



# Policy Profession Standards

Our competency framework  
for professional development

The Policy Profession Standards describe the skills and knowledge required by policy professionals at all stages of their career and provide the competency framework for their professional development.





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# 2021 Update

The Policy Profession Standards set out the expectations of all policy professionals across the UK. The framework defines the skills, knowledge and activities required for each Standard as individuals progress from gaining foundational knowledge, to becoming a skilled practitioner, to being a policy leader. The framework provides a guide for the personal, professional and career development of the Civil Service Policy Profession.

This document is an update of the framework, originally published in 2018. In this revised and refreshed version, the Standards are fewer and simpler. The aim is to make the framework easier to use and to ensure the Standards reflect the Civil Service needed to meet current and future challenges effectively.

The Policy Profession Standards are a competency framework for all UK Civil Servants involved in policy work and operating in a policymaking environment. By codifying the core skills of policy practice, the framework is designed to support the multidisciplinary teams so critical to effective policy making – bringing together the domain knowledge, system expertise and specialist skills required to solve public policy

challenges more effectively for our nations, communities and citizens.

The updated Standards have been refined via consultation with subject matter experts across the Civil Service, building on the evidence base that underpinned their first iteration. Consultation ensured the refresh was built upon best practice and emerging priorities, not only for the Policy Profession, but for all the multidisciplinary professions and functions who are partners in the policy process.

The Standards framework describes the essential features of policy practice in any administration. The Standards have been redesigned to be equally applicable across all the nations of the UK. This marks the first time the Policy Profession will have a common capability framework right across the Civil Service, with shared expectations in every nation. This framework for policy practice – what policy is and what skills it involves – is also useful throughout the public sector, where we continue to build partnerships across public services and tiers of government.





# Using the Standards: The Three Pillars

The Policy Profession Standards framework is arranged around three pillars that comprise the key skills of all policy practice:

- **Pillar One: Strategy** – *using evidence and analysis.*  
Generating, assessing and applying evidence and analysis to understand the context and develop new strategies.
- **Pillar Two: Democracy** – *understanding and supporting good governance.*  
Understanding and supporting good governance and accountability through the production of robust and challenging advice to inform decisions.
- **Pillar Three: Delivery** – *designing policy implementation.*  
Designing policy implementation and delivery systems in collaboration with delivery partners and users, including how policies will be evaluated and improved.

Each pillar contains four Standards with 12 Standards in total. These three pillars represent fundamental practices relevant to every policy area. The relevance of individual Standards will vary for each policy.





# Using the Standards: The Three Levels

The Policy Profession Standards define the skills, knowledge and activities required for each Standard as individuals progress from gaining foundational knowledge, to becoming a skilled practitioner, to being a policy leader. These three levels of learning set expectations for what a policy professional can do for every Standard at any grade or career stage, from attaining a universal baseline of knowledge at level 1, to applying skills and knowledge in practice at level 2, to developing deep expertise at level 3.

- **Level 1: Developing** – The Civil Service expects all policy professionals to be aware of and understand all the Standards by their first Grade 7 role in any Civil Service organisation – this is Level 1 competency. Level 1 represents the baseline for Civil Servants and is relevant to roles at the EO, HEO, and SEO grades. The Standards framework is multidisciplinary, as baseline competency includes understanding when and how to involve other professions and functions.
- **Level 2: Practitioner** – As policy professionals progress they will have the opportunity to apply skills and knowledge and will become skilled practitioners, often leading policy areas and teams – this is Level 2 competency. Level 2 competency is not universal: policy professionals are not expected to be able to apply the skills and knowledge associated with every Standard. Instead they will

develop unique individual combinations of skills as a result of their career path.

- **Level 3: Expert** – Policy professionals may progress from skilled practice to developing deep expertise for certain Standards, becoming policy leaders and sometimes undertaking professional qualifications – this is Level 3 competency. At Level 3 competency, policy professionals can demonstrate exemplary skills and knowledge across the Civil Service.

These three levels of learning are not directly linked to grades, as individual career experiences usually result in colleagues operating at different levels in different skill areas, regardless of their position within the organisational hierarchy. Furthermore, most roles will span multiple levels of skills and knowledge. As a broad guideline, Level 1 is relevant to a typical role at the EO–SEO grades and should be attained before the first G7 role; Level 2 to G7–G6 grades; Level 3 to SCS grades. In practice most roles will require a higher level of specific technical skills or knowledge for some elements of the role, with these expectations defined at Level 2 and Level 3. The levels of learning are cumulative – level two and three capability assume that level one and two capability has already been attained and where this isn't the case assume that level one should be sought first.



# Understanding the Standards

The Standards are designed to be used as a competency framework:

- by policy professionals, to understand expectations, and develop to meet them;
- by Civil Service organisations, to structure their capability-building, workforce planning, or performance management activities;
- by the Policy Profession Unit, to create a shared foundation for the support provided to professionals and the Civil Service.

## Learning Outcomes

Each Policy Profession Standard has a set of learning outcomes. The learning outcomes provide a summary description of the skills, knowledge and activities included for each Standard and set out the overall expectations for that Standard.

We expect most policy professionals will use the Standards and their learning outcomes to guide professional development.

The learning outcomes for each Standard can be found in the next section, organised by pillar.

## Detailed Descriptors

Each Policy Profession Standard also has a set of detailed descriptors. The detailed descriptors set out the specific skills associated with each learning outcome, at each of the three levels of learning, for each Standard.

The descriptors provide additional detail for those seeking a deeper understanding of the Standards, or those using the framework to support capability-building in their organisation. The detailed descriptors represent best practice for each Standard and were generated through consultation with subject matter experts and specialists across Civil Service organisations, professions and functions. The detailed descriptors for each Standard can be found in the annex.

| 2021 Policy Profession Standards |                                  |   |                                  |                             |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Strategy</b>                  | 1.1 Policy Context and Purpose   | 1.2 Data, Analysis, and Scientific Advice | 1.3 Participation and Engagement | 1.4 Working Internationally |
| <b>Democracy</b>                 | 2.1 Working with Ministers       | 2.2 Parliament and Law                    | 2.3 Finance                      | 2.4 Multilevel Government   |
| <b>Delivery</b>                  | 3.1. Policy Delivery and Systems | 3.2 Governance and Project Delivery       | 3.3 Commercial                   | 3.4 Evaluation              |



# Pillar One: Strategy

## 1.1. Policy Context and Purpose

- Understand the policy process. Develop expertise within the policy area to operate credibly and effectively.
- Interrogate and explore underlying issues addressed by the policy, using systems thinking to model policy problems.
- Define the sought impacts and outcomes of a policy.
- Apply decision making tools to model policy options.
- Embed cross-cutting policy objectives and responsibilities.
- Challenge assumptions and explore different scales of impact, using futures techniques.

## 1.2. Data, Analysis, and Scientific Advice

- Apply research methods to model, test and improve policy solutions.
- Commission, understand and use data, evidence, and advice from analytical sources.
- Commission, understand and use data, evidence and advice from scientific and technical sources.

## 1.3. Participation and Engagement

- Commission, understand and use data, evidence and advice on the diverse needs of those affected by policy.
- Apply the principles and practices of relevant approaches such as co-production, user centred design and behavioural science.
- Enable participation by stakeholders in the policy process. Seek enhanced transparency and openness.
- Deliver effective external communication.

## 1.4. Working Internationally

- Understand the international context and the priorities and interests of all parts of the UK.
- Work within complex contexts to build relationships, influence and negotiate to advance UK interests.
- Work effectively with international bodies.
- Understand the role of international development work.
- Understand international trade implications for policy area.





# Pillar Two: Democracy

## 2.1. Working with Ministers

- Deliver effective internal communication. Write for different audiences and purposes, including scrutiny.
- Work effectively with ministers. Understand the options for providing policy advice and how to challenge.

## 2.2. Parliament and Law

- Understand the legal framework applicable to your policy role within the Civil Service, know how to comply with essential regulations, such as equalities law, and how to work with legal risk.
- Understand the legislative process.
- Understand the role and functions of the relevant Parliament(s). Understand responsibilities to Parliament(s) and accountability of officials.

## 2.3. Finance

- Consider effective use of public money, value for money and fiscal sustainability in decisions.
- Understand how to manage risk and relevant accountabilities.

## 2.4. Multilevel Government

- Understand devolution in all parts of the UK. Understand the impacts, risks, and opportunities of intergovernmental relations.
- Work effectively with different levels of government in the UK, including local and regional government.





# Pillar Three: Delivery

## 3.1. Policy Delivery and Systems

- Explore delivery options using data, evidence and advice on the needs of those affected by policy.
- Collaborate with cross sector partners to design implementation, using systems thinking, service design and organisation design.

## 3.2. Governance and Project Delivery

- Understand the delivery of the operations of government.
- Understand accountabilities to the organisation and how to manage risk.
- Plan, monitor and continuously improve policy delivery.

## 3.3. Commercial

- Understand commercial and procurement options and the impacts on policy decisions.

## 3.4. Evaluation

- Use evaluation throughout the policy process to generate evidence and learning that informs decisions and delivery.

