprint for cross-government stakeholders, introduced by the then Government Chief Scientific Advisor, Sir Patrick Vallance.

Policy Lab curated a range of exercises to enable departmental policy leads to explore potential scenarios, map government levers, and prioritise concrete steps. The sprint fostered new inter-departmental connections and consensus on next steps. In doing so, it enhanced understanding and readiness for integrating genomics into policy frameworks across government.

Impacts:

- Joining up work across silos
- Generating ideas and solutions
- Value for money



Get in touch

Email: team@policylab.gov.uk

Twitter/X: [@policyLabUK](https://twitter.com/policyLabUK)

Blog: <https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/>

Future Learn: [People-Centred Policy Design](https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/people-centred-policy-design)