



July 2026

GPD-PN 05/26

Programme and project directors: role, importance and arrangements

Dear Chief Project Delivery Officers and Heads of Profession

Issue

This policy note supports the implementation of the [Government Functional Standard for Project Delivery \(GovS 002\)](#), which establishes the need for clear project delivery leadership roles and defined accountabilities. It sets out the importance and key aspects of the Programme/Project Director role.

Action

Departments and arm's length bodies in scope of the Government Functional Standard for Project Delivery shall apply the requirements this policy note describes to all new Programme/Project Director appointments in relation to Mega-Projects, programmes and projects within the Government Major Projects Portfolio, Departmental Major Projects, and Other Major Projects.

Context

Recent government reforms rebalanced accountability arrangements for programme and project delivery, alongside clearer tiering of government programmes and projects. This reinforced the importance of strong and effective Programme/Project Directors, for whom this policy note introduces tiering, mirroring the Senior Responsible Owners with whom they work.

The role and importance of programme/project directors

[The role of the senior responsible owner](#) offers the following description of the programme/project director role, that has been adapted slightly to reflect the recent reforms.

The programme/project director is a UK government specific role designation that is used for programmes and projects in the GMPP and for Departmental Major Projects. It is a senior role with expert project delivery experience and expertise to reflect the scale and complexity of major government projects. For lower cost and risk projects, this role could be called a project or programme manager, and the responsibilities would be similar though in a less complex environment.

The duties of the project director include:

- ensuring the solution is designed and business case and plans prepared
- defining the approach, accountabilities, work scope and targets for the team
- monitoring, forecasting and reporting overall progress against the plan
- resolving risks and issues and controlling change
- delivering the required outputs and outcomes
- monitoring and managing supplier performance
- engaging and communicating with stakeholders
- ensuring the project is appropriately resourced and organised
- ensuring the budget requirements are defined and managed within agreed limits
- identifying and managing risks and issues
- ensuring the project team's activities are lawful and ethical

The project director is responsible for all day-to-day decisions.

The key to a successful relationship between a senior responsible owner and a programme/project director is understanding each other's role and agreeing how they want to work together:

- the senior responsible owner steers and champions the project
- the programme/project director directs the project

Annex D of The Role of the senior responsible owner offers side-by-side comparison of the two roles.

Government Major Project Portfolio Programme Directors

If a programme or project is on the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP), the following arrangements apply to the Programme Director. This includes Mega Projects, which follow the same framework with a small number of distinctions.

Appointment and Accountability

- GMPP and Mega-project Programme Directors shall be personally accountable to their Senior Responsible Owner and thence to the Accounting Officer
- GMPP and Mega-project Programme Directors shall be appointed by the Senior Responsible Owner
- GMPP and Mega-project Programme Director accountability shall be formalised through an appointment letter using the template GMPP programme director appointment letter

[View a template GMPP programme director letter](#)

Accreditation and training

- GMPP Programme Directors shall be a graduate of or be enrolled on the Major Projects Leadership Academy (MPLA)
- GMPP Programme Directors PDs should be accredited at senior/master practitioner in accordance with targets set for departments

Pay and allowances

- Programme Directors of Mega Projects may fall within scope for pay freedoms, provided they are employed by the project's delivery body (and not the sponsoring department) and the Mega Project delivery body's agreed senior pay delegation includes provision for this role
- Civil servant Programme Directors of all project types can be proposed for pivotal role allowances (PRAs) through the general Civil Service PRA policy. This is subject to approval by the department. Any local retention or recruitment allowances may also be applied by departments on their own recognisance, in the usual way. For more information, email projectdeliverytalent@nista.gov.uk

Departmental Major Project Programme Directors

If a programme or project needs approval through HM Treasury's 'Treasury approvals process for projects and programmes' but is not on the Government Major Projects Portfolio, the following arrangements apply to the Programme Director.

Accountability and appointment

- Departmental Major Project (DMP) Programme Directors shall be personally accountable to their Senior Responsible Owner and thence to the Accounting Officer
- DMP Programme Directors shall be appointed by the Senior Responsible Owner
- DMP Programme Director accountability shall be formalised through an appointment letter using the template DMP programme director appointment letter

[View a template DMP programme director letter](#)

Accreditation and training

- DMP Programme Directors shall be eligible to apply to be enrolled in the Major Projects Leadership Academy (MPLA)
- DMP Programme Directors' accreditation and appropriate training is encouraged in line with departmental targets

Pay and allowances

- Civil servant Programme Directors of all project types can be proposed for pivotal role allowances (PRAs) through the general Civil Service PRA policy. This is subject to approval by the department. Any local retention or recruitment allowances may also be applied by departments on their own recognisance, in the usual way. For more information, email projectdeliverytalent@nista.gov.uk

Other Major Project (OMP) Programme/Project Directors

If a programme or project does not need approval from HM Treasury, the following arrangements apply to the Programme/Project Director.

Accountability and appointment

- Other programme and project Programme/Project Directors shall be personally accountable to their Senior Responsible Owner and thence to the Accounting Officer
- The Programme/Project Director shall be appointed by the Senior Responsible Owner
- Programme/Project Director accountability should be formalised through an appointment letter using the template programme director appointment letter

[View a template programme director appointment letter](#)

Accreditation and training

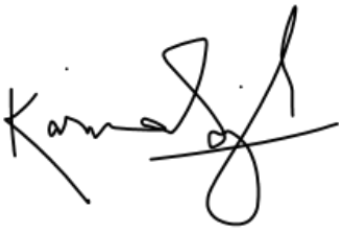
- Programme Directors' accreditation and appropriate training is encouraged in line with departmental targets

Pay and allowances

- Civil servant Programme Directors of all project types can be proposed for pivotal role allowances (PRAs) through the general Civil Service PRA policy. This is subject to approval by the department. Any local retention or recruitment allowances may also be applied by departments on their own recognisance, in the usual way

Support and further information

For advice on this policy or any other reforms being implemented, contact your NISTA Project Delivery Advisor.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karina Singh', with a stylized, flowing script.

Karina Singh

Government Head of Profession for Project Delivery