

HOW TO ASSESS YOUR GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT STRATEGY (GDS)

The Government Department Strategies Index Framework

1 Opportunities and Threats	2 Capabilities and Resources	3 Vision and Benefits	4 Approach and Focus	5 Implementation and Accountability	6 Alignment and Authority
1.1 Does it identify opportunities going forward?	2.1 Does it identify current and future capabilities (e.g. skills, partnerships/relationships)?	3.1 Does it provide a clear vision as to what success would look like (a desired future condition)?	4.1 Does it break down the vision into a number of strategic goals/objectives that are tangible, specific and different from each other?	5.1 Does it identify who is responsible for implementing the GDS?	6.1 Does it discuss predecessors to the strategy and identify any lessons learnt from these?
1.2 Does it identify threats going forward?	2.2 Does it identify what capabilities it does not have and needs to acquire or work around?	3.2 Does it identify who the beneficiaries are and how they will benefit?	4.2 Does it identify a range of strategic approaches to solve the problem?	5.2 Does it identify who will report on its progress?	6.2 Does it align with its department's SOI?
*1.3 Does it contain a clear statement describing the problem that this strategy is trying to solve?	2.3 Does it identify current and future resources (e.g. financial)?	3.3 Does it describe how success will be measured and over what time frame?	4.3 Does it clearly describe the chosen approach, outlining what it will and will not do?	5.3 Does it explain how progress will be reported (e.g. reports and statistics) and over what time frames?	6.3 Does it align with its department's 4YP?
	2.4 Does it identify what resources it does not have and needs to acquire or work around?		4.4 Does it highlight the risks, costs and benefits of the chosen pathway/ approach (e.g. possible unintended consequences)?	5.4 Does it discuss whether the GDS will undergo a final review once it is completed, updated or expired?	6.4 Does it align with its department's annual report?

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

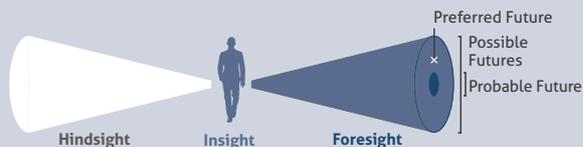
Strategy concerns choice. What we choose to focus on, as individuals, communities and a nation, indicates the direction we are likely to travel.

Depending on the intensity of our focus and the quality of our strategic instruments, we might drift slowly on a fixed trajectory, only changing direction in response to a disruptive event, or we may move rapidly and purposefully, working hard to be proactive, agile and open to emerging opportunities and challenges.

The cone of plausibility (Figure 1) illustrates the connection between hindsight, insight and foresight. It helps distinguish between the probable, possible and preferred futures.

The framework can contribute to better stewardship in terms of publishing better strategy documents, improving transparency, delivering better public engagement and critical assessment, and developing a deeper understanding of trade-offs and the way forward.

Figure 1: The cone of plausibility



Excerpt from *Think Piece 21 – Strategy Stewardship Matters: Utilising the Government Department Strategies Index*. The figure overleaf depicts the six elements and twenty-two sub-elements of the framework used to assess each GDS. To learn more about the application of the framework, see page 5 of *Working Paper 2015/04: Methodology for the Government Department Strategies Index New Zealand*, which can be downloaded from the McGuinness Institute website – www.mcguinnessinstitute.org/working-papers.

GLOSSARY

Foresight

The ability to anticipate and assess future events as well as to strategise to avert future dangers and grasp future opportunities.

Government Department Strategy (GDS)

A government department strategy must

- (i) be a publicly available statement or report;
- (ii) be generated by government departments with a national rather than a local focus;
- (iii) demonstrate long-term thinking in such a way that the strategy links to a long-term vision or aim, and ideally provide clarity over the factors that may impinge on the attainment of that vision or aim; and
- (iv) guide the department's thinking and operations over the long term (i.e. contain a work programme to achieve change over two years or more).

Hindsight

Hindsight is the knowledge gained from analysing past events and trends.

Insight

Insight is the ability to explore the impacts and consequences of current events.

Plan

A plan is operational in nature; it focuses on who will do what and when. It does not explore tensions/trade-offs in the external environment or the strategic options in any detail.

Possible Futures

Possible futures are the wide range of potential outcomes (including probable and improbable futures). Possible futures speak to the idea of 'what we know,' 'what we know we don't know,' and 'what we don't know we don't know.'

Preferred Future

A preferred future is a description of a future that is most desired by an individual or group.

Probable Future

The probable future is the most likely outlook.

Strategy

A strategy maintains a balance between ends, ways and means. Professor Lawrence Freedman, in his book *Strategy: A history* suggested that strategy is 'about identifying objectives; and about the resources and methods available for meeting such objectives. This balance requires not only finding out how to achieve desired ends but also adjusting ends so that realistic ways can be found to meet them by available means'.