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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

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1 Key points

Your score fell very slightly

Your score fell slightly this year from 3.73 to 3.69. However, the mean score of 3.75 remained the same.

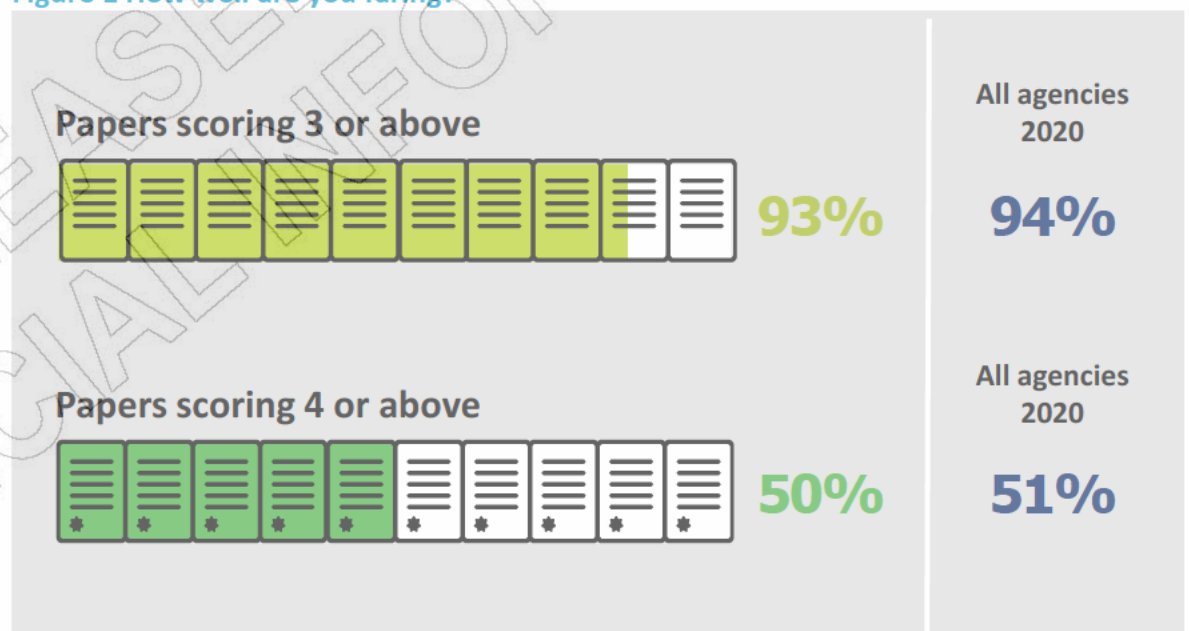
But more than 90% of papers met the PQF standard¹

The proportion of your papers which met the PQF standard¹ remained high – this year it was 93%. The proportion of papers scoring 4 and above remained the same. However, of these, fewer got to the very high scores.

Consistency remains a problem

The number and range of high quality papers show that even under pressure as you have been this year, it is possible to produce papers that are amongst the best we've seen. However, the quality is patchy. Last year we suggested you focus on improving consistency by spreading best practice and developing capability across the whole policy group. We suggest that this remains an area of focus.

Figure 1 How well are you faring?



Source: NZIER

¹ The standard is to score 3 or above.



2 We recommend that you

We know it's been a difficult year. With COVID-19 continuing, you've had to put significant resources into this area of business. Remote working has also made things harder. No doubt this has impacted on your ability to implement quality improvement initiatives.

But your results show that you can produce excellent pieces of work – even under pressure. The challenge is now to improve consistency – so you meet these high standards much more often. This is about embedding quality into your practice:

- Make sure that it is front and centre for authors, peer reviewers and managers.
- Spread simple best practice tips and tricks more widely, so they are incorporated into your advice as a matter of course.
- Innovate to find new ways of undertaking, then presenting information and analysis.

Earlier in the year, we produced a Masterclass on this. It is attached to this report in Appendix E.

2.1 Keep working on improving consistency

Last year we suggested a number of simple, practical ways of improving quality. These were:

- 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, 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 practices identified and thought given to how to apply some of these to other work. See our Masterclass on 'Learning from things that go well'.²
- **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. A fresh set of eyes can make a real difference.
- **Increasing coaching** of new or more junior staff by Principals and Seniors in writing papers.

Renew your efforts on these things.

² Masterclass no 30 *Learning from things that go well: capturing good practice*
https://nzier.org.nz/static/media/filer_public/ff/28/ff28ab80-0130-440f-acf6-6e8c1d5c0c51/brief_30_learning_from_things_that_go_well.pdf



2.2 Make the first-page count

One quick and easy win you could take to significantly improve the quality and impact of your papers is to streamline and tighten the front end of your papers. By this, we mean the Executive Summary (or better still Key Points) and the recommendations.

Not only is this the first part decision-makers read (first impressions count), but if pushed, it may be the only part of your paper they read. This particular applies to papers going to a range of Ministers for whom your paper might only be a side issue.

A handful of your papers did this well.

But all too many fell into the old traps of:

- Using the recommendations (lots of noting recommendations) to give a summary – this doesn't work well. The drafting tends to be stilted and more difficult to read due to the form it has to be in. Also, Ministers skip over noting recommendations.
- Repeating the summary in lots of noting recommendations – don't do it! It makes the front end longer than necessary (as well as the overall paper), and differences in language become confusing. As well, the actual decision-making recommendations can be hidden.
- Executive summaries which are long and poorly structured – try to keep them tight and use active subheadings if they are getting longer than about half a page.

Summaries of any kind need to be tightly written, clear and hit all the major issues. They shouldn't be structured in the same way as the paper; they should focus first on the Minister's decision and then explain why.

You might want to consider moving to Key Points rather than a traditional Executive Summary. We've seen this used to great effect by a number of other agencies in recent years. Actually, some have based this technique on your highly structured short aides-mémoires to Ministers ahead of Cabinet or other meetings. So we know you have this in your repertoire. Now use this technique on your standard briefings.

Writing in key points allows for shorter sentences and paragraphs and a more 'effective' writing style. This makes them easier to read and absorb at pace. Something that any busy Minister should appreciate. We've recently produced a Masterclass on Key Points. This is attached in Appendix E.



3 Results

3.1 The picture

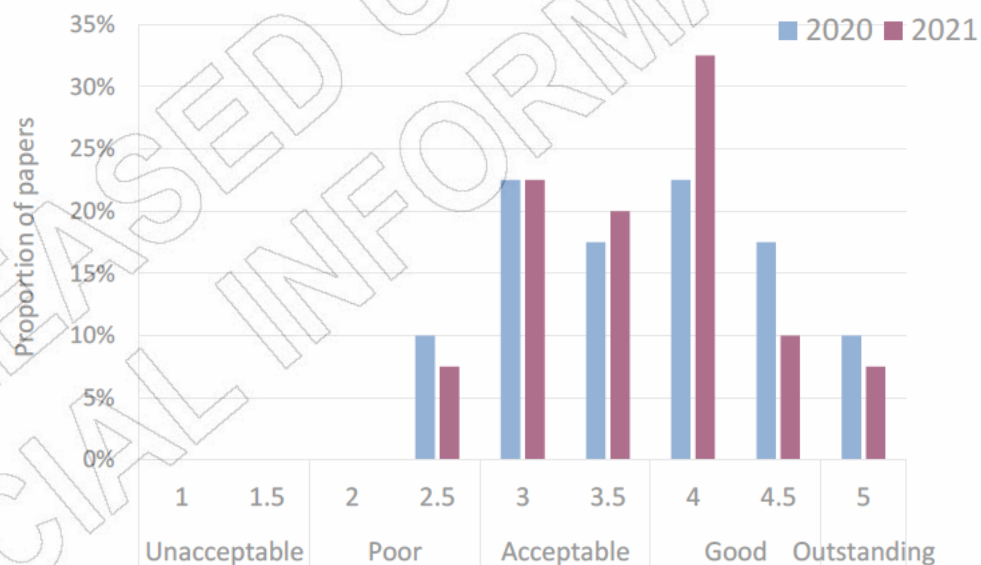
There has been a slight shift back in scores. In particular, the high scoring papers. The same proportion scored a 4 and above, but more scored at the lower end of that range this year. It's worth you considering why that is. It could be deadline pressure and not making adequate time for a robust peer review – which gives the opportunity to add that final polish.

There were similarly few low scoring papers. This means your QA and sign-out processes are stopping those leaving the building.

To improve your score. You now need to focus on turning those 3s and 3.5s into 4s or more. This can be done by using good practice techniques more frequently and making this a focus in your peer review.

Figure 2 Distribution of scores

Proportion of papers marked



Source: NZIER



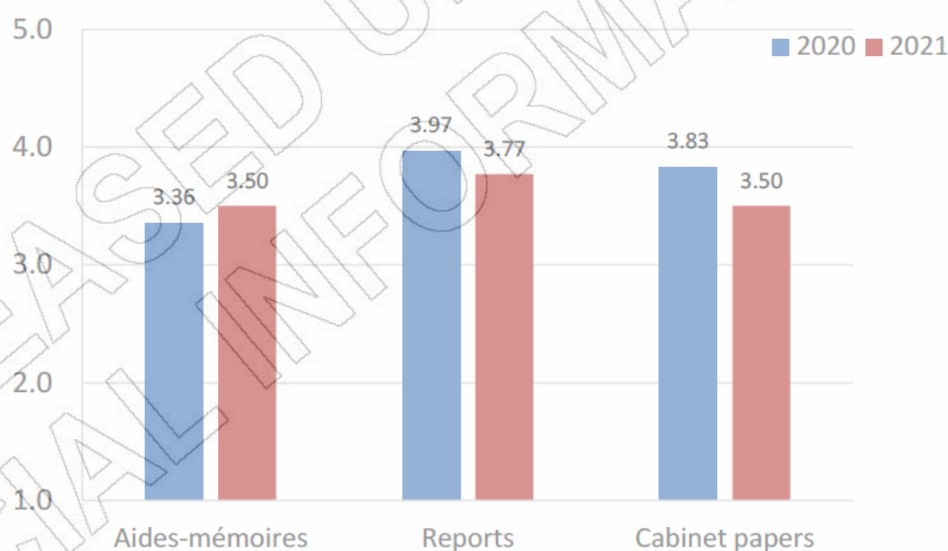
Table 1 Policy paper quality scores³

	Number	Mean	Median	Min	Max	St Dev
2020	40	3.73	3.75	2.5	5	0.76
2021	40	3.69	3.75	2.5	5	0.68

Source: NZIER

In the main, the differences between scores for different types of paper are small. The exception being Cabinet papers, although the sample size was small. We know it can be hard with Cabinet papers – as they are the Minister’s paper. At times you have limited control over the content and find the things that make it a high-quality policy paper get edited out. But they still need to contain appropriate analysis and be backed by evidence for Ministers to make a well-informed decision and understand the consequences of that decision.

Figure 3 Score by paper type⁴



Source: NZIER

³ The key statistics in the table summarise our overall impressions:

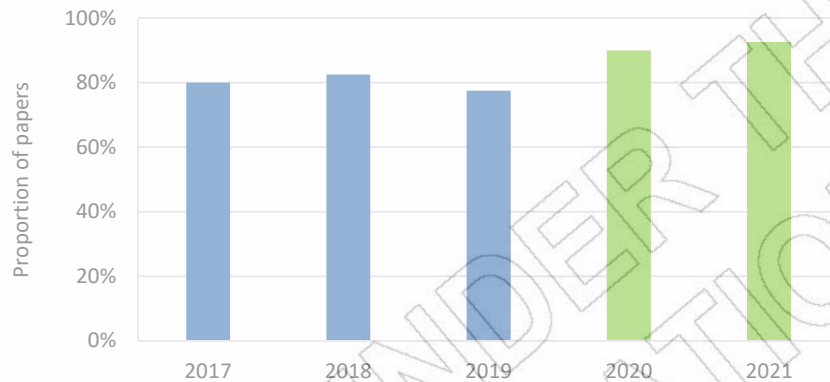
- The median reflects what the reader can commonly expect.
- The mean includes the impact of the extremes that make lasting impressions.
- The standard deviation indicates the consistency of the papers.

⁴ There were only 4 Cabinet papers in the sample, so these results need to be treated with some caution. The balance of the sample was 27 reports and 9 aides-mémoires.

3.2 Historical comparisons

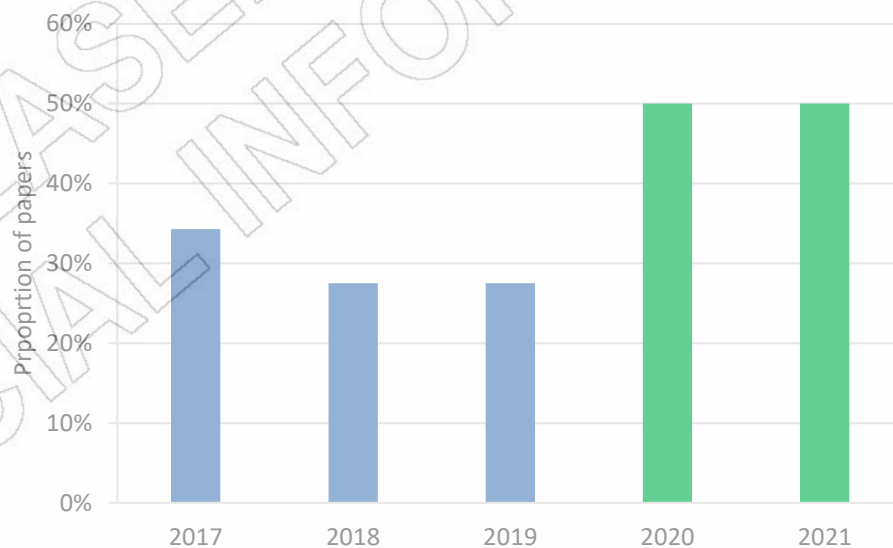
2020 established a new baseline, so, as noted, we have limited context for these results.

Figure 4 Proportion of papers which scored 3 and over⁵



Source: NZIER

Figure 5 Proportion of papers which scored 4 and over⁶



Source: NZIER

These graphs show you have maintained the high proportion of papers scoring over 3, and meeting the PQF standard, and maintained the levels of higher scoring papers.

⁵ Under the new system this is papers scoring a 3 or more, and under the previous NZIER system papers scoring a 7 and above. Note the comments in Section 1 that these aren't directly comparable.

⁶ Under the new system this is papers scoring a 4 or more, and under the previous NZIER system papers scoring an 8 and above. Note the comments in Section 1 that these aren't directly comparable.



3.3 Further advice

We are continuing with the series of Policy Advice Masterclasses in 2021 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 website⁷ 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.

⁷ <https://nzier.org.nz/quality-of-policy-advice/central-government-masterclasses/>

4 Strengths and weaknesses

4.1 Positives



Context

- **Seamless joint reports** – these are hard to do. They often show that they've been written by different agencies and don't stitch together well. Paper 15 did it really well.
- **Informative** – some great briefs for incoming Ministers. These were informative and highlighted things they'd have to deal with soon.



Analysis

- **Technical know-how** – there were many technical papers. Your technical expertise shone through.
- **What do others do?** – some good use of international experience, e.g. Papers 3 and 12. This is always helpful. Remember not only to describe what's been done elsewhere but also to provide some evaluative information. Explain whether it works or not!



Advice

- **Active headings** are largely house style – lots of great examples of using active headings and subheadings. This was in nearly all papers and stood out when it wasn't there. Good stuff – it makes papers easier to read at pace.
- **Who are they?** – bios and photos are always good for Ministers for a meeting.
- **A picture paints 1000 words** – nice use of graphics, e.g. Papers 6 and 15. Do this more often. They have an impact.
- **Tables** – good use of tables to present information and analysis, e.g. Papers 29 and 32.
- **Meeting brief** – the template is great when used. It helps to frame the key things which need to be covered. But it wasn't used in all cases.





Action

- **How is it working?** – monitoring and evaluation strategy was set out in Paper 11. Do this more often; it's a key requirement of the PQF framework.

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4.2 Areas to work on



Context

- **Tighten the Executive Summary** – this is one of the most important parts of the paper. Spend extra time on it. Make sure it boils down the issues, is succinct and leads into the recommendations.



Analysis

- **Māori impacts** – some useful analysis of the effects on Māori (e.g. Paper 31), plus some work on te ao Māori analysis. But it is not done often enough.
- **Full options analysis** – good practice is to assess options against a set of criteria. This also involves explaining why you are using these criteria (and relating them to the problem or opportunity) and explaining why these are the options you are analysing. See our Masterclass⁸ on options.



Advice

- **Nix the noting recommendations** – they unnecessarily repeat the Executive Summary and the paper. We've said this often. But there were good examples, e.g. Paper 4.
- **Shorter, shorter** – some papers were getting pretty long. The author and those doing QA and peer review should look for opportunities to shorten them. Easy options are reducing repetition, putting detailed information in the Appendix, and doing a tight Executive Summary or Key points section.
- **Watch the jargon** – your Minister may be OK (but even she might struggle if tired or overworked), but new Ministers and other Ministers will find it hard going.
- **Spoken voice** – talking points were presented in a ready to use manner in some papers, e.g. Paper 5. This is good practice. But all too often, they were framed as suggestions – this leaves the Minister with unnecessary work to do in the meeting.

⁸ https://nzier.org.nz/static/media/filer_public/3b/fa/3bfab3a9-1d34-4810-bbdd-a4536883cdb8/brief_27_options_analysis.pdf





Action

- **How is this going to be implemented?** – you are an implementation agency (as well as a provider of policy advice) and have plenty of expertise at your fingertips. Explain what is going to be done and when, and whether there are any major issues, e.g. staff training, IT, communications etc.

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Appendix A The Policy Quality Framework

Figure 6 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/policy-quality-framework-full.pdf>



Appendix B Policy Quality Framework scoring definitions

Score	Meaning	Description
1	Unacceptable	Does not meet the relevant quality standards in fundamental ways <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 Disability Support System Transformation: Machinery of Government Scope and Options

Overall assessment	
3	<p>The paper does a good job explaining the problems with the current system from a disability community perspective. It lays down some markers for Ministers to decide on to guide future work.</p> <p>It would have been a better paper if tightened and strengthened in a number of key areas – in particular, the Executive Summary, adding data and further evidence, and bolstering the options analysis.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>References previous Cabinet decisions.</p> <p>Explains the fit with the MoH paper.</p> <p>Outlines the role of the Working Group.</p>
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Detailed description of the different MoG options. This is clearly set out in some good tables.</p> <p>Plenty of information on stakeholder views.</p> <p>Uses the United National Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability as part of the underpinning framework.</p> <p>Contains a discussion of the Tiriti analysis.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Options only analysed using pros and cons. This is a pity, given you've developed several sets of principles (e.g. para 28) that could have been applied to consider the options.</p> <p>Lots of assertions without the evidential back-up, e.g. para 22 2nd dot point; and 5th dot point. This gives the paper more of an advocacy feel than a piece of analysis.</p> <p>Give a sense of the scale of the decisions, e.g. the differences between the two scopes discussed on para 22 in terms of funding, the number of users, the number of services provided, etc.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Some good active headings.</p> <p>Indicates the risks of change.</p> <p>Provides free and frank advice – it's very clear about the Working Group's views of the situation.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Lengthy Executive Summary – it was out of balance for the length of the paper. It needed to be edited down and have active subheadings. An Executive summary always needs to be a quick summary of the main points and be easy to read at pace.</p> <p>Too many noting recommendations. Focus on recommendations where the Minister needs to make a decision – leave the rest of the content to the summary.</p> <p>Recs aren't self-contained, e.g. rec 2, which refers to several sets of principles, but they aren't listed or referenced.</p> <p>No information on costs.</p> <p>Consider using a diagram to show the differences in scope.</p> <p>Long sentences, e.g. para 32.</p>



Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	Worth trying to set out the next stages of the review and reporting to Ministers in more detail. As it is, the Next Steps section doesn't seem to be consistent with the recommendations.

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C.2 Update on Accelerating Accessibility

Overall assessment	
3	<p>A wide-ranging update on the work and the thinking to date.</p> <p>Firm up the recommendations so they focus on the decisions the Minister has to make and the next steps in the process.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Notes the connections between this work and the NZ Disability Strategy and the Disability Action Plan.</p> <p>Good Purpose statement – it sets up for a wide-ranging update.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Does not mention earlier briefings on this matter. Is this the first briefing? Given this is an update on the work there may have been. Be clear.</p>
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Includes an appendix outlining the Treaty and te ao Māori analysis.</p> <p>Uses the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as a basis for the analysis.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>It is always worth adding a bit of data and evidence to support the key tenets of the paper – it will strengthen the arguments, e.g. para 2 re barriers to access.</p> <p>It takes a while to get to the point of giving assurance that the work is on track to meet Ministerial deadlines (para 26). And it's not evident in the title of this section in the paper. This could be more upfront given the paper's billing as an update.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Some good active headings – this helps to provide a clear and logical structure for the paper.</p> <p>Uses footnotes to define specific terms. This is helpful.</p> <p>Touches on risk – especially the costs and economic impacts of improving accessibility. But this could be further developed.</p> <p>Notes that there will be engagement with stakeholders.</p> <p>Incorporates expert advice.</p> <p>Briefly outlines the next steps in the process.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Recommendations could be refined to be more specific. Noting recommendations aren't needed. But rec 2 should be more specific about the elements of the work programme the Minister is being asked to endorse.</p> <p>Even through your footnote definitions, the use of technical jargon makes it a hard read. This is particularly the case in the Executive Summary – where terms are used before they are defined in the body of the paper.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	<p>How are you going to assess the success of the legislation and other measures? It's good practice to think about monitoring and evaluation in the policy design phase.</p>



C.3 Supporting disabled people to have equal access to art, culture and sports events

Overall assessment	
4	<p>A well-written paper that systematically goes through the issues and assesses a range of options. It uses international and local examples to inform the analysis.</p> <p>Worth explaining why you used this set of criteria to analyse the options, as opposed to other criteria mentioned in the paper.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Notes the Minister's request for advice on this matter.</p> <p>Puts the issue in the wider concept of accessibility.</p> <p>Explains the links to the UN convention.</p>
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Gives a couple of international examples and some local examples. Are there others? This seems like a fairly limited look at international practice. Better practice would be to include a more in-depth and systematic analysis in an appendix.</p> <p>Makes some high level comments about Treaty impact.</p> <p>Outlines the previous work on this issue and its conclusions.</p> <p>Describes a range of options and analyses these against a set of criteria. This analysis is presented in a table and then explored in more detail. This is good practice.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Provide evaluative material on other schemes, as well as descriptive information. It's important to explain whether it works or not!</p> <p>Remember to explain where the criteria for analysing the options come from and why they are important. This is not particularly evident in the discussion for the "voluntary" criteria.</p> <p>Also, why these three options?</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Good use of active headings and subheadings.</p> <p>Well written.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Para 7 needs an edit – a repeated phrase.</p> <p>Avoid the noting recommendations – they just repeat what's in the Executive Summary.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	<p>Could do more to explain the implementation issues.</p> <p>Limited discussion of the costs of the different schemes.</p>



C.4 Accommodation Supplement for community partners

Overall assessment	
5	<p>A succinct clear paper that does a good job of explaining a complex technical problem, the current practice, and how to solve the issue. It had an action-orientated set of recommendations – this is good practice.</p> <p>It would be helpful to pull together the next steps in the process for both suggested changes into a simple table.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	It's not clear how this issue has arisen – worth an explanation.
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Clearly outlines the current problem and how this problem plays out in the wider benefits system.</p> <p>Good use of examples to help explain the problem.</p> <p>Good to see the counterfactual explained. This is an underused device and can be a compelling argument.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Might be helpful to add some data about the number of people potentially impacted by these possible changes.</p> <p>Could do more to explain the population impacts.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Well written and succinct.</p> <p>Does a good job of explaining some highly technical issues.</p> <p>Footnotes were helpful if the reader needed to understand the issue in more detail.</p> <p>Great use of active headings and subheadings.</p> <p>Tight Executive Summary that boils down the key points.</p> <p>Gave free and frank advice. 9(2)(g)(i) OIA</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Worth trying to pull together the next steps on both sets of issues into a simple table.</p> <p>Light on discussion of risks.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Explains the links to the current legislative process.
Areas for improvement	



C.5 Meeting with Access Alliance

Overall assessment	
4	<p>Some great background information to support the Minister in the meeting. It's clear some research has been done into the issues that are likely to be raised and wider issues for the organisation.</p> <p>The material would be easier to use in a meeting setting if you had integrated the two sets of talking points (those in the main body of the briefing and those set out as answers to the questions raised by Access Alliance).</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Clear about the purpose of the meeting from both the Minister's and Access Alliance's perspectives. This is good practice.</p> <p>Notes the linkages to the wider government work programme.</p>
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Provides background information on the organisation and their work.</p> <p>Excellent background information on the issues that Access Alliance will raise. This helps the Minister to be well prepared. It also means that potentially tricky issues can be headed off.</p>
Areas for improvement	
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Takes the opportunity to include other relevant information – it will be very helpful for your Minister to know that Chrissie Cowan has recently received an award. It helps make the engagement more personal and shows the Minister is in touch with happenings in the sector.</p> <p>Good research.</p> <p>Talking points are in spoken voice. This is good practice.</p> <p>Outlines the risks with the current work programme.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Missing photos and bios of attendees. This should be standard practice.</p> <p>There are essentially two sets of talking points. This will make for hard work in the actual meeting. Best if they are integrated and on one page for easy reference.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	Is any follow-up necessary?



C.6 Update on Disability System Transformation

Overall assessment	
3.5	An A3 with several elements of best practice from our Masterclass brief. The A3 is essentially a plan on a page, telegraphing what is to come in September 2021. The paper could be improved with tighter editing and more visuals.
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Purpose statement captured succinctly in the title. Concise context provided on the recent Cabinet decisions, including the new vision statement.
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	The A3 has a clear and logical organising structure – starting with the context/situation, then opportunity and future decisions points.
Areas for improvement	More needs to be provided on the te ao Māori and te Tiriti aspects of the issue. For the A3, it would be enough to show what Māori need and what utilisation rates look like compared to the total population. This could be a great little graph. A very positive A3 that also needs to demonstrate some analysis of barriers to achieving the transformation, e.g. workforce, care pathways, funding models, cross-agency delivery etc.
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Good use of active headings The map makes a great visual. The circle of services diagram brings the portfolio roles into greater relief than words or dot points.
Areas for improvement	There is potential for more visuals, e.g. graphs on spending, access, timelines. Masterclass brief 19 ⁹ has some pointers that you may find helpful. It is ok to use tightly edited or even sentence fragments so long as you do not lose meaning. For example, <i>With the transformation of DSS, there is an opportunity to look at how we can achieve positive change for a larger cohort of disabled people than those currently receiving DSS, and ensure all portfolios are responsive to the needs of disabled people.</i> could be halved: <i>DSS transformation is an opportunity to reach more than current recipients and to improve cross-portfolio responsiveness.</i> The box headed <i>DSS is the starting point, but not the full picture</i> could be a picture. The A3 could be improved with a few points on the risks you will be looking out for in the transformation. More white space is needed to improve the look and readability.
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Good indication of what to expect in the September Cabinet paper.
Areas for improvement	If this is about transformation, you need to provide more on implementation. Key steps and timeline would work as a graphic.

⁹ https://nzier.org.nz/static/media/filer_public/ba/dc/badc980c-bc85-4bb9-a026-c86b9c5fa411/brief_19_getting_the_best_from_a3s.pdf



C.7 Establishing the amended COVID-19 New Zealanders Stranded Overseas Support Programme

Overall assessment	
4.5	<p>A process paper that deals very efficiently with extending payments for New Zealanders stuck offshore. The brevity and readability of this paper is an exemplar for similar process papers. Good background recap.</p> <p>A word on how you will implement and communicate the extension would round off this paper end-to-end.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>A clear and specific Purpose statement.</p> <p>The paper sets out the prior decision to extend the payment programme.</p> <p>The paper establishes the Ministerial legal authority to amend the programme.</p>
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>A process paper but a reminder of the problem and need for action is plainly stated – payments will stop otherwise.</p> <p>The growing magnitude of the problem – eligible clients stuck overseas.</p>
Areas for improvement	
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Big, bold action drives subheadings.</p> <p>Short paragraphs</p> <p>Short, tightly edited sentences.</p> <p>Easy to follow recommendations that cover every step of the government machinery.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>A risk section could improve the paper. Are you expecting any hiccups going forward? Possibly another extension? This is the time to say if there are risks and how you will anticipate managing them.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	<p>Nice clear next steps in the process.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>The paper deals with the machinery of government steps but could be improved with a few sentences on implementation and communication to the affected clients stuck around the world.</p> <p>For thoroughness, how will you be monitoring the amended programme?</p>



C.8 Superannuation reform: amendments to Ministerial directions

Overall assessment	
4	A succinct procedural to sign an instrument enacting prior decisions. Shows good command of the detail. Coverage of implementation or other risks would complete this paper.
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Good coverage of the context in which these decisions sit. Previous decisions are referenced.
Areas for improvement	Even if covered in previous papers, this note should state the source of legal authority for the decisions sought.
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	The rationale for the agreed amendments is recapped for completeness.
Areas for improvement	It is always helpful to remind Ministers how large some of the affected groups are so they know who is to gain. Although mainly a process paper and even if covered in previous advice, a word on the Māori dimension would help for completeness.
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Some intricate policy details are explained in an easy to read narrative. The mobile home issue, for example, is set out clearly. Good use of footnotes for detail. Good use of active headings and subheadings. Short paragraphs. Good use of dot points.
Areas for improvement	Any risks to implementation or other aspects of the changes?
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Clear next steps for the machinery of government steps.
Areas for improvement	A word on implementation and monitoring would round this paper off for completeness. For example, the mobile home inclusion is something new, so you may want to keep an eye on it and report back on implementation.



C.9 Legislative Programme 2021 – Final Bids

Overall assessment	
3	<p>A paper focused on a portfolio bid for Seniors.</p> <p>With a new Minister, the paper could be improved by explaining how the bid process works in practice.,</p> <p>Some reassurance is needed on how you expect to have Cabinet policy decisions by the end of March 2021, given the amount of policy work remaining.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Good context provided on the Cabinet Office requirements.
Areas for improvement	Some context on how the bid process works in theory and reality would be helpful for a new Minister.
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Some helpful numbers on the size of the population affected.
Areas for improvement	<p>What can you say about getting the Cabinet decisions by the end of March 2021, given the scope, functions, and powers are unclear at this stage – end of January now.</p> <p>Why was it that the bodies mentioned in para 9 of the attached LEG bid paper are calling for an Aged Care Commissioner – this is key to exploring problem definition.</p> <p>The LEG bid paper needs a clearer and tighter problem definition to compel the paper. Citing a ‘range of problems’ is too broad. An intervention logic is needed if a Commissioner is a solution. For example, how does the unregulated workforce, mentioned in para 4, lead back to the need for a Commissioner?</p> <p>What are the options – at least as a high-level heads-up for now.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Draft letter provided for the Cabinet Office Legislative Coordinator.</p> <p>The LEG bid paper meets the Cabinet Office requirements for formatting.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>What are the timelines for completion of the policy work – 8 weeks to go.</p> <p>Parliament is busy, PCO is resource-constrained. What is your assessment on this Bill progressing? You have a new Minister who does not have past experience.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Good immediate next steps provided and made easy with cover letter and draft LEG paper.
Areas for improvement	<p>Thinking ahead, what engagements should the Minister undertake to get this Bill on the legislative programme and through the House given all the contenders and all the congestion.</p> <p>Give her confidence that you can make this happen if she backs it.</p>



C.10 Introducing a \$350 COVID-19 Short-Term Absence Payment

Overall assessment	
5	<p>An exceptional paper for exceptional times.</p> <p>A seamless three-agency briefing paper seeking agreement to Cabinet paper insertions.</p> <p>This paper works because it is a clear and concrete proposal for keeping workers at risk of COVID-19 at home pending test results. Risks are well set out.</p> <p>As we are not the first country with COVID policy responses, some discussion/reminders of how other countries are handling this specific issue could improve the paper.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Clear proposal.</p> <p>Good background on other related payments.</p> <p>Clear statement of why this paper is in front of Ministers, and why now.</p>
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>The logic, eligibility and practical workings of the policy are well set out.</p> <p>Other design choices summarised.</p> <p>Cost analysis is set out clearly under three public health scenarios.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Any other countries doing this with experience to relate?</p> <p>A paragraph on distributional impacts for Māori and vulnerable groups could improve the paper.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Tone of the paper matches the urgency of risks posed by COVID-19.</p> <p>Tight Executive Summary.</p> <p>Seamless in execution. No hint of three authors or three agency views.</p> <p>Effective diagram in Appendix 2 explaining eligibility for the payment.</p> <p>Excellent, free and frank risk section including mitigations.</p> <p>Workability well canvassed.</p> <p>Unusual to just seek approval for inserts for another (in this case, much larger and urgent) Cabinet paper, but these are unusual times. The approach works because of the trust and confidence instilled in the quality of this briefing.</p> <p>Next steps are well set out, including the material to be forwarded for the Cabinet paper.</p> <p>Good use of tables to organise material.</p> <p>Short paragraphs.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Some discussion of the overarching risk – infected workers spreading COVID-19 could help complete the risk assessment, e.g. one infected café worker would be expected to infect x number of people.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	<p>Offers a rescheduling option for the next scheduled train if Ministers elect for more work to be undertaken.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>What monitoring and feedback are planned?</p>



C.11 Expansion of Flexi-Wage to support 40,000 New Zealanders into work or to start their own business

Overall assessment	
3	<p>Cabinet Committee paper looks to gain authorisation for a large scale boost in employment support by expanding an existing scheme. It is putting this proposal forward before the details are ready to combat predictions of growing unemployment. The broad outlines are clear, and the type of approach it will mean is already established – and a commitment exists.</p> <p>But best practice supports the view it would still be sensible to have a well-defined proposal for an informed decision and valuable to consider options to underline why this is the best.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Purpose clear and timing relates to the likely increases in unemployment that have been forecast and the commitment the Government has made to enlarge the scheme.</p> <p>Paper is proposing building on the previous scheme, and it provides background on how that works.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Wider implications and strategic impact are not covered – even though this drastic expansion of what is a largely discretionary subsidy regime is rather ground-breaking.</p>
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>The approach is public policy style. The problem is stated as the likely increases in the numbers of unemployed. But the way the discussion goes, the subsidiary issue is the groups that are disadvantaged in the labour market. The estimates of future unemployed are given and show the scale. But the problems of the disadvantaged are merely described.</p> <p>The broad outline of the proposal is sketched, but little detail is included.</p> <p>A formal section examines a range of risks – though the analysis is light and does not deal with the problems of managing the task of fitting the subsidy to the situation.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>This proposal is still subject to the fine details being completed, making the bid for funding somewhat of an exercise in risk.</p> <p>Despite the commitment, a serious omission is the lack of discussion of options. While the proposal is still fluid and there are different versions of Flexi-Wage proposed (to deal with various aspects of the issue), a formal comparison of alternatives is best practice.</p> <p>While there are high-level mentions of the disadvantaged, there is no Māori analysis. This is a weakness in this type of work.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Executive Summary pulls out the key details</p> <p>Good subheadings</p> <p>Helpful listing of detail on Flexi-Wage's six varieties in Appendix.</p> <p>Two helpful tables.</p> <p>Good detailed financial information shows what is sought and where it will go.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>But some bolding could help break up the text and guide the reader's eye (e.g. in the Appendix, pick out the key features of each variety).</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	<p>Explicit discussion of monitoring and evaluation – including seeking resources to complete the task.</p>
Areas for improvement	



C.12 Initial advice on Flexi-Wage Self-Employment

Overall assessment	
4	<p>Information paper to bring Minister up to speed with Flexi-Wage Self Employment (FWSE) as it stands and indicates where it is going. Solid piece with useful data, a thoughtful appendix summarising international experience, and a promise of a more detailed briefing soon.</p> <p>Would have been souped up by an enabling edit to make the reading easier and the use of some graphics to colour in the picture.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>This is a follow-on (after two weeks) to the Cabinet decision to inject a large amount into FWSE to massively expand it (from \$2m to \$30m).</p> <p>Purpose clearly explained.</p> <p>Links are made with existing schemes run by other agencies. Also explains the way it fits with other MSD policies.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Would have been good to see this scheme 'located' alongside the various policies already in the field – to show where it fits and what its role is. A diagram would be especially helpful. (This could draw on the stocktake mentioned in para 34.)</p>
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>There is no analytical framework – though the useful appendix and discussion of it in the paper look toward the lasting value of the intervention.</p> <p>The material is descriptive and works through the existing scheme, its usage in terms of take-up by various subgroups, possible enhancements, and what evidence there is for results. The survey is well done and interesting.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Though there is mention of the Treaty obligations and the current Māori situation in terms of the FWSE, more discussion would be useful as it is one of the key disparities.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Tidy.</p> <p>Great headings help the reader through the story.</p> <p>The Executive Summary is about the right length and generally nicely drafted but includes some material, not in the body of the paper.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Slips into long sentences at times (e.g. paras 41, 46).</p> <p>Some of the reporting on the data findings must be read twice to see what it meant.</p> <p>Cried out for graphs and other visual aids to make the most of the useful material.</p> <p>A stand-alone risk discussion would be worthwhile, even at this design stage, as it could be addressed in the next round.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	<p>Signals clearly the follow-up report (which will be joint with Treasury) to joint Ministers and outlines the content.</p> <p>Flags that the next round of advice will include arrangements for monitoring and evaluation.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>All the expansion is going to be difficult for MSD. What is planned? How are demands for more staff – especially skilled mentors, assessors and support people being handled?</p>



C.13 Enhancing the New Zealand Seasonal Work Scheme and Seasonal Work Assistance Programme

Overall assessment	
4	<p>The report focuses on a well-defined issue: how to improve the deployment of MSD clients (and others) to make up for the shortfall of seasonal workers in horticulture and viticulture. Positive and has suggestions based on expert knowledge with an air of practicality. Provides the Minister with a 'go' button to push – this is a model for action.</p> <p>But the lack of a solid framework and data context creates risks that needed a dedicated section and a sensible discussion.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Purpose stated early.</p> <p>Mentions other policies to explain why some unemployed are not pursuing opportunities in this area.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Placing these ideas in a wider picture of the labour market and the other public interventions would allow the Minister to see where this fits strategically for the long run.</p>
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Problem is described well. The shortage estimated by MPI shows the scale alongside figures on future unemployed. The estimated cost of the scheme also shows what is at stake.</p> <p>Approach is based on identifying and overcoming 'barriers', including lack of incentives. This throws up ideas – which are practical.</p> <p>Draws on information from MSD staff, claimants and employers.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Clear from a myriad of proposals here that MSD understands the diversity of situations among those targeted. But there is no analytical framework such as market segmentation used to discuss the various schemes. So, the proposals all seem 'ad hoc' – why set the increased Seasonal Work Assistance Programme rate at \$6 or \$12 an hour depending on a family situation?</p> <p>And what about the problems for MSD staff? This looks like an area needing special skills.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Tidy.</p> <p>Good active subheadings through the report.</p> <p>Lots of data to support the story.</p> <p>Great work to provide a complete package that the Minister only has to approve for it to be launched! This is a cracking service. And the follow up is also clear.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>But even an experienced and keen Minister may struggle to put the suggestions here in context. For instance, the figures in the Appendix are cited without any comparators to make them readily understandable.</p> <p>There is no risk section. This is important as the brief makes it clear that there have been earlier attempts to create similar schemes effective in the past – this one may have its difficulties.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	<p>Good to see a comms strategy mentioned.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>But no discussion of implementation. While these are schemes, they still demand good staff.</p> <p>And what about monitoring and evaluation. These are important when the proposals are risky.</p>



C.14 Meeting with Horticulture New Zealand – Seasonal labour submission

Overall assessment	
3.5	<p>Aide-mémoire for meeting with horticulture industry representatives lobbying for seasonal labour from the Pacific. Has a good picture of the situation and the way it is developing. Having decided on an approach, it backs this up with descriptive material. But arguing about numbers needs data which is lacking.</p> <p>A better meeting brief would be formally structured for use and contain talking points.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Purpose of briefing is clearly stated.</p> <p>Wider context is limited but includes general labour situation and MPI estimates.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>COVID setting goes without saying.</p> <p>But including a few words the Minister could use if she wanted to characterise the Government's general approach to entry would tie the discussion firmly to the topic.</p> <p>Lacks a clear steer for the Minister's aim at the meeting. There is no room for movement on the big issue, but what might the Minister try to achieve? More cooperation, experiments with higher pay, or just better accommodation?</p>
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>The shape of the argument is built around two points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The looming labour shortage (the problem) is not as dire as the industry says – various factors may offset the supply decrease • MSD (and industry) are working further to increase supply from a larger pool of locals. <p>And the industry could do more themselves through, e.g. wages and working conditions.</p> <p>These are backed up with descriptive material plus MPI estimates.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Despite this being set up as a dispute over (estimated) numbers, there are no figures associated with the MSD initiatives. This makes the debate one that is unlikely to make much progress – and thus may leave the sides as far apart as they started.</p> <p>Some rough idea of the expected results of the initiatives mentioned might give the industry something to take back to their members.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Readable drafting.</p> <p>Tidy with only a couple of very minor slips.</p> <p>Useful active subheadings.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Ongoing work and further advice promised.</p> <p>Assuming the Minister is well acquainted with the industry people and their organisation, best practice meeting briefs are structured to support the session. This means, for instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key material summarised on one page – accessible during the meeting. • Talking points drafted in spoken word – able to be read out as written. • Suggested conclusion – even in the form of 'agree to differ' but possibly more positive.
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	<p>But no suggestions about monitoring – will this be regularly reported? How will the Minister keep on top of the developments?</p>



C.15 Short-term immigration policy changes: Report back on streamlining the Skills Match Report process

Overall assessment	
4	<p>Thoughtful joint report to joint Ministers follows an earlier piece on COVID changes by suggesting a streamlining of processing Skills Match Reports (SMRs). Great self-contained piece. Once the Ministers agree, it's all on.</p> <p>But it would be improved by discussing what is actually at stake, what savings (funds and staff resourcing) will occur, and how much will processing be sped up?</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Announces the Purpose in the first paragraph.</p> <p>Report fills in the complicated backdrop of policies and processes as it develops its arguments.</p> <p>Main strategic stand positions these changes (which improve the efficiency of operational processes) as temporary, driven by COVID and the closed border.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Most of this work is resource-saving, so why not mention the potential for making the changes longer-lasting – perhaps after a review?</p>
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Framework is process engineering. It entails examining how the SMRs fit into the decisions and considering the extent to which there is a better (less resource intensive) way.</p> <p>A sound practical approach is adopted, and several more efficient methods are proposed as 'streamlining'. The description of this is well-grounded and often cites previous practice.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>No data is included – it would be useful to have an idea of the resources freed up and/or the potential to speed up processing.</p> <p>Given the arguments are efficiency-driven, this is a gap.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Effective, rather than sparkling, drafting but gets the message across.</p> <p>Good use of active subheadings.</p> <p>Nicely coloured tables are effective, though in A4 size demand strong eyesight to be read easily.</p> <p>Sets up the process change needing only Minister's approval – this is good stuff.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>An edit could tighten things up – it seems to take a lot of paper and some occasional long sentences to get to the point.</p> <p>It is also awash with noting recommendations. These take up space in a brief for your Minister.</p> <p>One or two minor slips of which misuse (or non-use) of an apostrophe stands out.</p> <p>Timing of implementation of changes once they are signed off would be helpful.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	<p>Says that this is going to be considered for termination in early 2021. This clear indication is helpful.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>But more on how this ending will happen would be better.</p> <p>As a process change, good practice is to include a facility for monitoring and reporting and a simple evaluation structure. If the idea is to use existing mechanisms – say so.</p>



C.16 Instrument amending the Employment and Work Readiness Assistance Programme for Ministerial Approval.

Overall assessment	
4	<p>Tidy short operational policy paper that provides the drafting required for the legal, operational instrument to give effect previous policy decisions.</p> <p>Look to shorten and sharpen the recommendations as they were often repeated verbatim in the supporting paper.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Clear Purpose statement.</p> <p>Includes references to the previous decisions that are being implemented through the instrument.</p>
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Legal analysis that clearly sets out why the instrument is drafted the way proposed.</p> <p>Provided a tracked changes version to support the proposed approach.</p>
Areas for improvement	
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Clearly expressed well-structured paper.</p> <p>Good use of active headings.</p> <p>Great discussion of next steps covering the timeline and upcoming advice.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Very detailed recommendations that are almost as long as the paper. The content of the recommendations was often repeated verbatim in the supporting paper. Look to shorten and sharpen the recommendations so they focus on actions and decisions. Put more of the detailed content of the body of the report.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	



C.17 9(2)(f)(iv) OIA

Overall assessment	
4	9(2)(f)(iv) OIA
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clearly sets out the purpose of the report. Provides references to previous decisions and draws out the key points from that advice.
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	9(2)(f)(iv) OIA
Areas for improvement	
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Well-structured with good use of active headings. Not always an easy read with some long, dense paragraphs. Nice use of graphics and tables to 9(2)(f)(iv) OIA
Areas for improvement	9(2)(f)(iv) OIA
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	9(2)(f)(iv) OIA



C.18 9(2)(f)(iv) OIA

Overall assessment	
3.5	<p>Straightforward, short process paper to 9(2)(f)(iv) OIA</p> <p>Would be better with a few key messages rather than a series of noting recommendations that are then repeated mainly in the body of the report.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Clear Purpose statement.</p> <p>Background section succinctly sets out the context.</p>
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Sets out the criteria for 9(2)(f)(iv) OIA</p> <p>OIA</p>
Areas for improvement	
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Concise and well written.</p> <p>Clear structure that guides the reader through the paper.</p>
Areas for improvement	9(2)(f)(iv) OIA
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	9(2)(f)(iv) OIA
Areas for improvement	



C.19 Amendments to the Housing Support Allowance Programme

Overall assessment	
3	<p>Short process paper to support the legal instrument that gives effect to some recent policy decisions.</p> <p>Would be better with a few key messages rather than a series of noting recommendations that are then largely repeated in the body of the report.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clear summary of the purpose of the report.
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Legal analysis that sets out the rationale for the changes proposed in the instrument.
Areas for improvement	
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Provides the information required to make an informed decision.</p> <p>Succinct, well-structured and easy to read.</p> <p>Next steps are set out, and a follow-up report is signalled.</p>
Areas for improvement	Twelve noting recommendations are excessive in a short process paper with four action recommendations. Consider boiling the noting recommendations down to few key messages followed by the action recommendations. That would remove the duplication between the noting recommendations and the body of the report – which generally adds little to the content of the recommendations.
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	



C.20 9(2)(f)(iv) OIA

Overall assessment	
3	Short, well-written briefing paper that 9(2)(f)(iv) OIA
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clearly sets out the purpose and background using the standard MSD briefing format.
Areas for improvement	9(2)(f)(iv) OIA
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	9(2)(f)(iv) OIA
Areas for improvement	
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Succinct, well-structured and easy to read.
Areas for improvement	9(2)(f)(iv) OIA
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	9(2)(f)(iv) OIA



C.21 Update on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Overall assessment	
4	<p>An admirably succinct introductory briefing on the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) following the election. It gives the new Minister a concise summary of the current state of the convention regarding New Zealand, the work programme underway, and the manifesto commitments the Government has made. It promises further work.</p> <p>It could do more to explain the complexity of the policy issues associated with a full implementation of the Convention. This would help give Ministers a sense of the scope, scale and importance of the issues; and therefore the work programme. This is particularly important for the new Minister, who might not be up to speed with these matters yet.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	An introduction for the new Ministers.
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Explains how UNCROC is managed in New Zealand and the role and responsibility of Ministers. Outlines the election manifesto commitments.
Areas for improvement	Could further explain the complexity or otherwise of the various issues and outline the work plan or process for addressing them. As it is, it's unclear in para 21.1 whether this will be a substantive paper or a work plan/process to investigate these changes.
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Great use of active headings. These make the paper an easier and quicker read for busy Ministers.</p> <p>Succinct and well written.</p> <p>Clearly explains the work underway, the commitments made, and the following pieces of work that will come up to the Minister. Just what we'd expect in an introductory briefing for a new Minister!</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Noting recommendations are not necessary for a paper to the Minister (5/7 are noting in this paper). It would be better to have a few key messages or a short Executive summary.</p> <p>Use the attachment – are there particular sections of it you want to draw the Minister's attention to? See our Masterclass¹⁰ on getting better value from attachments.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	Be clear about why you suggest referring this briefing to a Ministerial colleague. In this case, it is for information.

¹⁰ https://nzier.org.nz/static/media/filer_public/8a/04/8a049652-5a53-432c-9367-64c5448df546/brief_25_dealing_with_attachments_1.pdf



C.22 Options to establish new arrangements for the long-term home of the Independent Children's Monitor

Overall assessment	
3.5	<p>A well-structured paper that clearly outlines the issues and provides advice on options to address them for the Minister to consider.</p> <p>It could have done more to explain why these options were chosen to assess (and not others) and done a more sophisticated analysis of the options using criteria – rather than just pros and cons. Costings of the different options would also be a useful addition to the assessment.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	References earlier reports and discussions on this issue.
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Clear description of the options considered.</p> <p>The pros and cons of the options are presented.</p> <p>Presents high level work on financial implications. But this could be taken further as there are likely to be differences between the options.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Needs an explanation as to why these options were chosen for analysis. Are there others? (e.g. putting the function in an existing Crown entity; or a new Independent Crown Entity?) It's common to have a long list and then a short list of options. Some on the long list can be knocked off quickly (for various reasons – cost, legality, practicality).</p> <p>A more sophisticated options analysis would assess options against a set of criteria. These could include some of the issues mentioned in the paper (e.g. support for Māori and independence) and other factors like cost, sustainability, ease of implementation, and consistency with how other similar roles are treated.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>The paper does a good job at presenting different levels of the detail of the analysis, e.g. in the Executive Summary, the body of the paper and appendices.</p> <p>Some good active subheadings – but this isn't consistent throughout the paper.</p> <p>Weaves stakeholder views into the analysis.</p> <p>Notes the view of other agencies.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Consider using tables to present a detailed description of the options so they are easily able to be compared and contrasted. Tables could also be used for the options analysis.</p> <p>Outline the next steps in more detail. What consultation and engagement will be necessary? What role should the Minister play in this? What further information do you need to gather (e.g. costings; legal analysis) to develop a paper for Cabinet?</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Outlines some of the implementation issues associated with options.
Areas for improvement	



C.23 New Zealand's Sixth Periodic Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child

Overall assessment	
5	<p>Decent short Cabinet paper that does what it needs to do. It's written so all Ministers, not just those in the know, can understand the requirements and the process. It explains the issues that may attract adverse public comments and explains that there is a communications strategy to manage these matters. This is good practice.</p> <p>Remember not only to list the agencies you consulted with but also whether they supported the paper or not.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Outlines the requirements for NZ to report to the UN Committee.</p> <p>Explains the fit to wider government policies.</p> <p>Clear Purpose statement.</p>
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Outlines the key themes of the report. This is enhanced by using data and examples.
Areas for improvement	Go the extra mile. Give references to pages/section number in the main report for each of the items listed in paras 11 and 12 so Ministers with a particular interest can easily find the relevant sections in the attached Report.
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Clearly outlines the issues in the Report which may attract adverse comment. Explains the strategy in place to address any issues as they arise. This is good practice.</p> <p>Well written – the paper does a good job of explaining both the process requirements and content for the wider group of Ministers. It's always hard to write for all Ministers as their level of knowledge of the subject differs considerably. This is done well.</p> <p>Follows all the requirements of a Cabinet paper.</p> <p>Includes high level population implications.</p>
Areas for improvement	You list an extensive range of agencies that contributed to the report and this paper. But you don't mention whether they support the paper or not.
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	<p>Outlines the engagement strategy.</p> <p>Notes that there will be ongoing monitoring of take-up and the communications strategy will be adjusted in response if required.</p>
Areas for improvement	



C.24 Joined-up Government in the Regions report-back: strengthening a regional system leadership model for the public service

Overall assessment	
2.5	<p>The paper proposes a new regional coordination and leadership system for the public service based on a high-level discussion of the problem and the opportunities to do better.</p> <p>It doesn't, however, have any of the usual robustness of a piece of policy analysis, e.g. having some type of underpinning framework, considering alternative options to be sure that the best one is being chosen and using evidence to support these conclusions. We know it can sometimes be tricky to make sure this analytical content is in the paper when it's a Cabinet paper (and as such, the Minister's paper). But it should still be there and is a main requirement of the PQF. Without this, it doesn't provide well-informed advice to enable Ministers to make robust decisions knowing the potential benefits and consequences.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>References previous decisions.</p> <p>Explains the links to the public sector reforms.</p> <p>Clear Purpose statement.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Could have done more to explain the history of this issue and the previous attempts at coordination, and the extent to which they have worked (or otherwise).</p>
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Covers population impacts in a brief table.</p> <p>Outlines the benefits of the model at a high level.</p> <p>Very briefly notes the links to the Crown's Treaty obligations.</p> <p>Does a good job of explaining the problem, but only at a high level. Consider adding some more examples of poor and good regional level coordination, e.g. some case studies.</p> <p>Outlines a useful framework for thinking about how these Commissioners will operate, i.e. convene, resolve, escalate (para 32).</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>No evidence that some sort of underlying framework was used – and limited intervention logic.</p> <p>No discussion of options. Why is this the best way to go? What else was considered?</p> <p>Lacking evidence to support the proposals.</p> <p>Are there any relevant international models that could be applied in the New Zealand setting?</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Active subheadings to guide the way.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Jargon heavy. It sounded like bureaucrat speak, rather than plain English.</p> <p>Some long sentences, e.g. para 43.</p> <p>Light on next steps – how is this going to be put in place? And by when?</p> <p>Lists many agencies that have been consulted in the preparation of the paper but does not indicate whether they support it or not.</p> <p>No discussion of risk.</p> <p>No discussion of stakeholder views – in particular engagement with iwi to ascertain their view on these proposals. A bit light on local government perspectives, too – a lot is going on in this space that could be relevant, e.g. Three waters.</p> <p>Provides assurance that costs are manageable, although no indication is given of the likely costs of these changes in role and mandate. Given it seems like there will be an additional 11 Regional Commissions and support staff (para 22) – this seems odd.</p>



Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Notes that an implementation plan will be drafted. But no discussion was included as to whether there are any issues or challenges with the implementation or the timing of implementation.
Areas for improvement	Explain how the success (or otherwise) of this proposal will be monitored and evaluated.

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C.25 Regional Strategic Partnership Fund: Further implementation decisions

Overall assessment	
2.5	<p>A simple heads-up for the Minister on a paper going to Cabinet. It is clear about MSD's views and provides advice to the Minister on issues he should raise at the Cabinet Committee.</p> <p>All the information is there to make it a great note. But the material for the Minister to use would be better framed as ready to use talking points – this way, they could cover the issues you propose the Minister raises as well as the three areas of alignment discussed on the second page.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	A briefing on a paper coming to Cabinet.
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Gives a sense of the scale of the issue in financial terms.
Areas for improvement	More could be done to outline the benefits of the proposal.
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Clear about MSD's views and recommendations.
Areas for improvement	<p>Watch for alphabet soup – there are way too many acronyms at times in here! This makes it hard to read and understand – even for an experienced Minister who knows the topic (not to mention his colleagues).</p> <p>You give suggestions for points for the Minister to raise. These would be better framed as ready to use talking points.</p> <p>On page 2, it's not clear what the Minister should do with this material. Are these issues to raise as well? Can they be included in the talking points? Also hard to use given it is in two sections in the paper and runs over a page.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Give an idea of what needs to be done once the paper is agreed, and the role your Minister has to play in this process.
Areas for improvement	



C.26 Funding for Social Inclusion Initiatives

Overall assessment	
4	<p>Short aide-mémoire briefs Minister on a proposal before the Cabinet Business Committee. Gives reasons for supporting the proposal. But these are all in terms of alignment with aims and what the six initiatives (which are a bit vague) are said to be doing.</p> <p>An edit could have tidied the drafting in places, and evidence would bolster the proposals.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Clear the paper is driven by the Cabinet Committee agenda.</p> <p>The setting is discussed, including the role of MSD in work on social inclusion.</p> <p>It links to the report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Mosques (RCOI).</p>
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>The logic used is to take the proposal at face value and assess it in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities it supports. • Furthering the Minister's aims. • Helping social inclusion and aligning with the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy. • Responding to New Zealand's diverse population along the lines of the RCOI report.
Areas for improvement	<p>It is usual to have better developed proposals when funding is being approved. But these initiatives are at different stages – some are still being designed and so hard to judge.</p> <p>Given how far this is along, it is unrealistic to look for in-depth analysis, but it would be helpful to have an idea of what will eventuate for the money in each case.</p> <p>This would be best if based on evidence and or data – perhaps overseas experience?</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Clear about what is recommended.</p> <p>Appendix sums up the proposal's six practical funding areas in a table. This is very helpful.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Appendix would be more valuable if formatted to fit all the content onto one side of a sheet. This would overcome the lack of heading carry over.</p> <p>The appendix and the rest of the aide-mémoire needed an edit to remedy the lapses in drafting. (This would include avoiding the phrase 'implications on'.)</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Advises the Minister to support the proposal.
Areas for improvement	Hints at MSD involvement in the follow-on work, but would be better with a sketch of what is expected.



C.27 Social Workers Registration Act 2003: Review 2020

Overall assessment	
3.5	<p>Crisp report gives the Minister a heads-up on the Social Workers Registration Board's review of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003, which will soon be sent to the Minister. It focuses on proposed legislative changes and whether and how they might proceed.</p> <p>The point of the briefing coming ahead of the report is to avoid surprises. This means it needs to have the full details of all the legislative proposals from the review included – perhaps in an annexe table with MSD Comments.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Purpose clearly stated but not well executed.</p> <p>Setting is well canvassed – including MSD's intent to line the regulation of social workers up with the processes in the Health Practitioner Competency Assurance Act 2003 (HPCAA).</p> <p>The potential to use a current legislative bid to pass the review's ideas is mentioned.</p>
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Framework here is to consider the review's suggestions from MSD's perspective when they are found broadly acceptable – though with some work continuing – the discussion turns to how they might be implemented.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Rather oddly, ten of the proposals are not detailed. A simple full listing in an annexe would remove the mystery. The other three relate to training and involve discussion with education agencies that have yet to be concluded.</p> <p>Good practice would relate the assessment to a principled view of what the regulator should be doing and whether the proposals line up. While the idea of alignment with the HPCAA is a reasonable goal, it is not clear why it is being pursued and whether the Minister has endorsed it.</p> <p>What are the views of the social workers? Other stakeholders?</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>The drafting is clear.</p> <p>Tidy.</p> <p>Confident air prevails and drives the paper ahead smoothly.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Can all the work and advice be completed within the tight deadlines suggested?</p> <p>No mention of risks.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	<p>Various actions are mentioned as following this.</p> <p>MSD is assigned a significant share.</p>
Areas for improvement	



C.28 Family Violence and Sexual Violence (FVSV) in Ethnic Communities

Overall assessment	
3	<p>Demanding piece of work reacts to a question easy to ask and difficult to analyse. The problems are issues with definitions and the availability of data – lots of material about the setting and ongoing work, particularly by NGOs.</p> <p>It just didn't come together properly.</p> <p>So, lack of basic data and clarity about the scale of the issue needed to be addressed head-on. And the shape of the paper was not right to set up the discussion with the Minister.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Paper stems from Ministerial request. Turned around inside a month.</p> <p>It includes references to earlier and ongoing work in agencies and NGOs.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>The strategic aspect is undermined as there are no data points to identify the most salient issues.</p>
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>The analytical approach is built around policy work. It has a problem definition (combating FVSV) and creates a 'factors' model to consider what might be done.</p> <p>Useful material on the work already underway.</p> <p>Makes good use of previous work and cites it.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>But the scale and incidence of the violence are not provided. In fact, the distribution of the ethnic population is strangely only given for the centres 6-10 places in size. How big is the problem, both in absolute terms and relative to other population segments?</p> <p>The analytics gets bogged down in (the important for participants but not central to trying to do something about FVSV) definition details. Intervention logic would suggest the best approach is via groupings that are crucial for the effects that matter. So, the causal mechanisms discussion could be pushed ahead to identify characteristics that define relevant ethnic groupings. (For instance, if lack of English was a key causal factor, those groups with the least English knowledge could be prioritised.)</p> <p>More worryingly, the model has no clear origins and, anyway, is not used to develop possible approaches.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>This paper covers the ground broadly.</p> <p>The Appendix on Next Steps is a useful attempt to pull some ideas together as the basis of a discussion with the Minister.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>This is not an easy read. It is full of jargon and references to technical terms.</p> <p>It also needed a careful edit and check to eliminate a high incidence of unfortunate drafting and slips (starting at the base of page 1).</p> <p>It starts to tell a story but runs out of steam. This leaves the reader looking to weave the facts into a tale and not helped by the paper. A better shape is the classical policy report: problem definition (size); causes and intervention logic; possible actions; criteria; and suggested action. This can be used to engage with the Minister about open options.</p> <p>An annexe could discuss the technical matter relating to definitions and data.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	<p>Clear about wanting to discuss the issue with the Minister.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Somewhat unclear about who will be involved.</p>



C.29 Mahi Aroha: Carers' Strategy Action Plan 2019 – 2023: 2021 work programme

Overall assessment	
2.5	<p>Disappointing report to ready the Minister for a meeting. It had a framework with a useful overview of Mahi Aroha – in the attached tabular Appendix. The report zeroed in on the priorities of the Carers Alliance and showed consultation between agencies with their words included.</p> <p>But no overview was easily accessible. Drafting was opaque and without obvious conclusions about progress on targets. It was not in a readily useable form. The structure worked, but it needed a rewrite to make the material support the Minister's meeting.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>This is said to be to "inform" a meeting.</p> <p>It takes the form of a report on progress against aspects of a larger action plan.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>None of the trappings of a meeting brief is present. Good practice is to remind the Minister about the key organisations and players (especially their aims and hobby horses), suggest an agenda with supporting talking points and propose an aim for the meeting.</p>
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>The paper has a logical framework for its progress reporting and future work discussion. The headings make sense, and if the content followed through, it would be a sound report.</p> <p>There is a lot of information, albeit that much is on that little has happened for various reasons. It neatly focuses on areas where the Carers Alliance priorities mesh with Mahi Aroha.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>The material starts well with a good table at para 10 but quickly becomes turgid, hard to follow and unfortunately difficult to establish what progress has been made.</p> <p>Mahi Aroha is a project – as the Appendix shows. It would be better if that structure were to be used to sum up the developments. Sections there could be highlighted to flag the overlaps of Mahi Aroha with the Carers Alliance priorities.</p> <p>It would be further enhanced by a timeline for the stages proposed this year. With this addition, future reporting could take the familiar shape of an update against expectations.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>This is a fairly concise report.</p> <p>Tidy.</p> <p>The attached Appendix (assuming it is an A3 to make it easy to read) is helpful. It is brief and uses dot points. It sets out the achievements and says what is coming this year.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>In places, the drafting leaves the reader wondering what has happened. The main report is worse; full of jargon that does not easily translate into results. Does moving to the 'early stages of scoping' mean any progress?</p> <p>The main report seems in crucial places to have originated as separate information from different agencies using diverse approaches. There is limited drafting to unite the material into a whole (e.g. paras 32–35). It leaves the Minister to process this unintegrated data. This is not good practice; the idea is to save the Minister time and effort.</p> <p>Trying to sum up the situation for the Minister would be far easier if the table at para 10 were duplicated later with a further column summing up in simple language what had happened and what was coming. If this was on one page, it could support the Minister at the meeting.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	<p>There is a lot of material here that looks ahead. Much of this is tied to individual agency's initiatives. Other policies are being pushed ahead more collectively.</p> <p>The Appendix has a series of individual actions.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>A sensible outlook would give the Minister a picture of the whole Plan and how it is going.</p> <p>When will the resource shortages allow progress?</p>



C.30 Support for Foreign Nationals in Hardship from 1 December 2020

Overall assessment	
3.5	<p>Challenging Cabinet paper deals with a difficult issue that has not gone away. Considers options and presents full implications of the situation and the choice recommended.</p> <p>But it takes a long way round and would be better for a strong edit. The options would be improved by a clearer assessment of a wider set of alternatives.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Reasons for paper going to Cabinet are set out early.</p> <p>References earlier decisions on the topic.</p> <p>The background of the situation and the policy/legal setting are well explained. An appendix (not with our copy) has useful data about those affected, including their visa status.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>In terms of the longer term there is a case put for the temporary nature of the remedy here, but it is unconvincing. It seems to demand a scramble for another urgent decision in the opening months of the new year.</p>
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>The framework used is policy analysis. It sets out the issue and its scale. It then discusses the salient features of the situation.</p> <p>It considers a range of options that covers the possible paths ahead.</p> <p>Various risks are discussed, 9(2)(g)(i) OIA [REDACTED]. But a section on risk would be helpful.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>The options assessed are not set out explicitly as alternatives. Other options (such as another special programme not contracted to an NGO but run through DIA – perhaps using MSD criteria but without MSD's legal constraints) are not canvassed.</p> <p>Neither is there a discussion of the broad criteria used to pick the preferred option.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>The description of what is proposed and the (legal) limitations of the policy are painstaking and could not fail to be clear.</p> <p>In most places, the paper slogs away and answers all likely questions.</p> <p>Doesn't hold back and, in places, is offering free and frank advice.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>This is a long paper, and a lot of detail about the proposal is included in the body of the paper when it could have been put in an appendix to make the story flow.</p> <p>Similarly, there are sections dealing (usefully) with categories of people who fall between the cracks and thus are unlikely to receive support. A single consolidated table could gather these groups together and provide a powerful summary, including their numbers. It could include a crisper treatment of the likely outcome for them – some are just left hanging here.</p> <p>Drafting is clumsy with occasional slips and ugly constructions in places. It is thus hard to read at pace. There is also duplication (e.g. paras 44 and 47). It needed a firm edit to tidy it up and make it flow.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	<p>Crystal clear that MSD will be picking up the ball for the next three months.</p> <p>States that scarce resources within MSD will be needed to make the deliberations.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Would be improved by an indication of what will be done to improve the next paper – more data or an improved set of options? What information will be better?</p>



C.31 Implementing the manifesto commitment to increase the emergency dental support for low income households

Overall assessment	
4.5	<p>Authoritative paper that does a good job of getting clearance from the Minister about what the proposed Cabinet paper should cover. There was a lot to like about this paper.</p> <p>Needed to cover a wide range of options so the Minister can make an informed choice about the relative priority for the proposed change.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Very clear Purpose statement.</p> <p>Useful background on why oral health matters.</p> <p>Sets out why the paper is being provided at this time and the timeframes required to implement the manifesto commitment.</p>
Areas for improvement	Is there earlier advice of dental Special Needs Grants (SNGs) or the wider review of Hardship Assistance that needed to be referenced?
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Authoritative discussion of the operation of a policy regime that provides support for emergency dental costs and how it fits into the wider welfare and health systems.</p> <p>Well supported by evidence on the impact of poor dental health and data on dental affordability.</p> <p>Makes a good case for going beyond increasing the limit for emergency treatment to include widening the scope of what is covered.</p> <p>Include an analysis of the disproportionate impact on Māori and Pasifika of lack of access to dental care.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Make a case for a fast track option involving a pre-Budget commitment rather than exploring a wider range of options.</p> <p>For example, MSD has the discretion to waive the \$300, but this is only done in 1% of cases. One option, pending the wider review of Hardship Allowance, would be for MSD to give effect to the manifesto commitment by changing its operational procedures.</p> <p>The financial analysis needed tightening. The reduction in Benefit Advances enabled by an increase in SNGs has a cashflow effect but does not result in a corresponding reduction in the fiscal operating balance. As a result, the amount of funding required is understated as the net impact on the Operating Balance is much closer to the increase in the gross SNG cost.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Easy to read, well-structured paper. Some nice punchy expressions – for example, “oral health matters.... It allows one to eat speak smile socialise and work”.</p> <p>Great use of active headings to tell the story.</p> <p>Useful table breaking out spending on emergency dental treatment.</p> <p>Provides the information required to support the case for change.</p> <p>Provides a frank analysis of MSD operational practice, including declining to use discretion to increase the amount of SNG assistance provided.</p>
Areas for improvement	Look to limit the number of noting recommendations.
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	<p>Outlines what is required to implement the new policy settings.</p> <p>Highlights working with the Ministry of Health on developing the operational policy criteria.</p>
Areas for improvement	



C.32 Restarting income support settings and processes temporarily changed in response to COVID-19

Overall assessment	
4	<p>Great briefing paper that helps the Minister get across how to restart the benefit system processes as New Zealand exits from COVID-19 lockdown. Clear framework, active headings and supporting Annex make a very technical paper reasonably easy to read.</p> <p>Needed a key points summary that pulls together the framework at the start of the paper, in place of the noting recommendations. Also, be clearer on how the Minister will be involved going forward</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clear purpose and background on the previous advice.
Areas for improvement	Limited references to earlier decisions. These could usefully have been included in the column in the Appendix on decision making authority.
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Clear problem definition and applies a useful framework that splits benefit process restarts down different tracks – restart 2020, restart 2021, and whether those restarts are contingent on a regional outbreak of COVID-19.
Areas for improvement	<p>No discussion of options or the limitations of the analysis.</p> <p>Useful to include more data on the number of those affected as that brings out the scale of the issue.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Great active heading that operationalises the framework.</p> <p>Detailed Appendix that breaks down the details for each benefit process.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Need to anticipate the Minister's needs more. Nix the noting recommendations. Be clearer on what the Minister will see next and how they might be involved going forward.</p> <p>No discussion of communications strategy – what is likely to be contentious and how will key stakeholders be advised. What supporting material will be provided for the Minister?</p> <p>Useful to summarise the key risks and how they will be managed.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Signals upcoming Cabinet engagement through 2021 Budget initiatives.
Areas for improvement	Useful to discuss how the transitions will be monitored and reviewed if required.



C.33 Options for funding the JS-HCD medical requirements

Overall assessment	
3	<p>9(2)(h) OIA</p> <p>Made heavy weather of the issues: a shorter, sharper summary paper would have more impact.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Clear purpose – provide support for a budget bid.</p> <p>Includes reference to the last round of advice.</p>
Areas for improvement	9(2)(h) OIA
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>The issues are clearly stated, the problem identified, and two alternative ways forward are discussed</p> <p>Clear analysis of the legal options and proposed way forward.</p>
Areas for improvement	9(2)(h) OIA
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Provided the legal information required to make an informed decision on the options.</p> <p>Highlights the risks posed by the status quo.</p> <p>Sets out next steps.</p>
Areas for improvement	9(2)(h) OIA
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	9(2)(h) OIA



C.34 Further advice on main benefit increases through Budget 2021

Overall assessment	
3.5	<p>Joint departmental Budget report presenting the results of modelling a \$50 per week increase in Main Benefits. Solid technical paper that does the job by reporting on the first-round effects of the proposed changes.</p> <p>Would have been improved with a more critical analysis that assessed the package against a range of objectives. Could have led to advice on how to progress a package that delivers on a wider range of objectives.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Clear Purpose statement that signals what will be covered by the report
Areas for improvement	Useful to reference earlier advice and highlight the key findings, so there is a reference point to assess the impact of the \$50 increase on main benefits.
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	The three-tier welfare system is complicated and has complex interfaces with the tax and housing assistance systems. To make welfare reform even trickier, people's circumstances are heterogeneous, so assessing the impact of change requires computer modelling using large datasets. The paper does a good job of summarising the first-round effects of the proposed benefit changes and the impact of support delivered through the taxation and housing support systems
Areas for improvement	<p>What is less clear is the proposed reforms affect people in different circumstances. The paper includes some discussion of the general direction of impacts but does not report modelling results about how many people are affected.</p> <p>Would have been improved by more critical analysis assessing the package against a range of objectives – poverty alleviation, incentives to work, neutrality on family structure, the integrity of the benefit system etc.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Clear structure with the analysis presented in three sections.</p> <p>Some use of tables and graphs. Cites some evidence on housing market research.</p> <p>Well written, so given the highly technical content, reasonably easy to read.</p> <p>Suggestions provided for further work required.</p>
Areas for improvement	Highlights the interface with assistance to study and income assistance for the working poor. However, while a process is suggested for further advice on increases to student support, none is provided for the working poor.
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Discussion of implementation and monitoring. Authoritative treatment of the issues based on a thorough analysis.
Areas for improvement	



C.35 Special Needs Grants for food in the context of the main benefit increased for Budget 2020

Overall assessment	
3	<p>Short factual background information paper for Ministerial group meeting. Provides a good descriptive at a glance summary of food Special Needs Grants (SNGs).</p> <p>Left the heavy lifting up to the Minister.</p> <p>Needed sharper ready to use talking points.</p> <p>The recommended course of action needs to be upfront rather than buried on the last page.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Clear purpose and why this advice is required now.</p> <p>Provides references to earlier advice on the main benefit.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Is there any previous advice on SNGs that can be referenced?</p> <p>Useful to background when the level of SNGs was adjusted last and how much food price inflation has occurred since then.</p>
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Clear description of how SNGs operate and how they are accessed.</p> <p>Good use of data to break down the distribution of SNGs at a point in time in the Appendix.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Limited analysis provided. Which is important – that 87% of low-use clients incur 66% of the expenditure – or that 13% of higher-use clients incur 33% of the total?</p> <p>How to interpret that 70% of SNGs exceed the maximum limit due to exceptional circumstances?</p> <p>No breakdown of the clients is provided – for example, beneficiaries v working poor, gender, ethnicity, age etc. Nor a discussion of trends over time.</p> <p>Provides an MSD-centred view of the operation of the scheme. Leaves a range of questions unanswered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the pressure points on the operation of the programme? • How well does it interface with the rest of the welfare system? • What are stakeholders' views?
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Clear structure using standard MSD Ministerial briefing format.</p> <p>Good use of active headings to guide the reader and tell the story.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Next steps were weak ("depending on your objectives").</p> <p>The objectives of the SNG programme aren't clearly defined. So the Minister isn't positioned to lead the proposed discussion on the objectives of the programme.</p> <p>The lack of clarity about objectives also makes interpreting the data on the operation of the programme harder.</p> <p>The talking points are descriptive material on the operation of the programme. Needed rewording to be ready to use talking points.</p> <p>The recommended course of action needs to be upfront in the talking points rather than buried on the last page.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	<p>Unclear how the enhancement to individual case management and the overall operation of the scheme will be monitored.</p>



C.36 Budget 2021 Main Benefit Rate Increases and Related Regulatory Changes

Overall assessment	
4.5	<p>A good simple note to support the Minister in taking a complex technical paper through Cabinet Committee. Includes Q&As to help her to address any issues raised by colleagues. The talking points include examples and data which helps to make the changes real and understandable by other Ministers who are not expert in these matters.</p> <p>Worth explicitly covering off whether there are any risks with these announcements, or matters which are likely to attract adverse public comment, and how this will be managed.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>Standard briefing on a paper the Minister is taking to Cab LEG.</p> <p>Explains how the proposed changes align with wider government policy and objectives.</p>
Areas for improvement	Worth referencing previous Cabinet decisions on this matter.
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Outlines the legal process.</p> <p>Gives examples of the impact of the changes. This helps make the proposals real.</p>
Areas for improvement	
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Provides crisp spoken voice talking points. This is good practice.</p> <p>Includes a range of Q&As to explain technical matters further if needed. This is good practice and should be done more often.</p> <p>Next steps in the process are clear.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>No discussion on risk. This is the sort of thing that Ministers need to know. It's up to your Minister to assure her colleagues that she knows what the risks are and she has them covered! Give her some help to do this.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	



C.37 Welfare Overhaul – Review of Working for Families – Options for Change

Overall assessment	
3.5	<p>This is a technical paper that systematically goes through the issues and suggests some options for change. It would be pretty hard work for Ministers ahead of the meeting. However, the paper notes (rec b) that officials have prepared additional material to support the meeting – ideally, that should be in a much more engaging form. We note that this was prepared in haste, so it would have been difficult to produce more user-friendly material to attach to it in the timeframe.</p> <p>Worth structuring the request for feedback (rec d) so that Ministers can be clearer about each of the matters you seek feedback on and their choices. We've seen others do this with a table.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Previous decisions are summarised in a clear box. This makes them stand out and sets the foundation for this piece of analysis – a good technique.
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Clearly outlines the problems in the current assistance schemes. Uses data to back that up.</p> <p>Outlines a number of options to address the issues. While there is a helpful discussion of each of these, a more fulsome options analysis against a set of criteria would have taken this paper to a different level. Also worth being clearer about which of these could be used in combination and the impact of those combinations.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Consider using some examples or case studies to make the problems and solutions more real world.</p> <p>Little consideration of the impact on different populations groups.</p> <p>No Māori impact analysis, or consideration of Treaty implications.</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>The table at para 21 sets the structure for the content to follow.</p> <p>Notes that further information will be provided ahead of the meeting. That will be important – as this, as it is, could be hard work for Ministers.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>The Executive Summary was fairly long and dense – it would have benefited from subheadings. Best practice is to try and structure the request for feedback from Ministers to make sure it covers all the issues you need feedback about and that the feedback is clear. We've seen other agencies use detailed recommendations or tables with tick boxes and space for comments to do this.</p> <p>Use active subheadings – this helps emphasise the key points.</p> <p>It's very text-based – are there other ways of presenting some of the information and analysis? E.g. graphs, diagrams, infographics.</p> <p>So what next? After the meeting.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Explains some of the implementation issues in these programmes.
Areas for improvement	



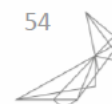
C.38 Compulsory money management in the Youth Service

Overall assessment	
4	<p>A well written and succinct cover note over a longer research report. The covering paper draws conclusions and proposes policy decisions as a result of the report.</p> <p>In these sorts of notes, it's worth referencing parts of the substantive report (i.e. chapter, section number or page number) that discuss the main issues so the Minister can consider the matter in further detail if needed and find it easily.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Explains how this issue has arisen and the connections to the Welfare Expert Advisory Group work.
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Uses key data to support the arguments in the paper.</p> <p>References wider research, in addition to the research, carried out for this project.</p>
Areas for improvement	The cover note is light on implications for Māori. Nor does it cover impacts on other population groups. There is some information on demographics in the research report, but little of that material distinguishes between findings.
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Great Executive Summary that gets to the essentials of the paper.</p> <p>Succinct.</p> <p>Good active subheadings.</p> <p>Well written – this makes it a quick and easy read.</p> <p>Tons of information on user, provider and stakeholder perspectives. The quotes in the research report bring the issue to life. Pull a few of the best ones into the cover paper for added impact.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Too heavy on the noting recommendations – they essentially just repeat the summary. Stick to decision/action recommendations.</p> <p>Consider including references to major items in the research report. This allows your Minister (and her Office staff) to quickly find relevant pieces in the research report without having to go through it all.</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	<p>Reports on the results of an evaluation.</p> <p>Covers implementation issues.</p> <p>Clearly outlines what MSD is proposing to do about the findings of the research.</p>
Areas for improvement	



C.39 Welfare Overhaul: Review of Social Obligations

Overall assessment	
4.5	A good discussion of a highly sensitive issue. Data and research findings are used to strengthen the arguments. A complete options analysis is done using clear criteria to assess the relative merits of the options. This is good practice. Do it more often. But remember to explain where the criteria come from.
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	Notes the findings of the Welfare Expert Advisory Committee. Explains the thinking behind the introduction of social obligations. References earlier Cabinet decisions, where relevant. Explains the wider context for this work.
Areas for improvement	
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	Explains the shortcoming of the administrative data in showing whether these social obligations worked or not. References some international examples. Introduces evidence of MSD frontline staff. This is construed as anecdotal advice – while it is that, that terminology also undermines its value. Discusses the links to the Kaupapa Māori values. Details a number of options for the way forward. These are assessed against clear criteria.
Areas for improvement	Remember to explain where the criteria for the options assessment come from. They could be derived from the law, the original policy objectives, a theoretical framework, or a combination of these things.
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	Uses active subheadings which emphasise the key points. Good process diagram that clearly shows the interactions between MSD and clients. Great RAG table summarising the assessment of the options against criteria. This is best practice. But take care on going as far as using weighted scores – this can lead to spurious accuracy. Includes advice and commentary from other agencies.
Areas for improvement	Too many noting recommendations. Stick to decision-making and action recommendations – otherwise, you are just repeating the content of the Executive Summary.
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	Gives an indication of implementation issues.
Areas for improvement	



C.40 Proposed scope for the application of kaupapa Māori values to the welfare system

Overall assessment	
4	<p>A very good early discussion on a tricky issue which breaks new ground. This paper would set the Minister up to have a useful and well-informed conversation on the matter.</p> <p>It might have been helpful to give some examples where Kaupapa Māori values and perspectives had been used in other parts of government (or indeed community of business organisations) to change what they do, and the impact for Māori and on Treaty obligations.</p>
Context: Explains why the decision-maker is getting this and where it fits	
Good practice	<p>A heads-up to inform an upcoming discussion with officials.</p> <p>Explains the links to the Welfare Expert Advisory Group (WEAG) report.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Worth including some more background on the values proposed by the WEAG – perhaps on a separate page in the appendix so they can be easily referred to in the meeting.</p>
Analysis: Is clear, logical and informed by evidence	
Good practice	<p>Summarises the WEAG's findings.</p> <p>Provides relevant data which helps show the scale of the issue (e.g. paras 4 and 8)</p> <p>Notes the legal underpinning and Treaty obligations associated with this work.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Are there other examples of using Kaupapa Māori values in government agencies or community/private agencies working in a similar sector?</p> <p>Has there been input from the Public Services Commission or Te Arawhiti?</p>
Advice: Engages the decision-maker and tells the full story	
Good practice	<p>Highlights the risks associated with this work.</p> <p>Explains how this work fits with other priorities.</p> <p>Sets out a high-level work programme.</p>
Areas for improvement	<p>Does the Minister need to discuss this work with colleagues? When would be appropriate to do that?</p>
Action: Identifies who is doing what next	
Good practice	
Areas for improvement	



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 7 Translating the Policy Quality Framework score into an NZIER score

The PQF scoring system		NZIER scoring system	
Mark	Meaning	Mark	Meaning
1	Unacceptable	5	Poor
2	Poor	6	Borderline: does the job but with risks
3	Acceptable	7	Adequate
4	Good	8	Good: goes beyond the task at hand somewhat
5	Outstanding	9+	Excellent

Source: NZIER



Appendix E Masterclasses

E.1 Masterclass 40: The long march to quality

It's all about keeping on keeping on.

Different shops follow different tracks

At NZIER we have been assessing the quality of policy advice and assisting agencies to raise their games for many years now. Looking back over the experience we are struck by the diverse course of the quality improvement process in different outfits. Many have striven to permanently improve their quality; but few have managed it.

Experience shows building a quality policy shop is a long job

What have we seen?

While the process of improvement has been different for each organisation, none have been able to create a lasting quality output quickly. Even those who have achieved high scores have typically found it challenging to maintain this over time.

Nevertheless, we have seen a few examples of agencies where the policy team have been able to achieve sustained quality improvements over the years. It has always been a long slog.

It's a unique problem

Advising Ministers is demanding. Each piece of advice has its own needs and its own story and each Minister their preferred presentation. The underlying demand to present a complex issue and its potential treatment in limited space and easily absorbed language is tough. In the main, each example is effectively a new specific problem requiring a specific solution. Attempts to use normal systemisation methods – like standardisation – have so far made limited headway except for regularly repeated tasks.¹¹ Obviously previous work can be helpful with

frameworks and in providing history. Other jurisdictions similarly can suggest useful approaches. This is not surprising: good advice is handmade, tailored to the issue and the audience.

In addition, there is often little available to give drafters a head start. Training and experience in other types of work do not generally set people up for this. Skills tend to be learnt on the job, with the guidance of senior experienced advisors.

So, for many issues, normal office practice of looking to minimally modify previous work is not the individual approach required. On the other hand, best practice examples can be extremely useful – either from your own agency or from others. The background in Masterclass 10¹² on how to approach various types of advice distils this good practice.

We consider the challenge of quality advising is frequently unique. No wonder sustained improved output is hard to manage and even harder to build into a shop.

The setting – the New Zealand Public Service

Despite the common elements like the legal and organisational backdrops to the various policy groups in Wellington, there is always a distinct feel to each unit. Clearly it reflects the agency surrounding it with its history and functions. But it goes further to have a degree of individuality, which has lasted through attempts to standardise policy advising. We call it their culture. It seems long lasting, and beyond the control of any one person. It is the background that shapes the unit's attitudes, actions and outputs.

We have long believed such 'cultural' effects can be deliberately influenced to give an advice group

¹¹ For example, regulatory annual fee adjustments; regular reporting on delivery; decisions under certain regulations (e.g. drought declarations) and some aspects of Crown entity monitoring.

¹²

https://nzier.org.nz/static/media/filer_public/4e/00/4e

[00983c-a9f7-4934-8715-6cb9d3d2219a/brief_10_masterclass_thinking_through_the_1_key_papers.pdf](https://nzier.org.nz/static/media/filer_public/00/98/00983c-a9f7-4934-8715-6cb9d3d2219a/brief_10_masterclass_thinking_through_the_1_key_papers.pdf)



a quality production bias. This comes from examining the history of many agencies we have worked with over the last fifteen years or so.

The successful policy groups have improved the quality of their advice and typically modified the culture. When this happens key features of class advice become part of the surrounding wallpaper: 'the way things are done around here'. In these groups old hands relentlessly turn out good work, and new recruits absorb good habits quickly without realising there are options. These groups also attract great policy advisors, as they are seen as a good career experience. Their scores hover at high levels.

Other units struggle to create such a platform. Their assessments move up and down with no real pattern. The quality of individual papers seems random; the pieces are detached from one another rather than being products of the same team.

Policy advising is a craft...

You might have heard this before.

But 'craft' here has a specific meaning. It is a collection of practical skills that can be deployed to solve professional problems. And the key is that these skills are learnt on the job – they come from experience. A degree of what might loosely be called theory exists (see earlier Masterclasses¹³), but the key elements of the high-level policy advisor's kitbag are based on personal experience.

...so skills need to be supplemented by suitable experience...

There are courses in public policy, of course, and these can be very helpful. So, acquiring advising 'tools' and knowing when and how they can be put into practice is about using as much learning as possible.

Luckily, that experience can be second-hand – based on others' work, including their stories.

Good policy groups make this happen by using a range of methods. They will: celebrate the best papers and processes; create a library of best practice; use formal workshops, seminars and debriefs; and hold informal chats over morning coffee to build a strong culture. It will have ways to examine recent group experience and identify what went well¹⁴ and what went badly.

Moreover, it will look outside the agency: discussing techniques with other successful groups; and borrowing good ideas from everywhere.

...and great advising is a team game – drawing on wider strengths

Individuals can on occasion knock out high calibre work. But we have never seen a paper that could not be improved by further input. Extra eyes often see possibilities the originator doesn't.

Good organisations make ways for team members to contribute to the improvement of all their output. After all, a typical policy group has a range of skills and backgrounds. These can be put to work to shed new light on challenging questions.

There is no one way to do this. It might be an open type of QA, a reference to selected colleagues or be part of a quality meeting. Wider consultations can be fruitful. So, for demanding issues it may be apt to look at other types of view within the agency – say an operations/delivery focus – or to discuss things with selected users. Again, for some problems, experts are useful and typically bring their own point of view.

What matters is that the opportunity to push the advice to another level by bringing in more horsepower is recognised as a vital and natural part of the system.

¹³ See for instance, Masterclass No 1 Communication with Aliens https://nzier.org.nz/static/media/filer_public/a9/28/a928cb35-5fdd-469b-8432-0130b2fa951f/brief_no_1_communication_with.aliens.pdf, or Masterclass No 9 Introducing the 11 Key papers https://nzier.org.nz/static/media/filer_public/c4/02/c402cac2-1846-43ad-9f49-cc3ab2f5338e/brief_9_introducing_the_11_key_papers.pdf.

¹⁴ See Masterclass 30: learning from things that go well https://nzier.org.nz/static/media/filer_public/ff/28/ff28ab80-0130-440f-acf6-6e8c1d5c0c51/brief_30_learning_from_things_that_go_well.pdf.



It is not easy to set up and keep going. It involves public comments on people's work. To be acceptable this must be totally accepted as the way things happen. Establishing that is time consuming and needs a supportive setting.

And the atmosphere most conducive to quality work is consistency...

All groups of policy advisors take their style to greater or lesser extent from the standards used to approve the papers for sign out. This process creates the tone as all advisors are keen to have their workflow through the system to its goal.

When the whole shop is well informed about the way a good paper looks (or doesn't) it becomes easier and more regular for quality work to flow.

DPMC Policy Project

A source for useful guidance is the Policy Project website.¹⁵ This has valuable material on standards and capability in a quality improvement setting.

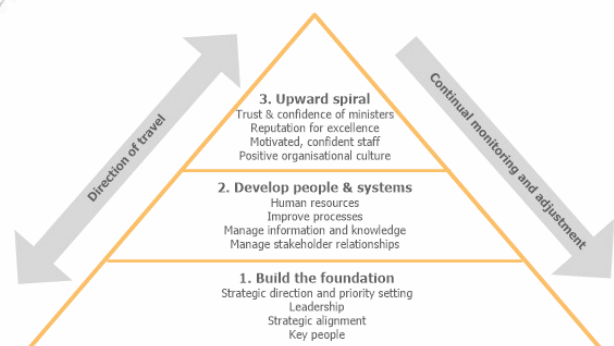
Building long term

Elements supporting success¹⁶ of policy units include:

- **Chief Executive (CE) commitment** – CE understands policy role and provides resources including active support for the policy manager.
- **Strategic Direction and Priority Setting** – Unit knows where it is going and has explicit priorities.
- **Policy Unit Leadership** – Strong leadership/'champion' drives strategy and support systems.
- **Strategic Alignment Within Organisation** – Policy unit directions aim at organisational goals.
- **Key People** – Quality analysts, (plus 'stars') build capability, score policy 'wins' and create reputation.

- ...sustained and reinforced over time
- It is a long job building a self-sustaining quality culture. But the good news is there are aspects of success that can create an upward spiral:
- **Trust and Confidence of Ministers** – Ministers look to the agency for advice so the unit has 'influence'.
- **Reputation for Excellence** – A reputation for excellence leads to conference presentations, publications and so on, further polishing the image.
- **Motivated and Confident Staff** – Staff stay on as part of a 'quality outfit' and others want to join.
- **Positive Organisational Culture** – Staff 'know what it takes', embrace quality ideas and need less oversight.

Figure 1 The virtuous circle



Source: NZIER Based on SSC 1999

Reinforcement – these are not natural behaviours

The aim of high quality work every time, is a stretch. Many of the actions that produce quality work are not regular practices (like having others publicly critique your work) or require individuals and groups to undertake stressful functions.

¹⁵ See dpmc.govt.nz then Home>Our programmes>The Policy Project>Policy improvement frameworks.

¹⁶ The points in this section and the one that follows (including the diagram) draw on a useful (and still relevant) piece from 1999, the

SSC Occasional Paper No 22 High Fliers: Developing High Performing Policy Units. It is a stages development model and we are using stage 1 and stage 3.

For this 'culture' to last it must be beyond self-consciousness – analysts should not have to prompt themselves by asking what a quality approach would require. The correct action should just be the way things are done.

There are probably as many ways of getting to the desired outcome as there are agencies. But the route we have seen succeed is the "relentless reinforcement" one. The whole of management is on the case at all times. They not only model the desired actions but seize opportunities to praise good work and suggest ways of improving poorer papers.

Constant reminders show that good work is a priority. It's vital to show that it is the bedrock – not today's management idea to be dropped if there is a 'panic.' Quality outputs are important in fair weather or foul.

Making it happen – practical ideas

We have offered general advice here as it allows each policy group to evolve according to its own background and environment. Turning to the more particular 'how to do it' side some organisations have used a policy committee or panel to polish all outputs. These have often been built on the NZIER assessment reports, or internal standards,¹⁷ which diagnose systemic weaknesses and highlight areas for improvement. A complementary diagnostic tool NZIER can provide is the 'deep dive' technique which examines the process as well as the outputs.

Another tack is to build a programme using Masterclasses on relevant topics perhaps in workshops (see suggestions below¹⁸). These both hone individual and team skills and keep up a focus on improvement.

The important thing is to work on the business of providing policy advice, as well as the actual provision of policy advice. Managers, and other key leaders, need to carve out time from their busy schedules to commit to this.

This can be supported by utilising ways of measuring the quality of policy advice by team, and across the group as a whole.

Other practical ideas we have seen that can be used to support a sustained push on quality:

- **Having standards** – including templates, a style guide, standard requirements on what expected in different types of briefings,¹⁹ etc. (these should be developed or launched as group exercises to engage analysts) as well as using the PQF, and other relevant tools.
- **Good commissioning**... as far as it can be used, given oft changing environments (see Masterclass 17).
- **Robust peer review** systems.
- **Rigorous use of data and evidence** – including monitoring and evaluation results, views of important stakeholders, other experts and international practices.
- **Being future focused** – thinking about the future, being strategic, and getting issues researched and thought about that will need to be advised about in future.
- **Capturing and celebrating good practice** – See Masterclass 30 on learning from things that go well.
- **A network of policy champions** – set this up to help others on particularly tricky issues. These could be the principal advisors, or other experts. This role needs to be explicitly recognised in those people's work programmes, so they have the time to commitment to supporting others.
- **Policy review panels** – to assess critical pieces of advice ex-ante; or ex-post as a general assessment of quality and identification of areas for improvement.

¹⁷ The new PQF includes a number of tools to assist.

¹⁸ These have all been sent around our regular clients and are available on the NZIER website at nzier.org.nz/quality-of-policy-advice/central-government-masterclasses/.

¹⁹ See Masterclass 10 https://nzier.org.nz/static/media/filer_public/4e/00/4e00983c-a9f7-4934-8715-6cb9d3d2219a/brief_10_masterclass_thinking_through_the_1_key_papers.pdf



- **Putting quality improvement on the agenda** – in management, team and one-on-one meetings so that they go

beyond the delivery of advice, to work on quality improvement.

This paper was written at NZIER, March 2021.

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E.2 Masterclass 41 Effective Key points

A few years ago we produced a Masterclass on writing great Executive Summaries.²⁰ We're now seeing more of a trend to producing what is effectively an Executive Summary, in the form of Key points. So, we thought it was a good time to cover off some of the dos and don'ts of writing effective Key points.

Key points are effectively an Executive Summary

They are just written in a different form. But all the usual principles should apply. These are:

- Make sure the Key points get the paper off to a good start – it colours the readers' impression of the paper overall.
- Make sure they have impact – the problem or opportunity definition must be clear, and give some indication of size, scale and impact.
- Remember, sometimes it can be the only part of the paper that a Minister pushed for time might read. It also serves as a refresher to the paper as a whole, either just ahead of the meeting, or the item being considered.
- Focus on the essentials.
- Don't repeat blocks of text from other parts of the paper – summarise any critical points.

Writing style is critical

Using dot points means that a less formal writing style is required. But should still promote crisp clear drafting.

But, you need to work at it to keep it succinct and clear. It needs to be easy to read and understand at pace.

Use:

- Plain English.
- Short sentences.
- Short paragraphs. It's fine to have more than one sentence per dot point – but don't let them become more than a few lines.
- Limit the number of dot points. If anything, it should be shorter than a standard Executive Summary. Also remember, without paragraph numbering (which they shouldn't usually need), they can be hard to navigate in a meeting setting.
- Use subheadings if it is getting a bit long, or on multiple, but connected, topics.

Writing great Key points can be harder to do than 'normal' drafting. So, give yourself some time to draft and then polish your Key points. Afterall, they are one of the most critical parts of any paper, alongside the recommendations.

Think of the Key points as an elevator pitch or a short verbal introduction to the paper (for example, at the beginning of the discussion of the paper). This will help you further refine them, boil down the essentials of the paper, and yet not miss critical matters.

Avoid repetition

Don't repeat things at the beginning of the paper. It gets boring, wastes space and can turn off the reader. It can also be confusing if things are worded differently. Rules of thumb to consider are:

- If it's a really short paper don't bother with Key points – use the Purpose statement to provide a super-summary instead. This should cover what the Minister or Government must decide or do, why, and when.²¹

²⁰

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

²¹

For example: "You need to sign the attached letters by 10 June to encourage these Board members to renew their terms."



- Avoid noting recommendations that just repeat the content of the Key points, unless they are formally required, e.g. in some statutory decision-making processes they remain important.

Look at the Purpose statement, Key points and recommendations together – they should be a package. Make sure they aren't repetitive, yet cover what's needed.

At times we see advice papers where these three parts aren't clearly a package, e.g. the purpose of the paper might not be played out in the recommendations or recommendations appear that aren't covered in the Key points. This seriously detracts from the quality of the paper, and can worry the decision-makers. It can look like the advice hasn't been well thought through.

If it's a longer complex set of decisions – then use subheadings in the recommendations – and make them the same as any subheadings used in the Key points section.

Try this as a structure for your Key points section

As with a traditional Executive Summary, we suggest you focus on what you are recommending and why – rather than following the traditional structure of an advice paper (e.g. beginning with the background, problem definition and traversing your thinking before the recommendations come).



Make sure that the Key points are a focus of peer review

Peer review should give significant focus to the Key points section as it is one of the most important parts of the paper. Extra time spent will make a difference.

Things to focus on are:

- Is it easy to read and understand quickly?
- Does it cover the critical issues in the paper?
- Does it lead into the recommendations?
- Does it fit the purpose of the paper?
- Could it be shorter or tighter?

Try having a different peer reviewer look at the Key points once the paper is complete to ensure it stands alone and meets the needs of a time-pressured decision-maker.

Key points only papers

We're also seeing short briefings written in Key points only (alongside some recommendations). Done well these are highly effective and efficient ways of communicating information and getting simple decisions. They can and should be done more often! A busy Minister will always appreciate this sort of advice.

They should follow all of the general points above – related to keeping things crisp, well structured, and leading into recommendations.

But choose this device carefully. This sort of paper shouldn't be used for complex issues or matters where there are many small issues to sort through.

Keep it short. A single page, or page and a half with subheadings is about the maximum that can be read easily using dot points. Reading lots of dot points is harder to do than reading a similar sized piece of normal drafting.

This paper was written at NZIER, March 2021. For further information, please contact anyone from our policy advice team:

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