

Band B: Civil Service Competency Framework and International Competences



About this framework

We are introducing a new competency framework to support the Civil Service Reform Plan and the new performance management system. The competency framework sets out how we want people in the Civil Service to work. It puts the Civil Service values of honesty, integrity, impartiality and objectivity at the heart of everything we do and it aligns to the three high level leadership behaviours that every civil servant needs to model: Set Direction; Engage People and Deliver Results. Civil servants work in a huge range of jobs across the country and overseas but one thing we have in common is that we are here to support the elected Government, providing advice to help shape its policies and ensuring seamless and practical implementation in line with those policies.

Competences are the skills, knowledge and behaviours that lead to successful performance. The framework outlines ten CSCF and two international competences, which are grouped into four clusters as set out above. For each competency there is a description of what it means in practice and some examples of effective and ineffective behaviours at all levels. The competences are intended to be discrete and cumulative, with each level building on the levels below i.e. a person demonstrating a competency at level 3 should be demonstrating levels 1 and 2 as a matter of course. These indicators of behaviour are not designed to be comprehensive, but provide a clear sense of and greater understanding and consistency about what is expected from individuals in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

What does it mean for me?

The framework will be used for recruitment, performance management and development discussions and for decisions about progression. Some Departments introduced the CSCF in April 2012 with the rest of Government doing so from April 2013. In these new arrangements your business objectives will set out “what” you need to achieve over the year and this competency framework will set out “how” you need to work to achieve those objectives.

Most of you will need to focus on a number of competences, usually around six, identified with your manager as being essential to your role. You are encouraged to discuss the framework with your line manager to identify the competences that apply most to your job role.

This framework has been developed in partnership with Civil Service professions. If you work as part of a profession with a separate framework this will complement your professional framework and should be used alongside it.

The FCO Competency framework consists of twelve competences. Below is a list of all the competences with a high-level summary of each one.

International Cluster

1. Engaging Internationally

Effectiveness in this area is about leading internationally, engaging our staff, contacts and international partners to help deliver UK Government objectives. For all staff it's about understanding UK Government aims in the wider UK and international context and developing productive relationships with those external contacts and partners to help deliver UK objectives. All staff are aware of cultural sensitivities in their area of responsibility. Staff build up negotiating expertise through the grades and champion and use language skills where appropriate to deepen impact. Senior leaders use the same behaviours but operate at higher levels of sensitivity and complexity. Managers have to lead and inspire teams in an international context. Staff adapt their approach to reflect the very diverse teams they manage while still promoting UK values.

2. Demonstrating Resilience

This is about helping our people to build resilience in international roles, supporting their ability to adapt to working in difficult and varied international environments; and to bounce back from crises and setbacks in these contexts. Individuals need to be aware of the impact they have on themselves and on others, and show support for others with a pragmatic attitude, perseverance and resolve. Individuals should be able to manage in a wide variety of circumstances and locations and, with appropriate support, to recover from challenges and setbacks. For leadership roles this competence would also include leading a culture of support, while promoting a proper regard for employee safety, health and well-being.

Strategic Cluster – Setting Direction

3. Seeing the Big Picture

Seeing the big picture is about having an in-depth understanding and knowledge of how your role fits with and supports organisational objectives and the wider public needs. For all staff, it is about focusing your contribution on the activities which will meet Civil Service goals and deliver the greatest value. At senior levels, it is about scanning the political context and taking account of wider impacts to develop long term implementation strategies that maximise opportunities to add value to the citizen and support economic, sustainable growth.

4. Changing and Improving

People who are effective in this area are responsive, innovative and seek out opportunities to create effective change. For all staff, it's about being open to change, suggesting ideas for improvements to the way things are done, and working in 'smarter', more focused ways. At senior levels, this is about creating and contributing to a culture of innovation and allowing people to consider and take managed risks. Doing this well means continuously seeking out ways to improve policy implementation and build a leaner, more flexible and responsive Civil Service. It also means making use of alternative delivery models including digital and shared service approaches wherever possible.

5. Making Effective Decisions

Effectiveness in this area is about being objective; using sound judgement, evidence and knowledge to provide accurate, expert and professional advice. For all staff, it means showing clarity of thought, setting priorities, analysing and using evidence to evaluate options before arriving at well reasoned justifiable decisions. At senior levels, leaders will be creating evidence based strategies, evaluating options, impacts, risks and solutions. They will aim to maximise return while minimising risk and balancing social, political, financial, economic and environmental considerations to provide sustainable outcomes.

People Cluster - Engaging People

6. Leading and Communicating

At all levels, effectiveness in this area is about leading from the front and communicating with clarity, conviction and enthusiasm. It's about supporting principles of fairness of opportunity for all and a dedication to a diverse range of citizens. At senior levels, it is about establishing a strong direction and a persuasive future vision; managing and engaging with people with honesty and integrity, and upholding the reputation of the Department and the Civil Service.

7. Collaborating and Partnering

People skilled in this area create and maintain positive, professional and trusting working relationships with a wide range of people within and outside the Civil Service to help get business done. At all levels, it requires working collaboratively, sharing information and building supportive, responsive relationships with colleagues and stakeholders, whilst having the confidence to challenge assumptions. At senior levels, it's about delivering business objectives through creating an inclusive environment, encouraging collaboration and building effective partnerships including relationships with Ministers.

8. Building Capability for All

Effectiveness in this area is having a strong focus on continuous learning for oneself, others and the organisation. For all staff, it's being open to learning, about keeping one's own knowledge and skill set current and evolving. At senior levels, it's about talent management and ensuring a diverse blend of capability and skills is identified and developed to meet current and future business needs. It's also about creating a learning and knowledge culture across the organisation to inform future plans and transformational change.

Performance Cluster - Delivering Results

9. Achieving Commercial Outcomes

Being effective in this area is about maintaining an economic, long-term focus in all activities. For all, it's about having a commercial, financial and sustainable mindset to ensure all activities and services are delivering added value and working to stimulate economic growth. At senior levels, it's about identifying economic, market and customer issues and using these to promote innovative business models, commercial partnerships and agreements to deliver greatest value; and ensuring tight commercial controls of finances, resources and contracts to meet strategic priorities.

10. Delivering Value for Money

Delivering value for money involves the efficient, effective and economic use of taxpayers' money in the delivery of public services. For all staff, it means seeking out and implementing solutions which achieve the best mix of quality and effectiveness for the least outlay. People who do this well base their decisions on evidenced information and follow agreed processes and policies, challenging these appropriately where they appear to prevent good value for money. At senior levels, effective people embed a culture of value for money within their area/function. They work collaboratively across boundaries to ensure that the Civil Service maximises its strategic outcomes within the resources available.

11. Managing a Quality Service

Effectiveness in this area is about being organised to deliver service objectives and striving to improve the quality of service, taking account of diverse customer needs and requirements. People who are effective plan, organise and manage their time and activities to deliver a high quality and efficient service, applying programme and project management approaches to support service delivery. At senior levels, it is about creating an environment to deliver operational excellence and creating the most appropriate and cost effective delivery models for public services.

12. Delivering at Pace

Effectiveness in this area means focusing on delivering timely performance with energy and taking responsibility and accountability for quality outcomes. For all staff, it's about working to agreed goals and activities and dealing with challenges in a responsive and constructive way. At senior levels, it is about building a performance culture to deliver outcomes with a firm focus on prioritisation and addressing performance issues resolutely, fairly and promptly. It is also about leaders providing the focus and energy to drive activities forward through others and encourage staff to perform effectively during challenging and changing times.

1. Engaging Internationally	
Effective Behaviour <i>People who are effective are likely to...</i>	Ineffective Behaviour <i>People who are less effective are likely to...</i>
Take an interest in the international picture and understand where their work fits in, including the wider UK agenda.	Have limited interest in or understanding of the international and UK context of their work.
Develop useful contacts to help achieve objectives.	Be dismissive of the value of contact networks. Fail to identify key people.
Negotiate effectively - prepare well for meetings, listen carefully to others' views, communicate their views clearly and be able to respond to the unexpected.	Be ill prepared for meetings and unclear about their purpose. Deliver inappropriate messages.
Have a working knowledge of country context and local sensitivities. Be interested in learning and using languages.	Show little interest in the country, region, language (where appropriate) or its people.

2. Demonstrating Resilience	
Effective Behaviour <i>People who are effective are likely to...</i>	Ineffective Behaviour <i>People who are less effective are likely to...</i>
Have a high level of self-awareness of the impact of their behaviour on themselves and others and use this to ensure they act appropriately in the work environment.	Fail to acknowledge their personal impact. This affects their ability to work and appropriate work behaviours.
Consider how they manage themselves and staff through challenges or setbacks in an international context, and develop as a result, bouncing back. Ask for support when needed, and encourage others in the team to do the same.	Fail to support their team to develop and become more self-aware. Lack awareness of their impact on others.
Recognise their individual strengths and limitations. Manage the impact of this on themselves and their colleagues.	Fail to understand their limitations. Disregard needs of colleagues and in some cases adversely affect their colleagues.
Manage themselves well in various challenging or ambiguous international scenarios and can adapt to the different circumstances that arise.	Pay little attention to changing scenarios. Fail to adjust as required.

3. Seeing the Big Picture	
Effective Behaviour <i>People who are effective are likely to...</i>	Ineffective Behaviour <i>People who are less effective are likely to...</i>
Keep up to date with a broad set of issues relating to the work of the Department	Have a narrow view of their role, without understanding the Department's wider activities
Develop understanding of how own and team's work supports achievement of Departmental priorities and delivery to the citizen	Carry out own tasks without considering how their work impacts or interacts with other teams
Focus on the overall goal and intent of what they are trying to achieve, not just the task	Fail to identify occasions when professional judgement and personal initiative are called for in order to deliver business objectives
Take an active interest in expanding their knowledge of areas related to own role	Rely solely on the knowledge they have already established about their role

4. Changing and Improving	
Effective Behaviour <i>People who are effective are likely to...</i>	Ineffective Behaviour <i>People who are less effective are likely to...</i>
Understand and apply technology to achieve efficient and effective business and personal results	Avoid use of technology and stick to tried and tested means of delivering business objectives
Consider and suggest ideas for improvements, sharing this feedback with others in a constructive manner	Be reluctant to consider ways to improve services in own area, even when improvements are urgently required
Conduct regular reviews of what and who is required to make a project/activity successful and make on-going improvements	Stick rigidly to the original brief, not adapting support/input to changing needs
Put aside preconceptions and consider new ideas on their own merits	Avoid considering different approaches, accepting the established way of doing things
Help colleagues, customers and corporate partners to understand changes and why they have been introduced	Dismiss colleagues' concerns about change and miss opportunities to discuss with them what is behind their concerns
Identify, resolve or escalate the positive and negative effects that change may have on own role/team	Implement change in a thoughtless and unstructured way, having not considered the possible effects it may have on others

5. Making Effective Decisions	
Effective Behaviour <i>People who are effective are likely to...</i>	Ineffective Behaviour <i>People who are less effective are likely to...</i>
Demonstrate accountability and make unbiased decisions	Avoid making decisions that lie within own remit; continually push decisions up
Examine complex information and obtain further information to make accurate decisions	Miss important evidence or make hasty judgements
Speak with the relevant people in order to obtain the most accurate information and get advice when unsure of how to proceed	Encounter problems by failing to check issues and relevance of information before using it
Explain clearly, verbally and in writing, how a decision has been reached	Share decisions in a way that leads to frustration or additional work
Provide advice and feedback to support others to make accurate decisions	Provide limited or no assurance that the right decisions are being made in team/work area
Monitor the storage of critical data and customer information to support decision making and conduct regular reviews to ensure it is stored accurately, confidentially and responsibly	Take little care with data and information storage; allow inaccuracies and mishandling to occur

6. Leading and Communicating	
Effective Behaviour <i>People who are effective are likely to...</i>	Ineffective Behaviour <i>People who are less effective are likely to...</i>
Display enthusiasm around goals and activities – adopting a positive approach when interacting with others	Express limited interest in goals and activities
Listen to, understand, respect and accept the value of different views, ideas and ways of working	Adopt a biased, exclusive or disrespectful manner in their dealings with others
Express ideas effectively, both orally and in writing, and with sensitivity and respect for others	Demonstrate no awareness of the impact of their behaviour on others nor consider the potential reactions of others to the ideas put forward
Confidently handle challenging conversations or interviews	Unable to deal objectively with conflicts and disputes when they arise
Confront and deal promptly with inappropriate language or behaviours, including bullying, harassment or discrimination	Avoid challenging inappropriate language or behaviours

7. Collaborating and Partnering	
Effective Behaviour <i>People who are effective are likely to...</i>	Ineffective Behaviour <i>People who are less effective are likely to...</i>
Demonstrate interest in others and develop a range of contacts outside own team to help get the job done	Ignore the knowledge and expertise that a wider network of colleagues and partners can bring to the work of the team
Change ways of working to facilitate collaboration for the benefit of the team's work	Continue to work in set ways that make it difficult for colleagues to contribute to or benefit from the team's work
Proactively seek information, resources and support from others outside own immediate team in order to help achieve results	Take a narrow approach to resolving resourcing issues in own area and fail to explore other resourcing opportunities and possibilities
Readily identify opportunities to share knowledge, information and learning and make progress by working with colleagues	Rarely share information, or restrict it to immediate colleagues only
Listen attentively to others and check their understanding by asking questions	Show a lack of interest or skill in interacting with others
Take responsibility for creating a working environment that encourages equality, diversity and inclusion	Adopt a biased, exclusive or disrespectful manner in their dealings with others

8. Building Capability for All	
Effective Behaviour <i>People who are effective are likely to...</i>	Ineffective Behaviour <i>People who are less effective are likely to...</i>
Take ownership of team and individual development by identifying capability needs and consistently achieving development objectives	Fail to address own capability needs or identify learning opportunities
Take responsibility for the quality of own work and seeking opportunities for improvement through continuous learning	Resist opportunities to broaden work responsibilities
Proactively support the development plans of others	Resist learning and development requests from others
Take account of the diverse contributions of team members and delegate work to improve capabilities of all	Tend to keep work to themselves that could be a helpful development opportunity for a team member, failing to ensure equality of opportunity
Encourage and be open to developmental feedback from others	Be disinterested in giving or receiving constructive feedback

9. Achieving Commercial Outcomes	
Effective Behaviour <i>People who are effective are likely to...</i>	Ineffective Behaviour <i>People who are less effective are likely to...</i>
Be able to identify and access departmental procurement and commercial expertise	Make poor quality commercial decisions or take actions without having engaged with departmental commercial experts
Understand and be able to explain departmental approach to assigning contractual and financial delegations	Enter into commercial arrangements without having the authority to do so
Recognise when deliverables and/or services derived from a commercial arrangement are not being delivered to the required level of quality or standard and take appropriate action	Not raise issues when cost or outcomes drift significantly from agreements
Fully meet commercial confidentiality and data security requirements in contracts	Put confidentiality and other security requirements at risk

10. Delivering Value for Money	
Effective Behaviour <i>People who are effective are likely to...</i>	Ineffective Behaviour <i>People who are less effective are likely to...</i>
Manage information and financial data so that it is accurate, easily located and reusable	Ignore financial management information procedures
Can account for expenditure and create well supported argument for extra expenditure e.g. overtime	Misunderstand basic financial concepts
Take opportunities to challenge misuse of resources in order to achieve value for money and sustainable ways of working	Favour the easiest method even if it is not the most cost effective – struggle to identify value for money opportunities
Understand that all actions have a cost and choose the most effective way to do something in a resource efficient way	Avoid using recommended tools and allow their team to do likewise
Ensure that recognised control procedures and practices are maintained	Use control and governance procedures and practices inappropriately or irregularly and allow their teams to do the same
Monitor resources against plans and budget, identify and flag up variances	Not manage resources against plan

11. Managing a Quality Service	
<i>Effective Behaviour</i> <i>People who are effective are likely to...</i>	<i>Ineffective Behaviour</i> <i>People who are less effective are likely to...</i>
Explain clearly to customers what can be done	Give customers and delivery partners an unrealistic picture of what is possible or focus on what cannot be done
Work with team to set priorities, create clear plans and manage all work to meet the needs of the customer and the business	Always rely on others to focus and plan their work
Ensure that levels of service are maintained – flag up risks or concerns in order to meet customer requirements	Focus on immediate service delivery problems and neglect overall quality or customer /end user needs
Keep internal teams, customers and delivery partners fully informed of plans and possibilities	Provide infrequent, unclear, insufficient updates to others in need of the information
Promote adherence to relevant policies, procedures, regulations and legislation, including equality and diversity and health and safety	Pay little attention to highlighting and explaining the reasons for compliance
Identify common problems or weaknesses in policy or procedures that affect service and escalate these	Show a lack of desire to improve the quality of service

12. Delivering at Pace	
<i>Effective Behaviour</i> <i>People who are effective are likely to...</i>	<i>Ineffective Behaviour</i> <i>People who are less effective are likely to...</i>
Create regular reviews of what and who is required to make a project/activity successful and make ongoing improvements	Fail to maintain pace and progress
Be interested and positive about what they and the team are trying to achieve	Display limited interest or positivity for their role or purpose
Take ownership of problems in their own area of responsibility	Avoid responsibility for dealing with problems
Remain positive and focused on achieving outcomes despite setbacks	Fail to adjust or react negatively when things change or go wrong
Check own and team performance against outcomes, make improvement suggestions or take corrective action when problems are identified	Neglect performance reviews and so be unable to give timely and constructive feedback
Set and achieve challenging goals and monitor quality	Blame others for poor quality work