

Congress for the Future

A new high-profile space for UK citizens to engage with and inform long-term political thinking

Congress for the Future is proposed by the Sustainable Development Commission as a way of giving adequate attention to the long-term in what has become an overwhelmingly short-term political world. The Congress would be convened by Parliament every year, bringing together citizens and experts to debate, scrutinise and pronounce on one or more long term issues. It would generate a sense of collective responsibility on issues that can't be solved by government alone, and would act as a counterweight to short term and sometimes media inspired 'something must be done' quick fixes.

"If we are to meet the challenge of engagement the old models of consultation need radical renewal...as we have come nowhere near realising the potential of the public to make better policies... I believe that Britain needs a new type of politics which embraces everyone in this nation, not just a few. A politics built on consensus, not division." **Gordon Brown**, [NCVO speech 2007](#)

What could it achieve?

Enhance Democracy

- Enable elected officials to pursue long-term reform and build momentum on key issues
- Support and enhance four-year voting system, moving it into 21st century
- Focus constitutional reform on issues that matter.

Improve Policy Delivery

- Result in more collective, transparent and joined up decision-making
- Generate new and innovative solutions that have broad public support
- Make policy development cost effective by mitigating likelihood of later challenges

Empower people

- Educate large number of citizens, (and government) empowering them to make changes in their own lives

How could the Congress work?

Status:

- Established by statute as part of the governance of the UK, ensuring it has real clout and independence
- Convened every year.

Quality deliberation:

- Between 100 and 5,000 citizens in deliberation with experts – able to commission research and call for witnesses
- Going beyond traditional protests, lobbies, consultation and market research to research, debate and resolve contentious issues

Reach and impact:

- Use of media and internet to reach beyond the policy community, building national awareness and interest in the topics under investigation
- Links to worldwide events and issues (e.g. [America Speaks](#))

Focus:

- Focus set by public concern via petition or opinion poll, and/or through the House of Commons or House of Lords
- Congress focus includes:

Agenda setting

- Setting vision and objectives and requiring government to respond
- Multi-party conflict resolution on unresolved long term issues
- Commissioning research to reduce long term uncertainties
- Opening public debate on long term issues to identify political space for change

Progress chasing

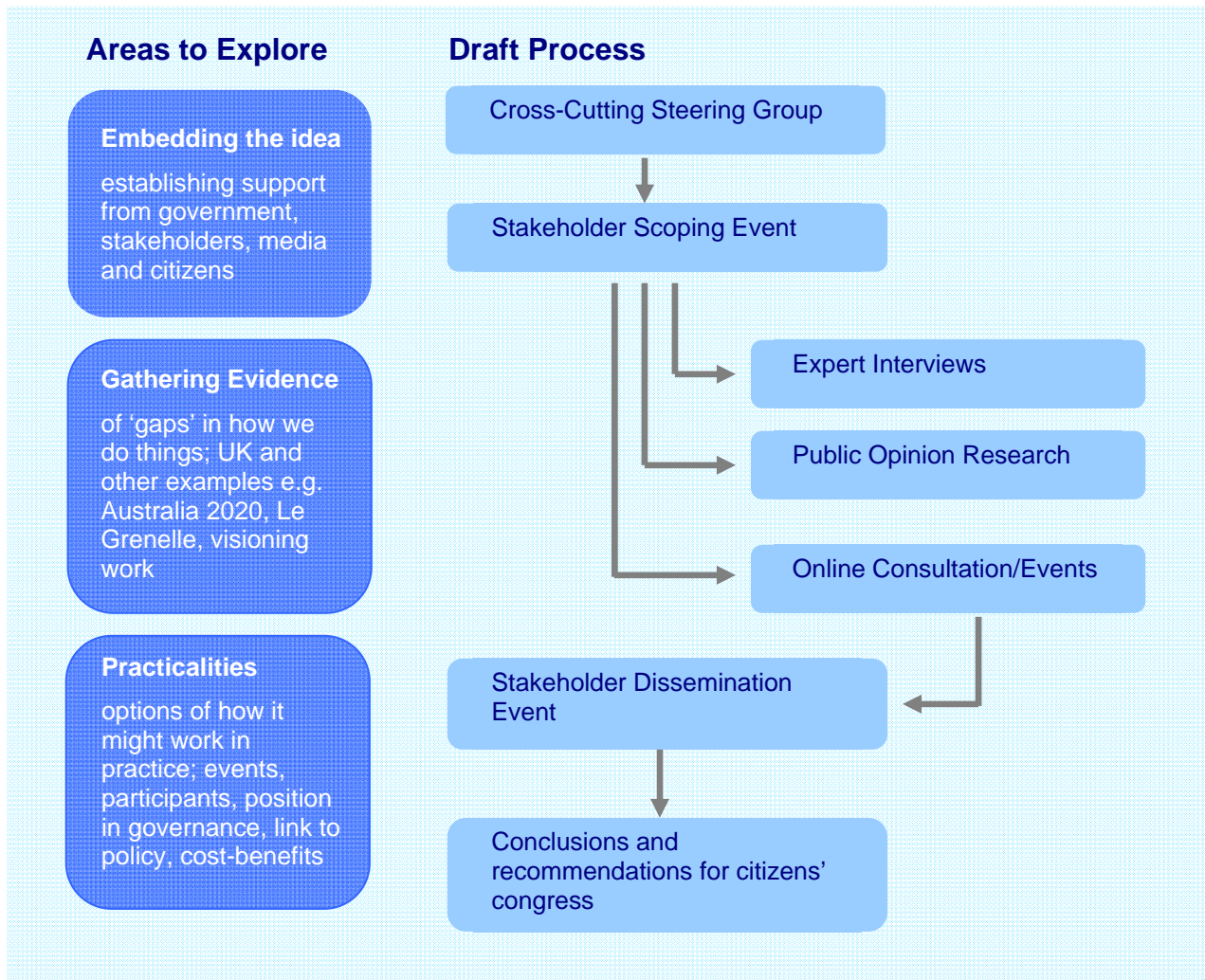
- Assessing government legislation for long term impact
- Assessing progress against targets set
- Requiring the production of action plans to address any lack of progress
- Use of special measures (e.g. reallocation of funding, power etc) to secure corrective action

"Instead of a government centric model of change we need a citizen-centric model in which we reinstate ourselves as the authors of our own collective destiny"

Matthew Taylor, RSA, [Pro-Social Behaviour](#)

Scoping Project

Having developed the idea over the last four years, the SDC would like to undertake a scoping project for a citizens' congress, working collaboratively with key stakeholders within and outside government as below:



"The ideas and ambitions from the Summit will now help us shape a long term strategy for the nation's future. It was a big agenda, but we need to continue to think big."

Kevin Rudd, Aust. PM on [Australia 2020](#)

"We are in the process of accomplishing in several days what we weren't able to do in several years,"

Nicolas Hulot, French ecologist commenting on [le Grenelle sur l'environnement](#) process

Next steps

If you have suggestions for the project, would like to work with the SDC in the scoping phase or want to find out more please contact:

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You can find more details on a citizens' council and supporting evidence in our primer paper: http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/engagement_r_and_e.html

For information on engagement and sustainable development please visit our webpages: <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/engagement.html>