

Developing papers with the Policy Quality Framework



Checklist for reviewing papers in development

This checklist can be used when reviewing a paper that you (or someone else) are developing. The Policy Quality Framework sets out four standards of quality policy analysis and advice. Detailed characteristics sit under each of these standards. Depending on the paper, some of the standards may not apply. If some content isn't in the paper, it's worth asking whether or not the omission was deliberate.

Questions to ask

Things to do

What's the elevator pitch?

- Is the purpose of the paper clear? Can you explain the key points in three sentences?

- Imagine yourself briefing the decision-maker in a meeting – what would you say?

Context

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

- Is the purpose of the paper clear?
- Is it clear why the decision-maker is getting this advice now?
- How does it fit with the decision-maker's priorities?
- What previous advice has the decision-maker had on this?

- Be clear about why the paper is being provided, and why now.
- Outline how the issue relates to the decision-maker's priorities.
- Remind the decision-maker what has already been agreed.
- Refer to any previous briefings and advice.

Analysis

– is clear, logical and informed by evidence

- Is the issue clearly defined?
- Does the evidence support the analysis?
- Is there a clear rationale for whether or not the government should intervene?
- Are the policy objectives clear?
- Are the options credible?
- What analytical frameworks and methodologies are used in the analysis?
- Are Treaty and te ao Māori frameworks used in the analysis?
- Does the analysis reveal diverse views, experiences and insights?

- Structure the paper so the argument flows logically.
- Make the analysis proportionate to the scale and importance of the issue.
- Distinguish between the root causes and the symptoms of problems.
- Identify who has a stake in the issue, and why.
- Document the engagement strategies used.
- Identify how the problem or opportunity and policy options could affect Māori, uphold the Treaty of Waitangi and its principles, and affect Māori Crown relationships.
- Indicate if the evidence is inconclusive or the outcomes uncertain.
- Assess the options according to clearly stated criteria.
- Check that the options are workable, and test with end users if possible.

Advice

– engages the decision-maker and tells the full story

- Will the advice help the decision-maker to act?
- Is the paper easy to read and free of errors?
- Is it in the best format?
- Is it free and frank?
- Does it reflect diverse perspectives?
- Does it identify risks and mitigations?

- Use narrative headings to storyline the paper and clarify key messages.
- Consider using a key messages section rather than an executive summary.
- Make clear, action-oriented recommendations that make sense even when separated from the paper. They should reflect the paper's content.
- Alert the decision-maker to the possible consequences of particular decisions (even if it challenges their opinions).
- Identify any differences in stakeholder views, and how to deal with them.

Action

– identifies who is doing what next

- Does it identify what needs to be implemented, by whom, when, where, and why?
- If a new policy solution is being developed, how will it be monitored and evaluated?

- Think about whether any follow-up work is required (e.g. report-backs, further advice, engagement with other decision-makers) and make the decision-maker aware of this as soon as possible.
- Explain how the policy solution will be monitored and evaluated, and how that will inform this and future policies.

Does it help the decision-maker?

- Will it be useful to a busy Minister?
- Does it provide all the information needed to make an informed decision, or take next steps?
- Have you used the format that best fits the situation, and included all the material they need?

- Include all necessary content to support next steps (e.g. talking points or a 25 words or less argument) and to avoid unnecessary follow-up.
- Prepare talking points in short sentences, in the decision-maker's voice, on a separate page, and spaced to aid readability. Read them aloud.
- If the material is to prepare the decision-maker for a meeting, set the agenda to reflect what they want from the meeting.