

Interim Evaluation of the Policy Project



Evaluation report

30 September 2021



ALLEN+CLARKE

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The Policy Project aims to affect system-wide improvement in policy capacity and the quality of policy advice. It does this by working with individual policy practitioners and agencies to support them to assess and improve their policy capability and quality. It facilitates network development to enable knowledge sharing and encourage joint approaches to common challenges. The Policy Project also works at the system level, undertaking strategic policy development to address system challenges and facilitating connections to system-wide capability building initiatives.



The Policy Project's frameworks, guides, case studies and tools are well regarded by senior leaders within core public sector agencies. There is broad recognition that the Policy Project sets a standard for what high quality policy development 'looks like'.



Senior leaders, managers and policy capability leads have high awareness of the Policy Project, use its resources, and are actively engaged through the Policy Profession Board, the Tier 2 Policy Leaders' Network, or working groups.



There is much lower visibility of the Policy Project amongst policy practitioners, particularly principal and senior advisors who are the 'engine room' of policy development.



The Policy Project would benefit from stronger promotion from senior leaders and policy capability leads promoting the products within their agencies. It is also vital for policy managers and senior policy professionals to socialise the Policy Project with more junior staff.



The Policy Project has invested significantly in resources with both Te Tiriti o Waitangi and te ao Māori components; however more can be done by the system (including the Policy Project) to ensure policy staff feel confident in applying these approaches to policy.



Building the policy community's capability to bring a diversity lens to policy development needs to be a priority for the Policy Project. The Policy Project is making substantial efforts to ensure that its activities and outputs support the needs of the modern policy context within Aotearoa. An ongoing challenge for the Policy Project will be to continue to identify, promote and elevate resources and initiatives to support policy staff to incorporate diverse perspectives, particularly those from marginalised communities.



Mandating the use of the Policy Quality Framework has allowed for system-wide measurement of the quality of policy outputs of agencies. However, there are currently few other mechanisms through which to measure other aspects of the policy processes, capability outcomes or system maturity. Additional metrics, such as the proportion of agencies with a dedicated policy capability lead, could be used as proxy indicators for the system as a whole.



There are system factors that the policy community needs to address to support the Policy Project to achieve its aims. The pressured, fast-paced nature of delivering policy, means that practitioners typically do not have the time or space to reflect on and improve their practice. The policy community needs to commit to embedding this time into the work programme of policy practitioners, including emphasising the long term value of investing in capability development.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Policy Project, based in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, is a long-term, systems-change programme that focuses on increasing the overall policy capability and quality of policy advice across the New Zealand public sector. The Policy Project's vision is *a policy system that supports good government decision-making, now and in the future, to improve the lives of New Zealanders*.

The Policy Project was launched in 2014 by a group of senior public sector leaders who wished to influence a major culture change to improve the policy system. The Policy Project was originally funded by large and medium-sized policy agencies in the public service but is now funded by all agencies with a policy appropriation.

The Policy Project works at the individual, agency, network and system level. For individuals and agencies, it offers products, services, and events to guide and support policy practitioners of all levels. This includes offering tailored support to individual agencies or teams to assess and improve policy capability and quality. The Policy Project also facilitates networks on policy quality and aims to drive joint approaches to common policy quality and capability challenges. At the system level, it aims to establish and maintain connections across system-wide change initiatives such as building te ao Māori and Te Tiriti capability in the public sector. The Policy Project also undertakes strategic policy development to address system challenges.

At the time of the interim evaluation, the Policy Project is seven years into its change programme, which was envisaged as taking at least ten years.

Evaluation purpose

The purpose of this interim evaluation is threefold.

1. To determine the extent to which the Policy Project is contributing to improvement in policy capability and the quality of policy advice across the public service.
2. To enable the policy system to learn and grow from the interim evaluation findings and inform decisions on the Policy Project's strategic and operational model.
3. To demonstrate and communicate the Policy Project's achievements in order to maintain trust and legitimacy with stakeholders.

Evaluation criteria and questions

The evaluation team worked with selected Policy Project stakeholders to identify key themes to be explored through the evaluation:

- implementation of the Policy Project,
- achievement of anticipated outcomes,
- maturity of the policy system, and
- barriers and enablers

The findings have been reported under these criteria. A fifth theme (learning and improvement) has framed the evaluation recommendations outlined in section 4 of this report.

Evaluation methods

The evaluation used a hybrid implementation-effectiveness¹ design that examined how well the Policy Project is being delivered and assessed its outcomes. The evaluation also followed a systems approach, given that the Policy Project is a systems-change programme.

The evaluation primarily drew on qualitative data through a series of interviews and focus groups. Where available, these were supplemented with quantitative data. Data collection methods included:

- 15 key informant interviews with 21 senior public sector leaders, policy managers and policy capability leads,
- 3 agency case studies, including focus groups and one-on-one and small group interviews with 15 senior leaders and policy managers, 6 policy capability leads, 1 organisational development lead, and 16 policy practitioners,
- 4 cross-agency focus groups and small group interviews with 1 policy manager, 2 policy capability leads, and 16 policy practitioners,
- a review of 71 contextual documents, including Policy Project resources, briefing papers, meeting agenda and minutes, speeches, annual reports, dashboard reports, newsletters, and
- a review of quantitative data including event attendance, survey results, ministerial satisfaction scores and policy quality assessment scores, and web analytics that were provided by the Policy Project.

Qualitative data were analysed thematically by participant group, including senior leaders (Tier 1 and 2); managers (Tier 3 and 4); policy capability leads (including chief advisors); and policy practitioners (principal advisors, senior advisors, advisors and graduates); and human resources and organisational development personnel); and by organisation.

The evaluation took a systems approach, exploring the impact of the Policy Project on the wider policy system. In line with the theory of change (see Figure 1) this included considerations of its interactions with and impacts on individuals, agencies, networks and the policy system. The evaluation assessed the Policy Project's processes and outcomes within the context of other system interventions intended to increase public sector capability, such as the Government Economics Network (GEN), which promotes the better use of economics in the public sector, and Te Arawhiti, which is charged with lifting Māori capability in the public sector. While these interventions are not directly (or solely) focused on policy, lifting the broader capability of the public sector in these areas contributes to lifting the quality and capability of the policy system.

Key findings

The key findings for this evaluation have been summarised under the four high-level evaluation themes: implementation of the Policy Project, achievement of its anticipated outcomes; the Policy Project's contribution to the maturity of the policy system; barriers and enablers.

Implementation of the Policy Project

The design of the governance model is fit-for-purpose, with a two-tiered model allowing the Policy Project to benefit from the advice and expertise of the public sector's most senior leaders. However, gaining

¹ Bernet, A.C., Willens, D.E. & Bauer, M.S. Effectiveness-implementation hybrid designs: implications for quality improvement science. *Implementation Sc* 8, S2 (2013).

www.implementationscience.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1748-5908-8-S1-S2

sustained engagement from all agencies in applying the Policy Project's frameworks and tools has been challenging, particularly in the context of a system-wide increase in policy workload.

Having the Policy Project housed within a central agency (DPMC) gives it the required 'clout' to engage across the policy system. The team is well-regarded and efficient.

The Policy Project's products, services and events (outputs) are perceived as high-quality. They set a clear benchmark for high-quality policy advice and are relevant to policy professionals at various stages in their career. The Policy Project's resources are most useful when both full and summary version are available for use. The Policy Project is focused on developing outputs that complement existing mechanisms within the policy system, such as promoting the use of existing te ao Māori and Te Tiriti resources developed by Te Arawhiti and regulatory policy capability building initiatives delivered by Government Regulatory Practice Initiative (G-REG). However, the data collected during this evaluation suggests the Policy Project can do more to ensure visibility of resources that are tailored to diverse policy contexts.

Senior public sector leaders have defined success for the Policy Project as public sector agencies using its outputs (particularly the three Policy Improvement Frameworks) and/or using agency-developed resources that align with the standard set by the Policy Project. The evidence collected through this evaluation suggests that there is high use of the Policy Quality Framework and moderate use of the Policy Skills Framework and Policy Capability Framework. However, while a comprehensive survey of the policy workforce was not completed, the qualitative interviews found that most policy practitioners do not have good awareness of the range of Policy Project resources and are not using them to inform their policy work.

Achievement of anticipated outcomes

The Policy Project's resources set a system-wide standard for policy capability and quality. The resources have prompted and assisted some agencies to focus more specifically on policy capability and quality, and can trigger conversations about continuous improvement year on year. However, there has been mixed feedback from a small number of agencies about the integrity of the annual policy quality assessment, the key criticism being that the in-house marking approach is perceived as inconsistent.

The Policy Project's resources continue to have a tangible impact on a select few agencies' policy capability and quality. Some senior leaders, managers and policy capability leads highlight that simply the presence of the Policy Project team, as a dedicated group with a specific mandate, encourages their department to focus on policy capability and policy quality. However, given the complexity of the system in which the Policy Project is operating there are a range of external factors that have increased agencies' focus on policy quality and capability, such as other resources or a mandate from their leadership. Numerous key informants are unable to attribute any improvements in policy quality or capability directly to the Policy Project, and highlighted other external factors that have a greater influence. System change is often not direct or linear. It may be possible that some of the external factors were an indirect result of the Policy Project and its activities.

Beyond the annual policy quality assessment and ministerial satisfaction scores there is a lack of other system-wide metrics of policy quality and capability which limits the Policy Project's ability to materially measure and track progress.

Maturity of the system

The evaluation aimed to assess how mature the policy system is and the Policy Project's role in facilitating this. A mature policy system is one where all agencies are striving to strengthen their policy capability and this is connected to interagency policy capability; it speaks a common language; it supports consistency and quality in policy advice; and it provides an environment in which innovative and durable responses to 'wicked problems' are encouraged.

The Policy Project provides some connection and collaboration amongst the policy community, but agencies still discussed working in fragmented silos. Policy is not yet seen as a profession or community by the majority of those interviewed.

The Policy Project's resources encourage policy practitioners to undertake a good practice approach to policy advice, and its resources encourage practitioners to seek continuous improvement. This has supported some policy practitioners to feel more confident in their work, although the majority of the senior leaders, managers and policy capability leads interviewed were unsure whether this is leading to a systemic best practice approach.

The Policy Project has put significant effort into ensuring the policy community is aware of the Te Tiriti o Waitangi resources produced by entities such as Te Arawhiti. It has also incorporated te ao Māori references into key Policy Project resources including the Policy Quality Framework and associated tools, and the online Development Pathways Tool. However, the evaluators heard that that policy practitioners need more support (from the Policy Project and others) to confidently fulfil Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations in their policy work. Again, while the Policy Project has resources regarding community engagement and the input of diverse voices into policy, they are relatively recent and further effort could be put into socialising them with stakeholders.

The Policy Project's barriers and enablers

Policy practitioners of all levels (senior leaders through to graduate advisors and advisors) feel that they are often too busy to use the Policy Project's resources.

The Policy Project resources need wider promotion, as policy practitioners at all levels within agencies could see the value of the resources when these were drawn to their attention, but expressed concerns that they had not previously been aware of them. The Policy Project would benefit from stronger promotion from the Policy Profession Board and Tier 2 Policy Leaders' Network to increase uptake and usage of these resources across the system.

There is a need for experienced policy practitioners, policy capability leads and policy managers to have the time to socialise the Policy Project with more junior staff. Champions within agencies are key to increasing the uptake and usage of the Policy Project's resources.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1.1. The Policy Project and its beneficiaries

The Policy Project is a long-term, systems-change programme that focuses on increasing the overall policy capability and quality of policy advice across the New Zealand public sector. The Policy Project was established in 2014 by a collection of senior public service leaders who envisaged a major culture change to improve the policy system. It was assumed that the impact of the Policy Project may not be fully realised for a decade.

The Policy Project was created following numerous inquiries and central agency programmes aimed to improve the quality of policy advice between 1991 and 2010. These identified that the policy system had been experiencing a range of issues with "quality, staff shortages, lack of evidence, meeting immediate Ministerial demands, and siloed agencies."² The programme is intended to support public sector officials

² Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. *The Policy Project – Responsive today, shaping tomorrow: Narrative and direction of travel*. (July 2014).

to deliver high quality policy advice on which the government can base its decisions. Better supported government decision-making can then contribute to improving the wellbeing of New Zealanders.

The Policy Project was initially funded by large and medium-sized policy agencies in the public service but is now funded by all agencies with a policy appropriation.

The Policy Project's vision is *a policy system that supports good government decision-making, now and in the future, to improve the lives of New Zealanders*. Good policy advice is the foundation of effective government decision-making.

[The Policy Project] is about building a high performing policy system that supports and enables good government decision-making. We do this by building and maintaining an active policy community, developing and promoting common standards, and working collectively with policy agencies in government to produce change at a system level.³

The intended public service beneficiaries of the Policy Project include individual policy practitioners, policy managers, and policy leaders (including the Policy Profession Board and the Tier 2 Policy Leaders' Network). Individual policy advisors and teams from Crown Entities and local government in New Zealand, or overseas policy advisors who access Policy Project resources via the internet may also benefit. The most important indirect beneficiaries are Ministers (who are better supported to make well-informed decisions) and the general public, whose wellbeing is improved by the decisions made.

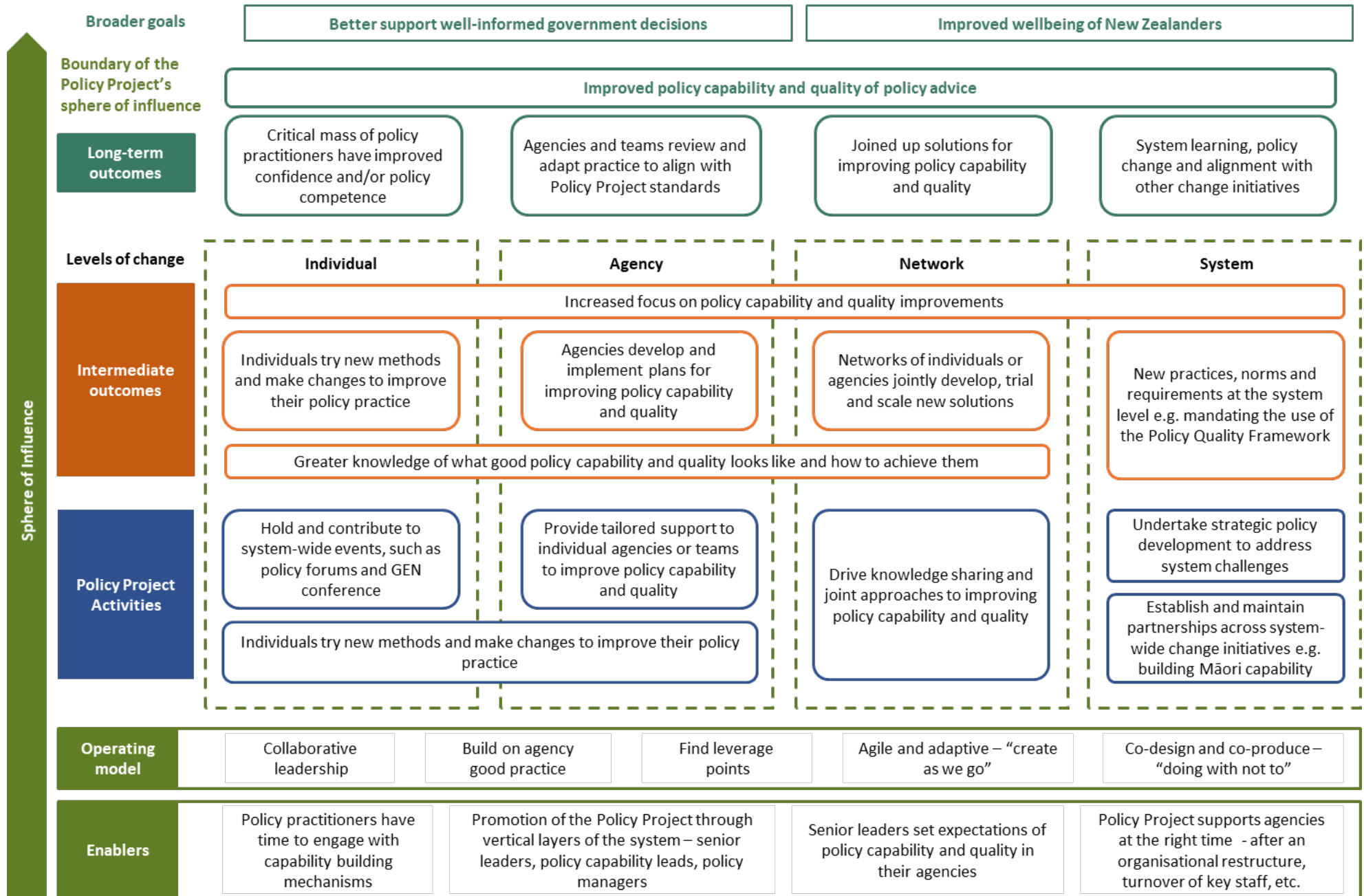
1.2. Theory of change

The Policy Project works simultaneously at the individual, agency, network and system level. The theory of change for the Policy Project is provided in Figure 1 and is based on the following assumptions:

- Ministers agree with the standards for quality policy advice.
- Policy Project outputs are relevant to the needs of policy practitioners and agencies.
- Once policy practitioners and agencies have used the Policy Project services, this acts as a gateway to other services.
- Individuals and agencies who have positive experiences of the Policy Project services, champion the Policy Project throughout their networks.
- Agency contexts are different which can impact when agencies use Policy Project services including:
 - Varying policy settings and demands
 - Ministerial direction and expectations
 - Agency restructures, turnover and retention
 - Varying levels of resources available to focus on policy quality and capability.

³ <https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project>

Figure 1: Policy Project theory of change



As shown in the theory of change diagram, the Policy Project provides individuals and agencies with a range of resources to support and challenge the steps that policy practitioners work through when providing policy advice. These are intended to empower policy practitioners of all levels to ask questions about what the right approach to a problem or issue should be.

The Policy Project also provides tools to help policy practitioners, policy managers and policy capability leads to understand what skills are needed at an individual and team level, and what organisational capability is needed at the team or agency level. It also provides resources on specific aspects of policy, such as guidance on engagement or policy methodologies. The key categories of tools and outputs referred to in this evaluation report are listed below.

- **Products:** resources such as policy improvement frameworks, guides, case studies and tools.
- **Services:** tailored workshops to support agencies or specific groups (e.g., graduates) in building their policy capability, quality of policy advice, and policy skills; advice and support to the Policy Profession Board and Tier 2 Policy Leaders' Network.
- **Events:** system-wide events, such as policy forums.

A more detailed (but non-exhaustive) summary of the Policy Project's products, services and events is provided in Appendix A.

The Policy Project also works to achieve system change through facilitating networks on policy capability, and aims to drive joint approaches to common policy quality and capability challenges. At the system level, it aims to establish and maintain connections across system-wide change initiatives such as building public sector capability in te ao Māori and te Tiriti o Waitangi. The Policy Project also undertakes strategic policy development to address system challenges.

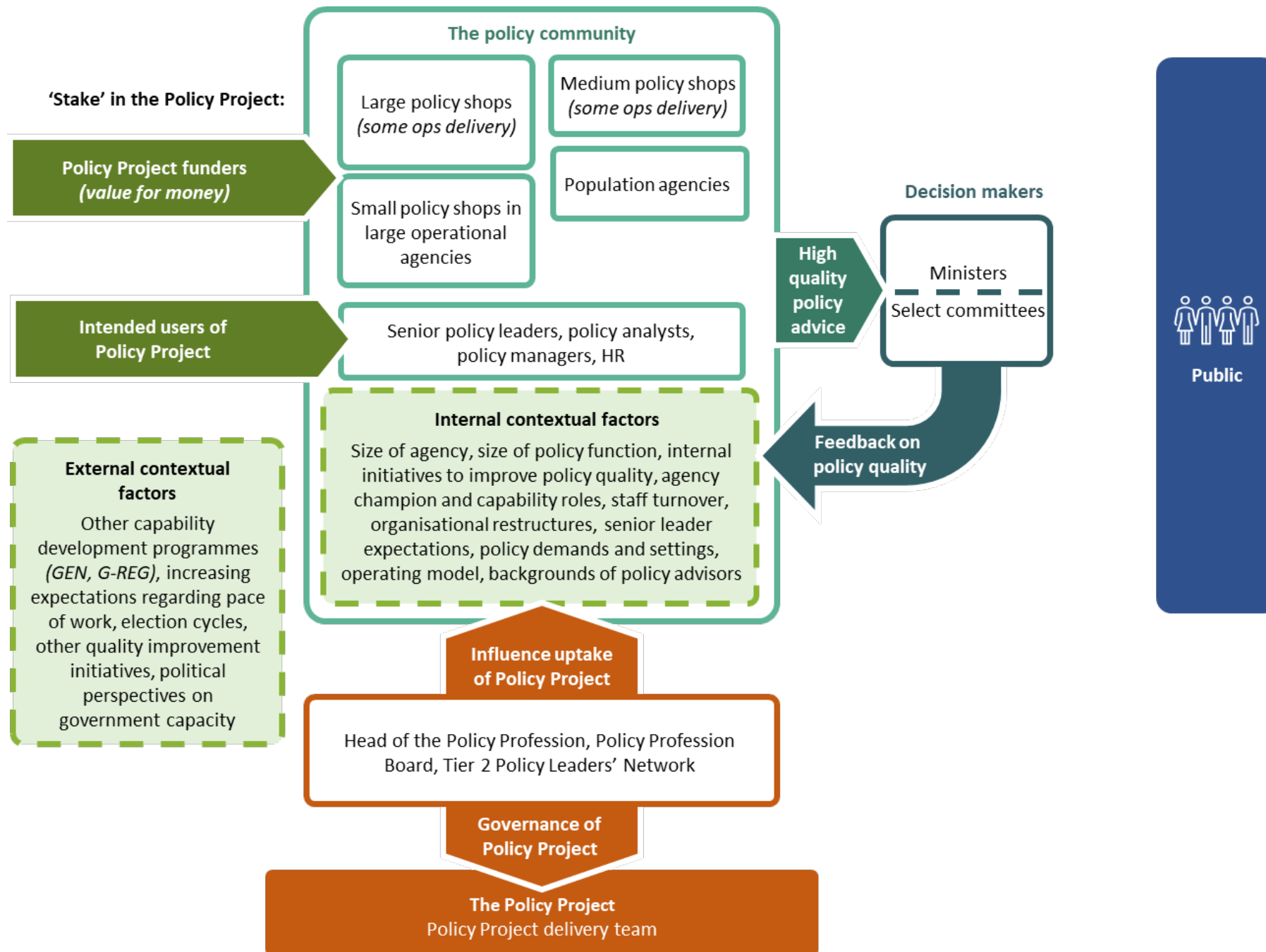
The evolution of the Policy Project intervention in the public service and broader policy system is described using a rich picture in Appendix E. This also identifies the broader system shifts over time.

1.3. Policy Project stakeholders

The Policy Project sits within a "complex web of relationships between people, processes and the environment that it is situated within".⁴ The figure overleaf (Figure 2) identifies the key stakeholders in the Policy Project, their 'stake' in the Policy Project (summarised in the arrows to the left of the figure) and the internal and external contextual factors that stakeholders may interact with, which could act as barriers or enablers to the achievement of the Policy Project's intended outcomes.

⁴ Burns, D., (2014). Assessing Impact in Dynamic and Complex Environments: Systemic Action Research and Participatory Systemic Inquiry, Centre for Development Impact (CDI). Retrieved from: <http://www.ids.ac.uk/publication/assessing-impact-in-dynamic-and-complex-environments-systemic-action-research-and-participatory-systemic-inquiry>

Figure 2: Policy Project stakeholder map



THE EVALUATION

1.4. Evaluation purpose

The Policy Project is seven years into its change programme since inception in 2014. The purpose of an evaluation at this point is threefold.

1. To determine the extent to which the Policy Project is contributing to improvement in policy capability and the quality of policy advice across the public service.
2. To enable the policy system to learn and grow from the interim evaluation findings and inform decisions on the Policy Project's strategic and operational model.
3. To demonstrate and communicate the Policy Project's achievements in order to maintain trust and legitimacy with stakeholders.

1.5. Evaluation criteria and questions

The evaluation team worked with Policy Project stakeholders to identify key theme areas (or "criteria") consistent with these objectives to be explored through the evaluation. These are: implementation of the Policy Project; achievement of anticipated outcomes; maturity of the policy system; and learning and improvement.

The key evaluation questions (KEQs) which frame the interim evaluation of the Policy Project are arranged under these criteria. The KEQs are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Criteria and KEQs for the interim evaluation of the Policy Project

Criterion	Key Evaluation Questions
Implementation of the Policy Project	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How well is the Policy Project working, for whom, in what ways and in what circumstances?2. If the Policy Project is not working well, why?
Achievement of anticipated outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none">3. To what extent:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. is the focus on policy capability and the quality of policy advice improving across the public service?b. are the outcomes of policy capability and the quality of policy advice improving across the public service?4. To what extent and how is the Policy Project contributing to the achievement of these outcomes?
Maturity of the policy system	<ol style="list-style-type: none">5. To what extent is the Policy Project contributing to enhancing the maturity of the policy system?6. What are the barriers and enablers of change?7. What are the unintended consequences of the Policy Project on the policy system (including beyond the public service), if any?
Learning and improvement	<ol style="list-style-type: none">8. What, if anything, should change to improve the effectiveness of the Policy Project?

To answer the KEQs, the evaluation team identified the desired achievements of the Policy Project under each criterion, and performance standards against which the Policy Project will be evaluated. These are provided in Appendix C.

As exploratory and descriptive questions, KEQs 7 and 8 do not have specific performance standards. KEQ 8 has guided the development of evaluation recommendations.

1.6. Evaluation methodology

1.6.1. Evaluation approach

The evaluation used a hybrid implementation-effectiveness⁵ design that examined how well the Policy Project is being delivered and assesses intervention effectiveness (i.e., outcomes).

The Policy Project is taking a systems approach to delivering long-term, sustainable change across the policy system. In alignment with this, the evaluation also took a systems approach. This included exploring the impact of the Policy Project on the wider policy system by examining its contribution to enhancing the policy quality and capability of individuals, agencies, networks and the policy system. The evaluation considered the Policy Project's role and alignment with other interventions intended to enhance public sector capability, such as the Government Economics Network (GEN), which promotes the better use of economics in the public sector, and Te Arawhiti, which is charged with lifting Māori capability in the public sector. While these interventions are not directly (or solely) focused on policy, lifting the broader capability of the public sector in these areas contributes to lifting the quality and capability of the policy system.

1.6.2. Data collection methods

A summary of the data collection methods used in the review is provided below, with further details of each method in Appendix C. Data was collected between April and June 2021.

- A **review of 71 contextual documents**, including Policy Project outputs, briefing papers, meeting agendas and minutes, speeches, annual reports, dashboard reports, and newsletters.
- **15 key informant interviews with 21 key stakeholders** from twelve agencies, including senior leaders, policy managers, and policy capability leads.
- **3 agency case studies**, including focus groups, one-on-one and small group interviews with 15 senior leaders and policy managers, 6 policy capability leads (including chief advisors), 1 organisational development lead, and 16 policy practitioners of varying levels.
- **4 cross-agency focus groups and small group interviews** with 1 policy manager, 2 policy capability leads, and 16 policy practitioners of varying levels from nine agencies.
- **Review of quantitative data** including event attendance, survey results, ministerial satisfaction scores and policy quality assessment scores, and web analytics that were provided by the Policy Project.

1.6.3. Analysis of interview data

Qualitative data were analysed thematically by coding the dataset to identify themes, sub-themes, and respondent characteristics. Data were sorted and analysed by participant group: senior leaders (Tier 1 and 2); managers (Tier 3 and 4); policy capability leads (including chief advisors); and policy practitioners

⁵ Bernet, A.C., Willens, D.E. & Bauer, M.S. Effectiveness-implementation hybrid designs: implications for quality improvement science. *Implementation Sc* 8, S2 (2013).
<https://implementationscience.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1748-5908-8-S1-S2>

(principal advisor, senior advisor, advisor and graduate); and human resources and organisational development personnel); and by organisation.

The evaluation team then reviewed the viability of each emerging theme, with greater weighting placed on themes that were raised or agreed with by a significant majority participants (75 percent or more) in the full participant cohort and/or specific participant groups. Where a theme was raised by a minority of those interviewed, this has been stated in the report.

1.7. Evaluative judgements

The data gathered through the evaluation fieldwork was assessed against the criteria, desired achievements and standards of performance in Appendix B. For each criterion, the data have been assessed against a rubric developed by the evaluation team (Table 2) to identify where each aspect of the Policy Project is sitting in terms of its performance. The judgements have been informed by the weight of evidence (i.e., they are based on findings that were raised by or agreed with by a significant majority (75 percent or more) of evaluation participants, and – where available – supported by quantitative data). These overall ratings form the basis of evaluative judgements on the Policy Project and the policy system.

Table 2: Rubric for the interim evaluation of the Policy Project

Exceeding expectations	Meeting expectations	Meeting some expectations	Not meeting expectations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent performance against all standards. • No substantive weaknesses. Some clear examples of exemplary performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good performance against most standards. • May have some weaknesses which are easily rectified. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fair performance against most standards. • Some positive achievements. • Some serious but addressable weaknesses on a few performance standards. • Heading in the right direction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear evidence of unsatisfactory functioning. • Serious weaknesses on crucial performance standards.

1.8. Methodological strengths and limitations

The approach to the evaluation of the Policy Project and the policy system offers a number of strengths:

- The evaluation sought evidence from a variety of sources, primarily focusing on qualitative information from stakeholders at the various levels of the policy system, and with varying relationships to the Policy Project. This provided rich data which enabled the evaluation to consider feedback on the Policy Project through a range of lenses, both vertically and horizontally across the system.
- The desired achievements and performance standards (see Appendix B) provided a consistent basis against which the responses of different stakeholders were compared, and transparent, evidence-based conclusions about the Policy Project were built.
- The evaluation also focused on ‘explanation building’ to allow for investigation of not only ‘the what’, but also ‘the how’ and ‘the why’. Further, the semi-structured style of interviewing has

enabled the evaluation team to respond fluidly as interviews progressed to build explanations for the findings.

Limitations of the evaluation methodology include:

- The current way of benchmarking or assessing the quality of policy advice is new, so it cannot be used to assess change over time. Therefore, this limits the feasibility of assessing the extent to which the Policy Project has influenced change within the policy system.
- The findings from the qualitative interviews on perceptions of the Policy Project's effectiveness provide data only on the perspectives of those interviewees – the findings are not generalisable more broadly. The agencies selected for case studies and the individuals interviewed represent a range of characteristics (e.g., size of agency, seniority of employment level within the public sector). This strengthens the relevance of the findings, but nonetheless those engaged are only a small portion of those who interact with the Policy Project and whom the Policy Project seeks to influence. Given the resourcing and timeframes of this work, the evaluation only provides a reasonably detailed 'snapshot' of how the Policy Project is interfacing with the policy system.
- Overall, the evaluation team spoke to 78 individuals from 16 public sector agencies. According to the Public Service Commission's Human Resource Capability Survey and evidence from the Policy Project, there are around 3,500 policy practitioners from 28 public sector agencies, which fit into the following groups:
 - an estimated 60 senior leaders (CE and Tier 2s)
 - an estimated 350 policy managers, and
 - the remaining are advisors, senior advisors, and principal advisors.

While the evaluation aimed to reach as many individuals as possible within the available timeframe and resources, it is worth noting that only a very small proportion of the policy system was included in the evaluation – some of whom may have had very little interaction with the Policy Project.

- Those involved with the design, management, governance and delivery of the Policy Project, as captured by the qualitative interviews, are likely to have an interest in its continuation. Whilst their perspective is valuable, and critical for the evaluation, it is not neutral. An unbiased perspective is difficult to capture from stakeholder engagement almost by definition. To mitigate this, the evaluation included engagement with parties other than those who have a direct role in the Policy Project. In addition, some key informants who are independent from the Policy Project may have motivations for the programme to cease.
- The quantitative analysis was limited by the quality and completeness of data, as there is only some data available on the utilisation of the Policy Project's outputs and outcomes.
- The Policy Project was designed and implemented with an understanding that any impacts would take at least a decade to be realised, given that both departmental and system-level change was required.⁶ The anticipated longer-term outcomes are therefore unlikely to be observable within the timeframe of this evaluation.

⁶ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *The Policy Project – past, present and future (Draft)* (New Zealand: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 23 February 2021).

EVALUATION FINDINGS

This section provides detail of the findings of the evaluation, structured under each evaluation theme.

1.9. Implementation of the Policy Project

This section addresses KEQs 1 and 2.

KEQ1: How well is the implementation of the Policy Project working, for whom, in what ways and in what circumstances?

KEQ2: If the Policy Project is not working well, why?

Exploration of the implementation of the Policy Project is based on assessment of:

- the Policy Project’s governance model and operating model,
- the extent to which the Policy Project’s products, services and events are seen as credible, relevant, useful and easy to use, and
- the extent to which the Policy Project’s products, services and events are being used by agencies and individuals in the system.

Key findings

The evaluation finds that the design of the governance and operating model is fit-for-purpose. The Policy Project is delivering products, services and events that are perceived to be of high quality. The evaluation evidence suggests that awareness and uptake of the Policy Improvement Frameworks (or an adapted version tailored to the agency’s context) is moderate to high amongst senior leaders and managers. However, awareness and use of Policy Project outputs is lower amongst the core group of practitioners developing policy advice. This limits the Policy Project’s ability to affect change. There is a need to enhance the visibility of the Policy Project at the policy practitioner level.

1.9.1. Appropriateness of the governance and operating model

The governance model functions well

Governance of the Policy Project is multifaceted, with oversight provided by two entities:

- the Policy Profession Board, consisting of eight chief executives and three deputy chief executives from policy agencies, which supports the Head of the Policy Profession in setting and overseeing the Policy Project’s work programme, and
- the Tier 2 Policy Leaders’ Network, comprising all deputy chief executives with a policy role, which is informed and consulted about the Policy Project’s work programme and offers a public service-wide sounding board.

The evaluation found that having two different entities involved in the Policy Project’s governance allows for input from a range of agencies and individuals. Interviews with six senior leaders that sit on these entities and Policy Project personnel indicated that both groups are functioning effectively in terms of setting the strategic direction of the Policy Project. A senior leader stated that the ‘right sorts of conversations are being had around that table’ and that the focus remains strategic rather than operational.

The senior leaders also provided positive feedback about the reciprocal relationship embedded into the governance model. Under this arrangement the Policy Project receives strategic advice and guidance, and in turn provides advice and information to the Policy Profession Board and Tier 2 Policy Leaders’ Network.

[The Policy Project team] has provided some first rate, granular and well-structured advice on complicated issues like how to build and sustain a public policy workforce. Some really thoughtful pieces of work that the Tier 2s could engage with and decide where their appetite and ambition lay. It was smart work.

- Senior leader

Senior leaders reported that it is difficult to achieve consistent engagement in the Tier 2 Policy Leaders' Network

All of the six Tier 1 and 2 senior leaders that were interviewed for this evaluation agreed that the Policy Profession Board and Tier 2 Policy Leaders' Network are the 'right people' to govern the Policy Project, comprising people with significant policy capability and experience. However, four out of the six leaders stated that attendance at the Tier 2 Policy Leaders' Network is 'patchy'. These interviewees raised concerns that some experienced senior talent is not contributing to the governance of the Policy Project.

The location of the Policy Project within DPMC is seen as appropriate

There was a consistent view from stakeholders that DPMC is a suitable location for the Policy Project to be based. As a central agency, DPMC was seen to have 'clout' within the system which enables it to access and engage with leaders across the policy system.

It needs to be in a central agency as this gives them gravitas. [DPMC is] a hub of lots of policy leadership stuff, so having the Policy Project attached makes good sense.

- Policy capability lead

The delivery team is skilled and respected, and needs to prioritise its limited resources

The Policy Project delivery team was described by almost all those interviewed as professional, hard-working, skilled and passionate. The majority of senior leaders, managers and policy capability leads interviewed appreciated their willingness to engage with policy agencies to identify their needs, discuss how these needs can be met, and assist with developing bespoke products or training sessions.

The model used to develop products was also viewed as appropriate. Products are developed through a co-design approach which seeks to 'crowd source' expertise by developing cross-sector working groups. For example, the process to deliver the Long-Term Insights Briefing work was seen as timely and well managed, resulting in high quality, effective guidance.

The team needs to prioritise what it can reasonably provide the public service within the allocated resource.⁷ The majority of senior leaders, managers and policy capability leads interviewed considered that the team should prioritise increasing uptake of the three Policy Improvement Frameworks, as these are viewed as the core tools to affect quality improvement. A minority of interviewees within this cohort advocated for a broader focus on enhancing the overall maturity of the policy system, such as building a policy community (e.g., offering cross-agency events for policy practitioners at the advisor and senior advisor levels) and addressing workforce issues (such as the need for consistent job descriptions across the policy system). Given the limited resourcing available to the team, it is important for the governance bodies to provide clear direction on areas of priority.

1.9.2. Relevance and usefulness of the Policy Project's products, services and events

Users of the Policy Project's products, services, and events consider them to be of high quality

⁷ Information from the Policy Project states that the total capacity of the team is 6.475 FTE as at May 2021.

The evaluation found that Policy Project outputs, including its products, services, and events⁸ are well regarded by those who use them. While uptake of the outputs was variable (see section 1.9.3) those that use the outputs described them as well written, practical and useful. Key features of effectiveness are outlined below.

The Policy Project's outputs **set a standard of what high quality policy advice 'looks like'**. There was a consensus that a core aspect of the Policy Project's value is the provision of a benchmark for effective policy advice.

We've never really had a consolidated piece for the New Zealand policy profession. One common base to start and work from is a good thing.

- Senior leader

Standardisation is useful from a systems perspective as it means that agencies and individuals are working to a common set of capability, skills, and policy quality metric. As individual policy professionals move around the system, the standards remain relevant despite a change in topic, sector or agency. Most of the 29 interviewees that work as Tier 3 and 4 managers agreed that having a standard benchmark is useful in managing performance:

Having an external standard that I can point to, and hold people to, is very useful. Senior management want to see that and so do Ministers.

- Policy manager

Standardisation is also useful in the context of recent systemic issues, such as workforce 'churn' and a shortage of policy professionals:

There's a bigger need for these resources than there was a few years ago. People are coming to quite senior roles with very basic knowledge of what is policy, problem definition, options assessment...this can't be assumed knowledge anymore.

- Senior leader

The outputs are **relevant to policy professionals at various stages in their career**. The Policy Project's outputs were seen as particularly useful for graduates and those at the beginning of their policy careers, those who have not undertaken academic study in policy, and those for whom policy analysis is not a core part of their role. The frameworks, guides and training sessions were referred to by people in these roles as offering a strong grounding in the fundamentals of policy development.

We've got a number of scientists and writing a policy paper is not their default setting, so those resources are useful. They love to see the evidence before they write it and showing a framework or guideline can be helpful for them.

- Policy practitioner

The outputs are **applicable and adaptable within traditional policy contexts**. Practitioners from 'big P' policy agencies and those delivering strategic and general policy typically considered that the written products, particularly the three frameworks, are pitched at the 'right level'. They offer clear guidance to policy practitioners but are broad enough to be potentially adaptable to a range of policy contexts. Agencies that have invested time to tailor the content to their specific needs found that this was beneficial

⁸ 'Products' refers to resources such as policy improvement frameworks, guides, case studies and tools; 'services' refers to tailored workshops to support agencies or specific groups (e.g., graduates), and advice and support to the Policy Profession Board and Tier 2 Policy Leaders' Network; 'events' refers to system-wide events, such as policy forums. See Appendix A for further details.

in terms of enhancing relevance and use. For example, one senior leader of a policy team within a large operational department noted that:

... we had to pick up the [Policy Quality] Framework and adjust it to meet our agency needs...It took a lot of work and there were some grumbles at the time but looking back that has actually made sure we use them.

- Senior leader

Policy Project outputs largely align with a Western tradition of policy development

Interviews with Policy Project team members and senior public sector leaders indicated that the Policy Project is intended to work in a complementary way with other system mechanisms to enhance public service capability. Given the limited resources of the Policy Project, there is a drive to prioritise gaps within the system and not duplicate but provide complementary support for collective impact. For example, the Policy Project has not developed products on regulatory policy, as this is the mandate of the Government Regulatory Practice Initiative (G-REG), which aims to improve leadership, culture, regulatory practice and workforce capability in regulatory organisations and systems. Rather, the Policy Project has held joint events with G-REG and references their resources in Policy Project products.

This was reflected in the findings of the evaluation: the Policy Project's outputs were seen as relevant and useful by policy practitioners that sit within the scope of 'big P' policy and a Western tradition of policy development. Some interviewees from population agencies, and agencies and/or policy teams that develop operational policy or regulatory policy, found the products less relevant to their work.

"We do operational policy and we found there was not much information on operational policy work so haven't used [the Policy Project] much."

- Policy capability lead

The Policy Project is making significant efforts to ensure that its outputs incorporate te ao Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. For example, during the 2018 revision of the Policy Quality Framework the Policy Project team collaborated with Te Arawhiti to incorporate Te Tiriti more explicitly into the standards. It also worked with population agencies to strengthen the Policy Quality Framework's focus on diverse views, experiences and insights. In 2020, the Policy Project hosted an event with Te Arawhiti and the population agencies to promote and demonstrate the value of their resources for incorporating Te Tiriti and a diversity of perspectives into policy development. In addition, the Policy Project has developed a suite of community engagement resources, run a Policy Forum to promote policy community awareness of these resources and Te Arawhiti and population agency tools (which will soon be available in one place in the online Policy Methods Toolbox).

Despite these activities, just over half of the 30 policy practitioners interviewed as well as seven of the 46 senior leaders, managers and policy capability leads considered that there was an opportunity for the Policy Project to promote a stronger focus on Te Tiriti.

"The focus on the Treaty in the frameworks is very light. This could be updated. Delivering on the principles of the Treaty is often an afterthought for agencies. This seems to be an area that the Policy Project can make a difference."

- Policy practitioner

The evaluation recognises that the Policy Project sits within a broader system in which a range of entities (such as Te Arawhiti, population agencies and the Public Service Commission) have a role supporting the public sector to incorporate Te Tiriti and diversity of perspectives into the policy process. Nonetheless, three of the senior leaders interviewed suggested that the Policy Project could more actively push the policy system to move beyond a centralised, Western policy process to a model that suits the unique context of Aotearoa. The challenge for the Policy Project is to identify what further actions it can take to

continue to complement and elevate efforts already underway so that change is coordinated and aligned for collective impact.

Products are seen as most useful when they could be accessed in both full and summary forms

Those interviewed for the evaluation provided mixed feedback as to whether the products, services and events offered the right level of detail and type of information. Just over half of the 78 interviewees, particularly policy professionals towards the early stages of their career, considered that the provision of detailed guidance is useful as it enables a thorough exploration of the topic or skill at hand.

Other interviewees, including the majority of senior and principal policy advisors, stated they are too busy to read detailed documents, and that the information could be condensed to recognise that the bulk of policy work being undertaken is tightly timebound.

There's a place for complex stuff but very few of us are doing long term projects, we need digestible resources that recognise the fast-paced environment most people are working in.

- Policy capability lead

As an example of conflicting views, the Start Right guide was identified by several interviewees as a useful resource which stepped them through the process of launching a piece of policy work. However, this tool was viewed by others as having too many elements which made it confusing to follow or not suitable for fast paced or urgent pieces of work in which there is little time available for the commissioning phase. It is worth noting that the Start Right guide is mostly used and recommended for medium-sized policy projects. It is not intended for projects that have only a short time between commissioning and delivery and there is a two-page commissioning conversation prompts guide that can be used for this purpose.

Policy Project tools and outputs were viewed as effective when there is the ability to engage with a long form version, as well as a summary version and/or supporting tools. For example, there was widespread praise for the Policy Quality Framework which can be accessed in full and summary form. Similarly, the provision of practical tools to support the Policy Skills Framework, such as the Map Your Policy Skills Profile and the Development Pathways Tool, were highlighted as enhancing utility.

When you're thrown into something, you don't have the time to wade through dense information. Being able to quickly look into the summary Policy [Quality] Framework to check I'm on the right track is really useful.

- Policy practitioner

The products, services and events focus on relevant topics and issues

There was a widespread view that the Policy Project's outputs focus on pertinent topics and issues. One senior leader noted that the strength of the Policy Project's outputs is that they focus on the fundamentals of quality policy advice. While the government priorities and policy agendas change, the outputs will remain relevant.

Five interviewees noted that the Policy Project is responsive to changes in the policy agenda. In particular, the Long-Term Insights Briefing guidance, developed in response to a requirement in *the Public Service Act 2020*, is highlighted as an example of the Policy Project's responsiveness.

They were really quick off the mark to start putting guidance out for Long-Term Insights Briefings and what came out is useful at a range of levels.

- Policy manager

Interviewees made a range of suggestions regarding topics that the Policy Project could consider producing, should resource allow. Commonly requested topics included resources relating to Te Tiriti o Waitangi analysis and engagement with Māori, Pacific and other demographic groups, systems analysis,

guidance for operational policy and regulatory policy, project management methodologies for policy projects, presenting oral advice, and more interagency training opportunities. It is important that the Policy Project identifies activities underway in these areas (for example, Te Arawhiti's Crown engagement with Māori resources, the Māori Crown relations capability framework and Treaty of Waitangi guidance; the Ministry for Pacific Peoples and other population agencies' resources on bringing the perspective of their population group into the policy process⁹; and G-REG's resources) and supports the policy community to access and use these existing initiatives.

1.9.3. Use of the Policy Project's products, services and events

The evaluation has explored the extent and ways in which public sector agencies are using the Policy Project's outputs. Discussion with the Policy Profession Board has indicated that 'success' for the Policy Project involves public sector agencies meeting the quality standards set by the Policy Project. This involves the Policy Project:

- a) providing resources to support capability development in agencies that do not have their own collateral; and
- b) setting a standard against which agencies should assess existing resources to ensure alignment.

The evaluation has therefore looked at both uptake of the Policy Project's resources amongst the public sector, as well as the extent to which those agencies which have their own resources have aligned them with those of the Policy Project.

In addition, the evaluation explored the extent to which individual policy practitioners are aware of and use the Policy Project's outputs and events.

Uptake and use of the Policy Project's products, services and events is variable across the system

Qualitative information provided by 78 interviewees (in roles ranging from CEs to graduate policy advisors) from 16 public sector agencies, as well as quantitative data from Policy Project dashboard reporting and website analytics, shows that:

- There is good awareness and uptake of the Policy Quality Framework amongst policy agencies. All sixteen agencies that participated in the evaluation stated that they use this framework, as mandated, to inform the ex-post assessment process.
- Eight of the 30 policy practitioners that were interviewed stated that they use the Policy Quality Framework to inform their practice.
- The Policy Skills Framework was used by about half of the agencies that participated in the evaluation, and by six of the 30 policy practitioners.
- As intended, use of the Policy Capability Framework was mainly at the agency level, with representatives from five of the 16 agencies that participated in the evaluation reporting that it is used within their agencies.
- Uptake of outputs such as guidance documents was relatively low amongst the individuals engaged in the fieldwork. For example, only ten of the 30 policy practitioners that were interviewed stated that they had used at least one resource from the Policy Methods Toolbox. In comparison, website analytics show increasing traffic to the Policy Methods Toolbox, which since September 2020 has received more website hits than other any section of the Policy Project webpages.

⁹ Ministry for Pacific People's Kapasa – the Pacific Policy Analysis Tool and Yavu – Foundations for Pacific Engagement; Ministry for Women's Bringing Gender In – Gender Analysis Tool; Ministry of Social Development's Child Impact Assessment Tool; Ministry for Primary Industries' Rural Proofing Guide; and the Office for Disability Issues' Disability Toolkit for Policymakers (to be published shortly).

- Policy Project administrative data shows that in the 2020/21 financial year tailored training has been provided to 16 agencies that have requested support or specific courses for a target group (for example, new graduates).
- The majority of the 46 senior leaders, managers and policy capability leads interviewed for the evaluation were aware of the policy forums and had attended at least one.

It is important to note that the above findings are based on interviews with a small sample of 78 participants representing 16 public sector agencies, and that a comprehensive survey of the policy workforce was not undertaken. The findings do not necessarily represent the views or utilisation patterns of the wider policy workforce.

A summary of the evidence collected from qualitative interviews, and the available quantitative data, is provided in Appendix E.

Uptake of products is highest where there is an external driver for use

The requirement for all government entities with a policy function to use the Policy Quality Framework to assess and report on the quality of their policy advice has meant that this framework is used across all public sector agencies.

About a quarter of the 46 senior leaders, policy capability leads and Tier 3 and 4 managers stated that this process has been a ‘gateway’ to the Policy Project’s other resources; the high quality of the Policy Quality Framework has prompted them to access and use the other frameworks. Two of these interviewees described how they had initially been reluctant to adopt the Policy Quality Framework ex-post assessment process, but after completing it had seen the benefits for their agency and were now drawing on the wider suite of Policy Project resources.

The learnings from the assessment of our policy outputs against the PQF weren’t initially put forward into a development programme. It was a compliance exercise. That has now changed... the outcomes from the reviews are fed to policy managers and we are going to develop a policy development programme that could include mentoring, experiential activities, some micro-training in a tailored way. The Policy Project frameworks have been really useful as a basis for that.

- Policy capability lead

Similarly, qualitative evidence from evaluation participants suggests that the Long-term Insights Briefing support from the Policy Project has seen high uptake. The Long-Term Insights Briefings¹⁰ provide information on medium and long-term trends, risks and opportunities that may affect New Zealand, and impartial analysis on responding to these matters including policy options. Evaluation interviewees provided consistently positive feedback on the Long-Term Insights Briefing work undertaken by the Policy Project.¹¹ The Policy Project saw the Long-Term Insights Briefings as a leverage point for strengthening policy stewardship, which is a key part of the Policy Capability Framework, as the policy system needed an incentive to do better in this area.

The Policy Project’s products are useful for smaller agencies

Based on the data collected through this evaluation, smaller public sector agencies and those with a small policy function have the highest rate of uptake and use of Policy Project outputs. These agencies often do

¹⁰ <https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project/long-term-insights-briefings>

¹¹ The Policy Project helped shape and drive the legislative requirements for the Long-Term Insights Briefings as well as developing guidance for agencies in delivering such briefings every three years and putting in place ongoing support such as training for those leading development of Briefings (co-sponsored by IPANZ) and an online community for agencies to learn and support each other.

not have the capacity or capability to create their own tools. Being able to access a suite of existing, high-quality outputs that they could draw on was seen as hugely valuable.

When I first started at [small agency], this type of thing was non-existent. The Policy Project gives a basic set of tools to operate against. We've come a long way in tightening up our policy quality.

- Policy practitioner

While some of these agencies use the products 'off the shelf', at least seven agencies have worked with the Policy Project team to adapt the resources to their policy context. For example, one population agency recognised the need for a tool to support the policy community in the provision of quality policy advice on issues that affect its priority population. The agency worked with the Policy Project to build on the Policy Quality Framework and create a bespoke tool which places the experiences of the specific stakeholders at the centre of the policy process. Policy professionals at all levels within the agency emphasise the value this tool brings to their work.

We rely heavily on [the tool]. We serve a niche population, and this analysis framework serves our needs.

- Policy practitioner

Several larger organisations use their own framework and tools

A predominant view of senior leaders is that the Policy Project's products do not need to be universally adopted throughout the policy system. The goal of the Policy Project is to create a system level increase in the quality of policy advice, and there is an expectation that all public sector entities will have a set of frameworks and tools that set quality standards and offer guidance for policy professionals to achieve the standard. Within the system, there is room for agencies to use bespoke frameworks and tools that suit the specific context of the agency.

Representatives from four agencies (out of a total of 16 agencies from which representatives were interviewed for the evaluation) stated that they have existing tools that are used to support policy quality. These were all large agencies with a substantial policy function. In most cases the tools were in place prior to the launch of the Policy Project. Interviewees from these four agencies stated that their existing outputs are fit-for-purpose and are well integrated across their agency policy system.

We have our own tools, we have a detailed policy competency framework, we have resources we use for the policy process. Policy Project stuff is not something I would whip out with my team; I would use our own Ministry resources.

- Policy manager

Interviews with members of the Policy Profession Board stated that it is important for agencies that are using bespoke tools to ensure that their products align with the standard set by the Policy Project. Representatives from two out of the four agencies that use existing policy capability building tools and frameworks stated that they have worked with the Policy Project team to ensure alignment.

We had the Policy Project come along and give a presentation on some of the material, particularly the PQF and the other frameworks. It isn't dissimilar to our own material and we are making some adjustments to line it all up.

- Policy capability lead

Representatives from the other two agencies stated that they had not made formal efforts to assess the extent to which their internal resources and tools align with those issued by the Policy Project.

There is a lack of visibility and use of the Policy Project in the 'engine room' of policy development

Awareness and engagement with the Policy Project is high at the senior levels of the public sector. Nearly all of the 46 senior leaders, managers and policy capability leads interviewed were aware of the Policy Project and were often actively engaged through the Policy Profession Board, Tier 2 Policy Leaders Network, or working groups, and use the resources.

However, there is much lower visibility of the Policy Project at the practitioner level, especially amongst those who are the 'engine room' of policy development. Two thirds of the 30 policy practitioners interviewed stated that they are not meaningfully using its resources. This was particularly prevalent at the senior and principal policy advisor level.

Five of the 30 interviewees, mostly at the graduate and advisor level, stated that they regularly use the Policy Project to inform their practice. A further five stated that they check them every now and then to ensure their process and policy outputs aligned with the standard set by the Policy Project. The remaining interviewees stated that they did not use the resources. Reasons included not being aware of them and/or already feeling confident in their knowledge and processes.

One policy practitioner at the start of their career stated that seeing the products used by more senior policy practitioners is an endorsement of their validity:

Seeing the resources used by senior practitioners and by people who I respected made it seem more worth my time.

– Policy practitioner

However, most senior and principal advisors interviewed stated that they are not socialising the Policy Project with new policy advisors.

Three of the Tier 3 and 4 managers and two senior leaders noted that the Policy Project does not appear to have a clear plan for marketing its services, and that while the outputs are of high quality the lack of a marketing and communications strategy is hampering uptake.

The evaluation did identify some practices that individuals and agencies are using to increase visibility. For example, one agency's policy capability function produces a monthly newsletter which highlights the various Policy Project products and how the agency expects them to be used. In another agency, the policy capability lead described working with policy teams to hold workshops on the Policy Quality Framework, and supporting policy professionals to assess their papers against the framework.

Five of the senior leaders, managers and policy capability leads interviewed raised concerns that in some agencies, the work of embedding and promoting some of the Policy Project's tools, particularly the Policy Capability Framework and Policy Skills Frameworks, have been delegated to the human resources (HR) and/or organisational development teams. While there is recognition that these teams have an important role in supporting policy skills and capability development, these interviewees consider that the broad scope of the HR role means that Policy Project outputs are unlikely to be embedded into professional development materials unless there is additional championing from policy leaders within the agency.

1.10. Achievement of anticipated outcomes

This section addresses KEQs 3 and 4.

KEQ3: To what extent:

- is the **focus** on policy capability and the quality of policy advice improving across the public service, and
- are the **outcomes** of policy capability and the quality of policy advice improving across the public service?

KEQ 4: To what extent and how is the Policy Project contributing to the achievement of these outcomes?

Exploration of the achievement of the Policy Project's anticipated outcomes is based on assessment of whether there is evidence of:

- an increased focus on policy capability and the quality of policy advice in the New Zealand public sector,
- an improvement in the policy capability of the New Zealand public sector, and
- decision makers receiving high quality policy advice.

Key findings

The evaluation finds that there is insufficient evidence to determine if the Policy Project is helping agencies increase their focus on and improve their policy capability and the quality of policy advice. While some agencies have seen improvements in their policy capability and quality of policy advice, it was difficult to attribute these directly to the Policy Project as opposed to other external factors. The lack of system-wide metrics of policy quality and capability beyond the Policy Quality Framework is limiting the Policy Project's ability to measure and track meaningful progress beyond the policy quality and ministerial satisfaction scores.

1.10.1. Public sector focus on policy capability and the quality of policy advice

The Policy Project's outputs provide a benchmark for policy capability and quality

The Policy Project's vision to "achieve good government decisions that improve the lives of New Zealanders" requires public sector agencies to have significant policy capability that can consistently provide high quality policy advice.¹²

The Policy Project's activities have prompted and supported some agencies to focus on policy capability and quality. The majority of the 46 senior leaders, managers and policy capability leads agreed that the Policy Quality Framework provides a mandated 'line in the sand' or benchmark for quality.

A small number of representatives from the 16 agencies interviewed report that the mandated use of the Framework for policy quality assessments is a motivation to improve their policy quality and capability, as the tool ensure that agencies:

... can no longer just guess how they are doing but have evidence against an external standard. This is a huge driver for improvement.

– Policy manager

¹² Andrew Kibblewhite, *The Future of the Policy Profession – Speech at the Policy Managers Forum* (New Zealand: Andrew Kibblewhite, 18 December 2018).

Three Tier 3 and 4 managers reported that developing their staffs' policy skills is another example of how the Policy Project helps increase their focus on policy capability and quality. It also promotes a common language or frame of reference that policy professionals can use. Senior leaders, managers and policy capability leads highlight that simply the presence of the Policy Project team, as a dedicated group with a specific mandate, encourages their department to focus on policy capability and policy quality.

This is a community that is doing something for ourselves and that's the type of leadership that the Policy Project is providing.

- Policy capability lead

There is mixed feedback on the annual policy quality assessments as a mechanism to improve capability and quality

Most of the 46 senior leaders, managers and policy capability leads supported the requirement for all agencies to use the Policy Project's Policy Quality Framework for the ex-post assessment. The Policy Quality Framework and annual policy quality assessment, including the ministerial satisfaction scores, were seen as critical tools to help agencies focus on policy quality. One senior leader believes that the league table ranking scores and reporting requirements will influence agencies to improve their policy capability and quality.

The annual policy quality assessments are also designed to drive performance improvement within each agency, as they offer the opportunity to identify strengths and weaknesses to focus on for the coming year. Two senior leaders and policy managers and one policy practitioner highlighted that there was a drive for continuous improvement in their agencies following annual policy quality assessments. In contrast, four senior leaders, policy managers and policy capability leads interviewed were critical of the annual policy quality assessment as a mechanism to improve policy quality and capability. While the scores that are produced are designed to improve transparency and accountability, the key criticism was that the in-house marking approach may be inconsistent and provides no option for external moderation.

We've got all these departments marking their own homework in different ways with no consistency about how that's done, and then all of their self-assessed grades get put up for comparison with no real explanation about what it means.

- Policy capability lead

The evaluation notes that in 2019/20, seventeen agencies used the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER) to undertake their policy quality reviews. The remainder ran their panels in-house.

Two representatives from smaller agencies spoke of a perceived unfairness when selecting papers to include in their annual assessment, as they have a much smaller sample size compared to the larger policy agencies.

I still think that the assessment favours the bigger agencies with bigger resources... Is that the full picture of quality? I am not sure... It is disheartening to see us at the bottom.

- Senior leader

The suggestion that smaller agencies are disadvantaged is unlikely, given that there is no statistical relationship between the sample size the agency adopts and the likelihood of the sample including poor or good papers. However, smaller agencies may have less resources to address the capability issues that can be reflected in poor policy quality assessment scores.

There may need to be some minor recalibration of the annual policy quality assessment to ensure all agencies are consistent in how they apply the Policy Quality Framework and scoring scale to mark policy

papers and use the opportunities for external moderation, which should lead to agencies having a greater level of trust in the results.

There are other external factors which have also helped agencies focus on policy capability and quality

The majority of the 46 senior leaders, managers and policy capability leads could not say with confidence that their agencies' increased focus on policy capability and policy quality could be attributed to the Policy Project. For some, this was too hard to measure or calculate as they are unable to compare their focus to previous years. These interviewees noted that other mechanisms within the policy system, such as resources developed by others like the Government Economics Network (GEN), New Zealand Institute of Economic Research Inc (NZIER), and the Treasury also have an influence. This supports the Policy Project's theory of change which involves aligning with complementary system-wide changes initiatives for collective impact.

The establishment of specific policy capability roles and programmes of work within some agencies suggests that there has been an increased focus on capability and quality within the policy system. However, the amount of time that the policy capability leads were able to dedicate to their role varied; some led specific policy capability work programmes, while others struggled to fit their capability work on top of their policy 'day job'.

One policy capability lead reported that their agency's increased focus in policy capability and quality is directed by its senior leadership team.

We've been fortunate as our DCE has been focused on this anyway, even if the [Policy Project] work hadn't been done. I think the drive towards raising quality comes from the leadership of each agency – it is not the Policy Project that is driving agencies' quality. It is the extent to which the leadership of each agency has decided that this is a priority for them and how much they are buying into the whole Project itself.

- Policy capability lead

1.10.2. Improvement in policy capability and the quality of policy advice across the public service

The Policy Project's outputs help some agencies improve their policy capability and quality over time and drive performance improvements

A small number of the 78 interviewees shared stories of how the Policy Project had a direct impact on their policy capability and quality. The Policy Project's three Performance Improvement Frameworks were the most cited resource that led to advancement. For example, one policy practitioner spoke of using the Policy Quality Framework to improve their policy paper from a 6/10 to an 8/10, as the material helped the individual know what to include in their writing. While it is not possible to directly attribute changes to the Policy Project, two out of 22 agencies¹³ improved their quality score and ranking significantly in the 2019-20 annual policy quality assessment compared to 2017-2018 results.¹⁴

Furthermore, the Policy Project has been able to track usage of the Policy Quality Framework beyond just the annual policy quality assessment to help with overall performance improvements. A report to the Policy Profession Board found that:

¹³ Note that some agencies are excluded from this analysis as they used bespoke scoring systems in previous years, which could not be compared sufficiently to the PQF. In addition, there were two new departments that did not exist during the 2017-18 annual policy quality assessment.

¹⁴ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Policy Performance 2019/20 presentation* (New Zealand: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, no date).

- 27 of 28 agencies are also using the Policy Quality Framework for some other purposes,
- individual policy staff from 18 agencies are using the Policy Quality Framework to develop and review papers, and
- managers from 13 of 28 agencies are using the Policy Quality Framework to assess papers.¹⁵

Mandating the use of the Policy Quality Framework for government agencies' annual policy quality assessment process has had some impact on improving policy capability and quality at an individual and agency level. One agency reported their policy quality and capability has improved since using the Policy Quality Framework for the annual policy quality assessment:

The Policy Project has shifted the emphasis, lifted the game. It has fed into the 'after the fact' check but it requires extra thinking from what you do at the front end [of developing a policy paper] to structure findings.¹⁶

- Senior leader

However, other agencies are unable to attribute their improvements in policy capability or quality directly to the Policy Project

Similar to the findings reported in section 1.10.1, it was hard for evaluation participants to confidently link their increases in policy capability and quality directly to the Policy Project's outputs. They cite a range of external factors that have also had an impact such as:

- ministerial direction and expectations,
- leadership direction and expectations,
- varying policy settings and demands,
- organisational restructures, turnover and retention, and
- internal quality processes.

System change is often not direct or linear. It may be possible that some of the external factors listed above were an indirect result of the Policy Project. For example, potential leadership direction and expectations may have been impacted by conversations held at the Policy Profession Board or the Tier 2 Policy Leaders' Network. However, as this was not addressed with, or discussed by, any key informants, this cannot be confidently concluded.

Two policy capability leads from large policy agencies stated that it is too soon to determine if there has been a measurable impact, particularly given many agencies used a different scoring system to the Policy Quality Framework previously.

Having the resources and the core three frameworks are helpful and I am pleased to have them, but I couldn't hand on heart say they have definitely led to an increase in quality output.

- Policy capability lead
- The lack of system-wide metrics of policy quality is limiting the Policy Project's ability to measure and track its progress

It is difficult to quantitatively evaluate the quality of the policy system using measure(s) that have universal acceptance by all senior leaders. While there are a range of tools related to the quality of

¹⁵ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Policy Performance 2019/20 presentation* (New Zealand: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, no date).

¹⁶ Note that the Policy Project also offers *Developing papers with the Policy Quality Framework – Checklist for reviewing papers in development* to support reviewing papers as they are in development.

individual or agency policy advice (for example, Ministerial Satisfaction Surveys and agency policy quality scores), these are component scores.¹⁷ and not intended as metrics to measure quality across the whole system.

When you ask a question like this, I don't know what the metrics are of this – another area the Policy Project could be useful is having metrics of its own success. "The system as a whole, the average of the public sector is..." How do we know if the system is operating well, is mature, has high quality policy advice?

– Policy manager

In the absence of other metrics, one proxy process-focused, point-in-time indicator could be whether every agency has a dedicated policy capability lead who has a significant proportion of their time allocated to building policy capability and the quality of policy advice across their organisation. The proportion of agencies with a dedicated policy capability lead could also be used as a proxy indicator for the system as a whole. This may be accompanied by an action plan for improvement (as a process-focused indicator) that is implemented, and regularly reflected on and updated as necessary. Currently, most policy capability leads have other full-time roles, or a very limited plan of action.

The Policy Quality Framework is a metric for policy quality, but this only measures a portion of the system (agencies' outputs). There is no system-wide metric or framework that can measure other aspects of policy processes, capability outcomes and their relationship to quality policy advice, or system maturity. However, the evaluation recognises that even if there were system-wide metrics, it may be difficult for the Policy Project to objectively evaluate its implementation or impact on maturity in a systemic way.

¹⁷ Each agency's PQF score makes up a component of the average score and range of scores for the policy system as a whole.

1.11. Maturity of the policy system

This section addresses KEQs 5, 6 and 7.

KEQ 5: To what extent is the Policy Project contributing to enhancing the maturity of the policy system?

KEQ 6: What are the barriers and enablers of change?

KEQ 7: What are the unintended consequences of the Policy Project on the policy system (including beyond the public service), if any?

Exploration of the extent to which the Policy Project is contributing to the maturity of the policy system is based on evidence of its contribution to a system that:

- connects individuals' policy capability, agency's policy capability and inter-agency policy capability,
- speaks a common language,
- supports consistency and quality in policy advice, and
- provides an environment in which innovative and durable responses to 'wicked problems' are encouraged.

Key findings

The evaluation finds that the outputs of the Policy Project are welcomed as adding to system maturity. However, it is hard to draw definitive conclusions about their specific impact. A continued focus on ensuring that outputs are reflective of a diverse Aotearoa, the diverse experiences of the policy workforce, and the different configurations of strategic and operational policy within the policy system is recommended.

The evaluation finds no unintended consequences.

1.11.1. Connection and collaboration amongst the policy community

The Policy Project assists connection and collaboration, but more is needed

Most of the 78 interviewees considered that the policy system is not mature yet. There is a sense that many policy agencies are still operating in silos or 'fragmented' and this is compounded by agencies using a range of differently-developed policy tools.

It is a maturing system but has quite a distance to go.

- Policy manager

Discussions with stakeholders uniformly suggest that people welcome the opportunities that the Policy Project offers to bring people together. Networking events, courses and training that bring together people from different agencies are particularly appreciated. However, when people do come together it does not always foster enduring connections across agencies.

The other thing in terms of actually supporting more cohesion, it's not visible enough...

- Policy practitioner

Stakeholders welcome the common language and discourse that the Policy Project's Policy Improvement Frameworks, other resources, events, and services offer. The Policy Project also has convening power, which is used through forums, Long-Term Insights Briefings guidance, and working groups. While almost no one could say they use the Policy Project resources specifically on inter-agency work, many stakeholders speak about its potential to foster connection. As one stakeholder said, the Policy Project has:

...opened people's eyes to the possibility of this [connection and collaboration].

- Senior leader

A number of policy managers said they tend to foster connection through mechanisms other than the Policy Project (for example, the Leadership Development Centre).

Policy practitioners are not yet acting as a 'profession' or 'community of interest' and the Policy Project can do more to foster this

One goal for of the Policy Project, as set by the Policy Profession Board, is to help build an active policy network. Whether this community is described as a 'community of interest' or 'profession', the majority of stakeholders interviewed were supportive of the potential the Policy Project had to enhance the connectedness of the policy system.

The quality standards create a sort of consolidated policy professional by outlining universal criteria and qualities.

- Policy practitioner

Multiple stakeholders mentioned the benefit of this uniformity that policy practitioners could derive from use of the Policy Project materials.

One of the things I really like about the PQF is it gives us a common set of standards to work towards. You can actually point to things and see what you're looking for. As advisors move around agencies, they're working to a common set of capability standards, policy quality standards, it creates a common language for us all to use. It is actually really helpful.'

- Policy Capability Lead

One group interview of policy practitioners said it was useful to have resources that delineated policy as a 'craft' compared to general advice or operational issues.

However, most of the 78 interviewees noted that policy is not yet seen as a 'profession' or community. Some stakeholders were unclear what the difference between a 'profession' and 'craft' or 'community' is. This appears connected to a lack of a common understanding as to what a mature policy system looks like, or even what 'policy' is.

If you ask five different advisors, you'll get five different answers about what policy is.

- Policy practitioner

One senior leader noted that vertical silos are a barrier to connection; good connection is happening at the Tier 2 level through the Policy Leaders' Network, but they did not see opportunities for connection happening at lower levels. Two of the senior leaders and one policy capability lead interviewed considered that the Policy Project could play a role in supporting the development of more communities of practice within the hierarchies of the policy system. For example, one policy capability lead suggested some form of 'on the ground' network comprised of policy practitioners could help foster the growth of a profession. Another stakeholder wants to see more opportunities for people at their level (in this case, a Tier 3 Policy Manager) to 'help facilitate connections through different levels of policy across government'.

1.11.2. Promotion of a best practice response to policy issues

Using the Policy Project outputs supports some practitioners to feel more confident in their practice, but no firm system-wide conclusions can be drawn

One third of the 30 policy practitioners interviewed spoke of the confidence that the Policy Project outputs help to give them in their advice. They noted the usefulness of knowing that there are benchmarks and standardised tools.

Innovation and continuous improvement are themes in both the Policy Skills Framework and the Policy Capability Framework. The Policy Skills Framework includes promoting a culture of diverse thinking, looking beyond one's immediate expertise for insights on best practice, and encouraging experimentation and continuous improvement methodologies. The Policy Capability Framework includes a focus on how well a culture of achieving outcomes, constructive challenge, innovation and continuous improvement is promoted and maintained.

The Policy Project has supported the policy system to foster innovation through:

- providing resources on newer policy methods such as futures thinking, behavioural insights and design thinking and connecting the policy community with communities of practice on these newer methods,
- hosting events and workshops to connect the policy community with experts in innovation and these newer methods, and
- aligning with and co-funding other system-change initiatives that are focused on innovation, such as the Auckland Co-Design Lab.

However, the majority of the 46 senior leaders, managers and policy capability leads were unsure whether this is leading to a systemic best practice and innovative approach, it is too early to tell, or gains are only happening incrementally.

1.11.3. Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Te Tiriti o Waitangi resources in the Policy Project are a good start, but there is more needed

Māori are citizens but also a Treaty partner, which is a different frame of reference and you need to do that [consultation and engagement] appropriately.

- Senior leader

Policy development that meaningfully takes account of Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles and obligations is increasingly seen as essential by decision makers. Nearly all of the 78 stakeholders interviewed were supportive of the need to incorporate Te Tiriti o Waitangi into their policy work; yet almost universally there was a lack of confidence in how to go about doing that.

The Policy Project seeks to encourage policy practitioners to thoroughly consider Te Tiriti o Waitangi terms and concepts in policy development and to, where appropriate, build closer partnerships between Māori and the Crown on policy solutions. It partners with entities with the appropriate expertise to craft resources as well as adding in a Te Tiriti perspective into other resources (such as the Development Pathways Tool, Long Term Insights Briefing guidance, and community engagement guidance). The online Policy Methods Toolbox has included Te Tiriti o Waitangi analysis resources since September 2020.

While the Policy Project team has gone to considerable effort to create and bolster resources with the Te Tiriti and te ao Māori components, about half of the 78 people interviewed did not know that the Policy Project had links to dedicated Te Tiriti o Waitangi resources. Most of the stakeholders interviewed had not used the resources for a Te Tiriti perspective or were otherwise unaware of this aspect of the material.

Haven't seen anything – it might be there – if it was well known I would have been aware of it. It seems to me the biggest gap.

- Senior leader

Some stakeholders are aware of the Te Arawhiti Te Tiriti o Waitangi resources, as mandated by Cabinet, that are linked on the Policy Project's website. These resources were characterised as a 'good start' but not enough.

We need comprehensive advice on Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations [and] policy theory specific to Aotearoa.

- Policy practitioner

One stakeholder said they would be more likely to start with resources produced by other entities (such as Crown Law) for 'Te Tiriti o Waitangi advice.

Some stakeholders note that these matters could be still treated in general as an afterthought in some agencies and/or there could be resistance to applying a Te Tiriti o Waitangi lens to policy problems from some people. That is, that this is an endemic issue in the policy system and not the sole responsibility of the Policy Project.

1.11.4. Diversity of perspectives within the policy system

The evaluation assessed the extent to which the Policy Project is promoting the need to take account of diverse voices and perspectives (such as disability, ethnic communities, LGBTQI+) in policy development processes and advice. It is worth noting that diversity within policy advice may have inextricable links to the diversity and makeup of the policy workforce and the visibility of different voices within it.

The Policy Project is working to support policy practitioners to incorporate diverse perspectives into policy advice

The Policy Project has explicitly incorporated taking account of diverse perspectives in all three of its Policy Improvement Frameworks:

- diversity is included in both the Analysis and Advice standards of the refreshed Policy Quality Framework,¹⁸
- 'Engagement and Collaboration' is one of the applied skills included in the Policy Skills Framework as needed by policy practitioners to be able to produce quality policy advice,¹⁹ and
- one of the four quadrants of the Policy Capability Framework is 'Engagement and Customer Centricity.'²⁰

To assist policy practitioners to deliver on this aspect of advice, skills and organisational capability, the Policy Project has created resources (such as the Development Pathways Tool and community engagement guidance) that encourage community input and engagement and diverse perspectives in the policy process and or policy practitioners to build their skills in this area.

However, stakeholders almost universally did not have practical experience of working with Policy Project materials to foster diversity. Most of the 30 policy practitioners interviewed stated that there is little visibility of Policy Project resources that would usefully help with embedding diversity of perspectives into policy processes. Discussion on diversity was generally muted in this evaluation. For some agencies participating in the evaluation, diversity (or 'broad engagement' as one policy manager called it) is not seen a priority and so they have not looked to the Policy Project for support in this area.

The evaluation notes that the suite of community engagement resources were released in late October 2020 and may not have had adequate time to gain visibility amongst those interviewed. Website analytics

¹⁸ <https://dpmc.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2021-08/policy-quality-framework-summary.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project/policy-improvement-frameworks/policy-skills>

²⁰ <https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project/policy-improvement-frameworks/policy-capability>

show increasing traffic to the Policy Project's Community Engagement webpage and downloading of guidance resources.

At least six population agencies have developed their own tools (some based on the Policy Project materials) with bespoke guidance on community engagement with their population. One of the two population agencies that were interviewed as part of the evaluation asked that there continue to be a reciprocal relationship in which the Policy Project promotes the use of the bespoke tool to other agencies in the system to amplify marginalised voices in the policy development process. The evaluation team is aware that population impact tools will be added to the Policy Methods Toolbox in the near future.

There is a need for more leadership to reduce the monolithic, homogenous nature of policy

One senior leader and two managers shared concerns that the Policy Project may be contributing to the perpetuation of policy as a monolithic, slow progressing, traditional profession focused in Wellington. Another senior leader thought that to progress the policy community and create meaningful change, the Policy Project should provide greater leadership on agile methodologies, incorporating lived experiences, and creating authentic partnerships in policy. These interviewees may not have been aware that the Policy Project offers guidance and case studies on community engagement and design thinking for policy, and that some staff have been appointed to 'policy hubs' outside of Wellington.²¹

As noted earlier, the Policy Project team's ability to produce tools on new policy methods is constrained by their internal resources. However, it is evident that a proportion of policy professionals are expecting more progressive tools for policy than are currently being produced.

Both policy practitioners and senior leaders spoke of the homogeneity of the policy profession, both within policy teams in departments and at the governance level. This lack of diversity impacts on policy professionals' frames of reference when developing policy. Similarly, being a policy professional can be seen as out of reach for Māori, Pacific peoples and other ethnic communities, as they do not see themselves reflected within the profession.

It's hard for people to see the value of being a policy professional, especially Māori and Pasifika whānau. A lot of them talk about their experiences as not clear or disconnected. The Policy Project can do a lot more in supporting the policy profession [in this area] ... [the] future is not just about the technical skills but also the diverse voices.

- Policy practitioner

1.11.5. Barriers to change

Policy staff of all levels feel that they are too busy to use the Policy Project's resources

Senior leaders, policy managers, policy capability leads, and policy practitioners considered that during periods of busyness, they cannot make time to use the Policy Project resources to guide or inform their work. Agencies spoke of the pressured, fast-paced nature of delivering policy, which did not allow them the time or space to 'lift their head out of the work' and use the Policy Project's outputs. For example, one senior leader from a small policy agency spoke of feeling 'stretched thin' and despite being a senior leader, also being a policy 'doer'. Policy managers and policy practitioners stated that they must weigh up the relative value of engaging with the Policy Project's tools compared to the urgency of producing policy outputs; meaning that few policy practitioners turn to the Policy Project's tools when faced with an urgent deadline.

²¹ These policy hubs were established by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. The Policy Project facilitated a seminar to inform interested agencies about this initiative.

The Policy Profession Board is aware of the pressure on agencies that has led to slow uptake of the outputs since early 2019: “Sadly, the agencies who needed [the outputs] most have the least band width to do so. Intellectually you can see the case for it; in practice, in agencies it is hard to see (and therefore implement) it.”²²

Numerous sources said that the policy workforce feels overworked and tired. One key informant noted that policy professionals will not use the Policy Project’s outputs if they are considered a burden, or a

...tax on that workforce – it needs to make things easier, not harder.

- Senior leader

The busyness of the public sector was evident, as the evaluation team experienced some difficulties reaching policy practitioners to participate in the fieldwork. Individuals from all levels of seniority (senior leaders and policy managers through to policy practitioners) struggled to attend the sessions due to workload demands.

Larger policy agencies may promote their own internal policy resources over the Policy Project’s

As was discussed in section 1.9.3, policy practitioners from four of the 16 policy agencies that participated in the evaluation report using their own agency’s tools and resources instead of the Policy Project’s. While the Policy Profession Board has made it clear that using a range of resources is acceptable, two of these four agencies stated that they had not undertaken work to ensure their resources aligned with the standard set by the Policy Project.

The Policy Project is aware of this barrier to uptake: “We have made more progress than previous New Zealand quality of advice improvement initiatives – by providing world class and practical performance-focused tools. But there is a conundrum: the Frameworks are top quality, but so far there is a relatively slow uptake of them. One of the reasons for this is status quo bias... many agencies... prefer to use their own framework.”²³ While uptake has increased with all agencies using the Policy Quality Framework, only 43 percent and 39 percent of agencies were using the PSF and PCF in 2019/20, respectively.²⁴

Smaller policy agencies may use the Policy Project’s outputs more than larger agencies, as ten out of the seventeen agencies who used the Policy Skills Framework and Policy Capability Framework in 2020/21 had up to 80 policy FTE, compared with seven agencies who had 81 to more than 200 policy FTE.^{25, 26} Furthermore, only one of the six large policy agencies (more than 200 policy FTE) reported using both the Policy Skills Framework and Policy Capability Framework, which may suggest that the larger policy agencies may use their own internal resources.

The Policy Project’s potential is constrained by the prioritisation of its resources

As discussed in section 1.9.1, the Policy Project is a small team with finite resources that can only complete a certain number of projects each year. As a result, the team must make tradeoffs when considering what projects or topics to focus on. Several agencies were clear about what their contextual requirements were for new or modified outputs, for example, guidance or presentations on:

²² Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Policy Profession Board minutes* (New Zealand: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 17 April 2019).

²³ Andrew Kibblewhite, *The Future of the Policy Profession – Speech at the Policy Managers Forum* (New Zealand: Andrew Kibblewhite, 18 December 2018).

²⁴ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Policy Performance 2019/20 presentation* (New Zealand: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, no date).

²⁵ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Policy Project Progress Dashboard for November 2020 – February 2021* (New Zealand: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, no date).

²⁶ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *The Policy Project: Funding Next Steps* (New Zealand: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 19 March 2020).

- writing business cases,
- using data in policy,
- policy fundamentals for graduates or new advisors,
- how to cost policy options,
- linking policy with operations,
- using modern project management methodologies in policy,
- lessons learned across the public sector in specific policy projects, and
- how to draft policy in fast operating environments.

However, the Policy Project cannot always service this level of demand. DPMC is aware of this barrier: “with its small number of FTEs, we have learned from experience that the Policy Project needs a clear focus for action, otherwise it risks being spread too thinly... There is a little resource in the system to work on cross-cutting policy capability issues and the Policy Project is frequently approached or expected to pick up work in this space.”²⁷

1.11.6. Enablers of change

Stronger socialisation from senior leaders

The Policy Profession Board and Tier 2 Policy Leaders’ Network’s relationships with the Policy Project team were implemented “for strategic oversight over the work programme by designated executive leaders, and for ensuring relevance across the public service.”²⁸ There is an opportunity for the members of these senior leader groups to use their strategic leadership to promote the Policy Project more broadly within their agencies.

A consistent theme from stakeholders is that support and communication regarding engagement with the Policy Project from the tier(s) above could either be a barrier or enabler depending on how meaningfully it is applied. One policy capability lead stated that while senior managers are engaged in governance processes they are not always ‘feeding back down the line’. They consider that all relevant tiers being briefed and made to feel included would help engagement and uptake of the Policy Project.

Tangible success and visibility increase uptake

People at a range of levels within agencies state that if they could see more visibility of the positive impact of the Policy Project on pieces of policy work (preferably specific to their agency’s context) that would encourage uptake.

This type of work needs to be tangible that brings benefits and drivers to lift quality and policy.

- Policy capability lead

Some stakeholders, particularly policy practitioners, stated that having been made aware of the Policy Project’s resources through participation in the evaluation, they would now use them. Evaluation participants consistently asked if the Policy Project could do more to promote its products and services.

²⁷ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Memorandum: The Policy Project (Policy Advisory Group) – Information for the incoming Chief Executive* (New Zealand: Dr Anneliese Parkin, 9 November 2018).

²⁸ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *The Policy Project – past, present and future (Draft)* (New Zealand: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 23 February 2021).

People need to feel like they have the time to engage with the material

Many stakeholders note variations on the theme of 'it would be nice to use the Policy Project resources but I am/we are far too busy'. How their managers message the prioritisation of time spent on the using the Policy Project frameworks and tools may be a powerful enabler.

[I was] pleasantly surprised by how much my manager and the department encourages professional development and taking the training sessions. I have a manager who is really good, she promotes using this stuff.

- Policy practitioner

People to work alongside policy practitioners

Many people said it is not enough to have good material, or even have the current engagement with the Policy Project (which is welcome) but there needs to be a more systematic method of championing the Policy Project's frameworks and tools to improve policy capability and the quality of policy advice in the agencies.

It's a hearts and minds thing. We need people to point to and champion the collateral.

- Policy manager

The role of policy capability leads goes some way to address this concern, but there is also a need for experienced policy practitioners to have the time to pass on best practice (which could include the relevance of the Policy Project's frameworks and tools) to junior staff.

It goes back to the point that very experienced policy practitioners need to give some of their time to passing on their craft to others. They need to be part of the process to improve quality policy for the system rather than saying it is sussed in our agency and moving on to something else. The methodology of the Policy Project needs to be reinforced constantly.

- Policy capability lead

Some stakeholders also stated that practitioners want to feel like they are being encouraged to use material rather than being forced to use it.

I'm a believer in markets. [The Policy Project] should do two things: if you don't have a framework, here's one. If you do have one, check your framework against this to make sure it's essentially aligned.

- Senior leader

Another stakeholder emphasised the risk of the Policy Project being viewed as an additional burden on the sector:

We have to go with the grain of the policy practitioners in the public service. If we tried to 'tax' them now, it would not be welcome.

- Senior leader

Policy agencies need outputs specifically aimed at their specific context in the policy system

Many stakeholders spoke about not wanting 'one size fits all' outputs but wanting context-specific resources. These interviewees suggested that contextualizing tools for operational, enforcement or regulatory agencies would be a useful next step. Others wanted to see tools such as guides to help make operational decisions and/or hearing from speakers from operational policy backgrounds. The evaluation notes that the Policy Project sits within a complex system, and there are a number of mechanisms that are intended to increase capacity in these areas, such as G-REG's emphasis on regulatory practice. Within its mandate of increasing policy capability of the core public service, the Policy Project has recently

undertaken action in this space. For example, the team recently conducted a workshop with a regulatory agency with an operational and enforcement role, which worked through modifications to the Policy Quality Framework to ensure it was fit for this agency's purpose.

One stakeholder expressed serious concern about the lack of understanding of policy in operational agencies. In their view, a factor driving this is a disconnect between strategic policy practitioners and those working in operational agencies:

We need to inform policy advisors so they have a better understanding of the operational realities. And the operational policy people need to understand why the rule of law is really important.

- Policy capability lead

One person from an operational policy background was quite frank that they did not understand 'policy'.

I'm from an operational background, and my 'go to' will always be communities to form advice. Policy language goes over my head a bit.

- Policy practitioner

A mature policy system must be aware of how policy is interconnected to, and indivisible from, the operational realities of implementing policy or strategies. The Policy Project addresses this through emphasising the importance of identifying workable solutions in the Policy Quality Framework, effective implementation in the Policy Skills Framework, and engagement with delivery units in the Policy Capability Framework. There is a dynamic relationship where operational realities can modify the authorising frameworks and legislation and vice versa.

The Policy Project's outputs should continue to be mindful of a need to be able to be reasonably understood and applied by anyone working in policy regardless of their background or level.

3.3.7 Unintended consequences

None of the senior leaders, policy managers and policy capability leads were unable to identify any unintended consequences of the Policy Project.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out the overall conclusions related to the evaluation criteria outlined in Section 2.2 and Appendix C, and provides recommendations for the Policy Project and the policy system’s consideration.

1.12. Implementation of the Policy Project

KEQ1 How well is the Policy Project working, for whom, in what ways and in what circumstances?

KEQ2 If the Policy Project is not working well, why?

Governance and operations of the Policy Project

<i>Exceeding expectations</i>	<i>Meeting expectations</i>	<i>Meeting some expectations</i>	<i>Not meeting expectations</i>	<i>Insufficient evidence</i>
0	100	0	0	0

The governance and operational ‘scaffolding’ set up to deliver the Policy Project is appropriate. The two-layered governance model allows the Policy Project to benefit from access to the experience and knowledge of public sector leaders from a variety of agencies. This aligns well with the Project’s intent to affect long-term system-wide change.

The reciprocal relationship of the Policy Project team with its governance entities is functioning effectively: the Policy Profession Board and Tier 2 Policy Leaders’ Network provide advice and direction to the team, and in turn are provided with information on current issues facing the system. However, some Tier 2 policy leaders interviewed noted there has been sporadic attendance by some members of the Tier 2 Policy Leaders’ Network.

The evaluation found that being located within DPMC gave the Policy Project legitimacy amongst its stakeholders. While the team has limited capacity, stakeholders note that the team is skilled and efficient. The team employs effective processes to deliver outputs, such as the co-design model for developing new products.

Relevance and usefulness of Policy Project products, services and events

<i>Exceeding expectations</i>	<i>Meeting expectations</i>	<i>Meeting some expectations</i>	<i>Not meeting expectations</i>	<i>Insufficient evidence</i>
0	100	0	0	0

The evaluation found that the outputs produced by the Policy Project are useful for setting a standard or benchmark for quality public policy advice, policy skills and organisational policy capability. As individual policy professionals move around the system, the standards remain relevant. This is seen as a significant aspect of the value that the Policy Project provides the policy community.

The evaluation found that the majority of interviewees that reported using Policy Project outputs were those working in policy roles in government departments within a Western policy model. For these users, the outputs are viewed as high quality, focused on relevant topics and adaptable enough to suit a range of policy contexts.

For those that work in diverse policy contexts, such as operational policy, regulatory policy or population agencies, the products are not always as relevant and may require some adaptation to suit their needs. Those interviewed for the evaluation were clear that the Policy Project should continue to actively push the policy system to move beyond a centralised, Western policy process to a model that suits the unique context of Aotearoa. This includes building on work such as Te Arawhiti resources, population agencies’ impact tools for their population group and working with agencies to customise the tools to their needs.

The challenge for the Policy Project is to identify what actions it can take to continue to complement and elevate efforts already underway in these areas, so that change is coordinated and aligned for collective impact.

Uptake and use of the Policy Project

<i>Exceeding expectations</i>	<i>Meeting expectations</i>	<i>Meeting some expectations</i>	<i>Not meeting expectations</i>	<i>Insufficient evidence</i>
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The goal of the Policy Project is to create a system level increase in the quality of policy advice. There is an expectation that all public sector entities will have a set of frameworks and tools that set quality standards and offer guidance for policy professionals to achieve the standard. Agencies can use the Policy Project’s outputs ‘off the shelf’, an amended version of these, or internally developed tools that align with the standard set by the Policy Project. Across the public sector, there is high uptake of the Policy Quality Framework, and moderate (but growing) uptake of the Policy Skills Framework and Policy Capability Framework.

Uptake of the Policy Project’s outputs is highest amongst small agencies that typically do not have capacity to create their own resources. Four of the agencies that participated in the evaluation consider their internal resources more suitable to their context than those of the Policy Project and/or the internal resources pre-dated the Policy Project and they are reluctant to change. Use of a range of resources is not necessarily a problem if they align with the standard set by the Policy Project. However, two of these agencies have not reviewed their resources and tools against those of the Policy Project and therefore it is not clear whether they are adequate to leverage improvements in the quality and consistency of policy advice.

The majority of senior leaders that participated in the evaluation are aware of the Policy Project’s outputs, and some graduates are also familiar with the materials. However, awareness of the Policy Project and use of its products is lowest amongst senior and principal policy practitioners. Given this cohort is the ‘engine room’ of policy development in the public sector, this represents a barrier to the Policy Project’s aim of affecting system wide quality improvement. Uptake amongst these individuals is hampered by a lack of visibility; they do not know about the Policy Project’s offerings. The Policy Project would benefit from stronger promotion from the Policy Profession Board, the Tier 2 Policy Leaders’ Network and other policy leaders to increase uptake and usage of these resources across the system.

Uptake of products and services is highest when the Policy Project is identifying and using levers within the policy system. The mandating of the Policy Quality Framework leads to very high use and visibility of this tool across the sector. There is consistently positive feedback on the Long-Term Insights Briefing support, in which the Policy Project helped shape and drive the legislative requirements for the Long-Term Insights Briefings as well as developing guidance for agencies in delivering such briefings every three years. Capitalising on such opportunities is an effective ‘gateway’ to Policy Project resources; once policy professionals are using one tool there is an opportunity to introduce other products.

1.13. Achievement of anticipated outcomes

KEQ3 To what extent is the focus on policy capability and the quality of policy advice improving across the public service? To what extent are the outcomes of policy capability and the quality of policy advice improving across the public service?

<i>Exceeding expectations</i>	<i>Meeting expectations</i>	<i>Meeting some expectations</i>	<i>Not meeting expectations</i>	<i>Insufficient evidence</i>
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KEQ4 To what extent and how is the Policy Project contributing to the achievement of these outcomes?

The evaluation is not able to definitively make a judgement regarding the extent to which the Policy Project has led to increased focus on policy capability and the quality of policy advice, or improvement in these areas across the public service.

There is some evidence that mandating the Policy Quality Framework across the policy system is prompting some agencies and individuals to critically assess their policy outputs and make changes to facilitate improvement. There is also a small amount of evidence of shifts in policy quality, including examples of changes in policy practitioner practice after engaging with the Policy Project and agency improvements in the annual policy quality assessment rating.

However, within the complexity of the policy system there are a range of additional factors that may drive changes in the focus on, and quality of, policy advice. These include changes in ministerial and agency leadership, direction and expectations, organisational restructures, and other initiatives to increase policy quality. System change is often not direct or linear. It may be possible that some of the external factors were an indirect result of the Policy Project and its activities.

Mandating the use of the Policy Quality Framework has allowed for system-wide measurement of the quality of policy outputs of agencies. However, there are currently few other mechanisms through which to measure other aspects of the policy processes, capability outcomes or system maturity. Additional metrics, such as the proportion of agencies with a dedicated policy capability lead, could be used as proxy indicators for the system as a whole. However, the evaluation notes that even if there were system-wide metrics, it may be difficult for the Policy Project to objectively evaluate its implementation or impact on the policy system's maturity.

1.14. Maturity of the policy system

KEQ5 To what extent is the Policy Project contributing to enhancing the maturity of the policy system?

KEQ6 What are the barriers and enablers of change?

KEQ7 What are the unintended consequences of the Policy Project on the policy system (including beyond the public service), if any?

<i>Exceeding expectations</i>	<i>Meeting expectations</i>	<i>Meeting some expectations</i>	<i>Not meeting expectations</i>	<i>Insufficient evidence</i>
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The Policy Project is delivering a range of initiatives that are intended to support greater maturity of the policy system. These include: forums and networks for senior leaders, policy managers and principal advisors that aim to support connection and knowledge; tailored support and training to support agency's policy capability building and those of specific practitioner groups like new graduates; products that set sector wide quality standards and provide a common language; facilitating joint solutions to common policy quality and capability issues; and forming partnerships with specialist agencies to support modern policy practices such as Te Tiriti o Waitangi analysis.

The evaluation finds that these efforts are appreciated by people in the system and are influencing change within pockets of the system (such as individual policy practitioners and some agencies). However, there is a need for the Policy Project to continue to bolster and socialise resources which resonate for different policy contexts. In particular, a greater focus on supporting the system to prioritise a Te Tiriti-informed approach to policy and meaningful engagement with diverse populations was identified as a continued need for a mature policy system. The Policy Project is not the only lever in this space, but it is an important one. It is vital that the Policy Project continue to identify and promote resources and initiatives already underway in these areas and work to fill any gaps.

The Policy Project will need to continue to find ways to work within the challenges and barriers inherent in the current policy system, including the fast-paced nature of policy work and the difficulties of changing entrenched behaviours. Change will be enabled through systemic promotion of the Policy Project through the vertical layers of the system, from senior leaders disseminating the outcomes of governance discussions, to policy capability leads promoting the products within their agencies, to policy managers allocating time for staff to engage with the Policy Project.

There are no unintended consequences of the Policy Project.

1.15. Learning and improvement

KEQ8 What, if anything, should change to improve the effectiveness of the Policy Project?

Based on the findings outlined in this report, the evaluation makes the following recommendations.

1. Develop and implement a marketing strategy so that agencies and policy practitioners are aware of the Policy Project, how it can assist them, and what products, services and events are available

While the quality of the Policy Project's products, services and events is high, the evaluation found that the 'engine room' of policy (policy practitioners) are often unaware of them. It is recommended that the Policy Project team develop and implement a marketing strategy to ensure that agencies and individuals are aware of the value proposition of the Policy Project, the ways in which it can support them, the products, services and events available, and how to access these.

2. Identify opportunities that could be leveraged to drive the policy community to the Policy Project

Uptake of the Policy Project is highest when there is a clear driver leading the public sector to access its products. It is recommended that the Policy Project team and governance boards explore opportunities that could be leveraged to drive the policy system towards its offerings. This may include mandating benchmarking processes (such as requiring agencies to assess their policy-related position descriptions against the Policy Skills Framework), similar to the system-wide use of the Policy Quality Framework.

3. Ensure that senior public sector leaders and managers promote and champion the Policy Project within their agencies.

The evaluation found that change can be enabled through promotion of the Policy Project through the vertical layers of the system. The Policy Project would benefit from stronger promotion from the Policy Profession Board and Tier 2 Policy Leaders' Network to increase uptake and use across the system. Within agencies, champions are key to increasing the uptake and usage of the Policy Project's resources.

4. Public sector agencies need to ring fence time for policy practitioners to engage with the Policy Project's capability building tools and resources

There is a need for public sector agencies to support staff to engage with tools and resources to enhance policy capability, including those of the Policy Project. This requires senior leaders to ensure that policy managers allocate time for staff to undertake these activities.

5. Ensure Policy Project outputs suit the needs of the pressured, fast paced policy delivery environment

Policy practitioners typically need succinct, easy to access materials which they can dip into as needed across the policy development process. The Policy Project could consider how to make new and existing outputs more interactive, with more summary and longform versions of outputs.

6. Continue to partner with relevant agencies to ensure the Policy Project reflects the diverse needs and voices of modern policy development in Aotearoa

The Policy Project is providing an effective service to individuals and entities involved in policy within the traditional Western paradigm. It is vital that the Policy Project support the needs of the modern policy context within Aotearoa. It is important that the Policy Project identifies, promotes and elevates resources and initiatives to support policy staff to engage with and incorporate diverse perspectives, particularly those from marginalised communities. It is recommended that the Policy Project team:

- i. continue to work with agencies to develop bespoke tools which are based on those of the Policy Project but align with their specific context, including for example operational policy and regulatory policy.
- ii. continue to partner with agencies such as Te Puni Kōkiri and Te Arawhiti to produce and promote Te Tiriti o Waitangi tools and resources.

- iii. provide training and support to policy practitioners to instil confidence in knowing how to engage diverse voices in policy creation and to co-design solutions.
- iv. continue to ensure that responsiveness to diversity is embedded and woven through all outputs.

7. Improve the annual policy quality assessment, so that agencies understand how these assessments operate, have confidence in the results, and use it to drive performance improvement

It is recommended that the Policy Project team develop and apply processes to enhance consistency of sampling and scoring policy papers, such as developing business rules documentation and/or undertaking cross-agency moderation of scoring.

8. Investigate the potential to develop system-wide metrics to measure policy quality and maturity, to provide clearer targets for the progress of the Policy Project and the policy system as a whole

This evaluation has scratched the surface of how a policy system's quality and maturity can be measured and understood. The Policy Project team and governance boards could undertake further work in this area to provide clearer targets for the progress of the Policy Project and the policy system as a whole.

APPENDIX A: EXAMPLE OF POLICY PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS, AS AT MARCH 2021

Policy Project activities and outputs	
<p>Products – resources and publications</p>	<p>Policy improvement frameworks and related tools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy Quality Framework, plus full and summary versions, Checklist for papers in development, and paper scoring template • Policy Skills Framework, plus Map your skills profile, Map your team’s skills profile, and Development Pathways Tool • Policy Capability Framework, plus Light-touch policy capability review tool, Deep-dive policy capability review tool, and Deeper-dive policy capability review tool – with maturity rankings • Ministerial Policy Satisfaction Survey and Guide • Policy Methods Toolbox – Start Right, Design thinking, Futures thinking, Behavioural Insights, Community engagement, Treaty of Waitangi analysis <p>Guides</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start Right Guide • Policy Quality Framework – A guide on panels and processes for assessing policy papers • Writing for Ministers • Guidance for central government engagement with local government • Good Practice guide for community engagement • Principles and values for community engagement • Community engagement design tool • Selecting methods for community engagement • Guide to inclusive community engagement • Long-term Insights Briefings suite of guidance – High-level overview, High-level development process, Detailed steps of the development process, and checklist. <p>Other publications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy Project newsletters • Conversation trackers on key events and roundtables with senior leaders • Case studies e.g. IRD – using the Policy Capability Framework • Demonstration Project Report: Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy
<p>Services</p>	<p>Co-designing new products for the policy system with cross-agency working groups e.g. Development Pathways Tool, refreshed Policy Quality Framework, new methods (e.g. futures thinking), Guidance for Long-term insights briefings</p>

Policy Project activities and outputs

	<p>Tailored support, courses, workshops and training for agencies and groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Policy? (for graduates and interns) • Policy and Pizza – IPANZ New Professionals Network • Defining policy issues • Futures thinking • Commissioning • Problem definition • Intervention logic • Risk analysis • Applying the Policy Quality Framework to Cabinet papers • Applying the Policy Capability Framework • Using the Policy Skills Framework and the Development Pathways Tool <p>Advice and support to the Policy Profession Board and Tier 2 Policy Leaders' Network</p> <p>Briefing the Board and/or Tier 2s on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Policy Project work programme (e.g four-year plan, priorities for workstreams and specific projects e.g. refreshing the web pages) • significant challenges and opportunities to lift policy capability and performance across the system and within agencies e.g: collective workforce issues, collective training initiatives, refreshing the Policy Quality Framework, Open Government Partnership, Long-term insights briefings • insights on the current state of policy quality and capability e.g. analysis of findings from the policy information request, analysis of policy workforce data, analysis of policy remuneration data.
<p>Events</p>	<p>Policy Forums – for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing quality Cabinet papers • The new government's priorities • Population assessment tools • Using the local government guidance, Development Pathways Tool, Policy Quality Framework, and Ministerial Policy Satisfaction Survey <p>Senior Leaders Roundtables – for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brenton Caffin – Creating conditions for innovation • Professor Mark Moore – Understanding public value • Aaron Maniam – Foresight Governance in Singapore • Professor Paul Carney – Maximising collaboration between public servants and academics in evidence-based policy making

Policy Project activities and outputs

Developing policy on the policy system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaining agreement that the refreshed PQF be mandatory for all public service policy agencies from 2019/20 • Recommending the inclusion of a stewardship commitment device in the Public Service Act 2020 (Long-term Insights Briefings)
Contributing to wider system and public service initiatives led or mandated by others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open Government Partnership – community engagement resources • Long-term insights briefings – guidance • Guidance for central government engagement with local government
Leading and supporting inter-agency communities of practice, networks and other groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairing Functional Leads Group • Member of Strategic Futures Group • Establishing Policy Training Network and Policy Capability Leads group • Member of Behavioural Insights Community of Practice steering group

APPENDIX B: STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE

Table 3: Desired achievements and standards of performance for the interim evaluation of the Policy Project

Criteria	Key evaluation questions	Desired achievements	Standards of performance
Implementation of the Policy Project	How well is the Policy Project working, for whom, in what ways and in what circumstances?	The Policy Project's governance model is effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Policy Project's governance model provides effective strategic oversight of the work programme The Policy Project's governance model has the right capacity and skill mix to deliver the programme effectively
		The Policy Project's operating model is effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Policy Project's operating model is fit-for-purpose to achieve its intended outcomes The Policy Project's team has the right capacity and skill mix to deliver the programme effectively
		The Policy Project's products, services and events are being used by agencies and individuals in the system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy practitioners are aware of the Policy Project's products, services, events and opportunities Data shows high uptake of the Policy Project's products, services and events Policy practitioners report that they are accessing and using the Policy Project's products, services and events Use of the Policy Project's Policy Quality Framework and Policy Skills Framework are built into or used in performance management, development or coaching frameworks within agencies Agencies regularly use the Policy Capability Framework to support them to develop capability plans There are efficiency gains as agencies do not have to create similar collateral themselves

Criteria	Key evaluation questions	Desired achievements	Standards of performance
		The Policy Project's products, services and events are seen as credible, effective, relevant, useful and easy to use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Policy Project provides access to specific information and resources of wide interest across the policy system • The Policy Project's products, services and events facilitate a common understanding of policy quality, capability and skills between agencies • The Policy Project's products and services set the standard for high quality policy outputs • Policy practitioners report that the Policy Project's products, services and events are useful in informing their policy work • Policy practitioners report that the Policy Project products and services are boosting their confidence and competence in developing policy advice and their wider practice • Policy practitioners report that they have made changes to their practice as a result of engagement with the Policy Project
Achievement of anticipated outcomes	To what extent: a) is the focus on policy capability and the quality of policy advice improving across the public service?	There is an increased focus on policy capability and the quality of policy advice in the New Zealand public sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agencies and individuals report that the Policy Project is prompting a focus on raising, and maintaining, the benchmark for high quality policy advice • The Policy Project is supporting a culture of continuous improvement within policy agencies and teams • Agencies are embedding a focus on improving policy capability and the quality of policy advice into their organisations
	b) are the outcomes of policy capability	There is improvement in the policy capability of the New Zealand public sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Policy Project's products and services facilitate a common understanding of what excellent policy advice looks like • The Policy Project identifies gaps in the policy ecosystem and develops tools, resources or processes to fill these gaps • Use of Policy Project resources is facilitating cross-government, central and local government collaboration on policy advice

Criteria	Key evaluation questions	Desired achievements	Standards of performance
	<p>and the quality of policy advice improving across the public service?</p> <p>c) To what extent and how is the Policy Project contributing to the achievement of these outcomes?</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Policy Project is supporting workforce capability by identifying and addressing key skill areas for development • Policy practitioners report that they have improved their practices as a result of engagement with the Policy Project • Agencies are continuously striving to improve the quality of policy advice and policy capability
		Decision makers receive high quality policy advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy advice is grounded in evidence and informed by the needs of decisions makers (e.g., Ministers) • Feedback from Ministers and senior officials indicates that quality of policy advice has improved over time • The quality of policy advice is consistently high within agencies, between agencies and across the system • There is a better understanding of the dynamics of the policy capability focus within agencies
Maturity of the policy system	To what extent is the Policy Project contributing to enhancing the maturity of the policy system?	The Policy Project is facilitating connection and collaboration amongst the policy community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Policy Project is supporting a consistent language and approach for policy across the public service • The Policy Project is supporting the establishment of policy as a profession or a 'community of interest' • The Policy Project is promoting the sharing of good practice policy across agencies • The Policy Project is supporting consistent standards of professionalism and performance for agencies and individuals for policy across the public service • The Policy Project contributes to policy advice that improves the effectiveness of how the policy system functions • The Policy Project can assist agencies to mobilise effort to tackle common issues of interest across the policy system

Criteria	Key evaluation questions	Desired achievements	Standards of performance
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Policy Project encourages joined-up, no-surprises policy responses to policy issues
		The Policy Project promotes a best practice response to policy issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Policy Project resources give policy practitioners confidence that they are providing the right advice The Policy Project supports advice that stands on its own merits (writing, evidence and rationale) regardless of which agency it comes from or the decision maker it is intended for The Policy Project helps agencies to identify and/or reduce barriers to the generation of novel solutions to ‘wicked problems’ i.e., longstanding, complex policy issues The Policy Project supports ‘ground-up’ community generated responses to policy issues The Policy Project provides access to specific information and resources of wide interest across the policy system The Policy Project promotes best practice and innovative approaches to policy development internationally
		The Policy Project supports the policy system to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Policy Project promotes the need to centre the voices and perspectives of tangata whenua in policy development processes and advice. It encourages partnership and co-design The Policy Project resources are consistent with relevant official guidance related to the application of Te Tiriti and te ao Māori to the policy process
		The Policy Project supports diversity of perspectives within the policy system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Policy Project promotes the need to take account of diverse voices and perspectives (such as disability, ethnic communities, LGBTQI+) in policy development processes and advice The Policy Project creates no barriers to increased diversity within the policy community The Policy Project encourages policy practitioners to engage with ‘hard to reach’ and marginalised voices

APPENDIX C: DATA COLLECTION METHODS

This evaluation was conducted through a mixed methods approach, including qualitative engagement with Policy Project stakeholders, and qualitative and quantitative analysis of its outputs and outcomes. It was informed by a document review, key informant interviews and a mix of agency case studies and cross-agency focus groups.

Data collection and fieldwork

We collected a mix of qualitative and quantitative data through fieldwork and a document review between 1 April 2021 and 31 June 2021, which has been used to inform the findings of the evaluation.

Further information about each of these activities is provided below.

Key informant interviews

The evaluation conducted 15 key informant interviews with 21 key stakeholders from 12 public sector agencies involved in the design, implementation and governance of the Policy Project. This included:

- chief executives and deputy chief executives
- members of the Policy Profession Board
- members of the Tier 2 Policy Leaders' Network
- policy directors and general managers
- policy managers, and
- policy capability leads.

The key informant interviews followed the criteria and KEQs described in Appendix B, and sought to uncover how effectively the Policy Project is operating, the extent to which the programme is progressing towards its intended outcomes, and its strengths and areas for improvement. The interviews took between 30 and 75 minutes. The interviews followed a semi-structured guide to cover all the necessary topics in the sessions, but allow the conversation to flow freely.

Almost all interviews took place using Zoom or Microsoft Teams video conferencing software, which allowed for changes in COVID-19 Alert Levels during the data collection period.

Each interview was carried out by two members of the evaluation team (one to interview and one to take notes). Participants were interviewed individually or in small groups, and informed consent was obtained prior to the start of each interview. We also ensured that interviewees remained confidential in this evaluation report and specific quotes have generic descriptors to protect the identity of participants.

Case studies with public sector agencies

We undertook case study-style data collection with three public sector agencies²⁹ to document and analyse how the Policy Project has been used in a range of contexts.

²⁹ The originally agreed evaluation plan included six agency case studies. However, the evaluation team experienced difficulties in recruitment, with over half of the agencies approached declining to participate. The data collection approach therefore pivoted to a combination of agency case studies and cross-agency focus groups.

The three agencies were chosen based on their key characteristics as policy agencies in keeping with the system approach. These characteristics are detailed below:

Agency	Agency type	Policy staff
Case study 1	Large policy shop with some operations delivery	Over 200 FTE
Case study 2	Medium sized policy shop with some operations delivery	81 to 200 FTE
Case study 3	Medium sized policy shop with some operations delivery	31 to 80 FTE

Each case study involved:

- an individual or small group interview with policy capability lead(s) or equivalent
- a small group interview with personnel from the agency’s human resources and organisational development teams (where possible)
- a focus group with Tier 3 and 4 managers
- one to two focus groups (each with six and eight participants) with policy practitioners. This will primarily focus on principal and senior policy personnel but may also include engagement with personnel at the advisor and graduate levels.

The personnel had varying levels of involvement with the Policy Project. Therefore, we ensured that the content of the interviews and focus groups was tailored towards the participants’ awareness and use of the Policy Project’s activities and outputs (such as the Policy Improvement Frameworks, Policy Methods Toolbox, and workshops).

The one-on-one and small group interviews were based on a semi-structured interview guide which covered the KEQs.

The focus groups were facilitated using the ORID method:

- **Objective:** questions about facts related to participants’ experience of the Policy Project, such as use of its tools and resources
- **Reflective:** questions seeking reflections on the quality, effectiveness, and appropriateness of the experience discussed above
- **Interpretive:** questions seeking views on implications of the participants’ interaction with the Policy Project, such as how the tools and resources have impacted on their policy practice
- **Discussion:** questions designed to discuss strengths, weaknesses and potential changes to enhance the Policy Project.

The approach to case studies pivoted during the evaluation due to difficulty getting enough agencies to agree to participate. The original intent was to write up and analyse the case studies separately. However, agency concerns regarding confidentiality and participants’ desire for anonymity meant that the data generated through the case study interviews has been analysed and reported with that collected through cross-agency focus groups and key informant interviews.

Cross-agency focus groups

We conducted cross-agency focus groups and small group interviews with individuals from varying levels from nine agencies. Participants were recruited by providing an email invitation and information sheet and consent form to the policy capability lead(s) and/or senior managers in core public sector agencies,

selected in partnership with the Policy Project team. These were then distributed to policy personnel in the selected agencies. Interested individuals were invited to attend the focus groups targeted at their level (i.e. policy managers, policy capability leads and policy practitioners). The small group interviews and cross-agency focus groups followed the same format as described in the case studies.

Analysis of data and documents

We reviewed 71 key documents and data supplied by DPMC related to the Policy Project. This review primarily addressed KEQs related to the processes associated with delivery of the Policy Project's work programme and its overall strategic aims.

The documents and data included the following grouped list of documents.

- Summary and regular reporting documents about the Policy Project.
- Key resources from the Policy Project, such as the Policy Improvement Frameworks, Development Pathways Tool, and Policy Methods Toolbox.
- A sample of Conversation Trackers from Policy Project workshops.
- Head of the Policy Profession speeches and briefings.
- A sample of Policy Profession Board papers, meeting agenda and minutes.
- Policy performance and quality reporting.
- A sample of agency policy improvement work programmes.
- Policy workforce analysis.
- A sample of Policy Project online publications.
- Policy Project workshop data.
- A sample of Policy Forum agendas.
- A sample of Policy Training Network agendas,
- A sample of Policy Project e-newsletters.

The document review contributed to our assessment of who the Policy Project is working for, in what circumstances, and how the Policy Project is contributing to achieving its intended outcomes. The information collected in the document review was used to compare and contrast against fieldwork data results.

The majority of this data was qualitative, as there was limited quantitative data available. The quantitative data used came from the Policy Project's webpage analytics, agency policy quality scores and ministerial satisfaction scores, and the number of workshops, courses and other events and attendance at them.

Engagement with the policy community during the evaluation

The evaluation engaged with a total of 78 policy staff from 16 core public sector agencies. This was comprised of:

- three large policy organisations
- four medium sized policy organisations
- four small policy organisations
- two population agencies
- three central agencies

The engagement included individuals at a range of levels within agencies. Table 4 provides a summary of the number of individuals engaged with at different levels of the system.

Table 4: Individuals engaged with during the evaluation

	Key informant interviews	Case study 1	Case study 2	Case study 3	Cross-agency focus groups	TOTAL
Senior leaders (Tier 1 and 2)	6					6
Managers (Tier 3 and 4)	11	3	5	9	1	29
Policy capability leads (including Chief Advisors)	3	1	5		2	11
Policy practitioners (principal senior, advisor and graduate)				13	17	30
Other (HR, OD, etc)		2				2
TOTAL	20	6	10	22	20	78

APPENDIX D: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS ON SELECTED POLICY PROJECT OUTPUTS

The following table presents a summary of the qualitative data collected about selected Policy Project outputs during the evaluation. This is based on interviews and focus groups with a total of 78 interviewees from 16 core public service agencies. Where available, quantitative data including website analytics and Policy Project reporting data is also provided.

Table 5: Summary of findings on selected Policy Project products, services and events

Policy Project output		
Policy Improvement Frameworks	Website analytics show the Policy Improvement Frameworks group page is the most viewed section of the website. Since its release in 2017, page views have increased steadily, with the average number of hits per month nearly doubling over time.	Qualitative feedback on each of the three frameworks is summarised below.
Policy Quality Framework (PQF)	<p>Policy Project website analysis shows that from February 2019 to March 2020 the Policy Quality Framework was the 3rd most viewed section of the website, with 7,562 page views.</p> <p>The February 2021 Policy Project Dashboard states that 100% of the 28 policy agencies are using the PQF.</p>	<p>The PQF is used by all of the 16 agencies that participated in the evaluation. The very high level of uptake is driven by the requirement, introduced in July 2019, for all government agencies with a policy appropriation to use the PQF to assess the quality of their policy advice after its delivery. Seven of the agencies that participated in the evaluation stated that they are attempting to embed it into their policy planning and quality assurance processes.</p> <p><i>The PQF is plastered on posters around our workspaces and people are encouraged to refer to it when thinking about how they approach a policy project and how they write briefings.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Policy capability lead <p>Most of the 30 policy practitioners interviewed were aware of the PQF, but less than one third (8/30) stated that they have used it to inform their practice. Three of these interviewees considered that the framework could be adapted to more easily support policy practitioners to use it at the ‘front end’ of policy development, as well as an ex-post assessment tool, which suggests that awareness of the <i>Checklist for reviewing papers in development</i> may be lower than the Policy Quality Framework itself.</p> <p><i>It does not lend itself so easily to starting a project and questions around “am I on the right track?” etc. It feels like more work required to get it to work effectively in this way.</i></p>

Policy Project output	Summary of quantitative data	Summary of findings from qualitative engagement
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Policy practitioner
Policy Skills Framework (PSF)	<p>From February 2019 to March 2020 the Policy Skills Framework was the 4th most viewed section of the website with 6,935 page views.</p> <p>The February 2021 Policy Project Dashboard states that 43% of the 28 policy agencies have used the PSF ‘in some way’.</p>	<p>Half of the 16 agencies that participated in the evaluation stated that they use the PSF. Organisational-level uses included informing professional development strategies, and progression frameworks and programmes. At the policy team level, managers use the PSF to direct performance reviews and professional development plans.</p> <p><i>We did an exercise assessing our skills, which was designed to inform individual conversations about PD plans, and a collective team conversation about collective strengths and gaps. It is generating discussion, interest and feedback.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Policy manager <p>Six of the 30 policy practitioners that participated in the evaluation stated that they had used the PSF, generally to identify areas of focus for career development.</p>
Policy Capability Framework (PCF)	<p>From February 2019 to March 2020 the Policy Capability Framework was the 7th most viewed section of the website with 4,408 page views.</p> <p>The February 2021 Policy Project Dashboard states that 39% of the 28 policy agencies have applied the PCF.</p>	<p>Representatives from five of the 16 agencies that participated in the evaluation stated that their organisation used that PCF. Examples of how it is being used include informing the development of an agency business plan, framing a gap analysis and informing development of a work plan for improving the capability of the organisation’s policy function.</p> <p>The simple structure of the PCF, organised under four components, was highlighted as effective:</p> <p><i>It provides a helpful, useful guide to organise our thoughts and structure our internal business plan in a coherent way.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Senior leader <p>In line with its intent to be used by managers, awareness and use of the PCF was mainly at the senior leadership and policy capability lead level. Only two of the 30 policy practitioners interviewed stated that they have used the PCF.</p>
Policy Methods Toolbox	Website analytics show increasing traffic to the Policy Methods Toolbox grouping of pages, becoming the most viewed grouping in February 2021.	<p>Ten out of the 30 policy practitioners interviewed had used at least one of the Policy Methods Toolbox³⁰ resources. The most commonly used tools were Start Right, Community Engagement, and Futures Thinking.</p> <p>Several interviewees commented that while the content is helpful, the materials are too dense and therefore not</p>

³⁰ The Policy Methods Toolbox includes Start Right, Design Thinking, Futures Thinking, Behavioural Insights, Community Engagement and Treaty of Waitangi Analysis

Policy Project output	Summary of quantitative data	Summary of findings from qualitative engagement
	The individual tools ranked from 8 th to 13 th most viewed.	<p>appropriate for the fast-paced context of policy development.</p> <p>The toolbox materials were most useful for new policy professionals at the beginning of their career. For this group, the breadth and depth of material was beneficial in reassuring them that they were following good practice.</p>
Courses, workshops and training for agencies and groups	1,043 individuals from sixteen agencies ³¹ attended courses, workshops and training events run by the Policy Project in the 2020/21 financial year. ³²	<p>Awareness of the availability of courses, workshops and training was low amongst stakeholders interviewed. However, it is important to note that the Policy Project does not provide training for the system as a whole; in the last two years the Policy Project has offered tailored trainings for individual agencies who request support or specific courses for a target group (for example, new graduates).</p> <p>Policy capability leads, managers and practitioners that were aware of the availability of training typically characterised them as effective. In particular, the What is Policy? course was seen as a useful introduction for graduates.</p> <p>Stakeholders particularly valued the opportunity to work with the Policy Project team to deliver inhouse training sessions to their staff. The ability to adjust the materials to develop a course that suits the context of the agency and the needs of its policy professionals is valued by stakeholders.</p> <p><i>The tailored offerings are a very good development and show the Policy Project is being responsive to what its customers need.</i></p> <p>– Senior leader</p>
Policy forums	Four policy forums, attended by 370 people, were held in the 2020/21 financial year. ³³	<p>The majority of the 46 senior leaders, managers and policy capability leads interviewed for the evaluation were aware of the policy forums and had attended at least one.</p> <p>Feedback from those that had attended policy forums was generally positive, with reports that the content is practical, interesting and relevant.</p>

³¹ This number of total attendees includes courses where “all agencies” attended, such as guidance on the LTIBs.

³² Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Number of people involved in Policy Community Building* (New Zealand: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, August 2021).

³³ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Number of people involved in Policy Community Building* (New Zealand: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, August 2021).

Policy Project output	Summary of quantitative data	Summary of findings from qualitative engagement
Senior Leaders Round Tables	No Round Tables were held in 2020/21 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the 2019/20 year, five Round Table events were held with 106 attendees. ³⁴	<p>Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these have not been held since early 2020. However, feedback from senior leaders was that these had been a valued opportunity to hear from thought leaders and there was a desire to see these events return when possible.</p> <p><i>The Policy Project seemed to tap into someone that was locally or coming to New Zealand who was pushing the thinking around policy. This was an important opportunity and I'd like to see them start up again.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Senior leader

³⁴ Figures provided in email communication from Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, August 2021.

APPENDIX E: RICH PICTURE

