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THE FUTURE OF GOVERNMENT

Making the UK fairer



About the author

Daniel Burke is a Partner in PwC’s Strategy& Government and Health Industries team. He leads our strategy work with major central government departments. He is currently supporting a number of Whitehall departments on preparations for EU Exit.

Dan is passionate about reforming public services to help deliver better outcomes for people. He specialises in working with senior leaders to create consensus around transforming the way they work and deliver services, particularly where organisations are required to collaborate across traditional boundaries as a result of regulatory change or financial pressure.

Dan joined PwC from the Local Government Association where he worked as a senior public affairs and policy officer. Prior to this, he worked for the Department for Education as a civil servant.



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Foreword

By Quentin Cole

As the UK prepares to leave the European Union, it has perhaps never been more important for us to focus on what kind of society we want to call home, and what role each of us can play in creating a fair and inclusive future in which everyone’s voice is heard.

At PwC we’ve been working to understand what fairness really means, because we believe this is the first step to effecting real change. A sense of fairness is a widely shared value which many people see as characterising the UK at its best. It was also clear to us that fairness is a live theme in our politics and society, with disconnects opening up between people in and of different geographies, generations, income brackets and upbringings.

For us the key question is how does the public define fairness and do people currently feel like they’re being treated fairly? Are they content with where and how they live? And what responsibility does government have – on both a local and national level – to create more inclusive communities?

Throughout 2019 and through the course of this research, we are seeking to answer these questions while also examining what tools and mechanisms local and national governments have at their disposal to help individuals feel engaged, heard and connected to their fellow citizens and their political representatives.

We have engaged with the most senior levels of UK government and public service provision, including a number of Permanent Secretaries, from the very outset to shape our research questions, discuss the emerging findings and identify potential practical solutions to the issues raised by our research. We have created five tests for fairness as a framework for new policy development.



Following this report, we will publish our emerging proposals for action, looking at how to apply our framework to the following priorities:



How we work:
Earning a living, skills and the future of work.



How we access services:
Personalisation of public services – improving access and helping the vulnerable.



Where we live:
Liveable communities – giving people a voice to shape their place.

We believe these areas can make a real difference and should be at the forefront of government thinking in terms of policy and spending as it considers how to transform public services and support future prosperity.

Above all, trust and transparency are essential to creating a fairer future for all no matter the political backdrop. If you’d like to discuss any of the themes within our research, please get in touch.



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Summary of the research

Guided by a steering group of experts we've been listening to views on fairness from business, our people and the UK public. We have explored its importance to our way of life, policy making and accessing public services. As a result of this analysis we have suggested practical steps government could implement to address some of the issues identified.

Our approach to tackling this important issue has been to listen and we have done this by:



Creating a conversation:

We worked with Opinium Research on a public engagement programme. The first stage brought together a group of 23 citizens covering different locations, socioeconomic grades, public service needs, ethnicities, and political attitudes in a three day online community. This included a wide range of tasks including open discussions, video diaries and reactions to stimuli.



Convening expert voices:

Throughout this process we have shared our findings and thinking with key groups, including people from government, business, civil society and our own people. We invited a group of experts to take part in our online community by reviewing the findings halfway through the tasks and we hosted two events with the Institute for Government to explore how government could improve its spending decisions.



Gathering robust quantitative data:

Continuing to work with Opinium, we took a robust and representative snapshot of the nation, polling over 4,000 citizens covering all major demographic, regional, ethnic and political groups. We then used cutting edge statistical analysis to interpret the findings.



Analysing the results to set out practical steps:

Using the capability of Strategy&, PwC's global strategy house, we have analysed the findings of this research to lay out practical steps towards building a fair and inclusive future for the UK.

A framework for fairness

This study has built a picture of the public’s priorities for fairness. Building on this and through our analysis and conversations with experts, including our steering group, we have created a framework of five tests for fairness. We believe these could be used by government to test and design public policy in a way that would build a fairer future for the UK.

Five tests for fairness:

1

Provide for fundamental needs, prioritising the vulnerable and those in greatest need.

2

Help people earn a decent living and prepare for the future world of work.

3

Close the opportunity gap that exists between places.

4

Give individuals more control over the services they access.

5

Empower communities to shape the places they live.



A steering group oversaw this research and was key to providing critical challenge to the thought process

Rt Hon Alan Milburn
(Chair) Former Secretary of State for Health

Lord James O'Shaughnessy
Former Director of Policy at Number 10 Downing Street

Nina Bjornstad
North European lead for Google Cloud Consulting

Dr Ruth Owen OBE
Chief Executive, Whizz-Kids

Sir Charles Bowman
PwC Partner and former Lord Mayor of London

Neil Sherlock CBE
Senior Adviser, PwC and former Special Advisor to the Deputy Prime Minister, 2012–2013

Ruth Ibegbuna
Director, The Roots Programme

Anna Wallace
Director of Reputation, PwC

Lord Nicholas Macpherson
Former Permanent Secretary to the Treasury

We are grateful to everyone we have met and discussed this research programme with – from members of the public, to politicians, senior local and central government officials and our own partners and staff.

We would particularly like to thank all the members of the steering group for their time, energy and advice throughout this process.

We would remind readers that the conclusions reached and views expressed, and of course any errors in the report, are those of the authors alone.

Introduction

While political debate in the UK has been dominated by Brexit, PwC has been thinking about the importance of the idea of fairness to our way of life and to public policy and public services.

Guided by a steering group of experts, we've been listening to views on fairness from our clients, our people and the UK public. As part of our programme of work, we commissioned a major national survey asking the question: How can government transform for a fairer future for the UK?¹

We want to share the results of what we've found and suggest how we can further embed fairness as a core principle in the design of our public services. In doing so, our aim is to make it easier for those who feel left behind to access the services they need to make improvements to their lives and to develop the skills required to adapt to the challenges of globalisation and the digital economy. We also want to give those individuals a voice that is heard in both the communities they live and the places they work.

Why focus on fairness?

Fairness is central to UK identity and is a core value of our country. Indeed, the Equality and Human Rights Commission

(EHRC) has published three Triennial Reviews devoted to answering the question 'Is Britain Fairer?'. Similarly the Social Mobility Commission's State of the Nation 2018 – 2019 report finds that "[social mobility] is about fairness across society and ensuring that people of all backgrounds get equal opportunities."

These reviews highlight how drivers such as globalisation, the financial crisis and immigration have all had an impact on perceptions of fairness and the emergence of parts of society who feel left behind.² But this is not just a UK phenomenon.

There is a global debate about what needs to be done to put societal concerns higher on the agenda. This is being expressed politically but also by other non-state actors, such as the Business Roundtable – a group of American CEOs who recently updated their business purpose statement to suggest an end to the dominance of shareholders' interests in business decision-making.³

But our survey respondents were clear that there are problems:

71%

Say it's "one rule for some and a different rule for people like me".

69%

Agree that "rich people get an unfair advantage".

30%

Only 30% agree that "British society as a whole is fair", with over a third (37%) disagreeing.

In the UK, fairness has been a central theme in political debate since the EU referendum. It is to be welcomed that politicians from across the spectrum now recognise the importance of this issue, particularly in relation to what comes after Brexit. The need to reconnect the country and bridge stark divides in opinion that have crystallised over recent years has been placed centre stage by all major party leaders.

Understanding fairness – we have a problem

Fairness is a value laden concept, but its essence is simple: treating people equally or in a way that is right or reasonable, free from discrimination and conforming to the rules and standards widely shared in society.⁴

The overwhelming majority (81%) of our survey respondents agreed⁵ that fairness is about making sure that everyone is given an equal opportunity to achieve. A similarly high proportion (70%) believe that fairness is about making sure everyone gets what they deserve.

This presents a major challenge for government. The majority of our survey respondents agree that, out of all stakeholders, government has most responsibility for achieving fairness in the UK (70%). But worryingly, only 25% of people think the "British government does a good job when it comes to making sure that people are treated fairly".

Our survey also shows that perceptions of fairness vary widely across the different regions of the UK. People in the South West, North West and East of England are least likely to think that "British society is fair" with only one in five agreeing.

While London is the most positive region, people living in Northern Ireland are about twice more likely to say that society treats them fairly than people living in the South West of England.

¹ We commissioned Opinium to run an online community in April 2019 to explore the views of around 30 individuals on fairness which was followed up with a quantitative survey of 4,007 members of the public between 28th May and 3rd June 2019.

² See EHRC's 'How fair is Britain? Equality, Human Rights and Good Relations in 2010: The First Triennial Review' https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/243528/9781842063132.pdf

³ Business Roundtable <https://opportunity.businessroundtable.org/ourcommitment/>

⁴ Cambridge and Oxford English Dictionaries

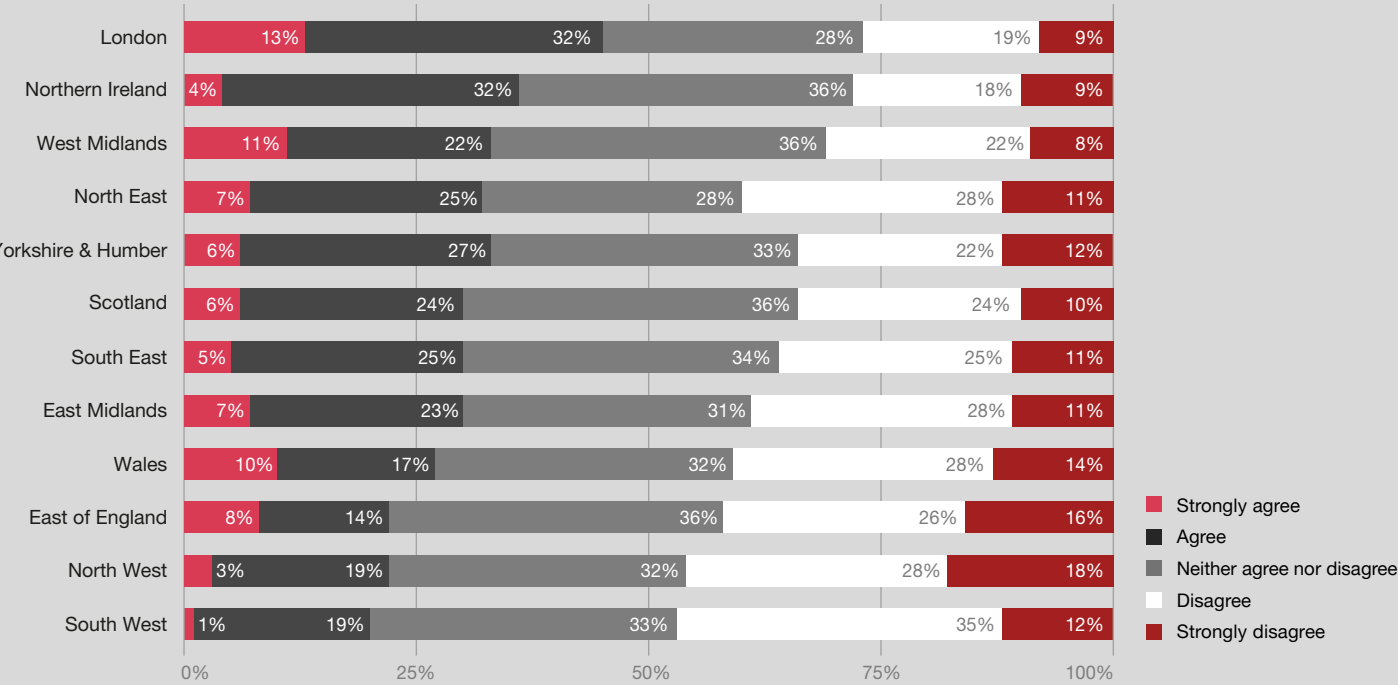
⁵ Throughout when we state our respondents 'agree' to a statement, this combines those who both agree and strongly agree, unless otherwise specified

Regional variations in fairness

We saw significant variation in attitudes towards fairness in different places

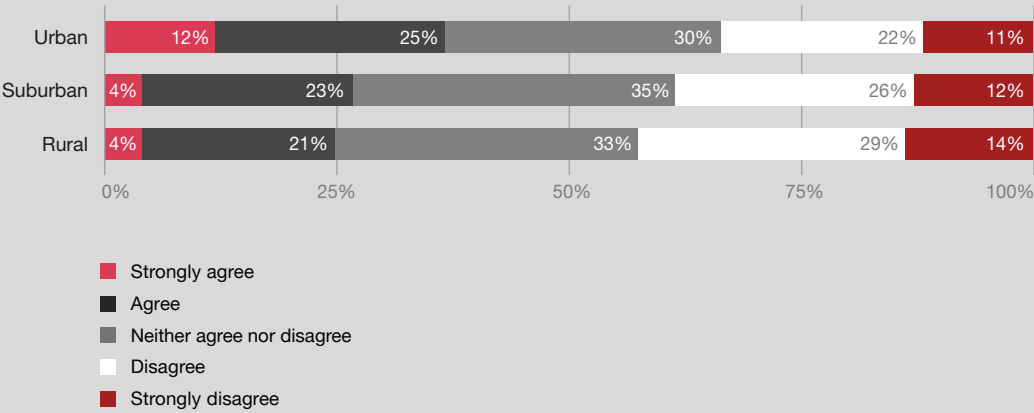
Londoners are twice as likely to think that “British society is fair” than those in the South West, North West or East of England.

“British society is fair” – To what extent do you agree or disagree?:



People in urban areas are 48% more likely to agree that “British society is fair” than people in rural areas

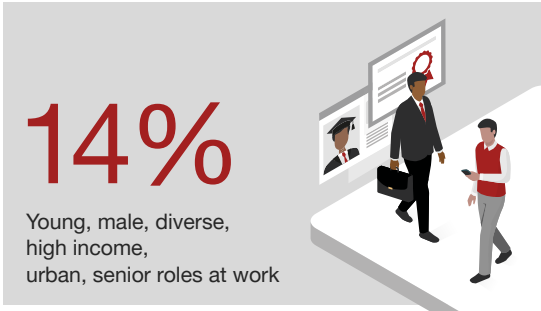
“British society is fair” – To what extent do you agree or disagree?:



Understanding fairness – it’s in the eye of the beholder

Asking questions about fairness throws into stark relief the emergence of two distinct groups of our survey respondents who have completely different experiences of life:

Group A:
UK treats me fairly⁶

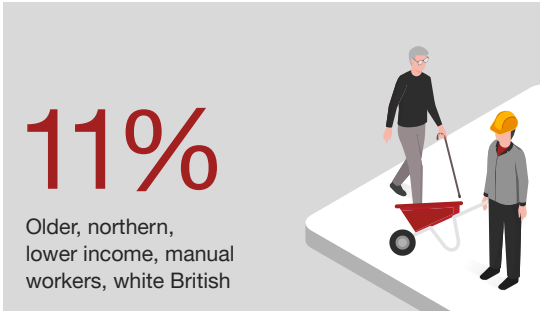


Group A can be characterised as generally being optimistic, confident in outlook, and comfortable with technological advancement and global change.⁷ This group is more open to using technology to get their voice heard on how to improve public services (76% of Group A respondents compared to 48% overall) and to making greater use of new technology to personalise public services (78% support compared to 49% overall).

Although those in Group A are more likely to think that their job will be made obsolete or significantly change due to automation in the next 10 years (68% compared to 36% overall), they are more hopeful (18% vs 10%), excited (23% vs 10%) and interested (23% vs 17%) about the prospect of 30% of jobs being automated by 2030, as predicted in PwC’s 2018 report “Will robots steal our jobs?”⁸.

6 This group of individuals feel that: British Society is Fair, that they are treated fairly, that they’d be able to do something if they felt they weren’t treated fairly and that the British government does a good job when it comes to making sure people are treated fairly.
7 The majority of our survey respondents in Group A voted to remain in the EU.
8 PwC – Will robots steal our jobs? <https://www.pwc.co.uk/economic-services/assets/international-impact-of-automation-feb-2018.pdf>
9 This group of individuals do not feel that: British Society is Fair, that they are treated fairly, that they’d be able to do something if they felt they weren’t treated fairly and that the British government does a good job when it comes to making sure people are treated fairly.

Group B:
UK treats me poorly⁹



In contrast, Group B comprises those who feel that they are being left behind by globalisation. They’re generally more pessimistic. For example, most of this group feel that automation presents more risks than opportunities (54% of Group B compared to 40% overall). More also feel concerned (53% vs 38%), angry (18% vs 8%) and anxious (40% vs 26%) at the prospect of 30% of jobs being automated by 2030.

The majority in Group B also voted to leave the EU, indicating that they may tend to feel left behind and historically unheard, resulting in frustrations that might have fuelled their decision to vote in the referendum.

What to do about this?

A national mission

Addressing these fault lines in UK society is clearly a major challenge but it’s critical that we do so. If the UK is to fulfil its potential in the world, whatever our future relationship with the EU might look like, we need to ensure that everyone can feel heard.

As Blair Sheppard, PwC’s Global Leader for Strategy and Leadership, commented in a recent Strategy+Business article, we also need to redefine success:

“The prevailing economic focus on GDP growth and shareholder value has hidden the real harms people are experiencing. National and global averages do not paint a full picture. Organisations must make decisions based on their more fundamental purpose: to improve the world’s value in human as well as economic terms. They need to be held accountable to the success of the communities in which they operate. Countries need to refocus on overall societal well-being and not just GDP growth.”¹⁰

Indeed other countries are already acting to deliver on this agenda. A leading example is New Zealand where, in May 2019, the government published the first ‘Wellbeing Budget’.¹¹

The budget centres around the argument that measuring the long-term impact of government policies on the quality of people’s lives is more important than focusing on short-term output.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern states in her foreword to this budget, “Growth alone does not lead to a great country. So it’s time to focus on those things that do. Our five Wellbeing Budget priorities show how we have broadened our definition of success for our country to one that incorporates not just the health of our finances, but also of our natural resources, people and communities.”

10 Strategy+Business – A crisis of legitimacy <https://www.strategy-business.com/article/A-crisis-of-legitimacy>
11 New Zealand Wellbeing budget <https://treasury.govt.nz/publications/wellbeing-budget/wellbeing-budget-2019-html#section-2>

Lessons from abroad

Five wellbeing budget priorities – The New Zealand Wellbeing Budget, 2019

- Supporting mental wellbeing for all New Zealanders, with a special focus on under 24-year-olds.
- Reducing child poverty and improving child wellbeing, including addressing family violence.
- Lifting Māori and Pacific incomes, skills and opportunities.
- Supporting a thriving nation in the digital age through innovation, social and economic opportunities.
- Creating opportunities for productive businesses, regions, iwi groups and others to transition to a sustainable and low-emissions economy.



In Scotland, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon stated in July 2019 that “the objective of economic policy should be collective wellbeing – how happy and healthy a population is, not just how wealthy a population is.”¹² This thinking lay behind PwC’s original research with Demos on economic wellbeing and good growth that began in 2011.¹³

These examples demonstrate that delivering on this agenda will require a wholesale transformation of the way the state works – the way money is invested and spent to drive inclusive growth, the way services are designed to solve real problems, and the way the state relates to citizens.

It will involve big, bold changes but with ambition and political will it can be done. The Budget and Spending Review offer a great opportunity to put this into practice, if they are aligned with a mission to promote fairness.

To help put the public’s priorities at the heart of these processes, we propose applying tests of fairness, which we discuss below, to new proposals and policies. These tests could also then guide the way in which the Spending Review is undertaken in a similar way to the criteria our Citizens’ Jury proposed for dealing with the deficit in the 2010 Spending Review.¹⁴

But we think we need to go further than set piece events such as Budgets and Spending Reviews. Government needs to do more to design fairness into the decisions it makes everyday.

Designing for fairness everyday

Fairness is a subjective perception, not an objective measure. And while there has been much progress across government to improve access to services and become more efficient, our research suggests more needs to be done to make the UK feel fair in the eyes of the public. This cannot be delivered through business as usual if rhetoric about closing the opportunity gap is to be realised. A change agenda is needed. The risk otherwise is one of further disappointment and disenchantment. That is why we are advocating structural change to embed fairness within future decision-making processes.

This means identifying the policies and actions needed to increase fairness across key areas of society. At one level, this can be understood by working out policies and programmes which match the spending priorities of the public. The key areas that came out of our survey were basic living standards, freedom from poverty, access to education, healthcare and security.

But we need to go further. This agenda also means getting a better understanding of how the decisions made by politicians and policy-makers are felt by those affected, not in terms of the outcomes delivered but also by the ways in which the services are designed and implemented.

¹² TED talks – Nicola Sturgeon https://www.ted.com/talks/nicola_sturgeon_why_governments_should_prioritize_well_being/up-next
¹³ Demos-PwC Good Growth for Cities <https://www.pwc.co.uk/industries/government-public-sector/good-growth.html>
¹⁴ PwC Citizen’s Jury 2010 – <https://www.pwc.co.uk/assets/pdf/spending-review-2010-jurys-verdict.pdf>



Consulting the public on major decisions and designing services with – rather than just for – citizens has been shown to improve their use and effectiveness.¹⁵

But despite a desire by three quarters¹⁶ of our respondents to take part in activities to shape public services (particularly through online methods), there is still a feeling by those we surveyed that their voice is not heard in these decisions.

¹⁵ For example see Demos, 'Journey to the Interface', 2006 [http://www.demos.co.uk/files/Journey to the Interface.pdf](http://www.demos.co.uk/files/Journey%20to%20the%20Interface.pdf) and Institute for Government, 'Smarter Engagement', 2015 <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/smarter-engagement>

¹⁶ Excluding those expressing no opinion

This is exemplified by views from our online community:

“

The government have become so separated from the common person they only listen to themselves or the greater few in their eyes.

I don't feel heard as a disabled person and a parent of a disabled child.”

A framework for fairness

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Five tests for fairness:

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2

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3

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4

Give individuals more control over the services they access.



5

Empower communities to shape the places they live.



1. Provide for fundamental needs, prioritising the vulnerable and those in greatest need

The top public priority for fairness which we identified through our research was that “nobody should go without basic needs being met”.

Our respondents define fundamental human needs as:



Access to food and shelter.



Freedom from poverty.



Access to high quality education for every child.

Another of the top five priorities for fairness was that “people with illnesses or disabilities are supported to lead full lives”.

This highlights the importance for UK citizens of a long established principle: that a fair society is one which helps people who are in greatest need. Fairly designed services make it easy to access services quickly (e.g. using available technology to help people prove their identity to government once rather than many times). They also utilise emerging technology to proactively identify people in need and try to help them avoid problems before they arise or worsen.

Find out more

The steering group for this research included Ruth Owen, CEO of the charity Whizz-Kids, which exists to transform the lives of disabled children across the UK, supporting them to become confident and independent young adults.

Find out more about their work [here](#).

2. Help people earn a decent living and prepare for the future world of work

The second priority for fairness was that nobody should live in poverty. Our survey also found that almost half of respondents (45%) felt that fairness means everyone earning enough money to support themselves and their families while 43% felt that it meant every child getting the same opportunity to progress in life.

To achieve this, public policy design should ensure that people have the opportunity to earn a decent living and that they are prepared (by being equipped with appropriate skills) for the challenges of the changing world of work, such as automation. We will explore this issue further in the next stage of this research programme.

Find out more

We are living through a fundamental transformation in the way we work.

This a problem for individuals, businesses, governments, policymakers and other institutions. PwC’s recent report on upskilling asked more than 22,000 workers globally to share their hopes and fears.

Read this research [here](#).



3. Close the opportunity gap that exists between places

Our survey identified a fairness gap that exists between those who feel “the UK treats me fairly” and those who feel “the UK doesn’t treat me fairly”. We also saw significant regional variation in how people feel about fairness.

Public policy design should address the needs of everyone regardless of region, background or class. Specific attention should be given to closing the gap between how different groups feel about fairness across the UK.

In parallel with addressing the concerns of those older generations in places that are characterised as ‘left behind’, there needs to be a renewed and sustained focus on helping young people have the best start in life.

All the evidence indicates that early childhood development, parenting, and stability at home are major drivers of lifetime outcomes. This policy area, which receives little attention (compared to schools and universities) should be prioritised as part of the fairness agenda.

Find out more

As part of our research, we conducted an online pop-up community event in which we convened members of the public from every part of the UK for an in-depth discussion on how they feel about our country.

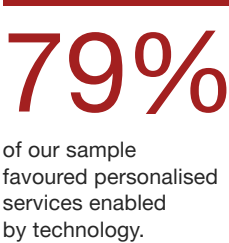
View their responses [here](#).

4. Give individuals more control over the services they access

This study demonstrates increasing support for much greater personalisation of services to meet the different needs of individuals, and a marked shift away from the view that fairness is achieved through the provision of universal services which are the same for everyone. We also discovered a significant appetite from the public to get involved and have more of a say in shaping those services.

Of those expressing a view, 79% of our sample favoured personalised services enabled by technology, over one-size-fits-all services. This figure rises to 89% for 16-24 year olds, but is supported throughout the age groups – including 73% of over 65s.

We will cover this in more depth in the third paper in this series, focusing on access to services.



Find out more

The steering group for this research included Ruth Ibegbuna, Director of the Roots Programme, a radical new initiative that brings together people with hugely different lives in an authentic and meaningful way.

Find out more about their work [here](#).



5. Empower communities to shape the places they live

Our research confirms the importance of attitudes, norms and perspectives which are held at the level of the locality and are key to informing how individuals feel about the nature of the society they live in. This transcends factors such as income, race and background.

One in four of our respondents felt that fairness meant that every part of the country is given an equal share of jobs, resources and opportunities. The fact that we saw high levels of regional disparity in whether people think that the UK is fair, suggests that fairness cannot be designed from Whitehall.

Communities need to be empowered to shape the places that they are based and have a say in how they are designed. One way to do this could be through citizens' assemblies or juries.

At PwC we have seen for ourselves how effective this can be. A citizens' jury brings together members of the community to deliberate an issue, one which requires tough trade offs. We have used this model to gauge public views on the Spending Review process, devolution and improving the quality of healthcare to name just a few examples and have taken their perspectives to politicians and policy makers.

We know from local public service provider interviews that we have conducted over the course of this project that the citizens' jury model is being used in a number of places on a range of topics. And the fact that 48% of our research group said they wanted to get more involved suggests that government will be pushing at an open door.

Find out more

Since 2010, PwC has published an annual report, 'The Local State We're In', exploring the views of leaders and chief executives on the ambitions of, and challenges facing councils and wider local public services. It considers how local public services work together to create inclusive places.

Read the latest version.

In 2019, PwC also published 'Rethinking Smart Futures', a report exploring how places can become focused on people, enabled by transport and powered by technology.

Explore this report [here](#).



How to apply the framework in practice

We would welcome further discussion with government about how the framework could be applied in practice. We have three ideas to kick this off:

Firstly: incorporate an assessment of impact on fairness to the process government uses for making investment decisions. For those familiar with the guidance set out in the Treasury's 'Green Book', this would amount to adding a sixth 'fairness' case to the current set of considerations (strategic, economic, financial, commercial and management). This could lead to different programmes being prioritised and return on investment being considered against a broader set of outcomes;

Secondly: a reappraisal of public spending funding models and formulas to refocus spending to more explicitly meet the needs of those who are, and feel, 'left behind'. Current models (e.g. for health, policing and education funding) take into account a range of factors like rurality and deprivation, but an approach which consciously directed more public money for areas of the country that are economically and socially disconnected could have a major impact; and

Thirdly: to be really bold, design the Spending Review planned for 2020 so that all departmental spending proposals have

to demonstrate how they will boost fairness against the tests. In order to overcome the inherent difficulties of comparing a large number of very different types of spending programmes, evaluation against the tests could be simplified by translating them into a composite 'index' so that programmes are assessed in a consistent way against a basket of indicators. This framework could then also be deployed to measure the progress government is making towards achieving its 'fairness goals'.

Certainly there is an opportunity to apply the fairness framework as part of major strategic events in the government calendar like the annual budget and the triannual spending review. The New Zealand Wellbeing Budget experience provides useful lessons about how it is possible to transform such decision-making processes by applying a fresh approach. What is important – and this is what the lessons from overseas tell us – is that this process is done in a transparent way in order to show the public that the government is taking their concerns seriously and is open about the challenges and trade-offs involved in delivering fair outcomes for all.



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Strategy&

Strategy& is PwC's global strategy house. We transform organisations by developing actionable strategies that deliver results.

Our strategy expertise is uniquely positioned to help deliver your best future: one that is built on differentiation from the inside out and tailored exactly to you. As part of the PwC network, every day we're building the winning systems that are at the heart of growth. We combine our powerful foresight with this tangible know-how, technology, and scale to help you create a better, more transformative strategy from day one.

As the only at-scale strategy business that's part of a global professional services network, we're uniquely placed to combine strategy with technical, industry and execution expertise. We embed our strategy capabilities with frontline teams across PwC to show you where you need to go, the choices you'll need to make to get there, and how to get it right.

The result is an authentic strategy process powerful enough to capture possibility, while pragmatic enough to ensure effective delivery. It's the strategy that gets an organisation through the changes of today and drives results that redefine tomorrow. It's the strategy that turns vision into reality. It's strategy, made real.

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