



# Critical Friend examples



# Introduction

---



- Critical friending examples based on interviews with senior staff members in the Strategy Unit
- Also draws on a small brainstorm held with other departments to discuss the role of critical friending
- Builds on “what is the critical friending offer”
- Highlights some of the successes and lessons learnt from SU/other departments’ experiences

# Critical Friending: Strategy Unit examples – supporting depts (1)



Follow-up to UK Fisheries project		
Approach	Successes & lessons learnt	Type of offer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Invited on to Defra's Strategic Fisheries board to explain rationale of project findings</li> <li>→ SU keen to ensure content of report captured accurately</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Clear process put in place &amp; buy-in from Defra secured</li> <li>→ Helped Director of Fisheries understand underlying logic of report</li> <li>→ Depts already aligned around the strategy so not attempting to challenge report's fundamental principles</li> </ul> <p><i>Could have brought stronger challenge to bear on some areas earlier on</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Helped quality of thinking &amp; strategic focus</li> </ul>

# Critical Friending: Strategy Unit examples – supporting depts (2)



Implementation of Energy White Paper		
Approach	Successes & lessons learnt	Type of offer
<p>→ Agreed with DTI/Defra would help review progress &amp; targets, identify gaps/trade-offs required to deliver on Energy White Paper</p>	<p>→ SU able to move from a partnership role (work on energy issues in lead up to WP) to a strategic challenge role</p> <p>→ Produced a good overview of progress on implementation</p> <p>→ Helped clarify synergies/trade-offs</p> <p>→ Able to contribute “workable” solutions – didn’t simply throw up more challenges</p> <p><i>Roles not as clearly defined as they could be</i></p>	<p>→ Contributed some content material</p> <p>→ Offered practical help in finding solutions</p>

# Critical Friending: Strategy Unit examples – supporting depts (2)



SU/DfES Youth Services Project		
Approach	Successes & lessons learnt	Type of offer
<p>→ On project completion, SU invited by DfES to help with more detailed follow-up work in lead-up to a Youth Green Paper</p> <p>→ Added more content over 2 month period incl. more analysis of how proposals fitted into broader initiatives e.g. Local Area Agreements</p>	<p>→ Developed good/"non-threatening" relationship with DfES – key to success</p> <p>→ Emphasis on <i>critical friend</i> – there to help department resolve problems – not simply provide another set of comments</p> <p>→ Valued as free from day to day constraints e.g. Ministers</p> <p><i>Important to identify positive impact of critical friending &amp; have time &amp; resources available</i></p> <p><i>Process planning important – could have engaged with DfES earlier to maximise impact</i></p>	<p>→ Intensive critical friending – offered deep &amp; broad content knowledge – helped take pressure off DfES</p> <p>→ Helped with selling proposals in Whitehall</p>

# Critical Friending: Strategy Unit examples – internal support



“Red” teaming projects		
Approach	Successes & lessons learnt	Type of offer
<p>→ Critical friend took part in “red teaming” at request of SU Direct Payments for Older People project</p> <p>→ Role was to point out what could go wrong with proposals; perverse consequences; challenge integration of proposals.</p>	<p>→ Persuaded project team to widen brief i.e. take account of both health and social care impacts</p> <p>→ Provided a useful challenge function – rather than substituting new evidence</p> <p>→ Able to bring to bear experience of analytical rigour, developing evidence-based policy making, addressing issues from a 1<sup>st</sup> principles basis</p> <p><i>Important to have regular, informal contact throughout project</i></p>	<p>→ Not “intensive” critical friending – not necessary to have in-depth content expertise in subject matter – able to test thinking, underpinning principles &amp; provide a fresh perspective</p>

# Critical Friending: Other examples



DfT's "policy challenge" function		
Approach	Successes & lessons learnt	Type of offer
<p>→ DfT's strategy division picks up on any cross-cutting issues where dept's capacity or response may need strengthening</p> <p>→ Ad-hoc function. Policy/specialist colleagues approach strategy division for a "strategic angle" on their workstreams; in return help the strategy division to keep up to speed with day-to-day policy work.</p>	<p>→ Contribute to discussion papers</p> <p>→ Meetings draw together interested parties to make sure individual policy areas pick up wider strategic questions facing dept.</p> <p><i>Getting the initial approach right is important. Policy leads don't like to know they're being "challenged" so an informal approach encourages a constructive/collaborative relationship.</i></p>	<p>→ 2-way gains from critical friending process</p> <p>→ Aids broader communication/joining-up across Dept</p> <p>→ Builds strategic focus in individual policy areas</p>

# Critical Friendring: Other examples



<b>Cabinet Office Corporate Development Group/DTI's Foresight programme</b>		
<b>Approach</b>	<b>Successes &amp; lessons learnt</b>	<b>Type of offer</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Began in SU (CF moved to Corporate Development Group) - offered critical friendring to a Foresight project – playing a facilitation/challenge role at meetings.</li> <li>→ Intensive workload of projects meant staff tended to get caught up in the detail of work – didn't have space to think about fundamental questions. So delivering projects to Ministers took longer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Offered considerable experience in Futures work</li> <li>→ Ensured project members stepped back &amp; thought about ideal outcomes/looked at deliverables/how to convince stakeholders</li> <li>→ Improved quality of project output</li> <li>→ As a result of positive experience every project now has three internal critical friendring reviews built into the process (at points where major review decisions are made)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Some subject knowledge</li> <li>→ Good listening skills</li> <li>→ Able to bring own perspective/get to "heart" of issue</li> <li>→ Able to ask probing questions</li> </ul>

# Summary – lessons learnt

---



- Client needs to understand role of critical friend – preferably clarify in writing
- Make clear aim of input is to help deliver better outcomes – “on their side”
- Sell your experience - give your client examples of where your input has been successful previously & what the long-term benefits were
- Make sure it’s a two-way process – provide client with opportunity to critique you as well
- Manage expectations - if you do not know all of the answers, say so.
- Recognise the context of your client’s work. Make clear they should tell you if your ideas/suggestions would not work & explain why
- After each meeting record where you started and ended up – if your client agrees, this is a good test that the approach is working
- Plan for aftercare – if you do a good job, people will want to come back to you

