



Periodic review of functional standards

A guide for those undertaking the review

Purpose of guide

The purpose of this reference guide is to support those carrying out periodic reviews of functional standards.

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.

[Continuous improvement assessment frameworks](#) set levels of maturity (using 'good', 'better' and 'best' criteria) against the most important aspects of a standard and makes 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](#).

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.

Why and when to review

A periodic review of the effectiveness of the standard should be carried out at least every three years. The aim of the review is to verify:-

- there is still a business need for the standard.
- the standard has support from interested parties across government.
- there is likely to be the capacity and capability to manage and use the standard.
- to check consistency with [Managing Public Money](#).
- that no conflict exists with any other published government standard or directive.
- to check levels of compliance and performance against the standard are understood and acted upon.



Consistent language and style

Standard managers have responsibility for ensuring that the standard is consistent and coherent with the rest of the suite. This includes language, layout, and publication.

Any new text or amends to text in a standard should be written:

- to contain mandatory (requirements) and/or advisory elements (recommendations)
- as outcome based, stating what is needed, rather than how activities are to be done
- for long shelf life, and not contain elements which are likely to change

Use the [common glossary of terms](#) to maintain consistency. Use the [handbook for standard managers](#); writing style guide; and the expertise in the [standards policy team](#) for advice and guidance throughout a review of the standard.

Each functional standard starts with a boilerplate section which defines the particular words used to denote what is mandatory ('shall') and what is advisory ('should'). The verbs used are the same as those used in both [British \(BSI\)](#) and [international \(ISO\) standards](#). This approach ensures your standard is clear on which parts are mandatory, which are recommendations, and which give 'permission'.

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.

Process

Once the decision to review the standard has been agreed with the standard owner, [contact should be made with the standards policy team](#). This ensures that reviews of different

functional standards can be properly timetabled.

A standard review feedback document should be maintained for the standard at all times. As feedback is gathered, you will collect issues that need to be addressed, and suggestions for improvement.

The review should incorporate lessons learned and user feedback received since the last review.

Following the gathering of feedback, discussion should be had with the standard owner around how significant the issues are, and to agree the type of update needed (no update, minor update, major update, withdrawal). The [standards policy team](#) can help determine whether a minor or major version is required.

Detailed descriptions of each type of update can be found in the [handbook for standard managers](#).

Approvals

When proposing a new shall or should statement, consider its applicability for all organisations in scope of your standard. You should agree on any new 'shalls' with the standards policy team before consulting with HM Treasury (normally through the HM Treasury Officer of Accounts) to ensure alignment with managing public money.

You should agree all new content with the standards policy team to ensure consistency in approach and terminology across the suite of standards, before submitting to the standard owner for approval.

The Civil Service Board, or a relevant delegated authority, has responsibility for the direction and oversight of the management of functional standards. That Board should be informed of any major review.