

RSE POST-COVID-19 FUTURES COMMISSION

# Coming Out of Covid-19: Reimagining Scotland



**RSE**

*Post-Covid-19  
Futures Commission*  
THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF EDINBURGH

**Covid-19 is probably the most challenging time many of us have ever experienced. However, this crisis has opened the door to new ways of doing things.**

**The RSE's Post-Covid-19 Futures Commission aims to support a better future for Scotland and to build a fairer and more resilient society, through addressing both immediate challenges and longer-term policy and practice questions.**

*This report represents the views of the Royal Society of Edinburgh's Post-Covid-19 Futures Commission, which was set up by the RSE to contribute to Scotland's recovery and renewal. The views are not necessarily those of the RSE but are the learnings and recommendations emerging from an 18 month programme of activities and research which were designed to take into account expert opinion and lived experience. Along with a number of bodies mentioned in the report, the RSE will explore these findings over the coming months.*

# Executive Summary

In Spring 2020 the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) established the Post-Covid-19 Futures Commission recognising both its role and responsibility as Scotland's National Academy.

Bringing together leading thinkers and practitioners from a breadth of sectors and backgrounds, the aim of the Commission was to contribute to Scotland's recovery and renewal and generate learnings that would support a better future.

This report summarises the key learnings and recommendations emerging from the Commission's work.



# Key Learnings

- We need to recapture the togetherness, sense of unity and common purpose from the first lockdown and move from talking about Covid-19 as a catalyst for positive change to making change happen.
- Prevention and robust preparation are key in supporting an effective response to both emerging and known challenges. This includes horizon scanning and foresighting to identify, and prepare for, societal risks and threats.
- A holistic and collaborative approach, working across boundaries and harnessing the potential of the public, private and third sectors, is critical in both understanding and responding to challenges.
- Engagement with citizens underpinned by a focus on ‘what matters to you?’ and a stronger emphasis on co-creation is core to effective public policy and public services, and building resilience to future challenges.
- There needs to be detailed consideration, and advance planning, of how best to support inclusive and meaningful participation and investment in the necessary skills and infrastructure.
- We need to develop a stronger learning culture which draws on learning from experience, from different sectors and places (including business and community-based projects) and from other countries.
- Data and technology has a fundamental role to play in helping understand, communicate and address challenges but investment and engagement is required to harness its potential and to do so in an inclusive way.
- The pandemic has highlighted a number of key gaps in understanding including around risk, resilience, how science works and digital technologies that require to be addressed.
- The importance of effective communication from Government and other public bodies cannot be over-stated and is critical in building and maintaining trust.
- There is a need to consider how the flexibility and adaptability that supported effective responses to the pandemic can, and should be, maintained outwith a crisis situation to support innovative approaches and solutions.

# Recommendations

## 1 We need to build on the momentum for change generated by Covid-19 to support sustained action and improvement

- The Scottish Government should reaffirm and recommit to the principles of the Christie Commission and work with delivery partners towards their implementation across public services and beyond, with business champions engaged to support the approach.
- The Scottish Government should set up a public service transformation partnership to actively promote the principles and experience of social prescribing from around Scotland and beyond, offer connections and development opportunities for people who want to work collaboratively, and act as a testbed for new ways of working.
- The third sector [led, potentially, by SCVO and SCDC] should explore the creation of a repository where case studies of effective change and learning can be shared and use this learning to develop an action tool kit on how to facilitate effective change and policy implementation.

## 2 There needs to be a step change in the way in which people are involved in decisions that affect their lives

- Third sector bodies and academic experts should work together, drawing learning from other projects such as the Social Action Inquiry and the Scottish Approach to Service Design, to develop a National Participation Strategy for Scotland setting out a vision for how citizens should be engaged in the development and delivery of public policy and public services in a way that puts citizens at the centre of decision making.
- The Scottish Government should establish a National Participation Centre for Scotland / National Participation Programme tasked with working across government, including local government, and its agencies as well as with communities and business leaders to build capacity and capability to support effective public engagement and genuine involvement in decision-making.
- The Scottish Government and local government should develop and invest in mechanisms, skills and infrastructure which support and enable meaningful public participation with all parts of society at both a national and local level.

### **3 We need to enhance the ability to access and engage with evidence and data**

- The Scottish Government should work with partners, such as The Data Lab, to support an informed national conversation on the use of personal data and data sharing for public good to inform responses to future pandemics and other societal challenges.
  - Education Scotland should work with The Learned Societies Group\* and other science bodies, to explore the scope for pooling resources to create a Scottish equivalent of Let's Talk Science Canada, to support science education and outreach to school-aged children.
  - RSE should establish a science into practice series with targeted sessions for key practice groups, including politicians and the media, on key scientific issues and questions or issues which have a scientific base / underpinning.
  - The UK and Scottish Governments should work with the RSE, the other national academies, and the university sector to establish a fully independent fact-checking service to review and challenge misreporting and presentation of scientific information in the media / social media which leads to, or could lead to, social harms.
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### **4 We need to put the necessary infrastructure in place to support better preparedness for future challenges**

- The Scottish Government should establish a Foresighting Centre, independent of government and industry, tasked with assessing future risks and preparedness and advising Government, its bodies and business leadership organisations on their effective management. Its remit should also include communicating with citizens.
- The RSE should work with the Scottish Government and the university sector to develop a rapid response service that enables the Government and wider public sector to rapidly access good quality, independent evidence and expertise from across the academic community in crisis / emergency situations.
- RSE should build on its existing international connections with national academies and other key institutions overseas to facilitate the sharing of learning between countries on shared challenges.
- Business groups and sector leaders should work together to identify and build on learning gained from adapting to Covid-19 including how best to support financial resilience and how to build resilience into physical and administrative structures.

\* The Learned Societies' Group capitalises on the expertise of its member societies and organisations to present a collective, cross-disciplinary position on issues affecting STEM (Science, Technology, Education, and Mathematics) education in Scotland.

# Main Report

## Background

1. In Spring 2020 as Covid-19 took hold, RSE's board of trustees (Council) agreed that RSE should reorient its work to support the post-Covid-19 recovery and renewal recognising both the Society's role and its responsibilities as Scotland's National Academy and making best use of its breadth of expertise, independence of purpose and strong convening power.
2. Against that backdrop, the RSE established the Post-Covid-19 Futures Commission. Bringing together leading thinkers and practitioners from a breadth of sectors and backgrounds, the overarching purpose of the Commission was to support Scotland to emerge as positively as possible from Covid-19 and generate learnings from the experience that would support a better future. The Commission's work was focused around four key themes: Building National Resilience; Data, Evidence and Science; Inclusive Public Service and; Public Debate and Participation.
3. The Commission was very clear from the outset that its role was not to come up with answers, but to support discussion and debate by providing a platform to raise and discuss key issues informed by evidence, expertise and experience. It therefore placed a premium on dialogue and engagement with a wide range of activity and outputs designed to prompt thinking and discussion from blogs to films, a hack to workshops, panel discussions to written reports. You can find all the Commission's outputs on our microsite [www.rsecovidcommission.org.uk](http://www.rsecovidcommission.org.uk).
4. The findings presented here represent a culmination of that process and learnings from across the Commission's work. A summary of each of the individual workstreams is attached at **Annex A** with links to further details of their learnings, recommendations and outputs.
5. Consistent with the Commission's ambitions, we hope this report will provide the basis for continuing conversations and collaborative working to build on the experience of Covid-19 to imagine and deliver a better future.



# Key Learnings

- Inequalities have been exacerbated and amplified by Covid-19 and responses to it. There is an appetite for change and a recognition of the possibilities to 'do different' and 'do better'. We need to recapture the togetherness, sense of unity and common purpose from the first lockdown and move from well-meaning speak about using Covid-19 as a catalyst for positive change to action. The pandemic has highlighted important questions around the kind of nation we wish to be with potentially far-reaching implications for the way in which we 'do' public service and business.
- Prevention and robust preparation are key in supporting an effective response to both emerging and known challenges. This includes horizon scanning and foresighting to identify, and prepare for, societal risks and threats; clear and candid communication about risks and; a preventative approach to ill-health and disadvantage which underpins a fairer and more resilient society.
- A whole systems / holistic and collaborative approach is critical in both understanding and responding to challenges. This requires connecting within and across government(s), sectors, specialisms and communities. The state has a key facilitating and enabling role but there is a need to recognise and harness the responsibilities and capabilities of both the private and the third sector as well as local communities, and to recognise the importance of culture, heritage, sport and our natural environment alongside businesses and key public services like health, social care and education.
- Engagement with citizens is paramount with the public seen as part of the solution and a stronger emphasis on co-creation. While there are some good examples of citizen engagement (e.g. Citizen's Assembly, Social Security Experience Panels) there is a need for better embedding of meaningful public engagement across all policy areas and on an ongoing basis. This includes engagement around policy issues, and developing citizen-centred public services that enable individuals and communities to flourish.
- There needs to be detailed consideration of how to support effective participation. This includes ensuring that engagement is inclusive, seeking out and listening to diverse views, ensuring access to reliable and trusted information and considering how engagement is best facilitated and the role of organisations such as the media. An inclusive approach which secures a diversity of views is critical for resilience, understanding and effective policy responses and interventions.
- There is a need for (on-going) learning from experiences (including of systems under stress), from different sectors and places (including business and community-based projects) and from other countries. As part of that there is a need to further develop and harness mechanisms which facilitate learning, including pilots and international networks, and build a stronger learning culture.

- Data and technology has a fundamental role to play in helping understand, communicate and address challenges. However, harnessing this potential to best effect requires investment in the necessary infrastructure (at individual, community, organisational and national level), the skills development pipeline and support to address digital poverty and exclusions. The pandemic has highlighted a number of key gaps in understanding including around risk, resilience, how science works and digital technologies. It has also demonstrated the need for better disaggregation and linking of data to understand how impacts play out across different geographies and communities.
- The importance of effective communication from Government and other public bodies cannot be over-stated. This includes openness and transparency around how decisions are made and the underpinning evidence and rationale. While (public health) messages need to be consistent it is also important to pay attention to who is best placed to communicate with whom including the value of peer communicators. Good communication is critical in building and maintaining trust in government(s), data and systems and in securing support for public health measures and interventions.
- Flexibility and adaptability, demonstrated by business, the public and third sectors, has been a key feature of effective responses to the pandemic with the provision of flexible funding and streamlined processes playing an important role. There is a need to consider how such flexibility can, and should be, maintained outwith a crisis situation and what foundations might be put in place to allow a rapid response to future emergencies.

# Recommendations

## 1 We need to build on the momentum for change generated by Covid-19 to support sustained action and improvement

We need to prioritise addressing poverty and inequality, as a core feature of a fair, inclusive and resilient society, and redirect resources toward a more preventative approach to societal challenges. We need to transform our public services as part of that, placing a stronger emphasis on co-creation. This means putting individuals and communities at the centre, focusing on what people have and what they can do, supporting them in what matters to them, and putting care and connection first.

We also need to ensure a joined up and holistic approach with the public, private and third sector working in partnership, harnessing the capabilities of each and with governance structures that enable, not hinder, creativity, innovation and the delivery of public benefit. This requires us to build a stronger learning culture which allows for a more experimental approach to policy-making and service delivery, piloting of different approaches, collaborating with businesses around innovation and learning from what works and doesn't work to inform public investment.

### Actions

- The Scottish Government should reaffirm and recommit to the principles of the Christie Commission and work with delivery partners towards their implementation across public services and beyond, with business champions engaged to support the approach.
- The Scottish Government should set up a public service transformation partnership to actively promote the principles and experience of social prescribing from around Scotland and beyond offer connections and development opportunities for people who want to work collaboratively, and act as a testbed for new ways of working. The partners should include those responsible for culture, heritage, sport, business and our natural environment alongside other public services, with a mission to transform public services by the end of this decade.
- The third sector [led, potentially, by SCVO and SCDC] should explore the creation of a repository where case studies of effective change and learning can be shared and use this learning to develop an action tool kit on how to facilitate effective change and policy implementation.

## 2 There needs to be a step change in the way in which people are involved in decisions that affect their lives

Policy development should start with individuals and communities. We need to put people at the heart of policy-making and individual decision-making with a clear focus on 'what matters to you'. And we need to develop and invest in infrastructure and skills that support and sustain inclusive and meaningful citizen engagement and participation. This requires a broad-based approach to build the capacity and capability of citizens, policy makers, practitioners, business leaders and academics to enable effective engagement, learning from best practice.

### Actions

- Third sector bodies and academic experts should work together, drawing learning from other projects such as the Social Action Inquiry and the Scottish Approach to Service Design, to develop a National Participation Strategy for Scotland setting out a vision for how citizens should be engaged in the development and delivery of public policy and public services in a way that puts citizens at the centre of decision making.
- The Scottish Government should establish a National Participation Centre for Scotland / National Participation Programme tasked with working across government, including local government, and its agencies as well as with communities and business leaders to build capacity and capability to support effective public engagement and genuine involvement in decision-making.
- The Scottish Government and local government should develop and invest in mechanisms, skills and infrastructure which support and enable meaningful public participation with all parts of society at both a national and local level. This might include toolkits for citizens on how to engage and hold policy-makers to account; a competency framework for effective public engagement practice and; independently curated evidence hubs which provide an accessible overview and understanding of key issues.

### **3 We need to enhance the ability to access and engage with evidence and data**

We need to support access to good quality, objective information to support decision making and public debate. At the same time, we need to better harness the potential of data and technology for public good but to do so in a way that reduces, rather than reinforces, existing patterns of inequality and disadvantage. As part of that we need to enhance scientific literacy and facilitate critical engagement with data and evidence ensuring that knowledge can be accessed and debated by all. And we need to take steps to address fake news and the dissemination of misinformation particularly where it leads to public harm.

#### **Actions**

- The Scottish Government should work with partners, such as The Data Lab, to support an informed national conversation on the use of personal data and data sharing for public good to inform responses to future pandemics and other societal challenges.
- Education Scotland should work with The Learned Societies Group\* and other science bodies, to explore the scope for pooling resources to create a Scottish equivalent of Let's Talk Science Canada, to support science education and outreach to school-aged children.
- RSE should establish a science into practice series with targeted sessions for key practice groups, including politicians and the media, on key scientific issues and questions or issues which have a scientific base / underpinning.
- The UK and Scottish Governments should work with the RSE, the other national academies and the university sector to establish a fully independent fact-checking service to review and challenge mis-reporting and presentation of scientific information in the media / social media which leads to, or could lead to, social harms.

\* The Learned Societies' Group capitalises on the expertise of its member societies and organisations to present a collective, cross-disciplinary position on issues affecting STEM (Science, Technology, Education, and Mathematics) education in Scotland.

## **4 We need to put the necessary infrastructure in place to support preparedness for future challenges**

We need better horizon scanning to support understanding of and preparedness for future threats and to develop the capacity and capability to respond to future emergencies. As part of that we need to build resilience into the physical and administrative structures of society (such as supply chains and power networks); secure a greater understanding of the value of reserve capacity in critical areas (e.g. intensive care beds) and; ensure there is clarity around where responsibilities and accountability for delivery lies. We also need to ensure an ability to access good quality information quickly to inform decision-making and harness learning from elsewhere both in planning for, and in response to, future shocks.

### **Actions**

- The Scottish Government should establish a Foresighting Centre, independent of government and industry, tasked with assessing future risks and preparedness and advising Government and its bodies and business leadership organisations on their effective management. Its remit should also include communicating with citizens.
- The RSE should work with the Scottish Government and the university sector to develop a rapid response service that enables the Government and wider public sector to rapidly access good quality, independent evidence and expertise from across the academic community in crisis / emergency situations.
- RSE should build on its existing international connections with national academies and other key institutions overseas to facilitate the sharing of learning between countries on shared challenges.
- Business groups and sector leaders should work together to identify and build on learning gained from adapting to Covid-19 including how best to support financial resilience and how to build resilience into physical and administrative structures.

# Annex A Summary of Workstreams

## ANNEX A SUMMARY OF WORKSTREAMS



## Data, Evidence and Science

### Key Learnings



**Transparency is critical for public understanding and building trust.**

This includes: transparency around the collection and use of data; transparency around the basis on which decisions are made including levels of confidence in data; and transparency on the structures, membership and discussions of advisory groups.

**Engagement with the public supports understanding and underpins effective decision-making.** This includes: engagement around how data is collected and used and the way in which data sharing provides public benefit; engagement that enables different voices to be heard and different forms of expertise to inform decision-making; and tapping into the potential of citizen science for providing data and intelligence.

**A holistic collaborative approach is fundamental to responding effectively to complex challenges.** This includes: a multi- and inter- disciplinary approach drawing on expertise from a wide range of disciplines and specialisms; recognising and drawing on evidence and expertise from the third and private sectors; and working effectively between and across all levels of Governments (national, devolved and local) and with the wider public sector.

**Good communications is key to ensuring public understanding.** This includes clarity, consistency and accessibility of messaging; being mindful about who is best-placed to communicate including the value of peer communicators; and working to address the spread of misinformation or misleading reportage.

More details on the activities and outputs of this Working Group can be found by going to [www.rsecovidcommission.org.uk/info-hub](http://www.rsecovidcommission.org.uk/info-hub)

## ANNEX A SUMMARY OF WORKSTREAMS



## Public Debate and Participation

### Key Learnings



**Participation needs to be hard-wired into policy and decision making from inception to implementation.** This means putting people at the heart of engagement with a stronger emphasis on co-creation, a clear focus on ‘what matters to you’ and, better valuing the expertise gained through lived experience.

**We need to better enable everyone to engage and participate effectively.** That requires building the capacity and capability of citizens, community organisations, policy makers and practitioners and developing and investing in the necessary infrastructure.

**The way in which public health messages are communicated is key to effective understanding and engagement.** This requires thinking about the accessibility and complexity of messaging; using a diverse range of platforms for the dissemination of information and; recognising, and fully harnessing, the power of communities and community groups to support effective transmission and dialogue. It also requires taking steps to tackle misinformation.

**How we talk about people matters.** We need to place greater value on each person as an individual, working to remove stereotypes that are still prevalent in society, tackling the blame culture that has existed during the pandemic and taking care with the language that is used in the communication of messages.

More details on the activities and outputs of this Working Group can be found by going to [www.rsecovidcommission.org.uk/info-hub](http://www.rsecovidcommission.org.uk/info-hub)

## ANNEX A SUMMARY OF WORKSTREAMS



# Building National Resilience

## Key Learnings



**There is a need to increase understanding of resilience at all scales and across all sectors of society.** This includes government, business, institutions, communities and individuals.

**Resilience is often seen as somebody's else's problem.** Everybody and every organisation has a role to play in building systemic resilience.

**Resilience needs to be built into the physical and administrative structures of society** from supply chains to communications and power networks. This includes ensuring reserve capacity of critical capability (such as intensive care beds) and being clear on where the responsibilities and accountabilities for delivering this lies.

**The potential trade-off between efficiency and resilience needs to be addressed.** Many key markets, including energy and food, and services have been specifically designed to minimise costs, but they have not necessarily been designed with resilience in mind. Society needs to fundamentally consider and challenge ourselves on what it is we truly value and what is required to achieve that.

**Understanding risk is the first step to creating resilience.** The Government needs to develop its foresighting and risk assessment capabilities to ensure that, as a nation, we are aware of the level of risk we carry and of how to cost that risk.

**There is a need to develop an inclusive and collaborative approach to decision-making on resilience.** Government needs to communicate and discuss national risks openly and honestly. Widespread public debate is needed so that the public is involved in resilience decision making and understand their own role in the creation of resilience.

**Inequality weakens resilience.** Social policies need to focus on the power, agency and justice of those who are most disadvantaged, thereby helping build resilience at both an individual and community level.

**The relationship between humans and nature is crucial to resilience.** We need to shift from a model where we continually extract from nature, depleting it and its capacity to support itself and human life, to one where we support nature in a restorative and regenerating economy.

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## ANNEX A SUMMARY OF WORKSTREAMS



## Inclusive Public Service

### Key Learnings



**Urgent change is needed to Scotland's public service to put people at the centre, giving everyone the help and support they need to live a full life.**

**The Covid-19 crisis highlighted Scotland's deep and long-standing inequalities**, and the inability of many public services to respond effectively. Urgent change is needed.

**We are a rich country, but we spend too much public money on propping up old systems designed for a different time.** Post-Covid-19 we need to build relationships and communities by putting care and connection first and focusing on what people have and what they can do.

**We need to ask: 'What matters to you?' instead of: 'What's the matter with you?'** with a stronger emphasis on co-creation as the core underpinning of effective public policy and public services.

**Our community films show some of the ways that people across Scotland have been supporting each other with generosity, energy and imagination. We can learn from these examples**, building capacity and resilience and opening up public services to include everyone.

**We have to start locally, come up with ideas and try them out**, adapting those interventions and practices that have demonstrated their capacity to deliver positive outcomes.

**The Commission is calling for the Scottish Government to lead the change**, working through a new public service transformation partnership with local government, public, private and third sectors and supported by seed corn funding to make a decisive shift to person-led care. This should actively promote the principles and experience of social prescribing from around Scotland and beyond, offer connections and development opportunities for people who want to work collaboratively, and act as a testbed for new ways of working.

More details on the activities and outputs of this Working Group can be found by going to [www.rsecovidcommission.org.uk/info-hub](http://www.rsecovidcommission.org.uk/info-hub)

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