Futures Framework
An introduction to Firetail
Our services, capabilities and team

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Firetail
Strategy for social progress

Introduction

Firetail is a strategy consulting firm that works around the world to help ambitious, purpose-driven organisations achieve social progress.

We specialise in future-facing strategy work at the intersection of the public, private and voluntary sectors. Our sector specialisms include science & technology, medical research, higher education, health, migration, international development, education and environmental issues.

Our experience of using futures tools in complex environments includes:

- **Scenario planning and Weak Signals analysis** to help the Royal Society of Chemistry set long-range strategy in the chemical sciences community
- **Horizon scanning** to help Transparency International anticipate issues driving the future of global corruption
- **Systems mapping** to help UKRI, the Wellcome Trust and UK research community anticipate long-term shifts in demand for R&D talent
- **Collaborative co-creation models** to shape research strategies for Anthony Nolan and Alzheimer's Research UK
- **Trend analysis** to help the Northern Ireland's Science and Industry panel Matrix to identify opportunities for advanced wireless connectivity

We are experienced at working in multi-stakeholder environments, with organisations and individuals that hold competing definitions of success, different perspectives about the future, as well as different capacities and capabilities for change.

We have built a team of multidisciplinary experts to help our clients meet these challenges. They bring cross-sector experience, new insights and an understanding of appropriate methodologies.

Our clients use Futures thinking to:
- **Reframe the conversation around an issue:**
  It gives people space away from day-to-day issues to think about the future and its consequences.
- **Create space for ambitious change:**
  Deep conversations about the future let people think about the long-term and about more ambitious policies and projects.
- **Build and connect community:**
  Our approaches establish a shared understanding and language for the essential issues in a topic or area – in terms of defining success, or understanding the challenges ahead.

Our approaches are participative and inclusive by design:
The more participative and inclusive this work is, the better the results are. A reflective process is an invitation to think more ambitiously. The time to think, collaborate, and reflect offers huge value not only to the final output, but also for the participants in the process. Everyone who takes part should feel a sense of ownership.

We integrate evidence from quantitative and qualitative sources; from expert testimonials and from co-production exercises. We bring together consumer, economic and policy research. We consider long-range forecasts and weak signals of disruptive change.

Our Futures thinking generates actionable insight:
Too often, organisations are unable to turn the insights of their thinking about the long-term into actions for the short and medium term. We focus on delivering actionable insight to support decision-making and develop impactful policy. To do this well requires a knowledge of the full policy spectrum, an understanding of the landscape in which our clients are operating, as well as an analysis of internal operational and financial constraints.

Our services

Firetail offers a broad portfolio of methodologies to support clients across departments, agencies and partnerships by thinking about the future and their place in it. We have particular expertise in using cutting edge methodologies in complex, multi-stakeholder environments.

We invest time with our clients to help them communicate the results of futures thinking. We start every engagement by identifying the target audiences and intended outcomes for those groups.

Skills
- Strategy development
- Scenario planning
- Horizon scanning
- Landscape analysis
- Weak signals
- Systems analysis
- Systems mapping
- Trend mapping and forecasting
- Theory of change development
- Strategic analysis
- Options development and assessment
- Stakeholder engagement
- Financial modelling
- Portfolio analysis
- Data Science
- Benchmarking
- Facilitation
- Evaluation

Sector expertise
- Science, technology and innovation
- International Development
- Higher Education
- Civil Society
- Health
- Environment

Communication approaches
- In-depth reports
- Visualisation and infographics
- Narrative storytelling
- Simulation and gaming
- Facilitation and interactive events
- Training and capacity building
- Simulation / gaming

Contact us

Please contact us to discuss how we might be able to support your engagement:

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Case Study: Firetail & Future of Maths for the Royal Society

The ambition

Firetail supported the Royal Society's Mathematics Futures Programme (MFP), with the aim of building a new vision of mathematics education that highlights the role of mathematics for individuals, education, economies, society, and which strengthens diversity and inclusion. The MFP focused on evidence gathering about the changing nature and importance of mathematics, as well as determining the importance of mathematics to individuals, societies, and the economy.

Our approach

To achieve this, Firetail designed and delivered a collaborative approach with two key streams. The first of these was a landscape and horizon scanning activity, which collected a diverse range of trends across the social, technological, environmental, economic, political, legislative, and ethical (STEEPLE) areas and an analysis of identified trend's relevance to the future of mathematics.

The second stream was to run a participative scenario planning exercise, exploring the dynamics and drivers of change, and helping the Royal Society to describe scenarios for the future and back-cast to understand the key drivers and levers of change. This allowed the Royal Society to test different policy options and choices and roadmap how different programme activities over time may combine to shape future policy. Following this, we supported the MFP team with how best to use the product to help inform policy decisions and how to monitor the drivers of change.

The impact

This work provided the client with a robust evidence-base to help drive future policy, but also the process itself delivered significant additional value by helping to provide a structure for productive and constructive conversations with their stakeholder community about future policy drivers, options, and impacts.

The work has been used in policy discussion with the Department for Education, and the MFP members are involved in ongoing discussion on the Government's new ambition of ensuring that all school pupils in England study some form of maths to the age of 18.

Case Study: Firetail & Wellcome Trust / UKRI

The ambition

We worked with the Wellcome Trust, UK Research and Innovation, and the Careers Research and Advisory Centre to help them explore the challenge of how the UK will meet future demand for scientific researchers. The Government has a target to increase R&D spend to 2.4% by 2027; this implies a radical increase in the number of researchers, at a much faster rate than growth over the last decade.

This group of clients were particularly keen to understand what future trends would drive this growth, what challenges and opportunities this would pose, and—most importantly—what current and future levers of change the group could use to help solve the challenges and exploit the opportunities.

Our approach

We ran a workshop that convened representatives from funders, higher education, industry, and professional bodies. We took them through a series of interactive systems thinking exercises to understand the drivers of change, the challenges and opportunities, and levers of change in the system.

Through this process one especially critical challenge within the R&D landscape was identified: issues in attracting and retaining people in research careers. The output of this was a systems map developed in kumu.io that described the career phases, issues, levers, and organisations related to this challenge.

The impact

The map enables stakeholders to see related issues – and potential knock-on effects – when evaluating intervention options. It also highlighted areas of duplication and gaps. We then supported the group in using this system's map to help prioritise and roadmap a set of policy and strategy actions to help address the challenge, whilst keeping in mind the complexity of the system and other factors to consider.

Case Study: Firetail & Matrix NI

The ambition

The Department for the Economy of Northern Ireland promotes the development of a globally competitive economy.

Together with NI's Science and Industry Panel Matrix, it asked Firetail to conduct a sectoral foresight study of current and future opportunities of Artificial Intelligence in NI.

This study was seen as a key element in its work to establish an AI Competence Centre, which will support the development of the AI sector in NI and maximise future research and commercialisation opportunities.

Our approach

To help DfE and Matrix understand the potential for AI in key sectors of the economy, Firetail designed a three-step evaluation framework, including the existing research base and the transformative qualities of AI. Evidence was gathered through desk review and engagement with internal stakeholders, leading AI experts and members of the academic and industry community. An economic model was established to estimate the economic impact of AI in NI over the next decade.

The impact

Firetail provided an in-depth comparative assessment of the attractiveness of key sectors of the NI economy. We then identified key opportunities and challenges for different sectoral approaches for the Competence Centre.

Based on this, we set out clear recommendations to maximise the impact of the Competence Centre across sectors of the economy. This directly informed the business case and ministerial case for support to drive outcomes for the Competence Centre.

Case Study: Firetail & Anthony Nolan

The ambition

Firetail recently supported Anthony Nolan to develop its next research strategy. Anthony Nolan is a UK charity that works in hematopoietic stem cell transplantation for a range of conditions, including leukaemia and other blood cancers.

To help them make decisions about where to invest to maximise patient outcomes, we ran a horizon scan of stem cell transplantation and cell and gene therapies. This is a field where cellular therapies (e.g. CAR-T) are likely to transform current patient pathways for patients requiring stem cell transplantation.

Our approach

We ran workshops with researchers and clinicians to understand opportunities for patient impact in the next 10-15 years, and where there are opportunities for Anthony Nolan.

This covered both specific research areas (e.g. GvHD) and research infrastructure (e.g. biobanking, data) to increase the pace of discovery and translation to clinical practice. This was supported by a landscape review of domestic and international data on e.g. patient outcomes, incidence and prevalence data, trends in research investment, domestic and international research activity, clinical trial activity, trends in biotech investment, and peer/competitor activity.

The impact

The new strategy recognises the importance of technology and infrastructure, as well as the value of Anthony Nolan's convening power in the sector.

In support of this, we have worked alongside the charity and its partners to progress the work of the UK Stem Cell Strategic Forum and its Working Group on data. This has brought together a multi-stakeholder forum to establish a data commission with the remit of improving patient outcomes and research capability.

Our clients

We seek long-term partnerships with our clients, who range from the world's largest foundations and research organisations to pre-launch campaigns and start-ups. A selection of the clients Firetail has worked with is given below:

Our team

We're practical optimists, working openly and with purpose to bring fresh perspectives and new insights to our clients. We believe in the power of ideas, grounded in evidence and insight.

Our team is experienced in multiple methodologies and your consulting engagement will benefit from our multidisciplinary expertise. We can also draw on associates with expertise in technology transfer, smart cities, innovation, ethnography and civic participation.

Andy Martin, Founder, Director
Andy is the founder and director of Firetail. He is an experienced strategy consultant and senior advisor to leaders of mission-driven organisations. He has delivered future-facing, scenario planning and strategy development engagements for a wide variety of clients. He is also an investor and advisor to a number of early stage science and technology start-ups and social enterprises. Formerly Head of Strategy, Cancer Research UK. Trustee: The New Humanitarian (Geneva), Education: MA, University of Oxford

Rachel McLachlan, Director
Rachel is a Director at Firetail. She has over 15 years' experience leading engagements at a senior level in strategy, fundraising, marketing and policy roles. She has led engagements in scenario planning, landscape analysis and proposition development. She has particular expertise in citizen engagement, diversity and inclusion, public mobilisation, participation, and consumer insight. Formerly Head of Strategic Planning, Save the Children UK. Senior Manager, Consumer and Strategic Insight, Cancer Research UK. Demos, Forum for the Future, Merlin, Trustee: Fawcett Society, Education: BA, University of Cambridge

Chris Percy, Associate Director
Chris is an Associate Director at Firetail with over twelve years' experience helping clients manage their organisations and enhance their impact. He specialises in bringing insights from a diverse range of sectors and types of organisation. He has particular expertise and interest in education issues. Formerly Director of Academic Strategy, King's College London. Senior consultant, Roland Berger. Education roles, UK Civil Service 14-19 Reform Team, Education: MSc, Birkbeck, University of London. BA, University of Cambridge

Ben Randall, Senior Consultant
Ben is a Senior Consultant. He is an experienced organisational design, strategy, and futures consultant, with 10 years of experience working in, and consulting for, UK Government clients. Before joining Firetail, Ben's work across UK Government included leading the organisational design, development, and implementation of a new national horizon scanning unit. He also led multiple organisational maturity and operating model reviews for civil service units, including developing a new national innovation, science & technology function and helping them to redefine and refocus their innovation strategy. Ben has also delivered a range of strategic foresight and futures analysis projects across Government, including a wide-ranging Future of Data report to help drive a UK Government organisation's national data strategy and conducting strategic scenario analysis to inform UK Government investment decisions.

Henry Lane, Senior Consultant
Henry is a Senior Consultant at Firetail, with deep experience in strategy, policy and research across the public and not-for-profit sectors. He has led co-creation, systems mapping and strategy development engagements for Firetail. He is a strong quantitative analyst, proficient in the use of a range of data tools and techniques including SPSS, Tableau and R. Formerly strategy and research consulting for NESTA, Cabinet Office, Scottish Government, Education: MA (Hons), University of Edinburgh. MA, University College London

Nicola Doyle, Consultant
Nicola is a Consultant at Firetail with cross-sector experience. She has led strategy and evaluation engagements with the Fred Hollows Foundation, a global leader on eye health, the Centre for Mental Health Law & Policy, and the Tor Project. Nicola has also worked with WWF UK, Access Now and Macmillan Cancer Support. Prior to joining Firetail, Nicola worked at Lighthouse Strategic Leadership, a bespoke management consultancy based in Johannesburg, South Africa. Nicola has previous experience as a researcher at the Brenthurst Foundation, a leading economic policy and governance think-tank, and in Amnesty International's Southern Africa regional office. Nicola holds a Master of Arts in Development Studies from the University of the Witwatersrand and a Bachelor of Social Science in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) from the University of Cape Town.

Josh Richardson, Associate Consultant
Josh is an Associate Consultant at Firetail. He has helped conduct strategic foresight studies looking at telecoms and animal wellbeing, for the Department for the Economy and RSPCA respectively. His other recent projects at Firetail include monitoring and evaluation support for Global Optimism and an organisational review of the Royal Academy of Engineering. Prior to joining, he worked as an analyst for a financial investigations company.

Anttoni Huiskonen, Associate Consultant
Anttoni is an Associate Consultant at Firetail. Before joining us, he worked as a Research Assistant at National Defence University in Helsinki, where he contributed to foreign policy and strategy research, and authored a paper on the medium-term implications of EU and NATO strategy in the 2020s. Anttoni also worked on projects to monitor global responses to the war in Ukraine and conduct a long-term strategic review of China's military build-up. Anttoni brings previous experience in business development and partnership building approaches at a range of start-ups across the urban mobility and social media sectors.