



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Policy Handbook

A 'real world' guide to
policy development

Civil Service Management Board 2024



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Foreword

Policy development is how government identifies, determines, and implements actions designed to deliver a better Ireland through real and meaningful initiatives. Effective policy development seeks to inform policy priorities and to understand the issues that need to be addressed to deliver on Government choices. Through examining evidence and working with relevant stakeholders it identifies, assesses, and recommends, feasible solutions. Once a preferred solution is approved, policy development moves on to the detailed design work necessary to ensure effective delivery of the policy goal.

There are many examples of successful policy formulated and delivered by public servants, not least in recent times in response to Brexit, Covid-19, and the cost-of-living crises. However, we can, and should, always aim to do better.

This is why the Civil Service Management Board (CSMB) developed a framework for policy development under the Civil Service Renewal Programme. The framework consists of three pillars – **data & evidence**, **feasibility & implementation**, and **legitimacy**. However, while the three pillars set out a useful conceptual framework, it was always recognised that the real challenge was to ensure that this framework was incorporated into the actual day-to-day practice of policy development in the “real world”.

To provide guidance on this issue, the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) published a comprehensive assessment of the policy development system in Ireland in May 2023.¹ The report endorsed the three-pillar framework, highlighted many strengths within the Irish policy development community, and suggested some improvements. These included developing a model of the policy process and bringing together guidance to support you, as policy professionals, in your work.

1. OECD (2023) *Strengthening Policy Development in the Public Sector in Ireland*. OECD Public Governance Reviews. OECD Publishing, Paris

As a first step, and taking on board feedback from a consultation process, we have developed this handbook of policy development practice. It sets out a consistent approach to policy development and design based on a stylised five phase model of understanding the **D**emand for policy, **D**eepen understanding of the policy challenges, **D**esign with best advice, **D**ecide from among alternatives, and then **D**eliver the preferred solution.

In doing this, and as is evident from some of the Case Studies included in the handbook, it is recognised that not all policy development can follow this structured approach. Policy is an inherently 'messy' process that is rarely linear. The political and societal environment is always in flux. Public servants often need to take urgent and immediate action without the luxury of time. Furthermore, the phases of policy development can often overlap and are, at times, inseparable.

Even in this 'messy' world however, and particularly perhaps because it is 'messy', it is important to not only understand best practice but also recognise and address the compromises that arise when we are required to deviate from this practice.

This handbook is intended, therefore, as a reference tool. It is not intended to be entirely comprehensive, that would be too off-putting. Nor is it intended to be prescriptive, that would be too naïve. It is best thought of as a guide to the steps that should, in ideal circumstances, be followed when developing policy.

As the public service continues to confront the key challenges within the policy environment, this handbook is offered as a tool that provides a shared language and understanding of the policy development process that gives some insight into best practice and, in doing this, can help to improve the quality of policy development.

Civil Service Management Board

Executive Summary

Overview

Policy development is a fundamental part of the work of the civil and public service. Designing and implementing policy is how the government translates its ambitions for Ireland and its people into concrete realities.

The work of policy development and implementation can take many forms, for example it can include:

- ▶ conducting research into an issue of concern,
- ▶ setting out a broad strategy,
- ▶ estimating the costs and assigning a value to the benefits of a new initiative,
- ▶ drafting new laws or regulations,
- ▶ designing and building new schemes or services,
- ▶ creating and implementing information campaigns,
- ▶ implementing and delivering services or schemes for the public,
- ▶ making changes to an organisation's systems, structures, and resources to enable services and schemes to be implemented, or
- ▶ conducting a review of how a policy has performed relative to its objectives.

This list shows that policy takes in a wide variety of activities. In particular, it shows that good policy development extends far beyond the realm of ideas and aspirations to encompass considerations such as:

- ▶ how to properly understand and define a policy challenge,
- ▶ how to engage with stakeholders and decision makers,
- ▶ how to resource the delivery of services and schemes,
- ▶ how best to communicate and promote the take up and understanding of schemes and services that arise from the policy, and
- ▶ how to learn from experience and adapt a policy/service in a 'live' environment.

Accordingly, many civil and public servants who may not think of themselves as working on 'policy' are actually key to the policy process. So, if you are involved in

- ▶ costing a proposal,
- ▶ drafting a bill or ministerial regulations,
- ▶ designing a media campaign,
- ▶ administering a service or scheme,
- ▶ developing and maintaining an IT system,
- ▶ planning the HR capacity requirements for delivery,
- ▶ supporting a project or programme board, or
- ▶ managing a project,

you are in fact involved in the delivery of policy.

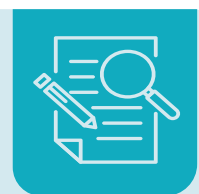
Recognising this breadth of work and understanding that the process of developing policy is complex, this handbook sets out a framework and simplified structured approach to support you in policy development.

This will help you to identify good practice and use it in your everyday work. It should also help you understand how what you do contributes to policy formulation.

In doing this it starts by setting out three fundamentals of policy development - the **Three Pillar Framework** of data & evidence, feasibility & implementation, and legitimacy.

Pillar 1 – Data and Evidence

Pillar 1 emphasises the importance of extracting evidence from data as the bedrock of good policy solutions. While data and evidence alone do not guarantee the creation of good policy, the development of good policy would be much more difficult without evidence to rely on. Policy makers should therefore seek out multiple data and evidence sources and use analytical techniques to extract the learnings to inform policy.



Pillar 2 – Feasibility and Implementation



Pillar 2 is the interaction between means and ends. It requires us to consider the actions we will need to take (means) to deliver our policy end. It stresses the need to understand implementation challenges and make sure that any proposed intervention can actually be put into practice, i.e. that it is feasible. We know from experience that policy failures can sometimes be traced back to a failure to properly assess a policy's feasibility during the research and development phase. This pillar details some of the pitfalls and underlines the importance of assessing feasibility during the development phase.

Pillar 3 – Legitimacy



Pillar 3 highlights the importance of political and public understanding, and buy-in during policy design and implementation. It recognises that, ultimately, public policy formulation relies on the democratic mandate of elected representatives which, in turn, requires public support. It is essential, therefore, that stakeholders at all levels are effectively engaged to understand:

- ▶ different perspectives, and
- ▶ how to translate policy objectives into action.

This ensures policy development builds and sustains public confidence, as well as political support. This is critical to the success of the process.

The handbook then goes on to outline five general phases or stages of development - **the 5 Ds** - that a typical policy would, ideally, be expected to follow.

We give details on each phase by describing the tasks that you are likely to carry out and, using real case studies, shows the value of using the three-pillar framework.

Policy making rarely follows a linear, step-by-step process. Instead, it is often iterative in nature. Nevertheless, it is helpful to consider the policy process as comprising of five discrete elements:

1. Understanding the **Demand** for a policy intervention,
2. **Deepen** understanding of the policy issues and options,
3. **Design** policy solutions with best advice,
4. **Decide** between the available options, and
5. **Deliver** the selected policy option.

These are the '5 Ds' of policy development. Each of the 5 Ds can be thought of as answering questions in the policy development process:

- ▶ **Demand for Policy:** Have I properly identified and defined the policy objective? Do I understand the origin of the policy question? – How should I go about those tasks?
- ▶ **Deepen Understanding:** Do I fully understand the scope and depth of the issues arising and have I identified potential policy options? – How should I go about those tasks?
- ▶ **Design with Best Advice:** Have I assessed the policy options and designed the preferred policy solution taking full account of costs, benefits, and implementation challenges? – How should I go about that task?
- ▶ **Decide Policy Proposals:** Have I secured the appropriate approval to implement the selected policy option? – How should I go about that task?
- ▶ **Deliver Policy:** Have I executed the policy correctly arranging for all of the legal, process, system, people, and organisation changes necessary for implementation? – How should I go about those tasks?

In this handbook, there are separate chapters focused on each of the 5 Ds. These chapters explain the aim of the phase and guide you through the tasks you might undertake during that phase to achieve that aim. Templates are provided for typical outputs and case studies used to illustrate the phase in practice. This is summarised as follows:

Phase 1: Demand for Policy



In Phase 1, we aim to examine the who, why, where, and when of the policy demand. As policy participants we assess why the policy issue to be addressed has arisen at this time and seek to define the policy objective clearly and concisely.

We illustrate this using a case study based on the development of the Irish water charges.

Typical outputs of this phase are a short briefing document with initial analysis and recommendations for next steps.

Phase 2: Deepen Understanding



In Phase 2, we aim to further explore the policy issue by using data and research and engaging with stakeholders to fully understand the issue in question. We outline the initial steps needed to:

- ▶ identify, review, and evaluate data and research literature, and
- ▶ commission research where necessary.

A case study based on the “Growing Up in Ireland” study shows how data and evidence can support well-informed policy decision.

Typical outputs of this phase are a detailed policy review and research reports that will lead to policy steps.

Phase 3: Design with Best Advice



In Phase 3, the role of the policy practitioner is to develop structure for a policy proposal based on the work done in previous phases. The structure:

- ▶ sets clear objectives,
- ▶ provides policy options,
- ▶ outlines implementation approaches,
- ▶ estimates detailed costings and benefits, and
- ▶ makes recommendations as to a preferred option.

We illustrate this phase with a case study on implementing local property tax in Ireland.

A typical output for this phase would be a policy briefing that favours a particular course of action.

Phase 4: Decide Policy Proposals



In Phase 4, we summarise how we would finalise the proposed policy and seek to have policy approved. During this phase, there may be political and legal assessments and we will typically seek ministerial, government, and budgetary approval.

A typical output for this phase would be a government memorandum seeking a decision and, in some cases, an Act of the Oireachtas or a Ministerial Regulation.

Phase 5: Deliver Policy



In Phase 5, we focus on the process of policy implementation. This includes:

- ▶ making the necessary changes to people, systems, legal arrangements, organisation, and processes to delivery the policy,
- ▶ creating a project plan and communications strategy,
- ▶ implementing appropriate Governance and risk management processes,
- ▶ setting up monitoring, evaluation and feedback processes.

We illustrate this phase using a case study about how we delivered the second national cancer strategy.

Typical outputs of this phase could include:

- ▶ legislative changes,
- ▶ assessment and necessary development of staffing capacity,
- ▶ implementation of system and process changes,
- ▶ development of information needed and reporting mechanisms for evaluation and review, and
- ▶ public information/promotion campaigns.

Understanding the 5 Phases of Policy Development: The 5 Ds

The Three Pillars and 5 Ds Process



Figure 1: The Three Pillars and 5 Ds Process



PART

1

Understanding the Three-Pillar Framework

Civil Servants and the Policy Making Environment

Government policy refers to the laws, strategies, plans, programmes, and services it develops to achieve its objectives and deliver public goods and services.

The term *policy* can have many meanings, for example:

- ▶ Policy can refer to a particular philosophy or ideology that sets the context for decision making, e.g. socialist policies, capitalist policies, etc,
- ▶ Policy can refer to a purposeful objective or ambition, e.g. a policy of moving to net-zero carbon emissions, or the achievement of a united Ireland,
- ▶ Policy can refer to a principled position, e.g. a united Ireland only by consent, and
- ▶ Policy can refer to a plan and course of action, e.g. we will achieve net zero by a combination of decarbonising energy production, retrofitting buildings, and changing land use.

The work of the civil service, and the focus of this rough guide, is primarily concerned with ***policy as a plan and course of action.***

In Ireland, Government policies are concerned with the generation, allocation, and organisation of public resources to meet social, economic, and environmental goals, where the mandate for the pursuit of these goals is derived from the democratic process.

The role of the civil service is to inform and support Government both to help it formulate its policy agenda and to then take ownership of, and implement, this agenda. Supporting Government in policy development and implementation is **the** central concern and duty of the civil service.

Good policy development needs to:

- ▶ be clear on the issue at hand,
- ▶ establish how it should be addressed
- ▶ engage appropriately with interested stakeholders,

- ▶ follow through with careful design and implementation of the selected policy option, and
- ▶ adapt the policy based on experience during implementation and in response to changing circumstances.

In order to develop and deliver good policy civil and public servants usually need to work across organisation boundaries requiring:

- ▶ collaboration between people with the right skills – including research, analysis, data experts, statisticians, financial, legal, design, project management, communications, people management, and systems development,
- ▶ cross-organisational commitment and support, including through the allocation of capacity and technical knowledge, and appropriate governance structures, and
- ▶ public buy-in and political commitment, achieved through public engagement and clear, concise, and timely communication.

Accordingly, it is helpful to have a good understanding of the wider policy making environment - an environment that can be represented as follows:

The Policy Making Environment



Figure 2: The Policy Making Environment

The Three-Pillar Framework

The three-pillar framework set out in this handbook was adapted from the work of the UK Policy Profession Board. Having been adapted to the Irish context, it now forms the touchstone for the development of policy in Ireland.

As its name suggests the framework is based on three pillars:

- ▶ data and evidence,
- ▶ feasibility and implementation, and
- ▶ legitimacy.

Combined, these three pillars provide the framework to approach good policy making in the Irish context.

We outline the three-pillar framework below:



Figure 3: The three-pillar framework

Pillar 1: Data and Evidence



Data and evidence are central to good policy development. Together they provide a sound basis for informed decision making.

"Evidence is bound to disappoint those who want conclusive proof from it. Evidence alone does not ensure wisdom or deliver something called "objective" or "the truth". Evidence alone cannot quickly silence doubts... Nor does evidence settle once and for all the value of a specific activity or policy... Evidence is always contingent on context, sources, perceptions and timing. Good evidence may be ignored; bad evidence may be used misleadingly. Knowing all this helps us to use evidence wisely."

The Challenges of Evidence, Dr Ruth Levitt [November 2013]

Data refers to the facts and information about an issue.

Evidence is the use of that data and information to help draw a conclusion about an issue.

Data and evidence alone do not make policy. But, if policy is to be properly informed, it is important to use evidence to weigh up policy options and priorities.

The importance of data and evidence

Data can provide concrete, objective information which can be analysed. This might, for example, include data relating to the take-up or costs of a public service. Research methods such as surveys can be used to gather data on views and opinions (for example, on the level of satisfaction with a public service) for further analysis.

Evidence involves the application of analytical methods to understand what the data is telling us. It helps to shed light on the nature of the issue in question – the size, scale, and complexity of the policy issue.

Evidence helps us to assess the effectiveness of existing policy options or interventions in place elsewhere.

We need data and evidence throughout the **five phases** of policy development and implementation. For example,

We can use data and evidence to help assess the need for a policy intervention and to refine the definition of the policy issue in Phase 1 (Demand for policy).

We can use data and evidence during Phase 2 (Deepen understanding) and Phase 3 (Design with best advice) to design the policy.

We may also use this data to:

- ▶ understand the resources needed to deliver a policy intervention and estimate the potential costs and benefits of any intervention,
- ▶ establish the feasibility of a policy intervention,
- ▶ help to establish the legitimacy (i.e. public and political support) for a policy, and
- ▶ inform decisions on policy in Phase 4 (Decide Policy Proposals).

We may later use this data to inform performance targets during policy implementation in Phase 5 (Deliver policy to achieve intent).

Sometimes, particularly with a new initiative, there may be limited data available within an Irish context. In these cases, it may be useful to seek data and evidence from other countries. In doing this, we must be aware that it is risky to assume that a successful policy can be simply 'transplanted' from one context to another. Our analysis of data and evidence in other countries needs to take account of differences, for example, in demographic, legal, financial, cultural, and social, conditions.

All of this work requires the use of appropriate tools by people with the skills to use these tools. We cannot be expected to have the full array of tools and skills but should draw on resources available across the civil service to assist you as necessary.

Appendix C provides a list of some tools and resources to support this pillar.

Primary and Secondary Data

Primary data refers to new data collected directly for the purpose of informing a particular decision. This data can include statistical data drawn from administrative systems, data obtained through observation, or data obtained through surveys of stakeholders or service users.

Secondary data refers to existing data and evidence, for example, the report of a research body or an expert group, usually created for another purpose but of relevance to the policy issue in question.

To assess the merits of a policy intervention or to understand if an existing policy or programme is working as intended, we need to decide:

- ▶ what data is needed to inform the assessment
- ▶ how to gather it, and
- ▶ if we need support to gather and analyse the data.

For example, a school meals programme found it needed new data to gain a comprehensive understanding of where and how well the programme was working and where it could be improved. To know what data they needed, they:

1. listed the questions they wanted to answer about the school meals programme (see column 1 in Figure 4 below),
2. listed where they could get these answers (see column 2), and
3. wrote a tender for research expertise to gather and analyse the data sources to get the answers they needed.²

2. RSM Ireland (2022) *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme*.

Key evaluation question	Sources of data
How does the scheme compare with programmes in peer states?	▶ Literature review ▶ Country comparisons ▶ Interviews with stakeholders
Was the current school meal programme effective?	▶ Department of Social Protection management information ▶ Surveys or interviews ▶ 'What works' workshops ▶ View of children
What are the gaps and what are the recommended changes to the current programme?	▶ Surveys or interviews ▶ 'What works' workshops ▶ Views of children
Is the current method of targeting the programme in relation to the DEIS categorisation effective?	▶ Department of Social Protection management information ▶ Interviews ▶ 'What works' workshops
What are the implications for outcomes for extending the scheme for non-Deis schools?	▶ Surveys ▶ Stakeholder interviews ▶ Financial modelling (cost of different options)

Figure 4: Evaluation of the School Meals Programme – Request for Tender

Some of the data above is secondary data, such as the literature review. However, most of the data was primary data that came from interviews and workshops with stakeholders such as officials, school principals, and school children.

The study was designed so that the evaluation had at least three sources of evidence for each question. This allowed the merits of one data set to compensate for weaknesses in another. For example, the financial modelling might identify the potential to make the programme more cost effective if it was possible to procure cheaper food. However, stakeholder interviews might stress that it was important the food provided was healthy and that children would eat it. Different sources of data help us to see different perspectives and ultimately make a balanced recommendation.

Summary

Data and evidence is a key input to the analysis, appraisal, and the weighing up of policy gaps, options and priorities. We need to make sure we have the capacity to do all of this. We may need appropriate research expertise to generate data and evidence and to help us to interpret it.

When assessing data to create evidence and inform policy, it is important to:

- ▶ Specify the questions the data is required to answer,
- ▶ Identify and understand the potential sources of primary and secondary data,
- ▶ Use multiple sources of data wherever possible to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the policy issue, and
- ▶ Use appropriate tools and apply the necessary skills to the analysis of the data to translate it into meaningful evidence.

While evidence plays a crucial part in developing policy proposals, you need to consider it along with the other pillars of the framework for policy development.

Pillar 2: Feasibility and Implementation – Can it be done?



The second critical pillar of the policy development framework is feasibility and implementation. Can the issue in question be successfully addressed? And, if so, how? It is through answering these questions that we move beyond the realm of idea and aspiration to something that is real and tangible, something that can achieve the goals of Government.

Assessing Feasibility

Often policy issues are addressed through simple statements of abstract policy objectives, such as what if:

- ▶ ...every child had a hot school meal
- ▶ ...waiting times in emergency departments were reduced to no more than two hours
- ▶ ...every child who needed an appointment could get an appointment with an orthodontist within 4 weeks
- ▶ ...every home in Ireland had a minimum B BER rating, etc.?

However, while it is legitimate to ask questions such as these, good policy development also demands that we accompany the answers with some assessment of the feasibility of how these objectives might be achieved.

A failure to associate valid policy objectives with an informed consideration of how these objectives might be delivered often results in unrealistic expectations. This, in turn, gives rise to assessments of 'implementation' failure, which, in turn, call into question the policy and delivery capacity of the civil service.

Accordingly, when developing policy and assessing policy options, we should engage, in good time, with all of the bodies and organisations that will be involved in implementing the policies concerned. In doing so, we should strive to fully understand the resource, legal, systems and organisational challenges associated

with implementing policy choices together with the costs involved, the benefits to be derived and the implementation timeline. These should be clearly documented, with a clear statement of underlying assumptions, and communicated to decision makers.

We should also understand how changes in key assumptions and decisions such as policy design features, time, cost, and wider economic circumstances could impact on project delivery. This can be done by undertaking a sensitivity analysis.

We should ensure that robust governance and project management structures and processes are put in place to:

- ▶ agree a detailed project plan and timelines,
- ▶ identify, assess, and respond to risk,
- ▶ identify responsible owners for each element of the policy and allocate tasks accordingly, and
- ▶ monitor implementation progress including cost.

We should ensure that the departments or agencies who will implement the policy choice sign-off on that choice or at least have the opportunity to present any concerns they may have to the relevant decision makers.

Policy practitioners could consider gathering a 'challenge team' of colleagues to examine and challenge each of the key assumptions behind the implementation design.

Every policy recommendation brought for decision should clearly set out an assessment of feasibility based on, and addressing, the activities set out above.

A well-designed policy

A well-designed policy, taking account of implementation challenges as set out above, explains up-front the changes it is trying to bring about and how these will be achieved. This includes identifying and discussing assumptions we, or others, may have made. We need to use this insight to help us think about how:

- ▶ a programme might fall short and put mitigating measures in place, and
- ▶ how we can monitor and evaluate progress to make sure it achieves the desired policy solution.

For example, the benefits of providing meals to children will only accrue if they eat them! We all know that may not happen despite our best efforts. This requires us to think, in advance, both about how we assess whether or not the children are eating their meals and, if not, how we might tailor meals to suit a variety of tastes.

Therefore, to help us translate and tailor policies into concrete outcomes we must engage with everybody involved in the delivery process. Naturally, this engagement includes those persons, groups, or sectors who are the subject of a policy change but also extends to providers and practitioners who can help to establish whether, how, and when, a policy can be delivered. In addition, it must also involve all organisations responsible for delivery.

Summary

A well-designed policy should be feasible, based on a proper assessment of implementation challenges. This assessment will help to inform the choice of policy instruments and to identify and mitigate against the inevitable risks that will be faced in translating policy choices into practice.

When we are considering policy implementation, we need to be engaging with everybody in the value chain who will be involved and be clear about who is doing what and when. This will help to establish accountability and is part of good project management. As part of this, we also need to put in place a robust governance mechanism to monitor both the delivery of the policy and its effectiveness and to take, or seek authority for, corrective action where required. This will assist us in being responsive to challenges which may arise once the policy is in place.

Pillar 3: Legitimacy



We must always remember that, in a parliamentary democracy such as Ireland, the Government's mandate to make policy choices ultimately comes from the electorate. Government can only implement policy when it can command the support of the Oireachtas. Oireachtas members, in turn, depend on the support of the constituents they are elected to serve and represent.

Accordingly, any policy intervention, no matter how well intentioned or designed, cannot succeed if it does not have sufficient political or public support. The legitimacy of the policy choice is dependent on this support.

Policy initiatives, therefore, also need to be backed up by:

- ▶ buy-in, or at least acceptance, by the people who will be affected by the policy, and/or
- ▶ a clear, prominent and sustained political commitment at Government level, supported by
- ▶ engagement with the Oireachtas to explain the policy and to build the broad political support needed to make sure the initial and long-term implementation of a policy is effective.

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholders are the people and organisations that have an interest in the policy issue. They will always include the people and organisations directly affected by a policy change but can also include advocacy and other organisations representing the interest of affected parties, the general public, academic and research organisations, media organisations, and public representatives.

We need effective stakeholder engagement when developing policy. The insights, in particular of direct stakeholders and their representative bodies, can help us

to understand the role, views, and experiences, of interested parties. These can often help us not just to formulate policy objectives but to turn these objectives into real action.

The public perception on a policy issue can change quickly. In addition to direct stakeholders and their representative organisations, the views and opinions of academics, media, and political commentators, can all affect how the public and the Oireachtas view a policy initiative.

We need a deep and ongoing engagement with stakeholders to ensure that we are aware of what is being said about an issue, and, if needed, to challenge misinformation and explain nuances of policy that might not be fully understood. Deeper engagement opportunities can include:

- ▶ Meetings with representative bodies,
- ▶ In-depth interviews with key stakeholders across different sectors and other departments,
- ▶ Public consultations,
- ▶ Thematic forums such as the National Forum on International Security Policy, Energy Poverty Stakeholder Forum and Social Inclusion Forum.

These types of activities allow all sides the time and space to elaborate on the complexities of policy choices, potential trade-offs, and what data and evidence is or isn't telling us.

Summary

At a societal level, legitimacy is about building and sustaining public confidence. Public confidence means the public trust in Government to act in the general interest, and to do so in a way that, as far as possible, does not unnecessarily or arbitrarily penalise or advantage any particular group.

While not all public policy can achieve widespread public support, it is important to assess and establish the legitimacy of proposed policy actions and to work to ensure that policy initiatives can sustain public and political support.

Conclusion – the Messy World of Policy Development



Policy development makes a real difference to the well-being of our people and communities. As civil servants, we are privileged to have a key role to play in the policy process, and we should apply our best selves to the task.

In doing this, we need to recognise that there is no 'one right way', that the work of policy development is rarely straightforward, and although it can be described in a stylised and structured manner in reality it is often unstructured and "messy".

This does not mean, however, that a stylised framework is of no benefit. Even when dealing with a challenge that is in flux and with many moving parts, all to be assessed in very tight timeframes, it is useful to have a structure to act as a touchstone. Use the three-pillar framework as this touchstone – a compass to guide the work of policy development and you won't go far wrong.

Approach policy issues realistically and positively. There will be bumps and successes along the way so stick with it. There are many colleagues who can help and resources and tools to which we can refer to. The appendices at the back of this handbook provide links to resources that might help you.



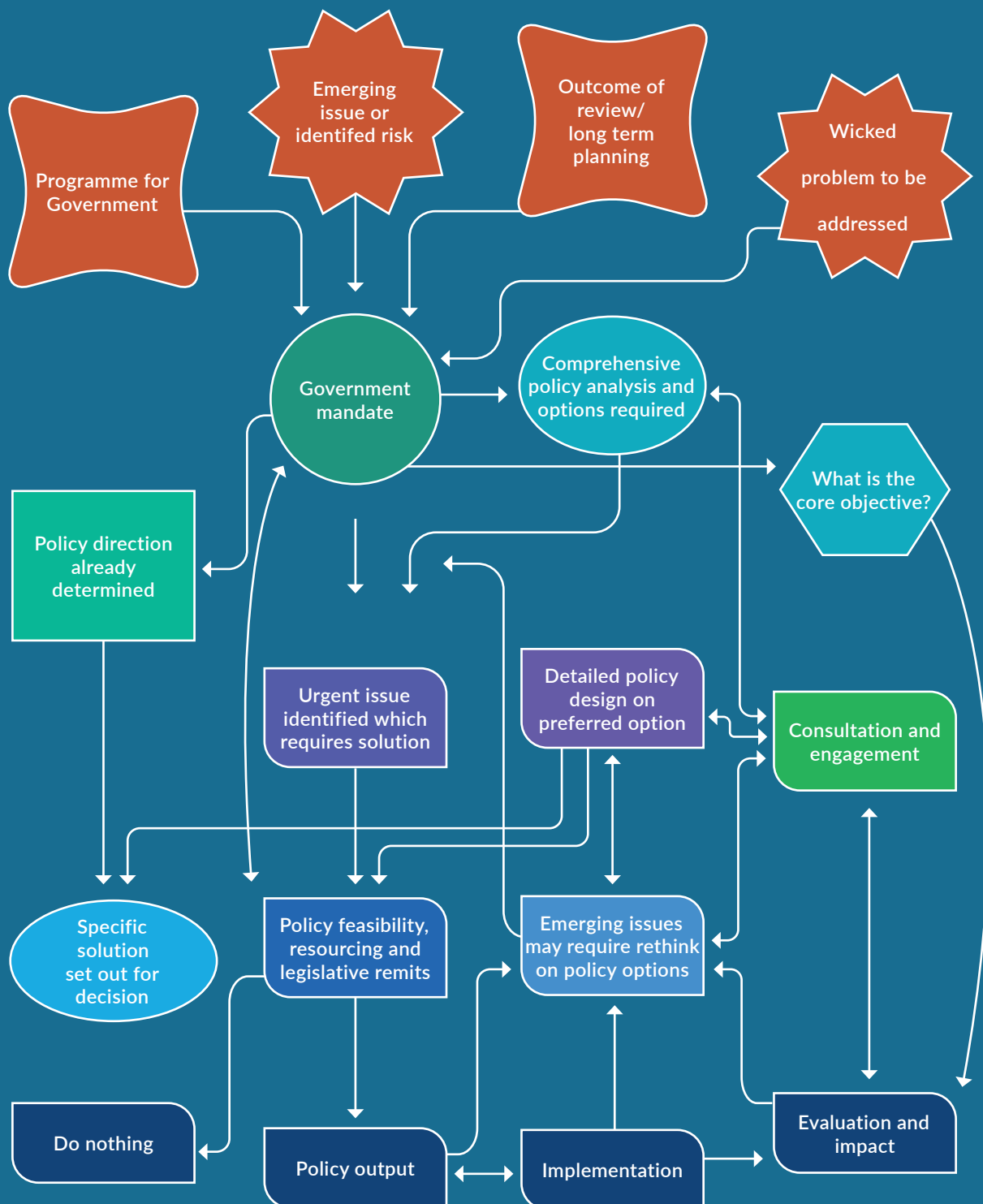


Figure 5: The messy world of policy development



PART

2

How to develop policy – a model based on the 5 Ds

Introduction – the 5 Ds

The following process model presents an ideal of how we can develop and implement policy. An effective and well-structured policy will typically pass through the same 5 phases, or the 5 Ds.³ They are:

Phase 1: Demand for policy

Phase 2: Deepen understanding

Phase 3: Design with best advice

Phase 4: Decide policy proposals

Phase 5: Deliver policy

This stylised approach is intended as a guide. In an ideal situation each phase would follow in sequence. However, in practice, the policy development process is iterative – we can expect to move back and forth between the phases, to skip some phases altogether, or even be in several phases at the same time! Still, this model has been used internationally, specifically in New Zealand and in Ireland, and has been shown to help policy practitioners in structuring their approach to policy development. An example of how the approach was used in Ireland is the reform of the state pension system as illustrated in the closing case study at the end of the handbook.

The 5 Ds model is presented in a little more detail in the diagram below. We also have a separate chapter on each phase later on. Take your time reading each phase and the three-pillar framework mentioned earlier. To help you remember the three-pillar framework we have included handy checklists at the end of each phase. Use them - as practice makes perfect (or at least better!).

3. This model is indebted to Sally Washington, who has elaborated a similar schema – see 'How to Deliver Great Policy Advice' (2024), available at <https://apolitical.co/solution-articles/en/how-to-deliver-great-policy-advice>



Figure 6: The Three Pillars and 5 Ds Process



PHASE

1

Demand for policy

Phase 1: Demand for policy



This phase is concerned with understanding the demand for policy solutions. A demand could come from ministers, a previous policy development commitment, analysis by officials, the public, a campaign, the law, and so on.

Typical **tasks** we must address during this phase include:

- Task 1: Establishing the source of the demand for the policy
- Task 2: Clarifying the policy demand (defining the problem)
- Task 3: Assessing the legal issues related to the demand
- Task 4: Undertake a preliminary gathering and assessment of available data
- Task 5: 'Sense check' consultation with colleagues and selected stakeholders
- Task 6: Making a recommendation whether to explore the policy issue further

Remember: We may have to revisit tasks. It may not always be as simple as doing tasks 1 to 6 in order.

Use the 'Checklist for Demand for Policy and the Three-Pillar Framework' as a compass to help keep your bearings and stay on course.

Typical outputs at this phase typically include:

- ▶ Briefing note
- ▶ Recommendation whether to progress to the next stage of policy development or not

In this section we have included guidance on these documents. We also use Irish water charges as a case study to help make the tasks and ideas of this phase more concrete.

Phase 1 (Demand for policy) is typically the starting point for any policy development. In this phase, we are trying to understand and define the policy change that is being considered. We are also concerned with why it is being considered and from where (or from whom) the policy question originated. We want to assess the demand and decide whether we should proceed further into the next phase of policy development. A possible flowchart of the tasks in this phase is illustrated in Figure 7.

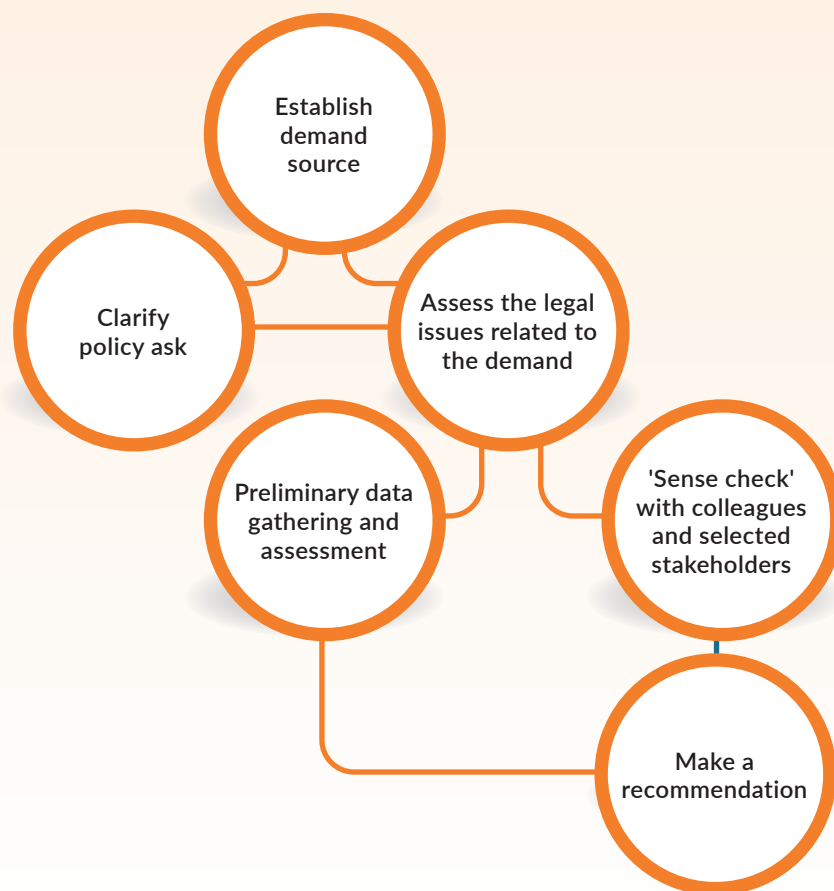


Figure 7: Process of Phase 1: Demand for Policy

Demand for Policy Tasks



Task 1: Establishing the source of the demand

The demand for a policy may come from various sources. For example, a demand may come from:

- ▶ a commitment in a Programme for Government document,
- ▶ EU directives requiring implementation through Irish law,
- ▶ analysis by officials highlighting a current or future issue, for example, through the use of 'strategic foresight' (a structured and systematic way of using ideas about the future to anticipate and better prepare for change),
- ▶ public alarm over an issue,
- ▶ a campaign spearheaded by a group,
- ▶ evidence of a risk to economic or social stability, or
- ▶ the decision of a court.

It is useful to consider these demands as falling into the following categories:

- ▶ Political
- ▶ Public/Civil Society
- ▶ Institutional
- ▶ Judicial/The Courts

Political

This refers to the demand and expectations for policies, services, or changes from political actors such as:

- ▶ government ministers,
- ▶ legislators,
- ▶ political parties, and
- ▶ supra-national bodies, e.g. the European Union.

These political actors may make policy and other demands based on their assessment of societal issues. This assessment and the subsequent demands can be expressed in documents such as policy statements, manifestos, and Programmes for Government, or may take the form of a Ministerial request or instruction directed to Department Officials. Other ways these types of demands are expressed are through parliamentary questions (PQs), budget submissions, Private Members' Bills, and the work of Oireachtas Committees. The work of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health, for example, gave rise to the Sláintecare health policy.

Policy imperatives can also emerge from agreements reached or resolutions passed at supra-national political institutions – this includes, in Ireland's case, the EU, the UN and the OECD. For example, the EU Social Charter, the UN adoption of Sustainable Development Goals, and the OECD Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) approach to corporate taxation, all have significant implications for the development and formation of policy in Ireland. Civil servants must incorporate the provisions of these international agreements in identifying and developing policy initiatives.

Public/Civil Society

Users of public services, and the people and organisations who are subject to the laws and regulations of the State, expect to have a voice in determining policy – not just through the democratic electoral process but through direct canvassing of policy makers.

In this context the public/civil society comprises:

- ▶ Individuals,
- ▶ Local communities,
- ▶ Specific group or sectors of society that use public services or are subject to State laws and regulations. For example, young people experiencing mental health difficulties may be users of the state-provided Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Farmers are subject to state laws regarding the cutting and selling of peat turf.

- ▶ Individual businesses and organisations, and
- ▶ Community and voluntary organisations that are involved in the delivery of services on behalf of the State (some of which have an advocacy as well as a service delivery role).

Policy demand can be articulated by individuals but is more commonly championed by advocacy or interest groups. In the case of the farming community for example, this might be the Irish Farmers Association. In the case of business interests this might be the Chambers of Commerce. In the case of the Traveller Community this might be Pavee Point. The policy demand, particularly at a local level, can lead people and groups to directly engage with elected representatives.

Administrative/Institutional

The Irish civil service is not just a passive advisor on policy issues referred to it from other sources but has a key role in identifying issues that need attention and proactively proposing solutions.

This role can be manifest in specific programmes of work including Strategic Risk Management and Planning, Strategic Foresight exercises, IGEES evaluations, and Value for Money and Impact Reviews. Operational experience within departments can also identify gaps in law or service provision and trigger policy development (see below).

The role of the civil service in articulating and sustaining the case for long-term policy changes and repeatedly restating the need to take action to ensure that it remains on the policy agenda is particularly important. For example, the development of Childcare and Early Learning services can be traced back to the work of some officials in the mid to late 1990s who argued that childcare provision needed to catch up with availability in other countries.⁴

4. F. Lynch (2024) *The Early Years Sector: A Case Study in Policy Development*. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, University of Galway, pg. 12.

The Irish civil service is not the only 'non-political' institution with a mandate to propose policy initiatives. Just as international political institutions can influence policy so can administrative bodies, including the EU Commission (EC), the ECB, the World Bank, and the IMF. In Ireland's case the role of the ECB, the IMF, and the EC (the Troika) was pivotal to the post-2010 recovery from the global financial crisis. This Troika specified policy actions that it required to be delivered as part of the programme of financial assistance to Ireland. While we would hope never to return to this situation, we still need to be aware of the policy preferences of these institutions, in particular, the EC as part of the EU semester process where member states align their budgetary and economic policies with the rules agreed at EU level.

Finally, the day-to-day front-line experience of the civil service and other public institutions in implementing policy and delivering services can also identify issues that need a policy response. These issues might emerge from, for example:

- ▶ customer/client feedback (including through customer service channels),
- ▶ staff feedback,
- ▶ performance against service targets (for example, the number of people in hospitals waiting on trolleys exceeds the agreed threshold),
- ▶ recommendations from audits and inquiries, or
- ▶ public feedback and campaigns.



The Courts

Ireland's legal system is based on both constitutional and common law. This means that the Courts have a significant role in interpreting our written laws or statutes and our Constitution. The Courts determine the scope of the rights and obligations set out in the Constitution and statutes. Additionally, the Courts establish law using precedent, under the Common Law system, where decisions of a higher Court bind lower Courts. These precedents form 'case law'.

The Government or the Oireachtas is therefore often required to change the law or to adapt existing policies or develop new policies in response to Court decisions. This is most evident in the case of social policy but can also arise in respect of other policy areas.

It is clear therefore that the Courts are important sources of policy demand. In responding to Court decisions policy makers often have a choice – either to propose a change in the law to support the status quo that applied before the Court decision or to accept the decision and adapt policy accordingly. To make this decision requires fully understanding the rationale or the 'demand' of the Court decision.

These four categories of demands described above are not entirely separate. We can imagine how public and political demands reinforce each other and may resonate with operational issues highlighted by the administrative system or with rights and obligations articulated by the Courts. Again, the case study of pension reform shows that public concern about an increase in the pension age resonated with the political system which established a Commission on Pensions. The work of the Commission emphasised increasing operational concerns about the inadequacy of a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to accessing the contributory state pension to due to people living and working longer.

We need to regularly monitor and evaluate a programme or initiative to remain aware of emerging issues. This also highlights that these policy phases are not just a set of linear tasks. In reality they will often loop back, we may need to repeat and revisit phases as new information comes to light.

Sometimes the demand for a policy may escalate quickly. We may find ourselves under a lot of pressure to provide a policy solution. While we often have to act quickly, we must still take the time to check that we understand the policy demand, its purpose, legality, and legitimacy. This filtering and refining is particularly important as we live in an age 'where unfiltered information is produced and widely consumed long before it can be properly verified or responded to effectively'.⁵



Task 2: Clarifying the policy demand

We need to ask for clarification about the policy demand, so we are clear where the demand has come from, understand the exact problem or opportunity we are required to address and, in some cases, understand a proposed solution. Once we are clear and understand these elements, we can assess the policy demand in line with the three-pillar framework: data and evidence, feasibility and implementation, and legitimacy. Questions to help us do this are given later under Task Four.

We need to expect a range of policy demands. They can range on a continuum from:

- ▶ vague and ill-defined demands such as a request to improve a particular service, to
- ▶ highly specific demands to put a strategy in place or to meet a legal requirement.

5. Effectiveness and Renewal Group for the Department of Justice and Equality (2018) *First Report*. Dublin, pg. 9. Available at <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/45511/f08e05455c1440d188d45a1e296bda61.pdf#page=null>



When we get a policy demand that is too vague or broad, we must ask questions to clarify what specifically is being asked – and why. We also need to be mindful that, given the very broad scope of public policy, it is not unusual for a demand to arise regarding an issue or service that has already been dealt with but those raising the demand are unaware of its resolution.

For example, calling on the Government to 'share data' is too general. We would have to ask questions such as:

- ▶ 'what data?,'
- ▶ 'between whom?,'
- ▶ 'for what purpose?,' and
- ▶ 'is it already being shared?'

When we get answers to these, we can then **refine** the policy demand and what the policy is expected to achieve.

We can then start to assess the policy demand.

When the demand is specific

At the other end of the spectrum, the policy demand may be a precise demand to implement a specific strategy.

For example, we may get a policy demand to increase household micro-generation using wind turbines. In this case, we need to stop and first clarify the purpose of this policy demand. In this example, the purpose would be to help meet the Programme for Government's ambition of using up to 80% renewable electricity by 2030. When we are clear on the purpose, we are in a better position to assess whether the proposed strategy will achieve the expected purpose, or to offer an alternative, and perhaps better, approach.

The key point here is that we should first focus on the issue to be addressed and then turn our mind to a solution.

In some cases, the policy demand may be highly specific, and the Government's view is clear on the solution. As advisors, our focus needs to be on recommending how it can be delivered and where there are any unintended consequences to be avoided.



Task 3: Assessing the legality of the policy

As well as being clear and assessing the policy demand in terms of its purpose and expected results, we also need to confirm, or refute, if the policy demand is compatible with the law.

To help us establish the legal issues relating to the demand, we often need to start by considering if it fits in with or might require changes to existing legislation.

For example, a new policy to change the qualifying factors for an application of guardianship of a child, may have to consider a number of existing laws, including:

- ▶ the Constitution,
- ▶ the Civil Registration Acts, and
- ▶ Children and Family Relationship Acts.

If the policy demand, as defined, is incompatible with the Constitution or existing legislation, we would need to consider if the policy can be developed in a way that is compatible. If not, we need to consider if the policy demand is important enough to justify changing the existing law. If existing law is to be changed, we need to consult with colleagues in relevant departments to determine the scope of the changes required and the capacity to undertake this work.

Even if there are no direct legal impediments we still need to explore further. We need to check other relevant legislation. For example, if we wish to change the qualifying factors for the guardianship of a child, we might need to examine if this would require changes to other legislation in areas such as family law, parental leave, and inheritance.



Task 4: Preliminary Data Gathering and Assessment

As already stated, the 5 Ds are not a simple step by step process – tasks can overlap.

In particular, in the initial phase of examining the demand for policy, it is important to consider the data that is already available to help understand and define the problem. This might mean examining sources of readily available data from bodies such as the Central Statistics Office, EuroStat, or published research by IGEES, Government departments, or the ESRI. A review of this initial data can help to estimate the scope, scale, and cost of a policy initiative. It can also help to define the issue at hand.

For example, there may be a policy demand to “reduce poverty levels” among people with disabilities. A review of data could find that the key driver of poverty among people with disabilities is low levels of employment, even among those people with a high capacity to work. This, in turn, could lead to redefining the policy demand for “supporting people with disabilities in accessing employment”.

In this way, considering available data on a policy demand at an early phase can, usefully, help to narrow and define the scope of a policy question. To use the cliché, it can help us to focus us on the smaller bites rather than the whole elephant!



Task 5: 'Sense Check' with Colleagues and Selected Stakeholders

It is not unusual for policy to be criticised as being detached from the real world or designed in an 'ivory tower'. Nor is it unusual for a policy initiative to require co-operation and input from multiple stakeholders, including colleagues in other Government departments and those in public bodies involved in service delivery, as well as external stakeholders who may be the subject of the policy initiative.

Engaging these stakeholders at an early stage can help to gather valuable information, define the policy problem, and ensure that the scope and effort required to implement a solution is appreciated. Questions that can arise during this process are what's

driving the policy demand, what's the underlying problem to be addressed, and is the proposed policy initiative the right 'fix'? Most importantly, it ensures that key actors in subsequent phases will not be 'surprised' by the policy initiative at a later point in the process, and instead gives them the opportunity to be part of the process and contribute to the design of a policy solution.

Of course, in some circumstances it is not possible to engage with stakeholders early in the process for reasons of confidentiality or to avoid creating false expectations. However, it is always wise to engage as early as possible to the extent possible, and where necessary, stressing that the policy issue is at a tentative stage of exploration.



Task 6: Make a recommendation

On the basis of the previous five tasks we should be able to recommend whether or not we need to explore the policy issue in more detail. This recommendation should be based on evidence and help make an informed decision as to whether we should:

- ▶ reject the policy demand,
- ▶ redefine or modify the policy demand, or
- ▶ move to Phase 2 of the five-phase policy process.

Phase 2 is about deepening our understanding of the policy demand. It is where we will conduct a more in-depth analysis of the policy issue. If we recommend moving to Phase 2, we should also list next steps.

Our analysis of the policy demand and recommendation will likely be documented in a short briefing paper. We have included a template for this briefing at the end of this phase. If you are writing the paper, your role is to make a **recommendation** based on the data and evidence. The actual decision on whether to proceed further with policy development may often be made by someone else, for example, a more senior official, an internal policy committee, or the Minister.

Checklist for Demand for Policy and the Three-Pillar Framework

The three-pillar framework can help guide us as we complete the tasks of this phase. To do this, we need to consider and answer the following questions under each of the three pillars:

Pillar 1: Data and Evidence



- » Is the issue based on **clearly** defined data and evidence?
- » Is the scope and the purpose of policy demand clearly defined?
- » Is there evidence of successful policy interventions on this policy area from other countries?
- » Are there international or comparative studies that provide additional insights into the policy?

Pillar 2: Feasibility and Implementation



- » Has the issue the policy demand intends to address been established?
- » Is there clarity about policy objectives required to effectively address the issue?
- » Is there clarity about wider environment **considerations** in which the issue and policy demand sit?
- » Has the potential timeframe for the policy intervention been set – think about whether it requires an immediate response or if it is more long-term?
- » Have the likely costs to address the problem been established? Is funding likely to be provided?
- » Does the policy need the cooperation of other government departments, agencies or external stakeholders to implement it? – if the answer is yes, does the proposed policy support or compete with their objectives and how might we address this?

Pillar 3: Legitimacy



- » Is the source of the demand credible, or is it questionable, such as a possible source of misinformation?
- » Is the demand legal or, if put in place, can we ensure its compatibility with domestic and/or international law?
- » Is the demand a requirement of EU legislation or the ruling of the European Court of Justice, which would incur penalties if Ireland failed to implement?
- » Is the demand compatible with the Programme for Government commitments in the relevant policy area?
- » Have reasonable efforts been made to make sure representation and inclusivity in stakeholder engagement? Are any voices missing from the process?

Once we have clarity on the above this will help us avoid unnecessary mistakes and make informed choices and recommendations about next steps in the policy-making process.



Typical Outputs from Phase 1



Policy Demand Briefing Template

As noted in Task 6, at the end of this phase, you may need to prepare a short internal briefing paper. This paper should be based on readily available evidence and data. It should help to establish whether you should further explore the policy ask. The briefing document will typically include:

- ▶ a statement of the policy demand,
- ▶ the source of the demand,
- ▶ the legitimacy of the demand in terms of responding to the political and public context,
- ▶ consideration of relevant legal, political, or social ramifications of proceeding, or not proceeding, with the policy demand,
- ▶ profile alternative approaches that could be explored to achieve the objectives,
- ▶ an initial assessment of how feasible it is to meet the policy demand, including high-level budget estimates and any other implications, and
- ▶ a recommendation (read more on this below).

This **recommendation** should be based on evidence and help make an informed decision as to whether we should:

- ▶ reject the policy demand, or
- ▶ move to Phase 2 of the five-stage policy process. Phase 2 is about deepening our understanding of the policy demand.

If we recommend moving to Phase 2, we should also list next steps.

Moving to Phase 2: Deepen Understanding

The briefing document and recommendation should help us make an informed decision as to whether or not we need to explore the policy demand in more detail. If so, we will move into Phase 2: Deepen Understanding where we will conduct a more in-depth analysis of the policy issue.

Case Study: Irish Water Charges

Demand for water charges

The demand for water charges came from our Government, partly as a means of conserving a scarce natural resource, partly as a means of funding investment in that resource, and partly in response to requests from the Troika of institutions on which Ireland, during that period, depended on for funding. The Troika includes the European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Irish water charges through the lens of the Three-Pillar Framework

Irish water charges may be popularly understood as failing under the legitimacy pillar of the three-pillar framework. It provoked widespread public dissatisfaction. On deeper analysis, we can see that many of the issues that afflicted it were partly caused by not adequately analysing the initial policy demand and not foreseeing the likely tensions.

Irish Water strove to pass a test called the Market Corporation Test (MCT). If it passed, it would enable Irish Water to be placed outside the Irish Government. It could then borrow on the strength of its own balance sheet. It was thought that this would enable a level of investment so it could upgrade the water infrastructure. To pass this test, private customers would need to account for more than 50% of total sales. However, it was exceedingly difficult to reconcile this target with the plan to give allowances and grants to customers.

Later analysis of this policy concluded:

“you can set out to pass the MCT or you can have free allowances, but you cannot have both... neither of these elements of policy were subjected to rigorous evaluation before being adopted. In the case of passing the MCT, it was embraced as a policy goal from the outset, but there is no evidence to indicate that this followed a formal discussion informed by a thorough assessment of what consequences might flow for other aspects of policy.”⁶

6. Jim O’Leary (2018) *How (Not) to do Public Policy: Water Charges and the Local Property Tax*. Whitaker Institute. NUIG. Pg. 75. Available at <http://whitakerinstitute.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/NUIG-Whitaker-Report-Water-Charges-LPT-Final.pdf>

In addition, the question of an allowance, was a 'given, pre-determined in the political domain' with no evidence that 'this was done on the basis of an evaluation of other options or a proper understanding of the implications.'⁷

The policy demands of MCT and allowances were not analysed as fully as they should have been and the initial policy demand was not filtered appropriately. This meant that we did not appreciate the scale, cost, or public opposition associated with the proposed regime change.

Lessons learned

The above case study shows that we **must** question the demands for policy, irrespective of their source.

As the demand for water charges came not just from the Government but from EU bodies on which Ireland was dependent for funding, this made it a difficult call to proceed or not. However, in the end, we did not have the data, evidence, capacity, or public support to implement water charges as originally envisaged.

If we don't critically assess the policy demand, we run the risk of pursuing policies that will be either ineffective or never happen. Even if filtering initial demands identifies a positive policy demand, we still need to work through the other 4 Ds of policy development to make sure that high-quality policies can emerge.

7. Ibid, pg. 75-76.



As the demand for water charges came not just from the government but from EU bodies on which Ireland was dependent for funding, this made it a difficult call to proceed or not.





PHASE

2

Deepen Understanding

Phase 2: Deepen Understanding



This phase is concerned with developing a deeper understanding of the policy issues, through an in-depth exploration of relevant evidence.

Typical **tasks** during this phase include:

- Task 1: Assessing existing data and evidence
- Task 2: Reviewing the data and evidence
- Task 3: Commissioning new data
- Task 4: Consulting with stakeholders
- Task 5: Evaluating the data

Remember: We may have to revisit tasks. It may not always be as simple as doing task 1, task 2, and task 3, and so on, in order.

We need to use the Checklist for Deepen Understanding and the Three-Pillar Framework as a compass to help keep our bearings and stay on course.

Case study: Developing Child-Centered Policy through Better Data

Typical **outputs** of this phase could include:

- ▶ Detailed policy review
- ▶ Research report

The objective of Phase 2 – Deepen Understanding is to use evidence and data to comprehensively understand the nature and context of the issue and inform the analysis of possible policy solutions.

This phase forms the basis of subsequent phases in policy development. It involves in-depth research, data collection, stakeholder engagement, and analytical assessments of an issue. It is at the heart of the 'data and evidence' pillar of the three-

pillar framework to policy formulation. However, the focus of this phase is not just understanding and defining the issue at hand but also an assessment of:

- ▶ *feasibility and implementation* (such as what any policy intervention would achieve); and
- ▶ *legitimacy* (such as questioning affected parties and finding their insights into the identified issues).

Deepen Understanding Tasks

The tasks in this phase are mainly focused on gathering and critically evaluating data and evidence to deepen our understanding of the issue. The flow chart below illustrates a simplified approach to this phase of the policy-making process.

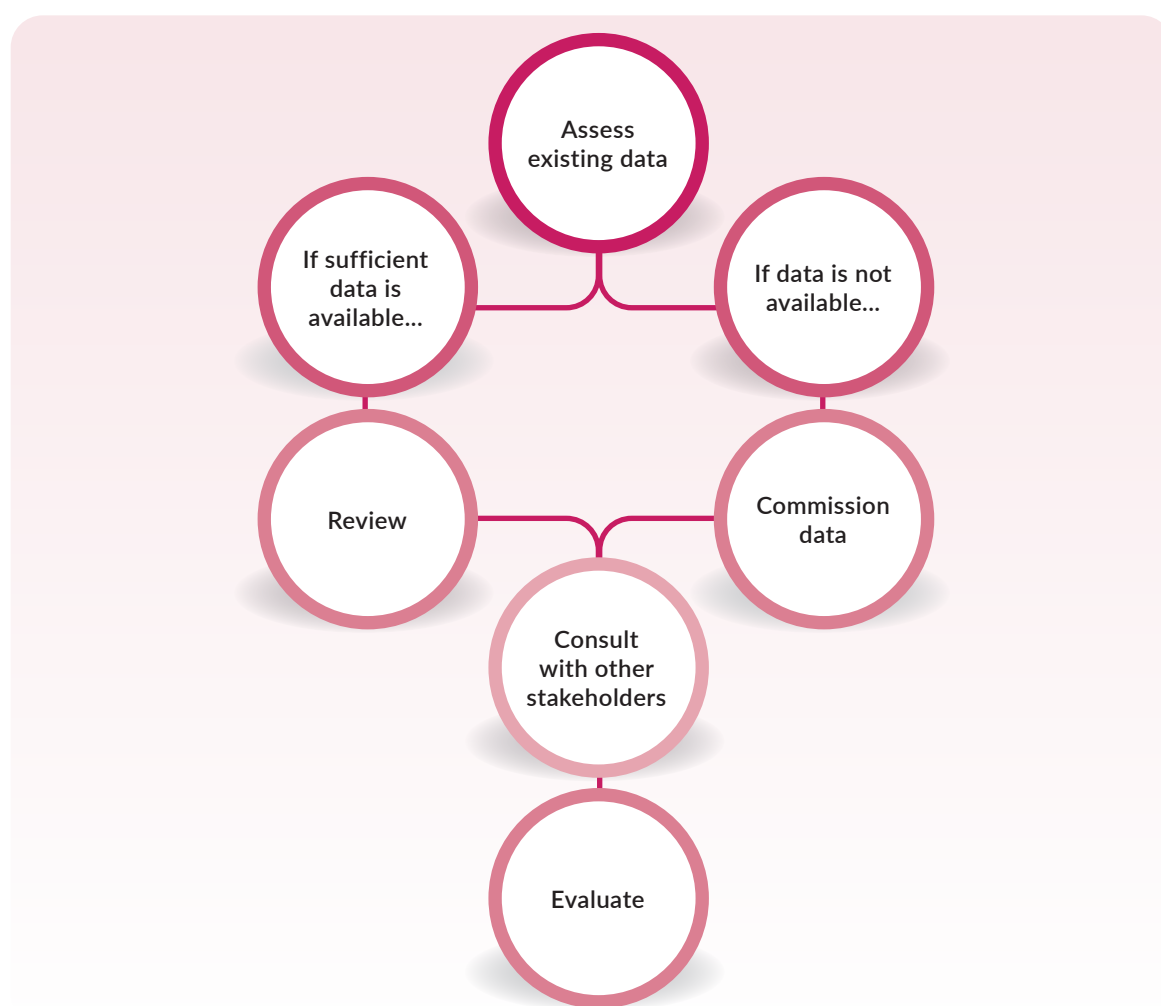


Figure 8: Process of Phase 2: Deepen Understanding tasks



Task 1: Assessing existing data and evidence

Task 4 of Phase 1 involved a preliminary assessment of available data. This was to help understand the origins of the policy issue and to refine the policy question.

During this stage of the process, we seek to “dive deeper” into the issue. To do this, we must first identify if there is additional data that we need to fully inform our understanding of the issue and potential options. We need to identify and source data to enable us to understand:

- ▶ the scope and scale of the issue,
- ▶ how other States addressed the same or a similar issue,
- ▶ the impact of previous initiatives as well as the impact of policies pursued in other countries,
- ▶ the reasons why previous policy initiatives or those in other countries either succeeded or did not succeed,
- ▶ the preferred or recommended approaches of bodies such as the EU Commission and the OECD, and
- ▶ the costs of various policy options, as well as the potential impact and benefits of each option.

In many cases, you may already have information available within your department or agency. However, it is always important to look outside your organisation to examine what other data and evidence might be useful. Useful sources of information, across a range of topics, include the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), OECD reports and data, and EU databases and resources, such as Eurostat.

In addition to these general sources of information, there may be topic-specific sources, such as industry or sectoral reports. For example, you might review reports from the Construction Industry Federation (CIF) in the area of construction, or by Teagasc in the area of agriculture.

The role of the policy practitioner is to identify and locate this data and evidence. This leads to the next step – reviewing the data and evidence.



Task 2: Reviewing the data

A desktop review involves an in-depth examination of existing data files and reports available from various sources as set out above.

Correlation and Causation

It also involves identifying what the data is telling us about the issue in question. This requires a critical examination of the data and evidence, in particular distinguishing between **correlation** relationships (where two factors appear to be related) and **causation** relationships (where one factor leads to a change in the other). For example, there could be **correlation** between incidents of sunburn and ice cream sales, as both may increase on a given day. However, critically, the change in sunburn doesn't directly **cause** the increase in ice cream sales. In contrast, there could be a **causation** relationship between hot weather and ice cream sales, as the hot weather is a factor which could cause an increase in ice-cream sales.

Limitations of Data and Evidence

Always ask whether there are any limitations to the data and evidence that is available. For example, for statistical reasons, household surveys tend to group people into bands or categories and so any analysis should always look at distributions within these bands.

For example, many analyses of poverty use the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), which is a representative survey carried out annually by the CSO. The EU-SILC reports the proportion of older people whose income is below the poverty threshold. However, further examination of the distribution of income among older people reveals that a significant number of older people have an income

very close to the poverty threshold. This means that even a small variation in income can lead to a large number of this group crossing the poverty threshold resulting in a sudden and sharp increase or decrease in poverty levels. Therefore, any policy analysis based on this data should proceed with this in mind.

We also need to contextualise data, particularly where it is used for comparison purposes between regions or countries or over time. This means considering wider social and economic conditions to determine if, and how, other factors may be influencing the data.

Similarly, we often see data being quoted claiming that a certain issue has increased by a large percentage either year-on-year or quarter-on-quarter as a justification for Government intervention. However, point in time comparisons can be misleading if there has been a significant change in economic circumstances or there is evidence in seasonality. For example, the impact of Covid-19 between 2020 and 2022 means that comparing current trends with trends in that period can be misleading. Equally, we know employment in the hospitality sector increases during spring and autumn but reduces during winter and spring. It is always important, therefore, to use time periods that are comparable and to adjust for seasonality where relevant. Where possible, it is better to examine medium to long term trends in data.

Is the data valid?

We also need to critically examine the source of the data to ensure the data is objective and reliable. If we are using a report by another organisation, we should check whether it was peer reviewed by a reputable body or academic. If survey results are reported, we should check the sample size and methodology to establish whether the data is statistically valid. It's also important to know who funded the report to assess whether there could be any bias or vested interests involved.

In short, we need to use best evidence, not any evidence. We must always ask ourselves whether the data we are using is accurate, relevant, and timely.



Task 3: Sourcing new data

Where possible, it is better to use existing data, as it can save time and resources. As a first step, the CSO could be approached to assist with new insights from their administrative and survey data holdings.

However, the existing data may be obsolete, incomplete, or unavailable. In addition, it may be missing important contextual or 'soft' intelligence.

In this case, we may need to generate new data. We can do this, for example, by commissioning someone to gather new data, similar to the school meals example in Phase 1, by combining and cross-refencing datasets to extract additional information, or by field study visits, including to other countries.

These techniques can help us to

- ▶ check and confirm the accuracy of existing information,
- ▶ fill gaps in knowledge, and
- ▶ support policies with solid evidence.

In particular, whenever possible in this phase, it is important to meet with other people who are involved in the policy area. Whether they're service delivery professionals within Government departments or policy experts in Ireland or abroad, meeting with them can provide valuable insights. These interactions can help illuminate key points from potentially dry data and even reveal any pre-existing biases we might carry.

Conducting bespoke surveys or research is a common approach to gather additional data. This is generally achieved by commissioning a specialist research agency to undertake the work. This type of research can generate quantitative data through questionnaires and qualitative data through methods such as interviews and focus groups.

When commissioning this type of data collection, we may need to conduct a competitive procurement process. This includes preparing and issuing a request for

tender followed by an objective assessment of tenders received. All procurement processes undertaken must be in line with the **Public Procurement Guidelines for Goods and Services** to make sure the process is fair, robust, and transparent. You can find different examples of requests for tender on gov.ie, such as the Department of Justice and Equality request for tender for research services to estimate the scale of illicit markets in Ireland.⁸

Preparing, commissioning, and conducting data collection takes time. We must balance the urgency of policy needs with the need for accurate data that we can reliably use and interpret. While timely decisions are essential, rushing the data collection process may compromise the quality of findings.

8. Department of Justice Requests for Tender for Research Services (www.gov.ie)





Task 4: Consulting with stakeholders

Data and evidence can give us useful insights into an issue and possible solutions.

However, we also need to consult with relevant individuals, organisations, and groups who have an interest in, or are affected by, the specific policy issue. This helps us to be sure we have a full understanding of the issue and its impact.

To gather different viewpoints and insights, we, as officials, need to:

- ▶ identify key stakeholders,
- ▶ hold interviews,
- ▶ host focus groups, and
- ▶ consider other consultation methods including surveys and thematic forum.

It is important to listen actively and to be transparent to make sure stakeholders are heard and feel valued. The aim is to build legitimacy, manage conflicts, and bring in stakeholder feedback. This will help create policies that are evidence-based, inclusive, and widely accepted. These lead to more effective and socially relevant policy solutions.

Consultations can vary widely in scope and scale, from Citizen's Assemblies held to discuss topics such as gender equality and biodiversity, to more niche consultations focused on a specific policy change. Consultations may request written submissions, in-person discussions, or a combination of both. The specific approach adopted for a public consultation will depend on a number of factors, including:

- ▶ the stakeholders involved,
- ▶ the subject matter, and
- ▶ the timeframe available.

A department may have scheduled consultations as part of its annual calendar. For

example, the Department of Finance and Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery, and Reform host the National Economic Dialogue every year in advance of the Budget. The Dialogue provides a deliberative forum for stakeholders to participate in an open and inclusive exchange on the competing economic and social priorities facing the Government. It is not intended to produce specific budget proposals or recommendations but to assist participants in preparing their own pre-budget submissions.

The '*Public Consultation Principles & Guidance*' is a useful resource when designing a consultative process. It can also be useful to learn from other consultations. A link to the guidance, as well as other public consultation resources, is listed in Appendix A.



Task 5: Evaluating the data and evidence

Once we have gathered all our data and evidence and consulted with our stakeholders, we need to evaluate it carefully. This will help to assess what might work to tackle the policy issue. Some evaluators advise ranking evidence according to the precision and strength of the methods used to gather the data. Bias can be difficult to spot when examining all kinds of evidence, but here are some general questions we can use to help identify bias:

- ▶ What is the source of the evidence?
- ▶ How has the evidence been funded?
- ▶ Were appropriate research methods used for the subject of the research?
- ▶ Does the content of the evidence seem to capture all related facts, or does it seem to support a particular outcome?
- ▶ Does the evidence rely on strong or hyperbolic language?
- ▶ Is the evidence supported by links and trustworthy citations?

We must be guided by the evidence when forming a judgement about what intervention would be most effective. To do this, we need to critically evaluate the data. During earlier tasks when we assessed and reviewed available data (Task 1 & 2) and sourced additional data (Task 3), we asked some important questions regarding the accuracy and validity of the data. At this point, the key question facing us is what does this data tell us about the issue, and is there an alternative interpretation of the data?

For example, the issue of the working poor has been increasingly raised as one that demands attention. While we might think a solution may lie in raising pay in general through an increase in the minimum wage, the data shows that most people earning the minimum wage are second or third earners in relatively high-income households. By contrast, half of all people in single-earner working-poor households depend on someone working less than 25 hours per week. Given this high incidence of low-hours employment, an intervention such as an increase in minimum wage is likely to have a limited effect. Other solutions, such as increasing the availability of child-care, might be more helpful.⁹

If we evaluate the evidence well, it should produce strong guidance as to the kinds of policy options that could effectively address an issue.

9. Roantree et al, op. cit.

Checklist for Deepen Understanding and the Three-Pillar Framework

Pillar 1: Data and Evidence



- » Are there any existing data-sets or evidence about the issue in question?
- » Is the quality and reliability of data-sets satisfactory or should we consider adding to it to or commissioning new data to address potential gaps?
- » Has a diverse range of evidence-based research been investigated, including statistical data, practice-based insights, and emerging evidence, to make sure conclusions will be comprehensive and well supported?
- » Has the potential for bias been considered, either from the findings of the evidence itself or from the conclusions drawn by the researchers?

Pillar 2: Feasibility and Implementation



- » Does existing research have anything to say about the issue in question, particularly in terms of 'what works' and how?
- » Where context or delivery varies, have the challenges and successes associated with their policy implementation and design been identified and can they be applied to the Irish context?

Pillar 3: Legitimacy



- » Have the perspectives and opinions of the stakeholders directly impacted by the issue been considered? It is crucial to consider viewpoints beyond lobby groups and NGOs and to recognise that these sources might provide only a limited perspective.

- » Have the implementing bodies and delivery agencies been consulted?
- » Has the proposed approach been “road-tested” against existing systems of delivery? Have potential similar procedures and their challenges been explored?
- » Does the analysis consider a wide range of perspectives and potential scenarios? Does it consider relevant information from the stakeholders?
- » Are there opportunities for collaboration with research bodies? Are there research or academic bodies engaged in this policy area? Can they contribute to the development of the policy?



Typical Output: Policy Review and Research Report

The output from this phase typically involves drafting a more lengthy policy review or research report which encompasses findings from Phase 2. The report should include:

- ▶ the data and evidence used during to deepen understanding of the policy issue, including details of any commissioned data collection,
- ▶ the insights we have gleaned from our research, and
- ▶ our findings outlined in a detailed and clear manner which will help you, your team, and the Minister, decide whether you are ready to progress to Phase 3: Design with Best Advice.

It is also possible our findings will reveal that the policy demand is not what we expected in which case we may need to return to Phase 1, again highlighting the point that the process of policy development is not always in one straightforward direction but may require you to revisit steps.

Moving to Phase 3: Design with Best Advice

Phase 2 (Deepen Understanding) is about uncovering insights from existing data and evidence which could help to scope out various policy options. Ideally, this exercise will

help to identify and further define the issue in question, the root causes of the issue and the policy options able to address it effectively. Fleshing out one or more of these policy options in greater detail is part of the next stage of providing policy advice.

The insights gathered during Phase 2 might uncover a fundamental misunderstanding of the original policy demand, or that the demand does not exist at all. If this happens, we must consider this before going to the next phase of the policy development process. It may be that the most appropriate course of action might be to return to the Phase 1 (Demand for policy) and reassess the original policy demand. It is equally possible that our finding will tell us to progress to the Phase 3 (Design with best advice).

The policy development process is messy and there is no hard-set rule to determine which course should be taken; each case must be decided on its own merits.

Taking stock before progressing to the next phase is a vital step throughout policy development.



Case Study: Developing Child-Centred Policy through Better Data

Policy Demand

The National Children's Strategy 'Our Children – Their Lives' (2000) recognised that there was limited practical data and research available about understanding children's lives. The absence of comprehensive research-based information made forming effective policies difficult. The Strategy underlined that better data and research would support officials, operational managers, professionals and others providing services at all levels.

The Solution: National Longitudinal Study

Ireland took a pioneering step by launching a nationwide study of children named 'Growing Up in Ireland' (GUI). This is a study which tracks the same group of individuals over an extended period, observing changes and developments as they unfold. This approach offers insights into:

- ▶ causal relationships, (how different factors affect each other),
- ▶ developmental trajectories (how children progress over time), and
- ▶ how variables evolve (how different factors change).

It captures nuances and trends that snapshot studies often miss. By repeatedly measuring the same participants, researchers gain a deeper understanding of how factors interact and influence outcomes throughout their lives.

The study is designed to give officials a valuable lens into children's lives, tracing their growth, challenges, and well-being across critical stages. By identifying causal links and trends, these studies inform targeted interventions that address specific needs and vulnerabilities. The GUI study has bridged the data gap by producing over 80 reports since 2006. Supported by a strong dissemination strategy and a well-established annual research conference since 2009, the initiative has prioritised data collection and analysis.

Additionally, GUI files have been archived and shared with the broader research community.

The study provides data that offers evidence of policy effectiveness over time, helping refine strategies and allocate resources more effectively.

The policy impact of this data collection has been significant. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth has used Growing Up in Ireland data extensively to inform public policy on a wide range of issues such as:

- ▶ GP use among children,
- ▶ childcare and cognitive outcomes,
- ▶ obesity and weight,
- ▶ transitions to post-primary school,
- ▶ take up of the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme,
- ▶ parenting and infant development,
- ▶ mothers' return to work and childcare choices,
- ▶ the effects of the recession and family stress on three-year-olds,
- ▶ socio-emotional and behavioural outcomes in early adolescence, and
- ▶ economic vulnerability and socioemotional development.

Conclusion

Commissioning data can play a pivotal role in bridging gaps in evidence where no substantial data exists, serving as a cornerstone in informed policy creation. In this instance, very little concrete data was available. Commissioning data provided a valuable avenue to gather targeted insights and information directly relevant to policy objectives. By engaging in purposeful data collection and analysis, officials gained access to real-world scenarios, trends and outcomes. This allowed them to make well-informed decisions based on reliable evidence.



PHASE

3

Design with Best Advice

Phase 3: Design with Best Advice



This phase is concerned with developing a concrete policy proposal based on the evidence and analysis from Phase 2: Deepen Understanding. This stage should provide sufficient detail to support government decision-making.

Typical tasks during this phase include:

- Task 1: Agreeing clear policy objectives
- Task 2: Analysing policy options
- Task 3: Engaging with stakeholders
- Task 4: Analysing legal implications
- Task 5: Establishing detailed costings
- Task 6: Making clear policy recommendations

Remember: We may have to revisit tasks. It may not always be as simple as doing task 1, task 2, and so on, in order.

Use the handy Checklist for Design with Best Advice and the Three-Pillar Framework as a compass to help keep our bearings and stay on course.

Typical **outputs** of this phase could include:

- ▶ Detailed policy proposal
- ▶ Draft roadmap or strategy
- ▶ Internal policy advice document

Phase 3 (Design with Best Advice) is where the insights from Phase 2 are used to develop a detailed policy proposal. This phase of policy development needs extensive detail. You may have to repeat tasks as feedback loops identify new or alternative

information, changed emphasis, or new requirements. We need to make sure every aspect of the policy proposal will contribute to the policy objective and does not conflict with or undermine existing policies. Consultation may also be very important if the policy design includes programmes or services.

The flow chart below illustrates a possible process undertaken during this phase.

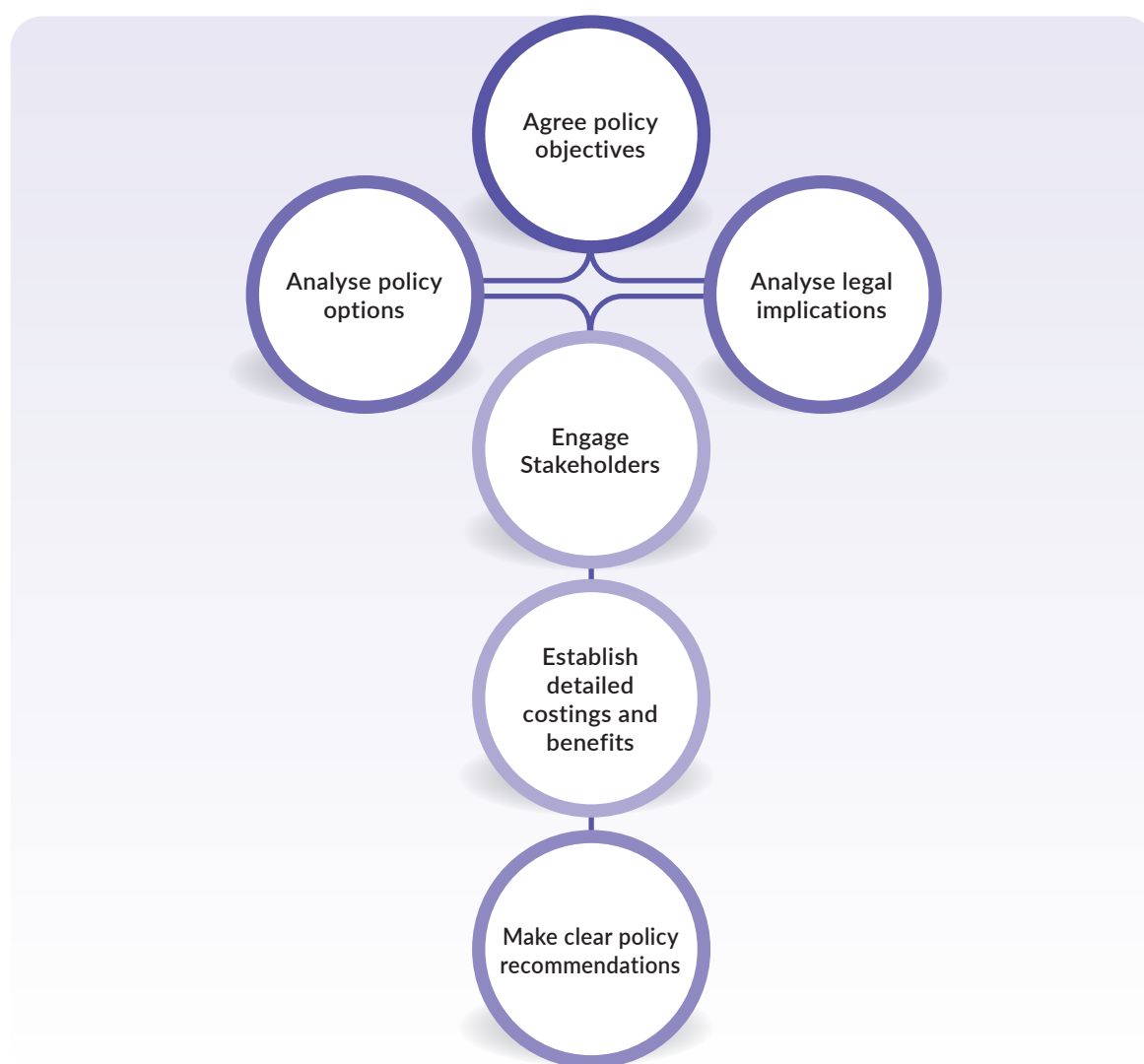


Figure 9: Process of Phase 3: Design with Best Advice

Policy Design Tasks



Task 1: Agreeing clear policy objectives

The policy objectives set out the aim of the policy. Hence, it is crucial that the policy objectives are clear and understood in the same way by all stakeholders. This will support robust design and implementation, the avoidance of scope creep and, if new legislation is required to implement the policy, it will support the effective development of that legislation.

Supporting Design and Implementation

Most journeys start with a destination. So it is with policy. To design, fund, and implement services and schemes on time and within budget, it is essential that we clearly articulate the purpose of all of this activity. Equally, we can only assess the effectiveness of alternative designs or policy options against a clear statement of purpose. Officials should, therefore, try to set clear objectives, that articulate the purpose of the policy and meet the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) criteria.

Avoiding scope creep

You may need to refine the identified objectives a number of times as you gather feedback and uncover new perspectives and priorities. This will make sure that policy design aligns with the central objective while considering potential conflicts with existing policies. In doing this, it is also important to be clear on what the policy is not intended to address. Oftentimes, 'good' policy is criticised for not being 'perfect'. This can be because there are many issues to be addressed in most policy areas. A policy issue that is designed to address one issue can be criticised for not addressing other related issues of concern. For example, a policy initiative to expand pension cover can be criticised for not resolving gender pension gaps. Unless policy practitioners and decision makers are clear on the primary policy objective, this type of criticism can lead, during the design phase, to muddled thinking and 'scope creep' which undermines the primary policy objective.

Informing Legislative Provision

To implement some policies, it may require a change in legislation. Drafting legislation and supporting the various stages of the legislative process is a key task of many policy practitioners. The legislative process, by necessity, is a long and detailed process which is conducted in association with, and subject to the approval of, the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel (OPC).¹⁰

It is important to be as specific as possible regarding the policy intention in order to draft effective legislation and reduce the risk of an extended legislative process. Clarity on the policy objectives helps prevent unintended amendments during the legislative process and unforeseen consequences after the legislation is enacted.



Task 2: Analyse policy options

You need to consider different available options when addressing a particular issue or problem. These options represent a range of strategies and interventions. When examining options, you should consider the different types of policy interventions or 'policy levers' which can be used by Government. It is also important to actively involve any departments, teams, or agencies that may play a role in delivering a policy option.

There is a vast range of policy levers available of which the most commonly used are direct provision of a service, regulation of services, or economic activities, economic incentives, and public information and education.

Directly Providing a Service

For some areas, the Government will directly provide a service. This typically happens where the service wouldn't be effectively provided in the free market, known as "market failure". The market failure could be due to:

10. More information on the legislative process is available online at [Oireachtas.ie - How laws are made](https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/how-laws-are-made/)

- ▶ the size and scope of the service required (e.g. public water supply), or
- ▶ because the Government is the main or only client for a service (e.g. the defence services and regulatory bodies).

In any of these situations, it may be appropriate for the Government to either directly implement or contract a service from a third-party provider.

Sometimes, a mix of direct implementation and contracting is used, especially in health services. Whatever approach is taken, the key defining feature is that the State is directly responsible and accountable for performance of the service.

Regulation

In other areas of activity policy goals can be achieved through introducing laws to require specific behaviours or actions aligned with the desired policy objective. Two examples of how a regulatory approach achieved their respective policy aims are:

- ▶ The Deposit Return Scheme which led to an uptake of recycling of qualifying containers, and
- ▶ The Plastic Bag Environmental levy which led to a significant reduction in the use of plastic bags.

Economic incentives

Introducing financial incentives whether in the form of subsidies, penalties, or fines can encourage action in line with a policy objective. For example, grants to businesses and households for energy efficient power and heating systems, such as solar panels, can support the achievement of carbon reduction targets.

Oversight and Governance

When using regulations or incentives, there's often a need for a compliance and audit role. This typically involves conducting inspections to check if regulations are being followed or if people and organisations who receive incentives are meeting

the necessary conditions. For example, the Department of Agriculture inspects food producers to ensure compliance with the standards necessary for certification and receipt of agricultural grants. The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) monitors the safety and quality of the healthcare and social care systems on behalf of the Government.

Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)

A regulatory impact assessment is a systematic evaluation of the potential effects of proposed policy changes. It should inform policy officials by analysing the economic, social, and environmental impacts of new regulations. RIAs should also consider cost benefit analysis, potential risks, and the regulatory alternative available to achieve desired outcomes. The goal of RIAs is to ensure that regulation changes due to policy development are effective, efficient, and achievable without imposing unnecessary burdens. A link to RIA guidance is listed in Appendix A.

Public Education

Often a policy objective requires a behavioural change by individuals and households. In many cases, this might not be legitimately achievable through the use of regulatory methods or economic incentives. In such instances public information and education campaigns can help to achieve the policy objective. Common information campaigns might focus on encouraging healthier lifestyles (to reduce health or social care costs, improve quality of life, and prevent chronic illness) or holidaying in Ireland (to promote tourism, and boost local economies). During the period of the Covid pandemic there was a very heavy reliance on public information and education as a means of changing behaviours to minimise the spread of infection.

Involving Delivery Teams and Agencies (Joined-Up Policy)

Ideally, we should involve the teams and agencies responsible for implementing the policy in all stages of the policy development process – from understanding the demand right through to delivery. However, while it may not be possible to engage

as much as we would like in the early stages of policy development, it is critically important that they are fully involved in the process of selecting and evaluating policy options. A key part in analysing the options is to ensure that the people who will ultimately be responsible for delivering any of the options are consulted and that their input is considered. This is critical to establish if the options under consideration are feasible. In addition, it will help to determine the costs, organisation, system and other resources required to deliver different policy options. It will also help to identify any trade-offs with other priorities and the potential timelines for implementation.

Engagement with delivery teams and agencies will also help us assess the likely impact of a policy initiative. In other words, they can help us understand how effective the initiative will be in achieving our desired policy objectives. Real-world experience can be extremely valuable and provide much richer insights than any “top-down” research.

In doing all of this, it is important to recognise that a policy objective will often require the use of a number of policy levers working together. So it is important to consult with all delivery units and agencies to ensure a joined up approach to the assessment, development, and implementation of a policy solution.

For example, to achieve the policy objective of increasing the use of seatbelts, the Government, via the Department of Transport, introduced legislation to make the use of seatbelts compulsory (regulation). It also introduced penalty points and fines for anyone caught driving without a seatbelt (incentives). This required collaboration with An Garda Síochána and the wider justice system (joined-up policy). In addition, the Road Safety Authority (RSA) was established as a state agency with the mandate to promote road safety in Ireland (direct provision of a service for the State). The RSA subsequently introduced the National Car Test to make sure all vehicles met safety standards, including provision of working seatbelts (audit and compliance). It also launched numerous education campaigns, including TV and radio ads, to promote wearing seatbelts (communication and education).

Among the various policy options, it is important to evaluate the consequences of the **'do nothing option'** i.e. an option where officials choose not to put in place any new policy or to maintain the status quo.

This option is often considered:

- ▶ when the severity of the problem is considered to be low,
- ▶ the source of the issue and the potential impacts of interventions are uncertain, or
- ▶ when the costs and risks of implementing a new policy outweigh the expected benefits.

Even if it is not chosen, the consequences of the 'do nothing' option need to be documented and its costs and benefits estimated as the "counterfactual" case against which other options can be evaluated.

Officials must carefully weigh the implications of each option, including the potential trade-offs and long-term effects, to make well-informed decisions that align with the overall policy objectives and societal interests. When canvassing various policy options, we must consider whether they are proportionate in terms of the scale of the problem, the intrusiveness of the intervention, the feasibility of implementation, the units and agencies that will be involved in their implementation and their costs and benefits (see further below on costs and benefits).



Task 3: Analysing legal implications

We need to analyse existing laws and regulations, both domestically and internationally important to make sure that the proposed policy is in line with applicable legal frameworks. It involves identifying potential conflicts, legal barriers, and constitutional considerations that may arise from implementing the policy.

Accordingly, you should consult with any internal legal advisors within your agency or department and, where appropriate, with the Office of the Attorney General to make sure the policy complies with all applicable laws, to identify and mitigate any risks of legal challenges and to assess if any new legislative provision is required to give effect to the policy initiative. Addressing legal implications at the outset:

- ▶ makes sure that the policy remains enforceable,
- ▶ respects individual rights, and
- ▶ operates within the boundaries of the legal system.

This process should also highlight if, and where, legislative changes will be required to implement the policy.

Task 2 and 3 together can help to narrow down policy options to those that are considered feasible. Once that is done it is important to move onto the next task – engaging with stakeholders.



Task 4: Engaging Stakeholders

As noted previously, when considering policy options, we must include those who will be involved in the implementation of the policy. This helps both to confirm/check the feasibility of different options being considered and to establish legitimacy. If the policy change is substantial, or the issue being addressed is complex or sensitive we may need to conduct a formal public consultation.

There are a wide variety of ways in which a consultation or engagement process can be conducted.

Traditionally, complex or policy issues were often approached through a two-phased process of formal consultation.

Initially, officials would publish a 'Green Paper' setting out the policy issue and identifying a range of potential approaches and seeking input and feedback from interested stakeholders.

This input and feedback would then be published and used to inform a specific policy approach which would be set out in a greater level of detail in a 'White Paper' which would also be published and to which feedback would be invited.

Following this process of engagement, a final selection would be made and submitted to Government for approval.

While the terms “Green Paper” and “White Paper” have largely disappeared, and methods of engagement and feedback have moved from formal written submission to a more interactive format, the general approach is still valid and should still be considered as a model for consultation. The approach can be adapted and ‘modernised’, for example,

- ▶ We could hold a consultative forum (e.g. a hybrid in-person and online format) to set out the parameters of an issue, share evidence and analysis, outline potential approaches, and invite open discussion with feedback captured in real-time.
- ▶ We could then use smaller ‘focus-group’ discussions to focus on specific issues in greater detail. During these discussions, options can be shared to gather the opinions of the group.
- ▶ We could address specific concerns and issues in bi-lateral meetings with key stakeholders.

Collating and interpreting ideas and feedback can be difficult if an issue is discussed in general or abstract terms. For that reason, even if we haven’t followed a ‘green paper/ white paper’ type approach, it is sometimes useful to create a ‘strawman’ document to crystallise key issues and provide a concrete basis for critique.

Engagement with the Oireachtas

Green/White papers or other consultative methods usually also involve engagement with the relevant Oireachtas Committees. These engagements typically involve a briefing by officials after which the Oireachtas Committee may decide to hold hearings or meetings with interested stakeholders. The Committee will then typically produce a report setting out its views on the matter. Engagement with Oireachtas Committees can be extremely useful. They can help us to identify gaps in potential solutions, explore alternative solutions, and assess or establish the legitimacy of policy options.



Task 5: Establishing detailed costings and benefits

At this stage, we need to estimate the resource requirements and costs and benefits of the proposed interventions. This involves doing a thorough cost-benefit analysis, considering direct and indirect financial costs and benefits, while also taking care to incorporate our best estimates of non-financial costs and benefits.

For example, in a decision to establish a new embassy the costs that could be valued might include.

Set-up costs including overseas travel to investigate potential sites for the new embassy, the cost of purchasing or renting an embassy site, furnishing the new embassy, installation of IT and other systems, as well as removal and relocation expenses.

Operational costs including ongoing costs of running the operation including staff costs, utility costs, necessary licences, etc.

Financial benefits might include savings from stopping the use of consular services provided by other countries and savings from reassigning staff who used to provide services for that location remotely.

Indirect/non-financial benefits might include increased trade and tourism revenues and increased foreign investment. Another benefit might be closer political ties and greater support for Ireland's position in international fora. These indirect benefits should, where possible, be "shadow priced" based, for example, on evidence from previous examples of consular expansion.

Indirect/opportunity costs might also arise. As we do not have an infinite budget, when you put resources into one purpose, this in turn prevents you from using those resources for another purpose. Indirect or opportunity costs are the costs associated with what you are no longer able to do. For example, allocation of staff to a new embassy might mean that staffing levels at international bodies such as the OECD or the UN would have to be restricted.

To conduct a robust cost-benefit analysis you should consider all of these types of costs and benefits for each policy option under consideration and estimate them as best as you can. You can then compare the overall costs and benefits of each policy initiative against the situation if the policy initiative was not taken.

We should also conduct scenario and sensitivity analysis which help us to assess how our policy outcomes could be affected if certain risks happen. These risks might relate to general economic or social conditions such as lower levels of economic growth, higher interest rates, or higher levels of migration. There could also be project specific risks such as an increase in the prices of key inputs or a delay in legislative approvals. Both scenario analysis and sensitivity analysis consider the impact of risks but with a different focus.

Scenario Analysis

Scenario analysis involves assessing the impact of changes across a mix of key factors. For example, we may look at a scenario where there is both lower economic growth and higher costs. By exploring different scenarios, we can understand how variations in these factors affect the overall impact of the policy initiative.

Sensitivity Analysis

Sensitivity analysis focuses on the effect of specific individual factors. For instance, we might analyse how a 5% percentage increase in prices affects the net benefit. This helps us understand the sensitivity of the outcome to changes in specific factors.

An example of the use of sensitivity analysis was the stress-testing of assumptions regarding the roll-out of water charges. One of the key assumptions was the gap in expectations regarding levels of payment and non-payment by the public. This emerged as a key difference between the Irish authorities and Eurostat.

Overall scenario and sensitivity analysis help us to evaluate risks and uncertainties, allowing decision-makers to make informed choices.

Useful Resource: Public Spending Code (PSC)

The Public Spending Code outlines value-for-money criteria for evaluating, planning, and managing public investment projects in Ireland. The Code applies to all public bodies and organisations receiving Exchequer capital funding. Each department is responsible for making sure that they and related agencies establish sector-specific procedures aligned with the Code for evaluating, planning, and managing public investments.

The Code emphasises obtaining maximum value for money by following disciplined project evaluation, preparation, and implementation processes. It is based on principles of public financial management. It offers sufficient detail to enhance decision-making and value for money, while remaining broad enough to cover the broad diversity of investment areas in the public capital programme. A link to the Public Spending Code is listed in Appendix A.



Task 6: Making clear policy recommendations

Having completed Tasks 1 – 5, you should then be in a position to bring forward clear recommendations. Policy development involves creating well-grounded policy recommendations on how the proposed intervention will achieve the desired objectives, together with the costs, benefits, and consequences of the proposed intervention compared to other options considered, including the 'do nothing' option. You must present a logical and evidence-based argument for each recommendation, explaining how the recommended intervention is expected to bring about the desired change. This includes referencing relevant research, data, any analysis conducted as part of Tasks 1 – 5, and expert opinions to support the feasibility and effectiveness of the policy. You should also outline potential risks and limitations, any assumptions made in formulating the recommendations, and any consequences or trade-offs identified from your analysis in terms of costs, resources required, and impact on other Government policy areas.¹¹

11. Each proposal brought to Government for a decision must set out if, and if so how, the proposal impacts Exchequer Costs, North-South and East-West Relations, Gender Equality, Jobs, Poverty Proofing, People with Disabilities, Competitiveness and Industry Costs, Quality Regulation and Rural Communities.

By providing clear evidence, you can:

- ▶ gain support from stakeholders,
- ▶ build public trust, and
- ▶ create a solid foundation for successful policy implementation.

Support from Dedicated Commissions/Review Groups

When making recommendations, especially where there are strong but diverse opinions regarding potential solutions, it can be helpful to draw on the findings of an expert group or commission. This is a group established who are gathered together to analyse the issues and provide balanced and objective recommendations.

Examples of such Commissions include the Future of Media Commission, the Commission on Tax and Welfare, and the Commission on Pensions. Commission members consisted of policy experts from academia and the public service together with representatives of stakeholder groups. They worked, with the support of secretariats provided by the civil service, to fully understand the issues in question (Deepen Understanding), and then to evaluate options and potential solutions (Design with Best Advice) up to the point of making recommendations as to best options. The consideration of these options then became a matter for Government.

Policy practitioners should always be open to involving external experts in the form of a Commission or otherwise to help develop recommendations for action. This approach can help to build legitimacy with stakeholders, to avoid perceptions that solutions are 'pre-cooked' with a particular bias, and to strengthen the hand of Government when it comes to selecting a policy option.

Ultimately, however, the civil service policy practitioner must take responsibility for, and own, the recommendation that is brought to Ministers and the Government. This may mean taking a different view to that of an expert panel. As a policy practitioner you should be ready for this and be prepared to back up your recommendation with solid analysis.

Checklist for Design with Best Advice and the Three-Pillar Framework

Pillar 1: Data and Evidence



- » Does the proposed intervention align with the most robust available data?
- » Does the evaluation of the initiative require ongoing data collection?
- » Is the policy objective clearly stated and specific enough based on the data and evidence assessed?
- » Have stakeholders, including delivery teams and agencies, contributed to data and evidence?

Pillar 2: Feasibility and Implementation



- » Does the intervention have a clear logic model that outlines how the proposed activities will lead to the desired final objectives?
- » Have the relevant delivery teams and agencies contributed to the assessment of options? Have they accepted the selected option and are responsible parties identified for each delivery activity?
- » Have the risks associated with policy options been identified and provisional solutions mapped?
- » Has a sensitivity analysis and scenario analysis been completed against each of the key risks?
- » Are proposals feasible (including assessing estimated costs and resources required)?
- » Is there an alternative (including a “do nothing”) policy scenario to consider? – assess each option against each other under various considerations.
- » Have the consequences for other areas of Government policy been identified and set out?

Pillar 3: Legitimacy



- » Have stakeholders been consulted in a substantive manner?
- » Has the policy been discussed with the relevant Oireachtas Committees and their views sought?
- » Does the policy align with the existing legal framework?
- » Will the policy effectively address people's aims and potential objections?
If objections arise, have you identified strategies you could employ to mitigate them?
- » Does the policy fit within the Government's wider mandate?
- » Who are the stakeholders and veto players on whom the policy depends for approval and implementation?

Typical Output: Examples of Policy Advice Documents



Once we have clarified the policy objectives, analysed the options, and identified the policy recommendations, we need to document them. We might need to consider whether the public need to be consulted on draft proposals to:

- raise the general public's awareness, and/or
- get their views.

We may also need to liaise with expert groups who might have useful technical advice to share.

For example, the Department of Environment, Climate, and Communications published a draft policy statement on geothermal energy. It was concerned with formally gathering the views of the public and key stakeholders. These included environmental groups, geoscientists and engineers, and potential sponsors and operators of geothermal energy projects.

We may also have to **prepare internal documents** to share with senior officials, an internal policy committee, or the Minister. The specific structure of these documents will vary depending on the audience, but they will typically include:

- ▶ the agreed policy objectives,
- ▶ an analysis of the options considered and budget implications,
- ▶ (where appropriate) a cost benefit analysis with sensitivity and scenario analysis,
- ▶ An explicit assessment of legitimacy and feasibility, and
- ▶ the recommended policy direction based on the analysis.

We may document a large-scale or multi-departmental **policy as a Strategy, Framework, or Roadmap**. These documents vary in structure and detail, but they all explain policy objectives and how they will be achieved. For example:

- ▶ AI – Here for Good: National Artificial Intelligence Strategy for Ireland, 2021
- ▶ Understanding Life in Ireland: The Well-being Framework 2023
- ▶ Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025

At this stage in the policy development process, these documents would be in draft stage, pending Ministerial and Government decision in the next stage.

Moving to Phase 4: Decide Policy Proposals

Phase 3 (Design with Best Advice) includes the scoping out of possible responses to the policy demand in the form of a credible intervention, compared to the 'do nothing' option of making no change. If the preferred option is recommending a new or modified intervention, then it should be accompanied by:

- ▶ clear objectives,
- ▶ a good idea of how it will be put in place,
- ▶ the resources needed (including sources of funding), and
- ▶ the consequences for other areas of Government policy.

This should all form part of the impartial advice in Phase 4 (Decide Policy Proposals).

Case Study: Designing and Implementing the Local Property Tax (LPT) in Ireland

One of the important insights in policy development is that a strong connection between design and implementation is a critical ingredient for success. Many policies have failed because we didn't anticipate the problems and challenges of implementation at design phase.

In the design phase of the LPT, recognising the importance of a well-informed and inclusive process, officials engaged in extensive consultations with citizens, local authorities, and experts. This collaborative approach allowed for a deep and nuanced understanding of the concerns and aspirations surrounding property taxation.

This would suggest that another necessary condition for the success of the LPT was that it be reasonably fair. Many, if not most, aspects of the tax's design were strongly influenced by this requirement, including its:

- ▶ proportionality,
- ▶ modest cost for a typical household,
- ▶ the banding for valuation purposes, and
- ▶ the availability of a deferral of payment option.

It is not enough that a tax is fair. It must also be understood to be fair. This means that simplicity and comprehensibility are important features of an acceptable tax.

Recognising the significance of taxpayer awareness and compliance, the Revenue Commissioners spearheaded efforts to explain the LPT to the public. It issued clear and accessible information that detailed tax obligations and calculation methods. Through various communication channels, including online resources and direct support, the Revenue Commissioners fostered a sense of transparency and understanding among taxpayers.

Another characteristic of good policy design is the rigorous and open-minded evaluation of different options. A comparison of Irish Water Charges with the Local Property Tax shows how, for Irish Water, universal free allowances were accepted unquestionably without its implications being understood.

In contrast, while there was a commitment to a site value tax as the basis for property valuation with the LPT, the question was kept open. 'The question was kept open until the practical implications of such a valuation base had been thoroughly examined and found to be off-putting, and a different base was selected'.¹²

Conclusion

The example of the LPT shows that successful policy design is not just a technical matter of choosing SMART objectives. Very often, policy design must incorporate and anticipate public views which may cause assumptions to be revised or revisited. Bear this in mind when it comes to presenting matters for decision.

12. O'Leary (2018), op. cit, pg. 85.

”

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PHASE

4

Decide Policy Proposals

Phase 4: Decide Policy Proposals



At this point in the process, a decision is made whether to proceed with the proposed policy.

Typical **tasks** during this phase include:

- Task 1: Conducting a 'legitimacy' assessment
- Task 2: Conducting a legal review/undertaking pre-legislative preparations
- Task 3: Seeking Ministerial approval
- Task 4: Preparing a memorandum
- Task 5: Seeking Government approval

Remember: We may have to revisit tasks. It may not always be as simple as doing task 1, task 2, and so on, in order. Use the Checklist for Decide Policy Proposals and the Three-Pillar Framework as a compass to help keep your bearings and stay on course.

The expected **output** of this phase is:

- ▶ A Briefing Paper or Decision Memo for the Minister, and possibly for the Government, setting out policy recommendations.

Once a decision is made by the Minister or Government and is sanctioned as appropriate by the Oireachtas, it is up to the civil service and public sector agencies to deliver that decision to the best of their ability.

In Phase 4 (Decide Policy Proposals), we must further scrutinise the policy proposal and then submit it for decision. Critically, the Minister **must** take ownership of and sanction the policy proposal before it can proceed. This process makes sure that policies are not simply the output of officials who, no matter how expert they may be, do not hold a democratic mandate. It ensures that policy initiatives are properly understood, accepted, and sanctioned by elected office holders who are the legitimate representatives of the public. This is critical to establishing the legitimacy of any initiative.

The flow chart below illustrates a possible process undertaken during Phase 4.

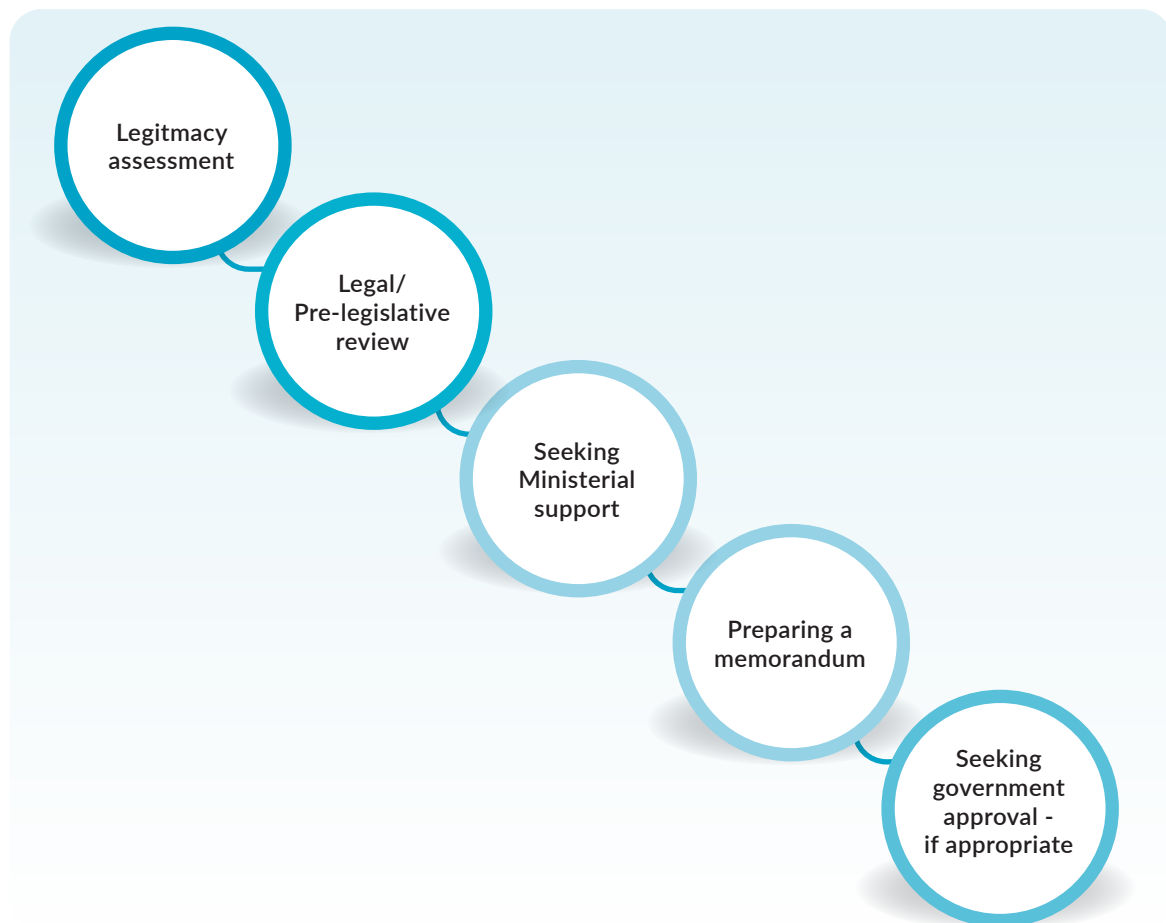


Figure 10: Typical process during Phase 4: Decide Policy Proposals

Decide Policy Proposals Tasks



Task 1: Conducting a 'legitimacy' assessment

We must conduct a 'legitimacy' assessment as part of the process of seeking formal approval for a proposed policy or project. This means understanding and considering public debate, media reporting, or political stances on the issues. It is not about assessing the policy through the lens of a particular political belief or ideology. Instead, we need to assess whether the public, and in particular the affected stakeholders and communities, will support the idea or if there might be sustained opposition.

Specifically, we need to carefully assess how a policy initiative aligns with public values and preferences. We also need to consider any possible points of objection from various groups, including affected communities and elected representatives. Consideration of these factors helps us to ensure that the proposed policy initiative is well received by the public or, at least, can be defended if it comes under criticism.

Most of the information for this legitimacy assessment will follow from the previous three phases. Indeed, assessing legitimacy is a feature of all the previous phases. This can be seen in the 'legitimacy' questions in the three-pillar checklist at the end of each phase. It is during this phase of the process, however, that we must crystallise or finalise our view on whether or not the policy initiative can gain sufficient support to be sustained and implemented.



Task 2: Conducting a legal review & pre-legislative preparation

A legal review is a comprehensive and meticulous assessment of proposed policies or legislation that we need to conduct to make sure that either a policy aligns with existing laws or to identify the changes required to laws to facilitate the implementation of the proposed policy initiative. During a legal review, legal experts:

- analyse the language, scope, and potential implications of the proposed policy to identify any inconsistencies or conflicts with the established legal framework,

scrutinise whether the policy is in line with fundamental principles of justice, fairness, and human rights,

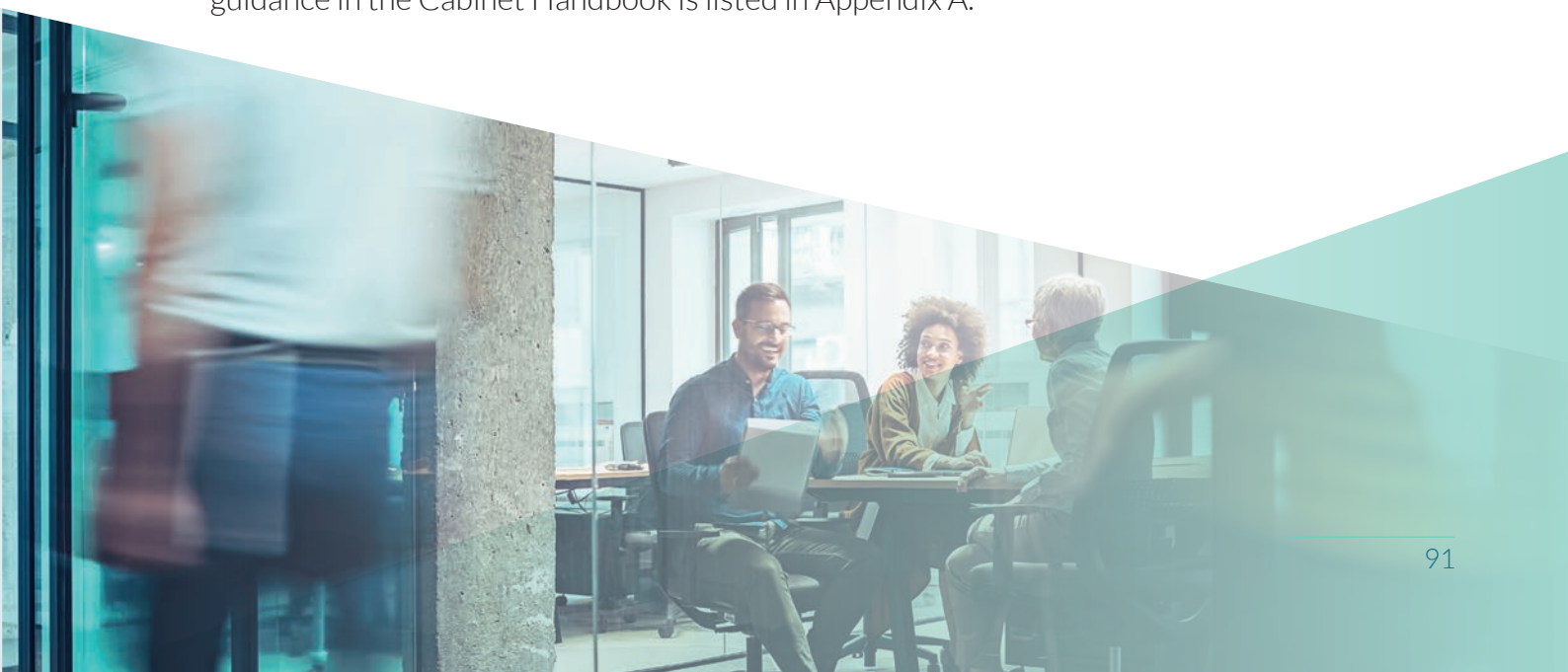
- ▶ assess if the policy can be accommodated within existing laws or whether any laws need to be changed, and
- ▶ check if the proposed policy's implementation process complies with procedural requirements and legal norms.

Depending on the nature of the policy intervention the legal advice may be delivered within a department by an internal legal team or it may be referred to the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) for an Opinion. Any initiative that requires a Government decision must be shared with the OAG as part of the memorandum process.

We must make sure that our proposals are legally sound. We need to do this to minimise the risk of legal challenges and to bolster public trust in the policy-making process. We need to be upfront about:

- ▶ any legislative changes that are needed to put the policy in place, and
- ▶ the proposed timeframe to enact those legislative changes.

The legislative process is, by necessity, slow and precise and comprises of multiple stages. Any policy that needs legislative changes will need to make sure that it has sufficient political support to carry it through the full process. A link to legislative guidance in the Cabinet Handbook is listed in Appendix A.



Prior to entering the legislative process, a Bill must pass a number of 'internal' or pre-legislative decision points.



1. Drafting the General Scheme:

- ▶ When a policy proposal requires new primary legislation or changes to existing primary legislation it is necessary to produce a "General Scheme".
- ▶ The General Scheme sets out draft "Heads" of a Bill.
- ▶ These are usually drafted by the responsible Department in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General.
- ▶ The General Scheme and Heads describe the proposed legislative changes, section by section, and summarise the purpose of each change.



2. Government Approval and Referral:

- ▶ This General Scheme is then submitted to Government for approval to publish and begin drafting the detailed legislation.
- ▶ At this point, we may also seek approval to publish the draft heads, so that they become publicly available.
- ▶ After Government approval, the scheme is published (if requested) and referred to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel (OPC) for detailed drafting.



3. Pre-Legislative Scrutiny:

- ▶ The General Scheme is then sent for pre-legislative scrutiny by the relevant Oireachtas Committee. For example, legislation related transport will be shared with the Committee on Transport and Communication.
- ▶ The Committee will review the General Scheme and produce a report setting out suggested changes or amendments.



4. Finalising the Bill:

- ▶ The detailed text of the Bill is then finalised by the OPC, under the instruction of the sponsoring Department.
- ▶ Once complete the Bill is resubmitted to the Minister and Government for approval.



Task 3: Seeking Ministerial approval

Before a proposal can be submitted to Government for decision or information, we need to gain the approval of a Minister. Read an example later in this section of how to prepare a brief for a Minister.

E-submissions

E-submissions is an online system used within the civil service to submit a written brief to the Minister. The submission is first reviewed and approved by the Assistant Secretary and the Secretary General in accordance with departmental policies.

It may also be appropriate to meet the Minister in person to set out the key points in the briefing paper and respond to any questions that they may have. During these briefings, don't assume that the Minister is very familiar with the matter in question so you should be prepared to set out the background, the options considered, the rationale for the selected option, and the delivery challenges and issues.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to include a draft text of a Memorandum for Government. However, keep the brief concise to focus on the key issues and decision points – do not elaborate at great length on details that are not directly relevant to the decision sought. It is called a brief for a reason!



Task 4: Preparing a memorandum

If a Minister approves the policy proposal as outlined in the brief, we will need to prepare a memorandum on the proposal. When drafting a memorandum, you will often need input from multiple stakeholders, such as:

- ▶ a department's Management Advisory Committee (MAC) or Management Board (MB),
- ▶ a cross-departmental committee, or
- ▶ a Cabinet Committee and the related Senior Official's Group (SOG).

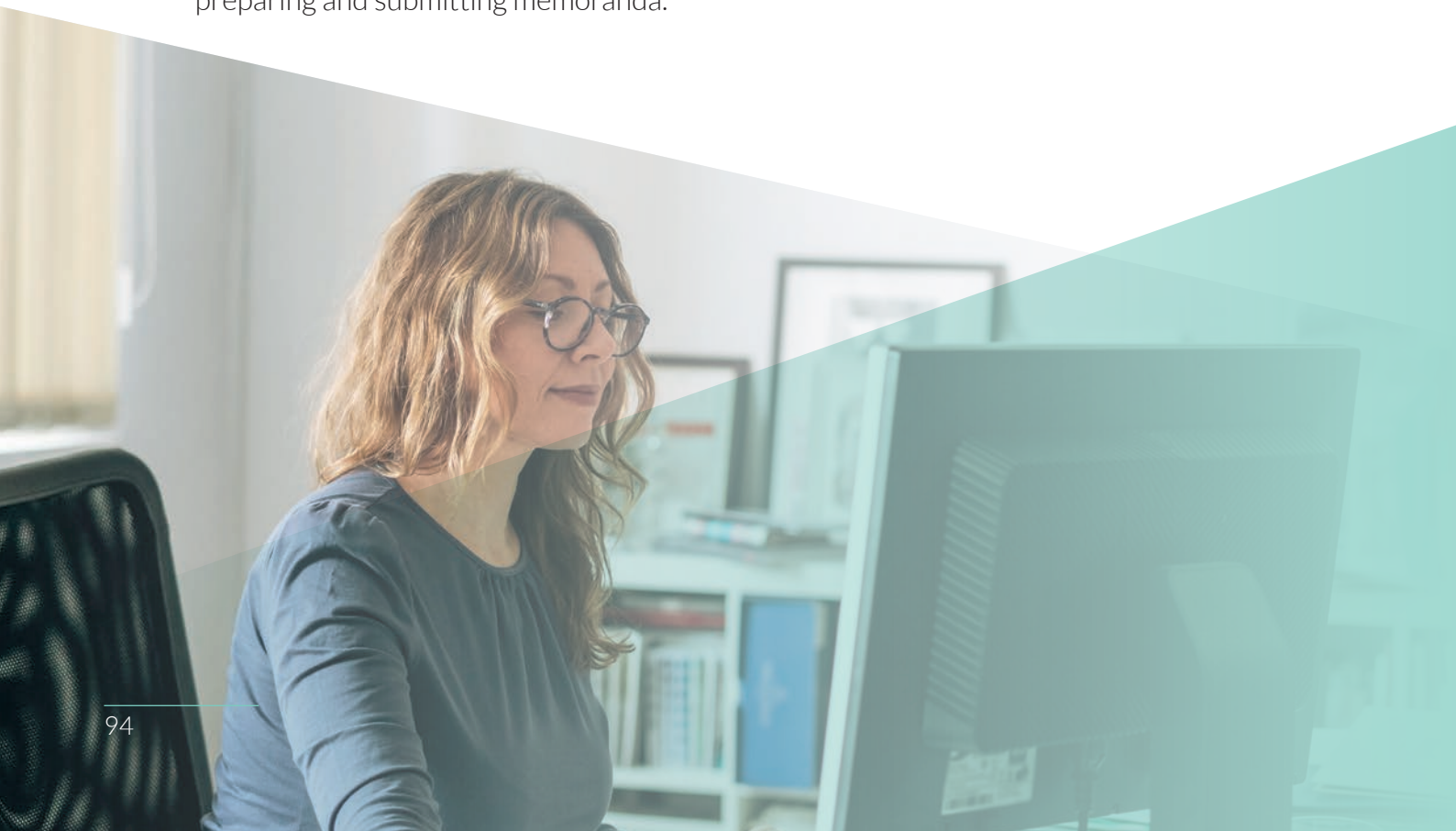
It is important to consider a policy issue from a variety of perspectives. This is why a SOG or an inter-departmental committee can be valuable, especially if there are cross-governmental aspects to the policy or implementation. They may help to raise unforeseen issues and suggest how to best resolve them.

Once a memorandum is approved by your Minister, the next step is to bring it to Government for information or approval. For policy, there are two main types of memoranda:

- ▶ **a memorandum for information** which serves to update Government on a particular policy area, and
- ▶ **a memorandum for decision** which typically asks the Government for approval to implement an action or change in a policy area.

Templates for both memoranda will be available within your department or can be sourced by your department's corporate services function on the e-Cabinet system.

There are five key steps involved in bringing a memorandum to Government, as indicated in Figure 11 below. We need to follow these steps and associated rules when preparing and submitting memoranda.



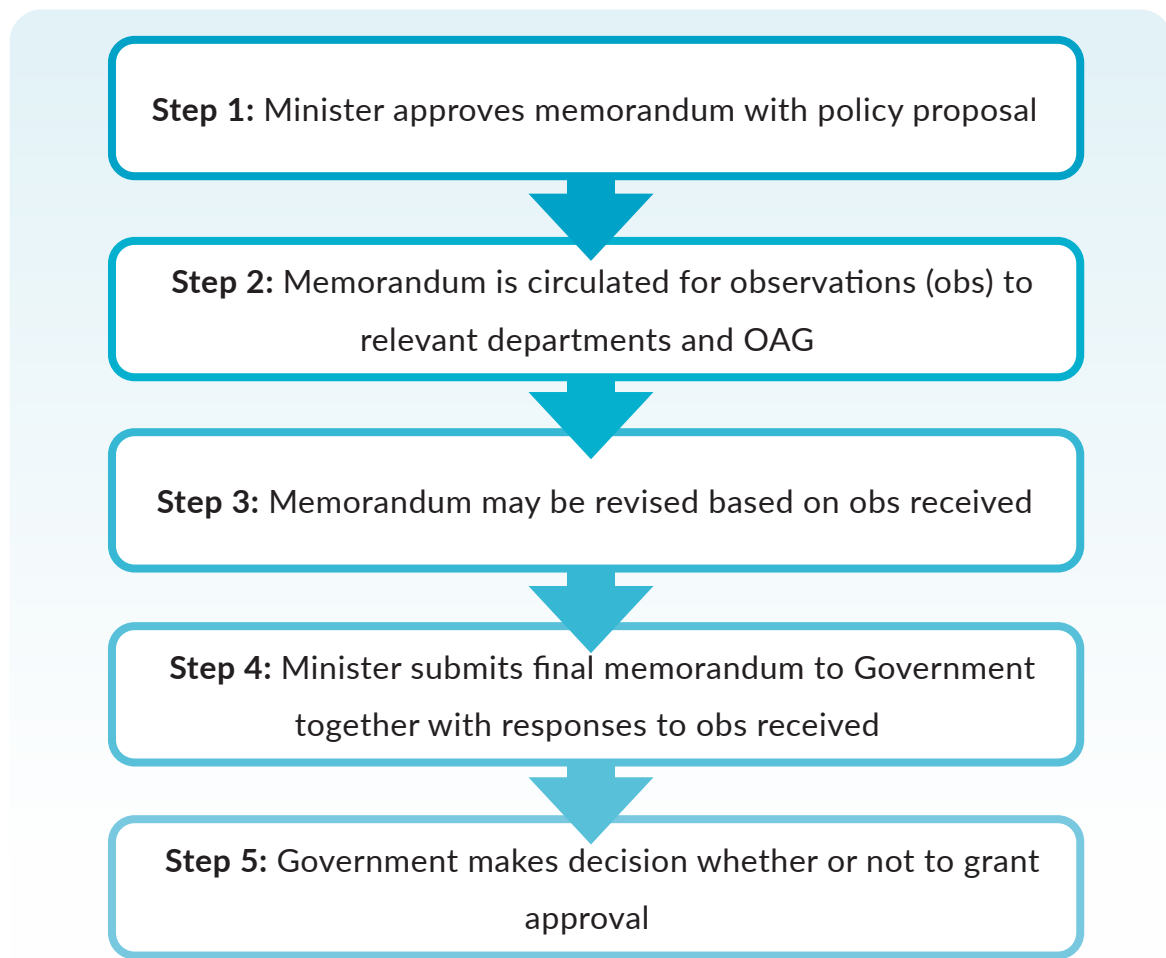


Figure 11: Submitting a Memorandum to Government ¹³

You can find further information on these steps and the submission of memoranda in the Cabinet Handbook which is listed in Appendix A.



Task 5: Seeking government approval

Government approval in policy development is the Government's formal endorsement and authorisation to implement a specific policy or initiative. This is typically given by the Cabinet or, in circumstances where they have clear delegated authority, a relevant Minister. This approval signifies the Government's commitment to support and deliver the proposed policy.

13. In addition to OAG, all memoranda must be circulated to the Departments of an Taoiseach and an Tánaiste and of any other leader of a Government party (in coalition Governments). All memoranda involving a cost to the Exchequer must be circulated to DPENDR. Any memoranda requiring co-operation and support from another Department or impacting on that Department's activities must be circulated to that Department.

The five-step process set out above outlines the formal 'memoranda' process for securing Government approval. However, each Government Minister will also rely on the advice of officials within their own department and on their own prior engagement with the topic when they decide whether to endorse the proposal set out in the memoranda. This highlights the importance of engaging with affected departments and relevant officials throughout the process.

As with the other phases of policy development, the Government approval process can be more complex than the five-step process. In practice, when you seek Government approval, the process may also involve:

Sub-Committee of the Cabinet: Substantive policy changes or proposals that involve or impinge on a number of Government departments will often be discussed first at a sub-committee of the Cabinet.

Engagement at Senior Officials Groups (SOGs) / Inter-Departmental

Groups: A SOG is a standing group of senior officials on a specific area of interest. They are aligned with the Cabinet Committees established by the Government. Officials from the sponsoring department circulate any policy proposals relevant to the SOG in advance of consideration by the relevant Cabinet Committee. Papers are discussed and refined over one or more SOG meetings. Where a SOG does not exist, or where a topic is of significant importance in its own right, a separate Inter-Departmental Group (IDG) might be established to refer the policy proposals.

Submission to a Cabinet Committee: Following engagement at SOG/IDG, a submission is normally made to a Cabinet Committee meeting. Typically, the sponsoring Minister will present the policy paper as prepared by officials and seek feedback from colleagues. Depending on feedback, the paper may be returned for a further review and consideration at a subsequent

Cabinet Committee meeting. Our role as officials is to prepare the Cabinet Committee paper, together with speaking notes and a frequently asked questions (FAQ) brief for our Minister. A senior official may also accompany the Minister to the meeting and contribute when invited to do so.

Bi-lateral engagement: Where an issue is particularly complex or sensitive, or where it directly impacts in a significant way on the work of another Minister, we may need to arrange bi-lateral meetings between the sponsoring Minister and their colleagues. This enables complex and sensitive issues to be discussed in greater detail than might be possible on the agenda of a Cabinet Committee meeting.

Submission to Government: Many memorandums can proceed directly to Cabinet and there is no requirement for them to be considered at a Cabinet sub-committee. These may be for matters related to previously agreed decisions, or matters addressing a department or sector which have limited or no cross-government implications.

After submitting a memorandum to Government, and if Government approval is received, responsible departments can proceed to implement the policy, including progressing legislation as set out above. They must make sure that civil servants have the necessary authority to carry out the approved plan effectively and transparently. This may require seeking separate expenditure sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery, and Reform. In addition, officials will often be required to report on progress to SOGS, IDGS, and at Cabinet Committees.

Checklist for Decide Policy Proposals and the Three-Pillar Framework

Pillar 1: Data and Evidence



- » Have you explained how and why existing data and evidence support the proposed policy?
- » Have any uncertainties about the proposal been shared in an upfront and clear way?

Pillar 2: Feasibility and implementation



- » Has a project management plan been developed? Does it include:
 - inputs,
 - activities, including project monitoring,
 - resources,
 - outputs, and
 - timelines?
- » Has a list of parties involved in each activity been developed? Does it specify those responsible, those accountable, those actions who should be consulted, and those who must remain informed? Has this list been shared?

Pillar 3: Legitimacy



- » Has approval been sought from stakeholders and veto players?
- » Has there been communication about the benefits and importance of the policy to the public, stakeholders, and decision-makers? Did it address any concerns

or misinformation that may have arisen during the process of seeking approval?

How was the effectiveness of communication checked?

- » Have you communicated with relevant stakeholders about how their perspectives and feedback have shaped the policy? Stakeholders include experts, affected communities, businesses, NGOs, and other government agencies.
- » Has a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) been conducted for the proposed policy?

Typical Output: Briefing Paper or Decision Memo for Minister Setting Out Policy Recommendations



When composing a brief, envisage a busy Minister raising two fundamental questions: 'Says who?' and 'So what?' The first prompts us to give compelling evidence to support our assertions, while the second urges us to trace our statements to concrete outcomes, often revealing practical advantages.

The brief's structure is crucial:

- » Start with a clear title that outlines the subject.
- » Give the core content and context in the middle portion.
- » Address practicalities and offer insights for future considerations.

Suggested Format for a Submission (decision-making brief)

A submission is the form in which most departments make recommendations to Ministers and seek decisions from them. Different departments use different formats. A typical format would include the headings below. While the total brief length will depend on the issue at hand and its complexity, it is important to try and keep it concise.

Title of brief: Capture the essence of the subject in the title.

Policy context: Define the policy to be decided on, or the problem to be solved. This could be something like **How to achieve X** or **Whether to do Y or Z**.

Suggested proposals: Set out the proposals for agreement by the Minister.

Decision required by: DD/MM/YYYY

Background: Describe the context of the demand and proposal

Briefing content: Include the points below.

Objective: What we are trying to achieve with this recommendation.

Proposal options: List the top three or four options and then compare their expected effectiveness in achieving our objective. Always consider the 'do nothing' option!

List the pros and cons of each option and highlight key implications. When listing the pros and cons of each option, remain objective. You are not trying to 'sell' them your preferred option. Provide a balanced overview of proposal options, including weaknesses of your preferred option and strengths of less preferred options. This is more persuasive and defensible than bias. Include more detailed information about implications of each option. Warn the Minister about any potential problem with an option or tell them about a particular advantage – for example, this will be popular with the motor trade but will raise protests from environmental lobbyists.

Incorporate political and public views. These are very important.

However, we can't let these views over dominate as no new tax would ever be introduced.

Include draft costings for each option, if possible, and where relevant.

Programme for Government (PfG): Tell Ministers how this proposal supports specific PfG commitments – for example, “this policy supports the commitment to increase the fund for students with disabilities”.

Presentation: Explain how you think the recommended policy option is likely to be received by the public and stakeholders. Suggest how best to present this decision to the public so it is easy to understand, compelling, and robust.

Next steps: Describe where we go from here and/or any action required.

Once a decision is made by the political system, it is up to the civil service to deliver that decision to the best of its ability.

Moving to Phase 5: Deliver Policy

All the good work completed in policy development achieves nothing if it does not result in, or lead to, effective delivery. If Government approval is secured, we must then take ownership of the task on ensuring successful implementation. Typically, this requires effective project management and risk management processes, together with robust governance and intensive communication and engagement with affected parties.

Moreover, if we find that effective delivery requires a significant change to the approved policy intervention, as it sometimes must, then this must be communicated to Government and appropriate approvals or sanctions secured.

Therefore, it is clear that the work of policy does not end with a Government decision. The implementation of policy, to which we now turn our attention, is where policy becomes reality.



PHASE

5

Deliver Policy

Phase 5: Deliver Policy



This phase focuses on how the proposed policy is implemented.

Typical **tasks and inputs** during this phase include:

- Task 1: Planning including Risk Management
- Task 2: Managing Resources
- Task 3: Developing Communications
- Task 4: Establishing Governance
- Task 5: Monitoring and Reporting
- Task 6: Planning to Evaluate

Typical **outputs** of this phase can, for example, include new taxes, services or infrastructure as well as information campaigns to inform people of these changes.

These can be supported by new processes and may require rule changes.

The expected **outcome** of this phase is the achievement of the policy objective.

Phase 5 (Deliver Policy) refers to policy implementation and undertaking the tasks needed to achieve the goals and objectives outlined in Phase 3 (Design with Best Advice). Putting in place a policy is often quite a complex process, with many interdependencies across systems, processes, stakeholders, changing behaviours, and organisational settings.

While most of the exploration and preparation for effective implementation should have been undertaken during the previous phases, these actions may require further refinement as you move towards realisation. We might need to deviate from expected steps or timelines due to issues concerning resource availability, timing, or unexpected events.

As a result, we need to be 'agile' in how we respond to such developments. Your delivery plan will have to be developed in such a manner that it is capable of dealing with unexpected events and still fulfil its main objectives. In part, this can be done by identifying the risks to project delivery and the mitigating actions to address these risks. It also requires a mechanism, such as scheduled project meetings, to regularly review and update progress. This will help ensure that you can make any necessary changes so that the policy becomes mainstreamed and fully operational.

Though it may be unlikely at this late stage, it is possible that a decision will be made not to implement the policy during, or at the start, of the implementation phase. If this happens, it may be due to external factors such as change of Government or priorities, developments in recent events, or budgetary reasons. Remember: policy development success is not judged solely on implementation. By completing the other phases so far, you have developed the work that could be used in a manner not originally foreseen.

The tasks in this phase are mainly focused on effective project management in terms of implementing and checking the policy is delivered in line with the outcomes expected. The flow chart below illustrates a possible process undertaken during this phase.

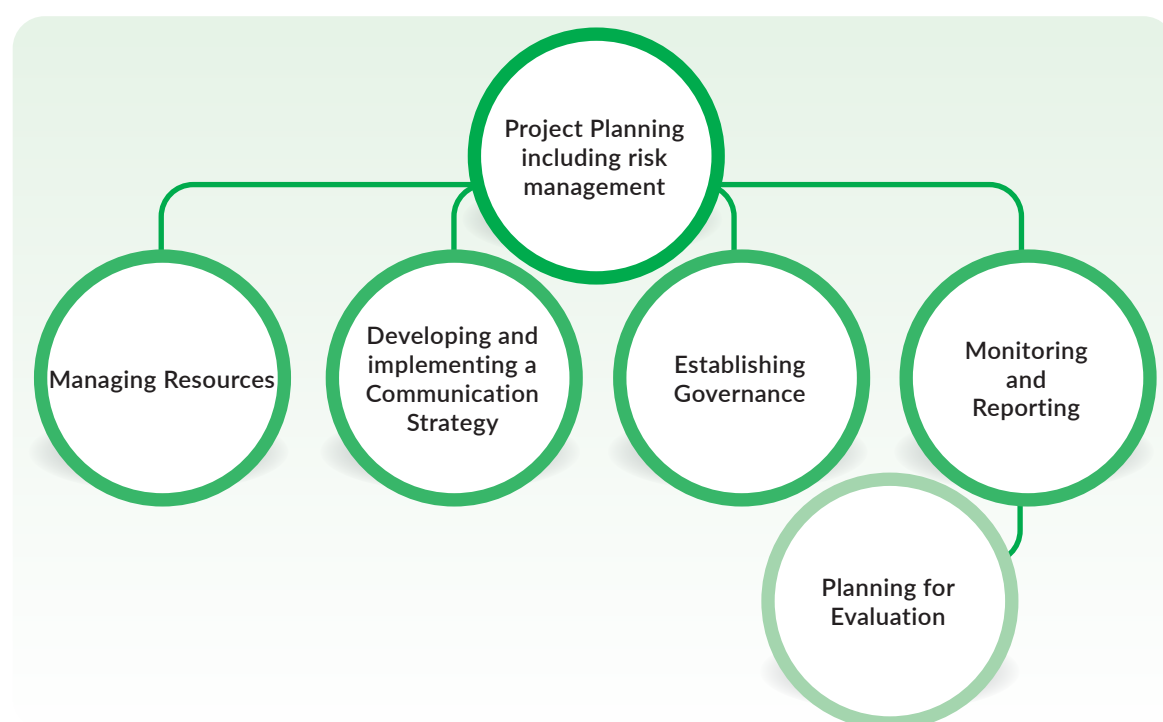


Figure 12: Typical process during Phase 5: Deliver Policy

Delivery Tasks



Task 1: Planning & Risk Management

We are more likely to successful delivery most policies if project planning and project management techniques are applied.¹⁴

In summary, a well-structured project methodology will include a plan that clearly:

- ▶ Specifies the overall project owner(s) and Sponsors(s),
- ▶ Outlines the steps and tasks required for the policy to be put in place,
- ▶ Defines the sequence in which the tasks need to be carried out (recognising that some tasks will overlap or can be completed in parallel),
- ▶ Assigns specific responsibilities for each task,
- ▶ Estimates realistic timelines for each step, and, as part of this approach,
- ▶ Sets out the 'critical path' of key actions that must be delivered in sequence and which, taken together, determine the overall project duration.

A project plan may include a number of workstreams which work in parallel to deliver the policy implementation, such as developing a resourcing plan or adapting an IT system.

Critically, the project approach should include a documented risk register for the project. The risk register should include mitigating actions and an assessment of what is known as the 'residual risk', which is the risk which remains after mitigating actions are implemented. These risks should be rated based on probability and impact and any risks which are rated "high" should be closely monitored.

In short, the project plan should be comprehensive, and you should make sure that

14. The Civil Service Management Board sponsored the development of a Project Management Handbook, and an associated Project Managers Network, for the Civil Service and across the wider public service. You are strongly encouraged to refer to this handbook and other project planning resources available at <https://www.gov.uk/en/publication/6748e-project-management-resources/>

you have the capacity and appropriate arrangements in place to deliver the project. This includes clearly designating roles and responsibilities to individuals or teams responsible for action. You need to regularly refer to the plan to:

- ▶ Track progress,
- ▶ Identify potential roadblocks, and
- ▶ Make sure that the policy's objectives are met within the specified timeframe.



Task 2: Managing Resources

We may be able to implement our policy initiatives by using existing organisations, staff, processes, and systems. However, in some cases we need additional resources or even the establishment of new organisations or service units.

If we need to develop additional organisational capacity, including new systems, people, and processes, then this needs to be a key objective during the implementation phase and will generally form a major part of the project effort. This might require:

- ▶ Developing and implementing a specific workstream focussed on a staffing plan including grading, role profiles, remuneration, recruitment, redeployment, etc,
- ▶ Developing and implementing IT systems, again as part of a specific workstream. For example, a change to penalty points policy would require an update of systems within several organisations,
- ▶ A workstream focused on linking systems and processes with other service providers, within or outside the department,
- ▶ Developing and implementing a financial plan, including funding, cash management, and accounting, for example, of a newly established agency, and
- ▶ Procuring and furnishing premises, where new premises are needed.

It is also critically important that we consider the resourcing of the project team necessary to deliver the plan at each phase in terms of people, finance, and supporting tools. All of these enablers need to be regularly reviewed to ensure they are sufficient.



Task 3: Developing Communications

As a priority, we need to establish effective communication throughout the implementation process. We need to:

- ▶ Ensure senior leadership are informed but also are aligned and consistent in communicating their support for the project or policy change,
- ▶ Create formal channels to consistently share updates, progress reports, and any changes with relevant stakeholders and with organisations involved in project delivery,
- ▶ Facilitate feedback to allow stakeholders to provide insights and voice concerns, enabling constant improvement, and
- ▶ Ensure consistent messaging across all communication platforms, especially if the policy requires a behaviour change by the public. This might require a well-designed and executed public communications campaign. If so, it will be important to engage with the Government Information Service (GIS), to ensure alignment with other Government information campaigns.

If we fail to communicate clearly, this can lead to misunderstandings among stakeholders as to the purpose and time frame for a policy, which can in turn undermine support.

Equally, many projects require collaboration across different parts of the organisation. In this case, if we fail to communicate, it can cause conflict over resources. This is particularly true in situations where there may be competing demands on an organisation for the same resources pool.

In considering how to approach these communication tasks, it is important to understand that the focus of the communication effort will change as the project proceeds, as will the audience with whom it is necessary to communicate.

At each stage, think about how you can make it 'known', make it 'clear', and make it 'ready'.



Task 4: Establishing Governance

Robust governance and oversight will guide policy implementation. We need to:

- ▶ Clearly define roles and responsibilities to support decision-making authority and accountability,
- ▶ Put in place a structured decision-making process to facilitate swift issue resolution and escalations when necessary,
- ▶ Put in place oversight of mechanisms, such as a project board or steering committee, to monitor progress, resolve conflicts, and make informed strategic decisions, and
- ▶ Ensure compliance with legal and ethical standards during implementation.

Through this process of Governance, it will be particularly important to ensure that the project management is fully compliant with relevant governance policies – for example, the Public Financial Procedures.



Task 5: Monitoring and Reporting

Monitoring progress and regular reporting offers insights into achievements, bottlenecks, and milestones, thereby creating an evidence-based foundation for strategic decisions and stakeholder engagement. We need to:

- ▶ Establish critical performance measures and indicators to gauge implementation progress and check if milestones have been reached, and
- ▶ Make sure relevant challenges during implementation are communicated at the same time as proposed strategies to deal with them (this will help to promote transparency and shared ways to resolve issues).

Regular reporting supports continuous improvement and accountability. It also helps safeguard fidelity to policy objectives.

When we are decided what we should monitor and report, it can be helpful to consider:

- ▶ The Inputs that will be developed or put in place towards – for example, the allocation of extra Gardai to road traffic duties,
- ▶ The Outputs that will be measured – for example, an increase in road traffic offences detected, and
- ▶ The Outcomes the policy is intended to achieve – for example, a reduction in road traffic accidents.

Usually, the project or policy implementation phase is most concerned with the delivery of defined 'inputs'; new processes, systems, etc. However, as we plan for evaluation to test if the policy is effective, the focus needs to turn to the measurement and monitoring of outputs and outcomes.



Task 6: Planning for Evaluation

As just set out, when finalising a policy we need to make sure policy implementation planning includes steps for review and, if necessary, evaluation. This is to help us identify if the policy initiative has been effective in achieving the desired outcomes or if it can be improved upon.

It can also inform the development of an implementation system by capturing data as part of the process of delivery itself. Being able to build in and then use administrative data is a very effective way to support evaluation and review.

Conducting evaluations usually involves specifying the performance metrics and measures that can be used to test outcomes. Ideally, this should be done in a way that enables us to isolate the cause and effect – for example, is a reduction in road traffic accidents following the allocation of extra Gardai to road traffic duties attributable to this factor or some other factor such as better weather.

It can be difficult to achieve such certainty in real-life conditions where there are so many factors in play. One approximate way of evaluating is to compare performance in different locations. It may be helpful to consult with IGEES colleagues for support and advice to determine the most appropriate form of evaluation for your policy initiative.

In addition to quantitative or numerical approaches to measuring outcomes, we should also consider the 'lived' or user experience and take on board the views of academics and other experts involved in the policy area. This can be achieved through the use of interviews, focus groups, and discussions.

An effective evaluation can identify the successes and improvements needed.

Checklist for Deliver Policy and the Three-Pillar Framework

Pillar 1: Data and Evidence



- » Is data being used to help monitor compliance with the policy and hold relevant entities accountable for their roles in implementation?
- » Is data collection ongoing during implementation? This needs to provide real-time feedback, enabling issues to be identified and addressed promptly.
- » Can it be "built-in" to new processes if not they are not already available?
- » Is data and evidence from reporting and monitoring being used to communicate the continued rationale behind the policy, its expected outcomes, and progress to the public and other stakeholders?
- » Has IGEES been involved in helping to establish the relevant set of performance metrics?

Pillar 2: Feasibility and implementation



- » Has the final project plan been prepared such that project milestones and objectives are in line with the wider strategic objectives of the policy itself?
- » Is there reliable confirmation that the required resources, particularly staffing identified at the planning phase, have been provided?
- » Are the early warning systems being managed and monitored so that performance and governance mechanisms have been effectively adhered to?

Are these systems also supporting timely and appropriate action where non-compliance is an issue?

- » Is it clear to all involved who are the people leading and accountable for delivering the policy and what their leadership roles involve?
- » Are there effective monitoring, reporting, and communications processes in place to facilitate effective leadership during implementation?
- » Are governance and risk mechanisms established and operating effectively from day one, including the monitoring and evaluation framework?

Pillar 3: Legitimacy



- » Are all internal and external stakeholders included, informed, and consulted **throughout** the monitoring and evaluation process? Are there systems and mechanisms being used to check this?
- » Are their mechanisms in place that ensure appropriate stakeholders (internal and external) have now been fully engaged and that a two-way communications process is maintained while policy is being implemented?

Typical Outputs



The outputs of this phase will depend on what is included in the implementation plan. Depending on the policy, typical outputs of this phase could include:

- ▶ Legislative changes, if required,
- ▶ New business or customer processes,
- ▶ Public information or promotion campaigns,
- ▶ New units or agencies, staffing, and organisation or system resources,
- ▶ Additional responsibilities for existing units or agencies, and
- ▶ A process of governance and feedback to evaluate progress, manage risks, and inform future policy.

Case Study: Delivery of the Second National Cancer Strategy 2006

Policy Demand:

With some exceptions, such as paediatric cancer, Ireland was performing poorly by international standards in relation to cancer risks, incidence, and survival. The fragmented delivery of cancer services was out of sync with best practice. Cancer services were spread across 36 hospitals and many with treating a small number of people and lacking full multidisciplinary teams. There was poor access as well as inequity in the provision, availability, and performance of cancer services when examined by region, gender, and by social class. The aim was to develop a cancer control system with the potential to achieve population and individual outcomes on a par with the highest international standards.

Policy Response:

The HSE published a plan which specified that eight hospitals were to be designated as cancer centres. These would provide primary curative surgery with full multidisciplinary care. The National Cancer Control Programme, led by Professor Tom Keane, was established. Its remit was to lead and implement the reorganisation of cancer services and set up a system of quality assurance designed to improve the care and outcomes for cancer patients.¹⁵

In a later testimony to the Oireachtas, where the implementation of the cancer strategy was described as one of the most successful examples of reform in the health service, Professor Keane described the delivery process as comprising three vital elements; communication, legitimacy through evidence, and leadership:¹⁶

15. NCPP (2014) Report on the Implementation of 'A Strategy for Cancer Control in Ireland 2006. Available at <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/cancer/pubs/reports/7-year-report.pdf>

16. https://www.oireachtas.ie/ga/debates/debate/committee_on_the_future_of_healthcare/2016-10-19/2/

Communication: Professor Keane noted that communication took up 50% of his time in a variety of different settings and to different audiences. He stated that communication about change was his first and most important priority and he engaged with the political system, medical professions, and the relevant unions. It is important to note that he set parameters on this dialogue and refused to revisit the strategy's guiding assumptions lest it delay implementation.

Legitimacy through evidence: A core pillar of the National Cancer Strategy's success was its reliance on robust evidence. Professor Keane highlighted that a substantial portion, about 80% to 90%, of the strategy's foundation was built on international literature and experiences from other nations. This evidence conclusively indicated that Ireland's cancer care practices were suboptimal. By comparing against international benchmarks like the OECD cancer outcome rankings, it was evident that Ireland's cancer outcomes were in the lower quartile. This compelling data-driven analysis underscored the need for major change, eroding any doubts about the legitimacy of the strategy's objectives.

Leadership: Professor Keane stressed the important of leadership at different levels. Oncologists were a vital community to lead on this initiative. They were receptive to the data analysis underlying the strategy, as were other medical groups such as coloproctology society representing most of the relevant surgeons. Support at ministerial and departmental level was also stressed.

While setting out with a clear plan is crucial to delivery, Professor Keane appreciated the need for constant engagement with people affected by the proposed decisions. As the above example shows, communication with a variety of affected parties can be vital parts of delivery but should not be an excuse for not implementing policy.

Monitoring and Evaluation: One final issue not addressed in the above is the importance of monitoring and evaluation in providing either assurance that interventions are producing the expected results or else signalling that things are not going as planned. The implementation of the cancer strategy was assisted by the

monitoring of key performance indicators (KPIs) that would demonstrate whether it was being successful. For example, you can see in the diagram below that the survival rate for males from cancer in 1994 – 1999 was just over 40% (41.5%: 4 out of 10 people). However, the survival rate for males in 2005 – 2009 increased significantly. It was almost 60% (59.6% or about 6 in 10 people).¹⁷

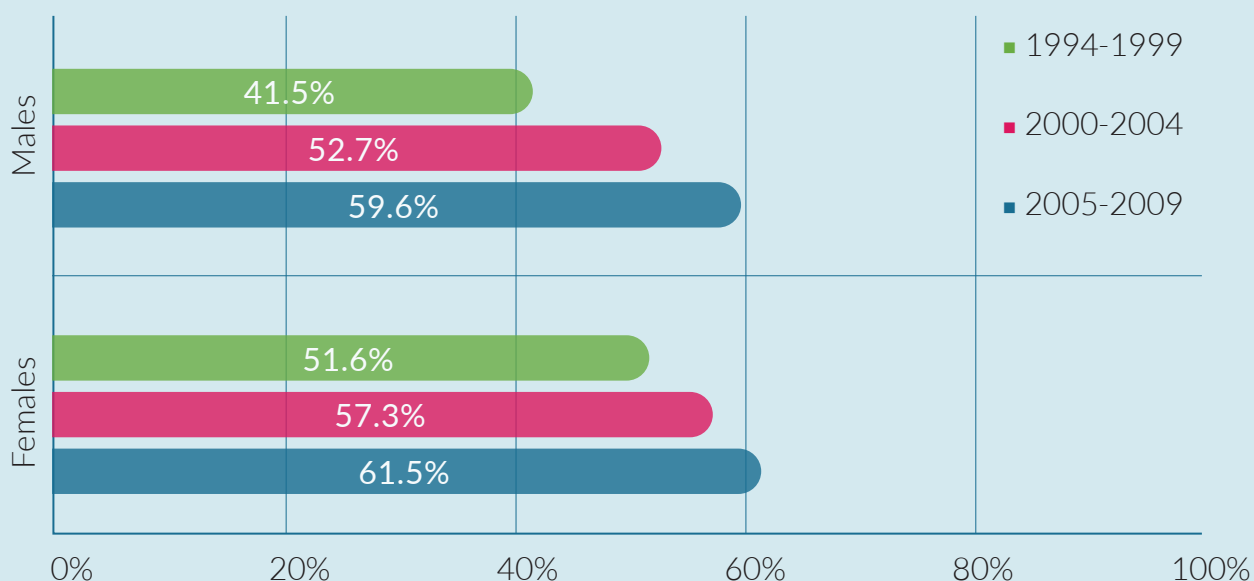


Figure 13: Five Year Relative Survival 1994–1999, 2000–2004 and 2005–2009

17. National Cancer Control Programme (2014) Report on the Implementation of A Strategy for Cancer Control in Ireland 2006. Available at <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/cancer/pubs/reports/7-year-report.pdf>



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One final issue not addressed in the above is the importance of monitoring and evaluation in providing either assurance that interventions are producing the expected results or else signalling that things are not going as planned.



Closing Case Study

Closing Case Study: The Policy Cycle in Practice – State Pension Reform

The following case study illustrates the policy cycle in practice using the example of the introduction of state pension deferral in 2023. The case study also highlights that it can take many years between the first consideration of a policy demand and the implementation of a policy response. For a policy to reach the final phase of the cycle, it requires the alignment of public support, political will, and the availability of a feasible solution.¹⁸

Phase 1: Demand for policy



The State Pension (Contributory) (SPC) is paid to people over the age of 66 who have enough qualifying social insurance contributions. Prior to 1 January 2024, the rate a person received was only calculated based on their contribution history on their 66th birthday.

Since the early 2000s successive Irish governments committed to supporting and encouraging fuller working lives. As people lived longer and healthier lives, many individuals were continuing to work further into their later years. However, they had no option to continue to build contributions towards their state pension after age 66.

In addition, there were those who, for various reasons, did not have the minimum number of contributions needed to qualify for the SPC by the time they reached 66 years of age. Even if they continued working after 66, they could not build contributions to allow them to qualify.

There was a question as to whether the 'one size fits all' approach of the Irish State Pension was appropriate.

Solutions to the issue had been considered for several years. A Green Paper on Pensions was published in 2007, followed by a National Pension's Framework in

18. If you are interested in learning more on this area, Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework is one representation of the conditions required for progressing policy.

2010 which included the policy agenda to enable 'postponement' of the SPC. The 'Roadmap for Pension Reform 2018-2023' included a commitment to develop proposals for a State pension deferral scheme, while the Programme for Government 2022 committed to introducing a system to enable people to defer receipt of their state contributory pension and establishing a Commission on Pensions to examine sustainability and eligibility issues with state pensions.

Phase 2: Deepen Understanding



A Pensions Commission was formed in November 2020. Its role was to examine sustainability and eligibility issues with regard to the State Pension. The Commission was an independent body comprised of knowledgeable and experienced academics, pension experts, members of civil society and representatives of workers and employers. The Terms of Reference for the Commission included an examination of pension deferral.¹⁹

Over the course of its work, the Commission invited experts to present and speak to the Commission on specific issues. It also conducted a public consultation process, which resulted in over 200 individual and organisational submissions and over 1,100 online survey responses. The Commission reviewed the evidence and submissions and published its final report in October 2021. The report established that changes were needed to the State Pension system and it set out a wide range of recommendations in this regard, including deferral.

Phase 3: Design with Best Advice



Officials in the Department of Social Protection examined each of the recommendations of the Commission and consulted across government through the Cabinet Committee system. This department also considered

19. gov.ie - About the Pensions Commission ([www.gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie/en/about-the-pensions-commission/))

the views of the Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands, and the Commission on Taxation and Welfare as part of these deliberations.

The department also did an actuarial analysis to examine the likely cost and impact of various policy options. It considered the political, social, and operational context to make sure that policy advice was evidence-based, legitimate, and implementable. Based on the consultation and analysis, officials provided policy advice to the Minister as to how to respond to the Pensions Commission recommendations.

Phase 4: Decide Policy Proposals



Officials in the Department of Social Protection prepared a memorandum for Government outlining the proposed policy direction and brought it to Cabinet for approval. In September 2022, the Minister for Social Protection announced landmark reforms to the State Pension system. Among these was the introduction of a pension deferral system which gave people the option to delay drawing their SPC until age 70 in return for an actuarially adjusted higher rate of pension. The department communicated these reforms to stakeholders and the general public.²⁰

Phase 5: Deliver Policy



The decision to provide for pension deferral had significant legislative, operational, and policy implications within and outside the Department of Social Protection.

Legislative matters: The conditions for payment of SPC are governed by legislation which would need to be revised.

20. [gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie) - Minister Humphreys announces landmark reform of State Pension System in Ireland (www.gov.ie)

Operational matters: State Pension applications and payments were managed using complex IT systems which would need to be redeveloped to support deferral.

Policy matters: Deferral of the SPC had implications on the payment of other social welfare payments such as job-seekers benefit, and the deduction of PRSI from employee income, which impacted on the work of the Revenue Commissioners.

The Government commitment was that this policy would be effective from 1 January 2024. To ensure delivery of this policy decision on time, the department established a project team to coordinate the various strands of work internally and to liaise with key stakeholders externally. The project team consisted of representatives from affected policy areas, operational teams, and IT. Team members also worked closely with legislation staff and external stakeholders including other Government departments and the Office of the Attorney General.

A communication's strategy was developed to inform the public of the upcoming changes, with a combination of print, radio, and online information pieces. The communication's team worked closely with the pension policy and operational teams to ensure the information was accurate and informative.

Primary legislation for state pension deferral was passed in December 2023, and the policy came into effect from 1 January 2024, supported by an extensive media campaign. At this point, the department began closely monitoring policy implementation, pensions data, media coverage, and public representations. As a new and significant policy, ongoing monitoring will be crucial to ensuring that the policy is meeting its intended objectives.



Conclusion

Conclusion

This handbook is intended to provide guidance to develop policy in a coherent and consistent manner across the Irish civil service. It has two main features, namely the three-pillar framework and the five phases. The former might be thought of as a compass and the latter as an itinerary. Using the three-pillars as a compass helps us assess whether we are on the right track or have strayed off course; and checking off the five phases tells us whether we have passed through the appropriate waypoints.

Some might say that the work environment of busy civil servants doesn't afford the time for such considerations. Given political and public demands, interventions need to be developed in a rapid manner and timeframe. While this is not necessarily the case – with the case of pension reform being just one instance of policy development over a number of years – it is true that sometimes policy will have to be developed and delivered quickly (e.g. the Pandemic Unemployment Payment). This demand might mean that civil servants will not be able to adhere to all five phases or the parts within them. What does this mean then for policy development?

At the very least, civil servants should still be able to use the three-pillar approach as a compass to check whether they are on the right path or not. Notwithstanding time pressures, policy development can be a messy process. The phases outlined in this handbook may need to be undertaken in a different sequence, or even in-parallel, depending on your policy needs. Regardless of the sequence, the three-pillar approach can be helpful in staying the course when the policy development process seems unclear and assist you in achieving the main tasks of each phase.

Using the three-pillar framework and the phases outlined in this handbook will empower you to competently assist Government in navigating the policy development process, and create policy that is built on sound data and evidence, fulfils the policy demand, delivers on Government commitments, and successfully engages with the public.

Appendix A: List of Resources

The following tables contain a series of tools, structures, and processes that are currently available to policy officials that may be of benefit to you in your work as you navigate through the policy development process.

These resources have been grouped under the three pillars of policy development with an accompanying suggestion about where that resource might be useful. It is important to note when reading the below that the pillar the resource is grouped under, and the phase where it might be useful, are only suggestions.

In practice, many of these resources could be grouped under all three pillars and could be of benefit at multiple phases. This fluidity reflects the point emphasised throughout the handbook; the policy development process is an iterative process and can be non-linear.

Data and Evidence	
Name	Phase where it might be useful
Strategic Foresight Community of Practice	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
National Data Infrastructure or Process Champions Group	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
National Risk Assessment	Phase 1 - Demand for Policy
Civil Service Research Network	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
IGEES analysis library: https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/a3f0b-igees-publications/	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding

Data and Evidence	
Name	Phase where it might be useful
Formal Statistics Liaison Group	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
CSO Administrative 'Data-room' service based on linked data	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
Strategic Policy Units	Phase 3 - Design with Best Advice
CSO Open Data support services	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
Irish Government Statistical Service secondment and short-term loan arrangements	Phase 3 - Design with Best Advice
Bespoke analysis of CSO statistics to support policy development	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
Enhanced Data-sharing through Data Governance Board	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
Equality Data Hub: https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/hubdashboards/	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
CSO 'Pathfinder projects' based on linked data	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
Analytics Dashboards (such as Ukraine Situation Report)	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding

Data and Evidence	
Name	Phase where it might be useful
Government Surveys (such as Trust in Government, CSEES): https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-trsu/trustsurveyoctober2023	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
Strategic Policy Discussions, Spending Review Conference, and Annual IGEES Conference	Phase 3 - Design with Best Advice
Provision of policy analysis training (for example, Cost Benefit Analysis, Counterfactual Impact Evaluation, Statistical analysis using R, or Stata)	Phase 3 - Design with Best Advice
Example of Request for Tender for Research Services: https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/fe97a-department-of-justice-requests-for-tender-for-research-services/	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
The Central Statistics Office (CSO) Datasets: data.cso.ie	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding

Feasibility and Implementation	
Name	Where it might be useful
Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA): https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2855d9-regulatory-impact-analysis-ria-and-related-legislation/	Phase 3 - Design with Best Advice
National Mapping Agreement (NMA): https://www.tailte.ie/en/surveying/services/national-mapping-agreement/	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
Project Managers' Handbook: https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/3274fd-quality-customer-service-initiative/	Phase 4 - Decide Policy Proposals
Public Service Innovation Network	Phase 3 - Design with Best Advice
Design Principles for the Public Service: https://www.design-system.ogcio.gov.ie/get-started/government-design-principles	Phase 3 - Design with Best Advice
Project Managers' Network	Phase 4 - Decide Policy Proposals
The Public Spending Code: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/public-spending-code/	Phase 3 - Design with Best Advice
Spending Review Process: https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/7dc2b1-spending-review/	Phase 5 - Deliver Policy
Public Procurement Guidelines for Goods and Services: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c23f5-public-procurement-guidelines-for-goods-and-services/	Phase 5 - Deliver Policy

Feasibility and Implementation	
Name	Where it might be useful
Small and Medium Enterprise Test (SME Test): https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/guidelines-and-template-for-application-of-the-sme-test.html	Phase 3 - Design with Best Advice

Legitimacy	
Name	Where it might be useful
National Framework for Children's and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making: https://hubnanog.ie/participation-framework/	Phase 1 - Demand for Policy
National Participation Office responsible for managing children and youth bodies:	Phase 1 - Demand for Policy
Guidelines on Public Consultation: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/e9b052-consultation-principles-and-guidance/	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
GIS Group on Skills, Networking and Capacity-Building	Phase 3 - Design with Best Advice
Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership Working with the Community and Voluntary Sector: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d4445-values-and-principles-for-collaboration-and-partnership-working/	Phase 1 - Demand for Policy
CSMB Sponsor Group on Civil Service Values and Leadership	Phase 4 - Decide Policy Proposals
Quality Customer Service Initiative (including 12 guiding principles, Guidelines for Customer Action Plans and Charters and QCS Network): https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/3274fd-quality-customer-service-initiative/	Phase 5 - Deliver Policy

Legitimacy	
Name	Where it might be useful
Open Government National Action Plan 2023–25: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/163db-irelands-fourth-open-government-national-action-plan-2023-2025/	Phase 1 - Demand for Policy
Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) Guidance	Phase 3 - Design with Best Advice
Suicide Prevention Impact Assessment Toolkit: https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/connecting-for-life/publications/suicide-prevention-impact-assessment-toolkit.pdf	Phase 3 - Design with Best Advice
Comhairle na nÓg, the national network of youth councils that represent and empower young people in Ireland: http://www.comhairlenanog.ie/	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
Participation Matters - NDA Guidelines on implementing the obligation to meaningfully engage with disabled people in public decision making: https://nda.ie/uploads/publications/NDA-Participation-Matters_Web-PDF_092022.pdf	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
Joint Policing Committees (JPC) / Local Community Safety Pilots	Phase 5 - Deliver Policy

Legitimacy	
Name	Where it might be useful
Pobal's Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making: https://www.pobal.ie/resources/a-guide-for-inclusive-community-engagement-in-local-planning-and-decision-making/	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
Public Participation Networks (PPNs)	Phase 3 - Design with Best Advice
International literature (such as EU Council Recommendations, OECD policy reports, Declarations by UN bodies like UNESCO)	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
Enterprise Forum: https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/enterprise-forum.html	Phase 1 - Demand for Policy
Local Community Development Committees (LCDC)	Phase 5 - Deliver Policy
Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC): https://www.cypsc.ie/	Phase 5 - Deliver Policy
International supports and advice (such as EU Technical Support Instrument; OECD Country Policy Reviews and Advice)	Phase 3 - Design with Best Advice

Legitimacy	
Name	Where it might be useful
Example of a Consultation on a Policy Scheme: https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/e2433-public-consultation-on-the-wage-subsidy-scheme/	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
Strawman document outlining a policy proposal to public: https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/a73aa-pay-related-benefit-scheme-consultation/	Phase 2 - Deepen Understanding
Cabinet Handbook: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/05c2e2-cabinet-handbook/	Phase 4 – Decide Policy Proposals

Appendix B:

Glossary

Term	Definition
Bottleneck	A point of congestion in the policy development process that creates a backlog, slowing or stopping further progress.
Budgetary assessments	An assessment of the financial resources/allocation of funding that a policy requires while it is being implemented. This assessment should account for further maintenance costs post implementation.
Cabinet	The decision-making body composed of senior ministers from government departments, led by the Taoiseach.
Causal links	Claims that assert a cause-and-effect relationship between two or more variables, such as exercise leads to improved health.
Central Statistics Office (CSO)	Ireland's national statistical office whose purpose is to impartially collect, analyse, and make available statistics about Ireland's people, society and economy.
Civil Service Management Board (CSMB)	A leadership body for the Civil Service composed of all Secretaries General and Heads of Offices that typically meet monthly to discuss cross-departmental issues.

Term	Definition
Cost-benefit analysis	A process used to measure the benefits of a decision or action, minus the costs associated with taking that action, using measurable financial metrics, for instance, revenue earned, costs saved.
Data collection	Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information on specific variables, usually for further analysis.
Data point	A single piece of information or value that represents a factor, for example if you are collecting data about the average age of a group of people, each individual person's age would be a separate data point.
Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)	An independent research organisation that conducts research and analysis on economic and social issues in Ireland.
European Central Bank (ECB)	The central bank of European Union Member States that use the euro. Its main role is to maintain price stability, primarily through the control of inflation and the issuing of bank notes.
European Commission	The executive branch of the European Union that is responsible for proposing EU legislation, implementing EU decisions, and managing its day-to-day affairs.
Focus groups	A useful information-gathering exercise where a small group of individual stakeholders discuss their opinions and experiences with officials or researchers during the policy development process.

Term	Definition
International Monetary Fund (IMF)	This is an international financial institution that works to achieve sustainable economic growth of its members by supporting economic policies that promote international monetary cooperation and trade.
Irish Water	Irish Water is the former name for Uisce Éireann which is Ireland's national regulated water utility.
Legislators	These are members of either House of the Oireachtas, the Dáil or the Seanad. Members of the Dáil are called Deputies or Teachtaí Dála while members of the Seanad are called Senators or Seanadóirí.
Lobby groups (sometimes called "advocacy" or "interest groups")	These are organised groups of individuals or entities that aim to influence government policy on specific issues. Lobbying is a regulated activity that must meet the criteria set out in the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015.
Local authorities (or local government)	These are typically County or City Councils that are composed of elected Councillors. The Councils are responsible for services in areas such as housing, roads, libraries, and others. Local authorities are overseen by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Term	Definition
Longitudinal study	A type of study that involves repeated observations of the same variables over long periods of time, for example tracking the academic performance of the same group of students over several years.
Ministerial briefing paper	A document which concisely explains a policy problem, and proposed solution, to the Minister. It can include a request for the Minister to sign-off on a policy decision.
Non-governmental organisation (NGO)	A non-profit organisation that operates independently of government. Their work usually addresses a social or political issue.
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)	An international organisation that promotes economic development and cooperation among member states through research, policy recommendations, and providing a platform to discuss global issues.
Outputs	The concrete products or services that are delivered when an activity or set of activities are completed. For example, the delivery of a media communication campaign, the enactment of legislation or the expansion of school meals services to new schools.
Policy gap	Policy gaps are typically the mismatch between the expectations of what a policy will achieve and what's actually achieved by the policy.
Policy objective	The goal of a policy that clearly sets out what the policy is aiming to achieve and what its outcomes are.

Term	Definition
Policy official	A public servant who is responsible for analysing, developing, providing advice about, and ultimately delivering on, a policy as decided by Cabinet. The role involves undertaking research, consulting with stakeholders, engaging with the public, and working with public bodies/agencies, amongst many other tasks.
Programme for Government (PfG)	A document that outlines what the government plans to achieve over its time in office, including policies in all societal areas (for example, economic, education, housing). It also outlines how the government will function.
Project management	The process of leading the work of a team to achieve all project goals within the given project constraints, for example, scope, time, budget, and so on.
Public confidence	The confidence, or trust, that the public has in government to act in their general interest and deliver on policy.
Public Spending Code	The set of rules and procedures that ensure that all Irish public bodies treat public funds with care and provide the best possible value for money when public money is spent or invested.
Revenue Commissioners	The government agency responsible for customs, excise and taxation in Ireland.

Term	Definition
Risk assessment	A systematic process of identifying and evaluating possible mishaps or risks that can occur during the policy. development process or as a result of a policy.
SMART goals	An acronym for specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely (SMART) goals. Breaking down goals or targets into SMART goals is helpful as it increases the chances of achieving your goal.
Stakeholder	A person or group with an interest in a policy issue, are affected by it, or could have a passive or active role in developing and implementing the policy designed to remedy that issue.
Stakeholder engagement	Stakeholder engagement is the process by which an organisation involves stakeholders in the policy development and decision-making process. It involves active listening and communication with stakeholders throughout this process.
Statistical data	Data that has been collected and/or generated by statistical procedures and can be broken down into two categories, qualitative (like personal views on a topic) or quantitative (like age).

Term	Definition
Steering committee	A steering committee is normally an advisory body that oversees a project and is composed of senior and experienced officials in that policy area. It should meet periodically to discuss the project and keep it on task. Key concerns for a steering committee include the direction, scope, budget and timeliness of a project.
Three-Pillar Framework	A framework based on data and evidence, feasibility and implementation, and legitimacy, that together provide a framework approach for good policy making. This approach can be applied at every stage of the policy making process.
Troika	A term used for the decision-making body composed of the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
Workforce planning/forecasting	Workforce planning / forecasting is the process by which an organisation analyses, forecasts, and plans their workforce supply and demand as well as other issues like gap assessment and talent management.

[illegible]

Notes

[illegible]

