HM Government

Handbook for standard managers

Developing, managing and maintaining functional standards

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Approved

This Handbook supports compliance with government functional standard GovS 001: Government functions, which sets expectations for the direction and management of functions across government, including management of functional standards.

The full suite of functional standards, and associated guidance, can be found at GOV.UK government functional standards.

For more information, please contact standards@cabinetoffice.gov.uk.

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1 About this handbook

1.1 Purpose

This handbook provides advice about how functional standards should be developed, managed and maintained.

It supports functions to meet the expectations about managing functional standards in GovS 001, Government functions [1].

1.2 Scope

This handbook is for those undertaking the role of standard manager defined in GovS 001, Government functions, and applies to the management of all functional standards.

It should also be useful for standard owners, and anyone interested in how standards are managed and used (including how continuous improvement assessment frameworks are developed).

The handbook assumes that the reader is familiar with the content of GovS 001, Government functions. Please refer to the standard for detailed expectations.

1.3 Further information

The full suite of functional standards and associated guidance can be found at: Functional Standards - GOV.UK [1].

For templates, tools, processes and further advice on fulfilling the standard manager role please contact the standards policy team at standards@cabinetoffice.gov.uk

The standards team can also provide a list of functional standard managers on request.

2 Context

2.1 Functional standards

Functional standards exist to create a coherent, effective and mutually understood way of doing business within government organisations and across organisational boundaries, and to provide a stable basis for assurance, risk management, and capability improvement. They support value for money for the taxpayer, and continuity of implementation.

2.2 Managing Public Money

The suite of standards is mandated for use across central government departments and their arm's length bodies, through inclusion in Managing Public Money [2]. For more information on what this means, see this Dear Accounting Officer letter [3]. HM Treasury Officer of Accounts is consulted before any new mandatory requirements are set in functional standards (the 'shalls').

2.3 GovS 001, Government functions

2.3.1 Overview

GovS 001, Government functions sets expectations for the direction and management of functions across government. The following roles are defined for managing functional standards:

2.3.2 Standard owner

The **functional standard owner** is accountable to the Chief Operating Officer of the Civil Service for establishing and controlling the functional standard within their area of responsibility.

2.3.3 Standard manager

The **functional standard manager** is accountable to the standard owner for developing, managing and maintaining their assigned standard.

2.3.4 Design authority for functional standards

The **design authority** maintains the alignment, completeness and integrity of the suite of government standards and champions their use across government. It consults standard owners before issuing: substantive new policy advice relating to standards; major new versions of GovS 001, Government functions; and new requirements or guidance relating to functional standards.

The Cabinet Office standards policy team leads a peer group of standard managers to fulfil the role of design authority, and provides advice and guidance to standard managers including:

- management processes for reviewing standards, including quality and version control
- associated cross-cutting 'how to' guidance linked to GovS 001, Government functions (such as this handbook)
- cross-functional induction and learning & development materials
- advice on practical arrangements such as brand management and publication

3 Developing a new functional standard

3.1 Proposing a functional standard

A prospective functional standard owner shall consult the standards policy team to discuss the business need for a potential new standard, including what purpose and scope any new standard would cover.

The standards team provides guidance to the prospective standard owner on what to consider, and whether a functional standard is the right approach. HM Treasury Officer of Accounts shall be consulted about any new mandatory requirements that are being considered.

Once there is agreement that a new standard is needed, the design authority assigns a title and number to the new standard, provides an approved Functional standard drafting template [4], and sets its status (see **Annex C**).

The standard owner appoints a standard manager.

Note: most functions already have functional standards, but new functions and functional standards might be needed.

3.2 Drafting and reviewing

The content of the standard should support the principles set out in GovS 001, Government functions clause 6.1. The standard needs to set the expectation of the outcome required, not the means of achieving it, and provide the reader with essential references to do the work.

It is essential your standard complies with current legislation, policies and regulations.

The standards policy team advises on content, consistency and alignment with other functional standards and provides a drafting template [4], which should be used from the outset and throughout. Do not use a shared document with multiple contributors as you will quickly lose version control and audit trail.

You should set up a review panel (assigned by and including the standard owner), comprising experts who can advise you on the subject matter of the standard. In addition, seek comment from a wider group of affected stakeholders to get direct user feedback. Review and re-draft the content of the standard iteratively, working in close collaboration with the standards policy team and subject matter experts.

Tight version control between each draft is essential. See **Annex C** for naming conventions.

To manage feedback, use a functional standard review sheet template [5] for each draft. This helps you to gather feedback, agree what changes are needed between each draft before you make them, and keep an audit trail of the changes made. Take advice from the standards team about changes you propose to make between drafts.

As many drafts of a standard may be created and reviewed as is necessary. Keep the standard owner in close touch with how the drafting is going. Make sure you consult other standard managers where you are cross-referencing their standard.

Note: Use the advice in the rest of this handbook as you develop the drafting (particularly **sections 4** and **5**, and **Annexes C, D and E**).

3.3 Approval for trial

You should review the standard with stakeholders until you and the design authority are satisfied the document is ready to be submitted for formal approval to the standard owner.

The draft submitted to the standard owner should have the status ‘for approval’, and should be copied to standards@cabinetoffice.gov.uk.

The standard owner may ask for modifications and for the standard to be resubmitted by the standard manager and design authority as many times as is necessary. Once all parties are content for the standard to be published for trial, the standard’s status is updated to ‘approved for internal government trial’ by the design authority.

You should follow the guidance at **section 5** and **Annex E** of this handbook to publish your draft standard on GOV.UK with status ‘for internal government trial’. Trialling the standard means you can get a much broader range of stakeholder feedback from users before it is mandated for use.

3.4 Full approval and mandate for the standard

You should have your standard under trial for at least 6 months. During that time, make sure you actively seek feedback from users. Capture the feedback on a new functional standard review sheet template [5].

Work with the standards policy team to decide how to address the comments you receive, and ensure you keep your stakeholders up to date about the changes you propose to make.

Once you are content, a draft should be submitted to the standard owner for approval (status: ‘for approval’) copied to standards@cabinetoffice.gov.uk that:

- reflects (or deals with) stakeholder views
- addresses any other issues that have arisen during the trial phase
- is consistent with the rest of the suite of standards

Once satisfied, the standard owner should submit the new standard to the Civil Service Operations Board for their information, highlighting to the board any new mandatory requirements being set (the ‘shalls’), and confirming that HM Treasury Officer of accounts is content with these.

The approved standard should be published with updated status (Version 2.0, approved). Thereafter, follow the guidance in **section 4 onwards** for managing and maintaining your standard.

4 Managing and maintaining a functional standard

4.1 Overview

One your assigned standard is approved, your primary role is to maintain, manage and communicate it. This includes:

- advising users in departments and arm's length bodies about how to implement your standard (**see 4.2**)
- gathering and managing feedback and improvement requests (**see 4.3**)
- undertaking reviews and making necessary changes and improvements (**see 4.4**)

You should make sure your standard remains consistent with the wider suite (**see 5**), and that your communications, induction and training materials align to the overall messages about use of standards (**see 6**).

You should support the standard owner to keep the standard's governance and management framework up to date and mutually consistent (**see 7**), and help your function understand how well your standard is being met (**see 8**). See also the **Guide to governance and management frameworks** [1].

4.2 Advising users

4.2.1 Overview

As standard manager, you are responsible for making sure users are aware of the standard and can use it. This includes engagement and communication, induction and training, and ensuring the standard is used for professional development. Practitioners across your function need to understand the expectations set by the standards, and to be supported to share good practice.

4.2.2 Engagement and Communication

You are responsible for promoting your standard, ensuring those who need to understand it are briefed and competent to use it, and that the context of the wider suite of functional standards is well explained.

The benefits of functional standards are set out in the guide to functional standards [1]. Additional communication messages that you should use are set out in **section 6**.

You should communicate your standard widely within your function.

You should connect with functional comms leads to ensure tailored messages and case studies about using functional standards are included in the wider engagement work and communications of your function. Make sure use of your standard is central to any communication about ways of working.

You should engage with users to understand how the standard is being used in practice, and provide a clear route for users to suggest changes and improvements.

Make sure you include a contact email address on your standard's landing page on GOV.UK.

4.2.3 Induction, training and professional development

Induction, training and professional development in your function should align to the standard, and be mutually consistent.

Work with heads of profession and functional capability managers to ensure your function's capability plans and professional requirements meet functional standards. Help them to adjust ways of working, induction and learning and development to help people working in your function meet the standards in practice.

Accountabilities for managing a function are defined in GovS 001, Government functions. You should work with your standard owner to ensure defined roles are assigned, and reflected in personal objectives.

> Note: the use of functional standards is now embedded into senior civil service performance management guidance.

4.3 Gathering and managing feedback and improvement requests

4.3.1 Overview

You are responsible for gathering lessons learned, and acting on user feedback received to inform and improve future versions of an approved standard.

4.3.2 Lessons learned and gathering feedback

You should ensure adequate feedback loops for users and practitioners are in place to feed into how you review and promote your standard. If you are finding there is low user engagement with your standard, do more proactive communication and outreach activities to gather feedback.

4.3.3 Record keeping and knowledge management

You are responsible for ensuring that previous versions of your standard and associated drafts and review sheets are stored appropriately, and are available for future audit and as the basis for answering questions. You should also ensure that supporting guides, manuals, training or coaching required to manage your standard are kept up to date and are mutually consistent with GovS 001, Government functions and this handbook.

Make sure you have excellent handover procedures in place for anyone taking on the standard manager role.

Use of the standard review sheet [5] is essential for managing changes to your standard, and as an audit trail for decisions taken on amending content. Avoid taking multiple stakeholder comments through track changes in a shared document, as you will quickly lose version control – this is one of the most common mistakes made during the review process.

Talk to the standards policy team about best practice if you are unsure.

4.4 Undertaking reviews and making necessary changes and improvements

4.4.1 Overview

As you gather and manage feedback, you will collect issues that need to be addressed, and suggestions for improvement. You should discuss with your standard owner how significant the issues are, and whether you think a minor or major change to your standard is needed in response. At least every two years, you should undertake a periodic review.

Contact the standards policy team in the first instance to discuss any proposed review. For major and periodic reviews you should book time with the standards policy team well in advance, so that reviews of different functional standards can be properly timetabled.

In order to publish a new version of your standard, you will need to formally withdraw the previous version. You should include a short explanation of the main changes made from the previous version at the beginning of the new version.

Note: see **Annex C** for advice on version control, **Annex D** for quality criteria and **Annex E** for step-by-step advice about a periodic or major review.

4.4.2 Minor review

You may determine that a minor revision of your standard is needed. This means the change proposed only applies to a few discrete parts of the standard, and that the purpose, scope and most of the other content is to remain unchanged.

In these circumstances you can do a formal review of only the parts proposed for amendment – not the full document – and can restrict stakeholder consultation to those people directly impacted. The standards policy team will help you determine whether a minor or major version is required.

4.4.3 Major and periodic reviews

GovS 001, Government functions requires a periodic review of each functional standard at least every two years.

You may decide that a major revision is needed before a periodic review of the standard is due. This means significant change to multiple clauses, and might affect the purpose and scope. You will need to follow the same advice whether undertaking a major or periodic review.

A periodic review might decide that no changes are needed, in which case the design authority confirms that an existing version remains in place until another review is needed.

If a periodic review has not been undertaken within the specified timescale, the design authority will ask the standard owner to decide whether the standard is still needed.

4.4.4 Withdrawing a functional standard

GovS 001, Government functions sets out the approach for withdrawing a standard, either to update to a new version following a review, or to withdraw a standard completely should it no longer serve a purpose.

You should consult the standard owner and design authority before any decisions are made about full withdrawal.

Once an instruction to withdraw a standard has been given by the standard owner, you are responsible for removing the standard from GOV.UK and communicating withdrawal of the standard to interested parties as well as what, if anything, is to be used in place of the withdrawn standard.

Once a standard is withdrawn, the design authority will update the standard’s status from ‘Approved’ to ‘Withdrawn’ and it will be retained only in the design authority archive.

5 Consistency: language, layout, publication

5.1 Overview

As standard manager, you have responsibility for ensuring that your standard is consistent and coherent with the rest of the suite. This includes language, layout, and publication.

Each functional standard is set out in a similar way. As users become familiar with the standards, this consistency helps with interpretation and navigation. As a standard manager, you should read and be familiar with other functional standards that you reference from your own.

Consistent content is helpful because it:

- avoids conflicts and unnecessary repetition, and keeps each standard succinct
- means requirements are set 'once and well', and then cross referenced from the rest (e.g. expectations on contracting in GovS 008, Commercial are cross-referenced where needed from other functional standards)
- avoids ambiguity - using the same phrases and symbols to describe the same things across the suite
- nudges everyone to use the same language for the same things, across organisational boundaries

5.2 Language

Each functional standard starts with a boilerplate section which defines the particular words used to denote what is mandatory ('shall') and what is advisory. The verbs used are the same as those used in both British (BSI) and international (ISO) standards, where:

- 'shall' denotes a requirement, a mandatory element which applies in all circumstances at all times
- 'should' denotes a recommendation, an advisory element to be met on a 'comply or explain' basis
- 'may' denotes approval
- 'might' denotes a possibility
- 'can' denotes both capability and possibility
- is/are is used for a description

Standards should be written with reference to the writing style guide for government standards set out in GovS 001, Government functions Annex F, using plain English and precise writing.

A common standards glossary [1] is maintained and published by the design authority. The common glossary comprises defined terms and phrases used in the suite of government standards, which should be used consistently.

If you are using a term already defined, use the definitions from the common glossary. Do not make up or add any new definitions to your standard without agreement from the standards team. Use plain English where you can.

5.3 Layout

The layout and content of each functional standard follows a similar pattern, which helps build familiarity and makes it easy for people to find what they need. This layout is built into the functional standard drafting template [4].

A functional standard includes the following sections:

Table 1: Typical layout of a functional standard*

Use the introductory sections of your standard to set the parameters…	
About this standard	sets the purpose and scope of the standard, and references to the other government standards directly needed to meet it.
Principles	set the mindset needed to follow the standard – use the principles to define the shared assumptions, values and group norms your function wants to encourage.
Context	provides essential background information users need to understand the main body of the standard.
Use the main body of your standard to set clear expectations for the work required (the 'shalls' and 'shoulds')…	
Governance	sets requirements for governance and management, which should normally include strategy/planning, assurance, decision making, and the roles and accountabilities required (who is accountable to whom, and for what). [Note that standards define roles, not job titles, to give flexibility to organisations about who covers the role].
Life cycle/ process	sets expectations for the work, usually described in terms of a life cycle or process.
Practices	set expectations for practices which apply across the rest of the main body of the standard.
Use annexes to provide additional information for your readers…	
Annex A References	provide directly referenced documents that readers need to meet aspects of your standard.
Annex B Glossary	defines terms used in your standard.
Further Annexes (C onwards as needed)	provide additional explanation about aspects of your standard if you think readers need more information – note that annexes do not set expectations (which should go in the main body), so write an annex using 'is and are' statements rather than 'shalls' and 'shoulds'.

** The main body of some functional standards differs slightly from the pattern shown above because of the particular content covered.*

5.4 Publishing a standard on GOV.UK

Approved standards are presented consistently and published on GOV.UK to meet Government digital service guidance.

See the **Guide to governance and management frameworks** [1] for advice on how to position your standard and your other cross-government functional documentation on GOV.UK.

See **Annex E** for practical advice on publishing a standard on GOV.UK.

Any questions about third party endorsement or branding for your standard should be referred to the standards team: standards@cabinetoffice.gov.uk.

6 Shared communication messages

Your standard should be positioned as your function's primary reference for ways of working.

Senior leaders in organisations need to use and champion your standard as a tool for continuous improvement. Make sure they are well placed to do this through appropriate functional communication. Augment detailed communication on your standard with consistent overall messaging (see below).

Please use the following messages consistently:

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3"><u>for everyone</u>:

one set of expectations for everyone to work towards
stable standards support coherence, consistency and continuous improvement</td></tr>
<tr><td><u>for senior leaders</u>:

use the standards to ask the right questions

…they help you to achieve your organisation's objectives more effectively and efficiently</td><td><u>for functional leaders:</u>

use the standards to put the right governance and practices in place

…they help you to assure and improve how functional work is done</td><td><u>for practitioners:</u>

refer to the standards to make sure you know what needs to be done

…they support continuity, joined up working, and your professional development</td></tr>
</table>

Benefits - help people work effectively and efficiently together by...

- setting a coherent, tried and tested way of doing business, bringing together and clarifying what needs to be done and why
- making it possible for functions to systematically organise and manage all the other guidance people are expected to follow
- providing a consistent basis to assure functional work, consider deliverability of policies and plans, and target continuous improvement and professional development

Reassurances - carrot not stick

- built in flexibility for each organisation to decide how to meet the standard in practice, with the functions providing further guidance as necessary
- no surprises: bringing together/clarifying what should already be happening
- no new 'industry' to be created: underpinning and augmenting existing arrangements for assurance and performance improvement
- support from the centre: continuous improvement assessment frameworks to help organisations understand how well they are meeting the standards

7 Governance and management framework

7.1 Overview

As standard manager, you are best placed to advise your standard owner about how to align your function’s cross-government governance and management framework to your standard.

You should work within your function to ensure the ways of working, requirements and guidance that enable people to meet your standard in practice are aligned with the expectations set out in your standard.

For large functions, your standard owner may want to appoint an individual or team to oversee the content of the governance and management framework, and in particular to make sure requirements and guidance are managed coherently to meet the standard.

Follow the advice in the **Guide for governance and management frameworks** [1].

7.2 Arm’s length bodies

Departments are the sponsors for their arm’s length bodies and are responsible for ensuring arm’s length bodies operate to the required standards.

In practical terms, departmental function leaders have accountability for ensuring arm’s length bodies adopt their function's standard, and arm’s length bodies function leaders have accountability to their Accounting Officer for doing so (see section 4 of GovS 001, Government functions for detail on the roles).

The application of functional standards should be proportionate to the size and complexity of the work being done. A small, non-complex organisation that does not do much of the functional work in scope might decide, by using the relevant assessment framework, that 'good' is 'good enough' for them - they can decide what works for them, based on their own business needs and in agreement with their parent department.

You should work with functional leaders in organisations to embed the right ways of working.

7.3 Devolved administrations

You should work with the devolved administrations to share learning around the use and impact of your functional standard. Where appropriate, you should encourage devolved administrations to adopt your standard, in full or in part.

Where agreement is reached on devolved administration take up, you can tailor the scope of your standard and its governance and management framework, to formalise the agreed arrangement.

8 Understanding how well a standard is being met

A standard manager is responsible for making sure performance indicators are in place to measure how well an organisation is undertaking the practices defined in their assigned functional standard. This might include:

- outputs from assurance at all levels
- results of surveys in organisations or within the function
- self-assessment by organisations

The Guide to continuous improvement against functional standards [1] sets out general advice and guidance on using functional standards to support continuous improvement within and across organisations, including the development and use of continuous improvement assessment frameworks.

The continuous improvement assessment framework is a companion product to your functional standard, presented consistently so that those in organisations who deal with multiple functions are able to engage with a familiar product and approach across all their functions.

You should work with the standards policy team and other standard managers to keep assessment against your standard aligned and coherent with the rest of the suite.

See **Annex G** for how to develop a consistent continuous improvement assessment framework.

Note: *GovS 002, Project delivery assessment framework* is an example of a published assessment framework that aligns to the standard.

9 Links to wider planning and reporting

9.1 Overview

As standard manager, you should work with functional colleagues in departments and arm's length bodies to ensure the use of functional standards is embedded and reflected in:

- function plans and quarterly performance reporting
- organisation business plans (including outcome delivery plans)

Over time, as organisations have more information about their maturity against functional standards (good/better/best), aspects of planning could be re-cast and simplified to reflect this new benchmarked management information (**see 8**).

9.2 Functional planning and reporting

Function plans should incorporate activity in the function that supports organisations to: embed standards; understand how well the standard is being met; and set ambition for continuous improvement activity.

Insights from continuous improvement assessment frameworks, where available, may be used to inform function plans and performance reporting.

9.3 Planning and reporting in organisations

Use of the standards should be embedded into each organisation's business plans for 2022-23 onwards. Statements about use of functional standards should be included in annual reports and, where relevant, Accounting Officer system statements.

Business plans should take account of the organisation's ambition for meeting relevant functional standards, as well as the scale and complexity of functional work carried out within the organisation.

Insights from continuous improvement assessment frameworks should be used to inform business planning in organisations.

A. References

All references are correct at the time of publication, users should check for updated versions.

ID	Description
1	Cabinet Office, Functional standards and associated guidance (2020), collection*
2	HM Treasury, *Managing Public Money* (2021)
3	HM Treasury, *DAO 05/21 Mandating Functional Standards from end September 2021* (2021)
4	Cabinet Office, Functional standard drafting template, available on demand*
5	Cabinet Office, Functional standard review sheet template, available on demand*

*Note: contact *standards@cabinetoffice.gov.uk* for design authority documents if unavailable online, such as templates.

B. Glossary

See also the common glossary of definitions which comprises defined terms and phrases used across the suite of government functional standards. The common glossary includes the term, definition, and which function owns the term and definition.

Term	Definition
assurance	A general term for the confidence that can be derived from objective information over the successful conduct of activities, the efficient and effective design and operation of internal control, compliance with internal and external requirements, and the production of insightful and credible information to support decision making. Confidence diminishes when there are uncertainties around the integrity of information or of underlying processes.
defined (way of working)	In the context of standards, defined denotes a documented way of working which people are expected to use. This can apply to any aspect of a governance or management framework- for example processes, codes of practice, methods, templates, tools and guides.
established (way of working)	In the context of standards, established denotes a way of working that is implemented and used throughout the organisation. This can apply to any aspect of a governance or management framework- for example processes, codes of practice, methods, templates, tools and guides.
governance	Governance defines relationships and the distribution of rights and responsibilities among those who work with and in the organisation. It determines the rules and procedures through which the organisation's objectives are set, and provides the means of attaining those objectives and monitoring performance. Importantly, it defines where accountability lies throughout the organisation.
governance and management framework	A governance and management framework sets out the authority limits, decision making roles and rules, degrees of autonomy, assurance needs, reporting structure, accountabilities and roles, together with the appropriate management practices and associated documentation needed to meet this standard.
organisation	In the context of government functional standards, organisation is the generic term used to describe a government department, arm's length body, or any other entity which is identified as being within the scope of the functional standard.
plan	A plan sets out how objectives, outcomes and outputs are to be delivered within defined constraints, in accordance with the strategy.
strategy	A strategy outlines longer term objectives, outcomes and outputs, and the means to achieve them, to inform future decisions and planning.

C. Conventions for standard naming, numbering, versioning, status

The standards policy team owns these conventions on behalf of the design authority and should always be consulted about naming, numbering, versioning and status.

Naming
The title for a standard should reflect the function, be in plain English and not use jargon. The title may be short, just representing the function or may include a sub-title. For example:

Project delivery or Project delivery: portfolio, programme and project management.

Numbering
Each standard should have a unique identification number, which should not be changed after the standard has been published. No implicit inference should be made concerning numbering. Numbering should be agnostic to any grouping such as departments, as these are likely to change. The numbering convention should be GovS followed by a space and then a number assigned by the design authority. If a standard is to be published as a series of documents, the numbering should show the 'part number' as a decimal. For example:

GovS 001; GovS 002; GovS 007; GovS 012 or GovS 001.1, GovS 001.2, GovS 001.3

Versioning
Major versions are denoted 1.0, 2.0, 3.0 etc. and require a full review before issuing. Minor versions are denoted 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1 etc. and require review of only the amended parts. Drafts are denoted by the version they will become, followed by Draft A, B etc. e.g. 1.1 Draft C.

Status
Each standard shall have its status maintained in the government functional standards register and be clearly marked on the cover and every page:

Status	Description
Proposed	A standard which has not been written but identified as being needed
Draft	The working draft of a standard version used for informal review
For review	The version of the standard submitted for formal review
For approval	The version of the standard submitted for formal approval
Approved for internal government trial	The version of the standard approved for stakeholder trialling across government
Approved	The approved version of the standard approved for use

D. Quality criteria for reviewing a standard

The front sections

- the purpose, readership and scope of the standard is clear (clauses 1.1 and 1.2)
- references to other government functional standards, necessary for using this standard, are identified (clause 1.3)
- the principles apply in all situations (clause 2)

The main content

The content of the standard:

- supports the standard's purpose and scope (clause 1)
- supports the principles (clause 2)
- does not breach current government policy, regulations or legislation
- is written for long shelf life, and does not contain text which is likely to change, such as job titles (as opposed to role titles)
- is agnostic to proprietary solutions and methods unless the government has adopted them
- does not conflict with any referenced government functional standards

The standard encompasses activities and practices within the defined scope in terms of "why" and "what".

The standard covers activities or practices for government as a whole, an organization (such as a department or arm's length body) and for required individual practices, lifecycle activities and/or episodes.

Roles required to cover the breadth of the function are defined and state what the role is accountable for and who to - and align with GovS 001, Government functions clause 4.6: Roles and accountabilities.

Annexes

- references to other government or external documentation are listed in Annex A and referred to from the appropriate places in the body of the standard using [square brackets]
- definitions used in the standard and listed in Annex B are consistent with the government standards common glossary
- additional annexes add value and are relevant to the content and use of the standard, such as underlying concepts, terminology or graphical representations

Writing style

GovS 001, Government functions specifies the use of the digital style guide.

You should also follow Annex E of GovS 001, Government functions which explains the writing style for standards. It is designed for precision and consistency, and based on best practice.

For example:

- present tense, plain English, one idea per sentence, no unnecessary jargon

- appropriate use of verbs such as “shall”, “should”, “may”, “might”, “can”
- no abbreviations or acronyms - state something in full
- use notes for ephemeral content that may change, to help the reader
- no shall or should statements in annexes – if you are setting expectations, they need to be in the main body of your standard
- The standard should be correctly labelled for status and version control as defined in this handbook
- follow the style guide eg no full stops at the end of bullet points

The functional standard drafting template [4] is set up to ensure consistency, and includes content and styles to help with drafting (eg for different clause levels, annexes, headers and footers).

Hints and tips

Here are a few other shared conventions to be aware of:

1. Avoid hanging paragraphs in your standard: all text needs to be attached to a clause. A hanging paragraph is a paragraph that, for example, sits between headings 5 and 5.1 and is not attached to separate clause. Instead, create a new clause (the usual heading used is ‘overview’).

2. When referring to another standard that your reader needs to follow, use the format: “GovS 001, Government functions shall be followed”.

3. For the title page of your standard, use a colon as a separator, like this: “GovS 001: Government functions”.

4. The term ‘must’ means ‘it is the law’. Each functional standard has a boilerplate note that says: “It is assumed that legal and regulatory requirements are always met’. This means ‘must’ is not usually used in a standard. When you want to refer readers to existing legislation or regulations, you should add a note after the relevant content: “*Note: attention is drawn to [XXX] and its equivalent in other jurisdictions”.*

5. When you cross-refer between clauses within the standard, always include the word see, for example: (see 3.2.1).

E. Checklist: undertaking a major or periodic review

Action for standard manager	Formal checkpoint with standards team
Step 1 – setting up a major or periodic review: before you start	
Review stakeholder feedback already gathered in your master review sheet about completeness and usability of the standard, consider any prior lessons learned, and implications for the focus of your review.	
Ensure your standard owner is involved in setting the terms of the periodic review and its implications.	
Agree timescale and approach for the review with the standards policy team, including whether you think this will be a major or minor review. *[Note: book in sufficient review time with the team well in advance of the next stage.]*	Agree draft scope and timetable for review.
Define the stakeholder community who will review your standard.	
Create a working group to undertake detailed discussions.	
Start a new master review sheet for this review, clearly marking version number at the top of the sheet. Carry over any ‘defer’ decisions from the previous version.	
Prior to sending to stakeholders, make sure your standard is 'clean' of any tracking and comments. *[Note: but do include highlighted drafting notes or questions if you want reviewers to consider particular aspects.]*	
Make sure version number and draft letter are clear and sequential (see **Annex C** of this handbook); status should be set as ‘for review’. Include the date. Make sure versioning, status and date on the cover, headers and footers all match!	
Turn on line numbering to help users provide precise comments.	
Save the Word file as a pdf before you send to stakeholders. *[Note: pdf conversion is necessary as formatting, line numbers and*	

pagination can change depending on whether people use MS word or Google versions. Do not use shared documents to conduct a stakeholder review – you will quickly lose version control!]	
Use a new blank functional standard review sheet template [5] – not your ongoing master sheet – to capture stakeholder comments, views and suggestions for improvement. *[Note: you will Input all stakeholder feedback gathered during your review into your master review sheet during the next step.]*	
Send both the pdf of the standard and the blank review sheet to your consultees, asking them to be specific about their comments when filling in the review sheet - what any perceived issue is and what they suggest as an amendment. Set a clear timeline for returns.	
Step 2 - undertaking a major or periodic review: managing the comments you get back	
Add all comments received - including any of your own proposed changes - into your master review sheet as they come in and sort comments by line number or clause, for ease of referencing. Do not forget to include issues that you have deferred from previous reviews. *[Note: avoid confusion – do not make amendments directly into your existing standard at this stage or rely on tracked changes.]*	
Discuss comments received with your working group. Do this as often as you need to. For each comment received, make an initial decision in the review sheet; you can: accept, accept with modifications, reject, note, or defer. Take a view on what you think any new wording or change should be. Then discuss with the standards policy team, who have an overview of how best to achieve what's needed without compromising the integrity of the standard or the coherence of the wider suite. *Tips:* • where you uncover potentially missing content or where people found it hard to understand a clause in your existing standard, capture that in the review sheet as best you can for discussion • beware red herrings! People often make reasonable comments or suggestions, but the standard may not be the right place for them. Or they propose wording which is not compatible with a standard. Flag such suggestions for discussion • beware bloat! You may wish to accept a suggestion, but there are often ways to include the right sentiment with minimal tweaking to existing wording (when people might have	Review comments received with standards team.

suggested an entirely new section or clause)	
Consult with HM Treasury Officer of Accounts on any new mandatory requirements proposed (the ‘shalls’) to ensure new requirements are fully aligned with Managing Public Money.	Agree approach on any new ‘shalls’ with the standards team before consulting with TOA.
Go through your master review sheet with the standards policy team, and finalise proposed changes. Do this as often as you need to.	Agree and finalise your response to stakeholders with the standards team.
Confirm with the standards policy team whether the revisions required are major or minor (see **Annex C**). They provide a final decision on new version number.	Confirm status of review as major or minor.
Step 3 - concluding a major or periodic review: updating your standard	
Re-save your standard in the Word template with the new version number as Draft A and re-set its status to ‘draft’ while you work through and make agreed changes. *[Note: only make actual text changes to your standard once you have been through all comments, taken advice from the standards team, and made firm decisions.]*	
Update your master review sheet with final decisions made (including any decisions that have been deferred until the next major review) and agree final decisions with your working group.	
Stakeholder management: formalise your responses to the comments provided by stakeholders during the review in your master review sheet, save as a pdf and use this to feed back to your wider consultees about changes you’ve made, or not made, for this review and the rationale for doing so.	
Submit the updated standard to the standard owner for approval, copying in the standards team, as design authority. *[Note: iterate as necessary until both standard owner and design authority are content with a revised version.]*	Agree content of draft standard and advice to standard owner with standards team.
Once satisfied, the standard owner should formally approve the new version of the standard. For a major update, they should submit the updated standard to the Civil Service Operations Board for their information explaining any significant changes. In doing so, they should highlight to the board any new mandatory requirements being set (the ‘shalls’), and confirm that HM Treasury Officer of Accounts is content with these.	

Summarise changes made from the previous version of your standard on your boilerplate page (inside cover) and publish your revised standard on GOV.UK (see **section 5** and **Annex F** of this handbook).	
Retain the completed review master sheet as an audit trail of review.	
Create a new master review sheet now, and start to capture any new issues or comments, so you have it to hand for your next major or periodic review. *[Note: any decisions you have 'deferred' from this review should be an input to the next major or periodic review.]*	
Once published, your standard should be re-reviewed at a minimum of every two years. Factor the next periodic review into your planning.	

F. Checklist: publishing a standard on GOV.UK:

Standard managers should follow these conventions and tips when preparing and submitting their functional standard for online publication on GOV.UK:

Preparing for publication
Ensure **Annex C** of this handbook has been followed for naming, numbering and versioning conventions.
Functional standards carry the HMG brand and follow HMG brand guidelines and additional standard brand guidelines. Each function has a dedicated colour for highlights and headline text in their functional standard. *[Note: standards brand guidelines on consistency, navigability and accessibility were developed for version 2.0 functional standards in summer 2021. For a copy of these brand guidelines, including each function's dedicated function colour, please contact standards@cabinetoffice.gov.uk.]*
The approved version should be professionally type-set and made web accessible in line with the standard brand guidelines, using either in-house design expertise or a design company. Build sufficient time into planning for this process - it can take a number of weeks to iterate. *[Note: you can begin this process with design companies before final content is approved but do so at risk if substantial content changes are requested by the standard owner.]*
Accessibility
For each image in a standard, standard managers should provide short alternative descriptive text for their images so they can be interpreted by screen readers. This ALT text will be embedded in the standard as part of production. See the Publishing accessible documents guidance for more information.
Get confirmation from your design/ typesetting company that the web-accessible PDF meets current accessibility requirements.
Once approved and produced to meet brand guidelines, each functional standard should be published on GOV.UK. as a web accessible pdf, under the GOV.UK content type 'standard'. *[Note: Current GOV.UK navigability design restrictions mean HTML is not yet a suitable or user-friendly publication method for these standards. HTML navigability is being addressed by the GOV.UK team, so that future iterations of the standards can be published in both web-accessible PDF and HTML formats]*
Provide clarity for your GOV.UK publisher
You should liaise with your local publishing teams who can provide you with a publication

form to raise a ticket for publication on GOV.UK. *[Note: for the functions based in Cabinet Office, this will be via cabinetoffice.publishing@cabinetoffice.gov.uk. Allow up to five working days for this process.]*
Use official titles for your standard on GOV.UK (e.g. Government Functional Standard GovS 002: Project Delivery), for the url of the document, and for the link to your standard on GOV.UK.
The version and date used on GOV.UK should be exactly as on the document.
Use exact wording from the ‘purpose’ of your functional standard for the online introduction to describe what the document is. *[Note: refer to these documents as functional standards to distinguish from other types of standards].*
Reiterate with your publisher that your functional standard should be published using the new ‘standard’ content type (a standard is not a policy document or guidance) and linked to the functional standards collection page.
Grid slot/ publicity
It is up to functions on securing a grid slot for publication - discuss with your press team and grid organiser if you want a grid slot, but click N/A in the publishing form if a grid slot is not required. If you are re-publishing or updating previously published material, a grid slot is optional.
For shared communication and messaging about the suite of functional standards, please always refer to the functional standards landing page and use **section 6** of this handbook.
Dedicated landing page
Make sure you have a dedicated functional landing page for your standard and its associated requirements and guidance (see **Guide to governance and management frameworks** for more information), including a function-specific contact email address for questions on your functional standard (e.g. govs.property@cabinetoffice.gov.uk).

G. Checklist: developing a continuous improvement assessment framework

Ask the standards team for advice on themes before starting to develop and iterate your framework, and for the agreed text that should be included in the introductory sections of a function's assessment framework.

1. Develop a continuous improvement assessment framework iteratively

    1.1 Create a working group

Many minds are better than one, and workshops with a group of knowledgeable people are essential. In the same way as you needed a reference/working group to create a functional standard you should work with a representative group of experts to derive your assessment framework. It will be iterative.

    1.2 Consider what good/better/best means for your function

At the outset, ask your group to consider what - in broad terms- 'good' means for your area of work. Do the same for 'better' and 'best'. This will be a useful reference as you move into setting criteria for individual practice areas. Try to keep to 75 to 100 words to describe each level.

2. Brainstorm your initial thoughts

Your initial thoughts and instincts based on your knowledge can help you outline what themes and you would expect to see covered in the assessment framework.
Brainstorm this in the group and come to a consensus. Keep this output for later reference to check against it once you have developed the framework.

CHECKPOINT: capture and keep a record of early thinking on good/better/best and themes.

3. Develop your themes

The structure and sub-headings of the functional standard should usually be replicated in the themes and practice areas of the assessment framework. This ensures relevance, ease of cross-reference and that the framework is comprehensive.

Keep visible and to hand:

- The principles and all the 'shall' statements from the standard
- The table of contents of the standard

Work through the standard section by section and choose themes that reflect the content.

For the life cycle and practices sections (or equivalent) of your standard, you should start with one theme for each step/ phase/ practice.

For the practices section, decide which are significant and need their own themes, which can be left out (if any) and which can be grouped (as they are often related and used together).

Do not worry if you have too many themes. You might find, as you develop the assessment framework, that some of the practices can be incorporated into the life cycle steps or phases.

Check the initial list of themes with the 'brainstormed list' (see 2). With your working group ask yourselves:

- is anything missing?
- did the brainstorm uncover a theme which can draw in many of the practices across the standard together?

CHECKPOINT: update and adjust the themes.

4. Create the practice areas for each theme

Each theme should comprise 3 to 5 practice areas, each stating the purpose of the practice. In the standard, practices are usually preceded by a purpose statement (a 'shall' or a 'should'). A practice area may relate to one or more clauses in the functional standard.

Remember that practice areas and associated criteria need to be statements which can be proven and demonstrated by the organisation assessing itself against the standard. The practice areas and criteria should reflect what is observed to be happening in the organisation (with evidence) so are written as 'is' or 'are' statements.

While some aspects of a standard are binary, which means that statements about meeting these binary requirements can be established quickly, a 'shall' might not always be binary. There can be good, better or best ways of meeting a mandatory requirement.

Similarly, some aspects of the standard can be mapped onto a maturity scale or continuum. For example, a percentage: the percentage of people professionally qualified to undertake a particular role, where 'good' would be 50 %, ' better' would be 70% and 'best' would be 90%.

Take one of the themes and find the related functional standard text. Use the text to discuss with your working group, and derive up to five practice areas for each theme. At this stage, identify headings only.

Ask yourselves if these practice area headings, brought together, cover enough of the themes. If not, rework them.

Draft a 'purpose' statement for each practice area. A practice area can group together many practices from across the standard.

CHECKPOINT: review and capture the practice area headings and purpose statements.

5. Derive appropriate criteria for the practice areas

Each practice area should be supported by up to 4 or 5 assessment criteria, each of which should be a statement of what the organisation should, through verifiable evidence, be doing.

Criteria may be:

- distinct, to distinguish between good/ better/ best as you observe something different being done at the higher level than at the lower level
- similar across the levels, but with different metrics for maturity levels: for example, you could have a planning horizon changing from 12 months for good, to 2 years for better, to 3 years for best
- chosen from international and/or industry norms: you should use insights from professional bodies

If organisations do not meet at least ‘good’, they are by default ‘developing’, therefore there is no need to set criteria for ‘developing’.

5.1 Start by defining ‘good’

As you work with your expert group (see 1.1), start by defining the criteria for ‘good’.

Check the principles and the ‘shalls’ to make sure they are covered in some way in relation to the themes. When you have covered them, tick them. All the ‘shalls’ from the standard ought to appear under ‘good’ along with the most important ‘shoulds’. This is the minimum level you want organisations to perform at.

Then, move to ‘better’ and discuss what else you would expect to observe. Then move on to ‘best’. This is the real stretch: you would expect very strong evidence if organisations are to meet it.

5.2 Keep track of the ‘shalls’

Criteria directly drawn from a ‘shall’ statement in the standard should be coloured red and appear under ‘good’. Similarly, any criteria drawn from the principles in the standard should be coloured red. This colour coding makes it easier to keep track of the ‘shalls’ to ensure they have all been covered in the assessment framework – make sure you don’t delete any red coloured criteria as you update or change the assessment framework.

> CHECKPOINT: put your agreed emerging framework onto your function’s template.

6. Test and pilot your assessment framework

6.1 Test with a broader group of stakeholders

Once you have some outputs you are satisfied with, validate them on some of your stakeholders. You can create another working group with some of your key stakeholders and test and pilot the assessment framework with them. Look at organisations of different sizes and configurations.

When you consult your stakeholders, ask them if they think the themes, practice areas and criteria work for them. They can help you uncover issues with the practice areas and criteria such as:

- the practice areas and/or criteria are too vague and are therefore very difficult to evidence
- on the contrary, the practice areas and/or criteria are too precise and do not allow enough flexibility for organisations of different sizes to evidence their compliance

Your stakeholders can also help you verify that no crucial aspect of functional work has been overlooked in the assessment framework.

Improve and update your assessment framework accordingly then retest it.

6.2 Test with the standards policy team and other functions

You might find that other functions have similar themes and have discovered neat ways to express particular types of criteria. Swap notes. You can use the functional standards Peer Group to raise issues.

7. Allow for tailoring

Organisations might want to augment the assessment framework by drawing metrics from suitable benchmarked information, including the Public Value Framework and the functions quality survey. They could add to the assessment framework locally to reflect a specific issue crucial to their business, where they want performance to be at a higher level than in other organisations.

CHECKPOINT: there is no final checkpoint - from here you should iterate, iterate and iterate.

8. Publish

See the **Guide to governance and management frameworks** for positioning your assessment framework if you propose to publish on GOV.UK (recommended). Note that completed assessments by organisation are not intended to be published (see section 8 of the Guide to continuous improvement against functional standards).