

World Class Policy tests

You cannot have good or great policy without placing implementation at the heart of your thinking. That means engaging colleagues in delivery agencies and wider at the very outset of policy development and throughout the process.

Keep thinking about these Tests as you work through the policy-making and implementation process. Often you will not be able to pass all of the Tests straight away or all of the time. Yes, we have to be realistic about the timescales faced when working with Ministers and iterating policy; and pragmatic about policy imperatives impacting on a course of action. But that cannot be an excuse for failing to use these Tests whenever possible, in how we think about doing our own jobs well, and how we offer challenge and support to colleagues and staff.

1. PURPOSE: Are you absolutely clear what the Government wants to achieve?

2. ROLE: Are you absolutely clear what the Government's role is?

3. EVIDENCE: Are you confident that you are providing world leading policy advice based on the very latest expert thinking, data and analysis?

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

5. DELIVERY: Are you confident that your preferred approach can be delivered, and in the timescales proposed?

1. What's the Point?

PURPOSE – Are you absolutely clear what the Government wants to achieve?

- Do you have a very clear picture of the high level outcomes and outputs that the Government would like to see?
- Can you describe what the market or service or system would look like if it was functioning properly to deliver the outcomes needed?
- Do you have a clear sense of how it would feel for those receiving the services, whoever they are, if the outcomes were achieved?
- Would they recognise your description?
- Have you described this to Ministers and checked your understanding is correct?

If your job is managing or implementing policy are you absolutely clear what the policy you're implementing is meant to achieve and how/why?

If not, find out or you might be pushing things in the wrong direction.

2. What's it got to do with us?

ROLE – Are you absolutely clear what the Government's role is?

- Is there definitely a problem here that can only be solved through some kind of Government intervention – really; are you absolutely sure?
- Are you about to nationalise a problem that should be dealt with elsewhere?
- Is it a problem that has actually manifested itself and cannot be resolved through other people – what's your evidence for that?
- Was your starting point that we trust expert practitioners and professionals on the front line to know what is best?
- Would you feel comfortable setting out how your policy advice fits in with the Government's agenda to reduce the role of Government and deregulate?
- Can you be confident that you are not about to make the problem worse or create a new problem through your policy advice – no matter how well-intentioned?
- Will you actually be able to demonstrate whether or not your policy has made a positive or negative impact?
- Have you considered how that impact might be different for different groups of people?

If your job is managing or implementing policy, how confident are you that what you're doing couldn't be done by someone else if you stopped doing it; or couldn't be done better in a different way; or that you're not making things worse; and how do you actually know?

3. Who Made You the Expert?

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

- Who is the world's leading expert in this policy area?
- Have you consulted them on their work?
- Have you delved into the archives to see how we tackled this problem last time (or when something similar arose?)
- Could you, if asked, produce a bibliography of evidence for your policy submission – would it look impressive and balanced or thin and one-sided?
- Have you consulted with specialist analysts who know most about the area?
- Have you deployed clear economic and behavioural analysis on the problem?
- Have you got a robust value for money case for suggesting any spending – and are you trying to spend as little taxpayers money as possible on fixing the problem?

If your job is managing or implementing policy, is your experience of implementation suggesting new evidence on how the policy could be improved or do you think it is perfect? Are you deliberately getting feedback on the quality of the policy and/or the quality of implementation from different groups of customers/stakeholders – and is this feeding back into policy and implementation design? Have you explored world/leading delivery organisations and how they would implement a policy like this?

4. Is Your Advice Predictable?

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

- Do you feel confident that stakeholders or Ministers or anyone else will be unable to come up with an idea you haven't thought of?
- Will Ministers be pleasantly surprised by your creative thinking?
- Have you looked at evidence from other fields and policy areas addressing similar questions?
- Have you had an open process of generating ideas?
- Have you shied away from any idea because you thought it was too radical – if so, why?
- Have you come up with something that is very deliverable but won't actually solve the problem you're trying to solve?
- Have you set boundaries around your creative process like "stakeholders won't like it"? And if so, what happens if you take them off and think about what new options are available?

If your job is managing or implementing policy, are you constantly thinking about how the process could be improved and putting ideas forward? Or are you just turning the handle on the machine without thinking too hard about how the machine could be re-engineered?

5. But Will it Actually Work?

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

- Have you worked closely with colleagues in the relevant delivery agencies at every stage of developing your policy solution?
- Are you confident that you have considered the delivery implications and risks in your preferred policy approach?
- Are you clear on the costs through the system and life of the policy?
- Have you thought about the burdens it will put into the system – including the administrative burdens?
- Have you created something which is as simple as it can be?
- Have you listened to experts on the ground and stakeholders, but done so in a challenging way to determine what legitimate concerns are and what is undue caution or resistance to radical ideas?
- Are you confident you have designed something which will work, but has not been designed for the sector – but rather has been designed for service users and the general public and taxpayers?

If your job is managing and implementing policy, have you recognised that you have a responsibility to find out if the policy you are busily implementing is actually working for all the people and groups that you serve and is being implemented fully? If not, why not? How can it be improved? Is there a flaw in the policy which means it can't be implemented and which needs to be fed back up the line?

If you pass these tests, ask:

- **Would I be comfortable exposing my policy thinking to the most challenging minds around?**
If not, it probably needs more work. If yes, go and do it but invite challenge to help you test your thinking and improve the final product.
- **Is my policy advice logically and crisply argued and free of jargon?**
Have you drafted your way through difficult issues and fudged them rather than working out exactly what you think and explaining that? If somebody wanted to criticise your ideas, what would their arguments be? And what would be your response to those arguments? Have you explained the essential issue and advice in a few pages, so that it can be understood quickly by someone with minimal understanding of the subject area and a full box of work?

- **Is it free from errors?**

If you were to be fined £5 for every typo, spelling error, arithmetical or other mistake in your submission, would you be comfortable hitting the “Send” button now? If not, print it off and sit in a quiet room to read it through; or ask someone else to; don’t expect Ministers or senior officials or private offices to spot and correct your mistakes?

- **Will my Analysis and Thinking be Available for Others to Use and Learn From?**

Are you making sure that your work, knowledge and contacts can be accessed by the next person who runs your policy are or by someone elsewhere in the Department or government who needs to understand and learn from you?

Source: Department for Education policy assessment document commissioned and endorsed by Permanent Secretary Chris Wormald and Tom Jeffrey, Director General, with minor adjustments to make it of general application.