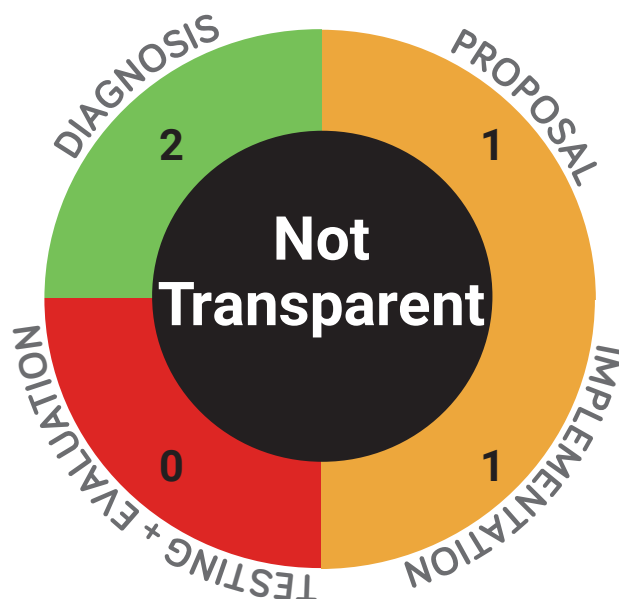# Is the evidence behind policies transparent?

Department for Work and Pensions, HM Treasury and Department for Education

Get Britain Working White Paper

April 2025

An evidence transparency review of the white paper proposed to
"Ensure all young people aged 18 to 21 are learning or earning."

Overview:

Get Britain Working White Paper is part of government's proposal to reform employment, health and skills support to tackle economic inactivity and support people into good work.

The policy aims *to deliver a Youth Guarantee so that all 18 to 21-year-olds in England have access to education, training or help to find a job or an apprenticeship.* Scored by volunteers around the UK, **this policy failed to meet the transparency test of whether a motivated citizen can see what evidence the government has used and how.**

- The white paper[1] highlights the problem with well-cited evidence about its scale and impact – from regional disparity to data on care, education and health backgrounds explaining the increase of young people not in education, training or employment.
- Costs related to the proposals and implementation of the Youth Guarantee are mentioned. However, the evidence and assumptions underpinning the costs and how they were calculated are missing.
- There is no discussion of how evidence was evaluated.

The Department for Work and Pensions, HM Treasury and the Department for Education have previously received low scores in transparency reviews[2,3]. The Department for Work and Pensions has, though, provided much clearer evidence reviews than in this policy.

Assessment against the Evidence transparency framework

Using the Evidence transparency framework developed in partnership with the Institute for Government (see notes below), volunteer scorers were invited to assess transparency on the four elements of a policy using a scoring system of 0-3[4]. A score of 1 indicates that evidence is mentioned. For a policy to be transparent it should achieve 2s (supporting evidence is linked to relevant parts of the policy and properly cited) or 3s (assessment of the evidence, uncertainties and assumptions is shared). It must also score at least 1 on plans for testing and evaluation. Scores indicate transparency, not approval of the policy.

Diagnosis score: 2

The white paper scored a clear 2 on the diagnosis stage as scorers could easily see the supporting evidence linked to the relevant parts of the policy. The rationale for the diagnosis was easy to understand and comprehensive, with the scale of the problem and the effects associated set out well.

It failed to score higher as there was no visible assessment or critical discussion of the cited evidence and no information about its strengths and weaknesses.

Proposal score: 1

Scorers could not see the evidence behind the different proposals underpinning the Youth Guarantee. They could not follow the rationale behind the government choosing this proposal over others based on evidence in the white paper.

Discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen proposals, as well as alternative options, is also missing. Moreover, there is no mention of the assumptions underlying the costs associated with each proposal, leaving it as a guessing game of how it was calculated.

Implementation score: 1

Whilst the paper is clear on the different ways the Youth Guarantee will be implemented i.e. via apprenticeships, fundings and trailblazer programmes, the evidence is unclear on why these methods were chosen. Scorers also could not find discussion around what evidence was looked at and what alternative options, if any, were considered.

Testing and Evaluation score: 0

Scorers noted that the document superficially covered how the Youth Guarantee will be tested and evaluated, such as setting up a panel group and launching trailblazers with agreed outcomes and approach to measuring impact.

However, the lack of details around specific metrics for evaluation, what success looks like and a timeline to measure it, resulted in a score of 0.

Evidence transparency framework and methodology

The Evidence transparency framework[5] is a 0-3 scoring system asking whether a motivated citizen can see what evidence has been used for different aspects of a policy: diagnosis (what the problem is), proposal (what to do about it) and implementation (how to do it), and how clear plans are for consultation inputs, monitoring and evaluation.

The framework was initially published in Show your Workings[6] in 2015 when the Institute for Government and Sense about Science established that, in order to evaluate policy evidence and the effectiveness of initiatives to improve it, government's use of evidence needs to be more transparent. The framework was modified through crowd-sourced testing and two spot check reviews of UK government departments[7,8] and through consultations and workshops across government.

The framework is included below.

Policy documentation reviewed

Efforts were made to locate all supporting evidence even if it was not cited specifically in the policy. Scorers reviewed the following publications:

- Get Britain Working White Paper[9]
- Get Britain Working Press Release[10]

Scoring

Scorers included people who were familiar with research, with policy and with neither; they were provided with links to cited policy papers and the Evidence transparency framework. Accompanying guidance reiterated that scoring is for transparency and not approval of the policy. Collated scores were reviewed and calibrated by a steering group from Sense about Science.

1   Department for Work and Pensions, HM Treasury and Department for Education, 2024. Get Britain Working, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67448dd1ece939d55ce92fee/get-britain-working-white-paper.pdf
2   Sense about Science, 2016. Transparency of Evidence: An assessment of government policy proposals May 2015 to May 2016, https://senseaboutscience.org/activities/transparency-evidence/
3   Sense about Science, 2018. Transparency of evidence: a spot check of government policy proposals July 2016 to July 2017, https://senseaboutscience.org/activities/transparency-evidence-spot-check/
4
Sense about Science, Institute for Government, Alliance for Useful Evidence, 2017. Evidence Transparency Framework, https://senseaboutscience.org/transparency-of-evidence/evidence-transparency-framework/
5   Sense about Science, Institute for Government, Alliance for Useful Evidence, 2017. Evidence Transparency Framework, https://senseaboutscience.org/transparency-of-evidence/evidence-transparency-framework/
6   Jill Rutter and Gen Gold, 2015. Show your workings: Assessing how government uses evidence to make policy, https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/report/show-your-workings
7   Sense about Science, 2016. Transparency of Evidence: An assessment of government policy proposals May 2015 to May 2016, https://senseaboutscience.org/activities/transparency-evidence/
8   Sense about Science, 2018. Transparency of evidence: a spot check of government policy proposals July 2016 to July 2017, https://senseaboutscience.org/activities/transparency-evidence-spot-check/
9   Department for Work and Pensions, HM Treasury and Department for Education, 2024. Get Britain Working, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67448dd1ece939d55ce92fee/get-britain-working-white-paper.pdf
10   Department for Work and Pensions, 2024. Biggest employment reforms in a generation unveiled to Get Britain Working again, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/biggest-employment-reforms-in-a-generation-unveiled-to-get-britain-working-again

Evidence transparency framework

Diagnosis	LEVEL:	0	1	2	3	Example
This concerns why something is proposed, ie what the issue is that will be addressed. The document should explain: • what policymakers know about the issue, its causes, effects, and scale • how policymakers have assessed the strengths and weaknesses of that evidence.	**So, can you see what evidence has been used and the role it has played?**	Not clearly enough for level 1.	Evidence is mentioned, with some explanation of how it has been used.	As in level 1 but the supporting evidence is linked to the relevant parts of the policy, properly cited and you could find the source.	As in level 2 but the evidence base is also assessed and uncertainties and contradictory information are acknowledged.	The government has assessed the extent of problem drinking in the UK: the economic and human cost

Proposal	LEVEL:	0	1	2	3	Example
What is the government's chosen intervention? The document should explain: • why the government has chosen this intervention • what evidence, if any, that choice is based on • how policymakers have assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence base, including what has been tried before and whether that worked or not • whether there are other options and why they have not been chosen • what the government plans to do about any part of the intervention that has not yet been decided upon. • what the costs and benefits are estimated to be and the assumptions behind those calculations.	**So, can you see what evidence has been used and the role it has played?**	Not clearly enough for level 1.	Evidence is mentioned, with some explanation of how it has been used.	As in level 1 but the supporting evidence is linked to the relevant parts of the policy, properly cited and you could find the source.	As in level 2 but the evidence base is also assessed and uncertainties and contradictory information are acknowledged.	The government has chosen to implement minimum unit pricing for alcohol, instead of, for example, increasing alcohol taxes or starting a new educational campaign.

	LEVEL:	0	1	2	3	Example
Implementation How will the chosen intervention be rolled out? The document should explain: • why this method for delivering the intervention has been chosen • what evidence, if any, that decision is based on • whether there are other methods and if so the reasons for not choosing them • if the way to deliver the intervention is still being decided, what the method is for deciding • what the costs and benefits are estimated to be and the assumptions behind those calculations	**So, can you see what evidence has been used and the role it has played?**	Not clearly enough for level 1.	Evidence is mentioned, with some explanation of how it has been used.	As in level 1 but the supporting evidence is linked to the relevant parts of the policy, properly cited and you could find the source.	As in level 2 but the evidence base is also assessed and uncertainties and contradictory information are acknowledged.	The government has decided to implement minimum unit pricing through a voluntary agreement with major retailers rather than through legislation.
Testing and evaluation How will we know if the policy has worked? The document should explain: • plans to test the policy first, or reasons why not • plans to measure the impact of the policy and the outcomes that will be measured • plans to evaluate the effects of the policy, including a timetable. • plans for using consultation	**So, can you see what evidence has been used and the role it has played?**	Not clearly enough for level 1.	Some indication of success measures but no plans for testing/ evaluation (or explanation of why inappropriate).	More comprehensive success measures (or process for developing them outlined). Also provides details about use of testing and plans for evaluation or explains why testing or evaluation would not be appropriate.	As in level 2 but explains the reasons for the use of testing and plans for evaluation. It is also clear what will happen to the results of testing and evaluation, including timing and plans for publication.	The government sets out how it plans to measure the results of the policy. The government sets out plans for piloting, initial evaluation of those results and timetable for publication and then describes decision process around roll-out if the evaluation is satisfactory.