**Undertaking Project and Programme Assurance Reviews**

**Assurance of Action Plan Guidance**

#### Introduction

The Assurance of Action Plan (AAP) review re-assesses a project or programme in the light of actions taken, following a Government Major Project Portfolio (GMPP) assurance review, where the Stage Gate Assessment was assessed as Red.

The AAP process is led by the National Infrastructure and Systems Transformation Authority (NISTA) and carried out in partnership with the parent department for the benefit of the Accounting Officer. The purpose of the AAP is to assess whether actions taken and/ or plans developed since the previous review have significantly improved the likelihood of successful delivery. The AAP provides the Accounting Officer (AO) and the SRO with the assurance that their programme or project is adequately addressing the issues that it needs to. It will be used to support decision making by HMT at key approval points.

The AAP will provide a Stage Gate Assessment (DCA), which will be based on the following definitions:

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| Colour | Criteria Description |
| Green | Successful delivery of the programme/project to time, cost and quality appears highly likely and there are no major outstanding issues that at this stage appear to threaten delivery.*Recommendation: The programme/project is ready to proceed to the next stage*. |
| Amber | Successful delivery of the programme/project to time, cost and quality appears feasible but significant issues already exist requiring management attention. These appear resolvable at this stage and, if addressed promptly, should not present a cost/schedule overrun.*Recommendation: This programme/project can proceed to the next stage with conditions but the programme/project must report back to NISTA and HMT on the satisfaction of each time bound condition within an agreed timeframe.*  |
| Red | Successful delivery of the programme/project to time, cost an d quality appears to be unachievable. There are major issues which, at this stage, do not appear to be manageable or resolvable. The programme/project may need re-baselining and/or its overall viability re-assessed.*Recommendation: This programme/project should not proceed to the next phase until these major issues are managed to an acceptable level of risk and the viability of the project/programme has been re-confirmed.*  |

## When does an AAP take place?

An AAP takes place following an assurance review of a project or programme on the GMPP if:

* It results in a Stage Gate Assessment of Red;
* NISTA decides that an AAP would add value.

Timing-wise, an AAP review will occur be after the project/ programme has had an opportunity to plan how to address the review recommendations and/ or when the Project Delivery Advisor (PDA) and Assurance Lead (AL) believes the programme/project and plans are in a fit state to be re-appraised.  This will be no later than within three months of the original review, but this may vary with the project/programme context and circumstances.

## Who makes up an AAP team?

The PDA will follow up with the Programme or Project Team after a Red review, initially to check that a suitable Action Plan in response to the recommendations is being created.  Once satisfied with the Action Plan, the Assurance Lead (AL) will then work with the NISTA Resourcing Team to build a suitable AAP review team.

* **Review Team Leader (RTL)**: The RTL may be an AL or PDA from NISTA. However, the RTL may come from outside of NISTA and it is sometimes useful to use the RTL that led to the last review.  Following the AAP planning meeting, the RTL will lead all aspects of the AAP review until the final report is agreed with the SRO and is issued to the AO. The RTL should also debrief the relevant AL.
* **Review Team Member (RTM)**: If the RTL from the previous review is available then the RTM will usually be from NISTA. If not, the RTM will normally be an RTM from the previous review so that there is some awareness of the issues that underpinned the previous Stage Gate Assessment.

## Running the AAP review

**The Assessment Meeting:**  In order to agree whether an AAP review is appropriate, an assessment meeting is held within a month of the assurance review which produced the Red or Amber/Red Delivery Confidence Assessment.  It is led by the AL and will involve key personnel from the programme or project and its leadership team including the Project Director and/or the SRO.  Where it is agreed that an AAP review is warranted, dates for the planning meeting and the actual review will be set.

**The Planning meeting (if required):** This is normally held two weeks prior to the actual AAP review and involves the:

* Review Team;
* AL;
* SRO and Project Director; and
* Project Representative organising the logistics for the review.

The aim of the planning meeting is to:

* Ensure that everyone understands the AAP review process and scope;
* Flag up key areas of concern to the AAP Review Team;
* Check on progress made by the programme/ project since the last assurance review;
* Agree documentation and interviewees.

**The Review:** The following documents should be supplied to the Review Team at least one week prior to the review:

* The previous assurance review report;
* The action plan produced by the Programme or Project Team detailing actions already taken, those in train and those to be taken; and
* The full list of documents to be read by the Review Team (as agreed at the planning meeting).

The review itself will normally be two days in duration and a draft report will be produced for the SRO at the end of the final day. Typically interviews will be held in the morning and the report written up in the afternoon.  If more than a morning is needed for interviews, to have sufficient confidence in the AAP process, then the report can be written up the next day. In that case, verbal feedback on key findings will be provided to the SRO at the end of the day.

A typical outline is as follows (note: timing can vary depending on the requirements of the AAP)

**Day One:**

09:00 – 09:30   AAP Team meet to discuss plans and documentation provided

09:30 – 16:00  Interviews with SRO, Programme Director/Manager and Programme staff and

 Others as appropriate (note: 1 hour lunch is included during this time period)

16:00 – 16:30 Review team internal discussion
16:30 – 17:00 Discussion and feedback with SRO

**Day Two:**

09:00 – 12:30   Final interviews.

12:30 – 13:30 Lunch

13:30 – 16:00  Assess and report writing
15:00 – 16:00 Discussion and feedback with SRO

**The Review Report:** Given the AAP is a short follow-up review, the report should be focused and should comment directly on the effectiveness of actions to address previous review recommendations. Significant risks and issues emerging since the last review should be reflected if they have an impact on the outcome of the review. The review recommendations, associated actions and interviewee list should be included.

## Post the AAP report activity

Within 5 working days of the AAP concluding, the RTL must submit a copy of the approved final report to the NISTA Gateway Helpdesk (gateway.helpdesk@nista.gov.uk) and to the AL. The SRO, RTL and RTM should complete the feedback forms provided and forward to the NISTA Gateway Helpdesk (gateway.helpdesk@nista.gov.uk).