



Policy Profession  
Skills and Knowledge  
framework

Policy Profession

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# Introduction to the Policy Profession

## Skills and Knowledge framework

The policy profession is the professional group for those working to bring together evidence, politics and delivery to support ministers in achieving outcomes for government and change in the real world.

The policy profession works across the Civil Service in the UK to help:

- the Civil Service be better at developing and implementing policy
- build a policy profession community across the Civil Service, encourage a cultural change within the profession in order to implement the Civil Service reform plan and enhance the career opportunities of policy makers.



A policy professional sees their career, learning and development anchored around policy work and seeks to achieve the level of competence, behaviour and status that goes with being professional in their work. Like all civil servants, policy professionals share a common set of transferable behavioural skills set out in the Civil Service Competency Framework (CSCF). As with expert professions such as law or finance, some roles require professional knowledge, skills and experience in policy and these are set out in the Policy Skills and Knowledge framework.

Aims for the Policy Skills and Knowledge framework	Intended uses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set clear expectations of performance</li> <li>• Capture what is unique to policy</li> <li>• Improve consistency of capability across and within departments</li> <li>• Allow straightforward movement between departments</li> <li>• Provide the basis for developing the policy professional curriculum</li> <li>• Provide a resource to be used in recruitment and selection, performance and talent management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help individuals working in policy roles develop the skills they need</li> <li>• As part of the performance management process</li> <li>• Inform talent management, career and workforce planning</li> <li>• As a basis for internal and external recruitment</li> <li>• Inform reviews of departmental policy capability.</li> </ul>

## Levels of policy skills and knowledge

The levels of policy skills are: **Developing**, **Effective** and **Strong**.

**Developing:** Those who are developing policy skills, regardless of their grade, will work on a small part of a relatively uncontroversial or relatively straightforward policy or, where they have transferred to a policy role from another discipline at a senior level, will be developing the skill-set in role where the post/team allows.

**Effective:** This framework sets out what an effective policy professional at Grade 7 would be good at, although not every role or policy will require a policy professional to do all of these things all of the time. They are confident across many of the skills and knowledge areas or strong in one or two areas.

**Strong:** Those who are strong in these skills, regardless of their grade, will have led high profile, controversial and complex policies with senior ministers. They have experience, and are confident in, the full breadth of policy skills and knowledge. They share their experience with others contributing to the body of knowledge and development of the profession.

## How does this relate to grades?

Broadly the level of complexity of policy increases with grade with more senior grades being responsible for a broader policy area. More senior grades are also more likely to include greater management and leadership responsibilities and will need to set the culture for policy work in their team as well as ensuring their teams have appropriate policy capability.

Grade	Policy Skills and Knowledge	Typical work and expectations
SCS	<p>Where required for the role, policy SCS will be <b>effective or strong</b> in their policy skills.</p> <p>Where appropriate to the role, policy SCS may be developing their policy skills in role particularly if they are coming in from another profession or organisation. In this case policy skills and knowledge can still be part of the performance management requirement although not essential at recruitment.</p>	<p>At this level they will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have responsibility for a broad area of policy</li> <li>• be involved in setting and communicating the context</li> <li>• find networking and cross-government working becoming more important</li> <li>• have established skills in briefing and making recommendations</li> <li>• be learning more advanced problem solving techniques</li> <li>• be responsible for setting the culture of policy work in their area, ensuring they have the appropriate team capability and sharing their experience for others to learn from.</li> </ul>

G6/7, S/HEO and EO >

Grade	Policy Skills and Knowledge	Typical work and expectations
G6/7	<p>The expectation at this level is for effective policy skills and knowledge confidently applied. They <b>may be strong in one or two areas</b> and will continue to develop their skills more broadly.</p> <p>Where appropriate to the role, policy G6/7s may be developing their policy skills in role particularly if they are coming in from another profession or organisation as above.</p>	<p>At this level they will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be confident across all the areas especially on oral communication, applying problem solving tools and techniques and working with subjective evidence</li> <li>• be more involved in the development of policy and planning the work as well as its implementation and maintenance</li> <li>• Find developing networks and forward thinking are becoming more important as is developing others.</li> </ul>
S/HEO	<p>At this level policy skills and knowledge will often be <b>developing</b> and depending on the post holder's experience or background they <b>may be effective or even strong in one or two areas</b>. Use of the competencies in the Civil Service Competency Framework will allow them to move into roles in other functions.</p> <p>Policy skills and knowledge are more likely than at SCS/G6/G7 to be 'desirable' or 'not required' at recruitment as they can be developed in post.</p>	<p>At this level they will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be confident with recommendations and decisions</li> <li>• have greater involvement in policy development using more structured tools and techniques</li> <li>• be starting to develop oral briefing, communication skills and forward thinking.</li> </ul>
EO	<p>At this level they will rely primarily on the generic Civil Service Competency Framework skills and will be <b>developing</b> policy skills and knowledge in some areas.</p> <p>Policy skills and knowledge are more likely than at other grades to be 'desirable' or 'not required' at recruitment as they can be developed in post.</p>	<p>Their role is likely to involve getting information, including engaging with frontline experts, and bringing it together primarily in writing. They will need to know their subject area and who to contact. The area will often be a narrower, more specific area than for other grades and they are often involved in the maintenance and implementation of policies. They are able to say what they are doing and why and have an understanding of the context they are working in.</p>

## What is policy work?

Policy work is about delivering change in the real world. This is important and challenging work: the problems tackled matter to and have a real impact on millions of people both in the UK and abroad, and are often complex and deep-seated.

That is why policy work relies on contributions from a wide range of colleagues in many different types of roles, **working together as one team** to achieve better outcomes and innovative solutions. It also depends on working openly and collaboratively with other parts of government, and with the private and voluntary sectors.

Policy is political, this is democracy at work – political judgement will also be exercised in the decision making process.

## What is policy?

Policy making is an activity intended to achieve the purposes of elected politicians in government. The 'policies' that this activity produces can be many different things including formal expression of activities undertaken by government to achieve outcomes e.g. through strategies, announcements, legislation, but also includes current practice, doing nothing, and political activity as well as activity that may not fulfil the goals of government in a simple and direct way.

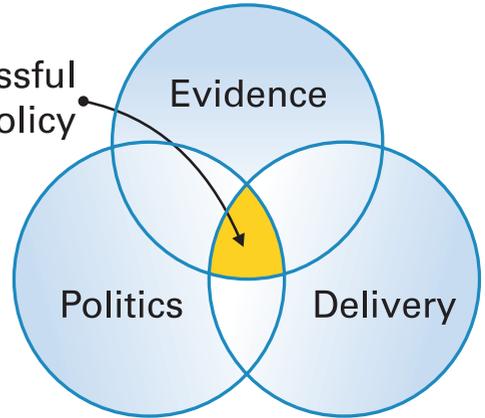


## What is good policy work?

Successful policy depends on:

- the development and use of a sound evidence base
- understanding and managing the political context
- planning from the outset for how the policy will be delivered.

Successful  
Policy



Policy officials must bring together these three elements to deliver successful outcomes for government.

There are four areas of activity where these three elements of successful policy apply although they don't necessarily happen discretely or in a specific order and engagement happens throughout:

- **Understanding** the context
- **Developing** the options
- **Getting** to a decision
- **Making** it happen

The profession deliberately doesn't have a set model or framework for policy development or problem solving, although a number of tools and techniques are taught on the profession's learning programmes. Many departments, and others outside the Civil Service, have created good models and they tend to be very similar in that they include a) understanding the context b) developing options c) getting to a decision d) making it happen. The challenge is how these problem solving models interact with the complexities of real life and politics and this is where the Policy Skills and Knowledge framework aims to articulate what makes policy development and implementation hard and what the professional skills and judgements are.

## Successful policy and the Policy Skills and Knowledge framework

There are four areas of competence in the Policy Skills and Knowledge framework. They directly relate to the description of successful policy above. They are:

1. **Bring together** evidence, politics and delivery to support ministers
2. **Evidence:** Developing and using a sound evidence base
3. **Politics:** Understanding and managing the political context
4. **Delivery:** Planning from the outset for how the policy will be delivered

Your level of professional policy skills and knowledge is determined against the framework as a whole – you are either developing, effective or strong.

## Application of the Policy Skills and Knowledge framework

### Performance Management

1. Establish whether policy skills and knowledge are needed for the job above and beyond the CSCF competencies.
2. If they are, decide which of the 'WHAT' objectives require policy skills and knowledge. Note the level – effective, developing or strong - of policy skill and knowledge required in the 'HOW' objective, as with the CSCF competences, emphasising any specific relevant points from the framework if you need such as 'relationship with Ministers' or 'consider alternative delivery models'.
3. Consider policy skills and knowledge as required for the current role and for future career development or Continuing Professional Development (CPD) when agreeing development objectives.
4. Review the WHAT, HOW and development objectives at key points throughout the year using progress against both the WHAT and the HOW objectives to assess performance.

### Development

1. Consider any policy skills you need to develop to deliver your current 'WHAT' and 'HOW' objectives and what you want to develop as part of your CPD in your career, as part of your own performance management process above.
2. Assess your strengths and weaknesses using the self assessment checklist.
3. Find appropriate learning and development opportunities in the work place, through online or other routes or face to face courses.
4. Agree appropriate development objectives.
5. Review your learning regularly.

## Recruitment

1. Decide whether policy skills and knowledge are essential for your vacancy or if you're happy to consider people from any discipline using the CSCF only, perhaps developing policy skills and knowledge in post.
2. Use the Civil Service Jobs site to advertise your vacancy across government or use your departmental systems.
3. Select type of role – Policy. In the future suggested competencies from the CSCF will come up as options along with the Policy Skills and Knowledge framework.
4. Select up to six competencies, typically four or five from the CSCF and one which is Policy Skills and Knowledge. You can require policy skills and knowledge at 'Developing', 'Effective' or 'Strong' level where appropriate for your vacancy. You can select, and manually enter, specific elements of the Policy Skills and Knowledge framework to emphasise them if you need, separating into more than one competency if it is more appropriate such as "enables effective public administration" or "understands political influences and government context".
5. Sift, interview, appoint and induct as per your departmental guidance. If they are new to policy, include a policy induction, using the Policy Skills and Knowledge framework to set out what is expected of them in their new role and the policy curriculum foundation modules to structure their learning.

The framework can also be used for talent management, workforce planning, training needs analysis and organisational capability assessments.

# The Policy Profession Skills and Knowledge framework

## Summary

Policy Professionals bring together evidence, politics and delivery to support

1. Advise ministers, honestly, impartially and objectively, on the options that will work to help ministers
2. Consider and balance all three elements – evidence, politics and delivery - at whatever stage the
3. Bring together often discordant information, manage the constraints of a given area and produce

### Evidence

Developing and using a sound evidence base

**Investigate, assess and advise on the political and practical implications of government policy using evidence and ideas from a wide range of sources to meet required outcomes**

1. Compile, assimilate, distil, interpret and present a strong evidence base from a wide range of types of evidence and opinions to form a sound and compelling base to inform coherent policy making
2. Understand and apply approaches, techniques and tools that draw on a wide range of inputs and improve the quality and pace of the analysis stage of policy making where it is appropriate

### Politics

Understanding and managing the

**Monitor developments in the political environment, honestly, objectively and impartially to respond to the changing context and to ensure the profession operates**

1. Understand political influences
2. Enable effective public administration
3. Understand and apply knowledge of the political sector and constitutional context
4. Aware of, and familiar with, government aims\*

\*key areas list agreed by Policy Professionals and reviewed regularly

### Ministers in achieving outcomes for government

Ministers make informed choices

the policy is at

the 'best available' option

<p>the political context</p>	<p><b>Delivery</b> Planning from the outset for how the policy will be delivered</p>
<p>political context and give timely, advice and recommendations context in which ministers</p>	<p><b>Develop sound policy, fast, in a public and political arena, and convert this policy into robust deliverable plans at whatever stage the policy is at, using creativity and confidence</b></p>
<p>aces and government context</p>	<p>1. Investigate and advise on practical aspects of policy options throughout the life of the policy</p>
<p>Administration</p>	<p>2. Convert policy into robust delivery plans, and implement and maintain policy collaboratively and accountably</p>
<p>ledge of the Civil Service, public context</p>	<p>3. Undertstand and use strong systematic approaches to understand how policies will work, and are working, in practice</p>
<p>current policy context and</p>	<p>4. Consider a full range of delivery models to achieve the outcome</p>
<p>Profession Board and</p>	

## Bring Together

Bring together evidence, politics and delivery to support Ministers in achieving outcomes for government

1. Advise ministers, honestly, impartially and objectively, on the options that will work to help ministers make informed choices
2. Consider and balance all three elements – evidence, politics and delivery - at whatever stage the policy is at
3. Bring together often discordant information, manage the constraints of a given area and produce the 'best available' option

## Evidence

Developing and using a sound evidence base

Investigate, assess and advise on the political and practical implications of government policy using evidence and ideas from a wide range of sources to meet required outcomes

**Compile, assimilate, distil, interpret and present a strong evidence base from a wide range of types of evidence and opinions to form a sound and compelling base to inform coherent policy making**

- Establish and bring together relevant facts, figures, ideas, analysis and research
- Quickly develop and apply sector and subject knowledge, including the history of the area, to understand the problem and develop a robust evidence base
- Use evidence from lessons learned, evaluations, academic and other research, parallel initiatives, other sectors and internationally
- Recognise and engage the right internal and external expertise and understands their contribution
- Understand the legal context and legislative framework in which they operate
- Establish systems to incorporate evidence from accountability processes, the media and interested parties
- Understand the limitations of evidence sources and plan to mitigate gaps
- Present compellingly, effectively and concisely orally and in writing

Understand and apply innovative approaches, techniques and tools that draw on a wide range of inputs and improve the quality and pace of the analysis stage of policy making where it is appropriate

- Draw on a wide range of inputs from the earliest stages of a policy cycle
- Understand the digital tools available to broaden the conversation
- Understand user centric approaches (where appropriate) to define problem and consider innovative solutions
- Understand and appreciate diversity in data
- Monitor ongoing validity of policy priorities in light of new evidence and ensure policies are evaluated after an appropriate time
- Familiar with and use policy processes i.e. risk analysis, cost-benefit analysis, **business cases** and **impact assessment** principles, policy appraisal (**Green Book**, including ROAMEF policy appraisal and evaluation cycle, and **Magenta Book**)



# Politics

Understanding and managing the political context

Monitor developments in the political context and give timely, honest, objective and impartial advice and recommendations to respond to the changing context in which Ministers operate

**Understand political influences and government context**

- Build collaborative, trusting and professional relationships with ministers, understand the source of ministers' interest and allow for appropriate challenge
- Translate ministerial vision into a clear outcome, and develop a clear and shared understanding of what the problem is and what success looks like; test mutual understanding of the problem and goal
- Respond to change in relationship with ministers at different stages of policy development; balancing the political view with other considerations i.e. evidence and delivery
- Describe key arguments clearly both orally and in writing, predicting potential challenge and criticism
- Understand where issues sit within the priorities of government as a whole, considering impact on and implications for other policies, programmes and other government objectives,
- Manage policy conflicts effectively, identifying and making links across government

**Enable effective public administration**

- Support effective cross-government decision-making
- Provide relevant and reliable advice and evidence to support ministers in making, explaining, defending and implementing decisions at whatever stage the policy is at
- Support ministers' engagement with parliament and enable public accountability in their area
- Represent government policy effectively under close public and parliamentary scrutiny
- Ensure compliance with clearance processes, manage responses to political accountability and government control procedures and take legal considerations into account
- Deliver Westminster legislation and effective EU influencing and negotiating

**Understand and apply knowledge of the Civil Service and government context:**

- The role of minister and civil servant and its implications in practice
- Government Budgetary cycle and public sector funding arrangements and models and their implications for government policy
- Parliamentary, legislative and election cycles and their implications
- HMT, Cabinet Office, No10 and Cabinet Committee decision making process and procedures
- EU, International, devolved and local government constitutional arrangements and their implications

**Aware of, and familiar with, current policy context and government aims\*:**

- Growth, reduce costs, tackle debts, prioritise spend, seek better deals
- Open public services, big society, localism through distribution of power
- Transparency, data and accountability
- Behavioural Insights
- Actively shaping EU policy

\*key areas list agreed by Policy Profession Board and reviewed regularly

## Delivery

Planning from the outset for how the policy will be delivered

Develop sound policy, fast, in a public and political arena, and convert this policy into robust deliverable plans at whatever stage the policy is at, using creativity and confidence

**Investigate and advise on practical aspects of policy options throughout the life of the policy**

- Advice includes full consideration of do-ability, feasibility, practicality (co-designed where appropriate) and affordability
- Where possible, develop policy thinking practically, using techniques such as prototyping and Randomised Control Trials
- Policy is designed and monitored to bring about the desired outcomes – and iterations are made continuously throughout the delivery phase where necessary
- Awareness of the processes of adjacent disciplines such as design, that are geared to the production of deliverable ideas
- Policy options are innovative, sustainable, affordable, commercially aware and offer value for money
- Policy options have their short and long term impacts assessed for the impact of potential future events and are able to respond to change
- Systematically identify issues that could affect implementation and addressing them/steps to mitigate gaps or weaknesses throughout the life of the policy
- Impacts, benefits, risks and adverse feedback are communicated when appropriate with communication that is compelling and engaging, timely & relevant, with robust arguments and clarity about the implications for policy in practice

**Policy is converted into robust delivery plans and then implemented and maintained collaboratively and accountably**

- Monitor the performance of policy using accurate, timely and relevant, quantitative and qualitative assessments including incorporating feedback from the delivery chain and making the best use of the wealth of feedback generated in an era of “digital by default”
- Work with delivery partners inside and outside of government to resolve problems effectively, identify common efficiencies, and advise ministers on the changes that result
- Maintain political legitimacy, and mandate, throughout the life of the policy, working across government to co-ordinate progress towards shared objectives

**Familiar with and use strong systematic approaches to understanding how policies will, and are working, in practice**

- Familiar with a range of techniques such as behavioural insight, customer insight and working with the frontline and delivery system to inform policy development including assessing the impacts on customers and frontline
- Build in, and use, policy evaluation right from the start, including Randomised Control Trials and other early feedback mechanisms, to develop an understanding of what works and adapt the approach
- Ensures that lessons learnt, including about what works, become part of the evidence base

**Consider a full range of delivery models to achieve the outcome**

- Familiar with a wide range of delivery models including the system stewardship role of government
- Undertake system analysis including the potential and limitations of existing systems, building in and managing accountability whilst leaving maximum room for discretion

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