



CABINET OFFICE



TO: Accounting Officers of Government Departments

18 May 2021

Dear colleagues,

PREPARING FOR FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF FUNCTIONAL STANDARDS

Government functions have been working together to set and embed the use of functional standards across government. These management standards have been developed over recent years, and many have been widely adopted to guide the way functional work is done. They set expectations for the governance, roles and accountabilities and practices needed, and provide a stable basis for assurance, risk management and capability building.

We wanted to make sure the standards met the needs of users before formalising them, so the functions issued trial versions. Since then, they have been working with their networks in departments to plan improvements. Feedback has been positive, particularly about how the standards prompt action to fill gaps in current practice. We are very grateful to the many practitioners across government who have provided constructive input on the details; the standards are currently being updated to take account of the latest stakeholder trials and feedback, led by each function. This will enable us to issue fully approved standards this summer.

There should be no surprises, as these standards bring together and clarify what should already be happening. They are also flexible: you can tailor how you meet the standard in practice, depending on your business need. This is a joint exercise between Heads of Function at the centre, working with departmental COOs and functional leaders across government, to create a suite of consistent standards that support joined up working.

In February the Civil Service Operations Board agreed that accounting officers should be asked to direct their organisations to follow functional standards from summer 2021. We are now writing in advance of the standards being formally promulgated to set out the coverage, the usage envisaged, and how this will be embedded into ways of working going forward. Information on these is provided in Annex A.

The main benefit of this work is to give us a tried and tested way of doing functional business across government, which in turn supports integrated management and continuity of implementation. Standards should make it easier for people to know what is expected, to work

together, and to hit the ground running when they move jobs. Over time, as we align functional work to the standards, we expect to see a natural 'joining up' across the system.

Further ahead, we plan to use the standards as a stable basis for continuous improvement. The combination of advisory ('should') elements and mandatory ('shall') elements means we can use them to set ambition. Different organisations, at different levels of capability and maturity, can progressively meet the standard from whatever their starting point is. Work is underway to help you understand how well your organisation is meeting the standard (good, better, or best) and to help you plan improvement activity and to benefit from peer review and peer support. This builds on work already done by the Commercial function.

Preparing in your organisation

Most people leading functional work should already be familiar with the standards, through the trial phase, but we recognise that this may not be true everywhere, and that people will need time to put in place the right disciplines.

Please make sure relevant people in your organisation know that they will be expected to follow the standards, and ask your functional leaders to engage with those at the centre of their function to look at what more might be done to support adoption.

We suggest that early work should involve:

- reviewing governance to ensure this takes account of the standards
- checking that named people are assigned to roles and accountabilities set out in relevant standards, and ensuring that these are reflected in personal objectives
- reviewing induction and training to highlight the standards
- referencing the need to meet the relevant standard when recruiting for functional jobs

Further information

Functional leaders are ready to answer any questions you may have, and will be working across their functional networks to follow up this letter.

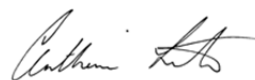
For general queries or feedback, please contact standards@cabinetoffice.gov.uk.

Best wishes,



Alex Chisholm

Civil Service Chief Operating Officer



Cat Little

Director General, Public Spending, HM Treasury

ANNEX A: Coverage, intended usage, and activities to embed the standards

1. Coverage:

- functions already covered are shown here: [Government Functional Standards](#).
- a further standard, for internal audit, is to be added shortly.
- the default scope of a functional standard covers 'departments and their arm's length bodies', but they can be adopted by other public sector organisations, devolved or local, as necessary.

2. Usage:

- to support the governance, planning, delivery and assurance of functional work.
- to support continuous improvement and professional development.
- to provide a reference point that other requirements and guidance need to meet, and a common set of definitions and language to describe functional work.

3. Embedding:

- the accounting officer is a named role in functional standards, to make a clear link between the practices defined in each standard and the content of Managing Public Money.
- formal arrangements for using functional standards will be set out in a Dear Accounting Officer letter very shortly.
- arrangements are in place to keep standards relevant and current, and ensure consultation about substantive changes, see [GovS 001, government functions](#).
- use of the standards is being built into other centrally provided guidance and documentation, for example for business planning.