

Implementing functional standards

A guide for senior leaders in organisations

Purpose

The purpose of this reference guide is to help senior leaders within government, to implement functional standards within their organisation.

What are functions and standards

A government function is a cross government grouping embedded into departments and arm's length bodies to manage specialist work such as HR, project delivery and security. The purpose of each function is summarised on the [government functions guidance page](#) on gov.uk. A function harnesses the skills of people from any relevant government profession.

A [functional standard](#) sets the expectations for the management of a function's work across government.

[Functional standard GovS 001, Government functions](#), addresses the purpose of functions and what is required of their leaders. The other standards set expectations for the management of their respective function's work.

The standards clarify what should already be happening in every organisation and working as a suite cross-reference, where appropriate, to the functional standards they rely on.

The standards drive coherence, consistency and continuous improvement, to support the enduring principles and requirements set out in [Managing Public Money](#).

[Continuous improvement assessment frameworks](#) set levels of maturity (using 'good', 'better' and 'best' criteria) against the most important aspects of a standard. They make it easy for organisations to understand how mature they are in relation the standard, and where they should aim to improve.

Mandate of standards

Functional standards were mandated for use across government (including arm's length bodies) in September 2021, and may also be adopted by other public sector organisations, see [Dear Accounting Officer letter DAO 05/21](#).

Consistent language used in standards

A functional standard uses consistent language and agreed definitions. Standards state what is mandatory (shall) and strongly advisory (should). They also share a [common glossary of terms](#) to be used in the organisation's documentation so people are clear on what is meant – avoiding misunderstandings.

Appropriate and proportionate use of standards

The standards should be applied proportionately to the size and complexity of the functional work done in an organisation, and used together with continuous improvement assessment frameworks to drive improvement over time.

Each organisation may decide how to conform with the standard in practice, taking advice from the relevant functional leader either in an organisation/parent department or across government.

Senior leader Accountabilities

The standard [GovS 001, Government functions](#), includes the accountabilities of the accounting officer and senior team members in relation to the management of functions within departments and arm's length bodies, including the adoption of standards. Each functional standard sets out the expectations in the respective function.



Senior leaders are expected to champion the suite of standards to drive coherence, consistency and continuous improvement to improve the way functional work is done in their organisations, see [accounting officer letter DAO 05/21](#).

The standards define roles, not jobs, giving flexibility for organisations to decide how to structure their operations, to suit the complexity of the work being done. Defined functional roles and accountabilities from the standards should be reflected in relevant job descriptions and personal objectives.

Part II of the [Orange Book: management of risk – principles and concepts](#), ‘The Risk Control Framework’ (RCF) outlines the accounting officer responsibility for ensuring organisational compliance with existing rules and guidance, including all relevant Functional Standards.

Governance and management

Functional standards are documents for implementing consistent ways of functional working in government. Their associated practices and guidance form cross-government functional governance and management frameworks.

Senior leaders within organisations should ensure the organisation has a defined and established governance and management framework in place to cover work within the standards. Including cross-government requirements and guidance are included wherever practicable, and any locally tailored material is aligned to the standards.

Senior leaders in organisations can use the standards as a prompt to engage with other organisations’ functional leaders and their teams on their work.

Using the standards in organisations

Functional standards are the primary reference documents for improved and consistent ways of working in functions across government, helping organisations achieve their objectives more effectively and efficiently.

Each standard covers the specialist activities undertaken by those in the relevant function, and provide a baseline of expectations that audit and risk committees and internal auditors can draw upon. Expectation around assurance is included in each standard. They support [the Three Lines Model for assurance in the Orange Book](#) and help accounting officers and senior leaders meet the requirements of managing public money. For example, supporting value for money and feasibility considerations, and to inform the content of [accounting officer’s system statements](#).

Continuous improvement

Senior leaders already use many sources of data and information to improve performance. Alongside each standard, it is recommended that there is a [continuous improvement assessment framework](#). These frameworks set levels of maturity against the most important aspects of a standard (good, better or best).

By setting ambition for each function, and understanding how well it is doing against its ambition, organisations can set priorities for improvement. Insight from the assessments can help setting of functional strategy and plans. The consistent approach by functions means: senior leaders and internal and independent assurance bodies have access to a common set of assessments across organisations, to inform their work; and there is a basis for comparison against peer organisations.