

Improving policy across government

Andrew Kibblewhite, Chief Executive of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and Head of the Policy Profession addressed a sell-out IPANZ audience on 26 May. Kibblewhite discussed the current state of the New Zealand policy profession, what future policy success will look like and the steps the policy community needs to take to get there. He noted that:

Great policy advice helps Ministers make good decisions. Decisions that improve the lives of New Zealanders. Great policy is much more than the collection of facts or data. It is advice that helps Ministers navigate the messy, complex world we live in.

Reflecting on his own career in policy, Kibblewhite discussed how policy advisors now face new challenges and opportunities, including demands from citizens and business for a service delivery experience comparable to the best the private sector offers, taking advantage of new technology and analytical tools and understanding changing demographics. He argued that to deliver real benefits, the policy community needs to use new methods of engagement to get a better understanding of New Zealanders' lives and how they experience public services: New tools such as design thinking have the potential to generate evidence and insights to enhance our policy advice.

Kibblewhite called for the policy community to knock down the silos between agencies, engage with the frontline during the policy process and build implementation strategies into policy design. He highlighted the need to operate as one public service with joined up policy advice. He called on agencies to work together to develop the policy people capability with a view to overall system capability saying we need the right people, in the right place, working on the right things.

Kibblewhite disagreed with commentators who claim that there has been a reduction in free and frank advice but agreed that the policy community must continue enhancing the key relationship for the policy profession - how we work with Ministers. He noted that free and frank advice to successive governments is now a legislative obligation not just a convention, and implies investment in the longer term health or stewardship of the policy function. He argued that the policy advisors should be shaping the policy debate and not let the urgent distract us from the important or longer term issues.

Kibblewhite has established a team in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet called the Policy Project. He concluded by saying that if the programme is successful we will have created a powerful policy culture, characterised by innovation, continuous improvement and sharing good practice. And that will mean we can articulate, tackle and solve the big problems facing our country, capture the opportunities that have escaped us this far. And improve New Zealanders' lives.

For more information about the Policy Project see: www.dPMC.govt.nz/policyproject

