

Rethinking Evidence Use

Why evidence about the future matters for policy

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The Paradox

We design policies for the future using evidence from the past

This creates a fundamental mismatch



Policies based on past trends risk preparing people for jobs that are already changing

Yesterday: Governments relied on data showing rising demand for digital skills

→ Coding, IT support, Data Analysis (with support in training programmes)

Today: Generative AI is transforming tasks

→ Some digital tasks are now automated

Future trend

→ Manage AI systems

→ Critical thinking

→ New hybrid social and technical capabilities

Two main points from me today

1. Why future-oriented evidence is essential, what it is, and what it is not
2. But why using it well requires a reflection on specific criteria and skills

Future oriented evidence: What Foresight thinking is about

Foresight is a set of systematized strategies to make decisions **anticipatory and forward looking**

But foresight is not prediction:

- Exploratory
- Normative
- Scenario-based
- Participatory

Why foresight matters

A structured exploration of uncertainty

- Horizon scanning
- Scenario Planning
- Future Wheels
- Causal Layered Analysis methods...

Help policymakers explore alternative futures, identifying emerging trends, question assumptions

The problem

- Using evidence about the future is not straightforward.

It appears as: background reports, one off exercises, disconnected from evaluation frameworks

Lack of integration of “Evidence about the Future” in public policymaking

What do we know about the limits of Evidence uptake?

- **Standard challenge** → hierarchy of evidence
- **Translation challenge** → adaptation to local contexts
- **Transparency challenge** → social construction of evidence
- **Structural challenge** → organizational and institutional barriers

Evidence about the future inherits these challenges, but reframes them...

Using evidence about the future is not straightforward

- **Standards challenge**
Lack of shared benchmarks and quality assessment
- **Translation**
Difficulty in translating scenarios into action
- **Transparency**
Limited clarity on sources, data and objectives
- **Structural challenges**
Time constraints, limited resources, low future literacy

We need specific criteria

Robustness → does it work across futures?

Appropriateness → is it used at the right moment?

Inclusivity → does it capture different forms of knowledge?

And skills: the right foresight for the “right moment”

Stage of policy process	How foresight is used	What it does	Use in practice
Early stage -Agenda setting & design	Exploring futures, Challenging assumptions, Identifying trends	Broadens the problem framing, opens alternative options	Highest use
Mid stage -Policy design & selection	Stress-testing options, comparing across scenarios	Reveals risks and trade-offs, improves robustness of choices	Low/average use
Late stage -Evaluation	Interpreting results, Assessing future relevance	Questions whether policies remain valid, supports learning and adaptation	Often underused

What does this mean for skills policies?

Evidence about the future should not be judged only by its predictive accuracy → but by how well it helps improve discussions, and strengthen the quality of decision-making

Handling evidence about the future ALSO requires specific knowledge and skills

“Future literacy”

- Designing skills policies is **not just about identifying future needs**
- It is about making decisions under uncertainty and in the right time
- And this requires:
 1. a different kind of evidence (evidence about the future)
 2. but also specific skills to know how use this evidence (skills about the future)

Evidence about the future is only useful if we have the skills to know how to use it, to question assumptions, navigate uncertainty, to really make better future informed decisions

Thank you