



Policy
Profession

Looking back to look forward: From 'Twelve Actions' to 'Policy Profession 2025'

April 2019

A summary review of progress on
'Twelve Actions to Professionalise Policy Making'
Report by the Policy Profession Board

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Foreword by the Head of the Policy Profession



“I am proud of how the profession has evolved...”

Five years ago, my colleagues and I made a commitment to improve policy making across government when we signed **Twelve Actions to Professionalise Policy Making**.

I am proud of how the profession has evolved to be highly collaborative, with a sense of collective ownership and purpose across all government departments and working with our colleagues in the devolved administrations.

Over the past few months, we have collectively cast a critical eye over what we have achieved in the past five years. We have also opened ourselves to scrutiny by some ‘critical

friends’ from other parts of the world, particularly Canada and New Zealand. We have reflected on what has worked well and where there are gaps or unmet opportunities. We are using these insights and analysis to develop Policy Profession 2025, our future vision and roadmap for policy excellence.

We are sharing our reflections in this report, to enable scrutiny and constructive feedback from the wider community interested in policy excellence. I encourage people to get in touch to share their thoughts and improvement ideas.

Policy making is increasingly complex and challenging. We owe it to the governments we serve and the people impacted by government decisions to ensure that our advice is informed by the best available evidence and expert analysis. For that, we need to be a highly skilled, engaged, and responsive profession. That is our goal.

Sir Chris Wormald

Head of the Policy Profession

Introduction – Twelve Actions to Professionalise Policy Making

This Report

Twelve Actions to Professionalise Policy Making was published in 2013. It was signed by Permanent Secretaries and departmental Heads of the Policy Profession (HoPPs) as a collective commitment to improve policy making across government. This report summarises what has been achieved in those five years and highlights gaps and opportunities for future action.



Read 'Twelve Actions to Professionalise Policy Making', a report by the Policy Profession Board (2013) [here](#)

The report:

- Revisits the Twelve Actions to Professionalise Policy Making, and summarises what we have achieved
- Shares insights from international counterparts who we invited to give a 'critical friend peer review' of our focus, work and progress
- Describes policy professionals views on policy improvement initiatives to date, based on a recent survey
- Highlights the strengths, gaps and where there are opportunities we have not yet fully explored
- Signals the direction of travel for next steps towards policy excellence - Policy Profession 2025.

Twelve Actions to Professionalise Policy Making

The Twelve Actions can be summarised as:

1. Transform the role of HoPPs. Each is accountable for raising standards and driving improvement in their department and contributing to Civil Service-wide action to professionalise policy making
2. Enhance Policy Profession support; a strengthened Policy Profession Board, funded by a levy on departments; build a service-wide policy community
3. Regular communication with policy officials; focus on professional development
4. Each department to adopt policy standards, and quality assurance against those standards
5. Departmental HoPPs to make improvement systems transparent and subject to HoPP peer review
6. Departmental HoPPs to champion Open Policy Making
7. Overhaul policy induction for new entrants
8. All policy officials to take responsibility for developing their own skills and expertise, linked to appraisals
9. Transform the development of policy Grade 7-SCS 1; more post graduate qualifications
10. High potential Directors to become a Civil Service-wide policy talent pool
11. Review and improve knowledge management practices
12. Assess the implementation and impact of Twelve Actions to Professionalise Policy Making.

What we have achieved...to professionalise policy making

A great deal has been done in the last five years to: build the policy community; ensure HoPPs and their departments improve their policy capability; develop a Policy Skills framework setting out the essential skills for policy and a policy curriculum to support the development of those skills; and to provide opportunities to share knowledge and learning across the Civil Service.

The Policy Profession Board provides overall governance and direction; the Policy Profession Unit acts as a broker, facilitator and catalyst for improvement across the Civil Service. Here are some highlights of what has been achieved.

Collective ownership and an active policy community: working together.

- The co-operative approach to developing and delivering initiatives to improve policy capability has led to a sense of community of practice that is owned and led by the profession. Overwhelmingly, senior policy leaders and external reviewers have endorsed this collaborative approach. A number of communities are especially important; at the leadership level through joint governance by the Policy Profession Board (with sub-groups accountable for deliverables), and at the working level through officials responsible for policy improvement initiatives in their respective departments (60 officials from 35 departments meet quarterly).

Policy Profession Standards: A framework for professional development.



- Over 500 policy professionals and other experts worked together to identify the skills a good policy maker needs to have. The resulting framework, launched in early 2018, describes a journey in three levels from basic knowledge to skilled policy leader, based on 18 key skill areas, covering Evidence (analysis and use of evidence), Politics (Politics and democracy) and Delivery (policy delivery). The [Policy Profession Standards: a framework for professional development](#) gives transparency about what is expected of policy advisors and how they can develop their qualifications, knowledge and practical skills.

A policy core curriculum: extensive learning and development offerings.



- A wealth of learning and development offerings, reflecting the skills framework, are set out in the regularly updated [Policy Profession Prospectus](#). These offerings range from an Executive Masters in Public Policy, co-designed and delivered by the London School of Economics and the Civil Service, to on-line policy training tools. Other offerings include a Fast Stream Policy Base Camp (to prepare Fast Streamers for senior roles with policy requirements), and an apprenticeship scheme to develop the pipeline into the Policy Profession. Feedback from participants on these offerings is consistently positive with average satisfaction scores of 8 out of 10.

Sharing knowledge across levels, jurisdictions and professions.

- Knowledge Series workshops and events have provided opportunities for policy professionals to share experiences and lessons learned in dealing with actual policy challenges. In 2018, 21 workshops were held with an average of 35 participants each. 'Leaders Teaching Leaders' involves Permanent Secretaries sharing lessons and challenges with their colleagues. The annual Four Nations conferences involve knowledge sharing between the administrations that make up the United Kingdom; 80-100 policy professionals participate in each session. Contacts with international jurisdictions (Australia, Canada, New Zealand), that are also grappling with how to improve policy capability, allow for further opportunities for cross-fertilisation of approaches. We have also engaged other Civil Service professions in our work; who all shaped the relevant components of the skills framework. A web page and fortnightly newsletter, enable communication with the over 18,000 civil servants who identify as policy professionals - as well as broader communications such as Civil Service Quarterly. Departments are key - there are many examples of departments learning across professional communities, bringing in other departments and colleagues beyond the Civil Service.

A broader policy ecosystem supporting good policy making.

- Good policy advice depends on good analysis, robust evidence, and innovative policy methods. We are building links across the broad ecosystem for policy with centres of expertise such as the What Works networks, and building skills in open policy making through the work of the Policy Lab. Since 2014 the Policy Lab has reached over 6,000 civil servants through workshops and training, and has worked with 12 departments on 40 large policy projects, applying innovative approaches to difficult policy challenges. The [Open Policy Making Toolkit](#) is a key resource for policy professionals. We are building links with experts and academia (including to develop specific training offerings) to build systems to help policy professionals draw on the latest research and engage the best expertise.

Testing the quality of policy advice.

- We have not taken a standardised approach to testing the quality of policy advice; we encourage departments to develop their own approach. Most have instituted some sort of Policy Test or arrangement to assess the quality of advice, including tests of ministerial satisfaction. We concluded that peer review was the best way to assess the relative success of departments' policy improvement performance, and have established a HoPP peer review process, whereby HoPPs and departments compare and contrast their activities against their counterparts. We focus on the quality of policy making processes as opposed to the quality of policy itself (which is the domain of ministers and political parties).

Measuring our overall performance towards professionalising policy making.

- This report, based on self-assessment by the Policy Profession Board, peer review from international counterparts, and the views of policy professionals across the Civil Service, constitutes an overall assessment of progress on the Twelve Actions committed to in 2014.

What others say about us...

The UK has an excellent reputation for the quality of our policy making. The [International Civil Service Effectiveness \(InCiSE\) Index 2019](#), an international benchmarking exercise, ranks us third on indicators related to policy making. In recent [reports](#), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has showcased both our Policy Professional Development Framework and the overall Twelve Actions programme, but we are keen to keep improving our performance. Therefore we asked a few critical friends* from other jurisdictions to review our work and here are some of their key reflections on us:

Keep the collaborative operating model and collective governance.



- Reviewers overwhelmingly supported our collaborative operating model, including collective governance by the Policy Profession Board, and delegation of parts of the Twelve Actions to groups of departmental HoPPs, which they felt had enhanced collective ownership for the programme, more than would have been the case with a top-down, centrally led approach.

However, they also noticed the variation in maturity between departments, some of which have more critical mass and resources to put into policy improvement activities. Reviewers liked the 'steal with pride' approach of less mature, or less resourced, departments drawing on initiatives and processes developed by their more mature colleagues, which they said should be pursued more vigorously. For that to happen, departmental HoPPs need to be active and connected with their peers. The Policy Profession Unit is key to facilitating the sharing of good practice across departments.

Should we become more directive? One reviewer insisted that compulsion can lead to compliance behavior or active resistance, noting that lasting reform is more likely with "enthusiastic fellow travelers not reluctant passengers".

* Reviews were received from: Qi Wang, Canada Policy Community Partnership Office; Professor John Halligan, Emeritus Professor, University of Canberra Institute for Governance & Policy Analysis, Australia; and Sally Washington, former Director of the New Zealand Policy Project. We thank them for their valuable insights.

Skills framework and development – excellent, but more-on-the-job development needed.



- Reviewers were enthusiastic about our Policy Profession Standards and the process of codifying skills for policy, and especially that they are linked to development offerings and career progression. One reviewer called the work “unequalled internationally”. However, reviewers thought we needed more information about the profession, including existing skills and development needs, and that we needed to “mind the gap” (between work on our senior cohort and our new entrants) to give more focus to the development of working level policy professionals, who provide the bulk of actual policy analysis and advice. They noted the results of the survey of policy professionals, which indicated that more on-the-job training was especially desirable (survey results are discussed below).

Less is more – Twelve Actions was too many.

- Reviewers felt that Twelve Actions was too many and that it was better to focus on a few key priority areas to build momentum. This was a conclusion we had come to ourselves. Policy Profession 2025 will have a smaller number of key pillars than the Twelve Actions programme.

What about standards for policy advice itself?



- While reviewers praised our work on people capability, they called for a complementary focus on the quality of policy advice itself. The Policy Profession Standards show policy professionals what skills they need to have; a new offering would set out what quality policy products should look like. That could also extend to policy organisations and overall capability: the systems, processes and capabilities organisations should have in place in order to support and enable policy professionals to produce good policy advice. Departmental HoPPs have been considering how to do this; Should we further develop the current range of departmental ‘Policy Tests’, or develop a whole-of-government policy quality test, albeit one that departments could adapt or add to, to reflect their particular context and role in the Civil Service?

Show the big picture - bring together pieces of the policy improvement puzzle.



- Reviewers complimented us on the wealth of capability in the UK Civil Service to support good policy making, including the Policy Lab, the Behavioural Insights Unit, the What Works centres, as well as some of the more longstanding resources like HM Treasury's Magenta Book. However, they thought those resources would be more effective and more widely-used if they were more "joined-up". One reviewer suggested a diagram setting out the various "pieces of the puzzle", hosted in one place and accessible to policy professionals across the Civil Service.

A profession or a function?



- An [Institute for Government report](#) called for the HoPP role to be expanded to a Head of Policy Effectiveness, and in a subsequent [report](#) compared the Policy Profession to others in the functional leadership team which have more resources and more interventionist operating models (including in areas like centralised recruitment and talent management). Reviewers commented on this profession/function debate. One noted sympathy with the 'function' label, as it implied that policy improvement was more than improving the skills of the people that do it, but considered that following the functional model with centralised recruitment and talent management was likely to detract from more valuable improvement initiatives, and cut across the responsibilities of departments to choose their own people. In short, the advice was to take the best of both the professional and functional models. Reviewers also thought that more engagement with other professions and insights about their approaches to whole-of-government change management would be valuable. Similarly, engagement would be useful for articulating the interface between professions; for example, a significant number of people working in policy roles also identify as lawyers, or accountants, or economists. On the question of resources, reviewers noted that the annual basis of the funding levy was not ideal for planning and managing a long-term change programme, but were neutral on where ongoing sustainable resources should come from.

Communicate, communicate, communicate.



- Reviewers noted that awareness of initiatives to improve policy making was uneven across the Civil Service; the survey of policy professionals showed that senior staff were better aware of initiatives than more junior staff. They suggested strengthening the effort to engage with policy staff at all levels, especially better communication by HoPPs in their departments, drawing on support from the central Policy Profession Unit.

Reflections from the policy community

We recently surveyed policy professionals from across the Civil Service for their views on their role within the Policy Profession, and on current policy improvement initiatives.



Policy professionals feel pride - but are more attached to their department than the overall profession.

- 1087 policy professionals responding to the survey expressed pride in their profession, with around three-quarters saying they are proud to be policy makers and would recommend working in the Policy Profession. However, they appeared relatively more attached to their department's policy community (61%) than the overall profession. Just over a third (35%) said they felt part of the wider Civil Service policy community.

Awareness of policy improvement initiatives is less than ideal.

- Less than half of respondents (42%) said they knew who the Head of the Policy Profession or policy champion in their department was. Awareness is much higher at SCS level where 85% reported knowing about their departmental HoPP or policy champion. Only one in five respondents (19%) knew about the central Policy Profession Unit, what they are there for and how to contact them.

Improvement initiatives aren't hitting the mark in departments yet.

- Over half of respondents agreed that action is being taken in their department to improve standards of policy making, yet only just under a third (31%) felt that policy systems and activities had actually improved in their department since 2013.

Policy professionals want more information and development, especially on-the-job options.

- Policy professionals have an appetite for more information and development opportunities. Only around a third (36%) of survey respondents were satisfied with the contents of communication received from their department's Policy Profession. Nearly three-quarters (71%) responding to the survey want to see more communication on policy professional development within the wider Civil Service.

Less than a quarter (23%) felt that a professional qualification had helped to improve their performance in policy making, suggesting that other forms of development including on-the-job experience was relatively more important. Indeed around two-thirds (66%) cited departmental learning as the means by which they kept up-to-date as a policy professional. Reading research, advice from trusted colleagues or advisors, and Civil Service Learning courses also featured in responses as being important for improving policy practice.

Seniors are more confident than other policy staff in using Open Policy Making Tools.

- The top sources of evidence used in preparing advice are: lessons learned, statistics, industry views, evaluations and academic research. The most used Open Policy Making Tools are evidence from "What Works" centres, Behavioural Insights, and horizon scanning. While not top of the list, use of data science and design-thinking have increased significantly since an earlier survey in 2014. However, about one in five respondents didn't answer questions related to the use of Open Policy Making Tools; in qualitative comments, a number explained that they simply didn't use them. More senior people expressed greater confidence in using Open Policy Making Tools; 88% said they were very or somewhat confident in using them while half of HEO/SEO said they were not at all or not so confident in using them.

Are we there yet? Gaps and opportunities

We have reflected on what peer reviewers said, on what policy professionals said they need, and on the results of interviews with departmental HoPPs who were also asked, “What do you think should be the priorities going forward?”. We found a good deal of convergence on current gaps, on where our challenges lie, and on where we should focus our collective efforts going forward.

Keep the collaborative way of working.



- There is near unanimous support for continuing to improve the profession through collaboration, sharing good practice, and collective ownership of the challenges and improvement initiatives. As Sir Chris Wormald noted to a recent House of Commons committee “...We run the Policy Profession as a co-operative of departments as opposed to a central thing”. We think this should continue and if there are to be any mandatory standards, that these are introduced by mutual agreement of departmental HoPPs from across the Civil Service.

Should we be more like a ‘function’? We are keen to expand beyond the ‘people’ side of policy making, but for now, we are not keen on taking on direct human resources functions like centralised recruitment or active talent management. Unless it is for specific cohorts or challenges, like new entrants to the profession or responding to EU Exit challenges, we think departments are best placed to understand their people capability needs. Moreover, we want to keep the Policy Profession ‘open’; as Sir Chris has stated he is keen to “allow people of other professions to think of themselves as policy makers”. There are lawyers, economists and people with other professional qualifications working in policy roles, and we need to encourage that diversity of thought and approach.

HoPPs said...

**Increase awareness
of the standards...**

Embed the standards.

- We can see that the Policy Profession Standards are not yet fully embedded. We will take steps to embed the standards further, to publicise and socialise them, while recognising that different departments (and different business areas of departments) will want to emphasise some parts of the skill-set over others. However, we want to see the standards used more extensively for guiding the training and development of individuals, but also to explore how they might be applied to performance management, recruitment and promotion. For example, could departments recruit to specification by using the standards to articulate the skill-set they are looking for? Could individuals articulate their particular skills profile with reference to the standards? Could departments use the standards in their workforce planning? Embedding the standards means that they become the reference point for a range of departmental human resources processes.

**Develop modular
programmes for level 2
accreditation...**

Close the gaps.

- A number of gaps were revealed in the review exercise. We need to improve the learning provision for people at level 2 of the standards, our 'engine level' policy practitioner at grade 6/7 (of which we have about 6,500 in the profession). We need to improve structured training and development options for them, and ensure a range of products in the market that will suit the diverse needs of different people. We also need to improve on-the-job development opportunities, which is where they believe their opportunities for advancement lie.

Monitor the quality and impact of policy advice...

Focus on the quality of policy advice itself.

- The review revealed a desire for more central guidance on what constitutes good policy and good policy advice, to help individuals know what policy tools and approaches are out there, and when to apply them. This could include more traditional approaches as articulated in HM Treasury's Magenta Book as well as modern approaches articulated in the Open Policy Making Toolkit. We will endeavor to see how we can bring the range of tools and resources into one place that is accessible to policy professionals in their day-to-day work. We might think of this as building the 'infrastructure for policy excellence'. There were some calls for a more standardised approach to 'Policy Tests', and how we might assess and monitor improvements in the quality of policy advice over time. This is another avenue we will explore, but with an understanding that departments need to be able to adapt any centrally co-designed tool to their own particular contexts and needs.

More cross profession/function working...

Build links.



- We will continue to build links with other professions, especially where there is an interface with particular relevance to policy quality. For example, we want policy makers to be legally-savvy, to be familiar with data and analytics, to understand procurement and business processes, and operational and delivery challenges. They don't need to be an expert at all these things, but they need to be able to engage with the people who are. Ensuring that policy advice includes effective implementation depends on it. We also want to build more engagement with academics to tap into state-of-the art research and evidence, and because universities are key partners in training and development. We also want to maintain and build contacts with international counterparts so that we can 'steal with pride' across jurisdictions.

Clear communication
from the centre will be
useful...

Communicate more; build the policy community.

- We will endeavour to strengthen our collective communications, to socialise the standards, to share good practice and lessons learned, and to build connections up, down, and across the Policy Profession. A revamped website will be part of this. We will also create more opportunities for policy professionals to come together to discuss their craft, how it is changing, and how it can be improved to better serve government decision makers and the people who are affected by those decisions.

All these gaps and opportunities will be underpinned by Diversity and Inclusion strategies. The more diverse the Policy Profession is - both in terms of diversity of representation and diversity of thought - the better we are able to develop policy that reflects society in all its diversity.

Where to from here? Policy Profession 2025

In the immediate future, we will continue to deliver existing programmes to develop an Open, Professional and Consistent profession, focusing on:

Embedding the Policy Profession Standards, helping individuals and departments to use them

Understanding more about the members of the profession, who we are, and what it means to be a policy professional

Widening our accredited learning offer, testing the market beyond the current Executive Masters in Public Policy

Expanding our knowledge sharing programme, to reach more people and more levels of the profession

Engaging widely across and beyond the Civil Service, including with other professions, and academics

Diversity and Inclusion strategies, included at every stage of planning.

At the same time, we are developing our future-focused work programme, Policy Profession 2025, concentrating on four 'pillars' to support future policy excellence:



Context: understanding the wider context (global, national, local) that policy professionals need to navigate

Customers: considering the customers of policy (ministers & the public) and how we engage with them. Is our current approach fit for purpose?

People: developing effective systems for how we recruit, retain and deploy the people we need, now and for the future

Policy making system: ensuring our policy system, approaches and processes are fit for future purpose.

We will also develop a robust approach to documenting our work and monitoring our progress, to ensure that all parts of the profession know where we are heading and can be involved in the direction of travel.

Want to know more, or have ideas to share?

The Policy Profession Board invites your comments and ideas. Get in touch at:

policy.profession@policyprofession.gov.uk

