Before You Sign

Practitioner templates for public managers working with consultants and external experts

A companion to “Putting the Mind Back in the Shell” (Ghost in the Shell, Part 2)

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What this toolkit is for

These templates help a manager decide whether, when and how to use external expertise, so that every engagement leaves the organisation more capable than it found it. They follow the eight decisions set out in the article, from the first idea of buying advice to the day the consultants leave.

They are not a procurement procedure and do not replace your organisation's rules, approval thresholds or legal advice. Use them alongside those rules, and adapt the wording to your own context. The worked examples are invented and refer to no real organisation.

Two formats. This PDF is for reading and printing. An editable Word version, with the same templates and expandable answer spaces, is available alongside it for completing and keeping with the business case.

This is a pilot version

The templates have not yet been tested at scale. The most useful way to try them is against one engagement you have already completed: fill them in as if you were about to sign, then note where a question made you hesitate, how long completion took, and whether the answers would have changed your decision. Feedback of that kind will shape the next version.

How to use the toolkit

Each template covers one or two of the eight decisions. For each one you will find: **why it matters**, the **questions to answer** with space for your answers, **what a good answer looks like**, the **warning signs** that should make you pause, and a **worked example**.

The eight decisions at a glance

Stage	Decision	Template
Before signing	1. Can we do this ourselves?	Template 1 · Internal Capacity Check
Before signing	2. Is this a judgement we must keep?	Template 2 · Core Judgement Test
Before signing	3. Have we written the question ourselves?	Template 3 · Terms of Reference Builder
Before signing	4. If we must go outside, who is the right source?	Template 4 · Source Selection Matrix
Before signing	5. Who on our side works inside the engagement?	Template 5 · Counterpart, Transfer and Ownership Plan
Before signing	6. What will we own at the end?	Template 5 · Counterpart, Transfer and Ownership Plan
During	7. Is this a mixed team, or a delivery to us?	Template 6 · Mid-Engagement Check
After	8. Can we stand on our own?	Template 7 · Exit Test and Lessons Record

How much to fill in: match the effort to the engagement

Engagement type	Typical profile	What to complete
Light	Small, short, clearly bounded specialist input (for example a one-off technical review)	The Quick Screen (Template 0) only
Standard	Medium value or duration, or touching a policy area	Templates 1 to 5 before signing; Template 7 at the end
Full	Large, long, repeated, or strategic engagements, or any work close to core judgement	All templates, including the Mid-Engagement Check, with sign-off by a senior responsible officer

Set the thresholds for Light, Standard and Full according to your organisation's own approval limits. Keep the completed templates with the business case: together they form the evidence an internal or external auditor would look for (see the mapping at the end).

The single principle behind every template

Augment, do not substitute

External expertise is valuable when it **adds knowledge the organisation keeps**. It becomes a risk when it **performs the thinking the organisation should do itself** and takes that capacity away when it leaves. The test in every template is the role the supplier plays, not the size or reputation of the supplier.

What “owning the work” means: three different things

The templates use “ownership” in three distinct senses, and an engagement can succeed on one and fail on another. A public body may own a model and still apply it uncritically; it may use a licensed method and keep real independence of judgement.

Sense	The question it asks	Where it is tested
1. Control of assets and access	Can we inspect, use, reuse, adapt and continue the data, models and files, whether we own them or hold the right rights?	Template 5, Part C
2. Command of the method	Can our staff examine the method, choose between it and alternatives, and adapt it when circumstances change?	Template 5, Part B; Template 6; Template 7, Part A
3. Fitness for public purpose	Does the analysis answer a public question, with the people affected and the outcomes that matter to them in view?	Template 2; Template 3, question 3.5

Losing the second sense while keeping the first is how the “rehired ghost” described in the article happens: the files are in-house, the posts are filled, but nobody can step outside the inherited method.

Template 0 · Quick Screen

For light engagements, or as a first filter before deciding which other templates to complete. Tick one box per line. Any answer in the right-hand column means the engagement should move to the Standard or Full route.

Check	Proceed	Pause and use the full templates
The skill is not available in our team, the wider organisation or another public body	☐ Confirmed	☐ Not checked / it exists internally
The work is specialist input, not framing, choosing options or final advice	☐ Specialist input	☐ Touches core judgement
We wrote the question ourselves and it is genuinely open	☐ Yes	☐ Supplier drafted it / answer expected
Smaller, specialised or local providers and individual experts were considered	☐ Yes	☐ Only large firms considered
Someone on our side will work alongside the supplier	☐ Named	☐ Nobody named
We will have the rights to inspect, reuse, adapt and continue the work	☐ In the contract	☐ Unclear or supplier-held
Conflicts of interest have been declared and checked	☐ Done	☐ Not done
If we bought this before, buying it again is a recorded, deliberate choice (a specialist service we keep outside), not a gap we meant to close	☐ First purchase / deliberate choice	☐ Unplanned repeat

Manager	Date	Decision: proceed / move to full templates

Template 1 · Internal Capacity Check

Decision 1: Can we do this ourselves?

Why it matters

Every task bought in is a task your staff do not learn to do. The cheapest moment to build capacity is before the first contract, not after the third. Public auditors advise starting from the assumption that the organisation's own people are the best use of resources, and exhausting internal options before buying. The skill you lack is often present elsewhere in the same organisation or in another public body.

Questions to answer

Question	Your answer / evidence
1.1 What exactly needs to be done? Describe the task in one or two sentences, without naming a solution.	
1.2 Does anyone in my team have this knowledge, even partly?	
1.3 Does the skill exist elsewhere in the organisation (another department, an analytics unit, a legal or finance team)? Who did we ask?	
1.4 Does another public body, a public research centre or a university we work with hold this skill?	
1.5 If the skill is not available today, could we build it within six to twelve months? What would it take (training, a hire, a secondment)?	
1.6 Is this task likely to recur? How often?	
1.7 Have we bought something similar before? If yes, when, and why are we buying it again?	
1.8 If this is a repeat purchase: is it a deliberate decision to keep a specialist service outside (who decided, and why), or a capability we meant to build and did not?	

What a good answer looks like

- The task is described as a problem, not as a product (“understand why waiting times rose”, not “a transformation study”).
- Named people inside and outside the department were actually asked, and their answers are recorded.
- If the work will recur, there is a plan to build the skill in-house, even if outside help is used this time.
- Or, if the work is highly specialised and recurring, a recorded decision to keep buying it, together with a plan to keep the skills needed to commission, scrutinise and use it well. Repeat buying is not in itself a failure.

Warning signs

- “We don't have time” is the only reason given, and it was also the reason last time.
- Nobody outside the immediate team was asked.
- The same type of work appears in the engagement history two or more times, and nobody ever decided that it should stay external.

Worked example

Example · Waiting times in a licensing service

A directorate responsible for business licences sees average processing times double in a year and considers hiring a firm for a “process transformation review”.

1.1 Find out why processing times rose and what would reduce them. **1.2** Two team members know the process in detail but have no data-analysis skills. **1.3** The organisation's statistics unit can analyse the case-management data; the digital team can map the workflow. **1.5** The analysis skill could be built by seconding one statistician for three months. **1.6** Performance reviews of this kind are needed every year. **1.7** A similar review was bought three years ago; its recommendations were only partly implemented because nobody inside could update the analysis.

Outcome: run the review in-house with a secondee from the statistics unit; buy only a short specialist input on queue design if needed (see Template 4).

Template 2 · Core Judgement Test

Decision 2: Is this a judgement we must keep?

Why it matters

Some work can be bought without any loss: a technical valuation, a specialist survey, a piece of software. Other work is the substance of governing: deciding what the problem is, which options are on the table, which one to recommend, and whether a policy worked. When that work is bought, accountability for it moves outside the institution, even though responsibility does not. This template helps you separate the two parts of a task, so that you buy the first and keep the second.

Questions to answer

Part of the work	Does the task include this?	Who will do it?
Defining the problem and what success means	☐ Yes ☐ No	☐ Us ☐ Supplier ☐ Together, we decide
Setting the range of options to consider	☐ Yes ☐ No	☐ Us ☐ Supplier ☐ Together, we decide
Choosing or recommending an option	☐ Yes ☐ No	☐ Us ☐ Supplier ☐ Together, we decide
Final advice to leadership or ministers	☐ Yes ☐ No	☐ Us ☐ Supplier
Evaluating our own policy or programme	☐ Yes ☐ No	☐ Us ☐ Independent evaluator ☐ Supplier
Specialist analysis, data collection or technical input	☐ Yes ☐ No	☐ Us ☐ Supplier

Question	Your answer / evidence
2.1 Which parts of the work above must stay with us, and why?	
2.2 If the supplier contributes to a core part, how will we keep the final judgement (for example, they present evidence and options, we choose and write the advice)?	
2.3 Could I explain to a board, an auditor or a parliamentary committee who made each judgement, and on whose analysis?	

What a good answer looks like

- Core parts are ticked “Us” or “Together, we decide”; the supplier's role is limited to evidence and specialist input.
- The final recommendation is written by officials, even if it draws on the supplier's analysis.
- Independent evaluation is commissioned from a party that did not design or deliver the programme.

Warning signs

- The supplier is asked to “recommend the best option” and the recommendation goes to leadership largely unchanged.
- The same firm that designed a programme is asked to evaluate it.
- Nobody on the team could explain the reasoning behind the recommendation without the supplier in the room.

Worked example

Example · Pension liability valuation (buying is right)

A finance directorate needs an actuarial valuation of a public pension liability. The valuation is specialist, technical and bounded: it is specialist input, not core judgement. The decisions that follow (whether to change contribution rates, how to present the risk) stay with officials. **Outcome:** buy the valuation from a qualified actuary; keep the policy advice in-house; ask the actuary to explain the method and key assumptions to the team.

Repeat purchase, by design. The valuation is needed every three years, and the directorate decides, on the record, to keep buying it rather than employ actuaries. That is not dependency. The capability it keeps is the ability to commission the work well, question the key assumptions (discount rate, longevity, salary growth) and judge the policy response, not the ability to reproduce the calculation.

Example · Strategy for a new public service (judgement must be kept)

A department plans a five-year strategy for a new public service and considers asking a firm to “develop the strategy”. Defining the problem, setting the options and recommending one are all core judgement. **Outcome:** officials lead the strategy; external input is bought only for specific pieces such as international comparisons or cost modelling, each with a named internal owner.

Template 3 · Terms of Reference Builder

Decision 3: Have we written the question ourselves?

Why it matters

Whoever writes the question shapes the answer. Terms of reference drafted by a prospective supplier tend to describe what that supplier sells. A question written after a decision has already been taken invites analysis that justifies the decision rather than informs it, which is how evidence-based policy turns into policy-based evidence. Writing the question yourself, and keeping it genuinely open, is the most effective protection.

Fill in before formal commissioning (open, recorded market engagement is fine)

Question	Your answer / evidence
3.1 Background: what has happened, and why does it matter now?	
3.2 The question: what do we need to know or decide? Write it as a question.	
3.3 Is the question genuinely open? Which answers would we be prepared to accept, including uncomfortable ones?	
3.4 Scope: what is included, and what is explicitly excluded?	
3.5 The public value at stake: who is affected, and what outcome matters to them (not only outputs delivered)?	
3.6 Deliverables: what will we receive? (Always include data, working files and documented methods, not only a report.)	
3.7 Our role: which parts will our staff do, and which decisions do we reserve? (Link to Template 2.)	
3.8 Knowledge transfer and acceptance: what must our team be able to do before final handover, and how will we test it? Which of these are essential? (These tests go into the contract: see Template 5, Part B and Template 7.)	
3.9 Date drafted, and by whom. Was any decision on this subject already taken before this date?	

What a good answer looks like

- The question could be answered in more than one way, and the terms of reference say so.

- The question is owned and drafted by officials; any earlier conversations with suppliers were open and recorded.
- Deliverables include the working files and methods, so the analysis can be checked and re-run.

Warning signs

- The terms of reference read like a supplier's brochure, or were based on a supplier's proposal.
- The preferred answer is already mentioned in the background section.
- The only deliverable is a slide deck or final report.

Worked example

Example · Rewriting a question

Before: "The consultant will develop a digital transformation roadmap to modernise the licensing service." (The answer, digital transformation, is already chosen.)

After: "Why have licence processing times doubled since last year, and which changes to process, staffing, rules or technology would most reduce them for applicants, at what cost?" (Open, problem-led, with the public outcome stated.)

Template 4 · Source Selection Matrix

Decision 4: If we must go outside, who is the right source?

Why it matters

Dependency is deepest where advice is concentrated in a few large firms that sell a method and a process as a package. Often what is needed is a specific piece of knowledge held by a specialist: a smaller specialised firm, a nearby or local provider who knows the context, a university team, or a recognised individual expert. Engaging a range of suppliers also brings more competition and more innovative proposals. Size is not a guarantee either way: the test is whether the source will add knowledge or take over the thinking.

Step 1 · Widen the field

Before naming candidates, check that each type of source has been genuinely considered: a colleague from another unit, another public body, a university or research centre, a recognised individual expert, a small specialised firm, a nearby or local provider, a large firm. These types are prompts, not verdicts. They overlap, and none of them guarantees competence or independence. What you compare in the next steps are **actual candidates**.

Step 2 · Minimum requirements (pass or fail)

A candidate that fails any of these is set aside, however strong its expertise or price. A high score elsewhere cannot buy back a failure here.

Candidate (name and type)	Independence: no conflict that cannot be managed	Role stays bounded: supplies knowledge, not our judgement	Accepts our rights, transfer and acceptance terms	Passes?
1.	☐ Pass ☐ Fail	☐ Pass ☐ Fail	☐ Pass ☐ Fail	☐ Yes ☐ No
2.	☐ Pass ☐ Fail	☐ Pass ☐ Fail	☐ Pass ☐ Fail	☐ Yes ☐ No
3.	☐ Pass ☐ Fail	☐ Pass ☐ Fail	☐ Pass ☐ Fail	☐ Yes ☐ No
4.	☐ Pass ☐ Fail	☐ Pass ☐ Fail	☐ Pass ☐ Fail	☐ Yes ☐ No

Step 3 · Compare the candidates that passed

Score each candidate from 1 (weak) to 3 (strong), on evidence: past work of the same kind, the named people who would do it, and references. Add a short note for any score of 1.

Candidate	Exact expertise (named people)	Delivery experience on similar work	Knows our context	Transfers knowledge	Value for money	Total
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						

Question	Your answer / evidence
4.1 Do we need a firm's method and scale, or a specific piece of knowledge? Explain.	
4.2 Which candidate is preferred, and why? If it is not the highest total, explain the trade-off.	
4.3 Conflicts of interest: has the preferred source declared its other clients and work in this field, and any former staff links with our organisation?	
4.4 If the source is a university or research team: is the task focused and well defined, and who on our side leads the project and turns the findings into practical advice?	

Working with university and research partners

Academic partners bring depth of method, evidence and independence. Their training and incentives, however, are built for research and teaching rather than for project delivery, budgets, stakeholder management or advice under deadline pressure. Many academics bridge both worlds, so judge the individual, but design the role carefully. The deciding test is the same for academics and consultants alike: demonstrated experience of delivering work of this kind. An academic who has led implementation may be the right person to lead it; a consultant who has never done so may be the wrong one.

Good tasks to give them: an evidence or literature review; designing or checking a method, survey or model; independent validation or peer review of our own analysis; a focused study with a clear question and end date; training our staff in a specific technique.

Tasks not to give them alone: running the project; redesigning a service; writing the final policy recommendation; open-ended briefs such as “tell us what to do”.

How to make it work: a practitioner leads the project and owns the practical judgement; agree timelines that fit the decision, not the academic calendar; ask for a short practitioner summary as well as the technical report; meet regularly, because collaboration between researchers and policymakers is the most frequently reported facilitator of research use (Oliver et al., 2014).

What a good answer looks like

- At least three different types of source were genuinely considered, not only large firms.
- Every shortlisted candidate passed the minimum requirements before any scores were added.
- The chosen source is hired for a defined piece of knowledge, with a clear end point.
- Conflicts were declared in writing and checked, not assumed.

Warning signs

- The supplier was chosen because “we always use them” or because they proposed the work.
- A large firm is hired for something a single expert could provide in a few days.
- A strong score on expertise or price was used to offset a doubt about independence.
- The supplier advises both us and parties affected by our decision.
- A university team is given an open-ended practical brief, such as running the project or redesigning the service, with no practitioner lead.

Worked example

Example · Queue design for the licensing service

After the in-house review (Template 1), the team needs specialist advice on queue and appointment design. Options considered: a large firm's operations practice; a small firm specialising in service operations; an operations research group at a nearby university. The large firm fails the minimum requirements: it is also advising the software vendor bidding to replace the licensing system. Of the two remaining candidates, the university group, whose lead has redesigned appointment systems for two hospitals, scores highest on expertise, delivery experience and transfer. It is given a focused task (run two workshops and review the team's model), while the service manager keeps the lead on the redesign itself. **Outcome:** a ten-day engagement with the university group, at a fraction of the cost of a full study, with the model staying in-house.

Template 5 · Counterpart, Transfer and Ownership Plan

Decisions 5 and 6: Who on our side works inside the engagement, and what will we own at the end?

Why it matters

An organisation can only absorb outside knowledge if it has people with enough related knowledge to take it in. A counterpart who only supervises learns little; one who works alongside the supplier learns how the analysis was done. Ownership matters for the same reason: if the data, models and working files stay with the supplier, the organisation will have to buy the same work again next time.

Part A · The internal counterpart

Question	Your answer / evidence
5.1 Name and role of the internal counterpart(s).	
5.2 How much of their time is set aside for the engagement (days per week)? Has their other work been reduced accordingly?	
5.3 Do they have the seniority and mandate to challenge the supplier's work?	

Part B · Knowledge transfer and acceptance tests

Agree these tests with the supplier **before signing** and write them into the contract. They are run **before final handover and final payment** (Template 7). Mark which ones are essential: an essential test that is not passed means the handover is not accepted until it is.

Skill or knowledge to transfer	Who will learn it	How (pairing, workshops, documentation)	Acceptance test	Tick if essential
				☐ Essential
				☐ Essential
				☐ Essential
				☐ Essential

Include at least one test of **command of the method**, not only of its use: for example, the counterpart explains why this method was chosen, examines one credible alternative, and says under what conditions the method would need to change.

Part C · Rights and control (to be written into the contract)

Ownership is not always necessary. What matters is that the organisation can **inspect, use, reuse, adapt and continue** the work after the contract ends. UK government guidance makes the same point: rights should be considered case by case, and the right to use intellectual property is often more important than owning it (Digital, Data and Technology Profession, 2023). Choose the level each item needs.

Item	Level needed	Agreed in the contract?	Format and documentation required
Raw and cleaned data	☐ Own ☐ Licence to use, adapt and continue	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Models, spreadsheets, code and tools	☐ Own ☐ Licence to use, adapt and continue	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Documented methods and key assumptions	☐ Own ☐ Licence to use, adapt and continue	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Interview notes, survey instruments, working papers	☐ Own ☐ Licence to use, adapt and continue	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Final report and presentations	☐ Own ☐ Licence to use, adapt and continue	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Sharing with other public bodies	☐ Needed ☐ Not needed	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Continuity if the supplier ceases trading or the licence ends	☐ Escrow ☐ Transfer ☐ Other	☐ Yes ☐ No	
AI tools and models: we can see how outputs were produced and check them without the supplier	☐ Needed ☐ Not applicable	☐ Yes ☐ No	

What a good answer looks like

- A named counterpart with real time allocated, not added on top of a full workload.
- Each skill to transfer has an acceptance test agreed in advance, for example “the counterpart re-runs the model with new data”, and the essential ones are marked.
- Every item in Part C has the level of rights the organisation needs, and that level is written into the contract.

Warning signs

- Knowledge transfer is described only as “a handover meeting at the end”.
- The licence does not let us inspect, adapt or continue the work, or the tool runs only on the supplier's systems.
- Acceptance tests are left to be agreed “at the end”, when the supplier has already been paid.
- The counterpart is too junior to question the supplier's assumptions.

Worked example

Example · Demand forecasting for a public transport authority

A transport authority buys a demand-forecasting model for a new bus network. **Counterpart:** a planning analyst, two days a week. **Transfer:** model structure and calibration, through weekly pairing sessions; test: the analyst recalibrates the model with the latest passenger counts without help (essential); the analyst explains why a four-step model was chosen over an activity-based one and when the authority should switch (essential). **Rights:** the authority owns the data, calibration files and technical manual; the modelling software is licensed, with the right to use, adapt and continue it after the contract and to share outputs with other public bodies.

Template 6 · Mid-Engagement Check

Decision 7: Is this a mixed team, or a delivery to us? Complete at roughly the halfway point of any Full engagement.

Why it matters

Good plans drift. Under time pressure, the supplier does more of the work and the internal team does less, until the engagement becomes a delivery rather than a collaboration. A short check halfway through catches this while there is still time to correct it.

Check	On track	Drifting	Action if drifting
Our staff are doing parts of the analysis themselves	☐	☐	
Key assumptions have been explained to us and challenged by us	☐	☐	
We could explain why this method was chosen rather than an alternative	☐	☐	
The acceptance tests (Template 5, Part B) still look achievable by handover	☐	☐	
Knowledge is being transferred as the work proceeds (Template 5, Part B)	☐	☐	
Working files and data are being shared with us as they are produced	☐	☐	
The question in the terms of reference has not quietly changed	☐	☐	
The counterpart still has the time allocated	☐	☐	
No new conflict of interest has emerged	☐	☐	

Worked example

Example · Correcting drift

Halfway through the demand-forecasting engagement, the analyst has attended only two pairing sessions because of other urgent work, and the supplier has started building the model alone. **Action:** the manager reassigns the analyst's other tasks for four weeks and asks the supplier to walk through the model structure before continuing.

Template 7 · Exit Test and Lessons Record

Decision 8: Can we stand on our own? Part A is run **before final handover and final payment**; Part B within three months of the end; Part C at six to twelve months.

Why it matters

The real result of an engagement is not the report; it is what the organisation can do afterwards. The exit test checks this directly, while the supplier is still there to close any gap. The lessons record makes sure the next manager facing a similar decision does not pay twice for the same learning.

Part A · The exit test (before final handover)

How to fill it in. For each row: (1) in the second column, mark whether this capability was agreed as **essential** for this engagement in Template 5, Part B; (2) in the third column, tick **one** result: Yes, Partly or No; (3) in the last column, write what you saw the team actually do.

The rule. The test is passed only if every row marked essential has the result "Yes", with evidence. Counting the "Yes" answers is not the measure: a team that can explain the analysis but cannot update it has not passed if updating was essential.

Can our team, without the supplier…	1. Essential? (from Template 5)	2. Result (tick one)	3. Evidence: what we saw the team do
…explain the analysis and its main assumptions?	☐ Essential ☐ Not essential	☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No	
…defend the conclusions to leadership or an auditor?	☐ Essential ☐ Not essential	☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No	
…re-run or update the analysis with new data?	☐ Essential ☐ Not essential	☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No	
…locate and open all data, models and working files, and use them under the agreed rights?	☐ Essential ☐ Not essential	☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No	
…justify why this method was chosen, examine one credible alternative, and say when the method would need to change?	☐ Essential ☐ Not essential	☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No	
Other acceptance test from Template 5, Part B:	☐ Essential ☐ Not essential	☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No	

Example · Two rows of the exit test, filled in

Row: …re-run or update the analysis with new data? **Essential:** ☒ Essential. **Result:** ☒ Yes. **Evidence:** on 12 March the planning analyst recalibrated the demand model with February passenger counts, without the supplier, and the results matched the supplier's check run.

Row: …justify why this method was chosen…? **Essential:** ☒ Essential. **Result:** ☒ Partly. **Evidence:** the analyst explained the choice of method but could not say when to switch to the alternative. **Consequence:** the test is not yet passed; one more working session is booked before final payment.

Result	Signed (counterpart and manager)	Date
☐ Passed: handover accepted ☐ Not passed: gap to close before handover		

Part B · Results and lessons (within three months)

Question	Your answer / evidence
7.1 What did the engagement deliver against the business case so far? What evidence do we have?	
7.2 What worked well in the way we used external expertise?	
7.3 What would we do differently next time?	
7.4 If we would need similar work again: is that a deliberate choice to keep a specialist service external (record why, and which commissioning and scrutiny skills we keep), or a capability gap (has it been added to the workforce plan)?	
7.5 Where have these lessons been shared (other units, a central lessons log, the procurement team)?	

Part C · Benefits review (six to twelve months)

Question	Your answer / evidence
7.6 Are the longer-term benefits appearing? Is the team still using, updating or adapting the work without the supplier?	

What a good answer looks like

- Every essential row in the exit test is “Yes”, with evidence such as a re-run carried out by the team, and the test was run before final payment.
- A repeat need is either recorded as a deliberate external service, with the scrutiny skills kept in-house, or turned into a training, recruitment or secondment action, not simply into the next contract.

Warning signs

- The team cannot find the model, or it only runs on the supplier's systems.
- Lessons are recorded but stay within the unit.
- The exit test is held after the supplier has left and been paid, so gaps can no longer be closed.

Link to the consultant-use audit

The article proposes that every public administration's use of consultants be audited each year against ten criteria, each rated green (met, with evidence), amber (partly met, or evidence incomplete) or red (not met, or no evidence). Missing evidence is never green, and a red on independence or on the integrity of the question cannot be offset by greens elsewhere. A manager who completes these templates already holds most of the evidence an auditor would ask for.

Audit criterion	Where the evidence is
1. Necessity	Template 1 (Internal Capacity Check)
2. Nature of the work	Template 2 (Core Judgement Test)
3. Competition, breadth and value	Template 4 (Source Selection Matrix)
4. Independence	Template 4, question 4.3; Template 6
5. Integrity of the question	Template 3 (Terms of Reference Builder), question 3.9
6. Knowledge transfer	Template 5, Part B; Template 7, Part A
7. Ownership and rights	Template 5, Part C; Template 7, Part A
8. Dependency over time	Template 1, questions 1.7–1.8; Template 7, question 7.4
9. Results and lessons	Template 7, Parts B and C
10. Method challenge	Template 5, Part B (method test agreed); Template 6; Template 7, Part A (method justified, alternative examined)

Sources behind the templates

The practices in this toolkit draw on the National Audit Office (2025) on assessing internal options first, engaging a range of suppliers, knowledge-transfer clauses and post-project review; the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee (2024) on knowledge transfer and conflict-of-interest controls, and the Australian Government's (2025) response; the Digital, Data and Technology Profession (2023) on intellectual property rights; Cohen and Levinthal (1990) and Harvey et al. (2010) on absorptive capacity; Kirkpatrick et al. (2023) on internal consulting roles; Marciano (2024) on bounded versus embedded consultant roles; Strassheim and Kettunen (2014) on policy-based evidence; and Oliver et al. (2014) on the research–policy relationship. The judgements on how to apply them are the author's own, drawn from practice.

Australian Government (2025). Australian Government response to the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee report: Management and Assurance of Integrity by Consulting Services. Canberra: Department of Finance, December 2025.

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