

Senior Policy Advisor

FF17 Legal, policy and public administration · ISCO-08 2422 · CBS 0414 Policy Advisors · seniority senior · Also known as: Senior Policy Advisor, Senior Policy Consultant

Leads complex or politically sensitive policy files, advises decision makers directly and coaches policy advisors on the quality of their advice.

The senior policy advisor leads the most complex or politically sensitive files and liaises directly with decision makers, management and external parties. Unlike the policy advisor, they also carry responsibility for the quality of colleagues' work on the file. Selection often fails to test whether a candidate can hold their ground on unwelcome advice under political pressure.

Key figures for this profile

25 skills · 6 competencies to measure · 6 knockout skills · centre of gravity: Professional knowledge domains 24%, Communication and influence 21%, Cognitive ability and problem solving 18%

1 Competencies to measure

These are the behavioural and ability constructs in this profile. Each one shows which hrmforce questionnaire measures it.

Competencies to measure	Target level	hrmforce instrument	Assessment method	Behavioural anchor at target level
integrity and dependability Competency (50-framework): Integrity Knockout	■■■■■N5	Big Fifty (Integrity Scale), 360 Feedback, Structured interview	Personality questionnaire	Sets the organisation's integrity standards, enforces them also with influential parties and explains the resulting choices publicly.

Competencies to measure	Target level	hrmforce instrument	Assessment method	Behavioural anchor at target level
Verbal reasoning	 N5	Ability Scan	Cognitive ability test	Dissects legal or policy texts with conflicting passages, reformulates the central question and substantiates the chosen reading for the whole organisation.
Judgement under uncertainty Competency (50-framework): Judgment	 N4	Big Fifty, Competency Check	Situational Judgement Test	Forms a judgement on incomplete files, names the assumptions used and states which new fact would change that judgement.
organisational awareness Competency (50-framework): Organizational Sensitivity	 N4	Big Fifty, Competency Check, 360 Feedback	Situational Judgement Test	Assesses which interests a proposal touches, involves the right people beforehand and chooses a suitable moment to raise it.
independence Competency (50-framework): Independence	 N4	Big Fifty, 15PF	Personality questionnaire	Takes a decision that departs from the group line, explains the reasoning behind it and accepts the consequences.
Stress tolerance Competency (50-framework): Stress resilience	 N4	Big Fifty, 15PF, Mental Resilience (4C)	Personality questionnaire	Keeps working in a structured way at peak load, keeps agreements with clients clear and flags early which results are at risk.

2 Full skill profile

Every skill in this profile, sorted by weight. The behavioural anchor under each skill belongs to the target level.

T	Skill	Target level	Weight	Knockout	Assessment method	hrmforce instrument
V	Critical thinking and source evaluation Sets the assessment criteria for sources and claims, including for texts made by artificial intelligence, and enforces them organisation wide.	■■■■■ N5	5	yes	Work sample test	Competency Check, Work sample test
V	Business reporting Sets the reporting line for the whole organisation, tests the quality of steering information and accounts for outcomes to board and regulator.	■■■■■ N5	5	yes	Work sample test	Work sample test, Competency Check
G	integrity and dependability Sets the organisation's integrity standards, enforces them also with influential parties and explains the resulting choices publicly.	■■■■■ N5	5	yes	Personality questionnaire	Big Fifty (Integrity Scale), 360 Feedback, Structured interview
V	Legal analysis Determines the organisation's legal line on matters of principle and shares knowledge of the field of law with the profession.	■■■■■ N5	5	yes	Work sample test	Knowledge test (client-specific), Work sample test

T	Skill	Target level	Weight	Knockout	Assessment method	hrmforce instrument
V	Policy development Sets the policy course for a domain, connects parties in the chain and has the effects evaluated systematically.	■■■■■ N5	5	yes	Portfolio or evidence	Portfolio, Competency Check
K	Applying legislation Independently assesses an application with exceptional circumstances, weighs discretionary room and motivates the decision traceably.	■■■■■ N4	5	no	Knowledge test	Knowledge test (client-specific)
V	Public governance decision making Independently prepares a decision with clear options, aligns with the departments involved and anticipates questions from the council.	■■■■■ N4	5	yes	Portfolio or evidence	Portfolio, Competency Check
A	Verbal reasoning Dissects legal or policy texts with conflicting passages, reformulates the central question and substantiates the chosen reading for the whole organisation.	■■■■■ N5	4	no	Cognitive ability test	Ability Scan
G	Judgement under uncertainty Forms a judgement on incomplete files, names the assumptions used and states which new fact would change that judgement.	■■■■■ N4	4	no	Situational Judgement Test	Big Fifty, Competency Check

T	Skill	Target level	Weight	Knockout	Assessment method	hrmforce instrument
V	Advisory skill Reframes the question behind the question, offers two supported options with consequences and agrees a decision moment.	 N4	4	no	Assessment centre	Competency Check, Structured interview
V	Stakeholder management Assesses influence and interest per party, chooses a fitting form of contact and discusses conflicting wishes before a decision is taken.	 N4	4	no	Assessment centre	Competency Check, 360 Feedback
G	organisational awareness Assesses which interests a proposal touches, involves the right people beforehand and chooses a suitable moment to raise it.	 N4	4	no	Situational Judgement Test	Big Fifty, Competency Check, 360 Feedback
V	Systems thinking Maps the chain around a bottleneck, points out the feedback loop and predicts the effect of an intervention.	 N4	3	no	Work sample test	Competency Check, Work sample test
V	Editing and plain language Rewrites a formal letter to plain language level B1 and explains to the author which choices were made.	 N4	3	no	Work sample test	Work sample test

T	Skill	Target level	Weight	Knockout	Assessment method	hrmforce instrument
V	Media relations and spokespersonship Gives an interview about own dossier independently, holds to three key messages and corrects incorrect assumptions immediately.	 N4	3	no	Simulation	Work sample test, Competency Check
G	independence Takes a decision that departs from the group line, explains the reasoning behind it and accepts the consequences.	 N4	3	no	Personality questionnaire	Big Fifty, 15PF
V	Professional currency and specialist literature Tracks sources and guidelines structurally, weighs their quality and adapts the own working method to new insights.	 N4	3	no	Portfolio or evidence	Portfolio, Knowledge test (client-specific)
V	Guiding on the job Agrees with the person guided which tasks go solo, observes purposefully and discusses two concrete learning points afterwards.	 N4	3	no	On-the-job observation	360 Feedback, Competency Check
V	Searching and evaluating digital information Combines search terms and filters across several sources, weighs source reliability and justifies the selection made.	 N4	3	no	Work sample test	Ability Scan, Work sample test

T	Skill	Target level	Weight	Knockout	Assessment method	hrmforce instrument
K	GDPR and privacy in practice Judges in own processes whether a legal basis exists, applies data minimisation and handles requests from data subjects correctly.	 N4	3	no	Knowledge test	Knowledge test (client-specific)
K	Basic contract law knowledge Assesses contracts on liability, termination and payment and proposes amendments within the own mandate.	 N4	3	no	Knowledge test	Knowledge test (client-specific)
K	Complying with sector regulation Translates changed regulation into the own work instructions and checks whether the records meet the requirements.	 N4	3	no	Knowledge test	Knowledge test (client-specific)
G	Stress tolerance Keeps working in a structured way at peak load, keeps agreements with clients clear and flags early which results are at risk.	 N4	2	no	Personality questionnaire	Big Fifty, 15PF, Mental Resilience (4C)
V	Handling objections and appeals Independently chairs a hearing, weighs the grounds put forward and writes a ruling a court can follow.	 N3	2	no	Work sample test	Work sample test, Knowledge test (client-specific)

T	Skill	Target level	Weight	Knockout	Assessment method	hrmforce instrument
V	Planning own work Builds an own plan with milestones and dependencies, checks progress weekly and revises the plan when actual progress deviates.	 N4	1	no	Work sample test	Competency Check, 360 Feedback

3 Levels per seniority

The same profile with the job family seniority adjustment applied. Target levels are clamped to 1 to 5.

Skill	senior	lead
Critical thinking and source evaluation	N5	N5
Business reporting	N5	N5
integrity and dependability	N5	N5
Legal analysis	N5	N5
Policy development	N5	N5
Applying legislation	N4	N4
Public governance decision making	N4	N4
Verbal reasoning	N5	N5
Judgement under uncertainty	N4	N4
Advisory skill	N4	N4
Stakeholder management	N4	N4
organisational awareness	N4	N4
Systems thinking	N4	N4
Editing and plain language	N4	N4
Media relations and spokespersonship	N4	N4
independence	N4	N4
Professional currency and specialist literature	N4	N4
Guiding on the job	N4	N4
Searching and evaluating digital information	N4	N4
GDPR and privacy in practice	N4	N4
Basic contract law knowledge	N4	N4
Complying with sector regulation	N4	N4
Stress tolerance	N4	N4

Skill	senior	lead
Handling objections and appeals	N3	N3
Planning own work	N4	N4

4 The proficiency scale

Level	Label	Autonomy	Complexity	Scope	Depth of knowledge
N1	Guided	works under supervision and follows instruction	routine, one variable at a time	own task	basic understanding of terminology
N2	Applying	works independently within set frameworks	familiar situations with limited variation	own role	working knowledge, applies standard approach
N3	Proficient	sets own approach and seeks input proactively	several variables, some ambiguity	own team or process	thorough knowledge, weighs alternatives
N4	Advanced	directs others and decides on the approach	complex, with conflicting interests	several teams or a department	in-depth knowledge, advises others
N5	Leading	sets the standard and the policy	strategic, under high uncertainty	organisation, value chain or profession	authority, advances the profession

5 Behavioural anchors per skill

Anchors sit at N1, N3 and N5. N2 and N4 are deliberately not anchored: raters interpolate between them, following the O*NET convention.

Skill	N1	N3	N5
Critical thinking and source evaluation Tests claims for logic, evidence and the interest of the source and thereby distinguishes facts from opinions and assumptions.	Asks what a claim is based on and checks whether the source is named and can be found.	Detects fallacies and selective evidence in reports and states which conclusion the data do support.	Sets the assessment criteria for sources and claims, including for texts made by artificial intelligence, and enforces them organisation wide.
Business reporting Bringing findings, figures and recommendations together in a report that leads the reader to a decision or next step in one reading.	Fills in an existing report template with the correct figures and describes per section what has been done.	Builds a report from question to conclusion, separates fact from interpretation and phrases recommendations with a named owner.	Sets the reporting line for the whole organisation, tests the quality of steering information and accounts for outcomes to board and regulator.

Skill	N1	N3	N5
integrity and dependability Acting in line with applicable standards and agreements, also without supervision, and being transparent about own interests, mistakes and doubtful cases.	Keeps to agreements and rules of conduct made and reports an own mistake to the manager.	Reports a possible conflict of interest on own initiative and asks for review before a decision is taken.	Sets the organisation's integrity standards, enforces them also with influential parties and explains the resulting choices publicly.
Legal analysis Reduces a case to the legally relevant facts, looks up the applicable rules and case law and arrives at a substantiated position.	Looks up the applicable statutory article for a simple question and summarises its content in own words.	Independently analyses a case with conflicting interests, weighs the case law and advises in writing on the line to take.	Determines the organisation's legal line on matters of principle and shares knowledge of the field of law with the profession.
Policy development Develops policy through problem analysis, exploration of options, consultation of stakeholders and elaboration into goals, instruments and evaluation.	Collects figures and documents for a policy exploration under guidance and summarises the findings briefly.	Independently elaborates a policy proposal with options and expected effects and organises consultation of the parties involved.	Sets the policy course for a domain, connects parties in the chain and has the effects evaluated systematically.
Applying legislation Applies laws, decrees and policy rules to individual cases, weighs exceptions and records the reasoning behind the decision.	Applies the fixed decision rules to a standard case and refers doubtful cases to an experienced case handler.	Independently assesses an application with exceptional circumstances, weighs discretionary room and motivates the decision traceably.	Sets policy rules and work instructions for implementation and decides on application questions that set precedent.
Public governance decision making Prepares decisions for a board or council with memoranda, options and consultation, taking political, legal and financial frameworks into account.	Drafts a memorandum under guidance in the standard format and collects the annexes the file requires.	Independently prepares a decision with clear options, aligns with the departments involved and anticipates questions from the council.	Determines the governance agenda and the quality requirements for decision making and advises officeholders on politically sensitive files.

Skill	N1	N3	N5
Verbal reasoning Understands written and spoken language and draws logical conclusions from it, also when the text is long, dense or ambiguous.	Summarises a short work instruction in own words and points out which word or sentence remains unclear.	Extracts the core arguments from a report of several pages and shows with textual references which conclusion does and does not follow.	Dissects legal or policy texts with conflicting passages, reformulates the central question and substantiates the chosen reading for the whole organisation.
Judgement under uncertainty Weighs the possible explanations when data are missing or conflicting and reaches a reasoned judgement while stating the remaining uncertainty.	Indicates which data are missing when in doubt and proposes a provisional judgement to the manager.	Forms a judgement on incomplete files, names the assumptions used and states which new fact would change that judgement.	Judges in situations of high uncertainty and opposing interests, accounts for this publicly and revises the judgement on new evidence.
Advisory skill Sharpening the question of a client and delivering a well founded recommendation in a way that the receiver adopts and implements it.	Supplies requested information and explains a standard recommendation following the fixed structure used by the team.	Reframes the question behind the question, offers two supported options with consequences and agrees a decision moment.	Advises the board on issues with conflicting interests, challenges established assumptions and safeguards the quality of advice across the organisation.
Stakeholder management Mapping who has an interest in an initiative and maintaining contact with those parties so that decisions keep their support.	Maintains a list of those involved and informs them about progress according to the agreed rhythm.	Assesses influence and interest per party, chooses a fitting form of contact and discusses conflicting wishes before a decision is taken.	Maintains a network reaching governance and political bodies, connects parties with differing interests and safeguards the position of the organisation.
organisational awareness Recognising how formal and informal relations, interests and decision making work in the organisation and taking these into account in own actions.	Asks who needs to be involved in a topic before a proposal is shared with others.	Assesses which interests a proposal touches, involves the right people beforehand and chooses a suitable moment to raise it.	Sees through relations between organisational units and external parties and steers decision making by organising support at an early stage.

Skill	N1	N3	N5
Systems thinking Describes how parts of a process or organisation influence each other, including feedback, delay and unintended effects.	Names who or what depends on the own task earlier and later in the process.	Maps the chain around a bottleneck, points out the feedback loop and predicts the effect of an intervention.	Models the interplay between departments, market and regulation and shifts the intervention to the point with the greatest leverage.
Editing and plain language Shortening, reordering and rewriting existing texts in plainer language without losing content, nuance or legal meaning.	Removes redundant words and repetitions from a text and corrects spelling according to a given checklist.	Rewrites a formal letter to plain language level B1 and explains to the author which choices were made.	Introduces an organisation wide plain language approach, measures readability of core products and adjusts standards based on user testing.
Media relations and spokespersonship Speaking to journalists on behalf of the organisation, holding key messages under pressure and judging the reputational consequences of statements.	Refers press questions to the spokesperson, records the question and uses only factual information that has been released.	Gives an interview about own dossier independently, holds to three key messages and corrects incorrect assumptions immediately.	Acts as lead spokesperson during a crisis, sets the communication line with the board and restores trust with press and public.
Independence Forming and maintaining an own position on the basis of own judgement, even when the environment or an authority expects something different.	Forms an own opinion on a familiar issue and compares it with the advice of a colleague.	Takes a decision that departs from the group line, explains the reasoning behind it and accepts the consequences.	Protects own professional judgement against pressure from stakeholders in senior forums and makes dissenting positions traceable and explainable.
Professional currency and specialist literature Follows developments in the own profession through literature, guidelines and networks and works relevant new insights into own practice.	Reads the professional information received and names which part matters for the own work.	Tracks sources and guidelines structurally, weighs their quality and adapts the own working method to new insights.	Assesses the state of the field, weighs conflicting research and determines which guidelines the organisation will follow from now on.

Skill	N1	N3	N5
Guiding on the job Guides a colleague or trainee during real work, gives targeted feedback on what was observed and builds up independence step by step.	Works alongside a new colleague, points out deviations in the operation and reports progress to the practice trainer.	Agrees with the person guided which tasks go solo, observes purposefully and discusses two concrete learning points afterwards.	Sets up workplace guidance for the organisation, trains the guides and keeps the quality of their coaching in view.
Searching and evaluating digital information Searches digital information with suitable search strategies, judges source and currency and records where information was found traceably.	Searches with given search terms in the designated sources and reports what was and was not found.	Combines search terms and filters across several sources, weighs source reliability and justifies the selection made.	Develops search and evaluation standards for the profession and trains others in weighing digital sources.
GDPR and privacy in practice Knows privacy legislation requirements for own work, which legal basis and retention period apply and recognises when notification is required.	Processes personal data only according to the applicable work instruction and refers doubtful cases to the privacy officer.	Judges in own processes whether a legal basis exists, applies data minimisation and handles requests from data subjects correctly.	Sets privacy policy, decides on high risk processing operations and represents the organisation towards the supervisory authority.
Basic contract law knowledge Knows the main rules on offer, acceptance, breach of contract and general terms and recognises when legal advice is needed.	Uses the standard agreement of the organisation and refers deviating clauses to a legal adviser.	Assesses contracts on liability, termination and payment and proposes amendments within the own mandate.	Sets the contract templates and legal frameworks of the organisation and decides on deviations with major risk.
Complying with sector regulation Knows the laws, standards and supervisory requirements of the own sector and organises the own work and records accordingly.	Works according to the applicable sector rules and checks which rule applies to a new situation.	Translates changed regulation into the own work instructions and checks whether the records meet the requirements.	Tracks regulation for the whole organisation, drafts policy when requirements change and holds the dialogue with the supervisor.

Skill	N1	N3	N5
Stress tolerance Keeps delivering work of the same quality under time pressure, opposition or unexpected turns and maintains a businesslike tone with others.	Keeps working on the current task as pressure rises and asks the supervisor which task can wait.	Keeps working in a structured way at peak load, keeps agreements with clients clear and flags early which results are at risk.	Keeps the organisation workable in crises, takes decisions under high uncertainty and sets the standard for composed action under pressure.
Handling objections and appeals Handles objections and appeals, hears interested parties, reviews the contested decision and drafts a reasoned ruling.	Registers an objection, checks the deadlines and drafts the standard letters to interested parties.	Independently chairs a hearing, weighs the grounds put forward and writes a ruling a court can follow.	Designs the organisation's objection procedure, analyses rulings and steers towards fewer upheld objections.
Planning own work Translates own work into a plan with steps, interim results and lead times, and tracks progress against that plan throughout the period.	Fills in a pre structured weekly schedule and discusses with the supervisor which step to take first.	Builds an own plan with milestones and dependencies, checks progress weekly and revises the plan when actual progress deviates.	Introduces planning methods that are adopted across the discipline and decides how capacity is distributed over multi year work streams.

6 Assessment methods and validity

The validities are the corrected meta-analytic estimates from Sackett, Zhang, Berry and Lievens (2022) in the Journal of Applied Psychology, which replace the older Schmidt and Hunter (1998) figures. The spread matters as much as the mean: with a high SD, validity varies strongly by context.

Assessment method	rho	SD	What it is
Work sample test	0.33	0.09	The candidate performs a representative work sample under standardised conditions.
Personality questionnaire	0.40	0.15	Self-report of behavioural preferences. At hrnforce the Big Fifty and the 15PF.
Portfolio or evidence	-	-	A collection of prior work or results, assessed against fixed criteria.
Knowledge test	0.40	0.13	Test of declarative job knowledge, usually assembled per client.
Cognitive ability test	0.41	0.14	Standardised test of verbal, numerical or abstract reasoning.
Situational Judgement Test	0.12	0.11	Scenario with response options, scored on knowledge or behavioural tendency.
Assessment centre	0.29	0.09	Multiple exercises, multiple assessors, dimension-wise scoring.
Simulation	-	-	Simulated work situation, usually digital, with standardised scoring.
On-the-job observation	-	-	Structured workplace observation with a form based on behavioural anchors.

7 Assessment instruments for this job

hrnforce instrument	Skills	What it measures
Competency Check	12	Behavioral-Level Competency Assessment
Work sample test	8	Representative work sample under standardized conditions
Knowledge test (client-specific)	7	Professional knowledge test, customized for each client
360 Feedback	5	Multiple assessments based on behavioral anchors
Big Fifty	4	Personality questionnaire, 150 items, 25 factors
Portfolio	3	Evaluation of prior work against fixed criteria
Structured interview	2	Behavioral interview with a fixed structure

hrmforce instrument	Skills	What it measures
Ability Scan	2	Aptitude Test: Verbal, Numerical, and Abstract Reasoning Skills
15PF	2	Personality Profile, a shorter alternative to the Big Fifty
Big Fifty (Integrity Scale)	1	
Mental Resilience (4C)	1	Mental Resilience According to the 4C Model

8 How to use this profile

1. Agree the profile with the hiring manager before the first candidate is measured. Weights shifted afterwards make the outcome indefensible.
2. Choose the assessment method per skill from the Assessment method column. Combine at most three methods per candidate.
3. Calibrate the assessors in a two-hour session using the anchors in chapter 5. Anchors without rater training deliver little.
4. Fill in the match calculator and discuss the gaps in the development conversation. Type A and type G are selection criteria, not one-quarter development goals.

Source: hrmforce Skills Framework 2.0, version 2.0.0, built 2026-09-08. Crosswalks to ESCO v1.2.1, O*NET 31.0, Lightcast Open Skills, SFIA 9, DigComp 3.0, EntreComp, LifeComp, GreenComp, AILit, WEF Future of Jobs 2025, ISCO-08 and the Dutch CBS occupational classification BRC 2014 edition 2025. This profile is a starting point, not a standard: align it with your own organisation before selecting on it.