

Research on the influence of political staff in Ministerial and Prime Ministerial Offices and political neutrality in the New Zealand public service.

Tables setting out the distribution of responses and open text answers to questions.

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Introduction

Earlier this year we distributed a questionnaire to individuals listed on a 'contacts database' held by the New Zealand Institute of Public Administration. The questionnaire was a modified form of one that we used in 2005 when we first started to research political staff in the New Zealand context. At that point in time we used three hard-copy questionnaires and targeted three respondent groups – public servants, Ministers of the Crown (present and former) and political staff (present and former). That first round of research was supported by the State Services Commission and the then Leadership Development Centre. Over the 12-year period since we have continued to research in this area, and have published quite widely, including in the leading academic journals in our field. We jointly edited a collection of country case studies and this was published by Edward Elgar in 2010. A second volume is nearing completion and will again be published by Edward Elgar with a likely publication date in 2018. However, we have also sought to engage with the New Zealand policy community on the issue of political staffers, and the wider issues around the enablers and dis-enablers of the public services' capacity to discharge its constitutional responsibility to provide governments with free, frank and comprehensive advice, and do so in a 'fearless' manner.

The New Zealand Institute of Public Administration (IPANZ) has provided a number of opportunities for ourselves and others to engage in the important conversations around public service neutrality. We want to place on record our thanks to IPANZ for agreeing to distribute a questionnaire through their contacts database. The research was confidential and the responses were anonymous. And while, in a normative sense, we make no secret of the fact that we share the strong value proposition that informs IPANZ as a professional body, the organisation bears no responsibility for the research, nor for any conclusions which we may draw as we proceed to analyse the data.

Our point of entry into this inquiry was the advent of the political adviser – what we and others have referred to as a 'third element' in executive government. As we noted in the introduction that accompanied our recent questionnaire,

"The questionnaire refers to 'Ministerial Advisors'. By this term we mean staff who are employed in Ministerial offices on 'event-based' contracts. They are sometimes referred to as Political staff or advisors and are not required to be politically neutral. Indeed the basis of their employment may, in part be a reflection of their commitment to the political or policy preferences of their Minister and they may be involved in activities (for example negotiations between governing parties) that would be deemed to be inappropriate for a politically neutral public servant".

We reinforced this message in the reminders that went out to those invited to participate in the research. These reminders notwithstanding it is clear that, for a very small minority of our respondents there was some confusion between those staff who are employed by Ministerial

Services on 'event-based' contracts and who are not required to meet the fundamental public service test of political neutrality, and those who work in Ministerial Offices – typically as 'Private Secretaries' who are seconded from departments or agencies that fall within a Minister's portfolio responsibilities.

We want to take this opportunity to share the initial results with those who participated in the research, and those who had the opportunity to do so. We thank all those who were invited for considering our request.

At this point we have not provided a commentary. That will come in due course as analyse the data and seek to identify and – where possible – explain differences in responses to particular questions. The import of the results are, in very many respects, quite clear and we hope that this research will help to inform the very necessary on-going conversations that needs to occur if New Zealand is to have the benefit of the immense expertise, institutional knowledge and commitment to the public good that resides in its public service, protect the political neutrality of the institution, and ensure that its capability is realised in good government and governance.

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What is the nature of your position? - Selected Choice

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Tier one (i.e. Chief Executive)	9	1.4	1.8	1.8
	Tier two (i.e. first report to the Chief Executive)	30	4.7	6.0	7.8
	Tier three (i.e. report to Chief Executive through a manager)	199	31.1	39.6	47.4
	Other (please specify)	264	41.3	52.6	100.0
	Total	502	78.4	100.0	
Missing	System	138	21.6		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate which of the following best describes your department or agency's major functional focus (please select ONE option only): - Selected Choice

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Policy	97	15.2	19.5	19.5
	Service delivery	113	17.7	22.7	42.3
	Policy and service delivery	207	32.3	41.6	83.9
	Funding/purchase	27	4.2	5.4	89.3
	Other (please specify)	53	8.3	10.7	100.0
	Total	497	77.7	100.0	
Missing	System	143	22.3		
Total		640	100.0		

If you have previously been employed in the state sector, what was the nature of the last position you held? - Selected Choice

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Tier one (i.e. Chief Executive)	6	.9	4.9	4.9
	Tier two (i.e. first report to the Chief Executive)	25	3.9	20.5	25.4
	Tier three (i.e. report to Chief Executive through a manager)	36	5.6	29.5	54.9
	Other (please specify)	32	5.0	26.2	81.1
	Have never been employed in the state sector	23	3.6	18.9	100.0
	Total	122	19.1	100.0	
Missing	System	518	80.9		
Total		640	100.0		

In your capacity as a public servant or government official, have you at any time had direct contact with ministerial advisors?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Frequent contact	176	27.5	29.9	29.9
	Infrequent contact	166	25.9	28.2	58.1
	Minimal contact	146	22.8	24.8	82.9
	No contact at all	101	15.8	17.1	100.0
	Total	589	92.0	100.0	
Missing	System	51	8.0		
Total		640	100.0		

As a present or former public servant, were/are you aware of any protocols governing contact between ministerial advisors in your minister's office and departmental officials? - Selected

Choice

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes (please tell us what those protocols are)	188	29.4	34.3	34.3
	No	255	39.8	46.5	80.8
	Unsure/not applicable	105	16.4	19.2	100.0
	Total	548	85.6	100.0	
Missing	System	92	14.4		
Total		640	100.0		

How long, in total, were you/have you been employed in the public service or state sector? -

Selected Choice

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	less than 1 year	36	5.6	6.6	6.6
	1-5 years	124	19.4	22.9	29.5
	6-10 years	125	19.5	23.1	52.6
	11-15 years	97	15.2	17.9	70.5
	16-20 years	63	9.8	11.6	82.1
	21 years or longer (please specify number of years)	97	15.2	17.9	100.0
	Total	542	84.7	100.0	
Missing	System	98	15.3		
Total		640	100.0		

What is your gender?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	239	37.3	42.3	42.3
	Female	316	49.4	55.9	98.2
	Other	4	.6	.7	98.9
	Prefer not to answer	6	.9	1.1	100.0
	Total	565	88.3	100.0	
Missing	System	75	11.7		
Total		640	100.0		

This set of questions is about the role and accountability of ministerial advisors and the provision of advice to ministers by public servants.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - Ministerial advisors make a positive contribution to the policy process.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	50	7.8	9.6	9.6
	Agree	196	30.6	37.6	47.2
	Neither agree nor disagree	211	33.0	40.5	87.7
	Disagree	57	8.9	10.9	98.7
	Strongly disagree	7	1.1	1.3	100.0
	Total	521	81.4	100.0	
Missing	System	119	18.6		
Total		640	100.0		

This set of questions is about the role and accountability of ministerial advisors and the provision of advice to ministers by public servants.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - Ministerial advisors facilitate interest group engagement with the policy process.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	26	4.1	5.0	5.0
	Agree	187	29.2	35.9	40.9
	Neither agree nor disagree	208	32.5	39.9	80.8
	Disagree	85	13.3	16.3	97.1
	Strongly disagree	15	2.3	2.9	100.0
	Total	521	81.4	100.0	
Missing	System	119	18.6		
Total		640	100.0		

This set of questions is about the role and accountability of ministerial advisors and the provision of advice to ministers by public servants.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - Ministerial advisors have too much influence in shaping the government's policy agenda.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	36	5.6	6.9	6.9
	Agree	146	22.8	28.0	34.9
	Neither agree nor disagree	244	38.1	46.8	81.8
	Disagree	85	13.3	16.3	98.1
	Strongly disagree	10	1.6	1.9	100.0
	Total	521	81.4	100.0	
Missing	System	119	18.6		
Total		640	100.0		

This set of questions is about the role and accountability of ministerial advisors and the provision of advice to ministers by public servants.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - Ministerial advisors do not encourage free and frank advice on the full range of policy options available to government.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	74	11.6	14.2	14.2
	Agree	161	25.2	30.9	45.1
	Neither agree nor disagree	170	26.6	32.6	77.7
	Disagree	102	15.9	19.6	97.3
	Strongly disagree	14	2.2	2.7	100.0
	Total	521	81.4	100.0	
Missing	System	119	18.6		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - Ministerial advisors are more influential these days than they used to be.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	70	10.9	13.9	13.9
	Agree	139	21.7	27.7	41.6
	Neither agree nor disagree	255	39.8	50.8	92.4
	Disagree	37	5.8	7.4	99.8
	Strongly disagree	1	.2	.2	100.0
	Total	502	78.4	100.0	
Missing	System	138	21.6		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - Ministerial advisors are a legitimate feature of executive government.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	57	8.9	11.4	11.4
	Agree	312	48.8	62.2	73.5
	Neither agree nor disagree	101	15.8	20.1	93.6
	Disagree	27	4.2	5.4	99.0
	Strongly disagree	5	.8	1.0	100.0
	Total	502	78.4	100.0	
Missing	System	138	21.6		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - Ministerial advisors add value to the policy process under coalition and/or minority government conditions.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	24	3.8	4.8	4.8
	Agree	194	30.3	38.6	43.4
	Neither agree nor disagree	239	37.3	47.6	91.0
	Disagree	39	6.1	7.8	98.8
	Strongly disagree	6	.9	1.2	100.0
	Total	502	78.4	100.0	
Missing	System	138	21.6		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - Ministerial advisors play a positive role in facilitating relations between coalition partners.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	34	5.3	6.8	6.8
	Agree	171	26.7	34.1	40.8
	Neither agree nor disagree	267	41.7	53.2	94.0
	Disagree	24	3.8	4.8	98.8
	Strongly disagree	6	.9	1.2	100.0
	Total	502	78.4	100.0	
Missing	System	138	21.6		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - Ministerial advisors play a positive role in facilitating relations between governments and their parliamentary support parties.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	27	4.2	5.4	5.4
	Agree	177	27.7	35.3	40.6
	Neither agree nor disagree	263	41.1	52.4	93.0
	Disagree	29	4.5	5.8	98.8
	Strongly disagree	6	.9	1.2	100.0
	Total	502	78.4	100.0	
Missing	System	138	21.6		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - Ministerial advisors have little or no bearing on officials' access to ministers.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	11	1.7	2.2	2.2
	Agree	71	11.1	14.5	16.7
	Neither agree nor disagree	113	17.7	23.0	39.7
	Disagree	246	38.4	50.1	89.8
	Strongly disagree	50	7.8	10.2	100.0
	Total	491	76.7	100.0	
Missing	System	149	23.3		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - Ministerial advisors hinder officials' access to ministers.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	26	4.1	5.3	5.3
	Agree	149	23.3	30.3	35.6
	Neither agree nor disagree	186	29.1	37.9	73.5
	Disagree	118	18.4	24.0	97.6
	Strongly disagree	12	1.9	2.4	100.0
	Total	491	76.7	100.0	
Missing	System	149	23.3		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - Ministerial advisors prevent departmental advice from reaching ministers.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	30	4.7	6.1	6.1
	Agree	136	21.3	27.7	33.8
	Neither agree nor disagree	170	26.6	34.6	68.4
	Disagree	133	20.8	27.1	95.5
	Strongly disagree	22	3.4	4.5	100.0
	Total	491	76.7	100.0	
Missing	System	149	23.3		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - Relationships between ministerial advisors and public servants are generally positive.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	16	2.5	3.3	3.3
	Agree	204	31.9	41.5	44.8
	Neither agree nor disagree	210	32.8	42.8	87.6
	Disagree	55	8.6	11.2	98.8
	Strongly disagree	6	.9	1.2	100.0
	Total	491	76.7	100.0	
Missing	System	149	23.3		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - Ministerial advisors sometimes exceed their delegated authority.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	48	7.5	9.8	9.8
	Agree	206	32.2	42.0	51.7
	Neither agree nor disagree	202	31.6	41.1	92.9
	Disagree	30	4.7	6.1	99.0
	Strongly disagree	5	.8	1.0	100.0
	Total	491	76.7	100.0	
Missing	System	149	23.3		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - It is appropriate for ministerial advisors to be drawn from the public service, and to return there on leaving a minister's office.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	39	6.1	8.2	8.2
	Agree	205	32.0	43.2	51.4
	Neither agree nor disagree	111	17.3	23.4	74.7
	Disagree	94	14.7	19.8	94.5
	Strongly disagree	26	4.1	5.5	100.0
	Total	475	74.2	100.0	
Missing	System	165	25.8		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - Ministerial advisors, through their actions, constitute a risk to the political neutrality of the public service.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	36	5.6	7.6	7.6
	Agree	154	24.1	32.4	40.0
	Neither agree nor disagree	127	19.8	26.7	66.7
	Disagree	140	21.9	29.5	96.2
	Strongly disagree	18	2.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	475	74.2	100.0	
Missing	System	165	25.8		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - There should be a limit placed on the overall number of ministerial advisors.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	35	5.5	7.4	7.4
	Agree	172	26.9	36.2	43.6
	Neither agree nor disagree	162	25.3	34.1	77.7
	Disagree	95	14.8	20.0	97.7
	Strongly disagree	11	1.7	2.3	100.0
	Total	475	74.2	100.0	
Missing	System	165	25.8		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - Parliament should control the number of ministerial advisors.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	27	4.2	5.7	5.7
	Agree	141	22.0	29.7	35.4
	Neither agree nor disagree	177	27.7	37.3	72.6
	Disagree	104	16.3	21.9	94.5
	Strongly disagree	26	4.1	5.5	100.0
	Total	475	74.2	100.0	
Missing	System	165	25.8		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - There should be a special Code of Conduct for ministerial advisors.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	170	26.6	35.8	35.8
	Agree	221	34.5	46.5	82.3
	Neither agree nor disagree	55	8.6	11.6	93.9
	Disagree	20	3.1	4.2	98.1
	Strongly disagree	9	1.4	1.9	100.0
	Total	475	74.2	100.0	
Missing	System	165	25.8		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - The risks posed by ministerial advisors to the neutrality of the public service has increased over time.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	43	6.7	9.1	9.1
	Agree	158	24.7	33.4	42.5
	Neither agree nor disagree	200	31.3	42.3	84.8
	Disagree	63	9.8	13.3	98.1
	Strongly disagree	9	1.4	1.9	100.0
	Total	473	73.9	100.0	
Missing	System	167	26.1		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - The presence of a ministerial advisor can have an impact on the receptiveness of a minister to advice from his or her officials.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	77	12.0	16.3	16.3
	Agree	255	39.8	53.9	70.2
	Neither agree nor disagree	112	17.5	23.7	93.9
	Disagree	26	4.1	5.5	99.4
	Strongly disagree	3	.5	.6	100.0
	Total	473	73.9	100.0	
Missing	System	167	26.1		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - Public servants in 2017 are less likely to provide a minister with comprehensive and free and frank advice.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	112	17.5	23.7	23.7
	Agree	140	21.9	29.6	53.3
	Neither agree nor disagree	103	16.1	21.8	75.1
	Disagree	97	15.2	20.5	95.6
	Strongly disagree	21	3.3	4.4	100.0
	Total	473	73.9	100.0	
Missing	System	167	26.1		
Total		640	100.0		

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following views by selecting ONE option. - The Official Information Act has the effect of impeding the provision of comprehensive, and free and frank advice.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	54	8.4	11.4	11.4
	Agree	143	22.3	30.2	41.6
	Neither agree nor disagree	91	14.2	19.2	60.9
	Disagree	148	23.1	31.3	92.2
	Strongly disagree	37	5.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	473	73.9	100.0	
Missing	System	167	26.1		
Total		640	100.0		

Overall, do you regard the advent of the Ministerial advisor as a positive or negative development? Please give a reason/s for your answer. - Selected Choice

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Positive	192	30.0	41.5	41.5
	Negative	58	9.1	12.5	54.0
	Undecided	213	33.3	46.0	100.0
	Total	463	72.3	100.0	
Missing	System	177	27.7		
Total		640	100.0		

Text responses from respondents who viewed the advent of the Ministerial Advisor as a positive development (spelling and typos corrected but no substantive edit)

departments and agencies have their own agendas. Politicians always have and always will seek other sources of information. Having Ministerial advisors is just a way of formalizing this. Also, a Ministerial Advisor can, and should, advise on the political consequences of policy... A job that a politically neutral public service I'd unsuited to.

Nothing to add

The advantage is it is transparent what the interest is.

a delicate balance currently unsupported by expectation management

A good one will pull together advice from multiple sources

A ministerial advisor can get into the detail of an issue

A secondary source of different perspective is always useful, and gives the Minister someone to liaise with on 'political' issues that wouldn't be appropriate for a public servant. The risk comes when the advisor (or Minister) considers that advisor's 'voice' is the prime or only voice of importance and therefore ignores departmental advice or, even more dangerously insists that 'departmental advice' is rendered in accord with the ministerial advisors own views/perspectives (and sometimes departments start doing this themselves to "get it through" the ministerial advisor.

accelerate resolution of issues

Advisors can be a conduit to the thinking and intent of the Minister in a manner that is difficult to achieve directly. Ensuring Officials understand the Ministers position and views is always helpful in the formulation of advice and policy. However, it can at times be used to prohibit or try and close down certain advice and in this context is inconsistent with the intentions of free and frank advice.

Advisors can help the minister make informed decisions and can act as an advocate for the general public in the policy process.

Advisors provide an important conduit between minister and department

All decisions made by governments have a political side to them. Officials role is to provide their best advice. Ministerial advisors provide political advice and they provide alternative views. Sometime Government departmental advice carries its own slants depending on the often strongly held views of the department bosses. Ministerial advisors offer another line of advice which should always be welcomed in a democracy. They also facilitate views of interest groups who may have struggled to get a hearing with bureaucrats. In this way they provide a type of ombudsman assistance level. Another set of eyes looking at an issue. They also liaise between Ministers offices and the PMO ,whips etc etc. A high quality Ministerial advisor can really improve the efficiency of an office and they can help organise, educate and assist some Ministers who may be inexperienced or just weak. Yes they can impede some

communication but the best will be offering advice that is just as valuable to Ministers as that coming from Departments. They also try to offer non-beltway advice at times which is important in Wgtn.

Allows for discussions with someone close to the Minister, who can anticipate what the Minister might want or say, or how the Minister might react to something without wasting Minister's time.

Alternative advice; coalition management

An effective ministerial advisor can enhance public service neutrality by assisting the Minister with advice and plans based on partisan political considerations. The public service can focus on non-partisan advice and policy implementation, and by integrating political considerations into workable solutions. The two streams of advice are needed to ensure the views of the electorate are integrated with the advice of experts.

Another head to think about issues, devil's advocate, able to work within party, across parties and so on.

As a private secretary, they keep me out of the wheeling and dealing and political business that I would otherwise need to be involved in without them. They can also provide the Minister with a valuable sounding board. However, they are often overly focussed on 'shiny things', and can make quasi-political requests of the department at times that can put me in difficult positions

Assists with management of complex and competing demands on a Minister's time, particularly when s/he has multiple and/or major portfolios.

assist agencies with access to Ministers, and providing agencies with feedback on what Ministers need both very positive and very negative

By incorporating a political dimension into their advice they reduce the pressure on public or state servants to do this.

Can alert policy advisors to immediate issues that need to be considered in providing advice

Can do in-depth research on a topic and provide a summary to the Minister.

Can make it easier for private secretaries/ dept. staff to draw line - if Minister wants advice on a political aspect, refer it to the Ministerial advisor to sort out

Can provide an information counterweight to departmental advice skewed by departmental politics.

Can serve as an effective bridge between the Minister and the department, particularly for new Ministers or new governments.

Clear understanding of Ministers' expectations

Complex world, balancing portfolios requires subject matter expertise and orienteering to departmental activities and trade-offs

Conduit between the agency and Minister

Democracy elects people to govern. But employment law prevents them from sacking and choosing those who will implement changes. That is an impossible conflict - no change manager can be effective without the capacity to change those who implement. The Ministerial advisor is an amelioration of

employment law's nobbling of democracy. 2 The career public service needs the competitive tension created by the ability to appoint ministerial advisors. Without it, status quo and 'yes Minister' powers could subordinate Ministers to their bureaucrats.

Different perspectives

Especially post-MMP, government is a process of negotiation on issues, often at a very micro scale. Ministerial advisers are vital to this. A positive relationship between a department, its leaders and ministerial advisers can make policy advising easier.

Especially under MMP govt they can facilitate the progress of policy and legislation. There are negative impacts from people who don't act in good faith, however the system works well when both officials and political advisers understand their complementary role and work together

Essential for good for process management and providing rapid feedback and turnaround.

facilitate communication between officials and ministers

Facilitates information flows, assists public servants with insight into ministerial thinking. Assist with risk identification and mitigation - work in partnership with public servants.

For Ministers. Another set of eyes with a political focus.

generally provide

Given the range of subjects a minister may be expected to understand over their career, ministerial advisers are a sensible way to create a bridge between public servants' politically neutral advice and a minister's necessary awareness of public sentiment toward the decisions at hand.

Gives a minister context and summary of a range of topics the Minister may not have time to cover otherwise

Gives departments more insight on how to improve their policy advice

Gives the Minister an alternative viewpoint

Good ones can add a lot of value and compensate for weaknesses in public servants

Having worked in this role, they do a valuable job of filtering information and ensuring advice is high quality. Sometimes, this oversteps boundaries, so some form of code of conduct would be useful.

Help smooth the flow of communication from officials and departments, better support for dealing with issues.

Helpful

Helpful having the Ministry's voice in the Minister's office. Potentially bad where there a ministerial advisor cannot stand up to a Minister where necessary.

Helps communication between government agencies and Ministers especially when they come from within government agencies

Helps to inform minister when they otherwise may not have time to get a full grasp of a situation before making a decision

Helps us understand minister's concerns and areas of focus, provides a means to give heads up or discuss if an issue is likely to be of interest to the minister.

However, your questionnaire is flawed, as you need to distinguish between departmental Ministerial advisors, and political Ministerial advisors. I have assumed this questionnaire refers to the former, and have answered accordingly.

I have had very good Ministerial advisors and bad ones. The good ones help officials understand the Minister's perspective and are able to put more time into issues than Ministers. I have also seen the good ones handle complex coalition negotiations and greatly assist political negotiations. Bad ones start to exceed their role and make decisions for Ministers and veto or substantively rewrite draft advice. However, these have been rare.

I love advice.

I presume any analysis and advice ministers can obtain is useful, providing it is transparent.

I think they are a necessity - Ministers need a trusted advisor who is in tune with political thinking, to balance out the advice they get from the public service. It is really the public service that needs to man up and offer free and frank advice, backed by the SSC and their chief executive.

I think they are extremely helpful in delivering a Minister's agenda, which is not an illegitimate purpose (and think this survey might elicit somewhat biased answers unless some of the questions are put in context)

If accessible and all about kaupapa, not personal.

if experienced in getting important messages across regardless of whether s/he looks good, they can fast-track key aspects of decision-making

If the advisor has good knowledge of the business of the Ministry, this helps with the timing and content of Ministerial communication.

In most cases Ministerial advisors play a useful role in liaising with coalition and support parties. They are also a useful testing point for officials' advice. This assumes that their presence does not impact on the flow of free and frank advice to the Minister.

In principle and sometimes in practice it is of value

In theory it means that public servants can focus on policy advice. In reality they rarely avail themselves of this opportunity. I don't think the political staff are to blame for that.

Increases diversity. Increases innovation. Reduces monopoly of advice.

Increases policy advice competition, which is a good thing.

Inevitable part of the system

Is essential backstop to assist a 'thinking' Minister assess policy options and work through risks; is even more essential for 'less-thinking' Minister to have someone with a role to ask core questions "have you thought of X or Y" and risk assess consequences of decisions

Is important as a review and generation of the policies

It could be quite positive if the role is carried out professionally and with integrity.

It helps Ministers better deal with the huge amount of material and issues they are expected to deal with

It helps to clarify the separation between policy and political advice.

It is a good way to keep ministers more closely informed of how their ministry/department works. However there need to be very clear policies and oversight into the neutrality and influence of these advisors.

It is a necessary role and better to have someone outside public sector to fulfil it

It is a sign of inevitable increasing sophistication in political and policy processes, but it poses substantial risks.

It is an important facilitating role for 'translation' and support of the agency's position on issues.

It is important for Ministers to have access to knowledgeable and experienced advisors as part of their staff

It is important in some portfolios but not all of them. Really depends on the amount of policy change being considered actively in the particular ministerial portfolio

It is unrealistic to expect an individual such as a Minister to analyse and provide direction without a sounding board, such as a ministerial advisor

It's a political reality so let's use it as an opportunity for improving and broadening advice streams to Ministers

It's difficult to answer when you have lumped private secs and political advisors into one category. It makes answering every question v difficult

It's essential to have someone between a department & the Minister to provide advice both ways

It's helpful to get a take on ministers' priorities.

It's important for Ministers to receive a range of advice on matters, from a range of viewpoints, and which cover their political interests. Ministerial advisor play an important role in this process. They do not politicize advice going to Ministers. It's not a zero-sum game. They can be a compliment to free and frank advice from officials. Any argument about negative effects of ministerial advisors on the provision of free and frank advice to Ministers (as implied by the positioning of questions in this survey) arguably sits more with the actions of public servants advising Ministers, who are often far more senior and experienced than ministerial advisors, and required, capable and trusted to continue to exercise their duties in a context where Ministers receive advice from a variety of channels.

It's part of the MMP landscape

Leaders have a lot of information coming to them. Ministerial advisors help to give them advice and prioritise the information, effectively being a bridge between the political and public sector priorities

Many Ministers have extensive portfolios and could not readily manage those portfolios effectively without the intermediary of a Ministerial advisor. Those advisors are also useful to Officials in that they can provide information in circumstances when it would otherwise be difficult to speak to a busy Minister in person.

Minister could not cope with volume or complexity otherwise

Minister's, especially those with numerous or large portfolios, do not have the time to look deeply into all issues or considerations on their own. More support the better in terms of creating the best outcome for New Zealanders.

Ministerial advisors can provide broader context or advice than it may be appropriate for a department to do

Ministerial advisors provide a different type of support to Ministers to enable them to perform their duties at the best of their ability, although some ministerial advisors may overstep their remit.

Ministerial Advisors tend to know their Ministers better than a seconded staff member, meaning they know how to provide advice and know how to deliver alternative opinions in a way that their Minister understands and appreciates

Ministers are very busy and the ministerial advisor is a good way to get a heads up or to take a sounding from.

Ministers come from a variety of backgrounds, without necessarily the knowledge of the Ministry or Crown Entity to which they are responsible. However, the advice tendered can be very severely impinged by the advisor's own abilities and agenda, political or otherwise.

Ministers come from a particular political perspective so it is only fair they have staff they can appoint that share that perspective to drive particular policy angles.

Ministers face real world implications of their decisions that public servants don't or rarely grapple with, like public preferences or public acceptability. This can be framed negatively, but political constraints are real & legitimate. Ministers are entitled to advice and support here.

Ministers have a big job which legitimately involves political considerations and a wider set of interest groups, including within coalition governments, than policy advisors regularly access or can assist with. A Ministerial advisor, when it works well, can assist with good government. It's not black and white, and I believe generally the issues that arise are not the kind that are readily solved through rules/regulations.

Ministers have a large, complex job. They have a lot of support from their department (including secondees in their office) around the technical, policy elements, and much less support around the political dimensions. The reality is that these two dimensions are both part of a Minister's role and they are ultimately more effective if they are supported in the whole of their role.

Ministers need a range of advice. It is appropriate to have ministerial advisors providing specifically political advice, to complement the policy advice from officials. However, ministerial advisors can be too risk averse, for example in their screening of responses to OIA requests

Ministers need all the free and frank advice they can get

Ministers need political advisors to work with departments to understand the nature and nuances of the policy issues under consideration and then advise/help the Minister decide how to respond to policy advice provided.

Ministers need someone to help them from a political perspective. they are no threat to a politically neutral public service

Ministers ought to have at least some input into and control over whom advises them

Ministers require facilitators between their departments and their offices.

Ministers should have advice independent of the public service

Ministers will need political advice on their actions which the public service can't give them. It seems natural they would have partisan staff for this purpose.

More advice the better

more nuanced read of environment and contextual matters can be provided. Ensures busy workload/portfolios can be better managed & prioritised

More people providing opinions and therefore representing a larger demographic of society

More resource is needed

More views and questions are positive in having generally a better outcome for NZ.

My assumption is that we are talking about ministerial advisors seconded from the relevant department/ministry. They can serve as a useful conduit to get advice in front of Ministers; but it depends to a large extent on individual personality and capability and the extent to which they are influenced by political advisors.

My most recent senior official role was in a Ministry that had a support party Minister. The Ministerial advisor was critical in managing the political dimensions of the work, thus enabling officials to maintain their focus on the policy dimensions.

Necessary in an era of multi-party government.

Necessary link between department and Minister

Necessary to provide additional insight for politicians. Few politicians have the administrative or managerial skill set to appreciate all their portfolio issues. Some advisors do not understand conventions well. However, taking the advice of those a Minister trusts and/or favours happens in any event, career public servants or not. So disingenuous to suggest this is a startling or concerning development. The public service risks looking very self-serving if it takes a negative or dim view of Ministerial Advisors and

it could open up a debate about the genuineness of motives of the career civil service if they raise objections.

Often very helpful with conveying and interpreting what the Minister wants from us - though unsure if the Minister's needs should be the most prominent consideration

Opportunity for subject matter specialists either within the Public Service or from the Private sector to provide input on policy. Opportunity for diversity of input and learnings

Overall positive as they are a conduit for information to Ministers.

Overall positive but in need of control as they do provide a strong link to party policy

Particularly if drawn from the public service, ministerial advisors can have in-depth knowledge of the policies and issues facing a sector; this can be useful information for a minister to have ready access to.

Political advisors allow neutral public servants to maintain their neutrality. By noting political considerations and factoring those into the policy development process, they allow public servants the luxury of neutrality.

Political Ministerial advisors are necessary to give Ministers a political view of any given option. The impartiality of a public servant can be preserved if this other role is provided. A lot depends on personalities and the chemistry between personalities as to whether balanced judgements and full, free and frank advice is given.

Positive overall, but depends on the individual.

Provide a balanced view of the information to better support decision makers and decision making

Provide continuity and a professional interface between the minister and agencies. Can provide continuity through transition between ministers

Provides alternative viewpoint on policy issues, but introduces risk because of set view and potential ability to block alternative advice.

Provides considered/balanced evidence to inform Ministerial decision making

provides subject matter specialist knowledge

Provision of critical and reasoned expert advice to Ministers who are time-poor

Public servants no longer feel pressure to provide political advice.

Public servants provide expert, non-partisan advice on policy matters. But it is ministerial advisors who support Ministers in considering the wider context - government priorities, tensions between interest groups, and the overall receptiveness of the public to policy proposals (all or some of which public servants can, for all our intellectual superiority, be insulated from or even ignorant of).

Public servants should provide advice on the political issues associated with advice, it is reasonable for Ministers to get this type of advice and to weigh it as they consider their decision

Quicker/easier feedback

Recognises the political reality of executive government. Fills a role a public servant could not do.

Representation and visibility

Robust discussions and input from a specific perspective

Someone needs to be doing that job, shouldn't be the neutral public sector

Streamlines efficiency

Supports legitimate political decision making

The advisers I have dealt with sought to expedite and facilitate the engagement between Ministers and policy staff.

The functions they perform, if performed well and conscientiously should provide Ministers with informed comment

The Minister may have more trust in their advisor. As long as the Ministerial advisor is reputable and able to be honest. I think it's positive

The Ministerial advisor is the link between officials and the Minister. Officials remain neutral to give free and frank advice. The role of the Ministerial advisor is to have the minister's political policy perspective covered.

The Ministerial role is an inherently political one. It is therefore fruitless to suggest that those elected to the highest political roles in the country would not require political advice. Ministerial advisers serve a purpose.

The role can facilitate political negotiation between coalition partners

The role of the Ministerial advisor has been incredibly effective in ensuring that there is an effective communication link for matters that are both small and large. Previously it was incredibly difficult to raise anything that was not considered a pressing need.

Their prerogative, and this way there is more transparency for officials on political considerations

There is a need for a Minister to get advice on the advice

There is a need for Ministerial advisors but they often overstep and prevent officials from exercising their constitutional role in providing free and frank advice.

These are tricky things to work through - but given time pressures and workloads it's good to have another person who you can bounce ideas off during the policy process and who can work to co-ordinate things with the Minister. It would become quite unwieldy if it was just the Minister and I think the risk of the absolute worst of Yes, Prime Minister (the Humphrey type blocking and obfuscation) would dominate - to the detriment of the general public. Let's not forget that the public service is a very large monopoly that needs to face considerable and consistent pressure to perform

They appreciate the position of departmental officials

They are focused on getting the elected government's business done, rather than departmental business, and provide contestable advice which can be difficult for officials or private secretaries seconded to a Minister's office to provide.

They are largely useful intermediaries, both between the Minister and the department and between parties. However, it's important that they do not overstep their bounds, and particularly that they do not seek to suppress advice which does not fit a particular agenda.

they are often valued conduits between the dept. and the Ministers office.

They are required to provide a second tier of advice and engagement for busy Ministers

They bring an important dimension by acting as a challenge for officials' advice, and as a conduit for contact from external stakeholders.

They can advise on technical/scientific matters or other matters requiring specialised knowledge

They can be a useful 'sounding board' for advice. The good ones do not hinder access or free and frank advice. The more junior ones can be difficult if they are straight from political party machinery.

They can be consulted when the Minister is not available. They can grab the Minister's ear without an appointment. They can facilitate contacts with other offices and parties. They can bring a fresh perspective to policy making.

They can play a role in coordinating and facilitating discussion, as long as they don't try to make the Ministers' decisions for them.

they can provide a more open vie to a minister

They could encourage ministers to be more accountable to the public

They facilitate access to the Minister on a more informal basis and can explain things to Ministers when officials do not have the opportunity. they can advise officials on Ministers' preferences. They are useful for initiating Minister to Minister engagements.

They fill legitimate roles that public servants can't without compromising neutrality.

They handle the political aspects and help the Minister be more effective within the Executive Arm. In some ways their presence makes it easier for the public service to do its job as we don't need to find ways to warn about political risks.

They help move thing along as long as the minister respects their input

They offer a different perspective, especially if they are drawn from outside the public service.

They often add a different perspective. They provide officials with insights into Ministers' thoughts on specific issues. Because they don't have to worry about being neutral they are often completely frank, which helps get to the nub of an issue quickly.

They play a crucial role in bringing the political dimension to the decision-making process.

they play a key role especially with coalition and other parties doing the role that it would be inappropriate for a public servant to do. They also provide additional support to Ministers enabling

Ministers to focus on more important decisions. However, ministerial advisors vary in competence and arrogance - some are extremely difficult to deal with, limit your access to the Minister, put you in difficult situation., But there are others who understand their role and yours and do what they can to ensure the Minister has advice from all perspectives and help you effectively manage the Minister.

They play a key role in MMP Government

They provide a check point for what goes to minister and can linkages across a Ministers portfolio

They provide a critical link between the department and the Minister. It works best when they "work for the Ministry" as an advisor to the Minister, rather than a Minister's adviser appointed to liaise with the Department

They provide a quality assurance role, and can provide an agency with awareness of the Minister's wider involvement on an issue, as well as his/her availability

They provide an important addition dimension and perspective on policy and legislative issues, which is helpful for both Ministers and those seeking to engage with Ministers.

They provide Minister's with advice that they need and are necessary for the negotiations required by MMP and with other Ministers Offices. It is dependent on the advisor as to whether they overstep the mark. I've experienced both positive and negative ones. I was an advisor before they become the norm and before they were political appointments and know that Minister's need more advice than just the Depts.

They provide useful feedback on policy work and context about the response of the Minister to officials, particularly more junior officials who have limited direct engagement with the Minister.

they will be more informed than the minister so are much needed

Useful point of contact to clarify Ministers intent/wishes without disturbing busy Minister. Great for testing new ideas/concepts

Very hard to generalise about any of these answers as they depend so much on the particular political advisor. However in general they play a useful role as an interpreter and go-between across the public service and political divide, and in bringing different ministers together. In the latter regard it would be hard to operate without them. The 'translator and coordinator' role hasn't changed over time - but is perhaps even more important under a coalition government.

We don't want Donald Trumps in NZ

When drawn from public service, they bring the ethos of political neutrality to the role

When they are good, they are very beneficial

When they know what they are doing, are close to the Minister, and understand the different roles of officials, departmental secondees and Ministerial advisors, they can be very helpful. When they are inexperienced, or stray beyond their proper role, they can be negative. But on balance, I think they can be positive.

while they can restrict the access of officials to ministers, access by officials to ministers is not the be all and end all of a healthy democracy. politics should come into it at some point.

With caveats. Much depends on portfolio; experience of Minister; previous background of advisors concerned.

Works well

yes

Text responses from respondents who viewed the advent of the Ministerial Advisor as a negative development (spelling and typos corrected but no substantive edit)

Lack of transparency in their appointment. - Lack of clear accountability framework/procedures. - they are responsible only to the minister so there is a lack of transparency in the event of misconduct.

Act as a barrier and often act to shape advice to minister. Too often substitute their views for those of minister.

Advisors provide a filtering service that belongs in the departments.

Although it is not negative that Ministers receive political advice in relation to their work in principle, the placement of Ministerial advisors within Ministers' offices leaves the temptation to influence advice from public servants to Ministers. This can be a hindrance to the Minister receiving full free and frank advice from neutral officials acting in the public interest.

Although there is always a balance required to be applied, on the whole I think that Ministerial advisors can have undue influence on Ministerial decision-making.

Because they act as gatekeepers. Their influence has greatly increased since 2008.

blurry lines of accountability, authority

Boundaries of role unclear

Can be politically biased

Frank and real-life input and contributions do not reach the Minister

Hinder free and frank advice flow to ministers

I think they really impact on official's ability to provide frank advice, or hinder certain advice from getting to ministers. They can also accidentally get departments into political problems and overstep their bounds

In general they serve to protect the Minister at all costs and often aren't aware of the basis of effective policy advice. They are overly focused on managing media risk and stifling debate in the media.

It encourages echo-chambers and is likely to make the Minister more attentive to party political masters than the democratic will of the people and evidence-based policy advice.

Ministerial advisor role can stand in the way of and inhibit good quality policy advice. Min advisor can have too much influence over public service policy role and also minister.

Ministerial Advisors can assume the role of a de facto Minister - unelected and unaccountable

Ministers are welcome to have political advisors who play a minor role in *separately* providing politically oriented advice. The problem is when they act as an intermediary between the Minister and public servants, who are trying to provide free, frank and politically neutral policy advice. They frequently filter what policy advice goes to the Minister, actively argue against policy advice in officials' meetings and work hard to influence the topics and content of advice. Those behaviours would be less problematic if ministries' senior management fought to uphold the Westminster model of neutral policy advice - but these days, they seem to understand their role as providing politically oriented advice to implement the already-chosen policies of the Government of the day. This means they seek the approval of political advisors, seek their input, etc, in order to please the Minister.

Ministers place too much reliance on political advisors - they often do not have the experience or knowledge to advise Ministers of the big picture. Worse they often interfere with public servants that could do this for. ministers

motivation; accountability; risk of capture given their history / experience.

na

Negative if the advisor is unable to listen, reflect and act as an unreasonable gate keeper. Negative if they don't build relationships and are ego driven

Political Advisers have no responsibility to the NZ public, only to the Ministers political aims.

political expediency over real policy drains the life out of democracy

Politicised group providing ministers with an echo chamber that drowns out independent advice and alternative options.

Politicising of technical discussions and options development

Primarily due to the role of 'gate-keeper' in preventing policy proposals from reaching the Ministers desk

Removes neutrality of dept.

See themselves as gatekeepers which inhibits officials engaging directly with Ministers - info is filtered. they cannot cover all work at any depth therefore a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. their position blurs the important question of who has the knowledge, the authority, the responsibility and the accountability on issues of importance to a Minister.

Since their introduction in 1984, the neutrality of the public service has been steadily eroded. Ministerial Advisors regularly interfere in the operational day-to-day administration of the public service, particularly when a decision is even remotely politically unpalatable.

The checks, and especially balances, of informed policy implementation has been compromised.

The Ministerial advisor has easier access to their Minister

The process is not transparent enough in these more corrupt times.

The risk is that Ministerial staff will just be there to help further the Government's ideology and even industry interests rather than promoting decisions based on well substantiated evidence.

The role changes the culture to the extent that senior public servants begin to use the same strategies to ingratiate themselves with Ministers as a used by ministerial advisors.

The trend towards pleasing Ministers and short term political goals is detrimental to long term development

Their 'closeness' to the Minister with often their own agendas limits discussions

They allow special interest groups to influence policy decisions as they are not subject to neutrality constraints of public servants

they are not accountable, see papers before the minister and then demand changes to the advice

They are not neutral.

They are parasites/opportunists and should be declared extinct

They aren't necessary, and aren't a positive development.

They can decide to return advice to a Department before it has been seen by a Minister, requesting changes, which undermines the relationship between a Department and a Minister. If the Minister wants further advice, different advice, or is dissatisfied with the advice they receive, this should be managed formally, not informally as a way of avoiding OIA obligations around advice received.

They can try put undue pressure or exert influence of officials to tailor advice to suit a Minister's wants - rather than providing free and frank advice about a policy problem.

They do interfere with the provision of free and frank advice, they overstep their boundaries, trying to tell government departments which options are or are not acceptable before a paper is submitted to Ministers or Cabinet. They can interfere with the ability for officials to meet with Ministers, and sway the Minister's views before the Minister has received advice from government departments. Political neutrality of the public service is at risk

they gate keep and shape what ministers get to see and hear, they are effectively hobbling the ministers

They have little concept of the role of the public service and have no code of conduct to guide their behaviour

They have their own agenda which negatively compromises the neutrality of advice made available to Ministers

They impede free and frank advice and they filter advice coming from public servants. They are often friends of the Minister

They often lack understanding of the issues on which they are providing advice.

They prevent the Minister from being given home truths or unpopular advice

They tend to be hired for their partisan views.

too much power and no oversight

Too unrestrained, not governed by any written or unwritten rules, conventions or Code of conduct. Minister's offices are highly politicised so tis a difficult environment, It needs string boundaries drawn and enforced.

Weakens the influence of the neutral public service.

Work of a purely political nature should be done by politicians, e.g.by an expanded number of parliamentary under-secretaries. Not by 'ministerial advisors'.

Final comments from respondents

Good Ministerial Advisors add value to both policy and process. Other Advisors create a communication barrier between the Government Department or Crown Entity and the Minister, and during their misguided attempts to add value or protect the Minister limit the information and options available. It is difficult for even the most experienced person working closely with Minister's offices to assess all Ministerial Advisors and determine "an average score".

The Minister is my department's client, and where the Ministerial Advisor is acting as agent for the Minister, they are, by extension, the client as well. As with Ministers, departmental policy advisors have a relationship management task with Ministerial advisors. For me, the most practical advice on managing such relationships is contained in Graham Scott's "Reflections in Managing the Treasury", External Relations Chapter. I have attempted to apply that knowledge in my own dealings and advice to Ministers and their advisors and to pass on that knowledge to younger staff.

A code of conduct for Ministerial advisors will add transparency and clarity to their role, which can only be beneficial in our constitutional system where the executive already holds a power imbalance. This could be provided for by statute but should not be enshrined there as it is likely to need to change with time.

A key aspect of diminishing reality is the daily involvement of Ministers in issue management. They are often making calls or decisions about matters for which they have no authority - such as investigations, prosecutions or in response to events that are a departmental responsibility. This occupation has created a leadership vacuum with no-one left to provide the vision and leadership needed due to the focus on the issues of the day. As Churchill said 'If you stop to throw a rock at every barking dog, you'll never get anywhere.'

A lot depends on the individual ministers and their advisors. I do think the provision of comprehensive, free and frank advice has diminished over time. I don't believe the OIA in itself is a barrier to the provision of free and frank advices - it's the attitude of Ministers and their advisors that creates the barrier. Some Ministers are perfectly comfortable saying that they disagreed with advice given, others don't seem willing to simply say that they didn't follow officials' advice for whatever reason. I think that some of the barriers to free and frank advice is the attitude of senior officials who no longer seem willing or able to hold that line and give fearless advice.

A more strong and clear Code of Conduct may be useful for clarifying exactly what Public Service neutrality involves. However, the State Services Commission plays a key role in enforcing and clarifying this.

advisers are important to Ministers especially in these days where media is more comprehensive and we have social media. But feel they have reduced the impartiality of the public service and has politicized the public service as officials are influenced by feedback from advisers. In practice, private secretaries need to work through advisers so advisers create a barrier between departmental advice and the Ministers.

Agree with Graham Scott's report (of about five years ago?) that the neutrality of the Public Service has diminished over time. Free and frank advice is almost a standing joke in the public sector. Much of this is

because of the a) lack of intellectual capability of the Minister to intelligently receive and deal with information b) protection of the Minister by senior officials - not many experts get in front of the Minister these days - everything is relayed second or third hand c) over-zealous anticipation of the Minister's wants (not needs) meaning short-term satisficing (this isn't a typo) rather than senior officials having a strategic view and d) the short term political view, meaning that anything that takes longer than three months isn't considered worth investing in.

All advisors to Ministers (whether departmental, political or other) would benefit from an understanding of the parliamentary process. There is too frequently an attitude that executive government is all-powerful, Parliament is merely a rubber stamp, and Ministers' actions are basically unfettered.

Also a creeping issue of Private Secretary's being employed that are not politically neutral - an even more worrying trend given they are the gateway for an agency into a Minister's Office and control the provision of advice.

An effective Ministerial Adviser is useful to help ensure 'neutral' Public Service advice/recommendations receives an appropriate 'political' risk assessment - but more than that an effective adviser can also assist/ enable the public servants to cover particular matters of strong interest to a Minister, and can also act as a facilitator to ensuring Ministerial decisions are actioned.....

As a CEO in the NGO sector, I have often experienced Ministerial advisors blocking opportunities for partners to Government to speak directly to Ministers. Also I have experienced advisors telling me and others that they don't necessarily agree with Ministers, but they are not in a position to disagree with Ministers, so they tell Ministers what they want to hear. I have also experienced advisors telling us that their advice has been completely ignored and they have been told not to return with that advice as it is not what the Minister wants to hear. So, how neutral is that?

as a new policy advisor I have been surprised how much the current economic orthodoxy is entrenched in almost all advice

As a public servant you are expected to provide a "no surprises" approach to your role with Ministers. You cannot do this if you cannot provide free and frank advice. Beware bullying Ministers and Risk Averse CEOs and leadership teams - schadenfreude that way lies....

As above - in my experience, there are few vestiges of political neutrality left in the public service these days. When the National Government came into power, it was suspicious of public sector policy advice after the long spell of Labour Governments, and made it clear that ministries' chief executives' jobs were dependent on gaining the approval of the new Government. Accordingly, from the top down, senior Ministry staff focused on politically orienting their advice to the new Government's policies, and shifted from politically neutral policy advice to implementation advice - how to implement already-chosen policies, without examining their evidence base or merit. The less robust scrutiny, the better - just write down what they tell you, no independent thought. Ministers' offices also got involved in screening OIA requests and politically orienting responses (both speed and content). SSC is nowhere to be seen on the importance of neutrality, not leading the fight to keep the Westminster model intact. It is not seen for its importance in the overall model or good governance as a whole. That's why I left permanent policy employment.

As an adviser, I definitely feel my role is almost more political advisor than policy advisor. Much of our work is targeted at providing what the Minister wants, what is politically feasible, and suggestions on how to wrangle proposals through Cabinet or the House or Select Committee. While I understand this is a valid consideration in some contexts, it is much more prominent than I expected upon joining the public service. I also spend a surprising amount of my time rewording briefings to more of a "read between the lines" format, and removing values and judgement statements, rather than explicitly stating what I think and why - possibly due to OIA considerations?

As I noted, I think the questionnaire has blurred its questions between departmentally seconded Ministerial advisors, and Ministerially appointed political advisors. Both have existed for all of the time I have worked in central government. Excellent political and departmental advisors by and large do a fine job of working the relationship between policy delivery, policy advice, and political decision-making. The lines will always be blurred. judgement will always be required to be exercised, and sometimes advisors cross lines and go rogue.

As in many situations, a good political adviser adds value to relationships between departments and Ministers but a bad one, particularly coupled to a poor Minister, is dangerous.

As mentioned the personalities of those involved is an important factor as to whether decision-making is optimal. As in other fields, there are Ministerial advisors who are able to balance their advice well, and others who decline advice from public servants who may be the subject matter experts.

As noted in my previous answer, I'd rank some of the Ministerial advisors I've worked with as a strength in the system: they mediate Ministerial views in a way that helps the department to scope options that respect government outcomes (which, after all, Ministers are perfectly entitled to set) and enable the options and debate to focus on how best to achieve those outcomes. The best of them also help you to understand the broader political dynamics in play. I think the difficulties of giving free and frank advice lately have been overstated, and it doesn't feel like it has got any harder over the last 5-7 yrs. or so when I've been signing out sometimes difficult advice. I do wonder whether the issue comes down to the traits that are being recruited for at 1st and 2nd tier - have we had a cohort of more inherently risk averse senior managers recently?

As policy analysts/senior policy analysts it is very difficult to have free and frank policy advice reach the Minister. Key information is generally stripped out during the sign-out process to make documents innocuous and pleasing to the Minister. Perhaps this is particular to government Agencies, as they are more removed from the Minister. However, free and frank advice is not provided to the Board to which we report either. How can they be expected to make good decisions and progress without key information and a full and accurate statement of facts and advice. I think this is a serious problem.

As with any position, issues can be more around culture rather than the structure, MAs tend to culturally be quite arrogant and full of their own perspectives. MAs do need some accountability back to the department or to the Executive. And protocols for what is acceptable and not acceptable are needed.

At best, they can broker relationships and test ideas early in development. At worst, they can interfere in options development and reduce the quality of advice.

Comment on your survey design: Provide me with a "don't know" option. My "neither agree nor disagree" responses were either neutral OR don't know - largely because my engagement with Ministerial Advisers has been relatively limited.

Doesn't seem like a big deal, but then I don't work in a department which gives policy advice.

Effective Ministerial advisors can really complement their ministers and bring leadership to complex issues. Ineffective or 'rogue' ones can cut across and confuse departmental accountabilities - and sometimes end up being advocates for particular interest groups. Clearer guidance for all parties on their roles and parameters (including the distinction from the departmental advisors also in ministers offices) could be very helpful.

Frankly there is now far too much anxiety about spin and how policies will play in the media. Officials already censor their advice on the way through. Poor leadership in the public sector means that the public interest takes a back seat to providing palatable advice. It hasn't helped that the Key government thought that governing was pretty simple and asked for dumbed down one-pagers. Ten years later, officials have largely forgotten what their job is.

Free and frank advice is the responsibility of the CE to uphold and foster. They should be strongly held to account for this and actively encouraged by SSC. Similarly SSC has a role in setting expectations of this behaviour across the public sector. While in codes of conduct it is not actively fostered. Rather advice is proffered on guesses about what the minister may like very often without an evidence base!

From time-to-time "free and frank" advice is discouraged in some Ministerial contexts and undermines the role of policy advisors.

Giving free and frank advice requires judgement, courage and tact. Receiving free and frank advice requires openness and a willingness to listen. When these elements are lacking, the dialogue can become limited and one-sided, and that ultimately does not serve the country well.

Government has increasingly become top down. Currently the public service is there to serve the Government and the Minister. The people or the citizens come distantly behind. I think some advisors help and others hinder this process. But I'm sure some advisors do a lot of gatekeeping to keep their minister 'safe'.

How well this works depends how explicit the protocols are, and having Ministers and senior people with integrity who are willing to make the system work

I am not that familiar with the role and function of Ministerial Advisors, but consider that such a role would be fundamental to the overall function of governance. The higher up one goes in the hierarchy, the more need there is for good advice - I cannot, though, comment on the quality of the advice Ministers get from their advisors! I know I have been a little surprised to see who the people in the Ministry I work have been to fill this position!

I believe NZ is very well served by public servants, and that their neutrality is generally unquestioned. Ministerial advisors have a quite different role, but the two act as a check and balance against each other.

I believe we have one of the most politically neutral public service entities in the world.

I consider Ministerial advisers as a legitimate part of the government process. Without them, Ministers would not have an effective 'triage' system and would have to do most of the behind the scenes work of building support for policy decisions themselves. There is scope for the role Ministerial Advisers to be made more explicit and for government departments to fully understand what they do. This will remove some of the perception that ministerial advisers work 'in the shadows'. It is also important that their behaviour is covered by a code of conduct. In the end they are paid for by the taxpayer and there needs to be more accountability for actions and behaviour. Generally, most advisers are astute and capable public servants. More support needs to be provided to junior advisers that come straight from the political party. again, another generalisation is that there is very little support for advisers (HR, professional development, etc) - this needs to be addressed.

I do wonder whether people avoid written communications with free and frank advice due to the OIA, and therefore have phone conversations and send printed (not electronically recorded) documents to avoid having to release advice. This concerns me.

I don't think the issues actually sit with Ministerial Advisers. It's more the general understanding to NOT provide 'free and frank advice'. This is the shift I've seen over the past few years. There have been consequences for officials who have gone ahead & provided advice that was not welcomed/received well/went against what the Minister wanted to hear.

I have been an advisor and worked with advisors. Much depends on the capability of the Minister and advisor, and their understanding of the portfolio and the issues before them. In some cases advisors can add clarity and substantial value, and act as a go between. Others may not use their proximity to authority well or have the depth of knowledge.

I have just completed a CE role in the NFP sector and found it very difficult to get access to the Minister- the hope one had to get through were difficult. it was facilitated by the relationships you had and if they were excellent that was easy- if your networks were in the early stages not so. A code of conduct- and also independent assessment of their ministerial advisors performance drawing upon stakeholders would be very useful. I have also held senior HR roles in the public sector and rarely were we able to absorb a departmental ministerial advisor back into the organisation as they had burned their bridges with the department- not representing departmental views, and setting themselves up as mini Ministers. Asking the question of departments- how many of their ministerial advisors- had performance reviews; and were re absorbed into the department would make an interesting question and indicate the real extent of political neutrality.

I have seen a huge increase in the number of departmental OIAs going to Minister's offices over the last 10 years, with very negative effect. It used to be that departmental OIAs were dealt with by the department, and the Minister's office was briefed, in accordance with the no surprises policy, But all decisions on the OIA were made by the department, and the Minister's office never saw the documents in question at all. They were at a distance as an informed party after the event. No almost all OIAs in full (that is every single doc to be released) goes to the Minister's office - these are departmental, not Ministerial OIAs. The Minister's political adviser then goes through them and puts pressure on to redact or withdraw items, saying they are out of scope for e.g. or pressuring for another ground to be used. This also significantly delays the release of docs making the department late in responding, This system of running it through the Ministers office is now the norm.

I have worked as a Ministerial Advisor and have provided a link to the Ministry. This is a difficult job, but is definitely useful, given the massive amount of information that comes into Ministers' offices and how fast issues can move. It's also useful to have people who understand the Minister's motivations and goals, as the Ministry is not always on the same page. Having also worked as a Ministry official and dealt with the Minister's Office from the other side, there is some tension with the Ministerial Advisors and the line can be difficult to see at times, so a code of conduct would be useful. On the whole, given the sometimes very poor advice I have had from the Ministry, I think these roles are important. Ministries often have inbuilt biases that they are not aware of.

I have worked in public service positions, as an independent (lawyer) advising Ministers and agencies, as a law drafter, as an MP and as adviser to bodies interacting with the public service, since 1978. In my opinion there is severe self-censorship now in many departments, with a low standard of analysis that eliminates many policy options and many grounds for constructive criticism from the advice provided to Ministers. If I were a Minister there are departments and ministries I would simply not trust to give penetrating advice. I would expect it to be anodyne, and often poorly tested. There are too few really experienced, confident and objective public policy specialists, and too many "analysts" with neither life experience, steeped in a Wellington culture that is prejudiced against the values of many New Zealanders. Nor do enough have adequate work experience or connections outside their world. Three decades ago they were confident and active participants in policy debate with outsiders, Today they absorb input without the confidence, or possibly the permission, or the ability to seek out and to engage with critics. That may be the result of political instruction, or it may be a recruitment problem reflecting second and third-rate university environments, or it may be generational. I do not opine on the cause, merely the result. . So as a Minister I would demand the ability to have advisors who could find and evaluate and filter sources of advice to contest what I was getting.

I make the comments based on my experience working with private secretaries for a number of Ministers whilst working at MBIE. Generally all who I dealt with were professional, high performers who managed a massive workload. I have not had contact with any other 'Ministerial advisors' outside of that.

I note that the number of political advisors under this government seems to have increased compared to the last government. That is an issue of taxpayer VFM, and the extent to which Ministerial Services is pushing back on demands for more. However the real issue is not whether political advisors are a good or bad thing - it is the ability of the public service to withstand political pressure. Politicians and their advisors will always push public servants as far as they can to get the political outcome they want - public servants must know their role and not be bullied into covering up inconvenient information or data. This requires the backing of the SSC, training for public servants to know what's expected of them, training for political staff to know where the boundaries are, strong support from chief executives and above all the SSC to get some cohesions and stand up for a neutral public service that offers free and frank advice.

I spent 18 months in two Ministers' offices as a policy private secretary. The political advisors and I kept a clear line between what was political and what was my job. They were both open to being trained in the realities of the portfolio operational work, and that took a lot of my time. They did all the inside Beehive negotiations that helped the Minister be effective. But I've also dealt with bad political advisors - ones who blocked, didn't listen, pushed poor quality outcomes. I've been watching free fair frank reduce over time. That's not directly because of political advisors. It's because CEO contracts make them less willing to upset Ministers, because of lack of training, because of general erosion of the

ethic/philosophy, a weak SSC, and because Ministers don't want it. The current government has been the worst in terms of not wanting awkward material on record (findable under OIA), and not punishing incomplete papers that don't identify all the risks and tell all the facts. The public do want it, and it's encouraging to see the new commissioner talking about it. As a PSA national delegate this is a key issue we discuss in public sector meetings.

I struggled to answer several of your questions. For instance, the question of whether a ministerial adviser who was previously a public servant should be able to go back and work in the public service: in principle, in my view, this should be possible; but there may be circumstances where the individual in question has acted in ways that have undermined trust and respect, or where his/her departure from the role of ministerial adviser coincides with a change of government, and where the person in question might be viewed with suspicion by an incoming minister. This might also happen if the person in question has been a candidate in the preceding election. In such circumstance, the person may be able to work in the public service, but not in role which involves providing policy advice in a portfolio area and/or on matters relating to their previous role as a ministerial adviser, etc.

I support the idea of adopting a uniform code of conduct for Ministerial Advisers, so that there is a uniform understanding of what is expected from them and conflicts of interest can be discouraged.

I think it is easier to be political neutral when working arm's length from the Minister - meaning once a public servant goes to work for a Minister's office, it becomes much harder to be politically neutral and the maintenance of that independence comes down to personal professionalism and integrity rather than because of a particular set of rules / code of conduct written down somewhere else.

I think over all Public Service Chief Executives have also become more politicised.

I think some Ministerial advisors turn their job into a power struggle with their Minister and over control and even withhold access to their minister. Instead of seeing it as a support role working in behind and keeping their minister informed they are actively structuring and shaping their Ministers thoughts.

I think that there is a clear distinction between the role of a private secretary and the minister's personal and political advisors. This distinction used to be clearer. However, I think that perceptions of public sector neutrality have become more negative since the political advisors are now private secretaries. It makes it harder to be transparent about what advice is from the public service private secretary, and what is from the political advisor.

I think the influence over departmental OIAs that the Ministerial advisors demand is unreasonable. It also causes a major hold up in the OIA process and often requires OIAs to be extended.

I think the term ministerial adviser as used here is not entirely distinguishable from that of political advisor - in many instances there is a separation of these roles as well as a merging. This is somewhat dependent on the individual Minister's operating style and expectations.

I was a ministerial adviser drawn from and returned to the public service pre-MMP (1990-1996). I have had direct experience of 5 ministerial advisers in Police (one of whom drawn from and returned to the public service) and in Agriculture approx. 3. Each has been different. As already noted the most positive assistance has been in their being able to translate through interactions with stakeholders as well as undertake negotiations with other Ministers as other coalition partners. Often the portfolio private

secretaries are inexperienced, had limited machinery of government experience and can't even manage basic communications between ministers' offices. Some Ministerial advisers are aspiring politicians. They have been the most troubling and appear to step into the Minister's role, make observations made on incorrect understanding and certainly have intervened in the policy development process. Some in the public servants have limited their free and frank advice but it is still possible to give advice that would be the same irrespective of what the make-up is of the prevailing government. Police has the advantage of operational independence although at times even Police sometimes does not fully understand that operational independence does not limit financial accountability.

I was one of few advisers on migrant education for the 1972 Kirk Labour govt, 1972-5, assigned to Phil Amos, Minister of Island Affairs, I don't need the cloak of anonymity to advance the spirit of this inquiry. My prof of Public Admin John Roberts, described my appointment as helping minister be one man facing an army of public servants.

I worked in the public health system from the late 90s to the early 10s. The increase in the level of politicisation of Health in that period was staggering. The unwillingness of the Ministry of Health to listen to rational discussion was at times almost surreal. I remember a senior Health Ministry official ringing up the chain at ADHB until she got the answer she wanted on an issue, badgering more vehemently with each level. I have recently read some IPANZ material and heard a discussion about NZ public servants offering fearless and frank advice. In all honesty, I just laughed. My experience may have been unique to Health and the Minister involved, but there is no doubt that State Services has allowed the bullying of public servants by Ministers when public servants were trying to do what in previous generations has been regarded as their job. There are some encouraging words from State Services now, perhaps they see that it has gone too far. But it may be that it has gone too far to recover. I wish you well with your research.

I would consider that Minister's while always saying they want free and frank advice, only want that when it suits their agenda. Relationships with Minister's must be carefully managed, so departments avoid saying the "wrong" things. A truly constructive minister would accept that officials will give occasionally contrary advice, and not take it personally, or let it damage the relationship. The OIA while an important function of an open democracy can impact the advice given. Ministerial advisers can either be a big help, or a big hindrance depending on who they are, and who they work for.

I would support a Code of Conduct for Ministerial Advisors to prescribe their roles, powers and functions and to make the difference between them and public servants clearer. I also don't think they should be described as public servants as this causes problems around political neutrality, as they are servants of the Minister and are not politically neutral

I'm not sure what training, if any, Ministerial Advisors receive. New, inexperienced ones could learn lots from the more experienced ones, but it is not clear if they do. Better understanding of boundaries would be a very good idea.

I'm really shocked at how leading the questions in this survey are. Way too much judgement in the wording of the questions demonstrating the agenda of the survey.

I've heard a few of your (Chris) public statements on things and my personal view is that you overplay statements about whether it has deteriorated recently. I've been very close to the process under the Clark, Key and English Governments and I haven't seen any more untoward behaviour under these two

most recent administrations than the Clark Government. Some of the absolute worst behaviour I saw from Ministerial Advisors was under the Clark Government, though I've also seen poor behaviour recently. Equally, I also saw superb behaviour under the Clark Government and the same under the Key and English Governments. I guess I'm saying that I think you can't generalise that it's better or worse on the whole. I would say it's a mixed bag and a bit too close to call.

I've only worked in the public service for a few months, and don't have much to do with our minister. But I get the impression that the appointment process for ministerial advisors is a transparent and fair one, and that those selected are of a pretty high calibre. I have observed a wide range of political views in my agency, but don't feel that it impacts on our service. That said, I work in more of a service delivery area than a policy area.

In answering this survey, I have assumed "Ministerial Advisor" refers to Political Advisors, not Private Secretaries.

In general, the role of political neutrality is taken very seriously. I found it incredibly heartening, and still do, after joining the public sector, when I witnessed continual reflection on the neutrality of advice, and how important it was to colleagues to be mindful of remaining politically neutral. Likewise, I usually witness colleagues taking the OIA very seriously, not just because of statutory requirements, but also because of a genuine belief in the importance of transparent government. Unfortunately there seems to be a false them/us mentality around the OIA, which often seems to be exacerbated by frivolous requests for information that are time consuming, largely contain nothing useful, and result in damaging, clickbait journalism. I have only ever witnessed colleagues willing to get OIAs done in a timely manner, however there is frustration when you must trawl through thousands of emails relating to an obscure subject when you'd prefer to be telling people about details of policy work. No-one wants to hide anything, but a continual barrage of vexatious OIA requests builds a fear based culture and develops risk aversion.

In many respects as a state servant (former public servant) it is not my place to have a view on the work of Ministerial Advisors. It is a little like electricians and plumbers having a view on each other's work. They often get along fine, or not, but the jobs are different and provide different functions. Ministers have the authority to make decisions, our job is to provide the best advice to them in the public interest. We should accept that our advice is contestable by anyone, including Ministerial advisors. We need to then respect the ability of Ministers to make decisions, to otherwise (within the law) would be subjective given our constitutional arrangements.

In my answer, I have differentiated departmental secondees in a Minister's office, from Ministerial advisers who I've assumed are the political appointees (often drawn from the relevant party). Secondees have an explicit role to help navigate the relationship between the department and the Minister (and his/her political advisers). As a result, they tend to report to and be supported by a senior executive in the department. There *may* be an issue around ministerial advisers who are drawn from the relevant department, and so who may blur this distinction. In my experience, most/all ministerial advisers that I've worked with have been appointed from outside the public service. I suspect (am pretty sure) there is some SSC guidance around the relationship with advisers already. There may be a case for developing a code of conduct as part of, or alongside the Cabinet manual. I'd strongly oppose putting this in statute, for the same reasons that the Cabinet manual is not in statute.

In my experience there is a degree of "finessing" of information that is going to the Minister and/or that may be discoverable, and there seems to be a concern about how the department's performance will be judged based on the information that goes to the Minister. Things seem to be reported to the Minister in a way that might not be completely free and frank, but rather, makes us "look good". Efforts are made to include information that puts us in a positive light, and to put some spin on things that may give a negative impression - so I find it hard to see it as "free and frank".

In my experience there is increasing pressure on departments to "reverse engineer" advice to reach a desired ministerial outcome. This pressure ultimately comes from ministers but the advent of ministerial advisors makes it easier for this pressure to be communicated to departments both directly and indirectly. For example, the minister's office of the department in which I worked was heavily controlled by the minister's political advisor, who acted as a gatekeeper between the department's advice and the minister. She would, for example: refuse to allow documents containing advice with which she was unhappy to go before the Minister; dictate the form in which advice could be provided (e.g. "off-the-record" oral briefings rather than written advice); and limit the issues to be addressed in advice. Meanwhile, the two departmental private secretary positions in the minister's office were downgraded to very junior staff, with primarily administrative responsibilities and who played very little role in policy liaison. This contrasted significantly with my experience on first joining the department, when there was no political advisor in the Minister's office and one of the departmental private secretaries was a 4th-tier equivalent staff member with responsibility for all substantive liaison between the Minister and the department on policy issues.

In my experience, ministerial advisors intervened early on in the policy process and thus impacted the provision of free and frank advice. Their role in manipulating the OIA in the political interests of their minister is particularly unacceptable. A code of conduct might help. Ministers also need to act with more restraint in what they ask their advisors to do.

In my experience, Ministers have often got more useful policy advice from political staff than from public servants who are too afraid to say what they actually believe would be best for NZ (or in some cases no longer even know). The political staff have a different job to the policy advisors, and in my view both roles are legitimate and valuable in their place. In particular, it's important that the public service isn't expected to give political advice to Ministers - and it's easier to maintain that negative expectation if it's very clearly someone else's job. The way I see it, it's not the political advisors' fault if their voices often drown out those of policy advisors. The public service should wear that one!

In my view these advisers run the risk of compromising the role of the ministers and are too active as gatekeepers.

In my view, the State Services Commission has, progressively over time, done a poor job of protecting CEs and the public service from Ministers who are reluctant to receive free and frank advice. This encourages risk averse leadership teams. There's also a huge disconnect between the 'best practice' exhortations of the head of the policy community (and SSC), and what they (and others) know is actually occurring with Ministers and Ministers' offices. Some of this appears designed to thwart the OIA. In other cases, we seem to have lost the independence we once had to provide genuinely frank advice in BIMs, since SSC now requires any BIM advice to have already gone to the relevant Minister (on the basis of no surprises).

In some cases they work well, in other cases not - some kind of code of conduct and better understanding of boundaries by some would be useful for them and for public servants.

In the NZ Public service, agency CEs get to choose how politically neutral their agency is (as far as advice is concerned). Many apply strong filters to departmental advice so that the minister only gets to hear what the CE thinks they want to hear. Others are better. My point is that the quality control function seems absent or broken. In theory, SSC should be active here. In practice, they seem to encourage some of the worst offenders.

It is my impression that Managers of Gov. departments are very cautious when it comes to dealing with Ministerial advisors (or anyone from a Minister's office). I am not sure why?

It is my view that the growing role of political advisers is a natural evolution of an MMP system where government's survive or fall on single digit percentage points. All decisions are viewed politically and sensitivity to public opinion is high. It is most unrealistic to expect this trend to end or reverse (if we retain MMP). It is my own view that NZ may need to confront the reality that the Westminster model may no longer be fit for purpose in an MMP system. If we are to have a political system of advisers then we should embrace that with necessary checks and balances. It is unwise to pretend that the game has not changed or that we are only going through a temporary diversion from the norm.

It is natural that Ministers should have "minders" with political backgrounds, or who are personally known to the Minister. There are many types of interaction that go beyond what a neutral public servant, even on secondment, can/should do. A problem arises if the Ministerial advisors, who are usually untrained in policy analysis and undisciplined by peer reviews, impeded other work, especially advice from the dept. to the Minister. I haven't seen much of that problem in NZ, but have (in spades) in Australia (where I worked for 18 years), where Ministers' offices have become very large, mainly with such advisors; public servants rarely get access to the Minister and some live in fear of the advisors. Federal ministers' offices have been large for ages; in Victoria ministers' offices suddenly expanded after the 1999 election and the policy clout of the depts. declined.

It is up the public servant first and foremost to stay neutral and make sure they work to the minister. Use the ministerial advisor wisely. They can be a real asset. Public servants need to know the boundaries.

It isn't exactly clear whether you are trying to capture secondees into a Ministers office from a department or political advisors with the term "Ministerial Advisors".

It must be instilled in new public servants at a high level that they should not take POLITICAL sides but should maintain the neutrality of the public service advise by backing up their advice with facts and good analysis coupled with references and examples relating to the issues not just opinions. Good "research" is an essential role for senior level researchers even if it may not agree with the opinions of the minister, Be prepared to argue the case without bias. I know this from my own personal experience. Also if the Minister decides to go ahead against your advice don't be too upset. "The risk has been delegated upwards by the Minister to himself".

It would be useful to have a clear code of conduct as there have been examples where appropriate separation is not maintained.

It's more about the character and conduct of senior managers in the public sector. They need to ask why, not how high if a political advisor asks them to jump.

It's critical the public services are neutral. The appointments need transparency so the decision process is made available for others to see. The appointee must be the best person for the job.

Lack of capability in the Treaty of Waitangi widespread at Ministerial advisor level.

Like all roles there are good and bad people in them. When you get a good advisor they facilitate and provide you with insights which help you. Other advisors seem to lose any semblance of manners or civility when they get to the Minister's office. The Minister's middle office at the moment is almost impossible to get work through, even when the Minister has requested work. This blocks and subverts free and frank advice.

Like all things involving people, the role, effectiveness and influence of a political advisor is heavily affected by their personality and competence for the job. The best advisors recognise the importance and value of communication and co-operation with government officials but also recognise and respect the boundaries (albeit unwritten). Used effectively they can be extremely useful in making progress with policy issues that might otherwise get stuck in the Minister's office or in assisting officials to present the material and messages they want to give to the Minister in a way that resonates with the Minister. They can be helpful mood barometers. They can unstick things held up in other Minister's offices. Of course the bad ones (usually in junior Ministers' offices) are the antithesis of the description above.

Ministerial advisors are not politically neutral. Increasingly officials are creating policy advice that is based on politics. One solution would be to create a code of conduct for Ministerial advisors, at the same time reviewing guidelines for officials and making it clear that the role of one is free and frank advice based on public interest and the other is free and frank advice based on political conditions.

Ministerial advisors differ in style and approach. I've had the pleasure of working with very switched on advisors who work to smooth the way in the political world, they contrast with overbearing advisors who were simply another problem to manage. This questionnaire assumes one style - but there are good ones and bad ones.

Ministerial advisors have too much power in minister's office - everything is secondary to their advice, and often they are relatively inexperienced or lack understanding of issues.

Ministerial Advisors influence depends on the Minister's preferred operating style - some rely on their Advisors more than their agency seconded staff for advice on day to day issues, whereas some Ministers are comfortable receiving advice directly from their agency staff. This can be good or bad, depending on how the Ministerial Advisor acts, sometimes they can act as a barrier to advice and/or access to the Minister.

Ministerial advisors must take particular care to respect the neutrality and non-partisanship of officials. Within a ministerial office, for example, the personal politics of a seconded official are irrelevant and private to them. A competent ministerial adviser can actually assist officials by bringing a different perspective or appreciation of risk; and shield officials from pressure to undertake tasks that are inappropriate for officials. Ministerial advisors should start with the default position that officials come

to work to do their professional best for the government of the day. Gratuitous denigration of officials (and their advice) by Ministers or their advisors is counter-productive and morale sapping.

Ministerial advisors per se are a useful addition to the Minister's office operations. However, the incumbents are often long standing ministerial stalwarts and thus have a primary goal of Minister protection - rather than a 'wider' scope. The survey suggests a code of conduct and introducing more neutrality to the roles and I agree with this direction.

Ministerial advisors with a good relationship with the Minister can wield a good deal of power, power that is not transparent. Ministerial advisors are gate keepers - that in its self is a risk to political neutrality. Ministerial advisors can assist officials understand the influence of certain lobby groups Ministerial advisors can assist officials to present risks and implementation issues etc in a manner the Minister will hear Ministerial advisors can sometimes be more about the political game than the quality of policy advice. Officials could be more brave at ensuring Ministers are presented with free and frank advice Sometimes phrasing advice for the ministerial audience is seen as a reduction of free and frank advice or political neutrality when it is actually an attempt to keep the Minister listening. More understanding of the parliamentary process may assist the public participation in select committee work and therefore balance some Ministerial Advisor power.

Ministerial advisors' most detrimental impact has been their creeping influence on departmental matters, particularly the OIA. Since the advent of 'no surprises', departments have great difficulty releasing even the most inconsequential or uncontroversial material under the OIA if the relevant ministerial advisor takes issue.

Ministers are entitled to get advice from whomever they choose, the public service doesn't have a monopoly. The questions you asked made it difficult to get to the heart of the matter. The role and interaction with the public service echoes the complexity of the relationship between the public service and ministers, can be both positive and negative (sometimes on the same day), but (as I said above) anyone who thinks there shouldn't be any ministerial advisors doesn't appreciate how large a ministers' job is.

Ministers should be able to draw of a range of sources of advice and information. They should be able to be exposed to contestable advice. Ministerial advisors play a crucial role in facilitating this for Ministers. They can enhance the democratic process and improve Ministerial decision making.

Most Ministerial Advisors just spend their time going through OIAs. Their influence should not be overrated. If necessary, officials need to stand their ground. I've done this in the past and the sky didn't fall in.

Most of what I had to say was in the previous section.

My comments are made from a 'community' point of view exploring the potential in the first purpose of local government viz enabling democratic local decision making and action etc. At present the Public Service seems inhibiting or undermining because of the influence of other agenda, particularly micro interactions with Ministers. In that respect it might be possible to discern neutrality in areas like environment and transport, but there is very little to distinguish advisors and public servants when it comes to housing, education, WINZ and CYPF.

My impression is that with the coming election, we are expected to be especially on guard to any possible flak-generating events. i.e. there is less room for error.

My initial perspective is that New Zealand has strong and robust guidelines and measures to ensure political neutrality of persons working in the state services.

My only comment is one that the researchers will know well, but should nevertheless continue to reflect on. Namely, that defining what is meant by Public Service neutrality in this context, or even defining an appropriate and desirable conception is difficult and contested. Neutral with regards to what? A great deal of trust in the public service is lost when public servants' neutrality is called into question - it is interpreted, in my experience, by those outside of the public service as if public servants are inappropriately serving the particular interests of a particular political party. Serving the interests of the government of the day (who have a right to govern) is an appropriate and desirable duty of the public service. This activity can be easily misinterpreted. I have worked directly for several senior public servants, and have not had reason to question their political neutrality, or the general state of free and frank advice. I can't comment in a similar regard on public service neutrality as I think it's a confused concept (or at least one I'm yet to see a workable conception of).

My recent observations that political advisors are becoming more powerful and influential within Ministers' offices and this is having a negative impact on the previously impartial role of ministerial advisors

NA

New Zealand politicians tend to be hands-on and stray from governance into management. This inevitably politicizes government institutions and their priorities. We have a very weak investigative press and little evidence based policy development or decision making. The select committee process is essentially a controlled form of lobbying where many different opinions are distilled down into some sort of water-down consensus. Therefore the ministerial advisors are perfectly reasonable roles to create in such an environment: Ministers need to take soundings from colleagues and other parties around the different ideas out there, in order to seek a politically acceptable consensus. However this means that we do not invest as much as other countries in real scientific 'think tanks' that develop strong evidence based policies focused on tangible outcomes and high performance.

None

Not related - The terminology 'event-based' contracts is a bit confusing. Is it not fixed term employment?

Officials seem to be much more cautious about providing free and frank advice - there is a reluctance in some agencies to provide advice which challenges Ministers. This is not at the level of advisors/senior advisors - it is at the management level.

One issue of modern Ministerial offices I do not enjoy is the need for each office to have someone skilled at refusing OIA requests. I appreciate a review has given the tick to current use of the OIA but I thought that was flawed. I would impose sanctions on those who obstruct information flows. I realise that endless "fishing expeditions" via OIA wreck the scene for genuine requests. Those journalists and political parties who carry on like this are hindering democracy rather than improving it

One of the risks observed with the emergence of Ministerial advisors, and particularly those who have grown out of a firming relationship with a particular Minister, is that they can become zealots for 'their Minister's' programme and political aspirations. As such, they can become 'obstructors' to the promotion and progress of quality advice and programmes, rather than remaining the 'natural facilitators' had they otherwise continued their political neutrality as attached Public Servants.

Ordinary public is unaware such a group exists... Even when selected they are often mates of the Government of the day.

Over my career (which dates from the 80's) I have noticed that public servants have become less willing to offer free and frank advice, and that Ministers have become more assertive about not accepting or even welcoming it.

Overall I think there has been some weakening of the absolute rules and guidance for Public Servants since the days of the old Public service manual. I think it's great that we have moved on to a time where Public Servants can assess potential impact for their department in certain areas and draw this to the attention of their managers and their Ministers and the potential outcomes of various activities, as long as this information is not politically biased and really follows the key objectives that their Department has agreed to.

Part of the ministerial advisors code should be to ensure the advice they provide seeks the best interests of the communities we serve.

Policy ideas are often tested with Ministerial advisors before being put forward to the Minister. This is ok as long as the Department takes a very strong line of protecting their neutrality and responsibility to provide free and frank advice. Departments aren't incentivized to act like this.

Political advisers have no doubt always been a feature of party politics and of government since the advent of political parties. Some of my assessments are based on the assumption that the Ministerial Advisors are paid for out of Government funding. Political advisers ought, IMO, to be funded from party funds (including public funds provided for party purposes to support their political responsibilities within parliament) rather than Government funding. Government funding belongs to all of the people, not just to those who support the party of the Minister.

Political advisers should be normalized in our process. Clearer role definition would help, perhaps a multiparty working group to could come up with a formula that would suit all parties and endure. This could then be incorporated into e.g. Cabinet Manual (DPMC) and the employment and support arrangements for political advisers (DIA). I also think that administrations with large parliamentary parties should consider using MPs in roles similar to political advisers. This seems a useful way to expose new MPs to Ministerial work, draw on senior MPs' experience, and use both to inform the detail of policy development and decision making, in a way that can't happen in the caucus room. As to preserving public service neutrality, the ongoing challenge continues to be the political and philosophical monoculture among public servants. The wider state sector seems disproportionately of a left-liberal persuasion, with some isolated pockets of economic rationalists (I would be happy to be proven wrong by some attitudinal research). If the Commissioner wants a Public Service that looks like New Zealand, shouldn't we also have one that encompasses and understands the range of opinions in the country?

Possibly not on topic, but we should move towards the transparent sharing of official information with the public as the default setting, not subject to OIA requests

Public servants should not be afraid of contestability of advice. However, Ministers need to remember the importance of the relationship between the Cabinet and the public service and be prepared to receive advice. Ministerial advisers can play a useful role in the policy process but need to be alert to the risks to neutrality of the public service and the importance of not impeding the flow of advice to the Minister.

Public Service neutrality is paramount if we want a government to work for the interests of the people. In order for the public servant to act in such a manner, the mechanisms put in place should be robust. There should not be any negative impact on the public servant when neutrality is upheld. Public service neutrality should not be confused with absence of political views. Public servants also can have political views. They should be able to exercise their political franchise and take part in public life so long as it does not conflict with their role as a public servant.

Public Service neutrality is taken very seriously by all agencies I've worked for (Ministries, departments, crown entities). Even to the extent that it has prevented free and frank advice, e.g. from independent scientists to the government and public (if advice is deemed to be too 'political').

Public service neutrality only works if valued and championed by all parties; I don't see that ministerial advisors are, as a concept, any more or any less likely to threaten this neutrality than Ministers of public servants themselves failing to value it and act in accordance with it. I'd suggest that the tone set by Ministers tends to filter down - a "good" Minister can recognise when he or she is hearing a broad range of perspectives, and can indeed facilitate that process and the ministerial advisor role can support this. Or a Minister can choose to only listen to what they want to hear and what accords with their own personal views - and here the ministerial advisor tends to be selected as, and end up performing, a gatekeeper role. Senior public servants should fight against this happening - but the evidence I've seen of this across several departments is patchy.

Public service neutrality will only be able to approach neutrality if officials are trained to recognise their own biases. This applies whether ministerial or departmental.

Questions seem a bit loaded?

Recently, 2017 - as a private citizen I sent an OIA request to a Minister for the pages of his official diary and at the due date (after an extension). In reply, I received five emails with eight PDF documents with a total of 75 blanked out pages (just pdf documents with big black squares on them - saying "released under the OIA") sent to me and copied to all six policy people in the senior team including the Ministerial Advisor. It appeared to be a political, unnecessary act and an attempt to ridicule (which would be political action by officials in its own right). Either the Minister urged and approved officials to behave like that, or they did for their own amusement. A new low for the NZ public service.

Same as last - you needed to be clearer about what Ministerial Advisor meant for these questions - I was confused about whether it was the role in my department, or the Advisor in the Minister's office.

See my comments on the earlier question. Some Ministerial advisors are on power trips and think their advice is the only advice that matters and is right - these advisors make life for a public servant very

difficult in terms of access to Ministers, and providing our advice. Some also cover their backs when they make mistakes by blaming officials and officials are not in a position to respond. But there are some very good ministerial advisors who understand their role and the role of the official and facilitate the Minister getting good advice. These advisors I would have no problem returning to the public service. But there does need to be better performance management of them.

See previous answer

some ministerial advisors have provided little value to the overall machinery of government processes - common mistakes include unclear and broad requests for information; unrealistic timeframes; specific and 'leading' lines of enquiry; lack of empathy for public servants and their workloads; and limited understanding of subject matter leading to poor advice to both the minister and the department. a good ministerial advisor is all over the issues - well-read and informed - and works hard to develop trust and confidence with public servants. they are robust in their advice to departments - having carefully constructed any requests so that department staff are not sent on wild goose chases. a good ministerial advisor can protect both the minister and the department from unnecessary risk. this is not a role for junior staff or for people new to this country (my experience).

Sometimes they have no clue about, or background in, the policy matters being dealt with. This results in seriously shoddy advice being given to Ministers.

Sorry but I'm not sure that I have ever come across any such Ministerial advisors. Our Minister always has an advisor who seems to be appointed on a temporary basis from our department who just organises papers to get to him/her etc and I thought was subject to the same neutrality requirements as we are but other than that I don't think I've come across a Ministerial advisor employed on an event based contract.

Staff within government agencies themselves are not politically neutral. I have been a Ministerial advisor and if you work for a Minister who is from a supporting party what information they are allowed is monitored, vetoed, approved by the principal Minister; staff members decide what is appropriate to go to that Minister's office, and what the Ministerial advisor (although is an employee of the agency) it is questioned what information they can access, even though they could access that information freely if they were in their agency.

Term Contracts for senior public servants has undermined the emphasis on "what is good for New Zealanders", to "what is good for individuals short term contracts." An independent, competent civil service is essential absent an upper house. In the last 20 years, NZ has lost both competence and self-confidence within its civil service. Public policy is fragmented, and there is little honest public consultation. Public Relations marketing of political party policies has become more influential over sound national policy analysis. Few public servants will now stake their careers by arguing against Ministers policy objectives that are not in the nations long term interest.

The 1987 State Sector Act and the way it has been used has served to effectively undermine the political neutrality of the public service. The public service has gone from providing 'frank advice and loyal implementation' to 'loyal advice and loyal implementation' The Ministerial behaviour is all about implementing the desires of the Minister and providing advice that suits the Minister's prejudices, not providing quality politically neutral advice.

The advisor is best to have the subject area knowledge instead of message translator. It is similar like 'Business Analyst' roll, which could either smooth the business or stuck the business. They should provide the valuable advice based on the facts they understand but not as their assumption. There are too many talkative advisor instead of doing real analysis works.

The best ministerial advisors I have encountered had some public service experience or had a clear understanding of relationship between all the branches of government (including the public service). I am also interested in the implications of the ministerial advisor network and how they meet with the PM's office. I can see this as a method by which the PM's office manages the Cabinet dialogue and decision making. However, I can also see how some might see this as a possible concern regarding the representativeness of the decision-making as these advisors are not elected or subject to public scrutiny. The amount of 'policy advice' given my ministerial advisors to Ministers on (non-OIAable) post-it notes should not be underestimated. While I think most advice I have seen prepared has often benefitted from Ministerial advisor input (i.e., "this will be the Minister's concern - so I will speak to her or you might want to address it in the paper"), there have also been several instances where I have seen Ministerial advisers attempt to play down adverse or negative recommendations with little understanding of the issues. I was neutral on the OIA question, but I do acknowledge how fear of OIAs drives Ministers and their advisors to attempt to soften or obscure the way advice they don't like (or poses political risk) is presented to them. I think the guidance in this area could be improved.

The few Ministerial advisors I've dealt with over my many years in the public service have by and large been OK. there have been a couple of times when I've had to challenge their approach as going too far, or moving into the realm of quite political in direct dealings with members of the public or businesses.

The high number of contract roles must be affecting neutrality as well since staff will be reluctant to give unpopular opinions for fear of not having their contract renewed.

The idea that we have a neutral civil service is rather quaint. That ideal has long since been buried. Maintaining the facade means there is little transparency and allows a multitude of behaviours that could reasonably be seen as self-serving as politicians are. And in my view, given the way funding is managed the behaviour is entirely understandable. Suggest that research into the drivers of policy and administrative advice is another area to be reviewed. I have seen far too many policies designed so that additional (or prioritisation of) funding could be obtained that had limited benefit to the policy delivery per se. IT and other organisational overhead investment are cases in point - almost always are related to some policy change. Whether this investment is required is in many cases is very debatable. The civil service is as adept as any business in ensuring its internal needs are met within the constraints of their environment. The SSC is an enabler rather than a robust reviewer of this type of expenditure or worse, and there is far too little light on the genuine effectiveness overhead costs.

the influence of advisors on Ministers and Ministry relationships increased significantly from 2000 through to 2012. the nature of the influence was more the result of the personal operating style of the advisor. out of control advisors seem to have few restraints on their behaviour although on occasions DPMC was required exercised some restraint. good advisors improved the policy process significantly

The issue is currently around transparency of responsibility for final decision making on policy issues. There needs to be more clarity for the public about who makes the final decision on policy issues. i.e. Departments need to know that the Minister and their advisors will take public responsibility for

accepting or rejecting departmental policy advice given. Ministerial advisors need to know their role is not to try and change departmental policy advice, but accept it may be not what they wanted to hear. Departments also need to not refer contentious OIA requests to Ministers if final policy decisions were different to the departmental advice given. They should release their advice.

The main concern is when they skew the advice or stop departmental advice getting to Minister's. When they are gatekeepers they pose a risk. The neutrality of advice is being eroded by more than the advent of Ministerial advisors - it comes from CEs unwillingness to give advice that Minister's don't want to receive.

The main risks is political advisers seeking to edit public service advice before it gets to the Minister. This does occur from time to time and this suggests some advisors lack role clarity. I see this as more an education and development issue than one of legislated codes or practice.

The Ministerial Advisors must maintain Political and Public Service Neutrality - at all times; Privacy and Official Information Act. should be used as a tool to hinder progress, all facts need to be stated as facts; and Reduce duplication of effort and cost across the Ministries.

The neutrality of the public service is critical to the operation of democracy and must not be impaired.

the opportunity for a code of practice would set the expectations clearly for all parties. this would offer the opportunity to regain some of the ground that has become somewhat less than firm. The access to the free and frank advice ethos, would regain some of the politically led policy optioning currently seen in some areas of government programmes.

The process of selecting Ministerial Advisors needs to be more transparent and perhaps centrally coordinated.

The public service must be able to provide robust free and frank advice to government. However, this doesn't mean it should not objectively assess any directions from the Minister. Ministerial advisors can be assets or could frustrate the process - it depends on the person who is fulfilling the role

The Public Service, especially senior officers, should be in a stronger position to use objective scientific knowledge research "for the public good", without fear of impeding their career. There appears to have a greater propensity to "tell the Minister what he wants to hear" than used to be the situation.

The question about 2017 being less neutral than previously misses the point. There has been a lack of transparency from agencies to Ministers for a very long time, and 2017 is no different from previous years. Note that this is not about the role of the Ministerial Advisors - it is about the way that each Minister is 'managed' by Government agencies (and I am familiar with six different agencies in that respect).

The reasons the OIA doesn't impede free and frank advice is that Ministers don't care about it. The need for Departments to tell ministers what they want to hear, and cumulative risk aversion does. There is far, far less access to Ministers generally - it used to be Senior Advisors were there frequently: that's not now the case. Departments feel the need to "sing from the same hymn sheet" and have no disagreement in front of the ministers - so CEs and DCEs don't have free and frank discussions as much as they once did.

The State Services Commissioner and Auditor General's office surely are in place to ensure that Ministerial advisors are used for positive good, and able to investigate if preference or partiality is a concern

The survey sees political neutrality in simpler terms than the reality that top public servants experience daily as they balance responsiveness with independence. The PM's speech last year on free and frank advice and Bill English's years of complaints about flaccid and unimaginative advice from the public service is relevant. Public servants and perhaps this questionnaire are too concerned about de jure political independence and whether it is threatened by political advisers and not sufficiently concerned about de facto independence. The daily reality is that capable senior public service advisers earn high levels of de facto independence by the track record of the quality of their work. Political advisers are much more likely to run interference and threaten the political neutrality of the public service when they know their minister has little respect for official advisers.

Their roles have changed with the times and the overall focus of governments

Their roles have developed in an adhoc and unplanned way. Like all important aspects of the public sector there needs to be clarity over roles, functions and how they are managed, with transparency and clear lines of accountability.

There are also questions to be asked about the neutrality of the developers of advice too

There are many layers of complexity in the relationship between officials and Ministers and personnel in Minister's offices. A significant aspect of working in a neutral environment is having clear and transparent understandings of the basis from which people operate, what their experience, relationships and allegiances bring to the role and how these are managed in the transaction of the day to day business.

There is a delineation that's not captured here in the survey - Ministerial advisors seconded from departments and political advisers that are party or Ministerial appointments. I see the functions as complimentary but distinct. In my experience those seconded from departments play a critical role in policy development.

There is a move toward employing 'career private secretaries' by departments. This means that the private secretary does not have a background or come from the department. This allows the department to provide information to the Minister without push back as the PS does not understand the ins and outs of the department. There has also been political appointments by the Ministers to the private secretary roles and the department does not have the opportunity to put forward its own candidate. My experience is that this is just another way for the minister to get an extra political adviser at the cost to the agency.

To clarify my answers on the impact of the OIA. My experience tells me that the OIA does not impede the provision of free, frank and comprehensive advice from the Public Service to Ministers. However there may be caution - particularly amongst junior and middle-level staff - about committing free, frank and comprehensive advice to paper, due to perceptions about its being released in response to an OIA request (notwithstanding the provisions of the Act), and potentially surprising and causing embarrassment to Ministers. I don't believe senior Public Servants are constrained in their obligation to provide such advice.

Trouble can arise when Ministers cherry pick the best of advisors to fill vacancies by sidestepping established appointment procedures. Not all Ministers can exercise this discretion but some do to the detriment of morale within the career service. Ministers and governments wanting deliverable results within a three year parliamentary term may also see advisory functions providing short cuts to outcomes they seek. Results may follow but only to kick the can further down the road over difficult problems requiring dedicated, collegial, and long-term analysis and management. Numerous examples exist. The 'can-do' brand that advisors offer can, of itself, contribute to an atmosphere of immediate fire-fighting and events management that will short term protect Ministers but not contribute much to needed to substantial policy development. This can erode institutional knowledge as career people look elsewhere, taking with them what Bagehot once called 'the facts that live in the office'.

Upon returning from the UK 6 years ago I have seen a steady decrease in the willingness to provide free and frank advice to Ministers.

Very timely survey as we were having a discussion this morning on political neutrality, free and frank advice and the role of Ministerial advisors. Having experienced several administrations - and Ministerial advisors who were everything from very helpful to a real obstacle - I think the extent to which Ministerial advisors help or hinder the policy advice process depends on a) how the relevant Minister chooses to use them; b) the character of the individual adviser; c) whether they are trying to push a particular policy agenda themselves (whether or not that is congruent with that of the minister); and d) whether the department has put sufficiently senior and confident people in the private secretary role to push back if necessary. Some of the more problematic Ministerial advisors I have seen were operating in an environment where the department had put relatively junior people in the office who got captured by the Ministerial advisor's agenda.

When I was a policy analyst in a govt department, we found ministerial advisors to be useful sounding boards for what the minister was thinking or how she would likely react to a policy proposal. We also found them overbearing and overly risk averse when it came to responding to OIA requests. There is an additional problem with an imbalance of resourcing between ministerial advisory staff and opposition party leader's office advisory staff - ministerial offices are disproportionately better resourced and paid.

While I have no issue with Ministers receiving advice from political advisers (or anyone else they choose) I am concerned at political advisers habit of making direct contact with officials and endeavouring to influence the advice that is provided to the Minister in the first place. Ideally the public service would give neutral free and frank advice and the political advisers can provide the Minister their take on that from a political risk standpoint but instead they endeavour to ensure politically unpalatable advice never reaches the Minister.

While I replied that I think there is less free and frank advice from departments, I don't think this is related to the advent of ministerial advisers. The first two MMP governments (1996 and 2000) had written coalition agreements on which ministers placed great store. Advice from official that questioned any part of those agreements was not welcome. From 2003 onwards, we have had minority governments with confidence and supply agreements. Ministerial advisers have been vital in the efficient workings of these agreements and can conduct and facilitate negotiations between parties in ways in which political public servants cannot. At the same time, Ministers have been less welcoming of free and frank advice that might disturb the political relationships between the government and its support partners. The Clark government was very unwelcoming of free and frank advice of any sort. Part of this

was a dis-trust of the public service in light of what was seen as the "capture" of the Lange government by officials, especially Treasury. Another factor was the PM's desire to present a united Labour Party in government and thus she did not welcome advice that would pit ministers against each other or give the impression that the Government has (a) of one mind and (b) always choose the best options. It was also part of a development of "professional" politicians who were in many ways just as knowledgeable as their advisers and thus were less reliant on officials for advice. The Key government was more indifferent to free and frank advice than hostile to it. A confident and pragmatic PM heading a pragmatic government was happy to receive and accept or reject whatever advice officials wanted to proffer. The new PM is probably of the same nature.

While the Public Service may attempt to remain neutral when providing advice to a Minister, there is always a level of politics which affect people's views. I might argue remaining politically neutral can therefore be damaging, although aligning to a specific party should never be accepted by an organisation.

Work that has some political dimensions has long been done quite well by professional public servants. Who can do that work while remaining essentially politically neutral. Work of a purely political nature should be done by politicians, for example, by an expanded number of parliamentary under-secretaries.

You haven't differentiated between Ministerial advisors appointed by Departments, and Ministerial advisors appointed by the Minister. They are very different roles within a Minister's office.

You may need to define what the definition of Ministerial advisor is you are seeking to define. The survey mentions those appointed from departments, but is silent on those appointed due to party alignments etc.

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As a present or former public servant, were/are you aware of any protocols governing contact between ministerial advisors in your minister's office and departmental officials? - Yes (please tell us what those protocols are)

Code of conduct -State sector act 1988 -Provide 'Free and frank' advice to ministers, even if it's advice Ministers do not want to hear -act impartially so as not to compromise your ability to work with current and future governments

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advice is always to the minister. Explain and/or listen to advisor but never take direction.

Advice should relate to portfolio and not political manifestos

All communication should be approved by our CEO

All communications for the Minister go through our Executive and Ministerial Services

All contact with Ministerial Advisor must be via the Private Secretary responsible for the portfolio relating to our entity

Although not formalised as a protocol, there was a clear expectation, and practice, that senior officials would work constructively with political advisors

Always communicate through those approved to communicate direct with the Portfolio Private Secretary

Approvals process for Aide Memoires, Briefings, Weekly reports, Fact Sheets, Media Releases, OIAs, etc. Manager's approval of responses to requests for information from Minister's offices. Code of Conduct and specific requirements in election year. Speaking at Minister's officials meetings to be specifically approved by manager.

Arranged by private secretary (departmental) for particular purpose

As a former public servant contact was initially through the next manager up and once a piece of work and/or relationships were established contact could be direct with relevant manager cc'd in

As much as possible directed through Private Secretary, esp. below tier 2

As per Cabinet Manual 2008

As per code of conduct and organizational policies/procedures

Aware of the need for political neutrality

Awareness of internal ministerial liaison staff

Boundaries and diplomacies. I was a private secretary and saw boundaries working well and not so well in different situations.

BRAGs and generally go through secondees to Ministers office first.

Broadly, that advisors don't engage directly with public servants, rather that the departmental staff (private secretaries) in the Minister's office act as a go-between.

but in a different role, in a different jurisdiction

Cabinet Manual, SSC Code of Conduct

cabinet manual SSC Stds Integrity & Conduct

Cabinet manual, other established processes not documented

Cabinet office manual

Can't remember exactly but we have a department that contacts the Minister's office directly and we go through them

civil service code of conduct. All Ministerial communications are to be through the Ministerial team within the organisation I work.

Code of conduct

Commissioning should come through private secretaries rather than political staff.

Common sense

common sense about staying away from party political stuff

communicate through private secretary

Conflicts of interest, political neutrality

contact between ministerial advisors and departmental officials had to go through the departmental private secretary.

Contact is limited to meetings with a senior manager present.

Contact normally mediated by departmental rep in office.

Contact should be through the department's secondees in the Ministers offices, and in general, the secondees should be present at any meetings with the ministerial advisors.

Contact should take place between private secretaries (department staff in the Ministers' offices) or senior managers

contact through a delegated staff member (usually a Manager tier 4 or above)

Contact to go through the Ministerial Services team and senior management

Contact to be minimised through a central conduit

Contact was through specified managers and only as required. Role clarity was maintained - they were politically partisan, we were not and gave free and frank advice. We both served the Minister, who had ultimate responsibility for policy decisions, on the basis of both political and departmental advice.

Contact was via private secretary, with little contact with political advisors unless purely transactional conventions around political roles, particularly around elections (e.g., costing opposition policies).

Conventions distinguishing policy and political advice, Ministerial requests of the department are NOT commissioned directly by the political adviser, etc

Correspondence was to go through our agencies secondees in minister's office.

Couldn't commission work for the political party/purposes, couldn't engage the departmental advisor for political purposes / involvement

Department officials are still employees of the ministry, and are therefore required to be politically neutral. They are not to undertake political tasks for the minister or their advisors (e.g. helping to compose a campaign email to constituents).

Departmental contact and information only through correct channels

Departmental policy in addition to the code of conduct

Departments might have operational policies in place regarding who can communicate with ministerial advisors directly, more generally protocols exist regarding the nature of advice that public servants can provide ministerial advisors

Depending on the nature of the work contact was either governed by Ministerial services or direct contact via email or phone. No document was to be sent over prior to permission being sought.

Depends on the department and the level but usually you should clear any communication with the director

Detailed guidelines and ministerial support team mediates interactions

Detailed in the UK civil service code

Differed between Ministers and over time. Some were to be seen as speaking for the Minister, others not. Explicit expectation of not being openly political, although some did not always abide by this

Different approach to political neutrality; separation of advice

Don't email someone directly to someone who is two levels or more above you (unofficial rule). -Be pro-government (whoever it is)

Don't put some things in writing. Be careful what you say. Protect your department. Protect the Minister.

During an election period there are restrictions on what ministerial advisors can ask officials to provide to them. SSC provides guidance. Similarly, in relation to OIA releases the ministerial advisors are only able to request that material is withheld by a department when it meets the conditions under the OIA.

Election year protocols and the State Sector Code of Conduct

Ensure Private Secretary and direct manager are aware of anything that ministerial advisors ask for - we can only provide policy (non-political) advice/information.

formal communication between advisors and the Ministry was through parliamentary secretaries; in practice there was considerable informal discussion

Free and frank Loyalty Confidentiality

General guidance from COs office regarding requests or information

Generally do not contact political advisers directly

Generally no contact between the two, unless they send us a request for Info on a person or situation generally through a manager

Go through the Ministry-seconded advisor, with the agreement of your Tier 3/4 manager

I am aware of the requirement for public servants to serve the government of the day and maintain political neutrality. When I worked for a Crown Entity I was aware (In broad terms) of how far the Minister's influence should extend

I am aware of the requirements of the Cabinet Manual which refers to the relationship between Ministers and their CEs and officials. I treat this as applying to ministerial advisors.

I am aware they exist but have not needed to apply them

I am not sure what you mean by this question, as every minister's office has different protocols around communicating with that minister as per their preferences.

I don't know what exactly...

I know that there are protocols, I don't know what they are

I managed a team of Private Secretaries. The protocols included which areas each PS dealt with, what kinds of issue were generally discussed with business owners and everything on a no surprises basis at both ends.

I worked as a senior policy advisor at CYF's National Office in the 1990s and no doubt had some contact with ministerial advisors, but I believe I wasn't aware of the protocol (if there was one back then). So: Unsure.

I'm not familiar with formal frameworks governing conduct (other than SSC guidance), but there is a strongly understood line between political and apolitical staff. For example, departmental staff are asked to leave rooms when political conversations are undertaken, and the nature of information requested is always framed in a politically neutral way.

In current position information passed through one person here; being helpful with information but taking account of status an autonomous Crown entity

In a former role I was a press secretary for the former Labour Government. In my office we were careful not to have direct contact between the political advisor and the department. I don't know if that was a formal protocol In my current role I observe that this distinction is not observed and the political advisor

often interacts with the department directly. Having said that, it is often more useful to deal with the political advisor as they usually know more than the Private Secretary.

In general you should be discussing issues with your Private Secretary rather than the Ministerial Advisor or Press secretary

In so far as Public Service neutrality is concerned; and the impartiality of policy and service delivery advice.

In some cases needed to be done via identified person (or level of person) in the Department. Requests for advice etc needed to be within certain constraints (non-political)

In writing, always

Independence of dept. advice

Informal protocols of not engaging directly without strong managerial oversight

Informal protocols on roles of Ministerial advisers vis Departmental staff in Ministers' offices

Informal protocols only - covering who had 'clearance' to engage directly with Ministerial advisors

Informal protocols suggesting contact with ministerial advisors should be limited, and messages channelled through agency staff based at the Minister's office.

Information is generally relayed between our team and the Crown Entity's private secretary to the Minister.

Informing minister's office of policy and operational risks, "no surprises" approach.

Internal conventions and SSC Code of Conduct and other related material

Internal guidance

Internal protocols and SCC protocols

It is understood that everything should go through the departmental private secretary unless there is a reason to talk directly to the political advisor. Reasons might include discussing an issue with the political advisor when face time with the Minister is scarce or when information is needed to coordinate with other Ministers' offices when there is an issue of political sensitivity. The private secretary is always present. Most/many conversations with the political advisory are done between a senior policy advisor and the political advisor.

letter of expectations

Maintain neutrality in all engagement with advisors. Advisors don't influence the advice we provide to the Minister.

Managed through Official Correspondence unit and/or defined relationship management roles depending on nature of issue.

Ministerial advisors are expected to insulate public servants in the minister's office (i.e. private secretaries) from political discussions. Requests that might be considered political (info requests during

election year which are clearly for party purposes, for example) are referred to a senior departmental official who can push back.

Ministerial advisors are not to interfere with the provision of free and frank advice

ministerial advisors go through private secretaries for any ministry contact

Ministerial advisors were supposed to work through Private Secretaries to the departments, e.g. request information through Private Secretaries, not directly to the agency.

Must direct them to appropriate position holders within organisation unless specifically authorised to speak/communicate on an issue as a subject matter expert.

My recall is that all communications from Ministerial advisors to the department were to come through the chief executive's office.

my understanding is that communication is to come through the departmental adviser in the office; and/or any communication between the ministerial adviser and departmental officials should include the department's adviser

No protocols in place was part of my job

No surprises

No surprises Free and frank advice

No surprises Ministers office to do overtly political and party-political work

No surprises trumped everything.

No surprises, evidence based policy.

Non-written 'protocols' covering confidentiality in respect of Ministerial role/ activity - My specific Ministerial role was one of 'translation' departmental official-speak to language Minister could understand, and also to undertake policy risk assessment

not by name, but aware from experience of the difference between a Dept. secondee to the Ministers office and a Ministerial advisor (latter requires more caution/discretion)

Not clear on what those are exactly, but is generally appreciated that there is a need to recognise what advisors role is and to be careful around the relationship.

Not formal written ones, but as a team we discussed boundaries as to where we thought the line was - e.g. colours of documents, approval over what documents...

Not formalised, but in principle, political advisors should only be requesting factual information 'or lines from officials, not political material

not to do it

Nothing formal, just what we're expected to generally do and behave.

OIAs 'no surprises' approach

Only general code of conduct/political impartiality requirements i.e. that public servants are impartial, must not provide political advice/spin, political advisors/Ministers should not pressure public servants to do so/to provide information for a political purpose etc

Only informal protocols which given ministerial advisers greater freedom of access across divisions and stakeholders

Only insofar as they were not neutral but reflected party interest.

Only to report/advise on the issue raised by our work and not to speculate on other issue. All interaction in known and regulated

Organisational protocols such as informing appropriate managers etc.

policy of 'no surprises'; Cabinet manual; other internal policies.

Political advisers don't direct public service advice

political advisors so treat them like the press secs, i.e. go through our departmental advisor in the office, no direct contact

Political neutrality and caution

Political neutrality of department officials. The need to balance and ongoing stewardship role with the ability to craft advice that is actually useful - as it recognises the context in which the advice is being considered.

Political neutrality. Factual responses.

Present advice and facts to Minister, not to be involved in political dealings

Primarily contact through the private secretary. No political advice to be provided.

Primarily interacting with political / term appointed staff through Departmental private secretaries / advisors in Ministerial office.

Primarily, contact was facilitated by the Dept.'s private secretary. Occasionally direct contact was required, file notes of the contact, discussion points, etc were required to be filed

Priv Sec contacted only certain officials

Privacy concerns during meetings and workshops

Probably not formal protocols, but there was clear guidance given by senior management as to what was and what was not appropriate contact.

Procedures for contact

Processes designed to give effect to "no surprises" expectations

Processes for working on OIAs overlapping agencies; no surprises agreement with Minister.

protocols around political neutrality govern contact

provide free and frank advice

Public Service Code of Conduct

Relevant protocols include: departmental policy, intranet postings/emails sent for ad hoc purposes relating to Ministerial communication, central agency guidance and the Cabinet Manual (plus core legislation including the State Sector Act.

Requests for costing of party political policies must be in writing from the Minister, not a staff member.

Retain impartiality as a public servant irrespective of political views of Ministerial advisors

Routed through governance / ministerial relations team

Set out in Code of Conduct

Should go through the private secretary.

Some depts. require contact to be through 4th tier and above managers or through the departmental private secretary

Some initial verbal instructions but nothing written

Sort of: Cabinet Manual, State Sector Code of Conduct

SSC

SSC Guidance

SSC guidelines Cabinet Office manual

state sector act; public finance act; statistics act; privacy act; SSC code of conduct; agency embargo and release of information policy; agency strategic communications policy; etc

State Service commission provides protocols

State Services code of conduct for public servants

State Services protocols for public servants

Submission requirements, time to contact, type of request

The advisor is still employed by the Govt agency - and liaises between the Minister and the agency.

The advisors are to be treated as spokespeople for the Minister. We should avoid fraternising with the political advisors. We should route questions from the advisors and responses through the departmental private secretary. The advisors may not interfere in the management of the department.

The agreement between the Minister and the Department on focus and who does what. Most of our interactions are based around the notion of supporting the government of the day with free and frank advice.

The use of a coordinating role in the national Office to link these contacts and assess suitability/conflict of interest

There aren't many protocols. Talk to private sec first to square away talking with the Ministerial Advisor.

There have been changes. I could easily find out what is current.

There is supposed to be a difference between political advisors and departmental secondees. This seems to have vanished.

They are to contact the department heads and not individual public servants directly

They were not to contact the department directly.

Though not a formal issue it is clear that unlike civil servants ministerial advisers comment on the political implications of a policy proposal

to be treated as the political representative of the Minister

To gain more information on the policy advice needed

Treasury had general "rules" around who could contact the Minister's office and who could provide "advice". I can't recall these being written down.

Typically through our own Ministerial Services Groups

unclear on does this mean dept. officials in my or other depts.? If mine - there is the usual chain of command, no surprises, processes for sign out of all comms to the office, etc

Unless otherwise arranged, to contact through the private secretary (seconded person)

Unwritten protocols about neutrality of public service but awareness of political nature of some ministerial advisors that were not seconded from the public service but worked direct to ministers

Very familiar with all formal and informal protocols.

We always worked through our CE and the CE's office under direction.

We must maintain the political neutrality required to enable us to work with current and future governments, However, we operate a 'no surprises' approach to the government of the day.

We must preserve our impartiality

When working as a ministerial coordinator/advisor you contacted the Secretary of the Ministers office or their advisors if you needed assistance with a request or to know when a Minister would be available to review information

Work in a ministerial team - this is our job :)

work through our ministerial services team

Work through private secretary or keep them up to date. Keep relationship formal. Keep senior management informed and seek approval to liaise with political advisor

Written guidelines outlining interactions and processes

Written protocols with input from Prime Minister's Chief of Staff and SSC

x there are heaps. and this box is tiny.