

# Twelve Actions to Professionalise Policy Making

**A report by the Policy Profession Board**

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Signatures</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Our aim and the challenges to overcome</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>How best to professionalise?</b>	<b>12</b>

## Foreword by Chris Wormald



The *Civil Service Reform Plan* introduced important initiatives to improve policy making. For instance, it led to the launch of the UK's first network of six independent What Works Centres, which will allow real-world testing in policy areas accounting for over £200 billion of public spending.<sup>1</sup> The *Civil Service Reform Plan: One Year on Report* built on this momentum with announcements of policy audits and more transparency of the evidence base for policy decisions.<sup>2</sup>

Even more fundamentally, the Reform Plan also challenged the Civil Service to professionalise its policy making. This document describes what we, the leadership of the policy profession, now intend to do.

At its best, policy making in the Civil Service can be highly innovative and effective.

However the quality of policy advice is not always consistent and can be too reliant on the strengths and weaknesses of individuals. The Civil Service, as a whole, needs to meet the challenge of professionalising its policy workforce, methods and processes. Within individual departments, effective activity to improve standards is undoubtedly happening, but our review has revealed that overall it is patchy and insufficiently visible to other departments to enable effective sharing of best practice. The review found that improvement activity is mainly led by a few enthusiasts, with little dedicated resource. Awareness of the Departmental Head of Policy Profession is low and the role is ill-defined. As a profession, we lack a common identity and sense of community. The review also revealed a large, mainly unmet, appetite amongst policy makers to significantly improve their skills and expertise, and for better learning within and across departments. We should, and can, be better than we are now.

Since the Fulton Report in 1968 this ground has been well trod. A multiplicity of reviews have diagnosed similar enduring problems and made recommendations to professionalise. Yet the level of ambition contained within myriad proposals has seldom been matched with commensurate delivery. Therefore, instead of making twelve recommendations in this report, the leadership of the Civil Service is committing to take forward twelve actions. The principal responsibility for policy improvement can in practice only lie with individual departments to embed lasting change. The clear public commitment of Permanent Secretaries and Departmental Heads of Policy Profession to *Twelve Actions* is a prerequisite for success and an encouraging step forward.

All twelve actions are important, but two are critical enablers for the other ten. First, transforming the role and accountability of the Departmental Head of Policy Profession, provides the clear leadership for this improvement activity. And second, building a small, but expert, central resource to catalyse improvement, under the control of the Policy Profession Board. We must start making these actions happen. Progress will be uneven and we must monitor impact. Yet these are practical solutions that will take us forward as we strive to professionalise policy making. To hold us to account for our progress, the final of the twelve actions is to make transparent what progress we make, including through an independent annual assessment.

**CHRIS WORMALD**  
**HEAD OF THE POLICY PROFESSION AND PERMANENT SECRETARY, DFE**

<sup>1</sup> HM Government, *What Works: Evidence Centres for Social Policy*, March 2013

<sup>2</sup> HM Government, *Civil Service Reform Plan, One Year On*, July 2013, p.15

## Signatures of Commitment

This Report has been endorsed by the following Permanent Secretaries and Heads of the Policy Profession.

### Cabinet Secretary



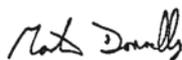
Sir Jeremy Heywood

### Head of the Home Civil Service

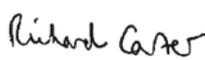


Sir Bob Kerslake

### Department for Business Innovation & Skills



Martin Donnelly



Richard Carter

### Cabinet Office



Richard Heaton

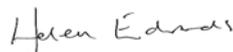


Will Cavendish

### Department for Communities and Local Government



Sir Bob Kerslake



Helen Edwards

### Department for Culture, Media and Sport

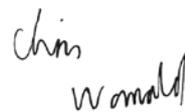


Sue Owen

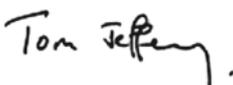


Jon Zeff

### Department for Education



Chris Wormald



Tom Jeffery

### Department of Energy and Climate Change



Stephen Lovegrove



Simon Virley

### Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

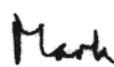


Bronwyn Hill

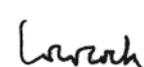


Katrina Williams

### Department for International Development



Mark Lowcock

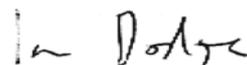


Chris Witty

### Department of Health



Una O'Brien



Ian Dodge

### Department for Transport



Philip Rutnam



Steve Gooding

**Department for Work and Pensions**



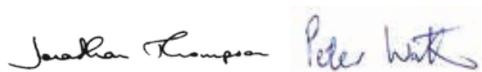
Robert Devereux    Mark Fisher

**HM Treasury**



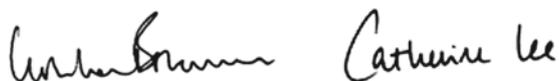
Sir Nicholas Macpherson    Indra Morris

**Ministry of Defence**



Jon Thompson    Peter Watkins

**Ministry of Justice**



Dame Ursula Brennan    Catherine Lee

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office**



Sir Simon Fraser    Peter Hill

**HM Revenue and Customs**



Lin Homer    Carol Bristow

**Home Office**



Mark Sedwill    Mike Anderson

This document is focused on the main policy making departments of the UK Government and those who have signed reflect this. As the Devolved Administrations are not subject to the *Civil Service Reform Plan*, we have not asked them to sign, although their respective Heads of Policy Profession are taking forward reform plans which reflect the priorities of each Administration.



Figure 1 – Key roles and functions of policy making as identified by workshop participants

## Introduction

1. The purpose of this review was to explore and make recommendations on how best to strengthen the policy profession and professionalise policy making.
2. The Civil Service *Capabilities Plan* called for reviews of the three “core” Civil Service professions of Operational Delivery, Programme and Project Management and Policy to be completed by November 2013.<sup>3</sup> This review of the policy profession fulfils that aim and took as its starting point the *Civil Service Reform Plan*<sup>4</sup> and its clear commitments to Open Policy Making, better skills and expertise (see Box 1).

### Box 1 – The Context of the Civil Service Reform Plan

The Civil Service Reform Plan made a number of commitments to improve policy making including:

- Exploring the potential for shared policy and analytical services
- Open Policy Making becoming the default – meaning that policy making always draws on a full range of external experts from academics to those who will deliver the policy.
- Establishing a contestable policy fund with matched funding that can be used to commission policy development from outside the Civil Service.
- Ensuring civil servants working on policy have the necessary skills and expertise, can use up to date tools and techniques, and have a clear understanding of what works in practice.
- Better allocation of resources to Ministerial policy priorities.

<sup>3</sup> HM Government, *Meeting the Challenge of Change – A capabilities plan for the Civil Service*, April 2013, p.11

<sup>4</sup> HM Government, *Civil Service Reform Plan*, June 2012

3. This review was initiated in December 2012 and:

- draws heavily on recent reports for its analysis of the issues, most notably the Institute for Government's *Making Policy Better*<sup>5</sup> – but also *Policy Making in the Real World*<sup>6</sup>, *System Stewardship*<sup>7</sup>, and *Reforming the Civil Service: The Centre for Management and Policy Studies*<sup>8</sup>. These provide a well-evidenced prior analytical basis for much of this document, as well as ideas for the necessary actions;
- looked at the history of Civil Service reform dating back to the 1968 Fulton Report, and international perspectives;
- set up an online survey of departments with 1,236 responses (see Annex A);
- ran workshops in 17 different departments (and the Devolved Administrations) attended by about 180 policy officials (see Annex B);
- carried out semi-structured interviews of all Departmental Heads of Policy Profession (see Annex C) and some current and former Permanent Secretaries, Ministers and special advisers;
- held a roundtable event at the Institute for Government to discuss the differences and similarities between working on policy within the Civil Service and outside government in think tanks and the voluntary sector;
- was overseen by a working group which included Neal Barcoe (DfE), Andrew Campbell (DCLG), Ian Dodge (DH, chair), Helen Edwards (MoJ), Peter Watkins (MoD), Jon Zeff (DCMS), Jill Rutter (Institute for Government) and representatives from the Policy Profession Support Unit. A DH secretariat team of Rachel Markey and Rachel Morton, with support from Alecia Lockwood, was overseen by Peter Howitt. Andrew Morris from DCLG provided valuable assistance in interviewing all Departmental Heads of Profession. The review team also greatly benefitted from the Institute for Government's help with understanding previous efforts to professionalise policy making and considering policy making beyond the UK Civil Service.
- benefitted from three meetings of the Policy Profession Board,<sup>9</sup> input from the full range of Departmental Head of Profession colleagues, and consideration by Permanent Secretaries.

4. A central finding of the review was that the concept of a policy profession had only limited resonance with civil servants working on policy. Policy officials liked aspects of a profession such as a focus on standards and professional development, but not the more formal characteristics of a profession which they saw as restrictive. Therefore this report focuses on helping to equip officials with the skills and knowledge they need to make effective policy.

---

<sup>5</sup>Hallsworth, M & Rutter, J, *Making Policy Better*, Institute for Government, 2011

<sup>6</sup>Hallsworth, M et al, *Policy Making in the real world: evidence and analysis*, Institute for Government (2011)

<sup>7</sup>Hallsworth, M, *System Stewardship – the future of policy-making?* Institute for Government, 2011

<sup>8</sup>Haddon, C, *Reforming the Civil Service: The Centre for Management and Policy Studies 1999-2005*, Institute for Government, 2012

<sup>9</sup>The Policy Profession Board is chaired by Chris Wormald, as Head of the Policy Profession, and consists of some of the Departmental Heads of the Policy Profession and representatives from some of the other professions.

## Our aim and the challenges to overcome

5. There are approximately 17,000 people who identify themselves as working in policy roles across the Civil Service.<sup>10</sup> There are thousands of other civil servants in related professions such as law and economics who are involved in policy making. The twelve actions contained here are focused on the former, but have relevance to both groups.
6. In proposing these actions to professionalise policy making, this review's goal is year on year improvements in policy making so that:
  - Policy officials are properly equipped to perform their roles and work closely with other professions, have and take opportunities for continuous professional development and share best practice across government. As a result they consider their roles more rewarding;
  - The Government of the day recognises and values the unique contribution of the Civil Service to policy making. The Government feels that it receives the advice it needs, in a form it finds useful and which draws on a wide range of relevant expertise to ensure that policies are well designed and capable of timely and cost-effective implementation.
7. Achieving this goal needs to take account of the continuing downward pressure on budgets and numbers, the need to address complex, long-term and cross-cutting challenges such as ageing and climate change in a much more interconnected world<sup>11</sup>, the new possibilities opened up by big data, transparency, social media and digital delivery and the redefinition of the role of the public sector not as a provider of public services itself, but instead as a funder and regulator of services.<sup>12</sup> This has led commentators to suggest that government's role increasingly becomes one of 'stewardship' with policy officials needing to get better at influencing the achievement of outcomes whilst having less direct control.<sup>13</sup> The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) have suggested a set of skills that will be increasingly important as civil servants' roles change. These include networking skills and knowledge management.<sup>14</sup>
8. Other governments are facing similar challenges and reforming their Civil Services. For example, it has been argued that Civil Services in the EU will need to be 'more accountable, performance-oriented, and subject to new competency and skills in the future.'<sup>15</sup> Singapore is trying to create a public service which is more 'responsive, flexible and innovative.'<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> ONS, *Annual Civil Service Employment Survey*, June 2012

<sup>11</sup> HM Government, *The Context for Civil Service Reform*, 2012

<sup>12</sup> Cabinet Office, *Open Services White Paper*, 2011

<sup>13</sup> Hallsworth. M, *System Stewardship – the future of policy-making?* Institute for Government, 2011

<sup>14</sup> Lodge, G & Kalitowski, S., *Innovations in Government, International perspectives on civil service reform*, Institute for Public Policy Research, 2007)

<sup>15</sup> Demke, C. Civil Services in the EU of 27 – Reform Outcomes and the Future of the Civil Service, *EIPAScope*, 2010 (2), p.7

<sup>16</sup> PS21, <http://www.ps21.gov.sg/rationale.html>, (Accessed 25 March 2013)

9. In this context of change, there have been criticisms of Civil Service capability. The Fulton Report description of policy officials being 'gifted amateurs' still has resonance.<sup>17</sup> Various commentators, most recently *Reform*, have argued civil servants change jobs too frequently, jeopardising the development of expertise.<sup>18</sup> Media reports have cited some Ministerial concerns about lack of skills and expertise amongst officials.<sup>19</sup>
10. Responding to these issues in recent years there have been a succession of internal and external reports. For instance the Cabinet Office's *Professional Policy Making for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*,<sup>20</sup> proposed a new model for policy making, and recommended initiatives such as 'policy knowledge pools'; joint training for Ministers and civil servants; and a programme of peer reviews of departments. In another example, the Institute for Government's *Making Policy Better*<sup>21</sup> proposed a new approach to policy making and a series of measures to help embed this new approach. However, these have not led to significant change. A major challenge for this report is therefore to ensure the actions it contains happen.
11. In seeking to do so, a number of barriers to change were identified by the review:
  - there is a lack of visible leadership – on average only 52% of people knew who their Departmental Head of Policy Profession was, and this varied from 26% to 66% across departments;
  - there is a lack of shared identity amongst policy officials – only 64% of survey respondents working in policy roles considered themselves members of the policy profession;
  - there is significant variation between the grades in identification with the policy profession – only 47% of respondents in the administrative/executive officer grades considered themselves members of the profession, in comparison to 80% of senior civil servants;
  - policy officials are doing insufficient Continuous Professional Development (CPD) – for example approximately 60% of policy officials are currently doing less than the recommended 5 days learning and development;<sup>22</sup>
  - the quality of policy can be adversely impacted by time pressures and wider constraints – the focus of this report is on improving the elements of policy making that policy officials can control, however, whilst recognising they need to be cognisant of the context in which they operate.
12. We are determined to meet these challenges. There can be no more missed opportunities for change.

---

<sup>17</sup> The Fulton Report, 1968; Public Administration Select Committee *Skills for Government Report*, House of Commons, 2007

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Haldenby, Tara Majumdar and Greg Rosen, *Whitehall reform: The view from the inside*, Reform, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> "Whitehall at War," *The Times*, 14 January- 16 January 2013

<sup>20</sup> Cabinet Office, *Professional Policy Making for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 1999

<sup>21</sup> See for example, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/our-work/better-policy-making>

<sup>22</sup> The survey revealed that 63% of those in policy roles had undertaken 1-5 days of learning and development with 15% citing that they had done no learning activities. The estimate quoted assumes an equal distribution of the 63% would mean a fifth of respondents were doing 5 days (or 13% in total). This means 65% (50% plus 15% doing no development) carry out less than the recommended 5 days a year of learning and development activities.

13. Within the Civil Service there is clear appetite for improvement. For example, during the workshops many policy officials expressed the view that there should be a greater focus on standards in policy making, creating a culture of continuous improvement and a stronger sense of a policy making community. The next section therefore proposes twelve actions that policy officials, Heads of the Policy Profession and the Civil Service as a whole should take forward together.

## How best to professionalise?

### Clear Responsibility for Professionalisation

14. Heads of the Policy Profession (HoPPs) have been appointed in departments since 2008. There are clear strengths with having these champions located in departments, where policy work is occurring. Yet the review found the role of the Head of Policy Profession is ill defined and not well known – only 52% of the respondents to our survey were aware who their HoPP was.
15. Promoting clear accountability for policy making within departments is not a new theme. The Fulton Report recommended a Civil Service head of policy.<sup>23</sup> More recently the Institute for Government has called for clear ownership of the policy making process, through establishing a government head of policy effectiveness and reconstituting the head of policy profession role in departments as a policy director, responsible for: policy planning; acting as quality control; ensuring regular review of policy and building policy capacity.<sup>24</sup>
16. Differences in how departments organise their policy making function mean that a policy director role would not be suitable for all. However, there is a clear need to strengthen the existing role of the Head of Profession so that he or she is accountable for improving policy making both within departments and across the Civil Service.

**Action 1:** Permanent Secretaries, assisted by the Head of the Policy Profession, will transform the role of the Departmental HoPPs during 2013/14. Each HoPP will be accountable for (a) raising the standard of policy making and driving improvement activity within departments and (b) contributing to Civil Service-wide action to professionalise policy making.

17. This gives the role much more prominence. It will also mean that HoPPs need more support for their responsibilities, especially resources. The review found that many HoPPs rely on volunteers to carry out their function. Departments will need to consider the best way to resource policy improvement work in the light of the agenda set out in this report.

### Building Improvement Capacity

18. In addition, there are economies of scale and clear advantages to establishing central resource to carry out common activities once for all policy officials across the Civil Service.

**Action 2:** The Head of Profession, supported by Permanent Secretaries, will establish enhanced policy profession support by December 2013 to act as a catalyst for professionalisation. This will be governed by a strengthened Policy Profession Board, and funded by a modest levy from departments. Resources will be used to build an enhanced sense of a service-wide policy community across departments to unlock synergies, share learning and codify good practice. This will include funding the establishment of a Policy Lab to promote innovative techniques.

<sup>23</sup> The Fulton Report (1968)

<sup>24</sup> Hallsworth, M & Rutter, J. *Making Policy Better*, Institute for Government (2011), p.20

19. The enhanced support will bring together the existing good work being done by the Policy Profession Support Unit<sup>25</sup> (PPSU), such as developing the policy curriculum, and the Open Policy Making team in the Cabinet Office, such as in creating an Open Policy Making online resource. Supplementary funding will not be spent on new infrastructure but on expanding the work programme. Departments will make a small monetary or staffing contribution and this will help to ensure departments both own, and make use of, the enhanced support. Up-front costs will be kept to a minimum – for instance once the Policy Lab concept has been proven, projects will be carried out on a cost recovery basis. Potential tasks for the enhanced support are indicated in Table 1.

Objective	What's already happening	What more could be done
Identify learning from policy failure/successes	Some learning happening sporadically in Departments.	Run Civil Service-wide "disaster classes/ master classes" analyzing the cause of an unsuccessful/successful piece of policy.
Creating specialist networks	Network of working level contacts on policy improvement run by PPSU.	Facilitate networks for policy officials working in sub-specialisms such as legislation and public inquiries.
Clear communications to all policy officials	Open Policy Making team leading on production of Civil Service Quarterly, a journal highlighting high quality Civil Service outputs.	Direct communications to policy officials (see Action 3) using a range of media.
Facilitate secondments across and into/outside the Civil Service	Some secondment programmes e.g. the Financial Services Authority and the Citizen's Advice Bureau, but small-scale and not well known.	Encourage swapping of policy officials between Departments and establish links with external organisations that do policy work.
Support Open Policy Making (see Action 5)	Helping departments adopt Open Policy Making through work on an online portal and management of the Contestable Policy Fund	Build on existing work through Policy Lab (see para 20).
Definitive Guidance for Policy Officials	Some examples like the Treasury Green Book, but most guidance internal to Departments	Produce appropriate Civil Service wide guidance on issues such as policy evaluation to avoid duplication.
Developing the Policy Making Curriculum	PPSU working on designing new courses such as on Advanced Policy Making.	Further expansion of policy making curriculum.

Table 1 – Policy Profession Enhanced Support Activities

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/networks/policy-profession/policy-community> (Accessed 23 September 2013)

*Designers assume that a problem needs to be redefined, you need to really understand what the nature of this problem is, you need to take it apart....they will spend time talking to employees and customers and clients...if there's one set of skills Departments lack it's not policy making, it's designing.*

(Interview with the Head of a Think Tank)

20. The Policy Lab will be the type of shared policy resource called for by the *Civil Service Reform Plan*. Departments would be able to access a creative space where policy teams could draw on techniques such as design-based thinking and ethnography to approach policy problems in a new way. Innovation has consistently been identified as a weakness in the Civil Service's approach to policy making.<sup>26</sup> The Policy Lab will seek to address this by being modelled on successful similar initiatives from Scandinavia including MindLab in Denmark and Sitra in Finland.<sup>27</sup>

### **Communicating to Policy Officials**

21. At present there is no systematic method for the Head of the Policy Profession to communicate directly with members of the policy profession. Messages are cascaded through Departmental HoPPs – but the variable recognition of the HoPP role or presence suggests this is not done systematically.

**Action 3:** The Head of the Policy Profession and Departmental HoPPs will develop and maintain direct regular communications with policy officials, with a particular focus on professional development, from October 2013.

22. Policy officials will be encouraged to opt-in to receive communications through building on existing contact lists, utilising the Civil Service Learning website and through the dissemination of this review. Communications will take a number of forms including the use of social media, newsletter updates and the *Civil Service Quarterly*. This is a journal containing articles on aspects of Civil Service work, including some on the latest policy thinking and analysis.<sup>28</sup>

### **Heads of Policy Profession Leading Change within Departments**

23. Part of the policy improvement work within each department should be the adoption of clear standards. There was considerable support in the workshops for some clear standards for good policy making.

**Action 4:** Each department will adopt during 2013/2014 a set of fundamental policy standards and subsequently work to embed these. All SCS in charge of policy work will be responsible for quality assurance against these standards.

24. Given departments' different needs the review is not prescribing a set of specific standards across all departments, but encouraging each department to identify the policy standards needed to drive improvement in its own context. Over time there might be a coalescing of standards perhaps around the groupings of departments highlighted in Figure 2:

<sup>26</sup> Hallsworth, M & Rutter, J. *Making Policy Better*, Institute for Government, 2011

<sup>27</sup> MindLab, <http://www.mind-lab.dk/en>, SITRA, <http://www.sitra.fi/en>, (Accessed 26 March 2013)

<sup>28</sup> *Civil Service Quarterly* <https://quarterly.blog.gov.uk/> (Accessed 23 September 2013)

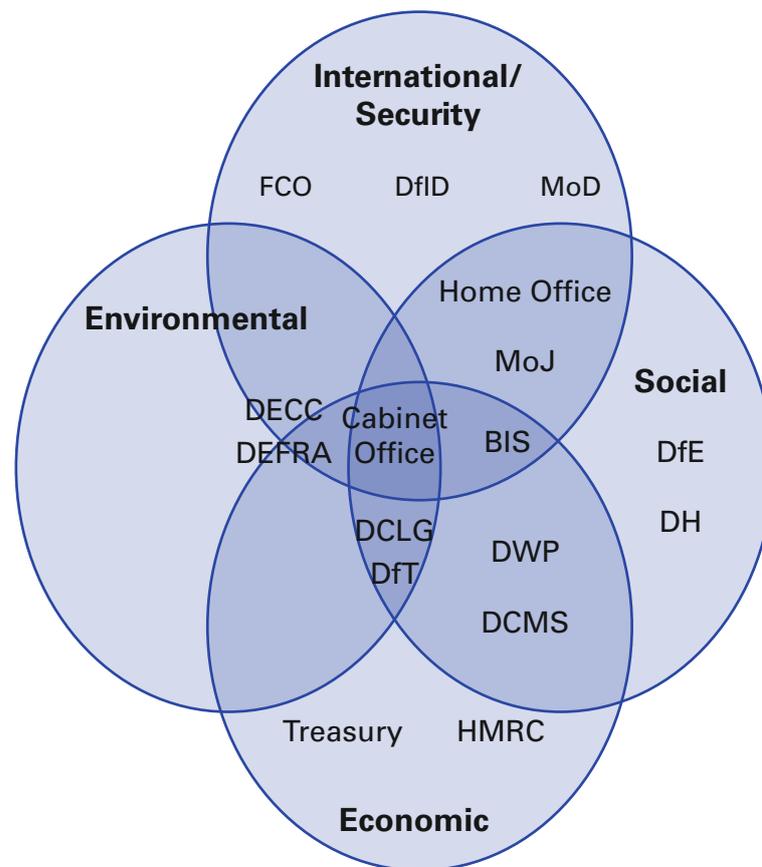


Figure 2 – Departmental Groupings<sup>29</sup>

25. Examples of existing standards include variants of the ROAMEF (rationale, objectives, appraisal, monitoring, evaluation, feedback) policy cycle. The Institute for Government found that the civil servants they interviewed for their report on policy making felt that policy is rarely made in the neat staged approach of such cycles. Instead the Institute recommended a checklist of seven non-sequential 'policy fundamentals'.<sup>30</sup> Policy officials should assure themselves against the policy fundamentals (clarity on goals, open and evidence-based idea generation, rigorous policy design, responsive external engagement, thorough appraisal, clarity on the role of central government and accountabilities, establishment of effective mechanisms for feedback and evaluation) before proceeding with a policy.
26. Similar to the policy fundamentals are the Department for Education's five policy tests (Box 2). These were introduced at the end of 2012 following extensive discussions across the department to identify the key internal challenges that would help ensure policies are deliverable and ultimately lead to improved outcomes.

<sup>29</sup> The Diagram indicates main functions – all Departments share some core responsibilities such as stimulating economic growth.

<sup>30</sup> Hallsworth, M., Rutter, J. *Making Policy Better: Improving Whitehall's core business*, Institute for Government, 2011, p.14

### Box 2 – The Department for Education – 5 policy tests<sup>30</sup>

**PURPOSE** – Are you absolutely clear what the Government wants to achieve? Do you have a very clear idea of the high level outcomes and outputs that the Government would like to see?

**ROLE** – Are you absolutely clear what the Government’s role is? Is there definitely a problem here that can only be fixed through some form of Government intervention?

**EVIDENCE** – Are you confident that you are providing world-leading policy advice based on the very latest thinking?

**CREATIVITY** – Are you confident that you have explored the most radical and creative ideas available in this policy space...including doing nothing?

**DELIVERY** – Are you confident that your preferred approach can be delivered?

27. In developing standards it is suggested that departments consider examples such as the seven policy fundamentals and the five policy tests, rather than starting with a blank sheet of paper. It will be crucial to get wide engagement across a department in the development of the standards if they are to have real impact.
28. Senior civil servants within a department would be expected to assure all new policies against the standards that have been adopted and tools could be developed to support this, such as checklists.
29. Creating explicit policy standards will also facilitate the evaluation of policy advice. The Policy Profession Board will consider how, from 2014, standards can be used to conduct policy audits “which will allow us to revisit policy advice, assess its quality, review whether the risk materialised, and learn the lessons from implementation effectively” in line with the commitment in the *Civil Service Reform Plan: One Year on Report*.<sup>32</sup>
30. Standards will be a fundamental part of departmental policy improvement activity. To fulfil their responsibilities from Action 1, Departmental HoPPs should be open about what they are doing to improve policy making capabilities in their organisations.

**Action 5:** All Departmental HoPPs will make policy improvement systems and activity within their department transparent on an annual basis, and subject to HoPP peer review.

31. This is not a requirement to publish a standalone plan. For instance, details could be part of a wider Departmental business plan. The transparency is vital as it helps to ensure accountability in delivering on promised progress and also enables the sharing of good ideas and practice such as those uncovered by the review and detailed in Table 2.

<sup>31</sup> Neal Barcoe and Helen White, The Policy Tests: Transforming Policy in the Department for Education, *Civil Service Quarterly*, July 2013, <https://quarterly.blog.gov.uk/> (Accessed 25 September 2013)

<sup>32</sup> HM Government, *Civil Service Reform Plan: One Year On*, July 2013, p15

<b>Departmental policy improvement activities</b>
<p><b>Policy Schools</b> – The Cabinet Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government run intensive policy courses aimed at high potential officials below Senior Civil Service level. Typically these are week-long courses which involve resolving a policy problem. Participants have access to a range of resources, including experts in areas, such as behavioural insight. Feedback from participants has been very positive. The Ministry of Defence also have regular policy courses and the Home Office is planning to run a Policy School.</p>
<p><b>Postgraduate qualifications</b> – In 2011, the Department of Health (DH) contracted Imperial College London to run an MSc in Health Policy to support the ambition of creating cadre of policy professionals in the DH. The course is two-year part-time Masters. Teaching is done in four fortnight long blocks spread over two years, with a different module taught each week. Teaching is done through the lectures, with some group and individual work, and modules are assessed by exam or extended essay. Participants also undertake a research dissertation to make an original contribution to health policy research.</p>
<p><b>Policy planning and flexible resourcing</b> – The Ministry of Justice’s Policy Group was adapted to meet changing needs: a central plan of all policy work was developed alongside a flexible resource management (FRM) model to support the delivery of priority policy work. Being able to track policy work in this way identifies crunch points and potential gaps but these issues need to be mitigated by trying to have the right people with the right skills working on priority work as facilitated by the FRM approach. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport have a similar model for deploying policy staff, with work prioritised centrally and then resources allocated in the form of policy project teams.</p>
<p><b>Challenge sessions</b> – The Foreign and Commonwealth Office runs these sessions for policy units and others (including external stakeholders) to go through the thinking behind emerging policy concepts. For instance, a session on Saudi Arabia involved the current and former ambassadors, desk officers and external experts. It has been helpful in resolving difficult policy issues, resulting in better submissions with clearer views.</p>

Table 2 – Examples of Policy Good Practice

32. To help departments in their policy improvement thinking, light touch peer review is proposed. This was an idea for which the majority of Departmental HoPPs expressed support for when interviewed. Such peer review would have the aim of getting other expert perspectives and helping each other.
33. One aspect that will need to be central to all improvement activity is the concept of Open Policy Making highlighted by the *Civil Service Reform Plan*.<sup>33</sup> Open Policy Making is underpinned by a deep appreciation that policy problems are invariably multi-dimensional and interconnected, their nature changes faster than a single policy maker’s ability to keep up, and they are complex to tackle in practice. A culture where Open Policy Making is the ‘default’ is one that is constantly alive to this complexity and one where openness to new evidence, experts and experimentation is the starting point.

**Action 6:** Each Departmental HoPP will champion Open Policy Making as part of their core responsibilities.

34. Box 3 sets out in more detail what a policy official working in an open way would do. There is no one model of Open Policy Making and the approach adopted will need to be determined by each department. For instance Open Policy Making is likely to be easier in policy on public services than for policy on national security. Some areas, such as health, benefit from subject specific think tanks. The matched funding of the

<sup>33</sup> HM Government, *Civil Service Reform Plan*, June 2012, p.14

Contestable Policy Fund helps provide an incentive for departments to commission external policy advice.

### Box 3 – What does the Open Policy Maker do?

#### Aspect 1: Invites broader inputs, expertise and creates space for others to help solve problems

- The starting position for an Open Policy Maker must be to: understand what excellence looks like; understand who the experts are; understand the user perspective and that of relevant networks; and actively go where the debate is in order to generate a better understanding of the nature of the problem, better insights, ideas and broaden the dialogue outside of Whitehall.
- Key questions to ask are:
  - ✓ Do I know what excellence looks like, who the leading experts/users are and how to reach them?
  - ✓ Am I clear what I want to be and can be open about – and what mechanisms and platforms are available to help me do this at pace e.g. do I know how to broaden the dialogue and open up the space for more collaborative policy making through deploying new tools and techniques such as digital?
  - ✓ Am I clear about the evidence base and problem definition – and what Ministers want?

#### Aspect 2: Develops options by trialling, testing and iterating, constantly with implementation in mind

- Policy advice has to be grounded in practice and developed with implementation in mind. Early identification of problems in the solution stage means unworkable options can be discounted and potentially workable solutions iterated and improved.
- Key questions to ask are:
  - ✓ Do I understand the practical implications of my proposed solutions, can they be implemented?
  - ✓ Do I understand the various way in which I can test, iterate and “prototype” my solutions?
  - ✓ Am I clear about who is best placed to innovate and experiment, and can I mobilise a diverse range of individuals and institutions to help me find solutions?

35. Linked to both Open Policy Making and greater transparency is the desire to make the evidence base behind policy decisions visible so it can be subject to testing and challenge beyond the Civil Service.<sup>34</sup> The Policy Profession Board will consider the best way to do this in 2014, building on existing mechanisms such as Impact Assessments.

<sup>34</sup> HM Government, *Civil Service Reform Plan: One Year On*, July 2013, p.15

## Improving Skills, Expertise and Talent Management

*The really on the ball civil servants kind of get [it], because they are thinking about this place here, and the wider world, I don't mean in a party political sense, but understanding the politics and how that should then impact on how policy is developed, and [there are] others who don't see that at all.*

(Interview with a former Cabinet Minister)

36. In order to rise to the challenge of meeting high standards of policy making, policy officials must improve skills and expertise. And this improvement needs to occur at every level, from new policy officials to the Senior Civil Service. The survey found that many policy officials had a long experience in the Civil Service (59% more than ten years), but only 32% of respondents had spent over ten years in a policy role, with 44% having fewer than five years policy experience.
37. A key theme emerging from the evidence gathering was that as people first move into a policy role – whether from another Civil Service role, another organisation or direct from education – there needs to be better induction.

*For many coming into the Civil Service and with the fluidity of movement in and out of policy roles, I do think that a more structured expectation and support for developing/refining policy making skills would be extremely valuable and would raise standards.*

(Survey Comment)

38. Time spent on induction compares unfavourably with private sector firms. In particular, management consultancy firms were cited as having a comprehensive approach to induction. Indeed, new recruits to consultancy firms undertake several weeks of intensive training before being able to interact with clients.

**Action 7:** The Policy Profession Board will make recommendations in 2013/14 for how Departmental HoPPs can overhaul policy induction for new entrants, learning from the best professional advisory services, to take effect during 2014/15.

39. A common structure for induction of policy officials will be developed across the Civil Service. Induction resources will be made available centrally for Departments to utilise as part of their own induction sessions.<sup>35</sup>
40. Induction will highlight the core skills that every civil servant should possess, regardless of department. These are set out in the *Policy Skills and Knowledge Framework*,<sup>36</sup> the policy specifics that sits alongside the new competency framework for all civil servants. The Framework emphasises the interplay of three factors illustrated in Figure 3.

<sup>35</sup> See Heads of Policy – Induction Resources,

<https://civilservicelearning.civilservice.gov.uk/profession-new/policy> (Accessed 25 September 2013)

<sup>36</sup> Policy Profession Support Unit, *Policy Skills and Knowledge Framework* (2013), available at <http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/networks/policy-profession/skills-framework>

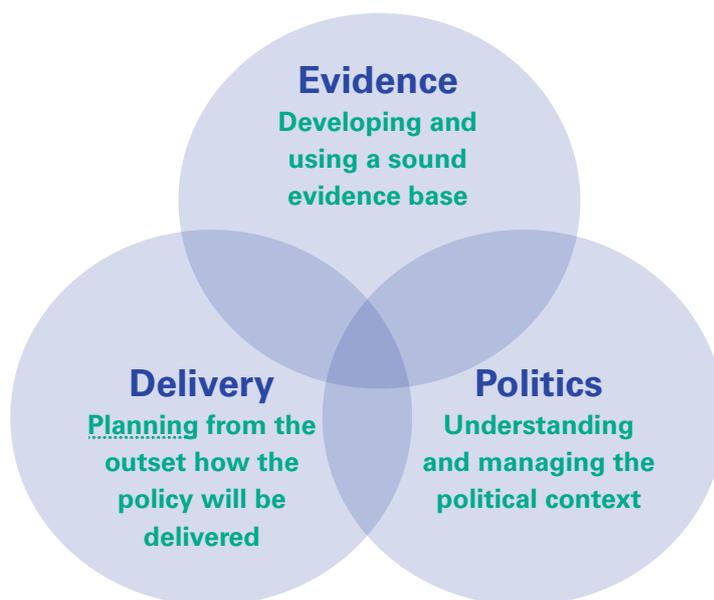


Figure 3 – Three key elements in policy making

41. The subject knowledge needed by policy officials will be far more varied from Department to department, and Departmental HoPPs will need to take the lead in tailoring the knowledge component of the induction to suit their organisations' needs.
42. It is vital that, throughout their careers, policy officials take responsibility for improving their skills and knowledge. To this end the *Civil Service Reform Plan* outlined an expectation that civil servants should undergo five days learning and development per year.<sup>37</sup> This can take a range of forms – for example, on the job training, e-learning, classroom training or experiencing the impact of policy on the frontline. Yet, the survey indicated that over 60% of policy officials are currently doing less than the recommended 5 days of learning and development.<sup>38</sup>

**Action 8:** All policy officials are responsible for developing their skills and expertise, including through appropriate continuous professional development (CPD). This should be considered as part of appraisals and in promotion exercises.

43. Policy officials should be actively seeking to develop their skills and expertise, recording the learning they have gained. Performance management should assess to what extent policy officials are doing this and rewarding those investing in their development. Interviews and promotion gateways should be assessing the extent to which candidates are developing their policy making capabilities.
44. The definition of standards (Action 5) should help here. When asked in the survey what would help them focus on CPD, 55% of respondents ticked 'a better understanding of the requirements of good policy making.' The second highest score was for 'more information about learning products available' (50%). During the review, a guide that

<sup>37</sup> HM Government, *Civil Service Reform Plan*, June 2012

<sup>38</sup> The calculation of over 60% is outlined in footnote 18.

one Civil Service department in New Zealand had produced was identified.<sup>39</sup> This offers practical suggestions for CPD activities, sometimes suggestions for reading or particular tools and techniques to consult, rather than time intensive courses. A UK version of this guide could be developed centrally to help policy officials.

45. Whilst the onus must be on policy officials to take the lead in their own development, there is the potential for more planned development opportunities. The Civil Service Fast Stream has already been redesigned for 2013, with shorter, more varied, and planned placements.<sup>40</sup> However, for those who make it to Grade 7 in the Civil Service, including ex-Fast Streamers, there is very little structured development. This should change.

**Action 9:** Departmental HoPPs, working with Human Resource Directors, will develop plans to transform the development of policy Grades 7 – SCS 1, with a focus on increasing (a) deep subject expertise, (b) post-graduate qualifications on public policy or business administration, (c) wider experience and (d) skills in related disciplines.

46. It is at Grade 7 to SCS1 where the policy experts in each department can be found. These people need to be subject matter experts so they must be supported to develop knowledge in their particular field, interacting with national and international authorities. Attempts must be made to capture and share their knowledge (see Action 11) when they move to new roles.
47. They may benefit from formal post-graduate qualifications. 41% of survey respondents had a postgraduate qualification, but only 18% of these were related to policy making, or 7% of total respondents. There have been few studies of the impact of formal qualifications but the Institute for Government found one study in the U.S. which suggested that federal employees with a Masters in Public Administration were perceived to be more effective by their managers.<sup>41</sup> By international standards UK civil servants are comparatively under-qualified. For instance 88% of Finnish policy officials have a postgraduate degree, with law and political science being the two most common subjects.<sup>42</sup>

*I've been quite impressed at how former colleagues of mine [civil servants], who've been very much in policy areas have gone and done operational delivery jobs and I think that will strengthen the policy profession massively if that sort of trend continues.*

(Interview with the Head of a Think Tank)

48. Expertise alone, however, is not enough. Wider experience is also needed to help policy officials develop implementable policy. For some this may be a secondment to a business or charity seeing how their department's policy impacts on their new organisation. For public service departments, HoPPs will want to work with their Operational Delivery counterparts to encourage frontline delivery experience that is meaningful for the policy officials and beneficial to services.
49. Furthermore, policy officials need to have awareness and skills in disciplines that are vital for policy development. This includes the ability to consider the financial and

<sup>39</sup> *Professionalising Policy, a guide to develop the craft of policy analysis*, 2011, available at <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/about/docs/panda-mfe-policy.pdf> (Accessed 15 March 2013)

<sup>40</sup> <http://faststream.civilservice.gov.uk/What-is-the-Fast-Stream> (Accessed 14 April 2013)

<sup>41</sup> Michael Hallsworth, with Simon Parker and Jill Rutter, *Policy Making in the Real World*, 2011, p.75

<sup>42</sup> Email from L. Forsman, Finnish Ministry of Finance, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2013

commercial implications of a policy to ensure that value for money is achieved, in line with *Managing Public Money*.<sup>43</sup> It also means the capability to take advantage of new digital tools and techniques to increase public interaction with policy making.

50. In terms of talent management, as with learning and development, there are few formal structures beyond the Fast Stream. Talent management of high potential Director-level officials should be introduced.

**Action 10:** High Potential Directors working on policy making will be considered a Civil Service-wide, rather than Departmental, talent pool from April 2014.

51. This is in line with the aspirations set out in the *Civil Service Reform Plan: One Year on Report* that "To match resources to the Civil Service's most important priorities, Permanent Secretaries will be required to release their 'top talent' on a planned basis. In future, the Civil Service High Potential Stream will be the route by which internal candidates develop their skills and abilities, so they can be considered for Director General or Permanent Secretary roles."<sup>44</sup>
52. Such an approach will develop breadth of experience as well as facilitating sharing of policy ideas between departments and encouraging better joint-working. Central co-ordination would ensure that departments losing a Director would have an appropriate replacement identified. If this approach is successful, cross-Civil Service management of policy talent could be extended to lower grades.

### **Improving knowledge management**

*We've got to get very, very good at sharing and holding knowledge within our own organisations.*

(Interview with a Permanent Secretary)

53. There is a tension between developing subject matter expertise and getting a wide breadth of policy experience. Part of the solution to this is much better sharing of expertise through effective knowledge management. The *Civil Service Reform Plan* proposes ways of strengthening capability, filling skills gaps in a number of areas such as digital.<sup>45</sup> Knowledge management, although, not specifically identified as an improvement area, is an area which the policy profession should fundamentally review. Concerns have been raised that the high turnover of staff and the frequent rotation of staff are real risks to the corporate memory of departments across the Civil Service.<sup>46</sup>

**Action 11:** The Policy Profession Board will initiate a fundamental review of knowledge management practices, surveying practices within each department, learning from other sectors and countries, and making recommendations during 2014.

54. The recommendations from this review will help to ensure that the Civil Service more effectively manages its vast body of knowledge, including the effective closure of projects and the codifying of experiences before teams are disbanded.

<sup>43</sup> HM Treasury, *Managing Public Money*, July 2013

<sup>44</sup> HM Government, *Civil Service Reform Plan; One Year On*, July 2013, p.24

<sup>45</sup> HM Government, *Civil Service Reform Plan*, June 2012

<sup>46</sup> Andrew Haldenby, Tara Majumdar and Greg Rosen, *Whitehall reform: The view from the inside*, Reform, 2013, p.10

### Assessing progress

55. The final action of this report is the need to assess progress. This report is seeking to avoid the fate of its predecessors in making sensible recommendations that are largely ignored. Aside from accountabilities and capacity, the third key plank to avoid this, is assessing if implementation is occurring, and taking action if it is not.

**Action 12:** The Policy Profession Board will ensure clarity as to whether these recommendations have been implemented, their individual and aggregate impact, (including through developing indicators of success) by commissioning an independent annual assessment and encouraging appropriate scrutiny.

56. Attempting to evaluate impact is vital, to ensure that the actions are beneficial considering their opportunity cost. However, measuring progress on improving policy making capability is difficult. The best means of doing so is probably through survey data. Policy officials could be surveyed (perhaps through the annual Civil Service Survey) to follow up questions posed in the review such as on the amount of learning and development they are doing. It also might be possible to survey the “customers” of policy officials such as Ministers to get a sense of if they are seeing an improvement.
57. An independent annual assessment could be informed by this survey data, interviews and other measures. It would help in holding the signatories of this document to account. Finally, Select Committees and others may have an interest in scrutinising progress in delivering the actions of this report.