

Geoff Mulgan: Ideas

I've been involved in developing a wide range of ideas over the last two decades. In every case I have been as much a vehicle as an originator, and very much the beneficiary of great collaborators. Here are a few quick summaries of some of the ideas that still excite me most and where they are headed.

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CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AND CREATIVE CITIES

One of my first jobs put me in an interesting role – working out how to connect economic policy to the arts and creative industries. I helped draft London's first cultural industries strategy which was published in 1985 and shaped the investment strategy of the then Greater London Enterprise Board. A lot of what it contained was ahead of its time – including recommendations on using a much wider range of investment tools; creating digital channels for creative industries; shared platforms to allow smaller independents to sell, and so on. The book 'Saturday night or Sunday morning: from arts to industry' (co-authored with Ken Worpole) set out much of the thinking and then went on to influence many cities as they developed cultural and creative quarters.

I also worked with Charles Landry to set up the creative cities network in the 1990s – that connected pioneers such as Helsinki and Barcelona. Later that decade many of these ideas moved into the mainstream, popularised and developed by figures like Richard Florida in the US.

All around the world cities have developed creative clusters and quarters; incubators; funds; flagship buildings and projects; tax reliefs for arts areas. Some worked well, but too many just copied others, rather than being tailored to specific strengths and histories.

Earlier this decade Nesta put out a [manifesto for the creative economy](#) – rethinking priorities for an era when a rising proportion of cultural consumption comes through digital networks. Many programmes – such as the [Digital R&D Fund for the Arts](#) and the Arts Impact Fund point to where the field needs to go next. More recently my colleagues have shown how to use new data tools to map the creative economy in far greater detail than was ever possible before. Another landmark was winning a bid to run the [Policy and Evidence Centre](#) for the creative economy, with Nesta leading a consortium of universities under the leadership of Hasan Bakhshi. This launched in late 2018. My most recent outing in this space was a proposal for [using land taxes to fuel investment in creativity](#). I'm now on the board of Luton Culture which oversees arts and libraries in my town, and is creating a buzzing new cultural district under the leadership of Marie Kirbyshaw.

STRATEGY IN GOVERNMENT

My work in the UK government led to a growing interest in systematic strategy – and a belief that the public sector needs different methods from those in use in the military and business. The work at the Strategy Unit – where I was the first director, from 2001-4 - showed that there was very little good material available, and so I commissioned the development of better tools. Some of these were summarised in my book '[The Art of Public Strategy](#)' (published by OUP) and applied in subsequent work with governments around the world including Australia, Singapore, France, UAE, Canada, China and Japan, and the creation of a loose network of strategy units across the world.

I remain convinced that governments badly need help in serving the long-term, and that there are many options for doing this better, from new structures and institutions, through better processes and tools to change cultures. Much of this has to be led from the top. But it can be embedded into the daily life of a department or Cabinet. One of the disappointments of recent years is that, since the financial crisis, most of my requests for advice on how to do long-term strategy well come from non-democracies.

JOINED UP GOVERNMENT

I coined the phrase 'joined up government' (in a speech for Tony Blair) and promoted the use of more horizontal structures in government, including pooled budgets, shared targets, cross-cutting policy and delivery teams, cross-cutting training programmes, local partnerships, data sharing and other devices. These ideas were developed at Demos in the mid-1990s (some collected in various reports on 'holistic government'). A summary of how governments have implemented these ideas (in the UK, Finland, US, Singapore and elsewhere), and how they could be taken further, is contained in 'The Art of Public Strategy'. I still see this as unfinished business. Governments can and should go much further in integrating horizontal and vertical structures. Surprisingly few use even well-proven methods. So there is no excuse for being trapped in vertical silos.

In 2014-5 I put out a [series of papers](#) suggesting how the centres of government could be better organised, including one on the European Commission and another aimed at the Mayor of London. Thanks to co-author Ann Mettler the EU proposals were largely acted on by the incoming Juncker administration, which created a series of powerful vice-presidents.

SOCIAL INNOVATION

In the second half of the 2000s I became heavily involved in the development of a social innovation field worldwide, partly building on the example of Michael Young. This included writing a series of pieces of theory as well as prescription – including reports published by Said Business School, the OECD, the European Commission and others.

From our base in the Young Foundation we created [SIX – the social innovation exchange](#) – which now links thousands of people and organisations worldwide, and holds a great series of conferences, telepresences and other events (much of this done with the late Diogo Vasconcelos). Around the world the past decade has seen the spread of a network of social innovation centres, funds and hubs; lots of work with governments and business on how to better support social innovation; and a steadily advancing 'craft' knowledge of how best to nurture ideas.

In 2007/8 I was Adelaide thinker in residence and recommended the creation of a new organisation, TACSI, the Australia Centre for Social Innovation. Now led by Carolyn Curtis, this has grown into an impressive organisation working across Australia and the region – a model of combining creativity and practical impact. Its tenth anniversary is in 2019.

I've had the good fortune to work with many innovators around the world, for example chairing an advisory committee for Won Soon Park, the Mayor of Seoul, who has been a great champion, and achieved an extraordinary amount in his city of 11 million people.

One of my favourite outputs on this field was the 'Open Book of Social Innovation' (written with Robin Murray and Julie Simon), which tried to document hundreds of methods in use around the world and put them into a

coherent framework. Some of the theory is summarised in essays I wrote for recent books - Social Innovation from Palgrave (edited by Alex Nicholls and Alex Murdoch); and Challenge Social Innovation (from Springer).

This is a field that is bubbling with energy and ideas – and truly global in nature, with pioneers all over the world, from India to Colombia, Brazil to Korea. In early 2017 I published an [overview](#) of what had been achieved and priorities for the next decade. My next book – ‘Social Innovation: how societies find the power to change’ - comes out late 2019 providing an overview of social innovation and bringing together updated versions of many of the pieces I’ve written.

PREDATORS AND CREATORS

After the financial crisis I did some intensive work on how to understand capitalism, where it may be heading and how to shift its direction.

This took me back to work I did in my 20s at the GLC with figures like Robin Murray, Michael Best and others. The conclusions were published by Princeton University Press, with the title ‘The Locust and the Bee: predators and creators in capitalism’s future’. It argued that political programmes needed to be sharp in reining in predatory tendencies in the economy, and equally sharp in better amplifying creativity. The aim was a very different approach to the conventional ones of both left and right.

Quite a few political leaders showed interest – but none has yet adopted the full programme it set out. The book also set out a series of theoretical shifts for economics which, again, I think were right. I’ve found it hard to get economists to engage, though.

COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE

I started work on collective intelligence in the mid 2000s, with a lecture series in Adelaide on ‘collective intelligence about collective intelligence’. The term had been used quite narrowly by computer scientists but I tried to broaden it to all aspects of intelligence: from observation and cognition to creativity, memory,

judgement and wisdom. A short Nesta paper set out some of the early thinking, and a piece for Philosophy and Technology Journal (published in early 2014) set out my ideas in more depth.

My book [Big Mind: how collective intelligence can change our world](#) from Princeton University Press in 2017 brought the arguments together.

Subsequently Nesta created a Centre for Collective Intelligence Design which is working on practical projects on jobs and cancer. With the UNDP we are helping to create 60 'Accelerator Labs' around the world using collective intelligence methods to speed up solutions to the SDGs. A grants programme is supporting imaginative new ways of linking AI and CI and I am now confident that this will emerge as a significant academic discipline and field of practice.

PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION

I've worked on how governments can innovate since my very first job in the government of London. In the early 2000s I co-authored a Cabinet Office paper on public sector innovation XXX and, a few years later, a Nesta provocation ([Ready or Not](#)). Throughout this time I have done a lot of talks and training for governments. The main aim has been to get away from the standard approach of public organisations – conferences with a few inspiring speakers, a handful of random methods injected into administration, but nothing resembling a strategic approach.

Instead I've emphasised the practical details of management – how to generate ideas and draw them in; how to prototype; how to embed; how to finance; how to scale. Many of these methods have been put into practice by Nesta in our own work in fields like health and education. Nesta published a useful empirical analysis of [I-teams](#) around the world; I later did an [overview of labs](#), linked to a gathering we hosted of dozens of labs from around the world. I put out a [collection of all of these pieces](#) in one place – covering the full gamut from new ways of using money to data and regulation.

Through our skills team at Nesta we created lots of materials and courses to help public servants innovate – most recently with [States of Change](#).

There is certainly now much more interest in public innovation, and regular big gatherings, but it's still a long way from being as systematic as I had hoped.

UPRISING AND TRAINING ACTIVISTS

With colleague Rushanara Ali (now an MP), I helped set up the organisation [Uprising](#) in the late 2000s to train up a new generation of public leaders. The background was strong evidence of a disconnect between many communities, and particularly young people, and the structures of power which had become even more dominated by privileged, highly educated, white elite. The aim was to provide a structured course that would help young people take, and use, power for the public good. Uprising offered a year-long course as part of which students had to shape a campaign for practical change.

The programme began in East London, and then spread to Birmingham, Bedford and Manchester – helped by endorsement from the three main party leaders, and strong support from many mentors and organisations. There are now several thousand alumni, and Uprising is growing fast. At its tenth anniversary in 2018 a bunch of ministers and Mayor of London Sadiq Khan were there to celebrate.

A parallel strand of work looked at youth leadership around the world – for example how digital technologies are being used, and the overlaps with entrepreneurship. My thinking on leadership is contained in a chapter in *The Art of Public Strategy*. Some of these ideas have also been used in leadership training around the world countries: for ANZSOG in Australia, the Canadian School of Government, Singapore Civil Service College, China Executive Leadership Academy and others. I recently wrote [a blog](#) reflecting on what works in this kind of training.

HAPPINESS AND ACTION FOR HAPPINESS

I've had a longstanding interest in taking happiness seriously as a goal for government and politics, as well as civil society and business, perhaps an effect of my encounters with Buddhism. This is a topic with a very long history – as I

showed in 'Good and Bad Power', where I trace rulers' interest in happiness back to ancient china, India and Greece.

My fascination with the relationship between happiness and public policy began when I made an Analysis programme for Radio 4 on the subject in 1995. There were fascinating interviews with psychologists (notably Michael Argyle), and economists (notably Andrew Oswald), but I couldn't get any interest from politicians or policy people. At Demos later that decade I started various pieces of work on the subject, which later materialised as the collection 'The Good Life'. In the Cabinet Office I commissioned a research study on the state of knowledge on happiness and public policy - though perhaps out of cowardice we used the phrase 'life satisfaction' to make it more palatable. There was still very little engagement from politicians. I remember my then boss Tony Blair being quite baffled why we were doing this.

But during the 2000s the momentum grew. I was quite closely involved in the OECD's Beyond GDP programme for developing new indicators (led by Enrico Giovannini), and spoke at their big events in Istanbul and Busan. The Young Foundation collaborated with Richard Layard to try out policies for wellbeing in local government, including teaching resilience in schools. David Cameron while still in opposition took part in a couple of sessions with this programme, and later committed to making happiness an important theme of his government. The main result of this was the Office of National Statistics survey on wellbeing, which is at least a good starting point. What's still missing is a serious approach to policy. I've written two recent pieces on this – one for the Oxford University Press Handbook on Happiness (published in 2013), and another for a Nef/Sitra publication XXX. I argue that although there is strong evidence at a very macro level (for example, on the relationship between democracy and well-being), and at the micro level of individual interventions, what's missing is good evidence at the middle level where most policy takes place.

The other big initiative in this space was the launch of Action for Happiness in April 2011, to provide tools for happiness in communities and daily life. AfH was put together by Richard Layard, Anthony Seldon and me, and appointed Mark Williamson as its first, and very effective, Chief Executive. It's a fantastic organisation – with tens of thousands of members, the Dalai Lama as patron (since 2014), and great impact through workplaces, schools and communities, and a model of how carefully organised knowledge can make the world a better place.

DIGITAL DEMOCRACY

I've consistently been involved in the use of digital technologies to transform democracy. I'm fascinated by the potential for spreading power, but also aware that simplistic hopes that networks would replace hierarchies have proven ill-founded. My written outputs in this space have included some theoretical work (eg in the Demos collection on 'liberation technology', and in my book 'Connexity').

I've also been involved in the practice, for example through the charity Involve (of which I was the first chair). My book 'Good and Bad Power' provides a theoretical account of what makes power good, and the many ways in which governance arrangements can be transformed making the most of technologies. A lot of hot air has been issued on this topic – mainly from a naïve belief that technologies automatically empower people. As I showed in my book 'Communication and control: networks and the new economies of communication', they empower both the people in networks and the people with power in existing hierarchies. They can strengthen both the rebels in Tahrir Square and the traditional authorities, both small startups and big firms like GE or Microsoft.

Nesta led a European consortium developing new democratic platforms – D-CENT variants of which have now been taken up in dozens of cities. In 2017 we published a survey of the state of the art in [digital democracy](#) and invited many of the pioneers to address the UK parliament and cities. Exciting initiatives are underway in Taiwan, Korea, Spain and Iceland – but sadly still not much in the UK.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE 'OTHER INVISIBLE HAND'

I coined the idea of the 'other invisible hand' to describe the work of civil society, and its dependence on the right laws and structures. Some of the thinking was set out in the Demos report 'The Other Invisible Hand' (co-written

with Charles Landry). I later set up the government's review of charity law (under the Strategy Unit) which led to the adoption of a public benefit test for all charities and new legal forms (notably the Community Interest Company, which has subsequently prompted equivalents in many other countries).

I chaired the Carnegie Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society which reported in 2010 – and focused, in particular, on the role of civil society in the economy, on the media and democracy. I hope that some of its ideas were a bit ahead of their time, including the emphasis on free and public media and why this needed to become a priority for philanthropy.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

I've been involved in the social enterprise and entrepreneurship field for twenty years. I commissioned Charles Leadbeater's seminal report 'The Rise of the Social Entrepreneur' at Demos in 1995, and had a close involvement in initiatives such as the School for Social Entrepreneurs and the Community Action Network. Michael Young – who Harvard's Daniel Bell rated the world's most successful ever social entrepreneur from the 1950s to the 2000s – became a mentor for me.

Within government I shaped UK government social enterprise strategy from 1997 onwards (some of this is summarised in my chapter for Alex Nicholls book 'Social Entrepreneurship' published by OUP). This included creating new funding streams; new legal forms; and opening up public procurement. With Robin Murray I wrote a report on social venturing; with a group of colleagues another one on scaling social innovations and enterprises [LINK - in and out of sync] (I've subsequently used the framework in this to help dozens of social enterprises think through their strategic options).

I remain a great enthusiast for social entrepreneurship but felt the field slightly lost its way. The best social entrepreneurs are steely yet humble. But some of the best funded organisations in the field started promoting a rather over the top ideology in which extraordinary heroic individuals single-handedly transform the world. This was bad analysis and bad history (for example, not many social entrepreneurs saw their ideas go to scale – much more often others took over at crucial points). It led to too much glitz and self-promotion, rather than honesty

and learning. And it also turned the heads of some of the best people, and left them circulating on the international conference circuit rather than doing good.

CHANGING CULTURES AND BEHAVIOURS

Another interest has been in how public policy can influence cultures and behaviour. This was the topic of a Demos programme, which resulted in the publication 'Missionary Government' in 1996. In the Cabinet Office in 2003 I commissioned and co-authored an overview of how behaviour change could be influenced in various fields, drawing on the emerging field of behavioural economics.

At the time there was limited interest in this from ministers. Interest greatly picked up at the end of the decade, mainly thanks to a best-selling book by Thaler and Sunstein. In 2010 David Cameron appointed David Halpern, one of the authors of the earlier report, to run a Behavioural Insight Unit (BIT) within No 10. More recently this has been copied by the White House in the US and by the Singaporean government, and looks set to go from strength to strength. In February 2014 a new partnership was announced between the Cabinet Office, Nesta and BIT, and BIT has carried on going from strength to strength.

EVIDENCE

I became interested in evidence when I started work in government. We tried to introduce the principle that any policy project would begin with a public review of the global evidence: what was known, what worked etc.

We encouraged the creation of repositories of evidence, and committing a good share of budgets to evaluation. However it soon became clear that the repositories didn't really work. The one exception was NICE which did detailed analyses of effectiveness and cost-effectiveness in the NHS, and ensured that the evidence was used and useful.

So in the 2000s I began advocating a NICE for other fields, including social policy. In 2011 we started an [alliance for useful evidence](#) at Nesta and advocated the creation of a network of 'what works centres'. These were formally launched a year later by ministers and there are now a dozen in place, some of which Nesta has helped to incubate (including the most recent one on children's social care).

The Alliance remains strong and has worked in other countries; trained politicians; and maintained the visibility of evidence even during a period when some political trends have gone in the opposite direction. I've written various journal articles and book chapters on the topic – usually emphasising the importance of promoting demand for evidence rather than just supply.

FUTURES

I've had a long involvement in futures methods of all kinds – the many ways there are to make sense of what lies ahead. These can be messy, and are usually wrong. But at their best they force people to think about how the world might change and how they might adapt. Since most organisations and bureaucracies like to assume that things won't change this is generally healthy. In the UK government, for example, I set up and chaired a network of futures teams from departments, and commissioned various pieces of work on the strengths and weaknesses of different methods (some of this is contained in the Art of Public Strategy). I was involved in Australia 2020 in the late 2000s and in 2010 I was part of an EU project looking at scenarios for the years 2030- 50.

Nesta started hosting regular [FutureFests](#) in 2013. These now attract many thousands of participants to discuss, experience and taste the future. We also commissioned various pieces of research on methods for futurology, from very quantitative ones to science fiction, and each year we publish predictions, which have done quite well in identifying key trends. Futurology has plenty of vices – in particular a consistent failure to learn.

That's why forecasts of the end of work, for example, continue to be repeated by famous futurologists even though past forecasts turned out to be wildly wrong (though there is undoubtedly, a slow and steady downward trend in

working hours). I'm attracted to the approach of people like Philip Tetlock who look rigorously at which forecasts turn out to be right. Of course some futurology is not trying to forecast, only to 'disturb the present'. But there still needs to be some reflection linking thoughts about the future to what actually happens. Our most recent exercise has been to apply collective intelligence to forecasting .

CONNECTEDNESS AND CONNEXITY

My PhD was on telecommunications, and in particular how power would change in a world of networks. It was published (by Polity) as 'Communication and Control: networks and the new economies of communication'. Its central thesis was simple: new communication technologies would strengthen both existing hierarchies and new networks. This happened to be a different argument to the conventional wisdoms. One was the argument that networks would automatically distribute power and decentralise. That argument has been fashionable since the 1960s, and continues to be repeated in an endless flood of books, articles and talks. It's an argument I find appealing but know to be at best half true. Since the advent of the Internet the share of governments in GDP has risen, and the share of GDP of the top 1000 companies has grown substantially. Networks have undoubtedly empowered billions of people and made possible all sorts of new ways of living, working and organising. But they've also empowered the Pentagon, the Chinese leadership, Microsoft and Exxon.

The other issue I've tried to explore is the morality of a networked world. My book *Connexity* (published by Vintage and Harvard Business Press) argued that interdependence would require radically different ways of thinking about responsibility – and awareness of our place in systems. It's a book I'm still proud of, though I regret its title – an attempt to reuse an old English word, which hasn't caught on. 20 years later, however, there has been renewed interest in the book, for example from writers such as Anne-Marie Slaughter and Julia Hobsbawm. I'm glad that it has aged well.

PUBLIC VALUE

In the early 2000s I started work at the Cabinet office on making the idea of public value more central to government decision making. This partly drew on collaboration with Professor Mark Moore at Harvard, who had authored a series of books on the subject. We published an overview and subsequently many organisations, like the BBC, took up the approach. I wrote a detailed paper for CAGE on how these ideas could be applied to the built environment. A paper setting out various public value methods – in health, culture and linked to ‘what works’ - is published by Nesta in 2019.

THE RELATIONAL STATE

During the late 2000s I developed a set of ideas under the label of ‘the relational state’. This brought together a lot of previous work on shifting the mode of government from doing things to people and for people, to doing things with them. I thought there were lessons to learn from the greater emphasis on relationships in business, and from strong evidence on the importance of relationships in high quality education and healthcare. An early summary of the ideas was published by the Young Foundation in 2009. The ideas were further worked on with government agencies in Singapore and Australia, and presented to other governments including Hong Kong and China. An [IPPR collection on the relational state](#), which included an updated version of my piece and some comments, was published in late 2012

Since then Nesta has backed many dozens of organisations which show the relational state in practice, in particular through the Centre for Social Action, a joint fund with the Cabinet Office. More recently similar ideas have been promoted by various writers, including Hilary Cottam.

HEALTH KNOWLEDGE COMMONS

A big idea which could have great impact in a few years' time is the 'knowledge commons'. This is a very simple idea: that in every field there is an increasingly important job to be done in orchestrating knowledge of different kinds and making it useable. Parts of this work are done within academia, the professions and other fields of practice. But generally it's done very badly. The ease of Google searches makes us think that knowledge is much more accessible – and of course it is. But the very abundance of information continually reveals how poorly organised it is.

Health is a good example, since in most respects it has more data, evidence and orchestration than any other field. But even in health there is a huge gap between what the typical doctor, nurse or patient needs to know and what they can get from existing sources such as the Cochrane Collaboration, NICE or NHS Evidence. I set out some of the answers in a talk in 2011 to the Nuffield Foundation, and then commissioned an overview piece published by Nesta in 2013. The UK is well placed to bring this idea to life – linking the NHS, BBC, and our strengths in the semantic web. But for different reasons all the major players are distracted – at least for now.

SOCIAL IMPACT BONDS

I've had a long involvement in new ways of using money, and at Nesta oversee various impact investment funds. I also coined the term 'Social impact bonds' – the idea of creating an investment vehicle for social value. This drew on previous work on using investment tools for social goals, such as a working group on creating a 'green book' for investment in people in early 2000s.

The first SIB was implemented by the organisation Social Finance in Peterborough. Various Young Foundation reports analysed both the potential for SIBs and the complexity of their effective implementation. There are now around 100 worldwide. I wrote a chapter on the broader social finance field for the book '[Social Finance](#)', published by Oxford University Press.

STUDIO SCHOOLS

In the mid-2000s, reflections on the failure of some recent educational policies led to the development of the idea of Studio Schools (with important inputs from Therese Rein, the founder of Ingeus, and Simon Tucker at the Young Foundation). The central idea was to redesign schooling with non-cognitive skills at the core of the school experience, and a return to the renaissance ideal of integrating work and learning.

Many discussions with teachers, pupils and employers led to the basic design principles being established: small schools, most of the curriculum to be done through practical projects with outside partners and clients; coaches as well as teachers for the pupils; organisation of the timetable and buildings to be more like a workplace than a traditional school. This approach was then piloted on a small scale in Luton and Blackpool. The very strong results – in particular on GCSEs, the standard exam for secondary schools, helped fuel a Studio School movement. Many schools opened in the early 2010s. The driving force in making them happen was David Nicoll, Chief Executive of the Studio schools trust, along with his team.

However the programme hit major challenges – a hostile government; the worst educational recession in living memory which squeezed budgets badly; and, in particular, challenges of recruitment. The Further Education sector which had sponsored many of the schools went into a severe crisis which led some colleges to close down their schools to save their older colleges. The government bailed out the parallel network of University Technical Colleges which had run into even more severe problems (their founder was a former Conservative Party Chairman, Lord Baker). A fair article on this appeared recently in Apolitical. I remain convinced the diagnosis and prescription remain right. In retrospect I wish we had been able to run them more centrally (each school was instead autonomous, and lacked the resources to cope with periods of difficulty) and that we had had a fraction of the philanthropic money some other chains had. Most innovations need a bit of leeway and spare cash to cope with bumps.

THE UNIVERSITY FOR INDUSTRY/LEARN DIRECT

In the early 1990s I came up with the idea for a University for Industry that would provide learning materials and opportunities at workplaces. The original idea was to use satellite TV, and online tools (this was just before the creation of the Internet). Employers would be encouraged to set aside space and time for their staff to learn – everything from lunchtime courses in foreign languages to very short tuition on use of a new technology. The idea was taken up by Gordon Brown, and included in the Labour Party manifestos in 1992 and 1997.

The University for Industry was launched at the end of the decade, and renamed as Learn Direct. At its peak Learn Direct had the second highest number of learners of any organisation in the world. The government elected in 2010 decided to sell the organisation (for around £50m). This proved disastrous as the organisation was asset-stripped, under the influence of investors. What could have been a great new public service ended up as a victim of dumb ideology.

More recently I have made proposals for adult learning, including for new entitlements and navigation tools. Some of the latter are included in our [Open Jobs](#) programme.

THE U/CITIZENS UNIVERSITY

In 2010 I developed the idea of the U, or Citizens University. The starting point was to design a networked organisation that would provide people with the skills most useful to other citizens, in short, fun courses, provided in empty retail spaces (this was during the recession of 2010 when there was plenty of unused space in shopping malls and high streets).

Our starting question was: what skills could 1% of the public have that would be most valuable to the other 99%? The Citizens University was announced by

Prime Minister David Cameron in October 2010, and moved into a pilot phase in Sutton in London and Hexham in Northumberland, focusing initially on first aid and conflict reduction skills. The idea evolved to emphasise helping people to get to know others in their neighbourhood – turning strangers into neighbours.

INSTITUTIONAL REINVENTION

I've become ever more interested in the design of new institutions to fill some of the glaring gaps of the 21st century. My mixed background straddling government and technology means that I'm fairly well placed to think through how new institutions can be designed. Some of the ones I've proposed include:

Ideas for **regulating artificial intelligence**, set out in my paper '[A Machine Intelligence Commission for the UK](#)' in 2016. A body along very similar lines was set up by the UK government in late 2018 named the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation.

Data trusts to curate and manage data – my [paper](#) set out a range of options for maximising the public value from data, and there are now many projects around the world acting on this. I'm convinced we will need new institutions to handle data in trustworthy ways.

Internet governance – I made recommendations for [global internet governance](#) (prompted by sitting on an ICANN committee and various gatherings hosted at the time by Brazil). Little progress has been made in this area (though Nesta's [Next Generation Internet](#) project, supported by the European Commission, is exploring many ideas in this space).

Integrity in infrastructures – prompted by various controversies over Huawei I proposed a new global institution that could assure the integrity of communications infrastructures. These were floated in the Financial Times in May 2019.

ANTICIPATORY REGULATION

I worked a lot on regulation in the 1980s and 1990s - particularly focusing on telecoms and standards. In the last five years, new ideas about regulation became an important area of work for Nesta. I wrote an overview piece on what I called ['Anticipatory Regulation'](#) in 2017, showing how new approaches were needed to deal with fast changing technologies like AI, driverless cars and drones. These methods needed to be more iterative and experimental, and to make more use of data. We have subsequently developed a stream of practical projects applying these ideas in banking, law, energy and drones.

We persuaded the UK government to create an innovation fund to help regulators adapt (titled 'Regulatory Pioneers Fund', launched in 2018), and are involved in many of the resulting projects.

SOCIAL POLICY

I've had a long history in social policy – how to better solve social problems. I helped shape and oversee the Social Exclusion Unit in the UK government which pioneered evidence-based, holistic solutions to social problems. Its work on rough sleeping helped bring the numbers down by two-thirds and ultimately 80% through a combination of measures, including stemming the flow on to the streets, dealing with the range of factors that kept people there (including mental health, drugs, alcohol etc) and providing a route out to housing and a job. Our strategy on teenage pregnancy succeeded in cutting numbers by a half, and on neighbourhood renewal reduced the gap between the poorest neighbourhoods and the average. Sadly there is little shared memory in government or the media of these achievements – and in the 2010s numbers of rough sleepers went up again, in my view quite unnecessarily.

A big study I oversaw at the Young Foundation in the late 2000s - [Sinking and Swimming](#) - tried to provide an up to date overview of changing needs. It included statistical analysis, local deep dives and a lot of ethnographic interviews, many of which I did.

The study pioneered many things including highlighting the growing importance of loneliness and isolation (a decade later the government appointed its first Minister for Loneliness); challenges of transition; and mental health. The Big Lottery Fund committed several hundred million pounds to act on its recommendations.

I particularly hoped that its framework for looking at a population in terms of both material and psychological prosperity would become mainstream. This still hasn't happened, but I'm hopeful.

SMART CITIES

For about 15 years I gave talks on what would make smart cities truly smart. Usually I would acknowledge the many ways technologies can improve traffic management or energy flows. But I also warned that the engineers' visions of smart cities left little place for people; did nothing to tap human intelligence; and often failed in their own terms. I argued that the field needed much more honest evidence about impacts (despite all the spending, there were no centres anywhere around the world doing this).

At Nesta we published various [overviews of smart cities](#) and did practical projects which showed how the public could play a role. Much of this thinking is now more mainstream. For me the next step is to link smart cities to collective intelligence, an idea I set out in [this piece](#).