CONCEPT

Board Paper and Policy Brief Writing: Decision Papers and Ministerial Submissions



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Technical depth: Conceptual · **Practical mode:** Case study

Introduction

Boards, committees and ministers can only decide as well as the papers in front of them allow. Papers that bury the recommendation, omit realistic options or understate risk lead to deferred decisions, repeated agenda items and approvals that later unravel. This Core Concept course equips senior officials and executives to write, commission and clear decision documents that get a clear answer first time. Participants apply recognised governance, appraisal and plain language frameworks to cases from several sectors and leave with a Decision Paper Pack built on a paper from their own organisation.

Course Objectives

- Determine what a board, committee or minister needs from a paper and match its type to the decision sought
- Structure board papers, policy briefs and ministerial submissions so the recommendation is clear on the first page
- Judge whether an options appraisal is balanced, evidenced and proportionate to the decision
- Direct and review drafts prepared by others, applying consistent quality criteria before clearance
- Present risk, uncertainty, dissent and sensitive advice candidly without weakening the recommendation
- Produce a Decision Paper Pack that sets the writing standard for the participant's office

Target Audience

- Executives and senior officials who submit papers to boards, executive committees or ministers
- Heads of policy, strategy and planning units accountable for the advice their teams produce
- Board and cabinet secretariat leads responsible for the quality of decision packs
- Directors of finance, legal and risk functions whose advice feeds major decisions
- Chiefs of staff and heads of executive offices who clear papers before they go forward

Course Outline

Day 1: How Decision-Makers Read and Use Papers

- Decision Paper Types: For Decision, For Discussion and For Noting
- Governing Body Information Needs Under ISO 37000 Accountability Principles
- Board Pack and Submission Cycles: Deadlines, Sponsors and Clearance Chains
- Policy Cycle Model: Agenda Setting, Formulation, Decision, Implementation and Evaluation
- Current-State Review of Recent Papers Against a Decision-Readiness Checklist

Day 2: Document Structures and Appraisal Frameworks

- Board Paper Architecture: Resolution Sought, Summary, Background, Options and Recommendation
- Two-Page Policy Brief Structure: Problem, Evidence, Options and Recommendation
- Ministerial Submission Format: Issue, Timing, Recommendation, Handling and Annexes
- Options Appraisal Using Multi-Criteria Analysis and Cost-Benefit Summaries
- OECD Regulatory Impact Assessment Principles for Policy Proposals

Day 3: Shaping and Directing Decision Documents

- Executive Summary Review Using the Minto Governing Thought Test
- Evidence Exhibits: Tables, Charts and Source Quality Grading
- Implications Sections: Financial, Legal, Risk, People and Stakeholder Impacts
- Plain Language Review of Technical Content Using ISO 24495-1
- Commissioning Briefs and Review Notes for Staff Who Draft Papers

Day 4: Risk, Sensitivity and Quality Assurance

- Risk and Uncertainty Disclosure Using ISO 31000 Likelihood and Consequence Language
- Conflict of Interest Declarations, Confidentiality Markings and Record Keeping
- Contested Advice: Presenting Dissent, Minority Views and Unwelcome Recommendations
- Cognitive Bias Checks on Recommendations: Optimism Bias, Anchoring and Groupthink
- Clearance Workflow and Secretariat Review Criteria for Paper Quality Assurance

Day 5: Case Work and the Decision Paper Pack

- Capital Investment Board Paper Case Study: Diagnosing a Deferred Decision
- Public Health Policy Brief Case Study: Presenting Evidence Under Time Pressure
- Infrastructure Funding Submission Case Study: Handling and Communications Annex
- Own-Organisation Paper Rewrite and Decision Paper Pack Assembly
- Peer Review Panel Using a Decision-Maker Scoring Rubric

Skills You Will Gain

- Decision Paper Design
- Policy Brief Writing
- Options Appraisal Review
- Evidence Synthesis
- Risk and Uncertainty Communication
- Paper Clearance and Quality Assurance
- Commissioning of Written Advice
- Governance Documentation

Why Attend This Course

- Take back a Decision Paper Pack, including a rewritten paper from your own organisation, ready to use at your next board or submission cycle
- Spend less time rewriting your team's drafts because you can tell them precisely what a good paper needs
- Present difficult or unwelcome advice in a way decision-makers can act on
- Compare the conventions of boards and government offices with senior peers from other sectors and countries

Conclusion

Every significant decision an organisation takes passes through a written paper, and the quality of that paper shapes the quality of the decision. This course moves from how boards and ministers read papers, through the structures and appraisal frameworks behind sound advice, to directing drafts and handling risk, dissent and clearance. The final day applies that material to realistic cases and to a paper from each participant's own organisation, producing a Decision Paper Pack that raises the standard of written advice across the participant's office.