

Core Competency 2B: Setting standards, terms of reference, parameters for the review

High expectations

Imagine you have commissioned a review or investigation and the final report has been written, with its findings and/or recommendations. Victims' families and the media are expecting that you, as the commissioner, will act on them - quickly. Their expectations may be high. So how should you begin?

Managing expectations

Sequeli suggests you first of all manage these high expectations. Your aim should be to inject some realism into the situation. Transparency is essential during the course of this.

Organisation is needed. But not as it might seem at first sight - according to topic or agency - but according to the type of recommendation. This is the best way to get a feel of what can be done quickly and what will take longer.

It will help you convey to the public that there different ways to learn and phases to the implementation of recommendations. It will help everyone understand that some changes are more difficult and will take longer than others. A timetable can emerge from this - something more accessible and comprehensible for families and the public than a management action plan.

Keep families on-side and ensure they are your allies. Research (Kate Morris et al - see Involving Families) has shown that families who participate in reviews do so because they want to prevent incidents being repeated.

Know the type of learning

It will be helpful to know the type of learning you are using. Reviews, investigations and inquiries have sometimes been criticised for failing to produce change. So it is worth being aware what kind of change it is

reasonable to expect from the method being used.

- Disseminating the report
- Implementing recommendations
- Learning within the review

Which is best?



A comparison is inappropriate. But it will be wise to know the strengths and limitations of each method.

Disseminating the report: This is a good way of getting out a message that professional change is necessary. Instinctively, one thinks it must make a difference but measurability is problematic.

Learning within the review: Some methodologies adopt a process of learning within the review (when the chair or reviewer also acts as a change facilitator). This approach may help organisations feel they are learning from within, though objectively it might be more difficult to demonstrate change through evidence.

Implementing recommendations: Recommendations have had a bad press. There have been too many and they have too often been poorly drafted. But they may be able to bring about focussed change. The answer lies in understanding each type of recommendation, its potential and problems, so that unrealistic expectations are avoided - and people, including public, victims and families, do not feel misled if things happen more slowly than had been hoped.

Type	Measurability	Possible problems	Time scale
Common theme	Can produce a powerful argument for change and make bigger changes possible and publicly visible.	The existence of several similar recommendations may make the process of change slow and unwieldy.	Will take time to gather the information needed.
National	Likely to have multiple components affecting outcomes, make measurability difficult.	May be difficult to justify a national change based only upon one review.	A long-term goal.
Commissioning	Changes to commissioning arrangements could make this type of recommendation difficult to follow-up.	Funding is the likeliest sticking point.	This could be a troubled path, taking a long time or being unexpectedly speedy if the money becomes available.
Major local or regional organisational change	Major organisational change may be easy to measure, but modifications or variations may be proposed which would be compromises.	Where two or more organisations are involved this is likely to produce political and financial tension.	Expect these to take years. Be prepared for the possibility that they get derailed by other competing demands.
Local professional practice	Difficult to measure. A variety of methods can be used such as user satisfaction surveys and audits.	Setting a standard for desirable professional practice is difficult and there may be disputes.	Possibly years. It may be hard to determine when a change to professional practice is completed.
Local policy and procedure	It can seem simple. The box is ticked when the policy is in place. But a good recommendation should also require an audit of the operation of the policy or procedure.	If the policy or procedure is to involve more than one agency or professional group, there are many possible hitches.	When asked, people estimate about a year, but it will depend on the circumstances. A staged implementation is possible, as audits indicate gradual take-up of a new procedure.
Local commitment	Usually easy to measure. For example, has there or has there not, been a stated commitment to a new post or a specific service improvement. Even partial, qualified commitment is at least measurable.	It cannot be assumed that commitment will lead to an improvement in service standards. For that to be achieved, a commitment recommendation might need to be re-framed as a policy or professional practice recommendation.	These recommendations may be quickly satisfied if the commitment has no cost or local political implications.
Practical	High, often easily visible change	Few, though funding could be an issue.	May even have been completed before the review