



**The
Policy
Project**

Responsive today,
shaping tomorrow



Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

Policy Quality Framework

Contents

Standards for quality policy advice	3
Context	4
Analysis	5
Advice	7
Action	8
Resources for developing quality policy advice.....	9

Purpose of this document

These standards can help you assess and improve the quality of your agency's written policy and other advice, and whether or not it's fit for purpose. The advice may be for a minister, Cabinet or other decision makers, and may be jointly provided with other agencies.

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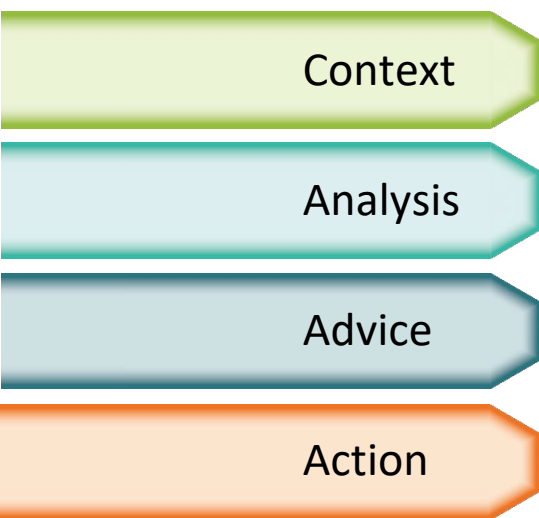


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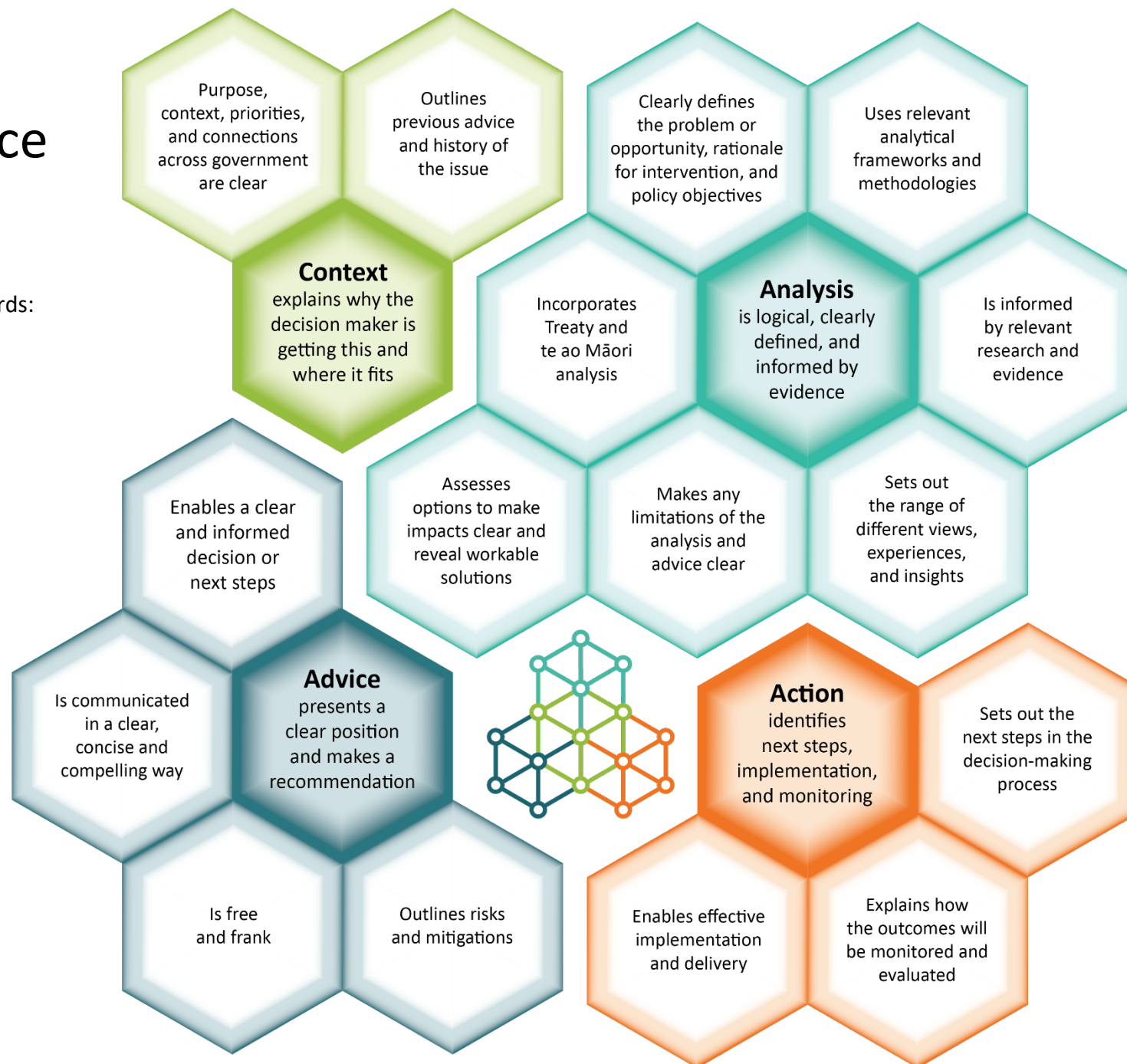
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Standards for quality policy advice

The Policy Quality Framework sets out sixteen elements of quality policy advice, shown in the diagram on the right. These elements are organised under four standards:



These standards have been developed to ensure consistency of advice to support decisions by ministers and Cabinet. All agencies use these standards to assess and report each year on the quality of their advice. Depending on the issue and the nature of advice, sometimes not all elements of this Framework will apply.



Context

explains why the decision maker is getting this and where it fits

Purpose, context, priorities, and connections across government are clear

The paper:

- clearly explains its purpose
- makes clear
 - why the decision maker is receiving the advice now
 - what the decision maker needs to do
- is set in the context of the decision maker's priorities, perspectives and current understanding of the issue
- is informed by a strategic view about what is important in the medium to long term (i.e. takes a stewardship perspective)
- makes connections, so decision makers receive a whole-of-government perspective
- specifies who else needs to be involved in decision making (other ministers, Cabinet).

Outlines previous advice and history of the issue

The paper:

- includes or references previous decisions
- summarises key points in previous advice and the history of the issue (including impacts of previous decisions).

Analysis

is logical, clearly defined, and informed by evidence

Clearly defines the problem or opportunity, rationale for intervention, and policy objectives

The analysis:

- clearly identifies nature, scale and immediacy of any problem or opportunity (including who or what is adversely affected or may benefit, where, how much, and trends over time)
- explains the impacts of current policy settings (the status quo)
- explains the problem's root causes (the what, why, and how) to the extent that they are understood
- clearly identifies what has given rise to any opportunities, their scale, and how they can be leveraged
- provides a clear rationale for whether the government should intervene or not
- clearly identifies policy objectives and outcomes that flow logically from the problem or opportunity definition.

Uses relevant analytical frameworks and methodologies

The analysis:

- identifies the analytical frameworks, tools, or methodologies used and their relevance
- makes any underlying assumptions or limitations of the chosen frameworks or methodologies clear
- is proportionate to the scale and importance of the policy issue.

Incorporates Treaty and Te Ao Māori analysis

Where relevant, the analysis:

- explains Māori concepts in an informed and understandable way
- identifies approaches to the issue or opportunity that are based on Te Ao Māori or would benefit Māori
- identifies how the problem or opportunity and policy options could affect Māori, uphold the Treaty of Waitangi and its principles, and affect Māori Crown relationships
- highlights relevant Treaty claims, settlement negotiations and commitments, Treaty jurisprudence and any litigation risks.

Is informed by relevant research and evidence

The analysis:

- is well informed by up-to-date data, evidence, knowledge, experience, and research from New Zealand and overseas including monitoring and evaluation results
- is unbiased and does not skew the data to make a particular course of action seem more or less attractive.

Assesses options to make impacts clear and reveal workable solutions

The analysis:

- scopes a range of options for meeting the policy objectives including:
 - regulatory and non-regulatory options, and doing nothing
 - opportunities for partnership approaches (e.g. with Māori, business, and non-governmental organisations)
- explains why these are the options, why others have been excluded, and the consequences of these choices
- logically describes how each option would achieve the policy objectives
- identifies relevant criteria, their relative weighting, and assesses the options against these (e.g. effectiveness, efficiency, equity)
- identifies the potential impacts of each option on which people, organisations, and resources (at a local and regional level as well as a national level) by assessing the likely scale and distribution of:
 - benefits, costs, risks, and opportunities
 - economic, fiscal, social, cultural and environmental impacts
 - direct and indirect impacts
- identifies what's required for successful implementation and delivery (e.g. resourcing, legislation and regulation, staff training, IT, procurement)
- considers relevant international obligations or comparisons
- identifies any trade-offs between options (e.g. cost versus ease of implementation).

Makes any limitations of the analysis and advice clear

The analysis describes limitations, including:

- any known limitations of the analytical framework or methodology used
- the level and quality of information and evidence available
- the level of engagement undertaken with stakeholders or consultation processes used
- the amount of time available to undertake the analysis.

Sets out the range of different views, experiences, and insights

The analysis:

- clearly identifies who has interests in the issue and who is impacted (e.g. the public, Māori as the Treaty partner, specific population or other groups and communities, users or regulated parties, delivery agencies)
- explains what engagement was undertaken and what approach was used (e.g. public meetings, hui, co-design workshops, online surveys, submissions)
- identifies the views, experiences, and insights of different communities and stakeholders.

Advice

presents a clear position and makes a recommendation

Enables a clear and informed decision or next steps

The advice:

- identifies a preferred option or options, and explains that choice and how it relates to the policy objectives and potential outcomes
- provides the information needed to make a decision or take next steps
- where relevant, reflects and responds to the views of other agencies, communities, stakeholders, and Māori as Treaty partner
- identifies the key judgements the decision maker needs to make
- demonstrates awareness of the political context of the decision maker and wider environment, without straying into political advice
- makes clear, stand-alone and action-oriented recommendations.

Is communicated in a clear, concise and compelling way

The advice:

- clearly sets out the purpose and key messages
- is presented in the most appropriate format that best fits the situation (e.g. aide memoire, briefing paper, A3, slide pack, draft Cabinet paper)
- is easy to read with simple sentences and short paragraphs
- uses tables, graphs and pictures, where these enhance communication
- is free from grammar, punctuation and spelling errors
- meets all relevant legal and process requirements (e.g. from Cabinet Office or the Treasury).

Is free and frank

The advice:

- reflects an understanding of both what has been requested and what is required
- focuses on the decision maker's objectives, and is frank, honest, apolitical and constructive about the best way to achieve them (even if this means challenging the decision maker's understanding and initial preference)
- ensures decision makers are alerted to the possible consequences of different choices.

Outlines risks and mitigations

The advice:

- identifies the risks of the options (e.g. not cost effective, implementation difficulties, cost escalation, not acceptable to key stakeholders)
- identifies the probability that a given risk will eventuate, and assesses the size of the impact if it does
- sets out how risks will be managed or mitigated (e.g. communications, monitoring trials, evaluation, exit)
- is not unduly risk-averse and reflects that taking calculated risks may realise opportunities.

Action

identifies next steps, implementation, and monitoring

Sets out the next steps in the decision-making process

The paper:

- identifies next steps in the decision process (e.g. Cabinet processes, Parliamentary process, regulations, financial/Budget proposals) and their timeframes
- identifies any further engagement required with other decision makers (e.g. other ministers, Cabinet), iwi/Māori or other stakeholders, and explains why.

Enables effective implementation and delivery

The paper sets out key activities and timeframes for implementation and delivery, including:


- legislative process
- delivery steps for new programme
- upcoming public communications
- how delivery will be managed and governed
- what needs to be done, how it will be done, and who by.

Explains how the outcomes will be monitored and evaluated

Where relevant, the paper:

- describes how monitoring will be undertaken (by whom and when)
- notes how the monitored data will be reported on and how this will inform future decision making
- identifies which indicators will be monitored to show how well the solution is working (including progress, activity, outcome and impact measures)
- describes whether and how evaluation will be undertaken (by whom and when)
- notes how the evaluation will be reported and how results will inform future decision making.

Resources for developing quality policy advice

Commissioning worksheet for policy papers  The Policy Project

Where did this request come from?
 Minister Manager Senior leadership Other: _____

Why this task? Why now?

What's the big picture? What's the history of this issue? What are the linkages to other work?

What's the purpose and scope of this task? What do you want the decision maker to do or decide?

What are the key questions that need to be answered? What expertise do you need?
 What information and evidence is relevant? Do you need input from other teams or agencies?


Deliverable
 Cabinet paper Briefing (advice) Meeting brief Memo Slides
 Aide memoire A3 Other: _____

When does it need to be completed? First draft: _____ Final for approval: _____
 (Tick all that apply) Manager General manager/director Deputy secretary

What level of quality assurance is required?
 proofreader
 Peer reviewer

Commissioning worksheet for policy papers

This worksheet can help you to commission policy papers, guiding you to think about the context, aim, resources, deliverable, and deadline.

Peer-review worksheet for policy papers  The Policy Project

When peer reviewing a paper in development, this electronically editable worksheet can help you test how well it meets the four standards of quality policy advice. For practical steps to improve your policy writing, see the Commissioning tool in the Development Pathways link. For more guidance on developing communication products, see the Policy Project's Writing for Ministers and Cabinet.

Name of paper: _____

Context – explains why the decision maker is getting this and where it fits

	Yes	No	N/A
The paper:			
• sets out the connections across government	●	●	●
• explains the purpose	●	●	●
• describes the context	●	●	●
• is clear about the priorities	●	●	●
• outlines previous advice and history of the issue	●	●	●

Comments on context: _____

Advice – engages the decision-maker and tells the full story

	Yes	No	N/A
The advice:			
• enables a clear and informed decision on next steps	●	●	●
• is communicated in a clear, concise, and compelling way	●	●	●
• is free and frank	●	●	●
• reflects diverse perspectives	●	●	●
• outlines risks and mitigations	●	●	●
• anticipates the decision maker's needs, next steps, and is timely	●	●	●

Comments on advice: _____

Peer-review worksheet for policy papers

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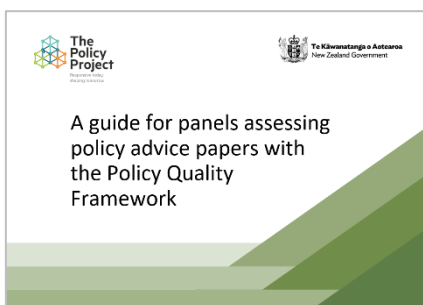
Start Right Guide

This document outlines how to apply the Start Right approach to initiating a policy project, so it's set up for quality and success. It also includes Prompts for Commissioning Conversations and the Green Light Framework.



Writing for Ministers and Cabinet

This document contains guidance on different types of communication with ministers and Cabinet. Whether you're writing a Cabinet paper, a policy paper, an aide memoire or an A3, you'll find high level descriptions of what's involved, links to resources, and tips for success.



A guide for panels assessing policy advice papers with the Policy Quality Framework

This guide contains advice on how to run a panel-based assessment of policy and other advice papers after their delivery using the Policy Quality Framework. It also explains how to score advice papers using the paper-scoring template.