



Government
People Group

Senior Civil Service Performance Management Framework

April 2025



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How to use this Guidance

1. Departments must ensure that this framework forms the basis of their performance management policy and process for the Senior Civil Service (SCS). This framework applies to all departments, agencies and non-departmental public bodies that employ members of the SCS who are subject to the SCS pay rules. Separate performance management guidance applies for Permanent Secretaries.
2. This document provides:
 - a. a **common framework** for the SCS to facilitate the cascade of organisational priorities into individual objectives;
 - b. a **minimum expected process and timeline** for the management of performance in the SCS; and
 - c. guidance on a number of matters that stem from this framework including **dealing with dips in performance and appropriate interventions to gain improvements for those who have only 'Partially Met' their objectives.**
3. This guidance does not cover the formal process for managing poor performance. This is set out in a separate guide, ['Managing Poor Performance Policy Procedures for the Senior Civil Service'](#).

Principles

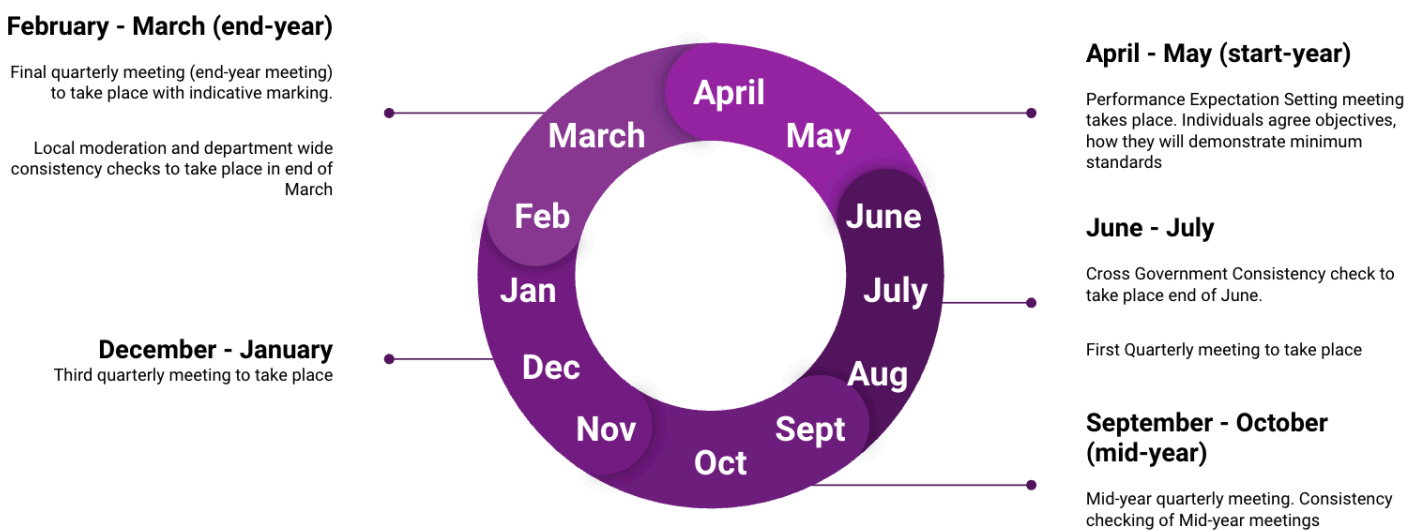
4. The general principles that underpin SCS Performance Management are:
 - a. a need to balance opportunity for flexibility to **align performance arrangements for SCS and delegated** grades within departments, to the need to ensure **consistency of expectation and outcome for the centrally managed SCS cadre**
 - b. a clearer link between **individual objectives and organisational and cross-government priorities** ensuring measurable lines of accountability to members of the SCS when it comes to the performance of the department as a whole
 - c. a common understanding of the **minimum standards** expected of members of the SCS, including with regard to expectations around leadership and Diversity and Inclusion (D&I);
 - d. simplicity in the objective setting process to allow for a **balanced focus on 'what' and 'how'**, with performance standards and expectations clearly articulated at the beginning of the performance year
 - e. an **all year-round focus** on performance and the value of conversations and feedback
 - f. emphasis on rewarding high performance, both in the moment and over a sustained period of time
 - g. departments being accountable for prompt identification, monitoring and **tackling of underperformance.**
5. The performance management framework is not intended to be wholly prescriptive and departments should use this framework to set their own policies. The framework approach therefore provides departments with the flexibility to tailor their performance approaches to suit their workforce needs,



within the parameters it sets out. As such, departments have discretion to build upon the requirements in areas where the framework is not specific. However, to maintain a level of coherence across the SCS cadre, this framework outlines key elements of the performance management lifecycle and process to which departments must adhere. Should a department wish to change or deviate from any of the expectations set in this framework, they must first seek Cabinet Office agreement, and should do so by contacting the [Civil Service Employment Framework Mailbox](#).

Timelines

6. The timeline below outlines key elements of the annual SCS performance management lifecycle. These dates are indicative but departments must ensure, where possible, that the end-year moderation meeting takes place **before** the start-year performance expectation setting meeting.



7. Departments should ensure that their performance management process includes and allows for:
- a start-year **performance expectation setting meeting**
 - quarterly performance conversations**
 - end-year performance moderation meetings** (both localised moderation panels and an overall moderation meeting).

Process

8. The performance management process is made up of a number of stages which are explored in more detail throughout this guidance. The main features include:
- Setting performance expectations:** this takes place at the beginning of the annual performance year and is designed to make clear performance expectations and directorate priorities for members of the SCS.
 - Agreeing stretching objectives:** these should be agreed between members of the SCS and their line managers once they understand the performance expectations for their directorate.



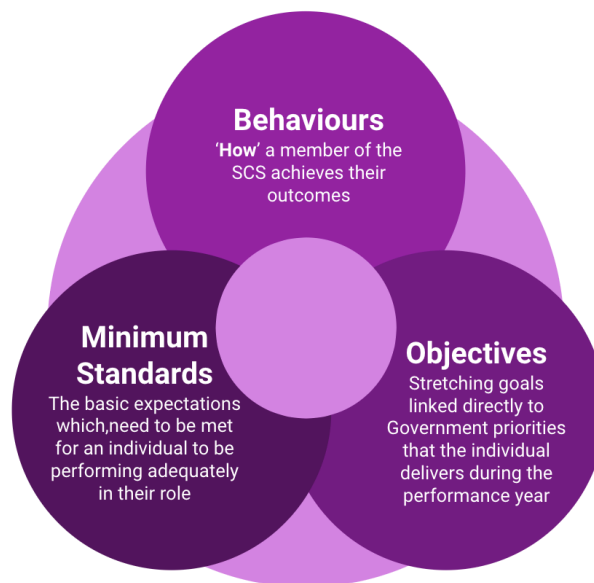
These **must** focus on both the **what and the how**. These meetings should also be used to agree how the individual will demonstrate the **minimum standards**.

- c. **Regular performance conversations:** these should be conducted quarterly between line managers and members of the SCS to ensure objectives remain relevant and stretching and that performance progress can be informally assessed on a continuous basis. Indicative box ratings should be agreed and recorded to demonstrate progress of objectives.
 - d. **Consistency check:** a mid-year consistency check is recommended to evaluate the distribution of indicative ratings across protected characteristics.
 - e. **In-year recognition:** line managers are encouraged to use in-year awards to recognise and reward members of the SCS for real-time performance.
 - f. **Performance assessment:** a formal box rating recommendation should be agreed between the individual and their line manager in the final quarterly conversation.
 - g. **Moderation:** following end-year performance conversations, departments will meet to moderate SCS performance ratings as a whole in both localised panels by business unit and an overall moderation meeting by evaluating the distribution curve. Departments will also need to report on their overall outcomes at the cross-government consistency check.
9. Each element of the performance management process is discussed in greater detail below.



Setting performance expectations - Behaviours, Minimum Standards and Objectives

10. Each performance year should begin with a performance expectation setting meeting, held after the departmental consistency checks. Performance expectation setting meetings are intended to both ensure:
- the cascade of government priorities, including mission-delivery, into individual objectives
 - consistency across the department in how they approach the upcoming performance year by agreeing expected standards for delivery and behaviour for each grade of the SCS
 - that members of the SCS at all grades understand the **minimum standards, assessment criteria for each rating, and behaviours** that they will be assessed against at the conclusion of the performance year in practice.
11. There are **three** key components to SCS performance, as set out below:



Behaviours:

12. Behaviours refer to *how* a member of the SCS achieves outcomes and should be treated with equal weight as *what* is delivered. It is important that members of the SCS are demonstrating and role-modelling the leadership behaviours expected in the Civil Service, but also working in a way which is congruent with the government's agenda for the operation of the Civil Service.
13. When considering 'how' individuals deliver their objectives, it is important to ensure that individual behaviour aligns with the optimum ways of working across the Civil Service. This should include:
- take personal responsibility for adherence to the Civil Service Code and Principles of Public life, role model and instill the gravity of these standards within the teams with which they work, and create a culture where people are encouraged to act with candour, raise concerns, share ideas, act with curiosity and learn from mistakes;
 - managing and maximising their resource allocation, and contribute to ensuring value for money in the organisations in which they work;



- c. adopting, and encouraging others to adopt, technologies and embrace innovation;
- d. working across boundaries, breaking down silos and building partnerships, crucially with devolved and Local Government, Civil Society and other stakeholders;
- e. proactively engaging in reform efforts across the Civil Service, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and taking a leading role in ensuring that the Civil Service is run in the most effective manner.

14. In addition, members of the SCS should remain mindful of the following:

- a. **Success Profiles** - departments will be required to use the Civil Service Behaviours element of Success Profiles in order to understand “how” we want people in the Civil Service to work. The full scope of Civil Service Behaviours is available in the [Success Profiles](#). Civil Service Behaviours have been designed to complement professional competency frameworks that have been developed by the Civil Service professions/functions, so should be used in conjunction with these.
- b. **Leadership Standards** - as the senior leaders of the Civil Service, it is vital that members of the SCS are mindful of their leadership behaviours, and seek to continuously improve these. As such, they should be mindful of relevant leadership frameworks, including when published, the new Civil Service Leadership Standards, which centre around the Civil Service Code and set out expectations for all Civil Service Leaders.
- c. **Line Management Standards** – line managers should familiarise themselves with the [Line Management Standards](#) to reflect on their line management practices and inform their personal and professional development as a line manager by identifying strengths and areas for growth and development. As senior and influential line managers, it is expected that members of the SCS will embed the line management standards within their own management practice and champion these within the teams they lead.
- d. **Functional standards** - the [functions](#) form a framework for collaboration across organisational boundaries. The [Functional Standards](#) set expectations for what needs to be done, and why, for the management of functional work. The functional standards have been [mandated since September 2021](#) for use across government. They give clarity on accountabilities, by defining the roles needed, what people in those roles are accountable for, and who to. They define roles, not jobs, giving flexibility for organisations to decide how to structure their operations, to suit the complexity of the functional work being done. These defined functional roles and accountabilities should be reflected in relevant job descriptions and personal objectives.

Minimum Standards:

- 15. The **Minimum Standards** represent common expectations that all members of the SCS should be carrying out, at a minimum, as the senior leaders of the Civil Service. They capture and combine finance, people and capability, diversity and inclusion and corporate leadership expectations which are relevant to all SCS roles, and therefore must be met for a member of the SCS to be deemed as performing adequately in their role.
- 16. This is a critical element designed to drive better outcomes and standards of senior leadership for the Civil Service - it places genuine importance on these expectations. So, delivery against these is assessed as *Met* or *Not met*. Those who receive a **Not Met** assessment for the minimum standards **must be automatically deemed to be Partially Met in their overall performance, regardless of**



how they perform against their wider objectives.

- 17. The Minimum Standards have been designed to be sufficiently high level so that they are relevant to all SCS roles, regardless of grade or profession. As a result however, it is important to ensure that all members of the SCS understand how they are expected to demonstrate the Minimum Standards for their specific role.
- 18. During the start year expectation setting meeting, departments may wish to give some consideration to how the standards will apply to the SCS3 cadre, which can then be cascaded. They may also wish to provide additional guidance for members of their SCS, based on the department’s understanding of their priorities, to support them in interpreting the minimum standards and the actions required to demonstrate that they have been met.
- 19. Crucially, a conversation between each member of the SCS and their line manager must take place at the start of the year to agree how these standards will be demonstrated by each individual, in a way which is relevant to their role. They should agree how they will determine whether they have *Met* these minimum standards, including what, if any metrics and the evidence required to support this decision.
- 20. The **Minimum Standards** require all SCS to:



Manage public money and other resources in line with the principles in the Managing Public Money guidance, and ensure adherence with any relevant spending controls. Continually seek opportunities for efficiency and consider value for money for the taxpayer in all decision making. Where necessary, take difficult decisions to make appropriate trade-offs to benefit the organisation and/or Civil Service as a whole.



Demonstrate, and evidence, positive and proactive leadership and management of people, enabling them to deliver consistently high quality outputs. Take responsibility for culture and provide a positive employee experience. Identify and address barriers, and inspire and motivate, to enable teams to work effectively. Champion and invest in others’ capabilities, utilise their technical expertise where relevant and identify opportunities for better alignment and collaboration across the Civil Service. Adapt leadership and line management approach, in line with the line management and leadership standards, as necessary to respond to changing needs across teams.



Lead the Civil Service by contributing to its collective running, performance, culture and reputation, beyond their business unit and immediate responsibilities. Actively deliver organisation-wide and/or cross-government initiatives by embedding them into their work and enabling teams to understand and contribute to these.



Take a data-driven, evidence-led and delivery-focused approach to Diversity and Inclusion. Take personal responsibility delivering Diversity and Inclusion strategies by embedding D&I considerations in all decision making and delivery. Set high expectations of leadership and people management for those with whom they work, and hold others accountable for making good decisions, even when this may prove challenging or unpopular.

- 21. Departments should adopt the Minimum Standards in full, and share these in their entirety with members of the SCS, in order to ensure consistency of expectation across the cadre. However, departments may wish to provide supplementary guidance for start of the year conversations between individuals and line managers, to guide how these standards are interpreted within the departmental context.

Objectives:



22. Objectives must directly relate to the delivery of government priorities, such as the Missions, or other related organisational objectives. They should reflect what the individual is responsible for delivering during the performance year. As such, it is expected that these should be stretching and have clear outcomes, against which the individual's performance can be assessed at the end of the performance year.
23. It should be possible for objectives to be linked back to the start of year expectation setting meeting, where cross-government and organisational priorities should be discussed. Deliverables against government priorities agreed at this meeting should then help to form the objectives of the SCS 3 cadre, which in turn should be cascaded further through SCS 2 and then SCS 1 objectives, with clear lines of responsibility for delivery, distinguished at each grade and the impact of each individual's contribution towards achieving them being clearly articulated. The SCS also play a vital role in leading the rest of the Civil Service and so to enable greater transparency and understanding of each individual's impact on delivering cross-government priorities, it is recommended that objectives be shared and available to all employees.
24. When setting objectives, the following should be considered:
- a. the relevance of the objectives to organisational and cross-government priorities, particularly considering alignment with the Missions as necessary
 - b. the metrics or performance outcomes that can be used to assess performance against the objective
 - c. the extent to which the objectives of the SCS cadre, particularly those at SCS3, cover the breadth of work that the organisation seeks to deliver, and whether there are any gaps or additional areas of work necessary to achieve the overall ambitions
 - d. how objectives continue to ensure distinct individual accountability and impact can be demonstrated at each grade, while still fitting in with the overarching departmental aims.
25. Objectives should be recorded in an objective setting form, which clearly sets out both *what* and *how* SCS will deliver through the year. An example objective setting form can be found on the SCS performance management [landing page](#) on gov.uk. Departments have the flexibility to use their own form if they wish, but this must capture both the what and the how as these should be given equal weight.
26. To be accomplished, stretching objectives **should ideally be SMART:**
- a. **Specific:** be clear about *what* the objective should achieve, *who* should achieve it and *when* it should be achieved by. Be clear about what behaviours are necessary to deliver the objectives.
 - b. **Measurable:** define which metrics should be used to determine if the goal has been met. If this objective will take a few months to complete, then set some key milestones by considering specific tasks to accomplish. This should also reflect how it would be evident that the individual had used the right behaviours in order to deliver.
 - c. **Achievable:** ensure that the objective can be accomplished and consider the necessary tools/skills required to do so. Though should also be given to which behaviours will be utilised, and how will the individual develop these to the required standard.



- d. **Relevant:** consider how the objective contributes to the performance of the department and Civil Service, and how it aligns to overall government priorities. In addition, the relevance of the behaviours used should be considered, particularly in light of how these behaviours build better ways of working across the Civil Service.
 - e. **Timed:** provide a target date to demonstrate the delivery of key objectives, consider how behaviours will help deliver against the timeframes set and ensure enough time is provided to enable the right behaviours be utilised to drive outcomes.
27. For each objective, job holders should record the associated behaviours necessary to deliver the objective, the main actions to be carried out with deadlines wherever possible, the measures or targets which will be used to assess whether the objective has been successfully delivered.
28. The **onus is on the job holder** to take responsibility for drafting their objectives and deciding upon the associated behaviours, which should then be agreed with their manager. We recommend that departments provide members of the SCS with a toolkit to formulate their objectives and behaviours, which can be based on the information outlined in this guidance and tailored to suit their workforce context.
29. Should they wish, departments can also take team-based approaches to objectives, providing they fulfil the mandatory criteria set out in this framework.
30. Objectives and behaviours should be reviewed regularly (at least at each quarterly conversation) by job holders with their managers, to ensure continuing relevance and stretch. The objective form should be updated as necessary.
31. Departments should also use the expectation setting meetings to ensure a consistent understanding of the four box ratings that members of the SCS will be assessed against. As part of this discussion, they should reflect on the results of the end-year department wide, and cross-government, consistency check to identify whether there should be any adjustments to their use of each of the four boxes to align better with the agreed standards for the SCS cadre.
32. It is important for effective performance management that those being assessed fully understand what is expected of them from the beginning of the performance year and that these expectations are not shifted throughout the period they are being assessed on. Below is a summary of the minimum expectation for each performance box, but departments may build on these as necessary.

Performance Rating	Descriptors	Additional Guidance
Exceeding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All behaviours beyond what was expected • Met minimum standards • Exceeding outcomes set in objectives. 	<p>This is likely to be appropriate where the members of the SCS consistently performed above and beyond all of their agreed stretching objectives, demonstrated corporate leadership beyond their business unit, including cross-government working and breaking down silos, throughout the performance year. It is absolutely vital for those who receive this box rating to have also embodied the expected leadership behaviours throughout the performance year in all aspects of their work.</p> <p><i>Examples</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A member of the SCS who delivered exactly what was agreed in their objectives should not be given this rating. • A member of the SCS who went above what was expected of them in the delivery of their objectives, but who did so not



Performance Rating	Descriptors	Additional Guidance
		<p>in line with the expected behaviours of their role, such as delivering at the expense of others or deliberately working in a silo at the expense of other projects , should not be given this rating.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any individual who did not meet the minimum standards must not be given this rating.
High performing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some behaviours beyond what was expected Met Minimum Standards Delivered beyond what was expected in some objectives 	<p>This is likely to be appropriate where the members of the SCS consistently performed above and beyond some of their agreed stretching objectives. They should have at least achieved the expected standards of delivery for every objective, and should have exceeded in some, but not all.</p> <p>Individuals in this box should also have demonstrated good leadership behaviours throughout the performance year, with some examples of corporate delivery beyond their immediate business unit. The absence however of certain behaviours, particularly those linked with the minimum standards, or the presence of certain negative behaviours, should mean that those individuals should not be given this rating.</p> <p><i>Examples</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A member of the SCS who delivered exactly what was agreed in their objectives should not be given this rating. A member of the SCS who went above what was expected of them in the delivery of their objectives, but who was not consistent with their behaviour in the way they went about delivering these objectives should not be given this rating. A member of the SCS who went above what was expected of them in most of their objectives and did so while sometimes going beyond their behaviour and leadership expectations should be given this rating. Any individual who did not meet the minimum standards must not be given this rating.
Achieving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behaviours as expected Met Minimum Standards Delivered as expected against some objectives 	<p>This is likely to be appropriate where the member of the SCS has delivered exactly what they agreed to deliver in their performance objectives. To be given this rating, you would expect the individual to have demonstrated the expected leadership behaviours consistently throughout the performance year.</p> <p><i>Examples</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A member of the SCS who delivered exactly what was agreed in their objectives should be placed in this box. A member of the SCS who went above what was expected of them in a few of their objectives while meeting the behaviours they agreed they would demonstrate to help them meet their objectives may be given this rating if it was felt that this was particularly inconsistent, or if they were not always demonstrating the expected behaviours. Any individual who did not meet the minimum standards must not be given this rating.



Performance Rating	Descriptors	Additional Guidance
Partially met	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Behaviours not at standard expected, or inconsistent• Did not deliver as expected against some objectives• Minimum standards not met <u>regardless of other delivery</u>	<p>This is likely to be appropriate where the member of the SCS has delivered some but not all of what they agreed to deliver in their performance objectives, as a result of factors either within or outside of their control. Additionally, this rating must be given if it was felt that the way in which the individual behaved while delivering their objectives was not up to the expected standard of the role.</p> <p>Any member of the SCS who receives a 'Not Met' rating against the minimum standards <u>must</u> be given this rating, regardless of delivery against objectives.</p> <p><i>Examples</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A member of the SCS who did not deliver what was agreed in their objectives, and these objectives remained reflective, or were updated to be reflective, of the expectations of them for the performance year, should be placed in this box.• A member of the SCS who did not demonstrate, or inconsistently demonstrated, the behaviours required of them to fulfil their objectives should be placed in this box.



Regular performance conversations

33. Performance conversations should form part of any on-going performance process and provide an opportunity to discuss the continued relevance of the job-holder's objectives, how the job holder is doing and any short-term or long-term development needs. It is imperative to the success of any organisation's performance management policy that these take place frequently, and therefore line managers and members of the SCS **should hold performance conversations at least quarterly**. During these conversations:
- a. Line managers should begin by evaluating whether the individual has 'met' or 'not met' the **minimum standards**. If an individual has not met the minimum standards, they should be marked as 'partially met' automatically, and a performance development plan should be drawn up as a matter of urgency to bring the individual up to the required standard.
 - b. **If the individual is deemed to have 'met' the minimum standard, the** line managers should then evaluate whether the member of the SCS is demonstrating that they are **on track** to be rated as 'Exceeding', 'High Performing', 'Achieving' or 'Partially Met' for their end of year discussion, based on 'what' how well the individual is delivering **against their objectives and demonstrating the required behaviours**. The agreed rating should reflect the performance as a whole rather than on each objective and behaviour individually. This provisional rating can be recorded following each quarterly performance conversation, but a formal write-up of these discussions is only required at the mid- and end-year points.
 - c. They should also **discuss objectives originally agreed and whether they should be revised in light of changing priorities**. Objectives should be revised to ensure an individual has an appropriate level of stretch and to reflect any shifts in government priorities.
 - d. **Managers should review the behaviours demonstrated by individuals**, to ensure that these are at the required standard, with specific reference to the expectations they set for themselves at the start of the performance year. This should also provide an opportunity to consider how individuals can adapt to ensure they are acting in a way which is aligned with the government's ambitions on ways of working and the operation of the Civil Service, including how individuals can stretch themselves to deliver increasing levels of corporate leadership and cross-government working.
 - e. Managers should give and record **feedback**, and may seek this from others ahead of the meeting. Follow-up action by both parties may be agreed as a result.
 - f. Managers and job holders should make time to discuss **development needs**, longer-term career aspirations.
34. Within the parameters set out by this framework, departments are encouraged to tailor the frequency and recording of performance conversations, to suit their departmental context. Departments should be mindful of the requirements for the end-year cross-government consistency check meeting, as set out at Paragraph 68. A good practice approach of this would be:
- a. monthly performance check-ins accompanied by more formal quarterly conversations;
 - b. regular collection of performance ratings on a central database which can be tracked across the department;



- c. regular collection of data on formal poor performance, and informal dips performance, and subsequent actions and outcomes to address these issues; and,
- d. all SCS are eligible for in-year awards up to £5,000, provided that they are not subject to formal poor performance procedures, and we recommend that the decision-making process for this is delegated to Directors General with some central oversight on the distribution of award, and the types of behaviours and achievements which are rewarded.



Underperformance

35. It is critical that underperformance is dealt with promptly and effectively, as soon as it arises. Although the [Managing Poor Performance Policy Procedures for the Senior Civil Service](#) is a separate policy, an effective performance management process should identify those who are performing to the expected level in the SCS and include provisions that act as a bridge to poor performance procedures.
36. It is important to recognise that many things, inside and outside of the work environment, can affect an individual's performance. **An effective manager will identify underperformance and work with the individual to understand why this is happening and what can be done to resolve it.**
37. It is important to understand whether the issue is a one-off dip in performance (maybe at a particular time or in a particular discipline) or an on-going performance problem where the individual is clearly not operating at the required level. A one-off dip in performance may be caused by a particular event or situation, such as bereavement, ill-health, relationship problems and financial worries, or other workforce barriers. Whilst the manager cannot always resolve these issues, support to bring performance back to an acceptable level must be given. This may include helping the job holder access support services such as Employee Assistance Programmes or allowing time off/adjusting working patterns to assist the individual to resolve the issue. A good practice guide to improving performance and handling difficult conversations is at page 24.
38. Where the performance of the job holder is not up to the standards of the role, in terms of either the achievement of objectives, or the behaviours being demonstrated, this **must** be brought to the attention of the job holder immediately. A single *Partially Met* rating should not in itself be a trigger for formal poor performance procedures, but instead be an indicator that additional support may be required.
39. There are a variety of reasons for an ongoing dip in performance, and some of these are listed below, alongside suggestions for improving these.

Reasons for ongoing dips in performance	Suggestions for addressing these
Skills or knowledge gaps	Training, coaching or mentoring - tailored to build confidence
Misunderstanding of performance expectations between the job holder and their manager	Clarify expectations
Impact of management style	Consider how you will communicate, set directions and clarify expectations
Workplace relationships, including manager/job holder	Consider mediation
Will or motivation of the job holder	Explore career aspirations, set more stretching goals, or consider ways to re-energise the current role

40. **When dips in performance have been identified, managers must talk to the job holder as soon as possible** to explore the reasons for this and discuss how best to restore performance to the



required level. The longer that underperformance is allowed to continue, the greater the problem for the individual and organisation when it is finally tackled. The impact of on-going poor performance is high. SCS poor performers:

- a. do not deliver required business outcomes or value for money
- b. impair the standard, reputation and professionalism of the Civil Service
- c. disrupt the flow of work and increase the workloads of their colleagues
- d. cause resentment and lower morale
- e. set a bad example to those they manage
- f. impact on the leadership and direction of the team and the Civil Service.

41. If a member of the SCS is, at any point in the performance year, deemed not to be meeting the **minimum standards**, or is rated as **Partially Met for two consecutive quarters**, their line manager must draw up a **performance development plan** immediately. They should also provide the individual with the necessary support to improve their performance and **schedule regular (monthly at a minimum) review meetings** to evaluate improvement.
42. If the member of the SCS **continues to be rated Not Met against the minimum standards, or as Partially Met against the behaviours and objectives** after a reasonable improvement period (no longer than 3 months), there will be a strong expectation that they are **placed on formal poor performance measures** as part of the SCS poor performance policy. However, managers should carefully consider the impact of exceptional circumstances that could affect individual performance before they use the SCS poor performance policy.
43. It is particularly important that members of the SCS tackle poor performance to demonstrate the expected behaviours and to help promote a **strong performance management culture** within the Civil Service.
44. Sometimes, the root cause of performance problems is ineffective recruitment. Managers should therefore **recruit with care**, being clear about why recruitment is taking place, what is sought, and searching for this from a wide, diverse pool of talent, with selection on merit as the core principle.



Performance assessment

45. The **final quarterly conversation** in March must be used to carry out the end of year performance assessment for members of the SCS and is the point where a **formal minimum standards rating, and box rating recommendation** (*Exceeding, High Performing, Achieving, Partially Met*) should be agreed between the individual and their line manager.
46. As with the quarterly conversation, the line manager should first make an assessment as to whether the **individual has met the minimum standards**. A binary *Met* or *Not Met* assessment should be given. If the individual receives a *Not Met* assessment, they will automatically receive a partially met overall marking for the performance year.
47. If the individual has *Met* the minimum standards, **the performance of job holders must be assessed by taking account of both *what they have achieved* and *how they have achieved it***. Managers should make a judgement over to what extent objectives have been fulfilled using the following criteria:
 - a. ***What they have achieved*** - whether objectives have been met or not, and to what degree
and
 - b. ***How they achieved it*** - the degree to which they have demonstrated the behaviours required to deliver their work, with specific reference to the expectations they set for themselves at the start of the performance year, and those set out in the behaviours section of this guidance.
48. When assessing these objectives, equal weight will be given both to *what* and *how* these objectives were achieved to ensure a balanced focus on delivery and behaviours. Rather than assigning a rating to each individual objective and behaviour, managers will instead evaluate performance as a whole.
49. Job holders and managers must agree a written record of the discussion and this should be recorded on the Performance Agreement form. A copy of the Performance Agreement form can be found on the SCS performance management [landing page](#) on gov.uk, however departments are free to use another form to align with their delegated grades should they wish.
50. Job holders must have been employed by the Civil Service since on or before 31 December to be eligible for moderation in that particular performance year.
51. If a job holder leaves their post on or after 1 January, then they are still eligible for moderation in their old department. If they move to a new department on or before 31 December then they should be moderated in their new department.
52. Those SCS who receive an *Exceeding* or *High Performing* rating are eligible to receive an end-year non-consolidated performance-related payment. Any individual not on formal poor performance is eligible to receive in-year award. In-year awards could be given for delivery against objectives, behaviours, or exemplary demonstration of the minimum standards, as departments and line managers see fit.
53. Regardless of how collected, feedback is a key part of performance assessment, as well as ensuring a focus on ongoing development. Feedback collected should cover a variety of relevant stakeholders, including direct reports, peers, customers, and **Ministers**, where staff frequently work with them. Feedback from direct reports and teams is particularly important for measuring leadership, performance management and capability building skills. **Peers** in other business units and departments are also in a position to give useful feedback on leadership, particularly corporate



leadership. Where SCS have objectives linked to delivering a cross-government priority, and/or a joint project or programme, SCS should seek feedback from peers in relevant partner organisations. **Other stakeholders** should also be involved where possible, and could provide insight about the individual's customer service skills. SCS have to take a proportionate approach to requesting feedback by carefully considering how many respondents they will approach. The job holder must agree who the respondents they will seek feedback from with their line manager. The feedback should be collected throughout the year so that it can be discussed with the job holder at quarterly performance conversations.

54. A great deal of effective work is already being done in departments to ensure that the performance management system is operated in an equitable and consistent manner. As a key part of this, SCS are responsible for focussing on improving the quality of performance management overall by strengthening the capability of managers.
55. When completing the Performance Agreement Form, it is important to be aware of the need to set aside any personal bias, conscious or unconscious, to ensure an objective appraisal of the person you are reporting on.



Performance differentiation and moderation

56. Departments should assess SCS members' performance absolutely against the minimum standards to determine a *Met or Not Met* marking, and then against their objectives and behaviours, assigning individuals to one of the four performance groups: *Exceeding, High Performing, Achieving* and *Partially Met*. Any members of the SCS who do not meet the **minimum standards** should automatically receive a *Partially Met* rating overall.
57. End-year performance ratings must first be moderated at the local level in each business unit. Moderation is a checkpoint to appropriately evaluate the given performance rating and ensure consistency across a cohort of SCS. Therefore, if managers share their recommendations with individuals, they must make clear that it is an initial recommendation and could be subject to change at moderation. However, managerial recommendations are based on a thorough and holistic assessment of an individual's performance so should be considered as the best indicator of an individual's actual performance, and should not be unduly changed to fit departmental expectations of what performance is expected to look like.
58. Localised moderation arrangements will vary according to the circumstances of particular departments/agencies and the number of SCS. Where feasible, moderation should be carried out by grade. Small departments/agencies that do not have sufficient numbers of SCS to moderate effectively should make arrangements with others to moderate across departments.
59. Following these localised moderation panels, departments must also conduct overall moderation meetings. In these overall moderation meetings, Directors General, Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Profession who participated in the start-year performance expectation setting meeting should reconvene **to moderate the scores of the SCS in their department as a whole by evaluating the distribution.**
60. The overall moderation meeting should also **evaluate whether the performance standards set at the beginning of the year were robust enough** in light of their distribution and whether their departmental performance management system is having a detrimental impact on a particular group of individuals.
61. Since 2018/19, there has been no forced distribution for the SCS. However, as with any normal large organisation, we continue to recommend to departments that performance differentiation is expected to take the shape of a curve, with the highest proportion of SCS falling in achieving. To ensure consistency of outcome across the SCS, given this group is a centrally managed cadre, the Cabinet Office has set an expected distribution for performance ratings, as set out below.

Rating	Expected Percentage
Exceeded	15%
High Performing	20%
Achieving	60%
Partially Met	5%



62. The expected distribution is set primarily to drive consistency and should **not** be interpreted as a requirement, or a series of targets which must be met under any circumstance. It should not be used to force managers to amend markings to meet the overall set distribution arbitrarability. To ensure the focus remains on the overall trends, the shape of any distribution should not be evaluated where it contains fewer than c.150 individuals.
63. The distribution would only be reviewed during consistency checking meetings which happen at local and departmental level once individual conversations between members of the SCS and their line manager have concluded. Comparison between the departmental distribution and the expected distribution can be used to challenge departmental decision making and ensure consistent standards of assessment are being applied across the department. If necessary, these comparisons could lead the department deciding to make alterations to the department-wide process for the coming year if the distribution is not in line with expectations without good reason.
64. The setting of robust performance standards at the outset of the performance year should mitigate the need to alter the distribution at the end of the performance year. Should a department find they have fallen well short of these expectations following the conclusion of their annual performance management cycle, then they should take action at the beginning of the next performance year to ensure that their processes are as robust as possible.
65. To enhance the effectiveness of moderation and to reduce the impact of bias, at least one *consistency check* mid-year is recommended to evaluate the distribution of indicative ratings across protected characteristics, but is not mandated as this is contingent on departmental capacity. Where these are conducted, we recommend that some, if not all, of the participants from the performance expectation setting meeting reconvene to discuss the distribution of indicative ratings as a result of the performance standards set at the outset of the performance year. It is recommended that a record is kept of this meeting so that comparisons can be made between the distribution of indicative ratings during, and at the end, of the performance year.



SCS Performance Management Reporting Requirements

66. The Cabinet Office conducts an annual data collection exercise on a series of SCS-related matters in the autumn. This exercise requires data on:
- number and percentage of performers rated *Exceeding' and High Performing* in the department
 - number and percentage of SCS rated *Partially Met* in the department
 - The number of non-consolidated performance related payments paid out, both in year and at end of year.
67. In addition, the Government People Group will collect data on an annual basis on formal and informal poor performance.
68. In order to ensure that the SCS performance management system meets the vision of a high-performing senior Civil Service, that there is appropriate central oversight of performance across departments, and most importantly to ensure consistency of implementation of the framework across the centrally managed cadre, **Government People Group also holds an end-year cross government consistency check meeting**. This meeting is chaired by the Government Chief People Office and should be attended by departmental HR Directors, who will be required to report on:
- the shape of their overall performance curve for the SCS, following departmental moderation
 - any amendments they are making to their departmental SCS performance management processes as a result of their curve or other outcomes
 - the number of poor performers (both formal and informal) throughout the year, the actions that have been taken to address the dips in performance, and the success of these actions
 - their overall approach to reward, namely awarding non-consolidated performance related pay, for their higher performers, and what they are seeking to acknowledge and incentivise as a result of this.
69. The cross-government consistency check is entirely for transparency and accountability purposes, and to give departments greater insight into how consistent their approach to performance management is with other departments. It is **not a form of moderation** and it is not expected that departments should need to make any amendments to their previous years' performance outcomes as a result of this meeting. As such, there should be no delay in agreeing performance markings, or awarding non-consolidated performance related payments, in anticipation of this meeting.
70. In addition to the above, there may be additional sporadic requests for data and departmental feedback on how the framework is working as required from time to time, in response to particular issues and to help us iterate if necessary.



SCS Performance Management Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently asked questions for the SCS performance management policy are outlined below. If your question is not covered and it is not included elsewhere in the framework, this is an area that the policy is not prescriptive on and departments should use their discretion to formulate their own arrangements. For localised queries, including those regarding long-term absence, unpaid leave, and job share arrangements, please refer to your internal departmental policies or consult your legal team.

For further information on the framework, please contact the Employment Framework team at csemploymentframework@cabinetoffice.gov.uk.

If a member of the Civil Service has left the department during the performance year, do they still need to be assessed?

If a job holder moves to another government department during the performance year, then they should still be subject to performance assessment and moderation. Job holders who move departments on or after the 1st January each year should be moderated in their new department. If the individual has left the Civil Service entirely, they will not be entitled to any bonus or performance reward if they were eligible for one.

If an individual is on a temporary promotion to SCS, how should their performance be assessed?

Departments have discretion to determine how an individual's performance should be assessed in this scenario. However, our recommended approach would be that the individual is assessed at the grade they have spent the majority of their performance year at. A consistent approach must be taken within the department. If an individual is assessed against the criteria for SCS, even if they are not substantive in that grade and they meet the criteria for an in-year award, our recommendation is that they should receive an SCS level award.

Which department should assess the performance and undertake moderation for a member of the SCS who moved to a new department at the same grade?

If an individual has joined a new department on or after the 1 January, they should be moderated in their old department as this considers a larger proportion of the performance year. The new department is encouraged to feed into this process to ensure a more holistic appraisal of an individual's performance, but the final performance assessment and moderation process should remain with the old department.

How is non-consolidated award distributed?

Funding for all awards will come from the 3.3% non-consolidated pay pot. All members of the SCS are eligible for in-year non-consolidated awards, up to the value of £5,000 per award, provided they are not on formal poor performance measures. Individuals can receive multiple in-year awards provided the maximum value of award received in one performance year does not exceed £17,500 (which would require approval from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury). Only those individuals rated as *Exceeding* and *High Performing* are eligible for end-year performance bonuses.



How does an SCS job holder appeal the decision on their end-year performance rating?

If a job holder wishes to appeal their performance rating following the end-year conversation, then they will need to follow their departmental grievance procedures or any other measures in place in their department to allow for the review of a management decision regarding performance ratings.

How should performance be managed when an individual is on secondment?

For inward and outward secondments individuals remain subject to their employers (home) performance management processes. The host should be encouraged to input into this process, and may choose to include them within their own processes if they see fit. Therefore, it is important for policies and processes to be communicated between employer and host, as per the arrangements set out in the individuals' secondment agreement.



Good Practice Guides:

Improving Performance

1. Tackle performance every day – on the day

You should make time to address performance every day – good and bad. Hold regular and constructive discussions and coaching conversations. Make sure you tackle poor performance on the day it occurs and in more detail in the first one to one that follows – do not wait for a six monthly or annual review. Talking to people about issues when they occur is vital, backing this up when needed with a file note you share with them enables and supports any formal process. Filing a note you haven't shared with the person undermines any formal process rather than assisting it.

2. In tackling extremes don't miss the majority

While you can sometimes find you concentrate your time and effort on the excellent and problem performers, the majority are usually in between. **There is real performance improvement here which is within your grasp.** Identifying those whose performance is improving or declining and managing accordingly can make a real difference to individual and team performance. Most people genuinely welcome feedback that helps them to improve and want to do well.

3. How people get things done is important as well as getting them done

Attitude and behaviour are part of performance – you can and should manage them. As communicators, how we present ourselves, handle situations and represent our profession are part of getting the job done well. You need to address attitude and behavioural problems even if 'technical' performance or delivery is good. This isn't about deeming a specific leadership style better or worse than any other, but about demonstrating both the corporate and organisational behavioural expectations. Corporate expectations are set out in frameworks like the Leadership Model. They also form part of our Civil Service values set out in the Civil Service Code. Departments should set out clearly any organisational expectations so that objectives can be linked to the business aims. In both cases job holders and managers need to be clear about what is expected of them and how this will be measured.

4. You need a different approach to managing behaviour and attitudes than managing capability

Capability problems are best tackled by clear task-based objectives; behavioural and attitude problems by being very clear with people on the behaviour you want and don't want. For capability issues a reasonable timeframe for improvement can be put in place to take account of any training/coaching requirements. Behaviour and attitude can be transformed very quickly if you actually tackle it with people and then keep tackling it.

5. What individuals can do to engender good performance management

- **Set clear objectives** - it may be self-evident but the start of good performance management is clarity about the objectives that are expected to be achieved, both in business outputs and the way business is conducted. The need for specific performance measures and criteria will vary from circumstance to circumstance but the key requirement is that both parties are clear about what has to be done and how they will assess how well it has been done.



- **Establish the right relationship** – it is very important to establish and maintain the authority to engage in performance management. That comes from being very clear from the start about the standards that matter to your business and the organisation. It is also helpful to separate the individual from their performance. You are not reviewing the individual's intrinsic worth. You are reviewing what they have done. This is particularly important when challenging poor performance.
- **Be generous** – good performance managers are generous with their time, with their support and coaching and, above all, with their aspiration that the individuals they manage should have the opportunity and support to grow and improve. They do not separate development from performance management. Their goal is for performance to improve and their skill is in helping their people to do that. This is nearly always accompanied by a style of leadership and management which is empowering – by being clear about outputs and helping their staff to learn and grow as they discover the best ways to deliver them – rather than specific and detailed checking and intervention.
- **Be tough when necessary** – these characteristics enable good performance managers to be extremely tough when they need to be. They have established the moral authority to be as robust and vigorous as necessary.

Handling Difficult Conversations

Preparing

- What is the issue? Is this a one-off situation and what impact has it had, for example on achievement of objectives or on others?
- Identify a specific example that illustrates the behaviour or situation that must change.
- What is your contribution to the problem? Should you recognise shared responsibility?
- Consider your emotional response to the situation and be aware of any unconscious bias.
- Consider if there is anything you could do differently to help resolve the issue.
- Prepare the points to cover and be clear about the outcome you wish to achieve.
- Arrange a suitable time for the discussion and think about the location.

During the Conversation

- Be clear about why the conversation is necessary. Be specific and give examples.
- Clarify why it is important.
- Be mindful of your body language and tone of voice.
- Let them know that you want to resolve the problem.
- Use open questioning and ask the other person's perspective, for example:
 - How do you feel things have been going? / How do you see the job developing



- How do you feel about that?
- Tell me, why do you think that happened?
- What do you think you could do differently next time?
- Check your understanding and paraphrase:
 - Have I got the right impression?
 - Do you mean that...?
- Invite the other person to respond and do not interrupt them.
- Ensure the other person knows you understand their views, feelings, position etc.
- Be ready for reactions – these could be any number of emotions from upset to anger or the individual may become quiet and withdrawn. It may be useful to take a break in the conversation to give individuals time to calm down or reflect.
- Keep it professional – don't let the conversation become like one between a parent and a child.

Moving On

- Where are we now?
- What do we need to do to resolve this?
- What is our new understanding and how do we go forward from here?
- What happens next?

Reviewing

- Set a SMART target for change in behaviour or situation.
- Review regularly until there is evidence of change in performance and/or behaviour.