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Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol | Equality and  
Social Justice Committee

Ymateb gan: School of International Futures | Evidence from: School of  
International Futures

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### Cat Zuzarte Tully: Submission for the Post-Legislative Review of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFGA)

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this review.

An initial key message I want to share is **how important the WFGA is at a global level as a north star for other countries who are wrestling with the growing challenges of short-termism.**

Although far from perfect or a panacea, Wales' experience of the past fifteen years is a powerful example of governing for the long-term as well as the present. This is needed now more than ever as legacy representative democratic systems seem overwhelmed by a challenging wider international context (geopolitical instability, declining trust in state legitimacy and authority (especially among young citizens who see their interests being entirely failed), misinformation and overshooting of planetary boundaries). The Act has led to Wales being a global first mover and leader in responding to the question: how can a government act in service of the wellbeing of future and current generations?

The ecosystemic approach taken in the implementation of the Act (given its origins, duties, implementing institutions, and call to action) is powerful and effective. By actively taking a whole of society approach - uniting civil society - including business, academia, community groups, together with public officials, and politicians it provides an indication of what an intergenerationally fair system fit for the 21st century might look like. From that yardstick - as a tangible demonstration or prototype of the kind of change that is needed - it has been very successful indeed. Please note that I am not an unqualified champion of the implementation of the Act in practice - there is a lot further to go as I hope the article quoted above shows. I am, however - having spent twenty years focused on building long-term capability across governments around the world - fully cognizant of how difficult it is to fight the tyranny of the present in political systems in a sustained way over time.<sup>1</sup>

Having opened with an international perspective, as good a global citizen Wales has been and continues to be, **the primary imperative of the act is to make a difference to the nation and people of Wales.** And here the **story is one of potential, and of positive signals; but one where ambition and impact must be scaled up.** I will focus on that impact, with the caveat that this is from the point of view of a supportive organisation but one based outside of Wales. As an organisation - and also speaking personally as an individual (having been in the room when the act was signed ten years ago) - SOIF has supported multiple implementation endeavours across the Welsh system, including supporting WCVA, NICW, FG Commissioner's Office, Parliament, Public Health Wales,



etc. We have the following observations to make in particular on three of the review questions: how far the intended objective is being achieved; actions to improve effectiveness; and value for money.

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<sup>1</sup> My paper on [“What we can learn from Wales”](#) explains why it has been such a powerful Act and movement - and helps other countries learn as they come into contact and are inspired by the Wales WFGA experience.

- The power of the WFGA framing to tell a **collective future-oriented story across Wales** that can connect different local authorities, businesses, and community groups, public bodies has been remarkable. It is at a level I have not seen achieved elsewhere - and I imagine is due to the relatively participatory quality of the dialogue process “The Wales We Want” in the year before the Act was signed.
- In particular, this facilitates coordination between different parts of the system to build the whole of society approach that is needed to have profound and **difficult conversations around tradeoffs and choices across policy areas** over time - whether to protect an area of special ecological importance, or changing curriculum, or reducing the speed limit. This is incredibly difficult to sustain or do - in particular in these atomised times - so the various success stories are ones to cherish and hold as an example of what is possible.
- Another success seems to be the **balance between constructive support versus scrutiny** from the commissioner’s office and Audit Wales - an area where most other international innovations have failed to get the balance right. In particular, I would like to commend the Article 21 process. I was part of the external advisory committee on that scrutiny process and I thought it was a very powerful way of doing an assessment, gap-analysis and directing recommendations for further progress in a way that was systemic and empathic.
- Relatively successful **embedding and driving change in culture and behaviour**:
  - The act has driven an interest and culture in building technical foresight and anticipatory capability that is much higher than most other countries and nations . Public organisations from NICW (2100 scenario building<sup>2</sup>) to Public Health Wales (insights and capability building) have been inspired to both build their own capability but also develop toolkits and programmes that have much wider benefit to other organisations and communities. There is far to go, but compared to many other governments, the sense of common endeavour and joint learning across technical staff is notable.
  - Civil society organisations - including youth groups such as EYST, supported by WCVA, as well as the youth “Wales 2100” group - have been having interesting conversations about the future connected to resources and action (Better Futures Wales: Community Foresight project<sup>3</sup>).
  - There has been good uptake by universities and businesses, with a number of businesses adopting the Act’s framework despite no legal requirement to do so - a testament to the WFGA becoming embedded in Welsh culture.
  - At a leadership level, there has been valued support and championing from the Permanent Secretary and First Minister, and senior leadership support. How these leaders communicate with the Welsh public about the journey Wales has taken, and why decisions are being made for current and future generations could be improved.



- But most importantly, it's the **interconnection and innovations that connect across these different sectors through cross-cutting different initiatives** -

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<sup>2</sup> NICW link

<sup>3</sup> Better Futures Wales Project

whether intergenerational mentoring and building champions of the future (Future Generations Leadership Academy), place-based conversations, or reports and storytelling (Futures Storytelling in Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority<sup>4</sup>) - that is most powerful.

- All this is a good start and needs building on - I hope the opportunity arises in the course of this inquiry to explore **how to turbocharge ambition and impact** by: connecting more profoundly to resource allocation processes; stronger intergenerational fairness scrutiny processes in legislative and budgetary processes; big infrastructure decisions; and deep decade-long partnerships with businesses that can give certainty around making early transitions to an ecologically sustainable and technologically equitable economy.
- Most importantly, I hope the review prioritises calling for **resourcing and building deep intergenerational dialogue at a community level** that is the foundational basis for exploring how we build consensus for the transitions ahead - and how to fairly distribute the costs and benefits between generations. This is the only way to build lasting support for politicians to do the difficult task of reflecting the interests of young stakeholders and future generations that cannot vote in representative democratic processes. Enabling quality conversations about the options and issues ahead - that taps into the insights of our older members of the community as well as valuing the insights from the youngest - in classrooms, the media, within family exchanges, communities, is the civic capability we need as citizens to help us manage and meet the pressures and anxieties of the current world. In particular, continuing to engage directly with young people so this Act is a space for them to positively imagine and shape their future is critical
- Two final points on impact and value for money from a beyond-Wales lens:
  - Impact can often be measured by 'FOMO' or imitation. **It is interesting to see how the rest of the UK and Eire - indeed local authorities e.g. Oxfordshire - outside of Westminster has learnt from the Wales experience.** Westminster itself is finally catching up, with the recent Cross-Party Liaison Committee report<sup>5</sup> recognising the model and growing calls for a similar approach from MPs of different parties within different sectors (prevention, public services, public health, children's rights). From a value for money point of view, the Commissioner's Office and Auditor General have been targeted in responding to the global interest in Wales' WFGA - choosing **judiciously how to use minimum resources to get maximum impact by working in partnership through powerful global networks and specific global moments.** The Wales Protocol and Future Generations Forum event in April 2024, and eventually the presence of the Commissioner at the UN Summit of the Future, had a significant impact on the content and the "cut-through" of the UN Declaration on Future Generations. Through building global legitimacy and clarity among member states in the



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lead up to the negotiations in September, Wales' role led to a higher ambition commitment to what will be seen in the future as *the most important document to come out of the UN this decade*.

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<sup>4</sup> Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority

<sup>5</sup> Liaison Committee Report

My final reflection (and associated recommendation) is that the power of the Wales story comes from the exceptional longevity and stability of the innovation. This has enabled an incredibly ambitious governance transition to play out over time. But the job of promoting the wellbeing of current and future generations is never done: constant effort is needed to combat the pressures to defect to the present that is an ever present feature of all social systems. **It is important more than ever to continue to resource and build awareness and support among the next generation of leaders and citizens across the political spectrum.**

## School of International Futures

The **School of International Futures (SOIF)** is a not-for-profit international collective of practitioners based in the UK who use futures thinking to inspire change at the local, national and global levels. SOIF has worked with organisations like the UN, Omidyar, NATO, OECD, the Royal Society and over forty national governments to make the world fairer for current and future generations. SOIF also supports a growing network of **Next Generation Foresight Practitioners**.