

CRITICAL FRIEND – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The critical friend service involves providing policy development support to Departments, which are in the lead in policy-making, and providing the type of friendly challenge function that the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit introduced. The critical friend works in partnership with a Department from an early stage in a major policy review, seeking to ensure that cross-cutting issues are picked up and that policy-making makes good use of evidence, and the right connections with the Priorities and Budget. The development of a critical friend service by the Economic and Public Service Directorate within OFMDFM was endorsed by Permanent Secretaries' Group Sub Committee D in June 2003.

Feedback from previous critical friend exercises was that the contribution of the service had been valuable in that it provided a “safe” challenge to the Department’s thinking, from a source which was aware of many of the constraints facing it but at the same time independent and objective. The capacity to step back and ask questions from an outsider’s or cross-cutting perspective was valuable. The engagement had been deemed useful at all stages.

This section of the Policylink website is designed to provide useful information for anyone wishing to use the critical friend service. It provides guidance on how to use the critical friend service as well as case studies of previous experiences. Templates are also provided should you wish to evaluate the progress of the service. If you have any queries regarding the critical friend service contact the Policy Innovation Unit by email at policylink@ofmdfmi.gov.uk. [We may be able to put policy teams in touch with potential critical friends within the NI Administration.]