

# Quality Assurance in VFM

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# Introduction

1. How we assure quality throughout the study cycle
2. How we assess the quality of published reports
3. How we learn lessons
4. How we take action to improve

How we assure quality through the study cycle

- Quality thresholds
- Internal and external reviews
- Post-study quality folders

# Quality thresholds

Quality Threshold 1: Are you ready to proceed?



Quality Threshold 2: Have you derived clear, compelling messages supported by the evidence



Quality Threshold 3: Are you ready to clear the draft report?



Quality Threshold 4: Are you ready to spread the message?



Quality Threshold 5: Have you learnt and disseminated the lessons?

# Planning- Options paper

- Options paper prepared by study team
- **Address the question 'What should we look at?'**
- Includes a brief synopsis of the proposal, with a number of genuinely different and feasible options.
- VFM Development team advice
- C&AG decides which of the options he would like and the level of resource he is prepared to invest.

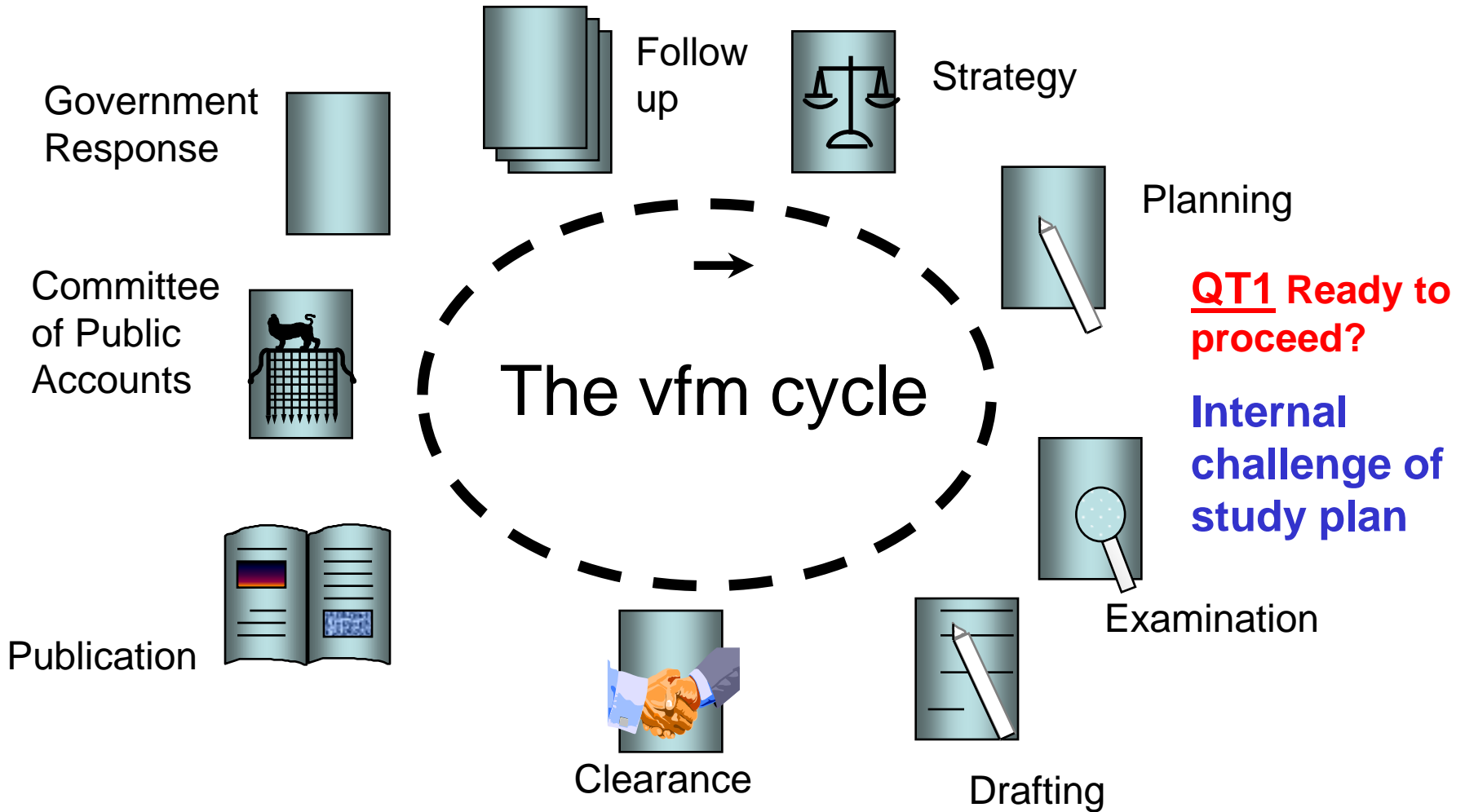
# Planning- Study Plan

- A more detailed planning paper based around the C&AG's decision of the Options Paper
- The Study Plan address the question "How should we do it?"
- Contains the methods, budget and timescale
- Signed off by the responsible AAG

# Quality Threshold 1

Are you ready to proceed?

# Quality Threshold 1





# Internal challenge of the study plan

- New arrangements introduced in 2005-06
- Internal review prior to being sent to the C&AG
- Internal review panel consisting of independent;
  - Senior Manager
  - VFM methods expert
  - VFM auditor
  - Financial auditor
- Provide constructive challenge to the study team

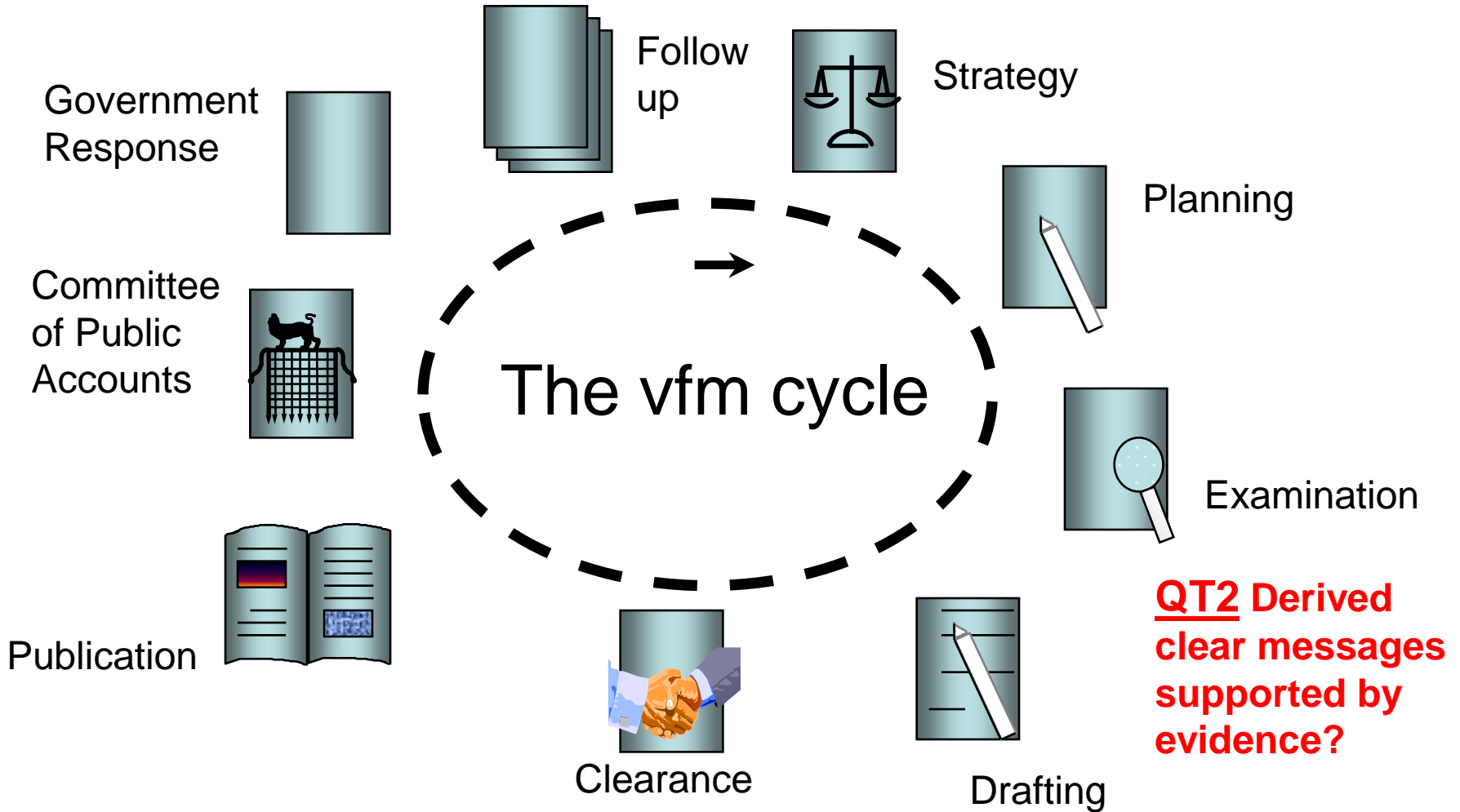
# Adding quality during fieldwork

- Methods experts within VFM Development Team
- Peer assist
- Expert Panels
- Practice networks

## Quality Threshold 2

Have you derived clear, compelling messages supported by the evidence?

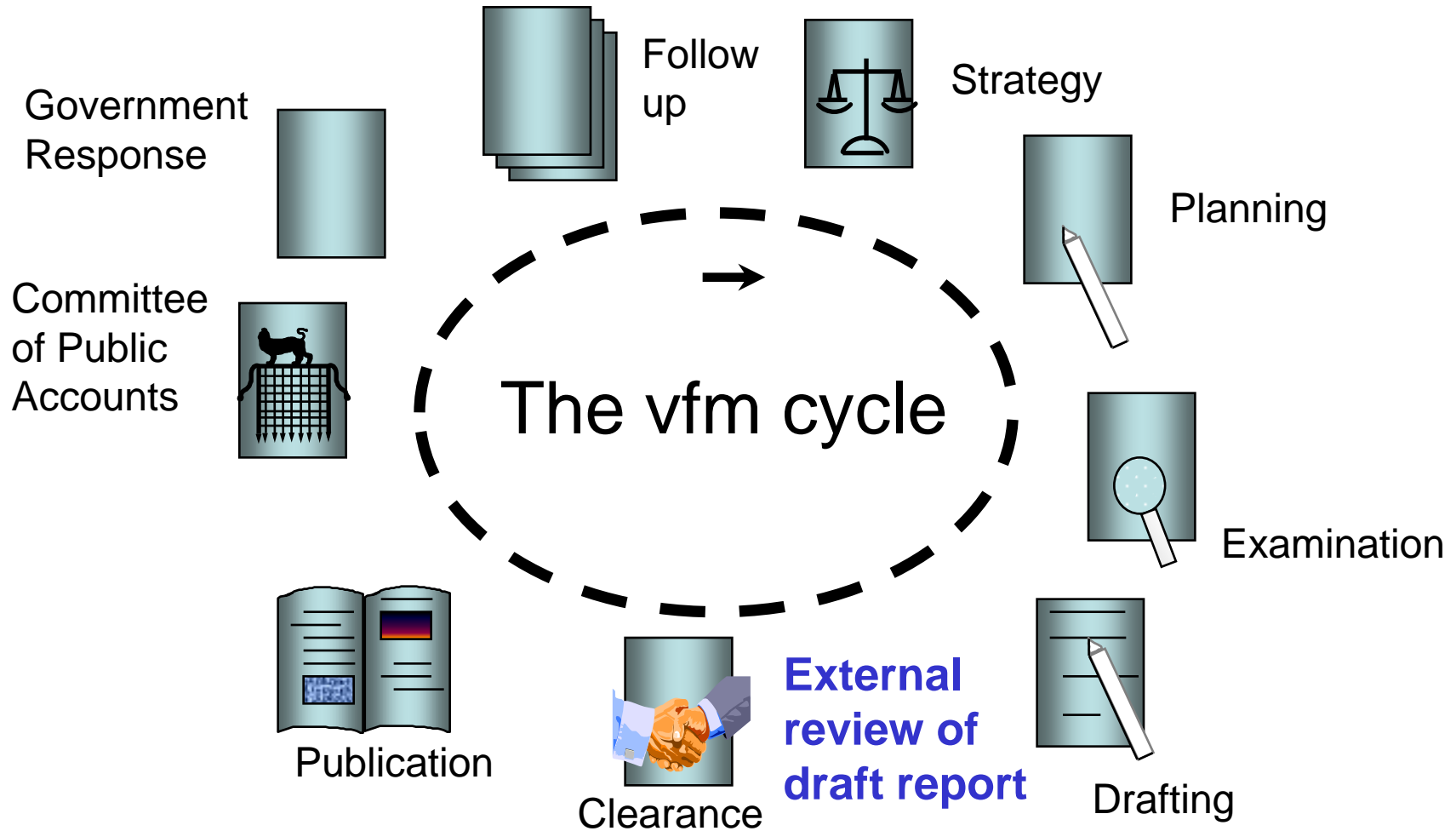
# Quality Threshold 2



# Developing Conclusions

- Study team, AAG, study co-ordinator at the Department, and interested stakeholders.
- Aim is to consider the evidence and reach a consensus about the key messages that need to be presented in the final report.
- Encourages buy-in from the Department and a no surprise approach when the draft report is received.

# Quality Threshold 2



# External review of draft report

- External hot review introduced in early 2006
- London School of Economics and Oxford University currently
- 10 assessment criteria used by external reviewers to assess quality of draft report

# The importance of external review

- Systematic review of all VFM reports
- Provided insights into strengths and weaknesses since 1993 and action to improve
- Just one perspective but:
  - authoritative views from experts
  - focuses on key elements of VFM process
  - key measure of external credibility
- Aim to get an external perspective before completion when there is an opportunity to make changes to improve the product.



# Assessment criteria used by external reviewers

1. Is the rationale for undertaking the study clearly set out together with its objectives?
2. Does the report clearly describe the administrative and managerial context?
3. Does the report include sufficient financial analysis and quantitative information on costs, benefits and performance? If not what would you have expected?
4. Is the report well structured and well-written? Does it include an effective executive summary?
5. Is the report sufficiently succinct?

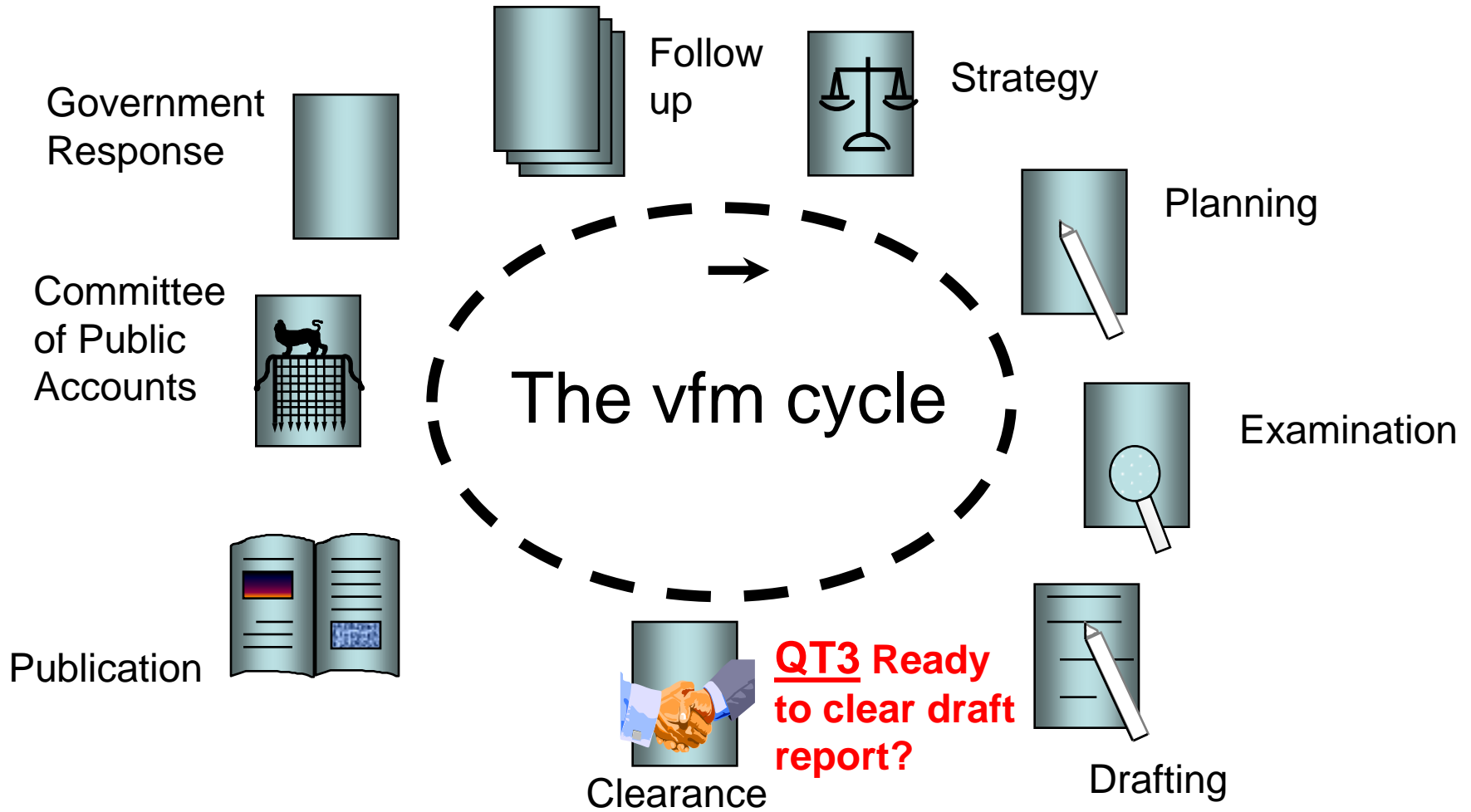
# Assessment criteria used by external reviewers

6. Are graphics and statistics appropriately used and well presented? Could they be improved?
7. Is the methodology clearly set out? And does it include an appropriate range of evaluative criteria and techniques?
8. Does the report reasonably conclude whether VFM has been achieved or is likely to be, together with an indication of the action needed to achieve better VFM?
9. Are the recommendations sufficiently specific, cost effective, convincing and supported by the underlying analysis in the report?
10. As a report to Parliament, is the draft sufficiently convincing in its use of evidence and analysis and is it likely to maintain or enhance **NAO's reputation?**

# Quality Threshold 3

Are you ready to clear the draft report?

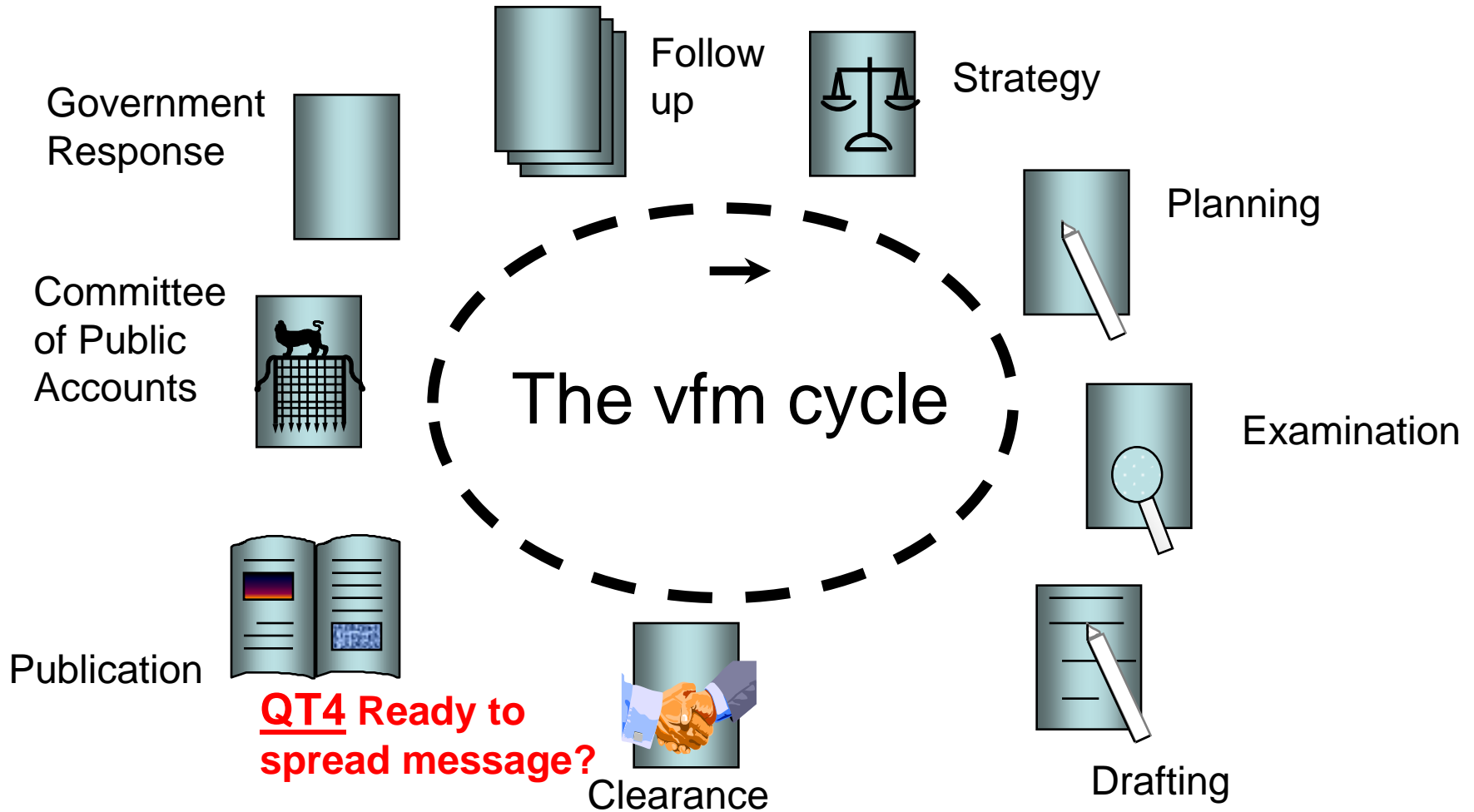
# Quality Threshold 3



# Quality Threshold 4

Are you ready to spread the message?

# Quality Threshold 4

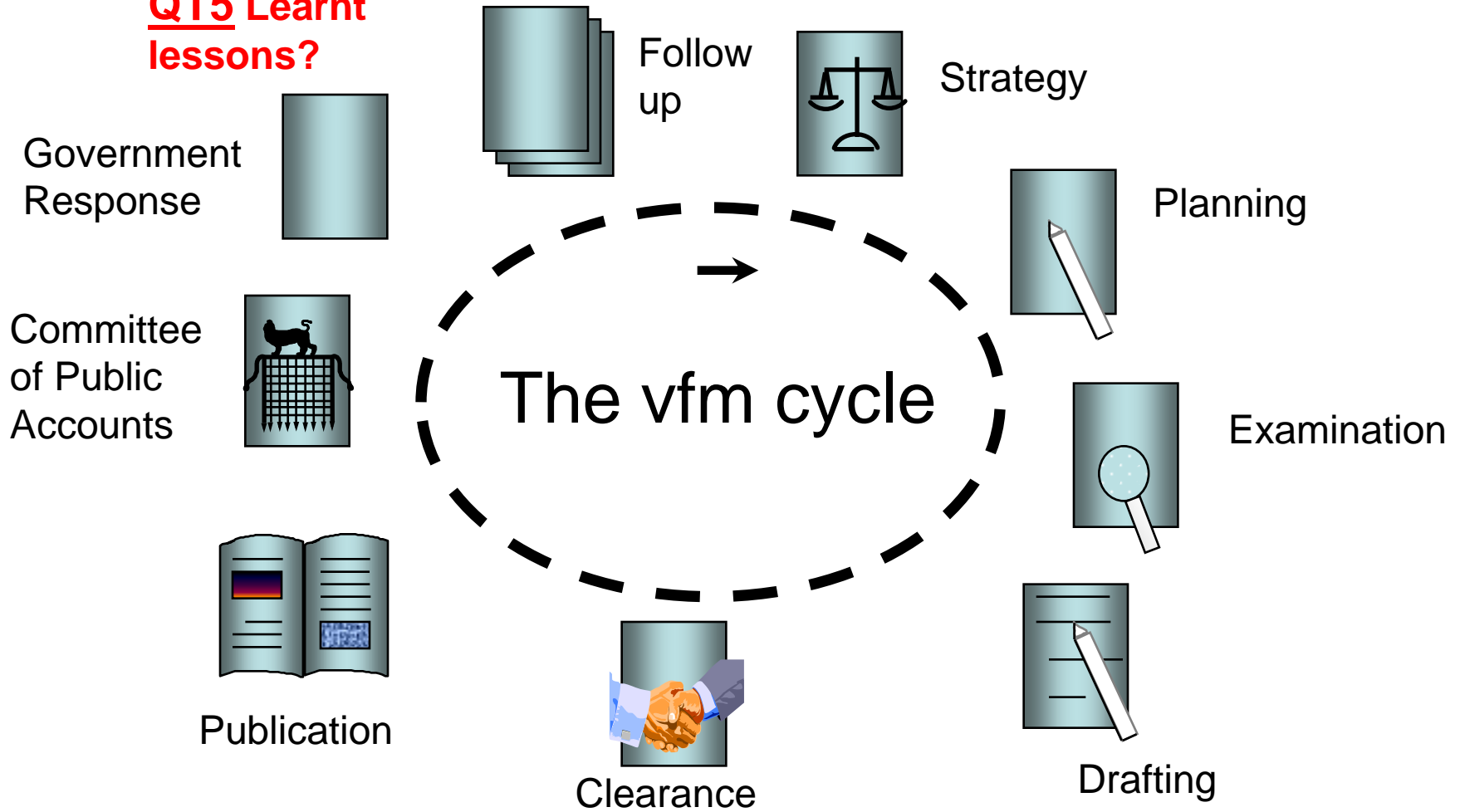


# Quality Threshold 5

Have you learnt and disseminated the lessons?

# Quality Threshold 5

## QT5 Learnt lessons?





## Quality Threshold 5- How we Learn Lessons

- Internal discussion by study team
- Feedback from the Department
- Media coverage
- Feedback from PAC members
- Quality file to AAG
- Annual analysis of quality summary paper to senior management

# Internal Cold Review

The Cold Review will examine whether:

- teams are delivering the product that was set out in the Study Plan;
- they are taking on board comments received in their internal and external reviews;
- they are carrying out the study to the expected professional Standards of objectivity, independence and reliability;
- evidence is fully documented and there is a clear audit trail;
- the clearance process and important changes made in discussions are fully documented; and
- quality review and assurance procedures are operating as they should.

# Lessons learnt

# Lessons from Internal Challenge

The main areas for improvement identified include the need for:

- greater detail on the methods proposed to allow greater clarity about the robustness of the evidence;
- more detail about sample frames and response rates;
- greater focus on obtaining time-series data;
- greater information on qualitative research methods and how the evidence will be used; and
- More detail on financial impacts, likely recommendations and VFM conclusion

# Lessons from External Reviews

- Consistently commended for well written and well structured reports, with valuable summaries
- Need for more rigorous financial analysis
- Not sufficiently clear whether VFM being achieved
- Methods, graphics and statistics largely appropriately used
- Recommendations are sensible, well argued and plausible, but often too general, and need better links to evidence

# How we take action to improve

- Including more information on costs in our reports
- Financial analysis course
- Widening the range of methods / data collection
- Methodology toolkit
- Training courses on VFM conclusion
- Guide to writing SMART recommendations
- Enhancing our training

Questions?