Policy quality review 2020

NZIER report to the Ministry of Social Development

July 2020

About NZIER

NZIER is a specialist consulting firm that uses applied economic research and analysis to provide a wide range of strategic advice to clients in the public and private sectors, throughout New Zealand and Australia, and further afield.

NZIER has been reviewing the quality of policy advice for central and local government for more than 15 years, using an evolving framework. This year we've moved completely to the new Policy Quality Framework for those reviews.

These reviews are the basis of NZIER's wider offerings supporting central and local government agencies seeking to improve the quality of their advice. Our capability extends from deep dives reviewing individual projects, to group or individual training and mentoring.

Our aim is to be the premier centre of applied economic research in New Zealand. We pride ourselves on our reputation for independence and delivering quality analysis in the right form, and at the right time, for our clients. We ensure quality through teamwork on individual projects, critical review at internal seminars, and by peer review at various stages through a project by a senior staff member otherwise not involved in the project.

Each year NZIER devotes resources to undertake and make freely available economic research and thinking aimed at promoting a better understanding of New Zealand's important economic challenges.

NZIER was established in 1958.

Authorship

Contents

Before you read this report...

This is your first review using the new Policy Quality Framework

This review was done using the new Policy Quality Framework. Copies of the summary of it, and the scoring system are attached in Appendices A and B, respectively.

A paper scoring a 3 is "considered to be of acceptable quality, it:

- Meets the relevant quality standards overall, but with some shortfalls

- Provides most of the analysis and information needed

- Could be used for decision-making

- Was sufficiently fit-for-purpose for sign-out

- Could have been improved in several areas."

Papers scoring a 4 meet all the relevant quality standards, and those scoring a 5 do that and more!

You can approximately translate individual paper scores to previous NZIER scores

In conjunction with DPMC, we have developed a tool to allow you to compare individual paper scores under the Policy Quality Framework, to the previous NZIER system. This is attached in Appendix E.

A 3 in the Policy Quality Framework would be equivalent to a 6.5 in the NZIER system, a 4, equivalent to a 7.5.

But, there are additional requirements in the new Framework The Policy Quality Framework places more emphasis on the following criteria:

- Te ao Māori and Treaty analysis (as part of the Analysis and Advice sections of the Policy Quality Framework)

- The need for evaluation and monitoring (in the Action section).

It will be a challenge for most agencies to up their game in relation to considering Treaty implications and impacts for Māori. We know a number have already started refreshing tools and capabilities, and are building on historical work. We have an developed a Masterclass which introduces Māori frameworks already in existence. Te Arawhiti are developing a number of resources to assist. These can be found at https://www.tearawhiti.govt.nz/tools-and-resources/

There was much published on evaluation by the former SuPERU. You can now find their introduction at:

https://dpmc.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2018-03/Evaluation%20Handbook%20Dec%202017.pdf.

As well as the new criteria, there are three other factors in the Policy Quality Framework which have more explicit requirements than the NZIER framework. These are:

- The *"Assesses options to make impacts clear, and reveal workable solutions"* in the Analysis section of the criteria. This calls for an explicit analysis of options against a set of criteria, and a clear assessment of impacts. While we have always looked for this and considered it best practice, there is greater emphasis on this in the new standards.

- There are very explicit requirements about reflecting diverse views and perspectives, and the views of stakeholders. These are included in both the Analysis and Advice sections of the new standards. The NZIER approach looked for these factors to be taken into account in the risk section of the assessment template.

- More focus on the need to consider how policies will be implemented, and any risks and issues associated with implementation. This is outlined in the 'Action' section of the framework.

The overall score cannot be directly translated

However, there are some differences in the structure and distribution of the scale. The new scale has more downside scores – NZIER followed a 'university' marking approach and limited downside scores to a 5 or 5.5. The new scale allows for 1s,1.5s as well as 2s and 2.5s.

The NZIER scoring system has more scope for upside scores. So rather than just a 5 in the new Policy Quality Framework scores, the NZIER system allowed for 8.5s, 9 and infrequently given 9.5s.

Because of the construction of the scale – the overall score cannot be translated easily. Any translation of the overall score would depend on the mix and distribution of the individual paper scores.

In comparison to the NZIER system, an average using the Policy Quality Framework scores would underweight the best performing papers and overweight the low scoring papers. So, the impact of this different approach to scoring would depend on the distribution of papers in your sample. For agencies with a large number of high scoring papers, performance will be underweighted.

However, given the small proportion of papers scoring at the extremes, this is more than countered by the relative difference between the two scoring systems, i.e. the mark at which the NZIER system determined that you had met the standards is relatively higher than under the Policy Quality Framework.

We have done a more detailed analysis of the historical database. Based on this, our report includes information on how your result compares to your historical performance. But, because of the factors above, some caution is needed in interpreting these results.

2   Key points

Your overall score was 3.73

Given this is the first year of using the new Policy Quality Framework (PQF), it's hard to tell how this compares to past results or to other agencies.

The vast majority of your papers meet or exceed the PQF standards

90% of papers scored a 3 or above, so met the PQF standard.[1] More positively, 50% of papers scored a 4 or more, so exceeded the PQF standards. This is a significant increase on previous years.[2]

The Budget 2019 documentation relating to policy advice quality measures requires you to meet a goal of 75%. At 90%, you have beaten that significantly.

Figure 1 How well are you faring?

Papers scoring 3 or above

90%

Papers scoring 4 or above

50%
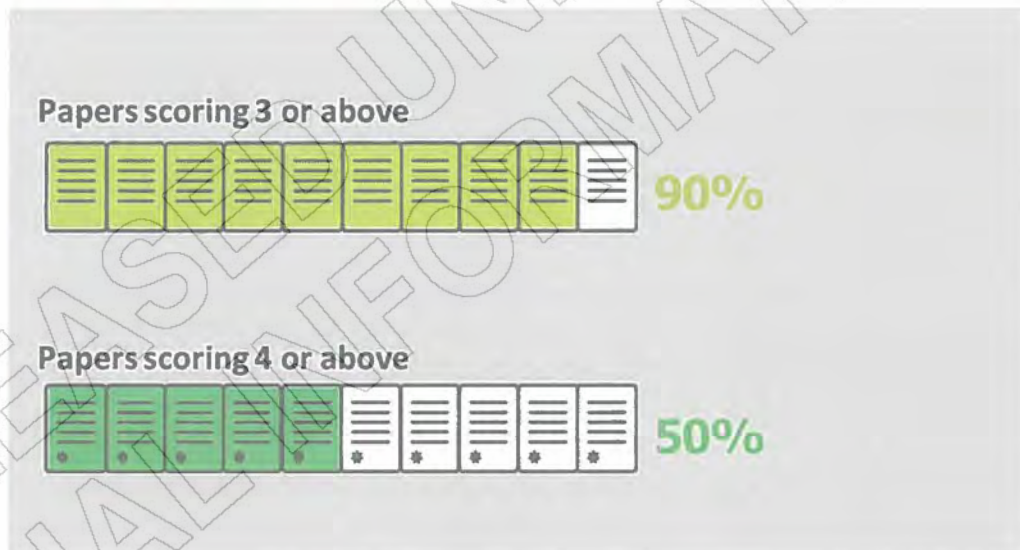
Source: NZIER

There was a lot to like

Four papers scored a 5. These were:

- Paper 3: Report Back on a Wage Supplement Approach to Replace Minimum Wage Exemption Permits

- Paper 13: Welfare Overhaul – Further Advice on Working for Families and Wider Income Support Changes

- Paper 16: Key policy decisions on temporary income relief for people who have lost their job due to COVID-19

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[1]   See information on the PQF scoring system and definitions in Appendix B

[2]   Even taking into account the changes in the scoring system (see Appendix D).

- Paper 40: Expanding access and level of rent arrears assistance temporarily to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on housing outcomes

These were all excellent papers of their type. We suggest you circulate and discuss them (along with the one-page assessments) amongst your teams. This will allow best practice to be understood, captured, and re-used in other papers.

Your technical know-how is impressive

A number of papers in this year's sample discussed the nitty gritty of the benefit system. More so than in previous years.

The benefit system is complicated, and the impact of any change is not simple.

Your papers did a great job in explaining the technically complex in easy to understand terms. Papers were also solution focused, where there was a problem, they offered suggestions of other ways to achieve similar outcomes.

Related to this, your papers written about COVID-19 support were generally of very good quality. This is impressive given the difficulties associated with producing them.

However, results were patchy

As well as the great papers, there was a similar number which didn't meet the standard. We also found this with individual characteristics within papers – they were at times done well, and at others not.

We suggest you undertake some further analysis to determine whether different results came from different parts of your policy group. This will allow you to target your quality improvement activities better.

Improving overall consistency is the key to improving your score overall. This is particularly the case with your aides-mémoires. They have a solid foundation. Done well, they provide excellent advice and support for your Minister. But not all had in them the features that made the great ones stand out.

3 We recommend that you

This year, we recommend you focus on:

3.1 Improving consistency of the quality of papers

Not only was there a broad spread of scores, we saw examples of good practice in some papers and other papers where these features weren't there. There was a distinct lack of consistency across the sample.

Focusing on consistency and spreading good practice across the policy group as a whole, would improve your overall score.

We know this can be hard work in large policy groups. But some have achieved this. It's all about strengthening your culture of quality, and having that carried by all people in the group.

The sorts of things you could think about doing are:

- Setting some **clear agency expectations**, consistent with the standards in the Policy Quality Framework. These might be the use of plain English (although this will no doubt be covered in your own style guides), active headings/subheadings, always having a clear Treaty and te ao Māori analysis, a gender analysis and disability analysis; including a risk analysis etc.

- **Sharing examples of best practice** – in particular, those papers which scored a 5 in this sample. This is best done in an active way – so that these papers are analysed, best practice identified, and thought given to how some of these things can be applied to other work. See our Masterclass on 'Learning from things that go well'.[3]

- **Strengthening cross organisation peer review** – getting people from outside your team/group to peer review papers, or as some agencies have done – set up a peer review panel which all papers should go through.

- **Increasing coaching** of new or more junior staff by Principals and Seniors in writing papers.

We have an upcoming Masterclass on what other agencies have done to improve quality. Do watch out for it!

3.2 Improving the tactical advice and support for your Ministers

We've mentioned this before (including last year).[4] But it was most evident in some of your aides-mémoires (AMs). There were some great ones, but others lacked the sort of things that Ministers needed.

We talk about giving Ministers an arm-chair ride – this means providing the sort of information and advice they need, in the manner that it is most useful.

Supporting Ministers goes beyond merely supplying them with briefings and expert advice about their portfolio areas. In our experience Ministers are constantly under pressure with too much to do and too little time.

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[3] Masterclass no 30, sent to you in 2019.

[4] https://nzier.org.nz/static/media/filer_public/f4/e0/f4e66b18-53ee-430b-a61d-b55efc7d592f/brief_22_tactical_advice_2.pdf

Their work lives are full of meetings; they are also struggling to read their way through mountains of papers that relate to the nation's hardest and most important problems.

That is, of course, the job description. But, it means that all Ministers need thoughtful and professional support to ensure they are effective and efficient in their jobs. This is the essence of 'giving the Minister an armchair ride'.

The idea is that without having to ask specially for it, all the helpful support that the Minister could use is readily to hand. It is sitting there waiting to be deployed if needed. This is because the departmental advisors have taken the trouble to put themselves in the Minister's shoes and not only work out what would make life easier, but then gone on to provide it.

We like your aide-mémoire template. In fact, we've suggested it as a model for other agencies. Now it's time to super-charge it!

Some suggestions:

- **Take care with the formatting and page breaks** – we know that a highly structured template can make this difficult. But take care to avoid hanging headings, awkward page breaks, and add in subheadings when needed.

- **Provide easy to use talking points** – draft them in spoken voice, so the Minister doesn't have to draft them in his or her head during the meeting. One great idea we saw in one paper in the sample was to put these talking points in a box in the paper – this made them really stand out.

- **Explain the purpose of the meeting from the Minister's perspective** – Most AMs explained the purpose of the meeting from the other attendees' perspectives, i.e. they wanted to discuss particular issues with the Minister. But they didn't think about what the Minister would want to get out of it, e.g. just to listen to the points raised, to have a regular catch-up with key stakeholders, to debate particular points, to explain recent policy decisions to stakeholders, or to seek feedback on particular matters.

- **Provide biographical details** – good practice is to provide fuller background on stakeholders attending meetings. This should not only include information about the organisation they are representing at this meeting – but also previous roles, other related roles (e.g. being on other Boards, government appointments) and whether they've met with the Minister before. Much of this can come from a quick search of the internet – LinkedIn is particularly useful. Ideally this should include a photo (often possible from an internet search).

- **Provide information on risk** – risk[5] is critically important to Ministers. Make sure your template includes a section on risk.

- **Provide intelligence on what others think** – this is particularly important in AMs on Cabinet papers, or for Ministers' meetings. It's always worth explaining the different perspectives of other agencies, and how they might be briefing their Ministers. If your Minister has to negotiate with her colleagues, forewarned is forearmed.

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[5] https://nzier.org.nz/static/media/filer_public/29/a3/29a34bf6-1a3f-46e5-96b6-5e288f0426d3/brief_no_5_masterclass_risk.pdf

3.3   Keep working on your Treaty and te ao Māori analysis

We saw some great examples in the set of papers. But not in all papers.

This requirement has strengthened in the new Policy Quality Framework and is one of this government's priorities.

We know this will be difficult for you as you have many different areas of work – and each will need some careful thinking as to what the issues mean for Māori, collecting data and evidence, and developing stakeholder relationships so those different views can be understood. However, you have a head start in this area as you have terrific data resources, and experts to assist you.

This will need to be a task that you allocate resources to, so that it's not just something that comes on top of normal work, with the possibility of getting squeezed out when the pressure is on.

Te Arawhiti[6] has increasing numbers of resources on their website that will be helpful in this journey. The relatively recent Cabinet Office Circular they helped draft has some useful questions for policy advisors to consider, during the development of policy advice and legislation.[7]

[6] https://www.tearawhiti.govt.nz/tools-and-resources/public-sector-maori-crown-relations-capability/
[7] https://www.tearawhiti.govt.nz/assets/Tools-and-Resources/CO-19-5-Treaty-of-Waitangi-Guidance-for-Agencies.pdf

4 Results

4.1 The picture

Figure 2 Distribution of scores

Proportion of papers marked
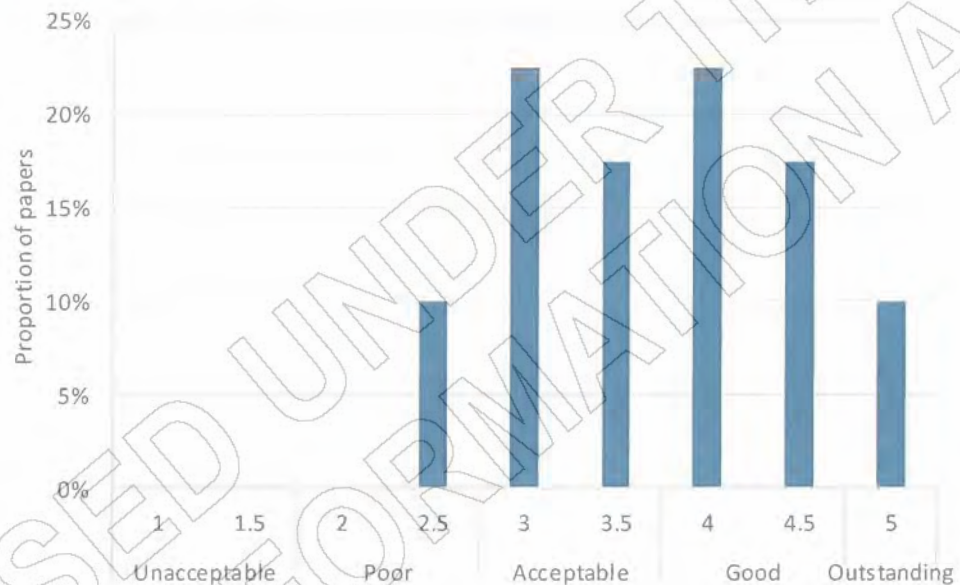
Source: NZIER

While there is a significant proportion of high scoring papers – there is quite a spread in the distribution of scores.

Table 1 Policy paper quality scores[8]

	Number	Mean	Median	Min	Max	St Dev
2020	40	3.73	3.75	2.5	5	0.76

Source: NZIER

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[8] The key statistics in the table summarise our overall impressions:
  - The median reflects what the reader can commonly expect.
  - The mean includes the impact of the extremes that make lasting impressions.
  - The standard deviation indicates the consistency of the papers.

4.2 Different types of paper scored differently

There weren't vast differences. But, this year the more substantive reports were better. The aides-mémoires, while based on a solid foundation, needed more attention to their purpose and support for the Minister. This is a core part of our recommendations for improvement this year – to focus on further refining them.

Figure 3 Average score by type of paper

Source: NZIER

4.3 Time constraints didn't impact adversely on quality

The COVID-19-related papers were generally better than the business as usual papers. This is remarkable as they were often written under extreme time pressure, and other constraints.

They tended to be highly technical papers focused on issues at the core of MSD's business. They were practical and looked at how things could be done, and the risks associated with implementation. Well done.

They were also often based on the lessons learnt from the Canterbury earthquake response – no doubt this helped.

Figure 4 Average score by COVID-19 papers versus regular papers

Source: NZIER

4.4   Historical comparisons

2020 establishes a new baseline, so, as noted, we have limited context for these results.

However, Figure 6 shows a significant increase in the number of papers which exceeded the PQF standards, even taking into account the changes in the scoring system.

Figure 5 Proportion of papers which met the PQF standards[9]
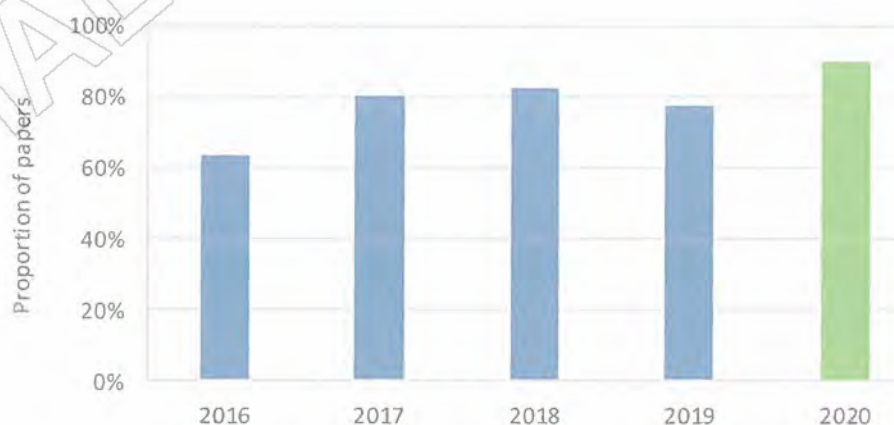
Source: NZIER

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[9]   Under the new system this is papers scoring a 3 or more are considered to have met the PQF standard, and under the previous NZIER system papers scoring a 7 and above. Note the comments in Section 1 that these aren't directly comparable.

Figure 6 Proportion of papers which exceeded the PQF standards[10]
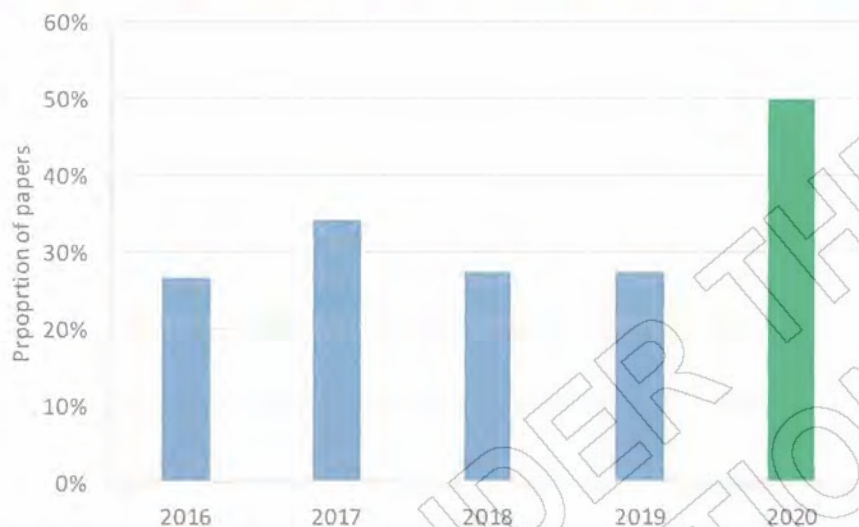
Source: NZIER

We have included some more comparisons to previous results in Appendix E.

4.5 Further advice

We are continuing with the series of Policy Advice Masterclasses in 2020 focused on tips and tricks to help you improve the quality of your advice. You will have no doubt received some of these Masterclasses by now.

Our earlier Masterclasses, developed over the past four years, are published on our website,[11] so that you can access them easily.

In November/December we will be holding our annual event to discuss emerging trends, plusses and minuses of papers overall, performance against the new criteria, and other issues we see in the reviews. We will also award prizes for the best papers.

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[10] Under the new system this is papers scoring a 4 or more have exceeded the PQF standards, and under the previous NZIER system papers scoring an 8 and above. Note the comments in Section 1 that these aren't directly comparable.

[11] https://nzier.org.nz/quality-of-policy-advice/central-government-masterclasses/

5   Strengths and weaknesses

5.1   Positives

Context

- **The big picture** – papers made the links to wider government strategies and objectives.
- **What came before** – previous decisions, and advice was consistently referenced.

Analysis

- **We know the business** – great subject knowledge including the operational detail. For example, Paper 14 made light work of the complexities of the system.
- **Made the most of previous experience** – many of the COVID-19 papers referenced other 'emergency' situation policies and programmes, e.g. those used to provide support in the Canterbury earthquakes; the GFC, and referenced international responses. This gave the papers an authoritative tone – as advice in this new situation was to some extent tried and tested.
- **Evidence based** – good use of data to underpin the arguments (e.g. Papers 29 and 38)
- **Choices** – Paper 11 did a great job of explaining the various options and assessing them against clear criteria. (Other examples were Paper 18 and 38.) Do this more often, it's one of the foundations of robust policy analysis.

Advice

- **Scripts can include other players** – a shrewd way of taking advantage of work for joint Ministers is to design a 'double play.' This uses the two ministers to present the two sides of an argument. This was extremely well done in Paper 3.

- **Impacts for Māori** – Paper 26 was a good example of explaining the distributional impacts for Māori of the policy change. But this sort of analysis should be included in all papers.

- **What to say** – some great examples of ready to use talking points (and questions) for your Minister (e.g. Papers 3 and 22). But this wasn't always the case. In addition, Paper 22 put the talking points in a box – this really made them stand out and would make the paper easy to use in a meeting setting. Make this standard practice.

- **Gender analysis** – Ministry for Women has been pushing this for the last couple of years; it's been a Cabinet requirement for much longer than that! Paper 29 was a great example.

- **A picture tells 1000 words** – some great graphics, which enhanced the papers (e.g. Papers 11, 13, 15, 19 and 26).

- **Some good use of active headings and subheadings** – but not done consistently. Done well these make papers much easier to read and improve the logic and flow of papers.

Action

- **Monitoring and evaluation** – a new requirement of the Policy Quality Framework. Paper 29 explained how the strategy was to be monitored. This is something you'll need to keep more front and centre.

5.2 Areas to work on

Context

Analysis

- **Assertion is not analysis** – in several cases important policy measures that were always going to be controversial were barely justified. There were only a couple of statements and no promise of further support. Good practice would be to indicate the likely problem and at least offer support.

- **What did they say?** – many papers listed which agencies were consulted, but not what they said, or whether they supported the paper.

Advice

- **Who are we supporting?** – too often the brief was strong on the subject and then left the Minister to work out their own tactics[12] and talking points. Great tactical advice and support gives the Minister an armchair ride – rather than having to think on her/his feet in a meeting.

- **Light on risk** – Ministers always want to understand any risk with policy proposals or decisions. Make sure you explain them upfront and discuss how they can be managed. We've talked to you about this before.

- **Italics don't stand out** – in some of your templates italics are used for subheadings. These don't stand out very well on a busy page, and somewhat spoil the impact of your usually very good active subheadings. We suggest you change the template.

- **Tighten your QA** – a fair few minor mistakes are slipping through (and not just on the papers that were done in a big hurry – which we didn't worry too much about). Page formatting was regularly a problem – try not to split lists, paragraphs, tables over a page, or leave hanging headings. This can be easily picked up in a final QA. Make sure you build in some time for a thorough QA right at the end.

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[12] See Masterclass Brief 22 Tactical Advice https://nzier.org.nz/static/media/filer_public/f4/e6/f4e66b18-53ee-430b-a61d-b55efc7d592f/brief_22_tactical_advice_2.pdf

- **More white space** – makes a paper easier to read. Some were text heavy and intense.

Action

- **Next steps finish the job** – leaving the follow up hanging is like leaving the job undone. Best practice is a timetable with various next steps listed.

Appendix A The Policy Quality Framework

Figure 7 Policy Quality Framework: standards for quality policy advice

Source: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet

The full framework can be found at https://dpmc.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2019-06/FINAL%20full%20Policy%20Quality%20Framework.pdf

Appendix B Policy Quality Framework scoring definitions

Score	Meaning	Description
1	Unacceptable	Does not meet the relevant quality standards in fundamental ways • Lacks basic information and analysis • Creates serious risk of poor decision-making • Should not have been signed out • Needed fundamental rework
2	Poor	Does not meet the relevant quality standards in material ways • Explains the basic issue but seriously lacking in several important areas • Creates risk of poor decision-making • Should not have been signed out • Needed substantial improvement in important areas
3	Acceptable	Meets the relevant quality standards overall, but with some shortfalls • Provides most of the analysis and information needed • Could be used for decision-making • Was sufficiently fit-for-purpose for sign-out • Could have been improved in several areas
4	Good	Meets all the relevant quality standards • Represents good practice • Provides a solid basis for decision-making • Could have been signed out with confidence • Minor changes would have added polish
5	Outstanding	Meets all the relevant quality standards and adds something extra • Represents exemplary practice • First-rate advice that provides a sound basis for confident decision-making • Could have been signed out with great confidence • A polished product

Appendix C One-page assessments

C.1 New Zealand Superannuation and Veteran's Pension Legislation Amendment Bill

Overall assessment	
4	A standard Cabinet Legislation (Cab LEG)[13] paper which does all the necessaries. It clearly explains some complex issues. The extensive and detailed recommendations are appropriate, given the nature of the paper. Remember to explain that agencies support the paper, rather than just listing them as consulted.
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	References previous decisions. Includes a tight summary of the provisions of the Bill.
Areas for improvement	Remember to reiterate how this Bill fits in with wider Government priorities.
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Follows the format and requirements for a Cab LEG paper. Systematically goes through the minor changes the Minister has decided on.
Areas for improvement	There is no indication of the scale of impact or cost implications of the changes proposed. It does seem like they were tidy-up type provisions to ensure the original intent was clear. But always worth giving some assurances about implications!
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Good use of active subheadings. New issues are carefully explained. They are highly technical matters, and the explanations are clearly and readily understandable.
Areas for improvement	The formatting in para 10 could have been simpler to follow. Some subheadings about the particular topics, or even bolding key phrases would have helped.
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Explains the timings of the next stages of the Bill.
Areas for improvement	Could do more to remind colleagues why these deadlines are necessary, i.e. coming into force on 1 July 2020.

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[13] Although it went to CBC!

C.2 Implementing our agreed approach to paying benefits and pensions to those stranded overseas

Overall assessment	
4	Good paper which clearly explains the legal basis for the scheme, and what is needed to be formally decided by Ministers.
	It would have benefited from some more information on other implementation issues to give assurance to Ministers that this could be easily done, warned them of any potential issues, and explained the overall timetable.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Includes a nice summary of the previous decisions (paras 2-4).
	Clear Purpose statement.
Areas for improvement	

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Informed by legal advice on the best way to implement these decisions.
	Explains the consequential amendments and new regulations/orders-in-council needed.
	Well drafted recommendations which cover the decisions, and the standard legislative, compliance, and financial matters.
Areas for improvement	Worth reminding about the number of people potentially affected.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Excellent heading and subheading structure. This makes the paper an easier and quicker read than it would have been otherwise.
	Includes information on the financial implications.
Areas for improvement	Formatting glitch para 22.
	Notes who has been consulted, but not what they say.
	If there are no risks, it's still worth giving the assurance.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Focused on the legislative/regulatory actions needed to implement the policy.
	Notes that a comms strategy will be developed.
Areas for improvement	While there is a focus on legislation, there is less on other implementation matters. Ideally, the paper should explain how and when MSD can implement the changes.
	A timetable would be a useful addition. While the paper notes that the programme will come into effect on 20 April, it would be useful to have timings for communications, payments to be made, and sorting the other pieces of legislation necessary to support the programme.

C.3 Report Back on a Wage Supplement Approach to Replace Minimum Wage Exemption Permits

Overall assessment	
5	Crisp aide-mémoire wastes no words supplying coordinated talking points for both Ministers. Has Q&As too as 'just in case'. Shrewd and well-drafted this is a model of how to do such a briefing. Goes on to include extra 'hip pocket' material to cover all eventualities.
	But would be better with more detail on consultation – especially reporting the various views by population group and types of employer – perhaps in the hip pocket material.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clear about purpose and zeroes in like a guided missile.
	Structures the proposed material to develop a strong case including showing how what is on the table is part of a wider strategy, using existing instruments (Labour Inspectors).
Areas for improvement	

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Definition of problem is extremely clear.
	Scale indicated by the costs included – these are clear.
	Arguments are clear if rather emotive.
Areas for improvement	Only option discussed is the status quo MWE system. Even in these notes more detail of what was wrong with other approaches (in the Q&A?) would be useful for the wider debate that will inevitably ensue.
	No mention of Māori or gender aspects.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Coordinating the material between the Ministers makes the collective arguments stronger.
	The writing is direct and crisp.
Areas for improvement	The risks are dealt with as largely mitigated by the trial and the follow up work promised by MSD. But the guarantee of no loss of income is not supported by a mechanism. A better discussion would show what policy would be used.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Broad strokes are used to show what follows.
	While there is no formal monitoring suggested, commitments are made about the way the system will work and a trial is proposed.
Areas for improvement	

C.4   Paper One: Accelerating Accessibility Cover Report

Overall assessment	
3	Worthy report attempts a difficult job – summing up substantial work in three other papers. It does the job, but without much flair. So, there is a proposal and arguments are made.
	A better paper would have a stronger case with more evidential support. Reading it is more a slog than a breeze. Lumpy drafting, poor proofing and lack of work on costs hold this paper back. Even the A3 is busy and hard to follow. It all needed a tough edit.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Background is filled in and other papers are now available dealing with three specific areas to round out the project.
	Good history of previous Cabinet dealings.
Areas for improvement	Even as an overview the discussion of what might be involved is thin.

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	The arguments are made – setting out what is in the papers to come.
	It is difficult to pick the level of detail in an overview but citing examples is always useful (para 47 has something of this and the discussion of the definition in para 48 is similarly helpful.).
Areas for improvement	But the analytics are not compelling to the neutral reader, at least as presented here without instances and evidence. Poor material on costing focuses entirely on public sector funding and then just cites an Ontario example. (There may be more on all of this, of course in the three other papers.)
	Some relevant data would help with the case.
	Risks are signalled based on overseas experience but not developed in practice and the illustrations seem lacking in details.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Has taken a stand on the issue in play and runs with it. The aim is to make progress and the question is not whether but how.
	Some useful headings carry the story along – more would be good.
Areas for improvement	Two-page Executive Summary in six-and-a-half-page paper! This is too much. Any summary needs to be short and sharp.
	Mentions aspects of consultation and views but has not consolidated the findings into a table with a detailed picture of what is thought by various groups.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Good table of steps to ensue to move along the paper's recommendations about the process.
Areas for improvement	But nothing on how the actual plan itself will evolve – not even a broad outline of the steps envisaged.

C.5　Draft for ministerial consultation: New Zealand Superannuation and Veteran's Pension Legislation Bill

Overall assessment	
3.5	A good descriptive paper for Ministerial consultation with a tidy set of recommendations to get the Bill into the House. The paper is a 'hybrid' of final policy and LEG issues. As a consultation draft with a few inputs still to come, this is the time to make it easy for Cabinet colleagues to agree by providing a brief recap of why the legislation needs to be modernised and simplified. Critically the paper should remind Ministers who is affected, and how, as a population or provide some worked examples.
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	The legislative context for the Bill is clearly set out. The timeline in the cover note helps to convey the speed of the consultation and introduction.
Areas for improvement	With the issue previously considered at Cabinet a reminder of what you mean by modernising would help to compel the paper. With a Category 3 classification in a very busy Parliament, time is scarce.
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	The paper demonstrates a strong sense of legislative analysis. This provides reassurance that the proposals constitute good law-making.
Areas for improvement	As a consultation paper the paper still needs to inform the Minister of who the winners and losers are in the changes proposed. It is not possible to get a sense of materiality in the absence of data or worked examples. Critically this includes the impact on the Crown accounts. Ministers always like to know how many people are affected, and by how much as a cohort and with a few worked examples. Remind them. In particular, the paper needs to cover the Māori dimension of the changes given the proportion of Māori in the affected groups.
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Well-written and tightly edited. Good use of active subheadings in the cover note.
Areas for improvement	This paper is headed for Ministerial consultation, what are the key points of interest for other Ministers? Offering a few talking points for her to raise in discussion with her affected colleagues can help with reassurance and smooth the way. What are the risk implications of the legislation not getting through as proposed?
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	The cover note conveys a sense of urgency and sets out the remaining departmental inputs. You have an excellent set of next steps and easy to follow recommendations in the Cabinet paper.
Areas for improvement	More information on what you intend to do to fill in the 'in progress' gaps with Veterans' Affairs, Inland Revenue, Treasury and others would help reassure the Minister that the Cabinet paper will be ready to go.

C.6 New Zealand Superannuation and Veteran's Pension Legislation Amendment Bill – aide-mémoire

Overall assessment	
3.5	The talking points provide a very comprehensive technical description of the changes. The aide-mémoire would benefit from pointers on which of the changes are most material. A 'what it looks like as a pensioner' perspective would greatly improve the Minister's pitch at Cabinet.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	The talking points remind Ministers that the package of amendments had been previously agreed and that the main intent is to align the schemes so that they assess individuals rather than spousal/partner arrangements. That is the overarching policy driver.
Areas for improvement	With all the detailed talking points, this is the time to remind Cabinet in a few opening talking points why this issue is in front of Ministers, why this is important and what the practical impact will be for pensioners and the Crown.

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Good command of the detail and explanation of the mechanics.
Areas for improvement	Bringing forward front and centre the policy rationale points buried in the 'Additional Talking Points' section would make this paper more compelling. These points answer the – remind me why are we doing this question. Being clear on the criteria you use to determine when changes are warranted helps to provide a frame for why this set of changes are proposed, e.g. fairness, efficiency of scheme, policy alignment. This includes a statement of how the changes make the situation better. For completeness, the talking points should specifically indicate the impact on Māori.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	The talking points communicate clear, specific and actionable intentions.
Areas for improvement	A few worked examples with typical dollar amounts would go a long way to taking the mystery out of what happens in practice for a typical couple or individual. A few talking points on the reaction you expect from pensioners helps Ministers understand the impact and how they can support your Minister. What risks are there and how are they being managed? It is not clear why only the winter energy payment was worthy of an A3. This is a lot of detail for Cabinet without a sense of materiality.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Indicating what the consequential knock-on changes are to other legislation as in PAYE, for example, help show that you have thought through the legislative issues.
Areas for improvement	A few brief talking points on how the policy will be communicated and implemented will provide reassurance that the policy can be given full effect.

C.7   Accessible Streets Regulatory Package: Public Consultation

Overall assessment	
2.5	A tidy aide-mémoire, on a Ministry of Transport (Transport) Cabinet paper and public consultation document, 9(2)(g)(i) OIA
	Adds weight by arguing from both a Seniors portfolio and Office for Disability issues (ODI) viewpoint.
	Best practice in second opinion advice is to use data. Give the Minister more ammunition for the Cabinet discussion - provide more evidence, back up assertions and advise why you propose 10 km/h.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clear purpose.
	Advises intent of the Accessible Streets package, which is the subject of the Cabinet paper and consultation document.
Areas for improvement	

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Gives history of discussion between MSD and Transport.
	9(2)(g)(i) OIA
Areas for improvement	Aide-mémoire makes assurances that appear emotive because they are not backed up. Give more evidence and statistics, such as how many accidents have occurred on footpaths, broken down into seniors and disabled people if you can.
	You disagree with a speed of 15 km/h on footpaths but why propose 10 km/h? Any research or overseas evidence that backs up a speed limit of 10 km/h?

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Provides clear recommendation 9(2)(g)(i) OIA
Areas for improvement	Nail this ongoing argument with facts as well as objectives and claims.
	Provide the Minister with talking points.
	Typo page 3, 'seed' should read 'speed'.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	9(2)(g)(i) OIA
	You can have a second bite of the cherry.

C.8   9(2)(f)(iv) OIA

Overall assessment	
2.5	9(2)(f)(iv) OIA
	Sharp and clear recommendations.
	Lacks clear problem definition, which sets the paper off on the wrong foot. Needs a sharper problem definition and objectives 9(2)(f)(iv) OIA

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	9(2)(f)(iv) OIA
Areas for improvement	

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Good links to other government initiatives.
	References previous briefings.
	Helpfully advises current work 9(2)(f)(iv) OIA
	9(2)(f)(iv) OIA
	Goes through options previously considered and the reasons for these options being dismissed.
Areas for improvement	Needs more rigour. Provide a concise problem definition. 9(2)(f)(iv) OIA What options fit best to these objectives?

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Recommendations offer up a suite of options for the Minister to choose from.
	Good subheadings.
	Acknowledges there will be financial, legal, privacy and consultation implications for any options that go ahead.
Areas for improvement	Apply the clear and straightforward language in the recommendations to the rest of the paper.
	Review for long winded sentences that don't add much to the story.
	Correct confusing phraseology. Do you really mean that businesses can access 9(2)(f)(iv) (in para 2)?
	Refine Executive Summary to synthesise advice, currently it reads like a background section.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Clear next steps.
	Smart forward thinking to 9(2)(f)(iv) OIA .
Areas for improvement	

C.9   Initial Income Stand-downs – Policy Settings and Options for Change

Overall assessment	
4.5	Well-structured paper which systematically goes through the possible options for introducing exemptions to the stand-down, their impact, and the implementation issues associated with them.
	This paper would have scored even higher if it had paused to summarise the conclusions of the analysis, before proceeding with the standard compliance matters.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Explains how this issue has arisen.
	Explains the links between this policy and the overall strategy.
Areas for improvement	

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Articulates a clear set of options (para 5).
	Good discussion of the merits and risks associated with each of the options.
	Footnotes used well to provide further technical information.
	Well-worked example to explain the impact of the current stand-down policy.
	Gives an indication of the number of people normally impacted by a stand-down. This gives some sense of the scale of the issue.
Areas for improvement	Worth including a paragraph summarising your analysis of the options before heading off into the compliance matters, i.e. just after para 34.
	Alternatively, a table assessing each option against the criteria used, e.g. cost, fit with the welfare reforms, the extent to which immediate hardship is addressed, ability to implement (systems and legislation), risk of legal challenge, fairness.
	While it is an evolving situation, still worth incorporating some current data (and potentially some forecast data) on the numbers of people potentially impacted.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Good use of active headings. But there could have been more of them.
	Structure is clear – the paper goes through the current settings, and then analyses each of the options.
	Discussion of risk is woven into the analysis.
	Financial implications of internal changes are clear. But light on overall financial implications. This is a bit surprising given the work that has gone into costing system changes.
	Well worded, and well set out recommendations.
Areas for improvement	Some long sentences, e.g. para 3.
	A busy paper – more white space, and headings which stand out more clearly would help.
	Watch page breaks – e.g. under para 34.
	Some extra full stops in para 22.
	Best explain why there has been no consultation with other agencies, e.g. Treasury.
	Recommendations could indicate which option is not preferred, e.g. Option C.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Next steps are covered in recommendation 7. But could be in the paper as well.
Areas for improvement	

C.10 Meeting with Fostering Kids New Zealand

Overall assessment	
3	Useful standard pre-meeting brief. You've obviously worked with OT officials in preparing it which will be helpful for both Ministers and will keep them on the same track.
	But, worth including some more tactical advice, starting with being very clear about the purpose of the meeting from the Minister's perspective, i.e. what she should try and achieve. Then adding/re-designing the briefing material to meet those goals.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Includes the practical information – when where, who.
Areas for improvement	

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Provides a useful description of the current policy settings.
Areas for improvement	Is there any data that could be added about the number of exemptions granted? The number of people impacted? Etc.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Notes that some issues have already been discussed with OT staff. Would be handy to know what they said.
	Identifies the issues that Fostering Kids NZ are likely to arise. This means that the Minister would be well prepared.
Areas for improvement	Would expect to see a bio and photos for those attending (not the other Minister of course). Also, helpful to indicate whether they have met with your Minister before, or not.
	Gives a general statement on the purpose of the meeting, e.g. a discussion. But try and take this a step further and explain what the Minister should be trying to get out of the meeting, e.g. just to listen to stakeholder views, to gain a deeper understanding of their concerns, to provide assurance that the government is considering these issues? Or just support Minister Martin?
	Useful information on policy development coming from OT – we assume that Minister Martin will mention this. Would also be good to know what advice Minister Martin will be getting ahead of this meeting if possible.
	Do you have any advice for your Minister on how she should play this with Minister Martin, e.g. take the lead or leave it to Minister Martin? Or are you expecting them to have a brief conversation ahead of time.
	Consider adding talking points and questions for the Minister to ask. As it is you are relying on her to do this on the hoof.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	

C.11 Further income support measures in response to COVID-19

Overall assessment	
4.5	Good think piece prepared under considerable time pressure. Your expertise shone through. The A3 was a great summary of the options analysis and would have no doubt been useful to Ministers. The format and structure of the recommendations needed to be tidied up to ensure that Ministers could more clearly indicate their preferences.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clear Purpose statement – an initial piece designed to get some feedback and set officials up for further work.
Areas for improvement	

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Always good to explain that the report was prepared under tight timeframes. But take this a step further an explain how this might have impacted, e.g. lack of access to data, haven't been able to source expert advice of some kind, or just that proposal require more refinement.

The suggested phasing concept provides a useful way of thinking about the types of support needed at different times.

Essentially a gap analysis – it explained potential needs, and the current assistance available, and identified gaps.

The table under para 25 was a very useful summary of the current assistance in place and likely gaps.

Uses criteria to evaluate the housing intervention options. These are clearly set out in the A3, but a bit buried in the paper itself.

Good data on the impacts for Māori and Pacific peoples (but light on data for the population as a whole). |
| Areas for improvement | |

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Good use of active headings. But the subheadings don't stand out enough.

Great A3 on housing. It would set you up to have a great discussion with Ministers!

Does a good job of explaining the operational risks, and lead times for implementing various policy options. |
| Areas for improvement | Recs 4 and 6 could have been better set up to allow different Ministers to indicate which of the choices they preferred (rather than just a yes/no for all of the points). |

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Outlines both short and longer term considerations. This discussion was helpfully tactical.
Areas for improvement	But still needed some explicit next steps covered in the body of the paper. The recommendations did this better, but still failed to include timings for the various actions.

C.12 Speaking points for draft Cabinet paper on Temporary Accommodation Assistance and Transitional Assistance Payment

Overall assessment	
2.5	A two- page aide-mémoire that seeks to do one straightforward job: provide speaking notes to introduce a Cabinet paper seeking pre-budget commitments for two temporary schemes with few significant recipients. The issues are outlined and the setting explained for each. But costs don't make sense as they are cited and for one case there is uncertainty about eligibility – assistance 'may be available'. This is not helpful as it leaves the matter hanging. The text is convoluted and needed careful editing to suit having selected extracts being read aloud.
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Explains one bid for a commitment that could not be made at Budget time as decisions were not made in time. Owns up to the fantastically complex nature of the interlocks in the welfare/tax system – this creates the need for one scheme.
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Cites estimates of who may be affected and who lose out. Gives precedents, though no detail of how these worked.
Areas for improvement	The figures don't work as they stand – and don't forget even if this is squared away in the paper many Ministers will be responding to the oral material alone. For the TAA: 15 recipients for a year at $330/ week is $257,400. Why ask for $770,000, unless there are other details that appear in the paper and are not mentioned? And for the TAP, the cost for a year is $110,968 with $256,000 sought, which is similarly incongruous without more information. If there is a complexity that means the numbers do make sense, it needed to be flagged – even if just to say there is a special wrinkle that causes the need to be higher than would appear.
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Separates the two proposals and handles each on its own merits. The key problem is the precedent risk which is discussed for the Transitional Assistance Payment (using historical examples) but not mentioned for the Temporary Accommodation Assistance. Brief, whole paper is just on two pages.
Areas for improvement	Could have been sharper and shorter – though this is a minor matter. No headings aside from Proposal, Temporary Accommodation Assistance and Transitional Assistance Payment. The idea seems to be for the Minister to read it all out. Best practice is to organise the notes in blocks dealing with separate areas and give each once a clear heading to enable it to be quickly located in the meeting for use as and when required. These are talking points and are more useful if they are ready to use. Otherwise the Minister will have to re-shape them while using them. Why drag in detail of other schemes that are in the same general area of (earthquake) application but may not apply?
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Clear about the expiry of the Temporary Accommodation Assistance. Hazier about the Transitional Assistance payment.
Areas for improvement	Despite the obvious administrative data available there is no mention of monitoring.

C.13 Welfare Overhaul – Further Advice on Working for Families and Wider Income Support Changes

Overall assessment	
5	Cracking briefing that presents a wide range of possible options of changes to Working for Families and associated policies. They are assessed for their contribution to several objectives, crucially child poverty reduction. Crisp drafting and sound organisation are complemented by useful appendices including diagrams. These features allowed it to communicate a series of technical estimates of the effects of different policies in a compelling way that did not gloss over the methods used. Readers would prefer the assessment measures to be explained in the body. An even better paper would remind Ministers of the (relevant) project aims and justify the tools.
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clear where this fits in the wider project. Has some context and background.
Areas for improvement	Economises on the setting and thus leaves a bit for Ministers to recall.
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	The heavy lifting in the analysis is done by the TAWA model. This is covered clearly and with flair in the diagrams/write ups and the Annexes. This paper focuses on assessing the results against the aims of the programme – especially child poverty. The way the analytical material is discussed means the results are clear and the comparisons stand out.
Areas for improvement	Any model will have weaknesses. The paper would be improved with more about these (and their implications) than the single sentence on page 10 and the footnotes to Annex C.
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Design features are simple but smashing – using a similar heading device to show how the paper is organised. And the diagrams and tables are really striking. They provide insights into the way the technical features of the policies work on the aims and goals of the Government in this area. Good clear writing deals effectively with the many possible combinations of cases.
Areas for improvement	Only one slip identified (footnote 5).
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	This is interim advice and a further meeting is scheduled. The idea is to warm Ministers up to the sort of combinations that might be possible. This package of results provides a great base for the discussion at the forthcoming meeting. The diagrams and tables are readily available to support the next round of decisions.
Areas for improvement	

C.14 Temporary Income Relief for people who have lost their job due to COVID-19

Overall assessment	
3.5	Significant Cabinet paper seeking large scale support for COVID-19-caused unemployment. It proposes a special intervention beyond the jobseeker allowance and discusses its detail.
	The mechanical side – what is to be done and how – makes sense within the complexity of the system, relative to the conditions it is set to answer.
	But there is limited justification and support for the specific proposal. And there is no consideration of options either in broad design or in key details like levels of payment (though we expect Ministers have reviewed options earlier).

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Has a good section on the situation.
	Timing speaks for itself – clearly this has been prepared at speed.
	Soldiers through the necessary complications created by the existing welfare system.
Areas for improvement	Lacks a discussion of where this proposal fits into the wider economic picture. How does it work as a macro intervention?

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	The framework builds on the idea of unprecedented times deserving special measures; and cites examples of policies used in response to the GFC and the Earthquakes.
	This leaves para 19 carrying a heavy assertion load without much support and little evidence.
	Some of the surrounding thinking is usefully exposed.
Areas for improvement	The rest of the paper is about the design of the proposal without explicitly analysing options.
	A better paper would have more discussion (perhaps an appendix) explaining why this measure was justified and how these particular parameters (e.g. the levels of payment) were chosen (What were the criteria? What evidence was drawn on? Why exclude those receiving a seemingly arbitrary level of redundancy?). If this had been traversed in an earlier paper good practice is to briefly remind Ministers of their discussion.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Great Executive Summary sets out the paper's case.
	Nice tone to the drafting pitches the paper appropriately.
	The writing and the structure of headings carry the paper along.
Areas for improvement	Lacks clear statement of the communications strategy to be used.
	No discussion of the risks that were obvious – why do people losing jobs one day later gain a higher allowance?

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	A section on implementation shows the work already done to ensure delivery will work.
	Mentions monitoring and reporting on the proposal explicitly.
Areas for improvement	While assigns the communications roles to the PM and Officials, has no detail of the line to be used, nor key messages.

C.15 Welfare Overhaul: income support system – priorities and future directions

Overall assessment	
2.5	Some hidden gems in a tentative, difficult to follow paper. It also had an overly long Executive Summary. The paper loses purpose early and could be improved by setting out the structure of what follows and providing clear criteria and analysis of what should be on the work programme.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Excellent show of joined-up advice with the four agencies.
	The policy imperative, scope and link to WEAG are made
Areas for improvement	The Executive Summary at 5 pages is far too lengthy. NZIER Masterclass 3 *The Golden Page: improving your executive summary*[14] provides advice on how to nail your opening.
	The paper could be improved with sign-posting what follows in the whole package including the cover note, main briefing and the three appendices. When within the text (e.g. para 23), the paper would help guide the reader by indicating which appendix contains the material being discussed.
	Paras 64-66 are repeated in para 142.

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Some specific quantified proposals in paras 64-66 that give a good feel for the magnitude of change
	Appendix 3 is well buried but does a nice job of setting out illustrative packages against criteria.
Areas for improvement	Some early facts and trends on the nature and magnitude of the issues would help Ministers engage in your request to identify priorities. For example, low take-up of in-work payment is how low?
	As a paper seeking prioritisation, the paper needs to provide criteria for assessment of work programme items up front, e.g. WEAG recommendation, major barrier, easy to fix, cost, equity.
	A paper on a topic of this significance needs to include reference to Te Tiriti, Māori perspectives and distributional impacts on Māori for completeness.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Appendix 2 does a good visual job of setting out budget packages
Areas for improvement	A five-page Executive Summary is too lengthy, especially for something going to the Prime Minister.
	Setting out the WEAG recommended changes in a table alongside your assessment would have been great way to present that body of work.
	The paper makes several references to what officials 'believe'. As advisors your advice should be grounded in evidence against an objective in order to differentiate analysis from opinion. A way to express this is to say 'In order to......then....'. Or 'If the government wants to maximise.... x...... then ....y.... is the best option because it.....'
	An effective way to engage Ministers in an open-ended briefing like this is to posit the questions on which you wish to engage and want ministerial feedback. These can be done effectively with subheadings for example, What criteria should be used to prioritise the work programme? What should be the short term work programme priorities?
	Illustrative packages would be easier to follow and compare if framed in an Appendix.
	Highlighting areas of risk would assist in setting the work programme.

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[14] https://nzier.org.nz/static/media/filer_public/13/70/137010dc-b2ab-44e8-a9ee-05843bc01507/brief_no_3_masterclass_executive_summaries.pdf

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	The paper contains only noting recommendations. It could be more action oriented by providing your assessment of what should be on the work programme and meeting agenda as a 'straw man'. You could list the questions for which you are seeking guidance to provide further clarity.
	You could have offered a draft agenda for the meeting to maintain momentum with the meeting only a few weeks away.

C.16 Key policy decisions on temporary income relief for people who have lost their job due to COVID-19

Overall assessment	
5	A pitch perfect paper that is tightly written, covers a lot of ground and logically works through an unusually high number of recommendations for triple Ministerial agreement to each.
	As asking for $700m, the paper could be improved with more discussion on how you intend to manage and monitor the uncertainty.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Excellent background on previous temporary income relief, when and why this is a rational policy response.
	Need for speed comes through loud a clear.
	New Zealand's OECD position on earnings replacement helps to anchor the proposals that follow.
Areas for improvement	The paper could be improved with a brief reminder right up front of what the requested revisions had been from the last meeting.

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	The paper contains a clear rationale for intervention, link to other supports, eligibility, recipient expectations, legislative and financial implications.
	A brief but impressive section on population impacts. One of the best human rights considerations we have seen.
Areas for improvement	Still a lot of risks to consider on implementation that could be discussed in detail.
	Would be good to hear the success of previous temporary relief packages. What worked and what was challenging.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	The narrative flows clearly and consistently through the Executive Summary, recommendations and main body. An excellent set of clear recommendations set out logically with good subheadings and the precision needed to get three Ministers through 15 'agree' recommendations.
	The paper sets out why these exceptional times require an exceptional response, and the important judgement calls. The report conveys a sense of considered wisdom on the part of officials that inspired confidence in the advice.
Areas for improvement	Some big calls here that would benefit on more discussion on how Ministers might manage stakeholder reactions.
	At 3 pages the Executive Summary could be shortened.

Action: identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	A real sense of pace with the implications of delay.
	The implementation section provides a clear explanation of the pathway and risks inherent in moving at the recommended pace.
Areas for improvement	The paper would be improved with more on the monitoring strategy and reporting back on implementation.

C.17   Support for early learning services in lieu of the childcare subsidy

Overall assessment	
4	A clear, on point , aide-mémoire, that highlights the key risks.
	As a note to support the Minister in Cabinet, the memo could provide a few tactical talking points to help her with mastering the content and collegial relationships.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Good explanation of process and why the Cabinet paper is in front of Ministers.
Areas for improvement	It would help to know what the other options where that had been ruled out

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	The example of weekly costs if Level 3 is extended helps give a good sense of the magnitude of the fiscal risk.
Areas for improvement	A few facts on the number of ECE centres, teachers, children and families affected would strengthen the memo. Just how low is the demand and when you say limited re-openings, how many?
	In particular, the Minister would be better armed if you had information about the groups who have the most to gain and lose from the proposal. This includes Māori and other vulnerable populations.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Pointing out how the risk could play out and leave the Minister in breach of an appropriation is the important 'no surprises' piece of advice that you place front and centre.
	Short and sharp. Tightly edited.
Areas for improvement	Cover notes for Cabinet papers provide an opportunity for more tactical advice as it does not need to repeat all Cabinet top or the Executive Summary.
	In this case, for example, you might suggest the Minister seeks some reassurances on what will happen if the appropriation is breached.
	If the Minister is supportive then she might also want to note how this decisions helps other Cabinet portfolios, e.g. with the Health strategy for social distancing and how it supports working from home to keep the economy rolling.
	A few talking points that help the Minister 'work the room' to manage her risk and show how she is supporting the whole of government COVID strategy would round out the advice from you.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Importantly, you have pointed out that SWC has power to act, so whatever you decide will be final.
Areas for improvement	It would be good to let the Minister know what your monitoring plans are against the risks. It would help to give a date for the advice on the best approach to restarting childcare assistance at Level 2.

C.18   Welfare overhaul and temporary changes to MSD's services: Next steps

Overall assessment	
4	A smart report to the Minister that rethinks the welfare overhaul in light of temporary changes made in responding to COVID-19.
	Good work undoubtedly done at speed.
	Back up assertions made to show the extent of the impact of COVID-19 by providing unemployment numbers or any other relevant statistics.
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	References previous Cabinet decisions (paras 4, 13 and 14).
	Discusses impact of COVID-19.
Areas for improvement	Improve paper title, needs to refer to COVID-19.
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Great use of headings to tell the overall story.
	Discusses policy initiatives taken to date to adapt the welfare system to the changing COVID-19 circumstances.
	Contemplates which initiatives address the known policy issues.
	Robust analysis.
	Discusses worsening existing inequities and the disproportionate impact on already vulnerable groups such as disabled people, Māori, and Pacific peoples.
	Attaches useful appendixes, one showing COVID-19 responses and potential fit to the welfare overhaul and the other a draft work programme.
Areas for improvement	Back up assertions with facts. For instance, regarding 'the hit on tourism and hospitality', how many jobs are lost in this sector?
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Advises complementary work that is also progressing.
	Provides a draft overall work programme for discussion, which integrates responding to COVID-19 into the welfare overhaul work programme.
Areas for improvement	Improve recommendations with subheadings.
	Tidy up typos and spelling mistakes – see para 11, heading above para 16.
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Smart advice that further changes will require deprioritising other items on the medium and long- term work programme.
Areas for improvement	

C.19 Welfare Overhaul: Amending the purposes and principles of the Social Security Act 2018

Overall assessment	
4.5	A compelling report to the Minister to convince that any overhaul of the purposes and principles of the Social Security Act 2018 (the Act) should be accompanied by corresponding changes to operational provisions.
	Good reasoning and framework used, in this demanding piece of work, to persuade that the purposes and principles and operational provisions need to be in sync.
	Provide talking points for the Minister. We assume she will need to respond to whoever asked the question of when the Government intends to act on recommendations.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clear Purpose statement.
	References previous briefings.
	Sets the context well. Advises that the Welfare Expert Advisory Group (WEAG) recommends changes to the purposes of the Act that, if pursued, would signal a major change in the approach to social security.
Areas for improvement	Be clearer in para 2 as to who has asked the question of when the Government is intending to act on WEAG's recommendations. Is it WEAG itself or others?

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Provides good history and explanation of current purposes and principles in the Act.
	Uses a robust framework. Tempers advice since to have integrity and credibility then purposes and principles need to be operationalised.
	Very credible way of making the argument that changes to the purposes and principles to the Act should not be made in isolation. Persuades through discussing previous changes to the Act, case law, the link between purposes and operational provisions in other Acts, and how a change in the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 was accompanied by new related legislative provisions.
	Quotes pertinent legal advice and case law.
Areas for improvement	

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Robust risk analysis. Provides well-rounded advice outlining the legal, public perception and operational/financial risks of changing the purposes and principles without the accompanying operational provisions.
	Good use of subheadings.
	Easy to read.
Areas for improvement	Provide simple talking points for the Minister to respond to whichever party is asking her questions. Don't be afraid of exposing legally privileged advice, these talking points don't need to cover that advice.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	You rightly point to your advice in the previous briefing, which outlines the medium to long-term policy work programme, including considering the purposes and principles of the Act.
Areas for improvement	

C.20   Welfare Overhaul: Update on Progress and Long-Term Plan

Overall assessment	
3	A considered aide-mémoire to complement her Cabinet paper seeking endorsement of the proposed plan for the welfare overhaul work programme.
	Does a good job of summarising the relevant aspects of the welfare overhaul work programme.
	Your approach is too vanilla. Sharpen up the aide-mémoire by pre-empting gnarly questions, which Ministers may ask, and provide answers to these.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clear purpose of paper.
	Reminds Minister of the Confidence and Supply Agreement.
	Provides names of those extra Ministers attending from the Cabinet Māori Crown Relations: Te Arawhiti Committee.
Areas for improvement	

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Summarises the key issue raised in inter-agency consultation and how it has been resolved.
	Provides key features of the future state of the welfare system.
	Lists Budget bids that link to the welfare overhaul work programme.
	Gives sense of short, medium and long-term work.
	Advises some issues will be more complex, such as the interface between the health and welfare systems.
Areas for improvement	Advise any inherent risks to the work programme, such as any timing or sequencing issues.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Gives talking points. Nice touch to remind her to welcome extra Ministers to the meeting.
	Smart to include a section on Kaupapa Māori values.
Areas for improvement	Provide Q&As. What are the hard questions Ministers may ask, particularly those extra Ministers attending from the Cabinet Māori Crown Relations: Te Arawhiti Committee? For instance: how will the Government assure the welfare overhaul work makes a difference to Māori access, service delivery and equity issues?

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	Given size of the programme then advise any review points, success factors, monitoring and evaluation plan etc. If these are in the Cabinet paper, then remind the Minister.

C.21   Childcare for Essential Workers at Alert Level 3

Overall assessment	
3	We know this would have been written under tight timeframes. But, this is a paper of two halves. It provides a useful update on uptake, as far as is known given data issues. However, the overall objective, and the problem that you are trying to solve with the transition period, is not as clear as it could be. If it was clearer, the arguments in the paper would be strengthened.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clearly explains the origin of the briefing and the discussions held by Ministers.
Areas for improvement	Add an extra statement into the Purpose explaining why you are proposing this change.

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Explains the problems with the data, and the interpretation of it. Raises the risks that ECE providers have with opening under Alert Level 3, e.g. financial viability, availability of staff, ability to operate under Alert Level 3 conditions.
Areas for improvement	Could do more to explain the things that childcare providers need to do to transition to Alert Level 3 (para 19 could be more precise). Could be clearer about the overall policy objectives, and therefore how the proposed transition period help to achieve those objectives from the perspectives of the different childcare providers, children, and essential workers. No other options considered.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	Could have done with some more active subheadings. Heavy on the noting recommendations. Would have benefited from a short summary/list of key points. Light on any a discussion on the risks of a transition period.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	Light on next steps.

C.22 Meeting with Judge Andrew Beecroft, the Children's Commissioner

Overall assessment	
4	Informative briefing ahead of what could be a tricky meeting. Good talking points, which were put in boxes to make them easy to find while in the meeting itself. This is something that should be standard practice.
	Remember to consider the objectives of the meeting from your Minister's perspective, as well as from those attending. This will help frame your advice and make it more tactical.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	All the practicalities are covered.
Areas for improvement	

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Systematically goes through each of the issues on the agenda using the same general format.
	Is clear about the purpose of the meeting from the Children's Commissioner's perspective. But isn't so clear about the objectives from Minsters' perspectives. Is it a regular meeting? A general catch-up? A way of resolving particular issues (it doesn't seem to be)? Or a chance to explain the Government's position on some of the issues being raised?
Areas for improvement	Could have done with some more information on the formal requirements for cost pressure bids. This would allow you to assess how this bid measures up with the rules.
	In item 2, the paper jumps to talking points, without going through MSD's advice on the matters raised by the OCC. The legal advice, in particular, needed some further information.
	Item 4 – could have done with a bit more analysis on the rapidly growing liabilities. This raises a bit of a red flag. So, explain.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Great talking points/questions. Good to see the talking points in boxes. This makes them easy to find.
Areas for improvement	In item 1, it takes a bit of work to fathom which bids MSD supports, or otherwise from the information presented in two separate sections under item 1. A table would have been a better way of displaying this analysis.
	Give some advice on which are the most important issues, and where Ministers should focus their time. You start to do this in Item 3 – but be more explicit.
	Always worth finding out what briefing other Ministers are getting, and letting your Minister know. A quick call to her officials or sharing briefings will do the trick.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Explains the next steps under each item, where relevant.
Areas for improvement	

C.23 Deferring the Publication of the Regional Reports and Dashboards

Overall assessment	
4.5	Clear sensible piece of advice. The problem is clearly articulated, and solutions discussed – all in effectively a page and a half. Well done.
	Worth checking with Cabinet Office, and specifically mentioning it in the paper, about a potentially more efficient way of formalising the deferral.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Refers to the Cabinet decision.
	References earlier briefings.
	Explains the purpose of the Regional Reports and Dashboards.
Areas for improvement	

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Provides a clear description of the problem, i.e. both diverting resources and accuracy problems.
	Outlines the preferred approach, as well as explaining the other options considered.
Areas for improvement	

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Good use of active headings which make the paper an easy and quick read.
	Well written.
Areas for improvement	No discussion of risks. Are there any?
	Would have benefited from a bit more advice about the best process for rescinding/deferring the Cabinet decision, given the situation with COVID-19. There might be other simpler options, e.g. a letter to the Chair of the Committee, and these could be explored in discussion with the Cabinet Office.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Notes the next steps.
Areas for improvement	

C.24 Social Service Providers Aotearoa and Martin Jenkins report on Social Service System Funding Gap

Overall assessment	
3	Rather awkward brief for Minister at session with sponsors of report on 'funding gap'. Given follow up meeting in 10 days this was a chance to lay groundwork and set out a framework.
	Offers opinions from MSD viewpoint but contributes little for the Minister. What will be the advice for the meeting? A better report would be crisper about key areas: the existing policy stands on the three causes of the gap; likely process once the report is released; what the Minister should say?

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Sketches who was involved and what is covered.
	Timing seems driven by Social Service Providers Aotearoa.
	Links with other potential Ministerial discussants.
Areas for improvement	MSD has not taken the initiative to find out views of other agencies likely to be interested.

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Does set out areas of Martin Jenkins report that are worth a comment. And gives the MSD perspective.
	Mentions a range of potential up sides to the report.
	Provides a low-key critique of aspects of the 'funding gap' including that it is based on a sample rather than a stocktake. Suggests technical discussion about these but focuses on moving ahead positively.
Areas for improvement	But unclear about what sort of process is envisaged following the discussion.
	Also lacks any anchoring via current thoughts about where policy might be going. Is pay parity intended soon? What is the thinking on transaction-based support funding compared with population blanket sums?

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Sets out the views of MSD clearly.
Areas for improvement	No discussion of where the Minister might be.
	Lacks a risk assessment.
	Adopts a really old-fashioned tone and approach.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Mentions next meeting as scheduled.
	Also names a couple of Ministers that may be interested.
Areas for improvement	No timetable.
	Would be better with a list of what might be on offer from MSD to support the Minister.

C.25 COVID-19 support for essential social sector services and communities

Overall assessment	
4.5	No nonsense Cabinet paper bidding for extra budget funds to support essential social sector (NGOs) and community services while COVID-19 Alert Level 4 prevails. Draws sensibly on local and overseas experience to propose solutions and forecast demand.
	But still could be edited to be less bureaucratic sounding.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clear why happening now.
	Links well with the range of providers including local government.
	Stays flexible and suggests flexible mechanism.
Areas for improvement	

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Simple approach via criteria for essential services to define the domain and GFC work to consider extra demand pressure.
	Gives detail on numbers (and thus costs) based on 'modelling' (with some detail in Annex 1). This is usefully split out by types of support.
	Shrewd use of previous experience for both modelling and solution identification. Summed up nicely in Annex 1.
Areas for improvement	Would be even better with more detail in Annex 1 to show what was the thorough basis of the costings in all cases to illustrate the likely risks in the figures.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Good sharp Executive Summary lays out the rest of the paper.
	Good headings signal what the paper is explaining.
	Section deals with the need to take risks to respond quickly to demand.
Areas for improvement	Would be improved by a section drawing on previous experience to assess the potential risk exposure.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Clear how funds are to be dispersed at a high level.
	Foreshadows another round of briefing and proposals.
Areas for improvement	A timetable with an indication of next report(s) and what they might contain would make the mention of further requests more concrete.

C.26   Report back on the COVID-19 emergency welfare response transition

Overall assessment	
3	A broad description of a transition for a centralised emergency response to community-based recovery that reads as aspiration rather than a report-back on what has happened.
	As advice to Ministers the paper could be improved by providing a framework and evidence-based understanding of the elements of a successful transition (e.g. avoid duplication and overlap and identify gaps), including the risks to be managed.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	The paper is not for decision but sets the scene and expectations around the transition from a highly centralised emergency response to a community-based recovery.
Areas for improvement	The purpose of the paper is stated as a report-back on how welfare support will transition to avoid duplication and overlap and address any identified gaps. The paper could have been set up to do this in a structured manner to more clearly address the report-back.

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	This paper is strong on the Māori dimension. It also outlines the impacts for different populations, people with disabilities.
Areas for improvement	What are the key elements of a successful transition? The paper needs a framework for this.
	In Appendix 1 the paper would be improved with a column added for comment on how the slack is picked up or just phased out and what transition risks are being managed. There are a few issues cited and left hanging such as MSD "may be able to assist with welfare support" to people in quarantine. This sounds too tentative and sounds like a gap.
	Lists agencies consulted, but not what they said or whether they support the paper or not.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	The paper paints a clear picture of how the three Ministers think relationships should look like and the opportunities between central government and communities, in an aspirational sense.
	Diverse perspectives are provided. Key communities are seen to have specific aspirations in recovery that need to be considered.
	A few pressure points are identified such as workforce.
Areas for improvement	As an aspirational paper, with only report-backs and noting recommendations, there is a piece missing in the main body of the paper that summarises the key transitions that are detailed in Appendix 1.
	What are the risks that arise from the transition that need to be managed and monitored?
	Full of jargon. A hard edit to put into plain English is needed.
	Long sentences, e.g. para 2.
	A move to active headings and subheadings would improve readability.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	The paper identifies what two pieces of work are still needed and seeks agreement to further advice.
Areas for improvement	This paper is all about signalling a shift from a very centralised emergency response to a more distributed line agency and localised approach. In doing so the paper needs to work much harder to provide a communications strategy /plan around the shift in expectation and responsibility. There are no action recommendations for communication with stakeholders.

C.27   Governance arrangements for the proposed Children's Commission

Overall assessment	
4	A paper that successfully navigates a few unusual governance arrangements to get a good result that has the best chance of success for children.
	Because of the special requirements of the roles, this paper could benefit from a few comparisons to similar Commissions and how their special features are managed in order to provide assurance you understand governance.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clear purpose and ground to be covered in the Purpose statement.
	Good background provided. The tricky bits around when a Commissioner is the Children's Commissioner and when a member of the Commission is a Commissioner are well explained.
Areas for improvement	The paper would be improved with some brief discussion of how other Commissions are configured to manage functions and specific roles. That will help Ministers with understanding what they are managing.

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	The paper sets why the Children's Commissioner needs more mana and in particular, high standing with Māori. The case for a mātauranga Māori experience board vs a specific Māori Commissioner is set out succinctly with the associated benefits and risks.
	The Māori and Te Tiriti perspectives are woven well into the paper.
Areas for improvement	The tensions around advocacy and monitoring could be explained in further detail. There is more to this separation than the temporal dimension of the work.
	The paper would be improved by having the budget more clearly stating the true costs of governance not just the salaries – even if indicative ahead of your further advice. These could be substantial as you allude to as the other commissioners will drive costs. It is a risk and could lead to disappointment.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Overall well-written with good use of bullet points.
	Good use of headings to signpost your advice.
	The case for strengthening the appointment process is well made if you want the right person and the mana that the roles demand.
	The appended diagram provides good visual support.
	Some helpful discussion on the risks that need to be considered and managed.
Areas for improvement	You could take this paper to the next level with some intel on what you understand already about what key stakeholders are expecting so that the Minister can see how much is riding on getting the right appointments and eventual results.
	The paper would be improved in para 26 with some sense from Cabinet Office or PCO as to whether the changes are indeed minor, or not, so that you don't risk embarrassment at Cabinet Legislation Committee.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	A clear explanation of the overall process is provided for in the appended diagram.
	The Next steps section gives the Minister what she needs to know about the remaining steps before sending to Cabinet Legislation Committee and introduction in the House.
Areas for improvement	Para 41 finishes with mention of stakeholder consultation and workshops. This is an exercise that you should set out clearly earlier in the paper as this process step might generate risks or expectations that have to be managed.

C.28 The Youth and Wellbeing Survey: agreement sought to postpone delivery until 2021 due to COVID-19

Overall assessment	
4	A professional report to seek the Prime Minister's and Minister for Youth's approval to delay the Youth Health and Wellbeing Survey. This is no doubt a sensitive topic and is handled carefully. Needs a simple table to show how all the pieces would now fit together.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clear Purpose statement. Explains context well. Advises that the original survey does not take account of the pandemic.
Areas for improvement	

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Advises how many students are to be surveyed. Notes that results are to inform 15 of the 36 indicators under the Strategy and is candid that the annual report will consequently have gaps, but these can be managed. Shows logic and thinking. Considers alternative approaches and provides reasons for dismissing these approaches. Considers the risks and potentially detrimental effects of asking certain questions given the impact of COVID-19. For instance: do young people feel safe? Contemplates that the residual impact of COVID-19 may affect responses and muddy the data.
Areas for improvement	Provide a table or diagram to show how the pieces would now fit together. That is: the survey, data surfacing tool, annual report, and work on an annual survey.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Recommends using the freed-up funding to develop a business case for an annual nationwide children and young persons' wellbeing survey (which has previously been discussed). Provides clear decisions for Ministers. Good use of subheadings. Plain English. Tidy.
Areas for improvement	

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Promises advice on implementation after decisions have been made.
Areas for improvement	Summarise timing of your recommended approach.

C.29 Mahi Aroha: Carers' Strategy Action Plan

Overall assessment	
4.5	A fulsome Cabinet paper to approve the release of the Mahi Aroha: Carers' Strategy Action Plan 2019-2023 (Mahi Aroha).
	Covers all angles and breathes life into the Cabinet paper by including carers' voices. Good work.
	Assure the Minister, in the briefing paper, that lessons learnt from previous Action Plans have been applied to Mahi Aroha.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clear Purpose statement.
	Provides history of Action Plans and their relationship to the New Zealand Carers' Strategy.
	Advises alignment to the Government's focus on wellbeing as well as ongoing key Government work streams in both MSD and other government agencies.
Areas for improvement	

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Well thought through Cabinet paper. Provides history, data on carers, collaborative development approach, assures broad support, outlines focus areas, informs of accompanying Budget bid and monitoring mechanism. Informs of collaborative development process including engagement with other agencies, Carers alliance and carers.
	Provides useful statistics on carers including number, gender balance, labour replacement value (in $s) and age. Acknowledges gap in ethnic breakdown.
	Identifies action areas and responsible lead agency.
	Informs of Mahi Aroha's additional focus on target population groups: Māori, Pacific, older and younger carers.
	Uses carers' voices to good effect, illustrating the issues that carers face.
	Robust gender analysis with statistics as well as disability perspective.
	Acknowledges financial implications and an associated Budget bid.
	Good use of subheadings.
Areas for improvement	Assure the Minister, in her briefing that any pitfalls of the previous two Action Plans have been avoided in Mahi Aroha. Similarly, that lessons learnt have been applied.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Advises broad support for Mahi Aroha from the carers' community.
	Provides sufficient details to Cabinet of the launch of Mahi Aroha.
	Assures the Minister no concerns were raised during the Ministerial process (briefing paper).
Areas for improvement	Say explicitly that the long list of government agencies you consulted support Mahi Aroha.
	Advise the Minister of any speeches or briefings she may expect to receive ahead of the launch.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	We applaud that mechanisms are in place to monitor progress on implementing Mahi Aroha and that accountability lies with an annual progress report to Cabinet.
Areas for improvement	

C.30   COVID-19 update and work programme prioritisation

Overall assessment	
4.5	Great note which clearly sets out what you are doing, and what will come up to Ministers next. This would give plenty of reassurance that you are on to it and working with others. Plus, it would set your Minister up to play her part in upcoming discussions with colleagues and decisions.
	Perhaps this should have been an aide-mémoire. There are no decision recommendations – it just asked the Minister to note what is being done.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clear Purpose statement – an update and an outline on what is coming next.
	References earlier briefings and Cabinet discussions.
Areas for improvement	

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Explains MSD's role in policy advice and providing support.
	Provides a useful introduction to the sort of interventions that could be considered. This is a nice taster and will no doubt get the Minister thinking.
	Notes that the responses used for the Canterbury Earthquakes and the GFC form a useful basis for responding to these issues.
	Explains the inter-agency arrangements.
	Is clear about the trade-offs between urgency for support, and the ability to deliver.
Areas for improvement	

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Good use of active headings. This make it easier to read.
	Tight summary which boils down the key issues.
	Canvasses some of the risks associated with the work, e.g. lack of data.
Areas for improvement	Too many noting recommendations. They just repeat the summary (and the body of the paper).
	Was a formal briefing the right tool for this advice?

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Includes a clear set of next steps.
	Is explicit about upcoming advice (but include dates).
Areas for improvement	

C.31 Achieving economic and social outcomes through Government procurement

Overall assessment	
4	Useful briefing ahead of an SWC meeting. It's very clear about the advice and what you are recommending the Minister to do at the meeting, i.e. support the proposal, and ask some questions.
	The paper could be clearer upfront about why you are proposing the Minister support this proposal. It's in there – it just takes a bit of digging in other parts of the paper.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	A briefing for an item at Cabinet Committee.
Areas for improvement	Not clear from this paper about the date of the meeting.

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Clearly a good deal of thought has gone into making sure such a proposal could work, and the intricacies of it. This is clearly spelt out in the paper.
Areas for improvement	Not clear why you support the proposal. Worth spelling this out clearly both in the key issues section, and in the body of the paper.
	9(2)(b)(ii) OIA
	Some international examples would be useful. Also examples where other priorities are sought through procurement, e.g. health and safety, or environmental outcomes.
	Worth explaining the evidence behind the proposal, i.e. how do you know it will work?

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Includes talking points for your Minister. Some could be re-written a little, so they are more ready to use – especially the penultimate one. It could be just framed as a question not a statement.
	Good summary which nicely condenses the issues.
	Well written. The briefing clearly explains the points you suggest the Minister should make.
Areas for improvement	Would be useful to find out what other agencies are proposing/advising. This should be easy enough to find out from the departmental consultation process, otherwise a quick ring around.
	Some awkward page breaks – try to make sure you don't split paragraphs across a page.
	Bit lengthy in places.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Hints at some next steps.
Areas for improvement	

C.32 Proposals for changes to the employer-assisted temporary work visa system

Overall assessment	
3	This aide-mémoire just circles what it should be zeroing in on. Clearly there is unease about the proposal, and this is a complex matter with lots of arms and legs so the advice should be clear. The basic story is here. A pre-meeting meet is useful if the Minister knows what to do.
	But it makes a meal of it by focusing entirely on what MSD still has to do. It should rather be direct about the matter and advise the Minister clearly on tactics for the meeting.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Fills in the background effectively with a list of who is attending and the purpose – a pre-Cabinet warm of up the group about changes to the employer-assisted temporary work visa system.
	Sets out detail of the impact of this proposal on MSD operations.
Areas for improvement	Writes the descriptions of the proposal and its effects as though the Minister is on top of the details of the process and its associated workings. The notes needed to be simpler and clearer.

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	The analysis is built round a comparison of the existing and proposed mechanisms. The emphasis is on the implications for MSD.
Areas for improvement	There is no fully laid out comparison. The elements discussed are only part of the system.
	There are no suggested questions for the Minister to raise to establish more clearly what is intended.
	Have these matters been raised with INZ – what do they say? If not, why not?

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Attaches MBIE slide pack with details of the proposal for discussion.
Areas for improvement	But then refers to details of a proposed change in operations that was provided in an earlier paper to the LMMG without attaching it. This means either the Minister is not going to be on top of this matter or someone has to search the paper out and provide the relevant extract.
	Even though this is going to a group of insiders it is still alphabet soup with acronyms abounding.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Gives a broad idea of what MSD intends to do next.
Areas for improvement	Offers no concrete advice to the Minister. Should she be trying to meet the Immigration Minister earlier – and if so, to do and say what?
	And at the meeting should she favour the general direction but insist on a delay in the process until the concerns have been sorted out? What sort of timing is appropriate?

C.33   Increasing the cap for the Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme

Overall assessment	
3	Aide-mémoire briefs Minister on complicated proposal by Minister of Immigration for Cabinet Economic Development Committee. Has clear advice – support it.
	But the detailed reasoning is convoluted and raises issues that don't align well with this suggestion. The MSD aims imply a nuanced position. This suggests the paper should have talking points for the Minister to explain what is wanted and what MSD is doing.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clearly set up the proposal and the occasion.
	Links the issue to the wider labour market and housing matters.
Areas for improvement	While has a few figures on the growth of the horticultural industry more on the setting would be useful as background for the Minister.

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	The analysis is straightforward. Its case rests around the need for workers and a shortage of locals. To support this a few constraints are considered, crucially housing in the key places. Other problems are mentioned but in less depth.
Areas for improvement	There is no discussion of wage rates and the influence they may have on the supply of local workers.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	A simple tale is told here: this year's crops will be harvested but the supply of RSE workers next year will depend on employers making moves in the right direction.
Areas for improvement	Needed a careful edit.
	Key points should be drawn out and presented as possible talking script material.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Paper advises the Minister to support the proposal. But gives no concrete material to further the action.
Areas for improvement	Providing a draft intervention that might be read out would take pressure off the Minister – who otherwise has to work up something herself.

C.34 Review of the labour shortage declaration

Overall assessment	
3.5	An informative paper that works through the key issues sufficiently to get sign-off on next steps.
	The paper would be more compelling with additional data and a stronger exposé of what is economically (and other policy objectives) at stake if these labour market interventions are not optimised.
	In addition, the paper would be improved with a next steps timeline for the draft terms of reference and the review to keep the pace on the issue and show what work lies ahead.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clear Purpose statement is upfront.
	The paper includes good discussion of the other interventions to strengthen industry workforce development. Annex Four does this especially well.
Areas for improvement	The paper would open more authoritative if you provided data on the low unemployment rate, a visual of the growth curve, accommodation shortages, and the low pay rates.

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Para 27 provides a clear future sense of how you think the labour market should work to address seasonal shortages.
Areas for improvement	The paper would be improved with some initial discussion of the counterfactual. What would has/might happen if a labour shortage is not declared and the resulting economic impact. Would fruit be left to rot on the ground? Understanding this dynamic would help to strengthen the problem definition.
	The paper would be improved with discussion of why the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme should be the primary vehicle (e.g. existing infrastructure, good buy-in, serves foreign policy objectives). It is not immediately clear from the paper so best to defend your proposal.
	Annex One (and illustrated in Annex Three) sets out the information in regional reports but there is no discussion on thresholds and the extent to which there are objective criteria vs general judgement used to make a decision.
	With such a strong regional focus the paper would be improved with a discussion on the distributional effects being felt for Māori, rural and vulnerable groups.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	The process map in Annex One provides a clear idea of the path to decision-making for a declaration because it is role specific.
Areas for improvement	Much more could be made of the economic/higher order policy risks of labour shortages and what really happens to the industry in term of lost (if any) output if the intervention mix is not optimised. This would help set the scene for the options you intend to develop in the review.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	The paper conveys a proactive future-oriented tone throughout.
Areas for improvement	The paper offers enough of the basics for a review, that with a few additions, you could have provided a timeline for a draft terms of reference. This would allow you to maintain momentum and reduce future paper load on busy Ministers.
	If you are recommending that the Ministers signal a review to industry, a set of talking points and draft release would take you to the next level in ministerial support.

C.35   Disability Employment Action Plan – Working Matters

Overall assessment	
4	A well-defended Cabinet paper that sets out the problem and reassuringly provides well benchmarked content for a disability employment plan.
	The paper would be improved by giving an indication of the top 3-5 interventions and to convince any doubting colleagues, the paper needs some free and frank discussion about what is/needs to be different, this time to ensure the plan will become an employment reality for people with disability.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	The very extensive background is compelling for the case.
	A strong description of the content of the consultation document is provided including the strategic objectives that drive the action plan objectives. This is important so Ministers can see what will be going out the door.
	Appendix 2 provides important information on related consultation events so that this placed in context.
Areas for improvement	With disability employment action plans issued in the past, the paper would be strengthened by showing what success previous plans have had and what is different this time.

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	A strong sense of strategy.
	Some excellent comparative information on employment strategies in other countries in Appendices 3-4. This will help reassure Ministers the content is sound.
	The paper covers who and how are you intending to consult. The paper mentions that you want to consult to improve the plan and gain support for the actions.
Areas for improvement	Apart from the plan content itself and what actions are needed, the paper would be benefit from the inclusion of analysis of the conditions that need to be assured for success with a plan like this. There is international and previous New Zealand history with disability action plans to draw on. This analysis is important if you want to convince cynics that the plan will not end up on a shelf.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	The story of the plan is told in full.
	The paper includes quantitative and qualitative discussion on affected Māori and vulnerable groups within the disability community. This would strengthen the diversity of the engagement.
Areas for improvement	A discussion of the risks in the consultation and how they might be mitigated would improve the paper.
	More process information on how you intend to reach Māori and vulnerable groups within the consultation process to improve the diversity of the engagement would strengthen the paper.
	The paper needs a proofread with a loose word at the end of para 40.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	The paper addresses your monitoring strategy.
Areas for improvement	More details, such as a timeline, on the upcoming engagements would improve Cabinet understanding of what is to follow. This is especially important given that the paper encourages other Ministers to undertake consultation on the actions in their areas of responsibility.

C.36   Draft Cabinet Paper for Social Security (Emergency Housing and Transitional Housing) Amendment Regulations 2020

Overall assessment	
3.5	A tidy draft Legislation paper (LEG paper) for ministerial consultation. Does the job. Assure the Minister that you have plans in place to meet the requirements of the Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) exemption.
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Provides straightforward Purpose statement in both briefing and LEG papers. Makes links to Government strategy and the Aotearoa/New Zealand Homelessness Action Plan. Reminds Ministers of previous briefings and decisions.
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Good problem definition. Uses policy framework of ensuring that emergency housing policies are fair and in line with transitional and public housing policies. Provides statistics on average stay in emergency housing. Advises requirements to be fulfilled to meet RIA exemption.
Areas for improvement	Advise how many people the changes will affect. Put para 20 in an active rather than passive voice, change 'would' to 'will'.
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Provides candid advice to Ministers that an oversight in drafting means that a further policy decision is required. Clear advice on next steps in the briefing paper.
Areas for improvement	Advise whether the long list of government agencies consulted support the proposals. Assure the Minister that you have plans in place to meet the requirement for a monitoring and evaluation plan for the proposal to meet the RIA exemption requirement.
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Advises instruments amending the welfare programme and ministerial directions are being prepared. Advises that dates for announcement of the policy changes are being considered with the broader homelessness package announcements.
Areas for improvement	

C.37   Housing Hui for disabled people, caregivers and whanau

Overall assessment	
3	An aide-mémoire to support the Minister's attendance at a Housing Hui (the Hui).
	Provides useful data and different perspectives on shortage of housing, accessibility and homelessness.
	Beef up tactical advice: rejig talking points, provide her with back-pocket Q&As in case attendees ask her questions, and suggest areas where she may wish to ask questions of attendees.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Purpose of paper clear.
	Gives good background on purpose of the Hui, organisers, and agencies represented.
Areas for improvement	

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Good analysis of issues.
	Provides useful statistics, such as analysis of housing stock against accessibility standards.
	Informs of different perspectives on issues regarding housing for disabled people.
	Advises MSD's, as well as other agencies', response to issues.
	Recognises area of contention and issues currently on the table.
Areas for improvement	Provide a concluding section to summarise housing issues for people with disabilities, these are scattered throughout the aide-mémoire.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Good coverage of logistics: other Ministers attending, media have been invited, press release prepared, likely number of attendees, and that event will be live streamed.
	Advises that Ministers have the opportunity to hear the needs of disabled people for specific accommodation.
Areas for improvement	Be more specific about the opportunity for the Minister, she is there to listen, but advise any areas where she may wish to ask questions of the attendees.
	Provide her with Q&As, particularly around tricky issues.
	Reorganise talking points as follows. Acknowledge that she is there to hear their views and stories. Add introductory paragraph that outlines the housing aspects she knows of. Consider switching talking points around so she talks about accessibility and shortage of housing prior to talking about homelessness. The first two issues are likely to affect a greater proportion of disabled people.
	Use subheadings in the text to delineate issues and views.
	Typo in heading bottom of page 3.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Informs that MSD will follow up with HUD and Kāinga Ora on a housing proposal put forward by VisionWest.
Areas for improvement	

C.38   Delivering Expanded Housing Support Products

Overall assessment	
3.5	A joint report to the Ministers of Housing and Social Development.
	Tells the story from end to end, from the Budget bid, policy settings, risks and mitigation, through to implementation.
	A joint paper can suffer from both agencies adding more and more. Pare back where you can, this is a dense read.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clear Purpose statement.
	References previous Cabinet decisions well.
	Gives comprehensive history of Budget bid complemented by more detail in Annex B.
Areas for improvement	Highlight, in Purpose, that you are seeking approval to change to one of the Budget bid parameters.

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Clear problem definition.
	Thorough analysis to confirm policy settings for the new recoverable Rent Arrears Assistance product. Provides useful table of policy parameters (Table 2) and then discusses eligibility, with income thresholds provided in Annex D.
	Provides good rationale for recommending that the payment limit be increased (para 30), illustrating that $2,000 will cover three weeks rent, even in high rental areas.
	Gives relevant statistics on the target population who will benefit from the Rents Arrears Assistance product.
	Lists other housing support products in Annex A.
Areas for improvement	Clarify upfront how many less people the Budget bid will now apply to given recommended rise in grant from $1,500 to $2,000 per applicant.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Great section on risks and mitigation approaches.
	Identifies gap for three groups who are currently ineligible for public housing and promises further advice to come.
	Tidy and professional writing.
Areas for improvement	Check subheadings, they are patchy, some need to be punchier and more active. For instance, rather than 'Risks and mitigation approaches', head up 'Several risks arise that we will manage'.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Gives clear next steps and deadlines so that the Rents Arrears Assistance product is available by December 2019.
	Assures that work is being conducted to allow smooth implementation, including IT work, operational guidelines, and the instrument for amending the welfare programme. Good work.
Areas for improvement	

C.39   All of Housing Ministers Meeting

Overall assessment	
3.5	Crisp aide-mémoire gives Minister solid descriptive briefing on selected agenda topics for housing session with other Ministers.
	But no news or topics for Ministers to discuss. And lacks tactical advice or points for Minister to make, or even general talking notes. Best practice would be a full annotated agenda with scripted interventions rather than to only background a few items.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clear about the meeting and the timing. The purpose is said to be for Ministers to "discuss key housing portfolio issues".
	Gives broad general background on four issues on the agenda, with more detail on the implementation of a specific measure on homelessness by MSD.
Areas for improvement	It is unclear what the Minister is to do with the material provided as far as discussion is concerned. She will have to put her own speaking ideas together.

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	No analysis included.
	Mention of a Kaupapa Māori approach for homelessness, but no detail of how this might work.
Areas for improvement	While the dashboard is to be the source of an 'overview' of the housing system a few figures here from an MSD perspective (perhaps covering the employment data mentioned) would provide a topic for discussion.
	Where does MSD stand on the National Homelessness Action Plan? Are there consequences?

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Says the five items covered are the Key Issues.
Areas for improvement	Would be good to have the full agenda and provide MSD comment for all items plus suggestions on what the Minister might do at the meeting.
	Including what was said in earlier briefing on the Hastings pilot (or attaching a copy) would be helpful.
	Has a lot of slips for a three pager.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	No follow up identified.

C.40   Expanding access and level of rent arrears assistance temporarily to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on housing outcomes

Overall assessment	
5	A well-crafted, easy to follow Cabinet paper that shows superb command of the policy and operations interface.
	The paper would be improved with additional assessment or plans you might have on the dynamic with landlords.

Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	A clear proposal with the rationale for why this paper is in front of Ministers now.
	Other supports are described so Ministers can see where these fit. Appendix One provides fuller detail so Ministers can see the size and reach of the related programmes
Areas for improvement	It would be helpful to hear if this proposal was ever used previously or currently overseas and to what effect.

Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Nice, brief discussion of what you considered and ruled-out. This is good practice in Cabinet papers because Cabinet papers tend to be the final proposals.
	The options analysis is usually already worked through at ministerial level and unseen at Cabinet as a whole. Para 6 swiftly shows you had a deeper assessment and then smoothly transitions to the proposal in para 7.
	Critical evidential support is offered on the doubling of the rent arrears during lockdown.
	Para 19 neatly projects what to anticipate in terms of a growing numbers affected.
	Quality consideration of the populations affected means that the distributional aspects of the proposals are clearly visible to Ministers.
Areas for improvement	Information on how landlords are responding to COVID-19 would help round out the analysis.

Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	The resource and short time span are raised as risks so that Ministers see the trade-off between other things being asked of MSD.
	Excellent use of subheadings to guide the narrative.
	The risks in para 24 are set out clearly with substantial discussion of mitigation in paras 25-28.
	A handy table on eligibility takes the mystery out of what it looks like to potential clients under rental stress.
Areas for improvement	Proving intel from landlords and what might be done to manage that stakeholder community would take a very good paper to the next level.

Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Implementation of the changes is well set out, conveying good command of what is happening and needs to happen on the frontline.
	The monitoring and reporting strategy is outlined in brief.
Areas for improvement	A bit more text on what key messages are to be communicated and to which stakeholders would improve the publicity section.

Appendix D Score translation tool for individual papers

The diagram below shows how the NZIER methodology and scores translate to the new Policy Quality Framework scores for individual papers.
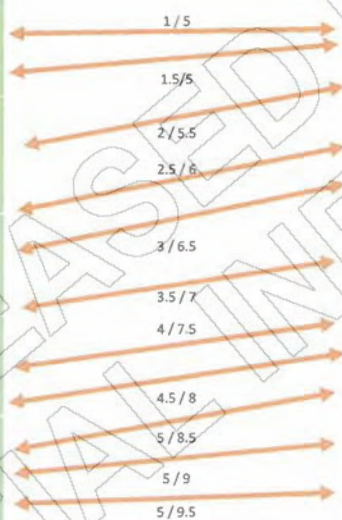
Figure 8 Translating the Policy Quality Framework score into an NZIER score

The PQF scoring system

Mark	Meaning
1	Unacceptable
2	Poor
3	Acceptable
4	Good
5	Outstanding

NZIER scoring system

Mark	Meaning
5	Poor
6	Borderline: does the job but with risks
7	Adequate
8	Good: goes beyond the task at hand somewhat
9+	Excellent

1 / 5
1.5/5
2 / 5.5
2.5 / 6
3 / 6.5
3.5 / 7
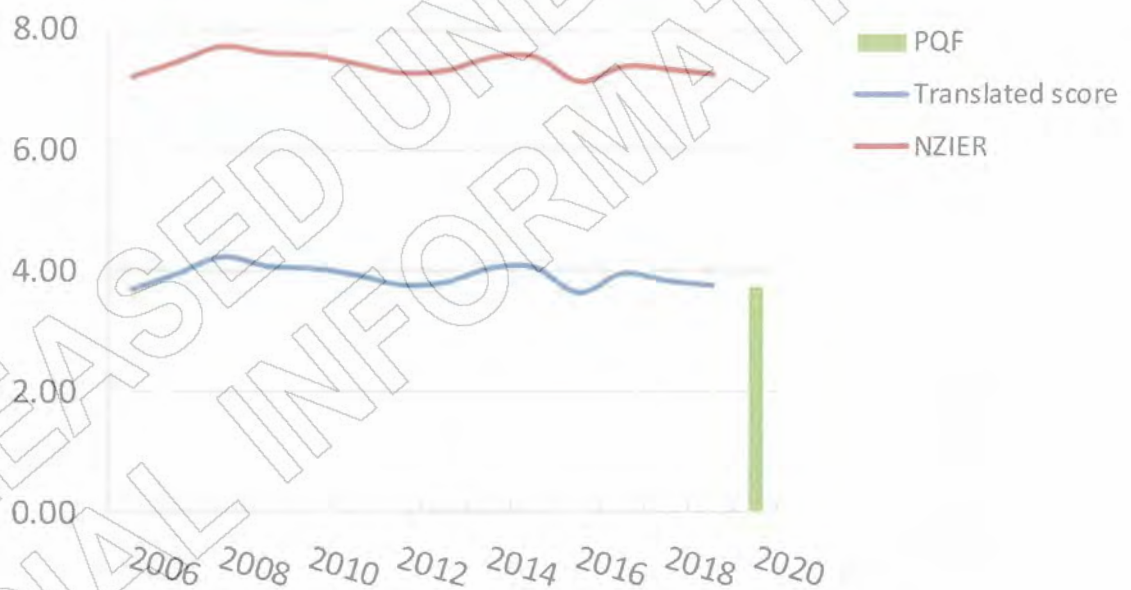4 / 7.5
4.5 / 8
5 / 8.5
5 / 9
5 / 9.5

Source: NZIER

Appendix E Historical comparisons – approximate only

2020 sees a new baseline relating to the Framework. Historical comparisons can only be approximated and this should be read with caution, as per the notes set out in Section 1 of this report.

The graph below shows your historical NZIER scores in previous years, an approximation of past scores in the new scoring system done by translating individual paper scores (as set out in Appendix D) and deriving an average score, and your current score using the Policy Quality Framework (PQF).

Figure 9 Approximate comparison of historical scores

Historical scores translated

Source: NZIER