

A photograph of three people in a modern office setting. On the left, a man with short reddish hair in a maroon sweater looks towards the center. In the middle, a man with a beard and glasses in a blue and white striped shirt smiles while looking at a laptop. On the right, a woman with long blonde hair in a striped top and beige cardigan also smiles at the laptop. The laptop is silver with the HP logo. The background shows office lights and a blurred interior.

**Nous Group: Your
expert partner for
government futures
planning**

We can help you prepare for the future

Nous group is an award-winning management consulting firm. For more than 20 years, we have partnered with leaders across the UK, Canada and Australia to shape future-ready governments, world class businesses and empowered communities. The need for organisations to be ahead of the curve in identifying potential crises and managing risk seems more pressing than ever in our current climate. The COVID-19 pandemic and recent large-scale conflicts remain the most prevalent reminders, but other trends such as climate change, changes in government also require organisations to be future-ready.

Our global expertise in futures methodologies and our distinctive engagement approach helps organisations tackle these challenges head on, and make both smart decisions for long-term benefits and quick decisions to address urgent change when circumstances require. We

20+ Years of experience

DELIVERING FUTURES WORK FOR PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANISATIONS

750 People

ACROSS THE UK, CANADA, AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

300+ projects

DELIVERED BY OUR GLOBAL CONSULTING TEAM EVERY YEAR

Experience

PARTNER OF CHOICE IN GOVERNMENT

We have partnered with public sector organisations to deliver futures projects for more than 20 years. We have experience using innovative approaches to help the UK, Canadian and Australian governments get ahead of risk effectively.

Scale

750 HIGHLY SKILLED STAFF GLOBALLY

We are well-placed to support your department. Our team includes leading strategists, economists and policy experts, including many former senior civil servants. Nous delivers over 300 projects a year, including policy and strategy work for government departments, not-for-profits and private sector organisations.

Capability

ROBUST FUTURES SKILLS INTEGRATED WITH BROADER CONSULTING EXPERTISE

We couple rigorous qualitative and quantitative analysis with effective futures projections to help clients make evidence-based decisions in an uncertain world. We present our findings in plain English, tailored to the audience. Pushing thinking to develop bold ideas is a core part of how we work – for example, clients value our distinctive stakeholder engagement, Human-centred design approach and codesign capabilities. But we are not naïve about how to achieve buy-in or manage change. We understand the unique and complex authorising environment within government, and can effectively engage those whose active or tacit support is needed for both agreement and implementation to ensure it will achieve your goals. From strategy design right through to implementation, Nous has the end-to-end capability to be your futures partner.

Flexibility

MEETING YOU WHERE YOU'RE AT

We provide a bespoke response to each client's need, adapting tools and providing the right blend of expertise to generate the best results. Our clients value our mix of creativity and realism to ensure we deliver useful recommendations in the timescales required. We intentionally push our clients' thinking to test the boundaries of existing perceptions and provoke meaningful discussion to challenge the status quo.



Nous quickly understood our organisation, and the challenges we face. They worked well with us, challenging us and stretching our thinking. Their structured thinking, ideas and facilitation encouraged open and productive conversations between members of our leadership team, gave us confidence we had considered all our options, and brought everything together at each stage to support us in prioritising what to take forwards.

**Head of Profession,
government agency**

We draw on an extensive toolkit of futures techniques to develop an approach tailored to your needs.

We deploy the full range of techniques covered in the UK's Government Office for Science toolkit, plus other innovative tools of our own devising. We draw on our tried and tested futures methodologies, paired with a close understanding of the context in front of us, to tackle the challenge at hand.

YOUR POTENTIAL REQUIREMENTS

RELEVANT NOUS FUTURES TOOLS

1	Understand trends, drivers, risks and opportunities affecting a policy area	SWOT analysis PESTLE analysis Regression analysis Axes of Uncertainty Driver analysis
2	Describe and explore the implications of different possible futures	Horizon scanning Scenario planning Role play
3	Develop and test the resilience of policies and strategies	Strategic planning Risk assessment and management Stress-testing Logic tree
4	Develop internal futures capability	Learning and development programmes Leadership immersion sessions Targeted staff workshops
5	Engage diverse stakeholders in Futures work (e.g. citizens, employees, domain experts)	Human-centred design Facilitation Structured interviewing Expert panel management
6	Data analysis and visualisation	Modelling future behaviours Economic modelling Systems modelling Road-mapping



Our innovative futures approach

Futures planning challenges established thinking. It requires policy makers to look beyond the first horizon to gain foresight into potentially subtle but impactful changes in the policy environment. We can help you do this.

TECHNIQUES

Scenario planning

A powerful analytical tool to stress-test strategy and policy decisions, which blends qualitative and quantitative inputs. Scenarios are alternative visions of potential futures that enable decision-making based on uncertainty. Use it when you want to put citizens at the centre of futures planning and expose possible policy vulnerabilities.

How Nous can help

We use the right mix of quantitative data analysis and visualisation to develop a comprehensive range of data-driven conclusions for potential scenarios. We engage policy makers and/or external participants in scenario analysis and use gaming techniques to allow participants to identify risks and unintended consequences, and test likely outcomes. Documenting, refining and presenting findings in an accessible format is key for cementing common learning across the organisation, and giving confidence in strategy and policy decisions. Mindset shifts in how to identify and manage future risks are common outcomes of this type of exercise.

Horizon scanning

A structured way of spotting changes in the wider environment to enable a timely response. Use it when you want to stay alert to contextual changes that might impact current or future policy outcomes.

How Nous can help

We consider the social, technological, economic, environmental/ecological, political, legal, ethical and demographic factors (STEEPLED) specific to your context and adapt the scope of enquiry as relevant to ensure comprehensive evaluation. Nous provides succinct insight into the short- and long-term risks and advises on how to mitigate possible impact.

SWOT analysis

A useful tool to identify capabilities to leverage or boost as you prepare for future challenges (e.g. competition from other public or private sector organisations), or explore the most effective way to deliver services.

How Nous can help

We use and adapt the framework as necessary, to identify and prioritise strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for our clients. We use our own knowledge and make use of departmental and external experts. We give concise analysis of the sector environment to frame our recommendations.

Behaviour modelling

A technique that combines qualitative and quantitative analysis, via historic data and data-modelling, to predict future behaviours. This helps organisations make smarter decisions.

How Nous can help

Our behaviour and economic modelling capability is a flexible tool for problem solving. We can scale the level of support we provide up or down from high-level analysis of existing datasets through to detailed design, analysis and visualisation based on original research.

Nous has delivered an extensive range of futures support to organisations. The following case studies describe how we have used some of the futures toolkit approaches to support future-readiness.

Human-centred design

Human-centred design (HCD) places users front and centre in the design process, to deliver real solutions to the challenges that they face. This technique can be paired with other futures methodologies.

How Nous can help

Combining our HCD capabilities with traditional consulting practice and deep subject-matter expertise allows us to create products, services and experiences that deliver real value for our clients and their customers, citizens and communities. We also support the implementation of solutions.



“

Working with Nous on this project was a really positive experience. They were knowledgeable, responsive and brilliant at getting things done in challenging timescales and despite the many twists and turns involved with large projects. Their ideas, support and constructive challenge really helped clarify our thinking on some very thorny problems.

**Head of Futures,
Government agency**



CASE STUDY 1

Stress tested
a UK defence
agency's multi-
billion pound
procurement
strategy using
Nous' futures
methodologies

3
CONSULTANTS

20
CONSULTING DAYS

9
MONTHS

HORIZON SCANNING STRESS-TESTING ROLE-PLAY

Challenge: Nous facilitated horizon scanning and scenario planning workshops with a UK defence agency's senior executives.

APPROACH

To create the scenarios for these workshops, we undertook a horizon scan guided by a STEEP (social, technology, economic, environment, political) framework, drawing on input from Nous' experts in futures thinking and the subject area to identify pressing trends. We tested these against a minimum threshold for plausibility, novelty, significance and timeframe. These trends were then grouped and translated into distinct scenarios. Nous used a process of iterative co-development with the client to confirm each scenario narrative to take forward into strategic planning conversations.

Nous was then commissioned to build on this work by stress-testing their multi-billion-pound procurement strategy using these scenarios.

We facilitated a series of team-based role-plays to explore the scenarios in greater depth, identified capability gaps through 1:1 consultations and road-mapped improvements in capability to address these.

OUTCOME

The products of this testing drove refinement to the agency's strategy and brought a different way of thinking to the organisation's strategic conversations. The agency said Nous helped them to think vastly differently and that the team's human-centered approach was effective. The Government Office for Science said Nous performed considerably better than other suppliers undertaking similar work.



CASE STUDY 2

Helped a UK government agency prepare for future workforce requirements through scenario planning

4

CONSULTANTS

40

CONSULTING DAYS
(HORIZON SCANNING/
SCENARIO PLANNING)

60

DAYS (WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT)

5

MONTHS

SCENARIO PLANNING

PESTLE ANALYSIS

RISK MANAGEMENT

Challenge: The Planning Inspectorate (PINS) faced multiple ongoing workforce challenges, which affected its ability to respond to changing demands and meet organisational performance targets. PINS sought an expert partner in Nous to understand how demand, resources and skill requirements might change over the next decade, and to outline options to increase its resilience.

APPROACH

We analysed existing data and conducted one-on-one interviews with senior leaders to understand PINS' work areas and the specialist skills it needed. We then conducted comprehensive desktop research into relevant external trends drivers, using news articles, think tank publications, international planning examples and specialist futures websites, as well as Nous' global expertise.

The team identified six PESTLE (political, economic, sociological, technological, legal and environmental) areas, which we tested in a workshop with leaders. We challenged the team to reflect on the future trends and identify priority areas they felt were most likely to affect their operating environment.

In a second workshop, we refined the scenarios with leaders, and invited them

to explore the potential impacts on required workforce capability, capacity and ways of working. To do this, we presented participants with initial ideas to push against and used personas to develop thinking on how each scenario would impact priority stakeholders.

Using the outputs of the workshop, we identified common implications across the six scenarios, which informed our final recommendations to help increase resilience across the operating model.

OUTCOME

Our final report validated existing futures thinking and expanded the organisation's thinking on external factors. PINS re-engaged Nous to explore options and approaches to access capability, optimise resource and drive a customer-focused culture in greater detail.



The weekly scenario exercises were invaluable in building understanding and exposing gaps. They brought a huge improvement of coordination, and were fantastic to sharpen understanding and expectations in multi-agency context.

Participant, senior government official

CASE STUDY 3

Conducted a cross-agency scenario testing programme to improve quality of maritime security incident responses

2
CONSULTANTS

25
CONSULTING DAYS

18
MONTHS

SCENARIO PLANNING | ROLE PLAY | DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Challenge: Nous used a scenario-based approach to support a group of related agencies to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of large-scale responses to maritime security incidents.

APPROACH

Nous developed a range of potential future scenarios and honed down to those most likely to happen through data analysis and engagement with subject experts and the client. We then ran weekly workshops with up to 100 cross-agency participants. The workshops were designed to simulate a series of security events occurring in real time – each one varying in impact/likelihood risk profile. Nous simulated escalation points, to which participants live role-played their response. Nous played two roles: first, as challenger to push the thinking on participants' responses; and second, as observer to impartially identify weaknesses in participants' coordination of an operational response.

Our facilitation helped resolve straightforward issues as they arose, and capture more challenging issues to resolve offline, with follow-up

actions allocated to specific agencies. A summary of findings was provided after each workshop, including an action tracker to monitor progress against identified actions to build organisational resilience.

OUTCOME

The workshops strengthened inter-agency connections, encouraged more formal documentation of the roles and responsibilities of different agencies, and improved agency awareness of both potential risks and appropriate response mechanisms. This will help keep the UK safer from maritime threats.



Nous were happy to collaborate to develop a perceptive set of futures that helped us to test our five-year strategy. They brought data, valuable insights and a rigorous framework which helped us get to a credible set of futures and build trust with our board. This led to a rich discussion and confidence in the conclusions we reached.

**Director of Policy,
social enterprise**

CASE STUDY 4

Stress tested a social enterprise's future strategy

2
CONSULTANTS

15
CONSULTING DAYS

4
WEEKS

LEADERSHIP IMMERSION

SWOT ANALYSIS

AXIS OF UNCERTAINTY

Challenge: A national £250 million turnover social enterprise engaged Nous to stress-test its future strategy. It sought an evidence-based futures review to test the limits of the strategy and build confidence in it across the organisation.

APPROACH

Nous first explored relevant contextual trends by expanding PESTLE analysis into STEEPLED, adding ethical and demographic components. We used predictive analysis to cast forward trends and explore their impact. For example, we considered the potential impact of demographic change in the UK (a slowing birth rate) on the organisation's services for children, and the increasing devolution of funding on their contracting arrangements. We worked collaboratively with the client to assess trends for likelihood, impact and velocity and the interconnectivity between these. The Axis of Uncertainty provided a useful framework to create four possible future environments, which we articulated at their most extreme to push the thinking.

Nous facilitated a session for board members, co-developing SWOT analysis and potential implications for how the organisation should operate. Our open facilitation voting methods enabled the board members to each have a stake in prioritising these implications.

OUTCOME

Nous' engagement helped better prepare the board to think through their strategic priorities and whether their strategy was fit for purpose in an unpredictable future. The board used the outcome of this thinking to adjust and build confidence in their strategy.



CASE STUDY 5

Used human-centred design to equip the Department for Education (DfE) for a post-lockdown estates transformation

4
CONSULTANTS

60
CONSULTING DAYS

8
MONTHS

HUMAN-CENTRED DESIGN

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

BEHAVIOUR MODELLING

Challenge: The DfE commissioned Nous to support the development of its long-term estates strategy and refresh of the department's London and Sheffield buildings.

APPROACH

The impact of COVID meant that past patterns of behaviour around home-based and flexible working were no longer a helpful guide in determining operating principles for estates management in the future.

Nous deployed our Human-centred design (HCD) method to research and document users' needs and preferences. We engaged over 650 staff via surveys, workshops and focus groups. The resulting personas and user journey maps summarised user requirements for department staff, identified key themes raised by staff and specific networks, and provided insights into how employees want to work differently in the future. In parallel, we developed a data model to predict how the department could optimise space within its estate based on staff needs.

OUTCOME

The research provided valued insight for the department's near-term adaptation to post-COVID lockdown working practices. Nous delivered replicable toolkits that the department can deploy as and when it undertakes this type of project in future.

Partnering for success

At Nous, we are inspired and determined to improve organisations in significant ways. As a genuinely purpose-based firm, we work on the opportunities and challenges that transform businesses, governments and communities. When we partner with you, we think big. We elevate your ambition and sharpen your sense of what's possible, and we build confidence in what we can achieve together.

What can you expect?

Critical friend

Nous' down-to-earth approach enables us to persuade sceptics and futurists alike of the need to adjust policy levers and mitigate risks. Our recommendations are grounded in evidence and compelling logic, and are communicated persuasively.

Value for money

We deliver maximum value for clients. Clients recognise this and return to us time and again.

Clear stakeholder engagement

We agree stakeholder engagement plans and engage key decision makers early, and are adept at engaging and influencing stakeholders at all levels. We use multiple tools including online surveys, focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and facilitated debate via online and in-person collaboration tools.

Effective communication and data visualisation

We tailor every report and presentation to suit the project's requirements to communicate to the right people in the right way. We can use digital, print or video media, augmented/virtual reality and interactive experiences as appropriate.

Effective project management

We keep projects – from micro to multi-million – on track while building buy-in from departmental stakeholders responsible for implementation. We use rigorous project management techniques (based on PRINCE2 and PMBOK), but flex our project management approach to meet the specific needs of your context. Our approach includes:

- Nous-client project charter
- clear structured, tailored project plan
- thorough and systematic consultation plan
- regular project reporting
- risk management
- agile sprint delivery, where appropriate.

OUR GLOBAL TEAM

Every project we deliver has a Project Director and consultants carefully selected to meet your specific needs. We resource projects from our UK office, but we and our clients benefit from our global presence, which provides:

- an extensive pool of expertise from over 750 Nousers
- experience from other jurisdictional contexts
- round-the-clock support where necessary.

How can you use us?

Clients return to Nous because our approach delivers results. We take different approaches to partnering with our clients, depending on what you need:

- 1. **Nous will work for you.** Deploy us as an extra resource for your department to fast-track projects and deliver results quickly.
- 2. **Nous will work with you.** We will collaborate closely and effectively with department colleagues as an integrated team to support long-term results.
- 3. **Nous will build your team’s capability for long-term success.** We can use side-by-side collaboration, articles, videos, seminars, webinars and training courses – either as stand-alone or embedded into projects – to build change that sticks.

We work hard to build excellent relationships with client teams and external stakeholders to ensure positive working dynamics and deliver high quality outputs that will be accepted and enacted after our project ends.

We consciously seek projects that have the potential to impact the world for the better and are proud of our ability to use innovative, logical thinking to solve complex problems. We can help with challenges across a full range of services, spanning strategy through to implementation.

Our teams are motivated by intellectual challenge and the desire to impact society for good, making our people ideally suited for futures work.

EXAMPLE PROJECT SCOPES

We adapt our team size and work for as long or short as you require to deliver results.

3-week horizon scan	1.5-month policy stress test	4-month scenario planning exercise	6-month capability support
2 consultants	3 consultants	3 consultants	3 consultants, 1 expert advisor
3 days stakeholder engagement	12 days stakeholder engagement	18 days stakeholder engagement	24 days stakeholder engagement
7 days research and write up	8 days research and write up	12 days research and analysis	18 days research and analysis



Our People

Nous' large team of expert consultants have a track record of delivering high-quality projects. The following individuals reflect our experienced UK team, supported by a wide pool of international expert advisors.

UK Experts

Peter Horne

PRINCIPAL

Peter has over 25 years' experience leading projects in executive and consultant roles. A former senior civil servant, he spent over a decade leading in government departments and at Executive Director level in public bodies. He recently led a project on futures thinking across the Maritime ecosystem, involving developing the responsive and partnership capability of a dozen organisations via scenario planning workshops. Peter also led Nous' work on futures thinking in defence, working to challenge existing preconceptions on a multi-billion pound, long term procurement programme. Peter brings a breadth of perspective, challenge and insight.



Katharine Purser

PRINCIPAL

Katharine brings over 20 years' experience of strategy, policy and operations in government. Having worked in private, public and third sector organisations, Katharine brings a varied background and a data-driven perspective to futures thinking. She has led futures projects for Nous in the third and higher education sectors, and in her previous role, she established the Chief Data Office for the Department for Work and Pensions and developed their first-ever data strategy. During her two decades in the civil service, she also ran the Centre for Public Appointments – she led on the action plan for diversifying public appointments, co-led the development of a Skills Strategy for London and developed the strategy for cross-government shared services.



Darren Leafe

PRINCIPAL

Darren draws on over 25 years' experience in government, education and the public sector to design, develop and deliver customer centric digital solutions that deliver long-lasting change. He is passionate about education and public service transformation and has led strategy development for government departments in the UK and abroad. Darren advised on the impact of policy and delivery reform of regulations for schools and academies. He has transformed, implemented and operated key digital government services and transformed communications, digital engagement and crisis management operations. Clients value Darren's deep expertise, frank engagement style, and ability to push thinking.



Jessica Weereratne

DIRECTOR

Jessica is a strategy and transformation consultant with more than 13 years' experience partnering with public sector organisations. She is an expert in managing and delivering strategic and digital transformations that position organisations to respond to future trends. She has also worked with institutions to rethink their future ways of working and how to support staff to make this transition.

Jessica has led a range of projects with organisations to effectively plan for the future. This has involved running sessions with university executives on the next generation of universities and the impact of global trends, detailed scenario planning on size and shape of universities and developing reports on the future of higher education to inform key strategic decisions. Jessica has a strong understanding of how government works based on her experience working in as a civil servant and a ministerial advisor.



Global expert advisors

DIGITAL AND DELIVERY

Kelly Rowe Toronto

Sudipto Sarkar Melbourne

Brenden Carriker Melbourne

REGULATION

Claire Noone Melbourne

Lauren Ware Morand Brisbane

Mhairi Cowden Perth

PEOPLE AND CHANGE

Tessa Dehring Toronto

Anita Sarris Perth

Philippa Prothero Canberra

STRATEGY AND ECONOMICS

Tanya Smith Melbourne

Steve Corcoran Brisbane

Simon Guttman Sydney

UK Experts

Steph Huang

MANAGER

Steph brings experience in leadership, behavioural change and futures gained through roles across management consulting, diplomacy and psychology studies. She works with senior leaders to think differently and lead boldly through major organisational change and shifting global trends. She is training as a psychologist and is a qualified Australian lawyer. Clients value Steph's analytical mindset, energy and willingness to challenge with empathy.

Steph has worked with the Ministry of Defence to use futures methodologies that identify possible impacts on their organisation and inform the development of long-term strategies. She has also worked with a range of government stakeholders to identify and develop leadership skills for the future, including by managing a nine-month leadership programme for a senior leadership team that seeks to equip leaders with the skills and emotional intelligence to lead in the context of a shifting operating environment.



Dan Benwell

MANAGER

Dan is an experienced consultant with expertise in organisational strategy, design and transformation. He has advised leaders across governments, universities, service providers and large not-for-profits in the UK, Australia and Canada. Clients value Dan's collaborative approach to engagement and focus on service user, organisational and system-wide outcomes. Dan's consulting work builds on his background supporting the design of public services at the intersection of welfare, health and youth policy in the UK.

Dan recently supported the Planning Inspectorate to understand potential implications of five- to ten-year trends on their workforce strategy using of horizon-scanning and scenario-planning techniques. He has also managed exploratory research to investigate employability and skills integration to improve sustainability in the employment support sector, exploring scenarios based on economic performance and the level of government intervention with more than 50 sector leaders and advisors.





A bigger idea of success

Nous Group is an international management consultancy operating across the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. We are inspired and determined to improve people's lives in significant ways. When our strengths complement yours and we think big together, we can transform businesses, governments, and communities. We realise a bigger idea of success.

A bigger idea
of success

750

PEOPLE

5

COUNTRIES

+80.7

2020-22 NET PROMOTER SCORE
– global consulting average: +76.6