Introducing the Project Delivery Standard

A guide to using the Project Delivery Standard

Version 1.1

Status: Approved for internal government trial

Date: 14 July 2017

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Contents

About this guide

What is the purpose of this guide?

This guide has been written to help you use the Project Delivery Standard in a way that is most effective for you. It explains what the standard is, what it is not and where its content came from.

How to use this guide

This guide is intended to be used side-by-side with the standard so that you can read the text in the standard together with the advice and information provided in this guide. Documents, whether published on line or in print, are always updated and often become out of step with associated information. To help avoid this, very little content from the standard has been duplicated in this guide. Where content has been copied into this guide, it is labelled. If there is any difference in content or advice between this guide and the standard, the standard always takes precedence.

Why wasn't it included all in one document? Simply because the document would have become too long, and its essential content could be lost. The standard does however include some guidance in the form of "Notes", which are always placed with the text they refer to.

The guide   The standard

The Project Delivery Standard

What is the Project Delivery Standard?

The Project Delivery Standard is one of a set of Government Functional Standards which aims to set out expectations for, and align, the most important activities undertaken in all departments of government. Other standards cover activities such as commercial, finance, digital services and risk. The government functional standards are written in the same style which mirrors that used by the leading standards bodies in the world. The form of words used in the standard is important and is explained in the front of each standard: "shall" is mandatory, "might" denotes a possibility, "may" denotes permission. "Should" is a recommendation, but don't think of this as optional; "should" is a powerful word and it's best to follow the advice and only discount it if it is irrelevant in the context of your work.

The Project Delivery Standard has been created to set expectations for the direction and management of portfolios, programmes and projects, ensuring successful, timely and cost effective delivery of government policy and business objectives. It is a standard, written by government, for government.

The standard describes the "**why**" and the "**what**" but does not define "**how**" anything should be done, leaving it to those who introduce the standard to decide the best way to apply its content in their context. In this respect the Project Delivery Standard is **not** a**:**
- "primer" for those wanting to learn about project delivery;
- manual or handbook;
- guide or methodology.

The standard sets out, in a concise way, the practices that you would expect to find on any government portfolio, programme or project; it is intended to be used as a reference to dip into as and when needed.

What projects, work, techniques and approaches are covered?

Section 1 of the standard answers this question. In brief, the standard covers any government project, in any sector, for any purpose.

The standard applies to all work, regardless of the delivery methodology or technique used. The practices allow for any approach, whether sequential, iterative or hybrid. On any large project or programme, there are likely to be a number of different delivery methods used depending on the outputs being produced and outcomes needed. The standard applies just as much to full scale system engineering approaches required for military capabilities or for infrastructure as for services for which the core software is developed using agile techniques. In fact "agile" has its own Annex E, within the standard, indicating where agile approaches can be used in a portfolio, programme or project context.

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Who should use the Project Delivery Standard?

Different people will find the standard useful for different purposes and section 1.1 of the standard lists these.

Who?[1]	Why they might need the standard
Permanent secretaries, directors general and chief executive officers of arm's length bodies and suppliers	For ensuring an environment exists which promotes delivery success and integrates with their organisation's governance, policies and other activities
Senior responsible owners	For understanding and ensuring the breadth of practices required for successful delivery are used on their programme or project
Owners of departmental methodologies	To act as reference when developing or updating processes and techniques to ensure project delivery practices are consistent in scope across government
Assurance and audit bodies	To act as a reference when developing assurance and audit tools
Programme and project offices, managers and their teams	To act as a reference when defining methodologies which reflect the practices in the standard
Individual programme or project managers	If you are using a methodology which already complies with the standard, you need do no more. The standard is however a useful reference for you to check your own programme or project against. Are you doing everything necessary to ensure your work is needed, under control and justifiable?

What is the Project Delivery Standard based on?

The Project Delivery Standard is primarily based on the best practice guides, originally produced by OGC in the UK Cabinet Office and now managed by AXELOS, and in particular:

- Management of Portfolios (MoP®);
- Managing Successful Programmes (MSP®);
- PRINCE2®.

These guides provide tried and tested processes, methods and techniques which can be tailored to suit the context in which they are used. They are not the only sources, however, and, in the development of the standard, we have also drawn on:

- Existing government practices, such as those published by HM Treasury and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority;
- External practices, such as ISO's international standards, British Standards and from the professional bodies, such as the UK's Association for Project Management and the USA's Project Management Institute.

The sources are referenced in Annex A of the standard.

The terminology and concepts from the AXELOS guides have been adopted simply because that is what most people in government (and often our suppliers) learn about and use. We have sometimes amended these or added our own, if the generic "AXELOS Common Glossary" does not fit. Annex B to the standard includes the glossary of terms with the sources of each word used.

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[1] From section 1.1 of the Project Delivery Standard.

Do I have to comply with this standard?

If you want to deliver successful programmes and projects, then complying with the standard is a good idea! It's not the only aspect though; if we think twenty or so pages of text will put an end to all failures, then we need to think again. By having a single standard, however, we have created a common understanding of what is required to deliver successful projects. So, **yes**, you are expected to comply in that you are already expected to use practices which are necessary for project success; the standard simply makes it clear what those practices are. If you are already using a well-established methodology you probably comply with the Project Delivery Standard, or at least much of it, already.

Senior leaders need to provide the right environments for project teams; senior responsible owners need to understand what a project manager has to cover and team members need to have confidence that their interests are being looked after. All too often projects fail despite the best endeavours of the team because the organisational context was wrong from the start or simply because people have different views on "what project management is".

Accounting Officers and Senior Responsible Owners for major projects are already accountable to Parliament; the standard does not change this. There are no new "compliance" or audit regimes to support the standard, just the ones that currently exist in HM Treasury's controls and in each Department and the various committees. By using the standard, however, you are more likely to have everything covered.

How can I check if I am aligned to the standard?

During development, the standard was checked against a wide range of publicly available standards, methodologies, bodies of knowledge and maturity models relating to portfolio, programme and project management (See "What is the Project Delivery Standard based on?"). A mapping tool was used to visualise which parts of each of these sources mapped to each section of the standard.

You can use this tool to check your Department's methodology or your project's "initiation documentation" to see if and where each practice is defined in terms of "how" you do this in your Department or on your project.

How does this fit with maturity models, competencies and training?

The Project Delivery Standard provides the "umbrella" for other guidance which make project delivery work in practice. The Project Delivery Standard is the touchpoint to which our competencies, learning and development, knowledge bases and maturity assessments should align.
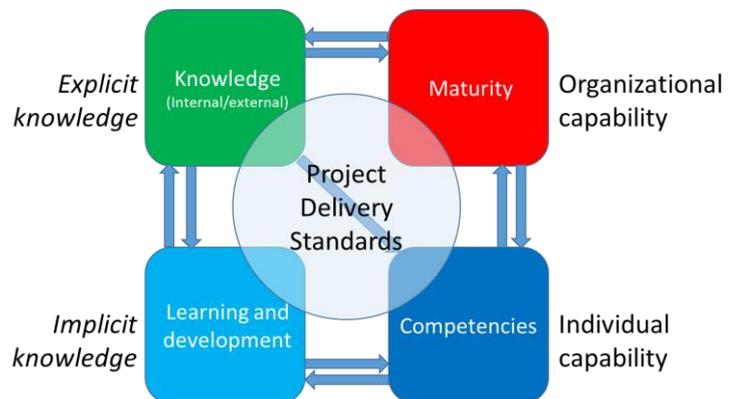
Knowledge: over time the language used in our various guides and supporting material is likely to converge on that used in the standard, making the whole set easier to understand and share by promoting consistency.

Competencies for the project delivery profession were published in 2017 and align with the standard.

Learning and development materials, will be updated to be consistent with the standard.

Maturity The Project Delivery Standard is not itself a maturity model, but simply states what practices should be apparent. It does, however, map closely to the AXELOS P3M3® Maturity Model. So, if you are at P3M3 Maturity Level 3 or above, it is highly likely you already comply with the standard, *if the standard was included as a source for the assessment.* Similarly, if you are following CMMI's maturity model, you'll find the Project Delivery Standard is a good fit for many aspects of Maturity Stage 3 upwards.

What does the Project Delivery Standard include?

The structure of the standard is shown below. The rest of this document looks at each section in more detail.
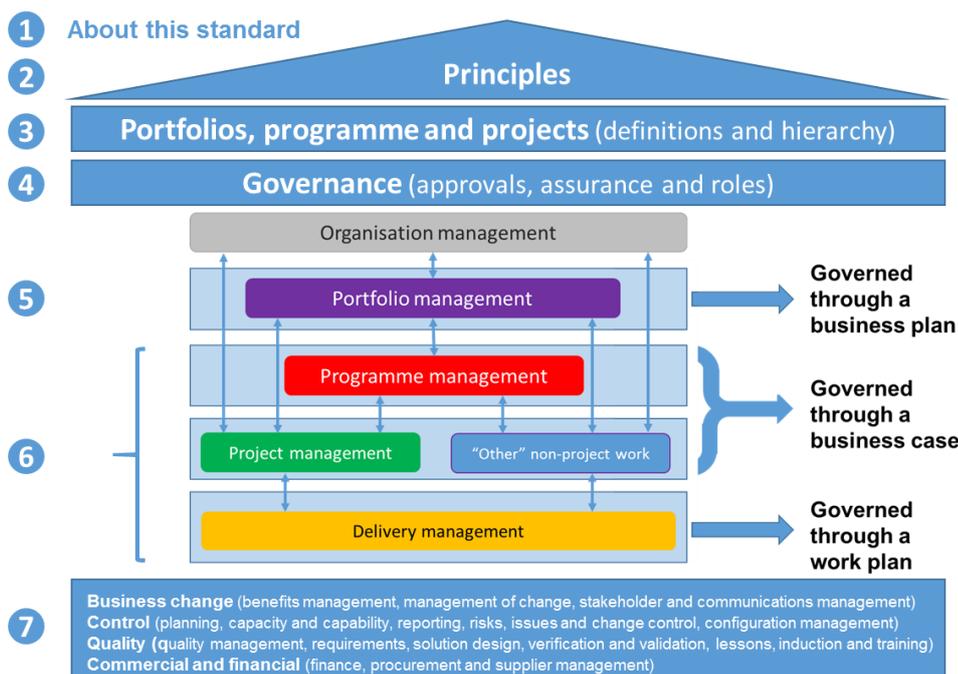
A walk through the standard

The Principles

Section 2 covers the principles.

There are nine principles, which form the values that should be applied at all times – they are not optional. Each practice in the standard supports one or more of these principles. By defining the principles, we can let the standard be adopted in a wide ranging way, allowing innovative approaches to be used (bearing in mind any risks!) rather than just sticking to the ones we know.

Principles (as stated in the standard)	**Why does this matter?**
Delivery objectives are aligned to government policy and organisational objectives.	If work isn't aligned to some wider goal, then why would we want to do it?
Continuing business justification to confirm benefits can be realised and risks managed within the organisation's risk appetite and that unjustified work is terminated.	Work must be justified and we have an obligation to Parliament to spend the public's money wisely. Further, political, social and economic contexts change and we need to reassess if this is the right thing to do, whether the solution still meets the need and whether it's still worth it.
Governance, management frameworks and controls are proportionate and appropriate to the work and the level of prevailing risk.	Too much oversight is as damaging as not enough, so the important words here are "risk", "proportionate" and "appropriate". A major project and a small one might need the same practices, but how they are used can differ.
Accountabilities and responsibilities are defined, mutually consistent and traceable across all levels of management.	If people don't know what they are accountable for or who they are accountable to, the chances are important things will be missed.
Experience and lessons are captured, shared and used to promote future performance improvement.	We should always be looking to improve how we work and then helping others to improve how they work. It's all public money and so the better we are, the further public money goes.
Work is appropriately defined, planned, monitored and controlled, and quality actively managed to maximise the likelihood of success. Defined working methodologies are tailored for use accordingly.	Just having "management" is not enough; we also need to define how the outputs are defined and delivered; this is where the real work happens. If there are departmental methodologies for this, they can be tailored to ensure the effort is proportionate and appropriate.
Outcomes and enabling outputs will meet the need and be validated by stakeholders.	Government is about improving things for our citizens. A computer system is no good, even if it is built as specified, if it doesn't trigger changes that stakeholders need.
Work is undertaken in multi-disciplinary teams and is assigned to people who have the required capability and capacity.	Very little can be achieved by one discipline working in isolation; project delivery usually requires capable people from a range of backgrounds, working towards a common objective.
The transition of capabilities to operations is planned and programme or project closure managed, with on-going operational responsibilities agreed and accepted.	Bad "back-end" practices may lead to failure. The transition to the "changed world" we created is as much a part of a project or programme as developing it a solution.

Portfolio, programme and project management definitions

Section 3 covers the definitions of portfolio, programme, project, work package and "other work.

In conversation, the term "project" is sometimes used interchangeably with the word "programme" and often this doesn't matter. Every now and then, however, the distinction is important as it is central to governance. Portfolio, programme and project management are inextricably a part of governance and so understanding the relationship between them is important if accountabilities are to be clear and traceable. For this reason, these terms are critical to a good understanding of the standard.

The definitions used in the standard are derived from what is emerging as an international consensus. The standard refers to a portfolio, programme, project or "other work" as work components, taking the lead from ISO 21504:2015. The "other work" component does cause some people difficulties. In MSP® this is limited to "change activities". The standard, however, allows you to choose and define it for yourself. It might be some "agile" work in a semi-business-as-usual context, or a Chief Engineer's Office or even an aspect of "business as usual".

Those introducing the standard can choose for themselves the scope of "portfolio" in their organisation, ranging from simply a grouping of their "important projects" to encompassing everything the department does.

In many cases it is clear what a project or programme is but sometimes it is not obvious. For example, a major endeavour, lasting, say 10 to 15 years, might be run as a programme, with "sub-programmes" or as a portfolio, comprising programmes. If the former is chosen, the governance will be based on a business case; if the latter, then it will be based on a business plan. Does it matter? Not necessarily; the point is to choose the form in which the endeavour is to be run and then define its governance accordingly and be consistent. Don't end up with roles and work components mixed up; it will just confuse people if they see a "portfolio" managed by a "project manager" or a "project" managed by a "programme manager"!

Governance

Section 4 covers governance of portfolios, programmes and projects.

Whilst the whole of portfolio, programme and project management could be seen as "governance", section 4 of the standard focusses on just three important aspects: assurance, approvals and roles. The rest is dealt with in sections 5, 6 and 7 of the standard.

Accounting Officers are accountable to Parliament for "high standards of probity in the management of public funds". They cannot, however, do this alone. The standard, supported by. HM Treasury guidance, can help them design the most appropriate assurance framework for their Department, including their Integrated Assurance Strategy, so that there is a seamless and complete picture of assurance and approvals across their organisation.

The Senior Responsible Owner is accountable for all aspects of programme or project governance and this includes assurance; their accountabilities and activities are covered in the standard.

The Government Major Project Portfolio is a list of key government projects which attract a higher level of attention, and the standard highlights these particular requirements.

Portfolio management

Section 5 covers portfolio management.

Portfolio management is the glue that makes sure all the programmes, projects and other work being undertaken fit government policy, represent value for money and are achievable.

Portfolio management is essentially an aspect of business planning and for this reason is best run as part of a Department's business planning and management, rather than as a separate entity. It can also be seen as supporting the second line of defence in assurance as it aims to provide an effective balance of organisational change and business as usual.[2]. Portfolio management is a critical aspect to what is now commonly termed as "business agility" as it is value focused, rather than simply budget focussed.

Portfolio management controls the flow of work for the organization; programmes and projects are sometimes delayed or fail simply because too much is being attempted and risks at an organisation level aren't managed. The Project Delivery Standard includes a set of practices, which should be part of any business planning and management framework.

Many Departments are already undertaking most, if not all of the portfolio management practices, but not necessarily using the wording and roles in the standard. This doesn't matter, as long as the practices are defined and performed, with named accountabilities. Other Departments might be using the practices for only a part of their business. If, however, resources and funding are shared, Departments should think about moving, over time to incorporate the whole of their organization within the scope of portfolio management and ensuring portfolio management practices are fully integrated with their business planning and management.

Programme and project management

Section 6 covers programme and project management.

Whilst programmes and projects are different they have so much in common that they are combined in the standard to avoid duplicating text. Where something only applies to a project or a programme this is made clear. This particularly applies to the life cycles, which are illustrated in figures 3 and 4 of the standard.

Many Departments have their own programme and project methods and lifecycles, which define most of what is needed. For example, this might be derived from a publicly available method and then tailored by a project manager to define how their project is to be managed. The figure below, illustrates this. The advantage of this approach is that the project manager does not need to define the "how" every time a new project is started; they only need to refer to and use the Department's method, defining anything which is specific to their project in their initiation documentation or management plans. If there is no departmental method or if the project is very large (like HS2), the management framework would need to be developed specifically for that project direct from the standard, from publicly available methodologies and previous experience.

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[2] From HM Treasury, Assurance Frameworks, December 2012.

Diagram showing tailoring from the Project Delivery Standard to an organization's project management method and to a project. External methods, standards and practices, legal, regulatory, health, safety, sustainability and environmental frameworks **Influence**. Internal processes, methods, standards, practices and policies; organizational maturity, culture, internal terminology and language **Influence**. Project Delivery Standard — *Tailoring for an organization* — Organization's project management method — *Tailoring for use on a project* — Project — PID *Project initiation documentation*. Defined methodology used on all projects, across the organization. Context, project type, scale, complexity, project management team capability, language, lifecycle model, contracts **Influences**. Tailoring by method owner → Tailoring by the project manager.

Practices which support delivery

Section 7 covers practices which support portfolio, programme and project management. They are collected in one section so that sections 4, 5 and 6 do not include repetitive text.

Benefits and change

Government requires beneficial outcomes not just outputs. This section of the standard emphasises this point by addressing benefits and business change. Business change practices, coupled with validation practices (from the quality section) exist to make sure there are no shocks just when we think the project is almost over.

Control

Control is about keeping to the plan. The standard covers planning and monitoring work, dealing with what might go wrong, handling uncertainties, and responding accordingly. This might mean changing your plan, undertaking the work in a different way or even terminating the project. In an increasingly complex world there are often many interdependencies between projects, and slippage in one might have a significant impact on another piece of work.

Quality

Quality goes to the heart of the project. It is what we produce which triggers the outcomes, and so the standard advises us to understand what the various users' needs are, create a solution and check it is what was asked for and actually needed. This is why the standard says we should define the way we gather requirements, design the solution and make sure it is not only built right but is the right solution. Methods will vary depending on the specialist outputs and those that build in user and customer involvement throughout the lifecycle are preferred. An essential part of quality is having skilled and competent people; sometimes that is difficult, so if they aren't yet competent, the standard says you should ensure they get the development they need to do the tasks assigned to them.

Commercial and financial

Government relies on contractors and suppliers for the delivery of a large proportion of its projects and so commercial, contract and financial practices are vital. This section highlights the practices which are most important for project delivery. The financial and commercial operating standards contain more detail, so you will need to use those alongside this Project Delivery Standard.

The annexes

The annexes are included to make the standard as self-contained as it can be by providing information which helps people use the standard more effectively.

Anne A References

Some of the references are freely available, others need to be bought or come as part of a subscription. All references are correct at the time of publication, but do look out for updates. The references are split into four sets:

Government references	These are the main references you will need and include essential process detail. The names have been chosen to help you find them on Gov.uk.
AXELOS references	These are the primary methodologies recommended for use in government and which many people gain accreditation for. These are a good source on "how" to do things.
British and international standards	These standards were used to make sure the Project Delivery Standard has the right coverage. They are a useful, though not essential, source for users.
Professional organisations	The publications from various professional and research institutions were used as a cross check on completeness for the standard. They have a lot of materials to help you understand the practices and implement them in the real world.

Annex B Glossary

Rather than refer people to a separate glossary, the key terms are included here. Otherwise, the AXELOS common glossary (available free, on-line) is a good source.

Annex C Example roles and accountabilities

The roles from the governance section have been expanded to help people understand them better. There are also references to where you can find more detail should you need it when using the standard.

Annex D Example project lifecycle

Projects are at the core of portfolios and programmes, and the project lifecycle is fundamental to governance, and risk management. The riskier the project, the more stages usually needed so that funds and resources are only committed when moving on to the next stage has been justified. This annex includes an example which illustrates a typical project lifecycle, showing the IPA assurance reviews, HM Treasury business cases and typical activities. Remember, this is just an example to illustrate the main features and actual projects might need fewer or more stages.

Annex E Agile delivery and this standard

Agile delivery is at the heart of digital service delivery and the techniques and behaviours can also be used in other areas. This annex emphasises this point and shows where "agile delivery" might fit. None of the practices in the standard exclude agile delivery approaches and in fact many, like continuous validation, involvement of stakeholders and iterative development, encourage it. The words may not match "agile terminology", but neither do they match the terminology of many other approaches or sectors either, having been chosen to encompass all circumstances.

HM Treasury business cases

• *Project brief*	• **Strategic outline case**	• **Outline business case**	• **Full business case**	• Updated business case	• *End project report*
Is there a real policy need or opportunity to address? Should we address this now?.	Is there a need or to address? Which options should investigate further?.	Is the project still required? Which option should be invest in?	Is the project still required? Can we confidently commit to undertaking the project	Are we ready to transition to operations (new capabilities & services) or withdraw redundant capabilities or services?	Is the project completed?

Gate/decision points

Project stages

Policy (Concept) → Feasibility → Appraise and select → Define → Deliver → Operate, embed & close → Operations

Assurance reviews

PVR Project validation review	**1** Business justification	**2** Delivery strategy	**3** Investment decision	**4** Readiness for service	**5** Operations review and benefits realisation	**5**

Example activities

Practices from section 6	Identify project	Initiate project	Manage project / Manage delivery	Manage project / Manage delivery	Manage project / Manage delivery	Manage project / Manage delivery / Close project	Review project outcome
	• Verify policy, business need or opportunity • Appoint SRO • Undertake project validation review • Prepare proposal • Obtain approval to start project	• Mobilise team, • Undertake an initial investigation to determine a range of possible outline solution(s) and their viability and risks • Select a short list of options for further study • Undertake assurance review • Prepare strategic outline case • Approve next stage	• Mobilise team, • Undertake a detailed appraisal of the shortlisted options, cost-benefit, risk and procurement approach • Select preferred solution • Prepare outline business case/PID and plans • Undertake assurance review • Approve next stage	• Mobilise team • Appoint suppliers for stage (if needed) • Undertake a more detailed investigation to define the selected solution and assess its viability • Identify suppliers and obtain quotes • Prepare full business case/PID and plans • Undertake assurance review • Approve next stage	• Mobilise team • Appoint suppliers • Undertake the work defined in the project documentation to develop the outputs and achieve outcomes. • Update business case/PID and plans • Undertake assurance review • Approve next stage	• Mobilise team • Oversee initial use of the outputs and check outcomes are as expected: take corrective actions • Undertake assurance review • Formally close the project, when completed • Approve closure	• Assess benefits and operational performance • Take action to exploit opportunities and correct any shortfalls • Undertake assurance review

Example of a typical project lifecycle, taken from Annex D, which may be tailored to the particular circumstances. Higher risk projects usually need more stages, low risk ones, fewer stages.