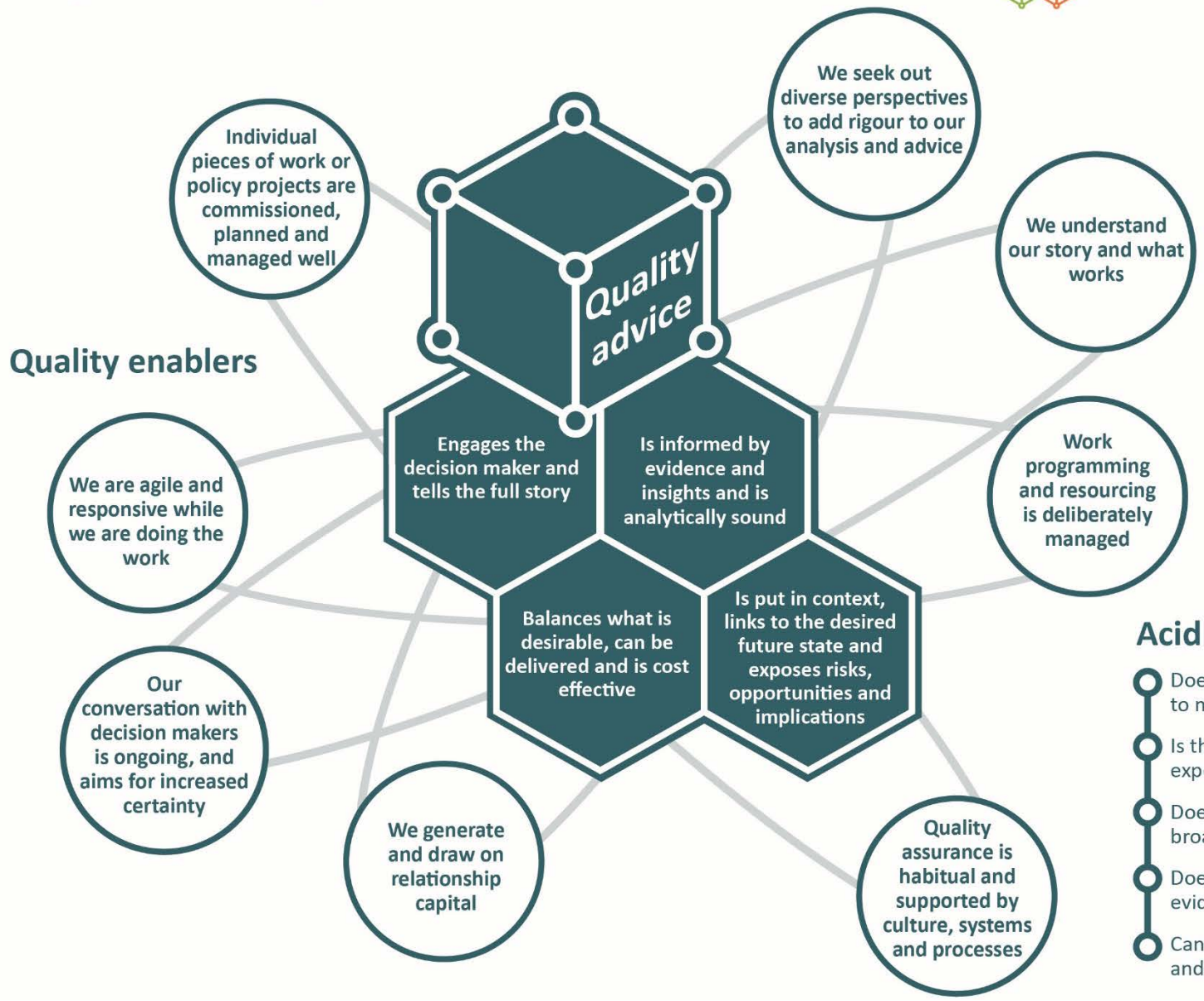
Policy Quality Framework

The Policy Project



Acid tests

- Does this equip the decision maker to make fully informed decisions?
- Is the real problem (or opportunity) exposed?
- Does this advice take account of the broader context?
- Does advice make sense of the evidence & insights?
- Can these options really be delivered and deliver results?

High level view of the Policy Quality Framework

Characteristics of quality policy analysis and advice

In sum, quality policy advice:

- ❑ reveals the problem or opportunity, as well as its size, scope and immediacy
- ❑ is clear about what is intended and describes the vision for success: links outcomes, immediate objectives and recommended actions to that intent
- ❑ is clear about why the government/ agency should intervene
- ❑ is well staged and sequenced
- ❑ is error free, and meets legal and process requirements (e.g. of Cabinet Office, Treasury).

Each piece of advice:

- ❑ starts with a clear purpose
- ❑ is timely
- ❑ is in a format that fits the purpose and the decision maker's preferred style
- ❑ makes action-oriented recommendations and sets out next steps.

- ❑ Problem/opportunity diagnosis and solutions are well informed (i.e. by data, evidence, insights, research and/or relevant experts).
- ❑ Insights come from diverse perspectives along the 'outcomes value chain' (e.g. from customers, operations, frontline staff, regulators, investors, service providers).
- ❑ Takes account of stakeholder's views, preferences and stake.
- ❑ Is clear about assumptions, uncertainties and gaps in information or evidence and what these mean for the decisions being made.
- ❑ Uses analytical frameworks to elevate analysis and make sense of information.

- ❑ Considers the context that is shaping the current state (e.g. infrastructure, norms and attitudes, issues of the day, current policies and strategy).
- ❑ Reveals relevant prior advice and decisions.
- ❑ Describes opportunities that can be leveraged.
- ❑ Assesses risks and how they could be managed or mitigated.
- ❑ Is forward looking and considers stewardship responsibilities.

- ❑ Focuses on the decision maker's intent and is frank, honest and apolitical about the best way to achieve that.
- ❑ Scopes a range of options (including doing nothing).
- ❑ Articulates how options can be delivered and confronts what is required for successful implementation.
- ❑ Assesses options:
  - ❑ focusing on results and impact on outcomes, implementability, and costs & benefits
  - ❑ making the choice criteria transparent
  - ❑ matching the level of analysis to the scale of the decisions being made.
- ❑ Identifies timely indicators that will show "Is this working?"
- ❑ Identifies if uncertainty should/can be reduced (and how) before moving ahead, or if an interim or adaptable decision is needed.

Quality Enablers – Advice that is high quality and influential is more likely when:

- ❑ Strategies, priorities and issues are translated into a work programme and commissioned policy outputs.
- ❑ The overall work programme is manageable, focused, and responsive to changed priorities or phasing requirements.
- ❑ The agency is able to prioritise work and direct its resources accordingly.
- ❑ We consider resourcing requirements early, so that the right skill sets and expertise are available when required.
- ❑ To reduce risks and increase certainty of success, extensive programmes of work are broken into distinct shorter projects.

- ❑ The commissioning process is transparent, clear and managed.
- ❑ Policy design and implementation is as joined up as it needs to be.
- ❑ We agree early on the key components of what to do and how to do each piece of work.
- ❑ The roles and responsibilities for governance, management and implementation are clear.
- ❑ We think early about who needs to be part of the work and how we will work together.
- ❑ Links and dependencies with other pieces of work are clear.
- ❑ We choose programme and project management tools and methodologies that are fit for purpose.

- ❑ Cabinet, parliamentary, central agency or in-house requirements are identified at the start of new work.
- ❑ Time is allowed to assure for quality throughout, not just at final draft stage.
- ❑ We agree early on expectations for review, sign out, decision making and the level of planning and control required.
- ❑ There is clear accountability for each policy output, project and programme.
- ❑ There is a good match between what people are asked to do and their skills and expertise.
- ❑ We seek feedback from 'critical friends'. Peer review is part of how we do things.
- ❑ Sign out includes those who best understand the risks and can verify analysis.

- ❑ We are 'strategically opportunistic' – we seize opportunities, collaborate and draw connections that will support policy intent.
- ❑ Work is managed flexibly enough to integrate new information, re-prioritise tasks and make other changes as required.
- ❑ Trade-offs between time, quality, risk and completeness are made mindfully.
- ❑ Internal decision makers and managers are decisive when required, and flexible if further change is warranted in the future.
- ❑ The 80/20 rule of diminishing returns is applied when timeliness is critical.

Quality Enablers – Advice that is high quality and influential is more likely when:

Our conversation with decision makers is ongoing, and aims for increased certainty

- ❑ Policy intent, objectives, direction of travel, appetite for risk and innovation are tested early and often with decision makers and influencers.
- ❑ The level of communication matches the level of uncertainty and change surrounding the work.
- ❑ Decision makers are always made aware of the 'stage' or completeness of advice. Staged/gated decision making is advised where required.
- ❑ New information and insights are integrated into the ongoing stream of advice.
- ❑ We are willing to challenge our earlier assumptions or conclusions in light of new information.

We seek out diverse perspectives to add rigour to our analysis and advice

- ❑ We have identified the expectations of stakeholders. Engagement occurs early and often (unless discretion is required).
- ❑ We connect with those likely to be impacted by the policy and those who will implement it.
- ❑ We value insights that are based on the lived experience of the 'citizen-as-customer' and the frontline; we know how to generate these insights and use them to inform advice.
- ❑ We are willing to examine issues beyond institutional boundaries and silos.
- ❑ We value and cultivate capacity for multi-disciplinary analysis.
- ❑ We consult with analysts and experts from across our agency (policy, operations and business functions) as well as external co-producers to pre-empt problems and confirm requirements for implementation.
- ❑ We counter our own biases by checking our thinking with others.

We generate and draw on relationship capital

- ❑ We build relationships with potential delivery partners, experts and key organisations inside and outside of government.
- ❑ We have built up trust by being responsive to others and engaging openly.
- ❑ We make the most of our relationship capital to support intent and outcomes.
- ❑ We are savvy – we understand roles in the policy process, how decisions are made, who makes and who influences them. We use that awareness to help achieve objectives.

We understand our story and what works

- ❑ Our practice is influenced by lessons learned from past successes and failures.
- ❑ To build our internal knowledge base and evidence-based understanding of what works, we invest in:
  - ❑ measuring results and benefits/impact
  - ❑ feedback loops and fit-for-purpose evaluations to understand what worked, what didn't, and how to improve
  - ❑ in house or commissioned research to keep our view of what works fresh and current
  - ❑ knowledge of expertise and evidence sources outside our agency.
  - ❑ Our advice contains a clear storyline on short, medium and longer term outcomes.