

Breaking Bad Policy: How we built HMRC's Policy Lab

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& Customs



Hello and welcome!

First things first

To be clear...

- ① HMRCs Policy Lab was not my idea
- ② I actually don't believe HMRC was or is making bad policy

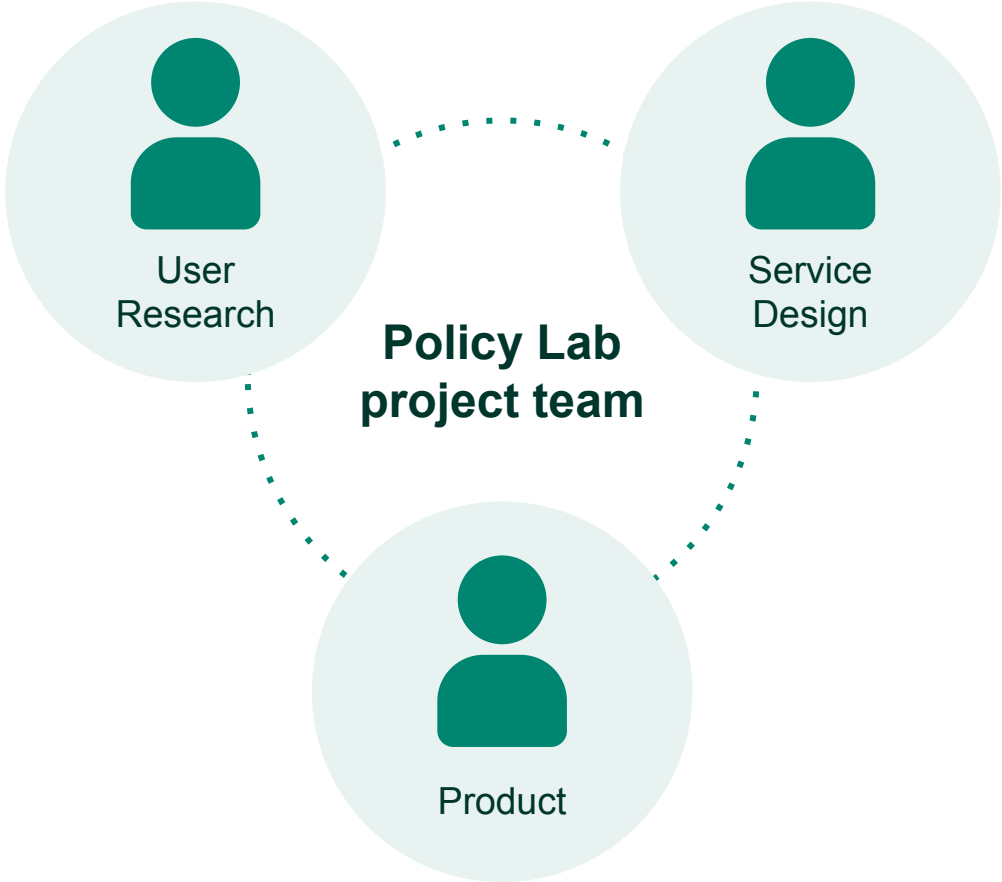
The next 60 minutes

- Some honesty on what worked and what didn't
- Probably some personal opinions which you may or may not agree with
- Perhaps a bit too much excitement, I'm insanely proud of the people I work with
- Possibly some inspiration on how you might approach this in your own world
- Definitely someone who is happy to answer questions - but hold them till the end of this talk or I'll wander off piste!

A short introduction

HMRC's Policy Lab uses a **user-focused approach** to ensure that policy is **feasible**, **meets its intent** and delivers **value for money**

What each team looks like



47

policy projects

since HMRC Policy Lab started



4 Product Managers (inc me)

2 Senior Service Designers

3 Service Designers

1 Junior Service Designer

2 Senior User Researchers

4 User Researchers

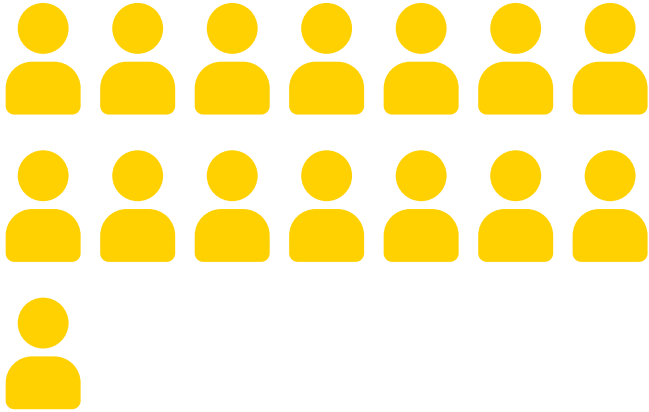
1 Apprentice User researcher

1 Industrial Placement Service Designer

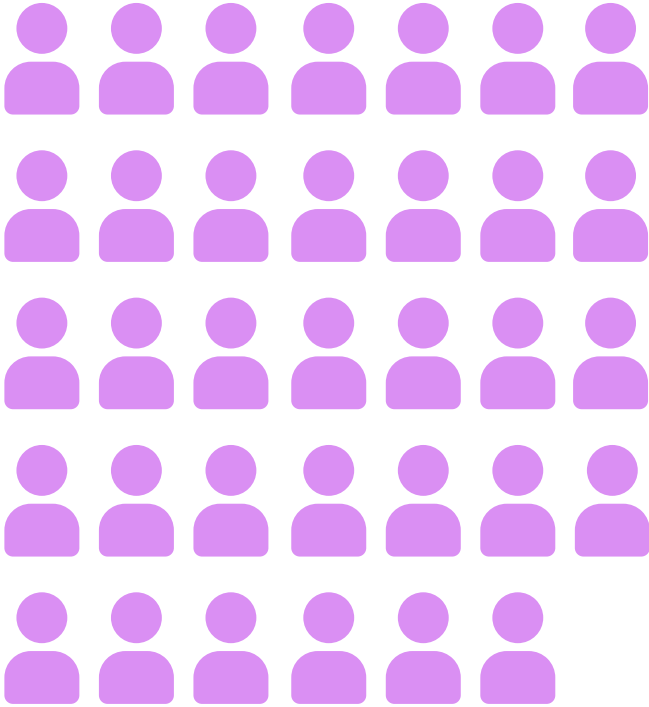
= 5 - 6 projects

at any given time

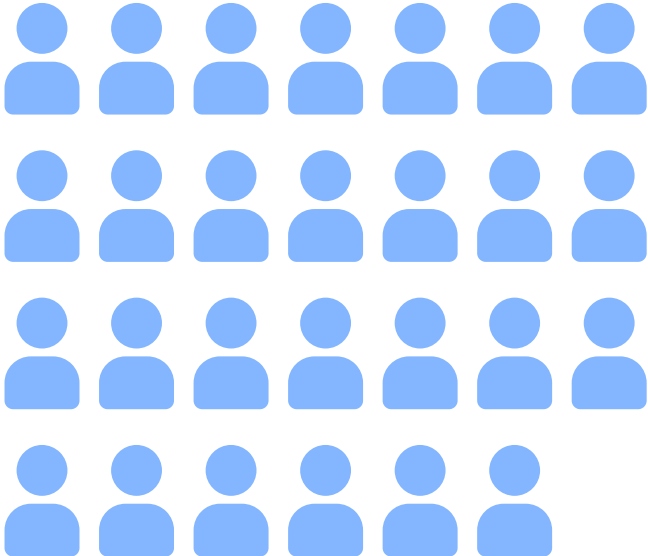
77 people through the team since 2017



15 contractors



34 permanent



**28 Fast Streamers +
other dev schemes**

The impact we have

- Identifying and minimising negative impacts
- Alternative ways to address the problem
- Slowing things down - don't rush to the end goal
- Removing confusion for users
- Don't do it!

2017

A Policy Lab is born

How it all started

- Digital delivery centres were in full flow
- Discovery teams finding tensions with legislation

How could we reduce that tension?

- Bring user-centred design into the very earliest stages of policy making
- A pilot project

Talk, deliver value and keep talking

- Engage with policy - understand their world
- Find a fairly senior policy sponsor to help smooth the way
- Find an interesting problem to solve... but don't try to boil the ocean
- Work out how you interact with your wider org governance
- Keep talking - the policy world is big and changes a lot

2018

Starting to walk

Deliver at pace

Mission: Work out what the function / service ought to be

- Took on 5 projects within 12 months of varying scale and complexity
- Started to work out what a “good” project for us looked like
- Developed our mission statement
- Developed our resourcing model

The unofficial mission:
With **evidence**, help **stop stuff**
that will cause problems
and help make the things going
ahead **be better**

Where do you add value?

Problem: How to know you're working on the right things?

- Deliver quickly to
 - Gain momentum and interest from policy
 - Get a sense of how team should be set-up and resourced
 - Learn what a good project feels like

Right things = a quality pipeline

Developed a criteria assessment:

- Maturity of the idea
- Risk of things going awry / political impact
- Technical complexity
- Types of customers
- Financial exposure

Type	Description	Comments from reviewer	Rating 0-4	Score	Score Help, Low Range (0)	Score Help, Mid Range (2)	Score Help, High Range (4)
Problem to solve	Do we have enough time to solve the problem			0	No	Maybe	Yes
	Is there flexibility for the scope to change under our work			0	No ability for change/suggestions	Possible to do design improvements	Lots of flexibility
People	Types of customers impacted (Individuals rates the highest)			0	One Customer group	Businesses	Individuals
	Level of involvement from OGDs			0	No involvement	>1 Depts	>3 Depts
Financial Exposure	a) Tax at risk if not delivered (pick a, b or c)			0	<£500m	>£1bn	>£3bn
	b) Tax to be raised (pick a, b or c)			0	<£500m	>£1bn	>£3bn
	c) Relief given (pick a, b or c)			0	<£500m	>£1bn	>£3bn
Risk	Are there any other teams involved which may duplicate effort?			0	Yes, and we have no influence on their scope	Yes, but scope could be negotiated	No other teams
	How confident are you that the project/policy team will respond to UCD insight			0	Already seems resistant	Can't say	No reason to doubt they wouldn't listen
	How likely is it that we will be blocked on research			0	High	Uncertain	Low
	How much resistance is expected from the policy or project team?			0	Policy Team does not want to work with us	Unknown	Policy Team keen to work with us and act as Service Owners
Team Impact : Right engagement at right time	Policy Lab			0	Delivery date is <2 months. Fit with fiscal cycle	Less than 1 year, but need good design work	Engaging at the start of Policy development and fiscal cycle is achievable
	UCDI			0	Highly complex area, broad policy problem	May benefit from desk research	Delivery date is <2 months. Fit with fiscal cycle
	EUID			0	Very fluid policy	Some policy work to be done	Policy set, but complex delivery which needs early design shaping
Technical	Will the service be complex to deliver technically?			0	Static website	CDIO impacts - new or update service	Solution with complex integration with third parties
User experience	How good is the user experience currently (only complete if there is an existing service)			0	High user adoption and very good feedback	Unknown or New Service	Very bad user experience or very low user adoption with very bad feedback

2019

The teenage years

Find a sense of self

- Traction with policy makers was growing
- Team got bigger - running with 6-7 projects at a time
- Worries starting to loom...
 - The cost of the team
 - Protecting the team
 - Ensuring quality of our work
 - Being “special”

Set out your stall to protect the team

Problem: How do you manage stakeholders expectations of what you will and won't do for them?

- Outline what you're going to do
- Explain how you work
- Define your stakeholder's responsibilities
- Say how you want to work

Have you had an impact?

Problem: How do you measure the success of a policy design which potentially won't be in front of a citizen or business for another 3 years?

- You possibly can't, get comfortable with that
- Explore what is measurable and important to you
- Track progress

We're all special aren't we?

Problem: How do you share the work you're doing when people aren't allowed to know what you're doing?

- Often the subject isn't important, it's the approach
- Things desensitise over time
- Create stuff - case studies etc
- Develop "safe" communities

2021 **All grown up**

Settling in to life

- Covid
- Team costs reduced
- Project capacity reduced
- Setting standards for our work
- Better recruitment
- Speeding up

Setting standards

Problem: Is what you're doing any good?

- Govt service standards
- RAD
- Support teams earlier
- Formal/Informal

Show me the money!

Problem: What is the best funding model?

- The one which works for you/your organisation
- My preference
- Establish it early
- It's not just resource

Tax is sooooo boring

Problem: How can you encourage people to apply for a job at the tax office?

- Show the impact and the team environment
- Better adverts
- Plan, plan, plan
- Be fussy, attentive and slick

Speed, I am speed

Problem: How can you speed up consultation/call for evidence analysis?

- Sentiment analysis
- LexRank text summarisation
- Topic clustering

2022

Our family expands

Taking over the world....

Challenge: How can we get the principles of Policy Lab across more than just policy work?

- UCDi team
 - Policy Starters
 - Hare and the tortoise projects
 - Front door
 - Spending Review
- So much data....

Codex

Problem: With so many change ideas how do we get a sense of the overall HMRC picture?

- Records everything we impact
- Searchable
- Hotspots
- Tracking/Metrics/Success

14
projects

251
policy starters

132
impacting tasks

since UCDi was set up



2 Product Managers (inc me)

1 **Principal Data Analyst**

1 Senior Service Designer

1 Service Designer

1 **Business Analyst**

1 Senior User Researcher

1 User Researcher

4 Fast Streamers

= lots of things

at any given time

What have we/I learned?

People

- Have courage to change your resourcing models
- Small teams work and keep costs down
- Invest in recruitment - make adverts engaging and inclusive
- Give your teams space to decompress
- And trust! Try new things, fail, it's all learning

Stakeholders

- Get a sponsor who will help clear the path for you
- Build your network - it helps keep your pipeline current
- Stakeholders hate you moving people around in teams, but sometimes you just have to do it
- Be very clear about what you will and won't be doing and what you want from your stakeholders

Projects

- Measure your impact and successes
- Define your funding model early
- Start on small, fast and tangible projects - you can sell your benefits faster
- Work out how to manage your pipeline of work

Thank you

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Questions?

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