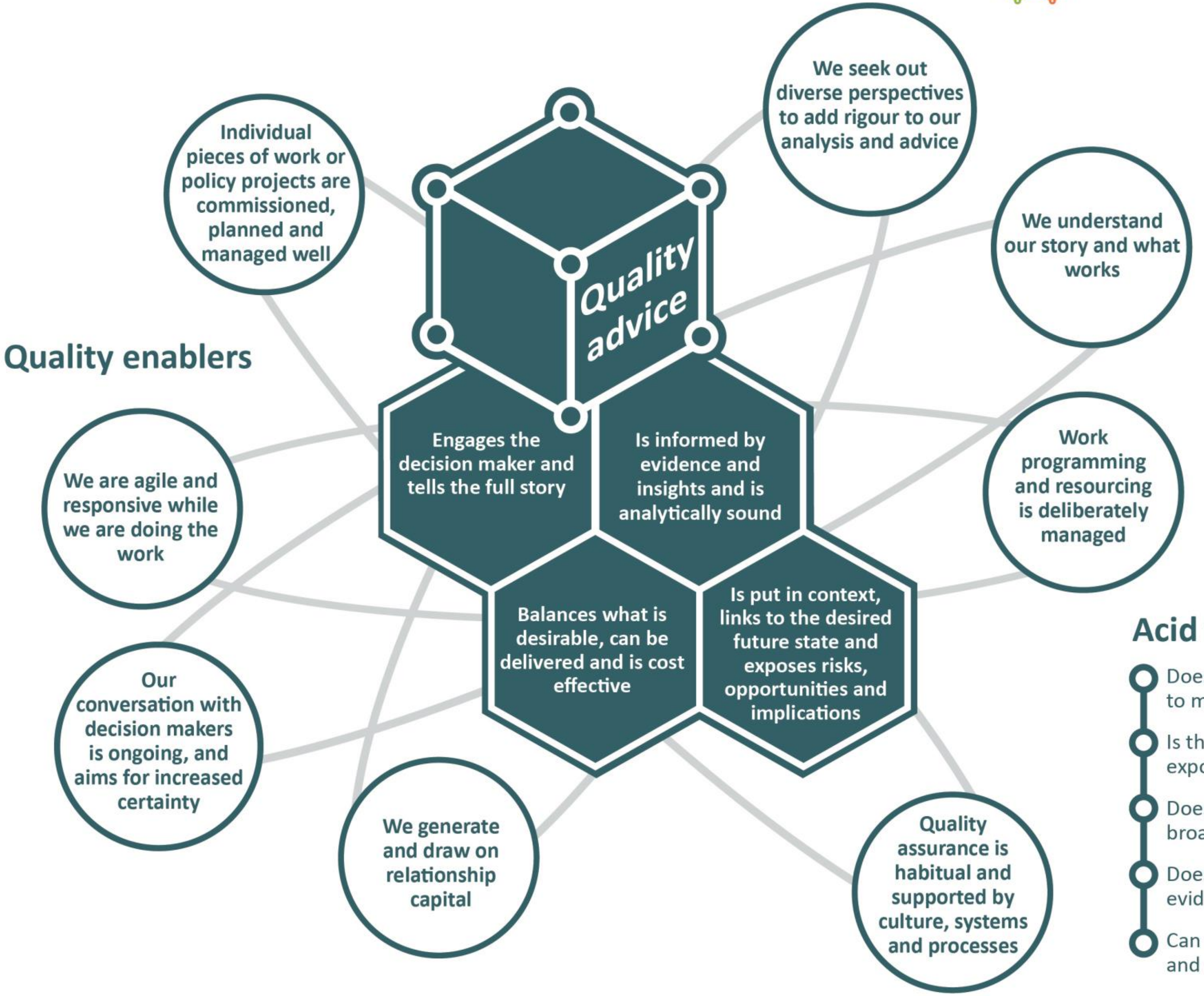
Policy Quality Framework

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?

Characteristics of quality policy advice

The full story **Advice engages the decision maker and tells the full story.**	• Starts with a clear purpose and tells a coherent story • Conveys the policy intent and what success will look like; links proposed actions to objectives and desired outcomes • Makes action oriented recommendations and identifies next steps • Takes account of the decision maker's views, but is frank, honest & apolitical about the best way forward • Is well staged and well timed – hits the decision maker at the right time • Is in a format that fits the decision maker's style preferences and intended use. Is engaging, easy to digest and error free
Inputs **Advice is informed by evidence and insights and is analytically sound.**	• Is informed by credible evidence (research, data, evaluation) and insights from different points of view (e.g. citizen-customer, operational, institutional or agency perspectives); admits assumptions, gaps and weaknesses in evidence and the knowledge base • Accurately identifies the problem or opportunity and its size, scope and immediacy • Uses analytical frameworks to make sense of information (e.g. market failure, comparative institutional analysis, competition impact, cost benefit analysis, living standards framework)
Context **Advice is put in context, links to the desired future state & exposes risks, opportunities & implications for affected groups.**	• Considers the current state (e.g. infrastructure, social norms & attitudes, relevant issues of the day, current strategies, system dynamics, points of leverage), and how current policy settings affect it, as well as prior advice and decisions (including agency or sector strategies) • Considers the vision for the future and ongoing stewardship responsibilities (e.g. regulatory stewardship) • Exposes differing points of view and objectives of stakeholders and the implications of advice for affected parties • Describes opportunities that can be leveraged and risks to be managed
The best option **Advice balances what is desirable, can be delivered and is cost effective.**	• Scopes a range of options (including doing nothing) showing expected results and links to desired outcomes (e.g. using intervention logic and/or benefits realisation) • Articulates how the options can be delivered and what would be required to implement • Establishes the best option using criteria that are transparent and focused on results, implement-ability and impact (i.e. costs and benefits) and appropriate to the size and complexity of the decisions being made (e.g. multi-variate criteria analysis, cost benefit analysis, high level vs detailed business case for investment)

What enables good advice? Advice that is high quality and influential is more likely when:

We understand our story and what works	• We have a clear narrative on short, medium and longer term outcomes, and we reference this story-line in our advice.
	• Our advice is grounded in deeper policy perspectives and investments over time in evidence and analysis.
	    • We maintain an internal knowledge base, as well as connections with sources of expertise and evidence outside our agency.
	    • We build an evidence-based view of what works; we measure results and impact and we plan and resource fit-for-purpose evaluations to understand what worked, what didn't, and how to improve.
	    • We scan for and commission new information/reviews to keep our view of what works fresh and current.
	• Lessons learned during delivery and from past failures and successes influence our practice.

Work programming and resourcing is deliberately managed	• 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/policy shop is able prioritise and deprioritise as required, and redirect its resources accordingly. • To reduce risks and increase certainty (about intent, authorisation, deliverables etc.) large programmes of work that look likely to run over extended periods of time are broken into distinct shorter projects. • Work programming incorporates thinking about resourcing requirements so the right skills sets and expertise are available when required.
Quality assurance is habitual and supported by culture, systems and processes	• Cabinet, Parliamentary, Central Agency or in-house requirements are identified at the start of new work e.g. requirements to complete a business case, preliminary regulatory impact assessment, or privacy impact assessment. • There is good match between what people are asked to do and their skills & expertise. We play to our strengths; people are stretched so that they can grow and learn, but not to the point of undermining quality and creating risks. • We are open to feedback from 'critical friends'. Peer review is part of how we do things. • Quality assurance expectations are clear and resourced. There is clear accountability for each policy output/project/programme. Expectations for review, sign out, decision making and the level of planning and control required are agreed early, particularly when decision making and the team extends beyond the policy shop. Sign-out/sign-off includes those who best understand the risks (and so can verify that analysis and advice is credible and robust). Outputs are reviewed throughout, not just at final draft stage. Time is set aside for quality assurance.
We generate and draw on relationship capital	• We have networks we can tap into. We proactively build our internal and external networks; we build relationships with potential delivery partners and organisations already in the field (inside and outside of government) to ensure policy options are viable and feasible, and to resolve problems and identify efficiencies early. • We have built-up trust e.g. by being responsive to others, engaging authentically with openness, demonstrating respect for diversity of views and by making space for robust exchange of views and ideas. • We leverage our relationship capital to support intent and outcomes – e.g. to positively engage others in the policy discussion, to build 'coalitions of the willing', to negotiate and resolve conflicts, and to spur collaboration. • We are savvy - we understand the various roles played in the policy process, how decisions are made, who makes and who influences them, and use that awareness to help achieve objectives. • We are 'strategically opportunistic' – we seize opportunities, collaborate and draw connections that will support policy intent.

Individual pieces of work or policy projects are commissioned, planned and managed well	• The commissioning process is transparent, clear and managed; we know what is being asked for. • Key components that frame what to do and how to do it (e.g. scope, stakeholders, risks, deliverables, timeframes and so on) are agreed early; e.g. in an endorsed high-level plan / mandate / extended commissioning document (or in verbal briefings for simpler initiatives). • The work is broken down into manageable parts. • We think early about who needs to be part of the work and how we will work together. • The programme and project management tools and methodologies used are fit for purpose (see *We are agile and responsive*). • 'Doing', managing and governing roles and responsibilities are clear (e.g. managers orchestrate on time delivery and manage resource, issues, risks and quality assurance; governance ensures that the focus stays on delivering the policy intent). • Links and dependencies between this work and other work is clear. • Policy and implementation is as joined-up as it needs to be.
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. • Decision makers are always made aware of the 'stage' or completeness of advice, recognising that advice often progresses from advice based on high level analysis to advice based on detailed analysis. • New information and insights are integrated into the stream of advice ongoing; there is a willingness to challenge earlier assumptions or conclusions in light of new information. Resulting changes to benefits, costs, risks and issues are assessed. • Staged decision making is advised where required; stages gates/less formal check points and exit points are provided, if needed, to allow policy, investment or implementation to be modified on the basis of risk or greater clarity on costs relative to benefit.
We are agile and responsive while we are doing the work	• The level of communication (within the team, across collaborators, and between those managing the work and those making decisions) matches the level of uncertainty and change surrounding the work. • The way that work is managed is flexible enough to integrate new information, re-prioritise tasks and other make other changes as required. • Trade-offs between time, quality, risk and completeness are made mindfully. • Internal decision maker and managers are decisive when required, and flexible if further change is warranted in the future. • Advice is provided quickly when required but may be qualified e.g. limitations and level of completeness are made clear. • The 80/20 rule of diminishing returns is applied when timeliness is critical.
We seek out diverse perspectives to add rigour to our analysis and advice	• We connect with those likely to be impacted by the policy and those who will implement it. • We value insights from the 'citizen-as-customer' and the frontline; we know how to generate these and use them to inform advice. • We engage effectively with internal and external functional areas/experts to confirm requirements for implementation and pre-empt problems (e.g. we connect with the PCO early and work with procurement, finance, legal experts as necessary). • Stakeholders' expectations are surfaced. Engagement occurs early & often (unless discretion is required). • We counter our own biases by checking our thinking with others – including those with different views from other parts of the policy ecosystem. • We are willing to examine issues beyond institutional boundaries and silos. • Capacity for multi-disciplinary analysis is valued and cultivated.