



Department
for Education

Soft Landings Guide

Shared resources

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Summary

This document is the Soft Landings Guide to be used as part of the DfE Soft Landings process for all DfE delivered schemes using the DfE Construction Framework 2025 (CF25)¹. The Soft Landings Guide outlines DfE's process pursuant to Government Soft Landings (GSL) to ensure easy transition across the briefing, design, construction and occupation stages of a Scheme with the overriding aim of realising optimal operational performance.

Review date

This document shall normally be reviewed at 12-month intervals however, DfE reserve the right to update it at any time.

Who this publication is for?

This resource is for:

- local authorities (for community, voluntary-controlled schools, foundation schools and maintained nursery schools)
- academy trusts (for academies and free schools)
- governing bodies (for voluntary-aided schools)
- school/college leaders, staff and governing bodies in; further education colleges and designated institutions, sixth form colleges, maintained schools, academies and free schools, pupil referral units, City Technology Colleges, non-maintained special schools and maintained nursery schools
- technical professionals involved in the design, construction and maintenance of school and college premises.

Academy trusts with a religious character and the responsible bodies for voluntary-aided and voluntary controlled schools should engage with the land/site trustees for their land and buildings and the relevant religious body, most often their Diocese.

¹ When not using the DfE Construction Framework 2025, seek appropriate advice on how the DfE's Employer's Requirements can be incorporated into the relevant Contract(s).

Document history

This table lists the key changes in each update.

Revision code	Status code	Date	Amendment
C01	A	2026-01-12	GOV.UK publication

The DfE and its agents and advisers accept no liability whatsoever for any expense, liability, loss, claim or proceedings arising from reliance placed upon this resource.

1 Introduction

This Soft Landings Guide outlines DfE's process pursuant to Government Soft Landings (GSL) to ensure easy transition across the briefing, design, construction and occupation stages of a Scheme.

The purpose of the DfE Soft Landings process is to ensure effective team collaboration, communication and coordination, resulting in:

- a well-defined Project Brief considering end user and facility/facilities management requirements
- a set of clear, aligned and measurable performance targets/requirements reviewed at information exchanges throughout the project
- the design and construction of a facility that meets end user needs and DfE's Employer's Requirements
- the support and training of end user operators during the transition between construction and occupation via a period of aftercare
- the facility performing according to the brief and as intended, and verified through Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE) and other building performance reviews in conjunction with the Contractor and their delivery team(s)
- the collation and handover of structured digital asset information for effective long-term facilities management, and
- the capturing of lessons learned, including from operational stakeholders

An important benefit of a smooth transition into operation, coupled with an extended aftercare and in-use monitoring period, is the potential to optimise operational performance as early as possible and to close the performance gap between design intentions and operational outcomes.

This in turn informs lessons learned, to enable timely action to be taken where performance is either above or below requirements, encourage improvement in best practices, inform future projects, and convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge for reference, use and continuous improvement.

This Soft Landings Guide should be read in conjunction with the following Soft Landings resources:

- Soft Landings Checklist
- Soft Landings Letter Templates
- Lessons Learned Register
- Non Conformance and Observation Register
- Training Register
- Defects Register

2 DfE Soft Landings process

The DfE Soft Landings process, like this Guide and accompanying Soft Landings Checklist, has been structured using the [RIBA Plan of Work 2020](#) (with reference to the DfE's delivery gateways) as follows:

- RIBA Stage 0: Strategic Definition (Pre-Feasibility)
- RIBA Stage 1: Preparation and Briefing (Feasibility)
- RIBA Stage 2: Concept Design (Feasibility/Procurement)
- RIBA Stage 3: Spatial Coordination (Planning)
- RIBA Stage 4: Technical Design (Contractor's Proposals)
- RIBA Stage 5: Manufacturing and Construction (Pre-Handover)
- RIBA Stage 6: Handover (including 12-month Rectification Period and Post Completion Activities)

The Soft Landings Checklist outlines the tasks to be actioned and completed within each of the above RIBA work stages together with assigning who, of the primary roles outlined below, is either Responsible, Accountable, Consulted or Informed (RACI) for each task.

Note: This checklist should be reviewed alongside the project specific Detailed Exchange Information Requirements (DEIR), part of DfE's Information Management Requirements.

A copy of both this Soft Landings Guide and the Soft Landings Checklist should be issued to each member of the Project Team at the earliest opportunity as the DfE Soft Landings process commences at project inception.

2.1 Roles and responsibilities

To implement the DfE Soft Landings process, the following roles and responsibilities are required.

Employer's Soft Landings Champion: DfE Project Director (PD) or Project Manager (PM), identified at the outset of a project, who will oversee the entire Soft Landings process, ensure each step/task is implemented and maintain project records. They shall liaise with the Employer's Representative, Contractor's Soft Landings Representative and Responsible Body/School/College Coordinator(s) as required.

Employer's Representative²: Employer's Representative (Technical Advisor Lead) who will lead, manage and track the progress of all Soft Landings tasks including, but not limited to, development of the Project Brief, technical appraisals to ensure design intentions are met, handover and post completion activities such as the resolution of

² Also known as the 'Technical Advisor', abbreviated as TA (DfE term); and 'Employer's Agent' (JCT term).

defects and building performance evaluation, and the recording of actions and recommendations from project specific lessons learned workshops.

Contractor's Soft Landings Representative: Representative who will manage the day-to-day Soft Landings tasks on behalf of the appointed Contractor in the run up to and post Practical Completion including, but not limited to, testing, commissioning and witnessing, soak testing, decant, contractor's clean, the training of identified School/College personnel, initial aftercare, the resolution of defects, seasonal commissioning of building services systems, and building performance, energy and carbon reporting.

Responsible Body/School/College Coordinator(s): Responsible Body/School/College representative(s) with sufficient technical knowledge to be present at all relevant meetings and inspections from the development of the Project Brief through to Project Close, and responsible for articulating facility/facilities management requirements, coordinating staff training, understanding the operational requirements of the new facilities, and providing effective day-to-day liaison with the Contractor's Soft Landings Representative during the initial aftercare and Rectification Period.

2.2 Supporting processes

2.2.1 Information management

Information management plays a critical role in the DfE Soft Landings process by ensuring the timely and assured delivery of structured asset information throughout the design, construction and post completion stages of a Scheme. This is to ensure measurable performance targets/requirements are met and that end user operators have the required documentation to support them in day-to-day operations and short- to long-term facilities management.

DfE's ISO 19650 aligned Information Management Requirements ensure that schools and colleges receive essential asset information founded on Building Information Modelling (BIM), including Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Manuals, final record drawings, asset registers (COBie), and maintenance logbooks.

2.2.2 Lessons learned

Lessons learned are intended to encourage improvement in best practices and convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge for reference and use. The lessons learned process is threaded throughout DfE Soft Landings, from the compilation of lessons learned from other DfE centrally delivered and/or Responsible Body self-delivered projects at project inception (RIBA Stage 0) to a lessons learned workshop at the end of Feasibility (RIBA Stage 2).

When the Contractor is appointed, further lessons learned workshops are held at the end of RIBA Stages 3, 4, 5 & 6 with the DfE, Employer's Representative, Responsible Body (and other stakeholders as applicable), Contractor and their delivery team(s). All workshops shall document both positive and negative experiences in a project Lessons Learned Register to inform future stages of the project, as well as future projects.

The lessons learned process shall:

- focus on learning, not blame
- cover as many aspects of the project as possible relevant to the stage, and
- be applied to the start of the subsequent stage or project, wherever possible

2.2.3 Close monitoring to ensure build quality, compliance and optimisation

DfE's quality and workmanship assurance processes during construction and post-handover incorporate a range of measures to ensure build quality, compliance and optimisation including:

- regular site inspections during RIBA Stage 5 by the DfE employed Construction Quality Monitoring (CQM) Team, together with further ad-hoc inspections by the DfE Health, Safety, Quality and Workmanship (HSQW) Team, with any identified areas of non conformance³ recorded and monitored by the CQM Lead in a project Non Conformance and Observation Register until fully rectified by the Contractor in accordance with the Contract
- witnessing the testing, commissioning and soak testing of all building services including alarm systems towards the end of RIBA Stage 5
- inspecting the works just before Practical Completion to identify any snagging items which may or may not be significant enough to prevent the safe occupation of the new facilities, culminating in a series of Snagging Reports to be closely monitored until fully rectified by the Contractor
- the identification of any defects post-handover and during the 12-month Rectification Period (RIBA Stage 6), which shall be monitored via a Contractor produced and updated Defects Register and remedied by the Contractor (along with any residual minor snagging items) in accordance with the Contract
- the execution of the Building Performance Evaluation (BPE) process for energy and water consumption, CO₂ levels and air temperature for 15 months post completion to outline any issues with building performance and/or monitoring
- Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE) at the end of the Rectification Period following the process set out by DfE, and
- the Responsible Body having the benefit of a legal remedy to enforce the rectification of defects that arise in the remaining 11 years of the liability period

³ Work/workmanship, materials or goods not in accordance with the Contract.

under the Contract via the package of collateral warranties provided by the Contractor, its design professionals and sub-contractors

2.3 Soft Landings across work stages

The following provides a high-level overview of the DfE Soft Landings process across RIBA work stages 0 to 6. Refer also to the project specific Soft Landings Checklist for details of/progress against each task.

RIBA Stage 0: Strategic Definition (Pre-Feasibility)

At project inception, the DfE Soft Landings process focuses on establishing the Project Team, assigning responsibilities according to role and learning from the past.

Key activities include:

- appointment of the Employer's Representative, and
- the compilation of lessons learned from other DfE centrally delivered projects and/or Responsible Body self-delivered projects to inform this project

RIBA Stages 1-2: Preparation and Briefing to Concept Design (Feasibility/Procurement)

At Feasibility, the DfE Soft Landings process seeks to establish the technical capability of the Responsible Body to manage and maintain the new facilities once complete, produce a well-defined Project Brief⁴ considering site opportunities and constraints and end user and facility/facilities management requirements, and set clear, aligned and measurable performance targets/requirements for review at information exchanges throughout the project lifecycle.

Key activities include:

- production of a stakeholder map to define all stakeholders (including facilities/estates management from the Responsible Body through to end user operators), roles, responsibilities, communication and reporting lines
- ensuring the Soft Landings Checklist is made project specific, with roles and responsibilities clearly assigned
- sharing all Soft Landings resources (Guide, Checklist and templates) with the Project Team and regularly monitoring progress with tasks in project meetings
- observing daily operations and recording site challenges affecting day-to-day operations at the School/College to inform specific design, operational and facilities management needs within the Project Brief

⁴ By following the prompts in the DfE's Project Brief template.

- assessing current facilities management practices/capabilities relative to the practices required for the new facilities, informing recruitment or training needs
- reviewing existing asset information and undertaking new surveys to assess site specific risks and inform design development/project scope
- completing an initial decant and transition plan for any temporary accommodation, the moving of legacy furniture and equipment and pupils/students and staff into the new and/or refurbished building(s) and outdoor environment, and
- for the Employer's Representative to chair and manage a lessons learned workshop at the end of Feasibility with the Project Team (including operational stakeholders) with all outcomes recorded in a project Lessons Learned Register

RIBA Stage 3: Spatial Coordination (Planning)

At the early design development stage with the appointed Contractor leading up to the submission of a planning application, the DfE Soft Landings process seeks to ensure the design is developed in accordance with the Project Brief and DfE Employer's Requirements with all end user and facility/facilities management requirements and measurable performance targets/requirements being met.

Key activities include:

- confirming the name and contact details for the Contractor's Soft Landings Representative and meeting them on a regular basis in Client Engagement Meetings (CEMs)
- agreeing the zoning strategy for the new/modified site and building(s) to ensure day-to-day operational and facilities requirements (including for out-of-hours/community use) will be met
- verifying the proposals to ensure an integrated environmental design meeting the DfE's environmental performance targets/requirements is being provided
- developing the decant and transition plan to include details for any temporary accommodation, the moving of legacy furniture and equipment, staff training and pupil/student familiarisation, and all post completion activities including in-use performance monitoring
- assuring information in accordance with DfE's Information Management Requirements, and
- for the Employer's Representative to chair and manage a lessons learned workshop at the end of this stage with the Project Team (including operational stakeholders, and Contractor and their delivery team(s)) with all outcomes recorded in the same project Lessons Learned Register

RIBA Stage 4: Technical Design (Contractor's Proposals)

At this stage of the design development process leading up to the submission of Contractor's Proposals, the DfE Soft Landings process seeks to ensure the detailed/technical design is developed in accordance with the Project Brief and DfE Employer's Requirements with all end user and facility/facilities management requirements and measurable performance targets/requirements being met before manufacture/construction commences.

Key activities include:

- verifying the Contractor's Proposals to ensure an integrated environmental design meeting the DfE's environmental performance targets/requirements is being provided
- evidencing that previously recorded outcomes within the Lessons Learned Register have directed the development of the design up to Contractor's Proposals, wherever possible
- ensuring all pre-commencement planning conditions have been discharged by the Local Planning Authority
- agreeing the Construction Phase Plan to minimise disruption to the School/College during construction
- producing a Training Schedule, tailored to suit the facilities/estates management structure to provide training and information proportionate and appropriate to individual roles and responsibilities
- finalising the Decant Protocol and transition plan for any temporary accommodation, the moving of legacy furniture and equipment, staff training and pupil/student familiarisation, and all post completion activities including in-use performance monitoring
- agreeing the metering/sub-metering strategy, commissioning strategy, 5 year Planned Maintenance Plan and Landscape and Ecological Maintenance and Management Plan and determining high level operational and maintenance costs for the new facilities
- assuring information in accordance with DfE's Information Management Requirements, and
- for the Employer's Representative to chair and manage a lessons learned workshop at the end of this stage with the Project Team (including operational stakeholders, and Contractor and their delivery team(s)) with all outcomes recorded in the project Lessons Learned Register

RIBA Stage 5: Manufacturing and Construction (Pre-Handover)

During offsite manufacture (if applicable) and onsite construction, the DfE Soft Landings process focuses on the regular monitoring of build quality and compliance, testing, witnessing and certification, the support and training of end user operators, the collation

and handover of structured digital asset information for effective long-term facilities management, and preparation for all post completion activities including in-use monitoring.

Key activities include:

- regular site inspections by the DfE employed Construction Quality Monitoring (CQM) Team with any identified areas of non conformance recorded and monitored by the CQM Lead in a project Non Conformance and Observation Register until fully rectified by the Contractor in accordance with the Contract
- the inspection and approval of a pre-agreed sample room to a sufficiently advanced stage ahead of the overall programme
- ensuring all pre-occupation planning conditions have been discharged by the Local Planning Authority
- the issuing of 3-4 'soft landings' letters to the Responsible Body/School/College in the 'Countdown to Handover' and in support of their preparations and readiness for accepting various responsibilities at handover (e.g., insurance, installing fire safety/evacuation equipment, coordinating evacuation and lockdown procedures, completing/updating operator risk assessments, arrangements/leases with service providers and/or third party operators, ensuring staff are trained and ready for the operation, maintenance and management of the new facilities etc)
- completion of the Building and Outdoor Environment Readiness and Maintenance Programmes (part of the Master Programme), 6 months in advance of Practical Completion, to capture all end user support activities in the run up to Practical Completion and through to the end of the Rectification Period
- confirmation of a suitable tariff(s) in place for exporting excess electricity generated by on site renewable technology to the grid
- witnessing the testing, commissioning, certification and soak testing of all building services systems just before handover together with thorough inspections of the works to identify any snagging items, which may or may not be significant enough to prevent the safe occupation of the new facilities
- the decanting of legacy furniture and equipment into the new facilities in accordance with the agreed Decant Protocol, with items in their final locations and tested/certified as safe for use where applicable
- staff training on all operational aspects of the new and/or refurbished building(s) and outdoor environment, aligned with the agreed Training Schedule, with all attendance recorded in the Training Register and prerecorded training videos/material handed to the Responsible Body/School/College for future reference/use
- assuring information in accordance with DfE's Information Management Requirements including the Operation & Maintenance (O&M) Manual (containing the Health and Safety File, 5 year Planned Maintenance Plan, Landscape and

Ecological Maintenance and Management Plan, Building User Guide, Building Log Book, final record drawings and test certification)

- agreeing a suitable base for the Contractor's Soft Landings Representative to be stationed at the School/College for one day a week for a period of six weeks post-handover
- the scheduling of dates (including agreeing access arrangements) for all post completion activities including monthly aftercare meetings, monthly Building Performance Evaluation (BPE) reporting, seasonal commissioning of building services systems, and soft landscape maintenance
- the handing over of labelled keys, swipe cards, proximity fobs etc and security responsibilities including alarm setting processes/codes to the Responsible Body/School/College
- the issuing of all signed statutory certificates, collateral warranties, product guarantees, compliance trackers and contract completion certificates/notices, and
- for the Employer's Representative to chair and manage a lessons learned workshop at the end of this stage with the Project Team (including operational stakeholders, and Contractor and their delivery team(s)) with all outcomes recorded in the project Lessons Learned Register

RIBA Stage 6: Handover (including 12-month Rectification Period and Post Completion Activities)

During the 12-month Rectification Period post-handover, the DfE Soft Landings process focuses on the support and further training of end user operators via a period of aftercare and ensuring the facility performs according to the brief and as intended through the resolution of defects, Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE) and other building performance reviews/in-use monitoring in conjunction with the Contractor and their delivery team(s).

Key activities include:

- the Contractor's Soft Landings Representative being present on site for one day a week for a period of six weeks post-handover as support for the School/College and to enable issues to be addressed as soon as they arise, including any additional training
- evidencing that previously recorded outcomes within the Lessons Learned Register have directed handover and support procedures, wherever possible
- monthly aftercare meetings: these may be increased in frequency should the quantum and severity of aftercare issues warrant enhanced communication and oversight
- monthly Building Performance Evaluation (BPE) reporting with in-use consumption and performance data collected over a 15-month period

- completion of routine maintenance within the building(s) by the Responsible Body/School/College in sufficient time and manner to prevent any voiding of warranties, premature degradation and safety risks and documenting all maintenance activities within the Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Manual
- seasonal commissioning of building services systems by the Contractor including heat pumps/boiler plant and controls in the first winter period and ventilation and cooling plant in the first summer period, together with checks of water systems, automatic lighting controls and power settings, with all activity documented within the Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Manual
- whole life carbon reporting
- maintenance of new (protected) soft landscape areas by the Contractor for a minimum period of 12 months post completion or until the Rectification Period ends, whichever is longer⁵. Beyond this period, the Responsible Body/School/College should be familiar with the maintenance requirements for the outdoor environment in accordance with Landscape and Ecological Maintenance and Management Plan
- the identification of any defective items⁶ or 'defects' post-handover, which shall be monitored via a Contractor produced and updated Defects Register and remedied by the Contractor (along with any residual minor snagging items) in accordance with the Contract with all access arrangements prior agreed with the School/College (likely over holiday periods)
- Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE) at the end of the Rectification Period following the process set out by DfE
- outcomes from the planned fire drill post-handover to test procedures including any unexpected consequences from the new arrangements
- for the Employer's Representative to chair and manage the final lessons learned workshop at the end of this stage with the Project Team (including operational stakeholders, and Contractor and their delivery team(s)) with all outcomes recorded in the project Lessons Learned Register, and
- the issuing of the Notice of Completion of Making Good (or any other notice or certification of completion of making good as the Contract requires) and the Project Close-Out Report

⁵ Noting this may be later than the handover of the building(s) should seasonal constraints prevent the planting, seeding or establishment of areas such as trees, seeding and turf by the time of Practical Completion.

⁶ Note: Will not cover damage, misuse or a lack of building maintenance.

2.4 Useful reference information

Information, tools, training and guidance to help responsible bodies operate and maintain their facilities efficiently to reduce running and maintenance costs can be found [here](#).

Further information on managing and making the most of the new facilities can also be found in the DfE's [Good Estate Management for Schools guidance \(GEMS\)](#), which sets out the policies, processes and documents that all responsible bodies should be aware of when managing their estates.

Responsible bodies should also be aware of the DfE's [School estate management standards](#), which set out the practices and processes required to effectively manage the school estate.



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