

## Research Into Future Generations - Summary of Findings

### Summary.

- This research investigated how people in the UK view their obligations towards future generations and priorities for the world they will inherit.
- We find that even in a time of deep economic uncertainty, once people are encouraged to consider issues from the point of view of the longer term future, their perspective shifts to one of concern for our planet and the future generations of both people and other species which will inhabit it.
- At the same time they feel that too little consideration is given by government to those future generations in the decisions that it is making in the here and now.

### Introduction & Methodology.

- The research was commissioned by the Intergenerational Foundation and the Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development. The research aims to contribute to the work of the Alliance for Future Generations.
- The study consisted of 4 structured questions placed on an Omnibus survey managed by Ipsos MORI. Face-to-face interviews were undertaken with a sample of 989 UK adults between 1st and 4th November 2011. The sample was weighted to be representative of the UK adult population.

### Research Findings.

**Question 1. Which one of the following generation's needs, if any, should have priority when thinking about using the earth's resources?**

| Options                       | %           |
|-------------------------------|-------------|
| All future generations        | 63.9%       |
| My children's generation      | 13.2%       |
| My generation                 | 13.1%       |
| My grandchildren's generation | 7.7%        |
| Don't know / None of these    | 2.1%        |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>100%</b> |

- This question asked people to think about future usage of the earth's resources. Almost two-thirds (64%) felt that these resources should be used by all future generations. Just 13% felt that usage should focus on their generation alone.
- Clearly, therefore, when questions are framed in terms of the big picture of the earth's resources and their future usage, UK adults feel that their usage should be planned with an emphasis on all of those who come after us.

**Question 2. Which one of the following generation's needs, if any, should have priority when you consider the needs of each?**

| Options   | %           |
|---|-------------|
| Future generations of all people living on the earth                | 48.6%       |
| Future generations of plants and animal species living on the earth | 22.5%       |
| Future generations of my family                                     | 13.4%       |
| Future generations of people of my country                          | 12.6%       |
| Don't know / None of these  | 2.9%        |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>100%</b> |

- When people are asked to think about which future generations should have priority almost half (49%) choose future generations of all people living on the earth and just under a quarter (23%) choose the future generations of plants and animal species. Smaller proportions choose future generations of my family or people of my country (13% each).
- Once again, when thinking of the long-term, people choose to go beyond the more familiar personal boundaries of family or country and to consider the future generations of all living things.

**Question 3. Which one of the following, if any, do you think is most important to hand down to future generations?**

| Options  | %           |
|--|-------------|
| A healthy planet   | 45.4%       |
| The technologies and skills to ensure mankind's survival | 16.1%       |
| Safety and security                                      | 15.9%       |
| A thriving economy                                       | 8.7%        |
| Thriving communities                                     | 8.4%        |
| An unspoilt countryside                                  | 3.8%        |
| Don't know / None of these                               | 1.7%        |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>100%</b> |

- Almost half the respondents (45%) thought that the most important thing to hand down to future generations was a healthy planet. The choice of healthy planet was almost 3 times higher than the second/third most popular choices; technologies and skills to ensure mankind's survival and safety & security (both 16%). The other options of a thriving economy, thriving communities and an unspoiled countryside scored < 10%.
- In spite of current concerns about the state of the economy in the light of the current recession and safety and security in the context of the riots that occurred in England in the summer of 2011, when people think about future generations, the overriding concern is healthy planet.

**Question 4. What best describes your opinion of how well the UK government considers future generations in decisions it makes today?**

| Options  | %            |
|--|--------------|
| It considers future generations far too little   | 28.2%        |
| It considers future generations too little       | 38.7%        |
| It considers future generations the right amount | 24.1%        |
| It considers future generations far too much     | 3.1%         |
| It considers future generations far too much     | 1.5%         |
| Don't know / None of these                       | 4.4%         |
| <b>Total</b>                                     | <b>100%</b>  |
| <b>Total – Too Little</b>                        | <b>66.8%</b> |
| <b>Total – Too Much</b>                          | <b>4.6%</b>  |

- More than two thirds (67%) thought that UK government considers future generations too little in the decisions that it makes today. More than a quarter (28%) felt that it considered future generations **far** too little. Just under a quarter (24%) felt that future generations were considered the right amount. Under 5% felt that future generations were considered too much.
- There is a clear gap, therefore, between the expectations that people have of the government (when thinking of the long-term in the form of future generations) and the way it currently makes decisions.

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