



Senior Civil Service Performance Management Framework

Supplementary Guidance: Annual Performance Reviews

April 2026



Table of contents

Supplementary Guidance: Annual Performance Reviews	1
Table of contents	2
How to use this Guidance	3
Individual Annual Performance Review	4
Performance Outcomes:	4
Expectation Setting	5
Departmental Annual Performance Review	6
Performance Differentiation and Moderation	7
Review of organisational approach to managing performance	8
Expectation Setting	8
Annex - Model Documentation	10
Annex A - Suggested Structure for Individual Annual Performance Review	10
Annex B - Outcome Agreement Form	12
Annex C - Annual Organisational Review - Model Agenda	15



How to use this Guidance

1. Departments must use the [Senior Civil Service Performance Management Framework](#) as the basis of their performance management policy and process for the Senior Civil Service (SCS). The 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, and the framework should be considered in tandem with the separate policy on ['Managing Poor Performance Policy Procedures for the Senior Civil Service'](#).
2. The SCS Performance Management Framework sets out a series of components that **must** form part of each organisation's performance management approach. It also strongly recommends that departments use Annual Performance Reviews, to combine **Expectation Setting** and **Performance Assessment** components at individual level, and **Performance Differentiation and Moderation** and **Expectation Setting** components at an organisation level, to ensure a holistic and continuous process. This document sets out further guidance on how departments should implement that approach.
3. To that end, it is split into two sections:
 - a. Individual Annual Performance Reviews, including guidance;
 - i. **Performance Assessment** against the agreed outcomes for the previous year; and
 - ii. **Expectation Setting** at an individual level, to agree outcomes including delivery objectives, behaviours and the application of the minimum standards, for the following year.
 - b. Organisational level Annual Performance Reviews, including guidance on;
 - i. **Performance Differentiation and Moderation** of the previous year's outcomes at organisational level; and
 - ii. **Expectation Setting** for the coming year, at an organisational level.
4. This supplementary guidance is intended to provide organisations with additional support to ensure performance management processes around the Annual Organisational Reviews are consistent between organisations, and conducted transparently and fairly.



Individual Annual Performance Review

5. Individual Annual Performance reviews are a meeting between the line manager and member of the SCS and **must** take place between 1 March and 30 April. These meetings are effectively seeking to combine the end year performance assessment with the start of year objective setting meeting, and as such, line managers and members of the SCS may choose to use one of the mandatory quarterly conversations (e.g. Q4) to conduct this meeting. It may also be helpful to combine this meeting with other requirements, such as talent conversations depending on internal organisational priorities.
6. The meeting provides a chance to review an individual's performance holistically, and reflects the fact that performance and delivery is an ongoing process, often with activity continuing outside of discrete performance years. Additionally, combining this activity provides a chance for a formal check in to enable the outcomes of the performance review to feed into the objectives and goals for the future.
7. A suggested structure for the meeting is at **Annex A**, which includes some conversation prompts. Organisations are free to add additional guidance or support, and ultimately line managers are responsible for conducting these conversations which should provide:
 - a. An opportunity to review and assess performance (including delivery against the minimum standards and objectives) for the previous year;
 - b. A discussion and decision on the final performance rating for the previous year; and
 - c. A discussion of the outcomes the individual will achieve in the following year, including how they will demonstrate the minimum standards and achieve their delivery objectives.

Performance Outcomes:

8. In order to meet the requirements of the Framework, the individual and line manager **must** discuss outcomes from the previous year, including:
 - a. **Minimum Standards** - whether the individual has met all of the minimum standards, and the evidence for this. Line managers should note that any individual *who does not meet all of the minimum standards should be rated as partially met and placed on a performance development plan.*
 - b. **Delivery Objectives** - how far the individual has delivered against what they set out to achieve at the beginning of the year. This should include discussion of how they achieved this, including whether they delivered to time, how they worked with others, and the skills and experience required to make this effective. Consideration should be given to whether they exceeded expectations in any objectives, which could be through delivering early, with greater impact and scope than originally required, or to a higher standard. Equally, any shortfall should be discussed in terms of tolerance and impact on delivery, with any objectives where the individual did not meet the requirements contributing to a partially met rating.
9. The individual and line manager **must** then discuss the performance rating that the individual should be given. If the individual has not met the minimum standards, they should be rated as partially met and placed on a performance development plan, regardless of their business delivery objectives. Provided they have met the minimum standards, their performance rating should be a holistic assessment of the individual's performance across the year (i.e. not necessarily just an aggregate of ratings per objective). At the end of this discussion, the line manager is responsible for making the final decision on performance rating, and the outcome should then be recorded according to organisational



practice.

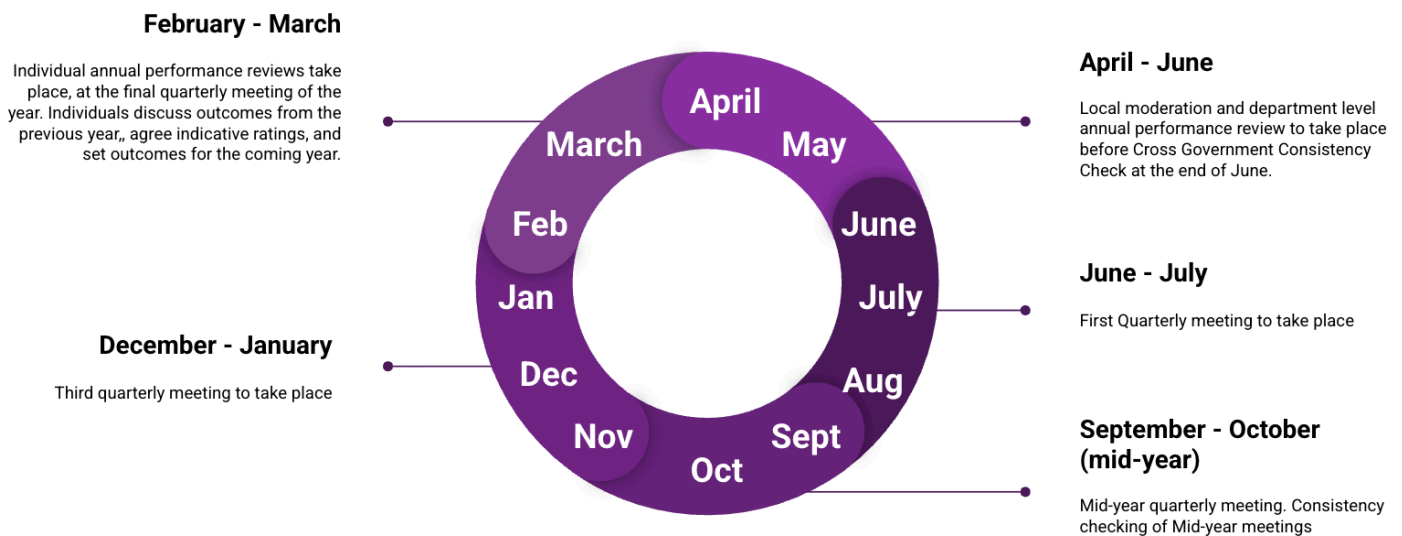
Expectation Setting:

10. The second part of the meeting **must** be used to agree expectations for the coming year. It is perfectly reasonable that in some cases these may be a continuation of the delivery objectives from the previous year, but the opportunity should be taken to review these to ensure they remain aligned to organisational and ministerial priorities.
11. The meeting should include a discussion on ministerial and organisational priorities, and where possible the areas of the organisational plan that the individual will be responsible and/or accountable for delivering. This should be recorded. Equally, the line manager should, as far as possible, share their objectives with their direct report to enable a cascade of objectives, and should encourage their direct reports to do the same within their teams.
12. It is recommended that the meeting results in the completion of an Outcome Agreement Form, similar to the model set out in **Annex B** and available [here](#) as an editable version. This ensures that all elements of expectation setting are covered in the meeting, but also that there is a written record of this agreement. Organisations may introduce different versions of this form, but in order to be consistent with the Framework, they **must** ensure that the following is captured:
 - a. How the individual will demonstrate that they have met the minimum standards in their role;
 - b. What the individual will deliver in the performance year, linked to organisational and ministerial priorities;
 - c. How they will go about delivering this; and
 - d. How they will measure whether or not they have met their objectives.
13. Once completed, individual Outcome Agreement Forms should be submitted to the relevant teams to be sufficiently redacted and anonymised so that a sample can be collated in preparation for the DG to present at the organisational level Annual Performance Review.
14. The meeting may also be used to agree a rhythm of performance check ins for the performance year. At a minimum, these **must** be quarterly, but depending on the work being delivered, the level of support required by the individual, and individual preference, these may occur more frequently.



Departmental Annual Performance Review

15. The organisation level Annual Performance Review seeks to streamline the end year organisational performance moderation, and the start-year expectation setting meeting into one meeting that provides both a review of the previous year’s performance outcomes and the expectations for the following year. It should not replace internal business unit level moderation, but is instead focused on taking a holistic view of SCS performance at an organisational level. The outcomes of this meeting should feed into the cross-government consistency check, held in late June each year.
16. The timeline below outlines key elements of the annual SCS performance management lifecycle, **if a department adopts an Annual Performance Review approach**. As such, this varies slightly from the suggested approach in the Performance Management Framework itself. These dates are indicative but organisations must ensure, where possible, that the end-year moderation meeting takes place **before** the start-year performance expectation setting meeting.



17. Individual Annual Performance Reviews must take place between 1 March and 30 April. The Departmental Annual Performance Review **must** take place between 1 April and 30 June each year.
18. A proposed model agenda for the Departmental Annual Performance Review is available at **Annex C**, although organisations are free to conduct this as they see fit. Organisations may choose to use existing board meetings to host this discussion if that is appropriate, but in order to be consistent with the expectations of the framework, the meeting **must** enable a discussion of:
- a. The previous years’ performance outcomes. This should include:
 - i. The overall distribution of performance outcomes (often referred to as the ‘performance curve’), specifically in light of the expected distribution set out in the SCS Performance Management Framework.
 - ii. Assessment of performance by grade, and potentially by business area (where size of organisation allows).
 - iii. Assessment of impact of performance on protected characteristics.



- b. The consistency of objectives via dip testing Outcome Agreement forms
- c. The performance expectations that should be upheld across the organisation
- d. Any changes to the organisational approach to performance management for the coming year.

19. Where possible and relevant, the meetings should be attended by:

- a. Permanent Secretary (preferable chair);
- b. Directors General;
- c. HR Director / Chief People Officer;
- d. Where relevant, heads of profession.

Performance Differentiation and Moderation

20. The SCS Performance Management Framework sets out that organisations will conduct a local level, business unit, moderation panel, and then an organisation level moderation. The local level moderation will be focused more on dip testing outcomes for consistency, whereas the organisation level moderation **must** consider the overall distribution of outcomes and approach to performance management, rather than individual ratings. This guidance document is concerned with the latter, although it should be acknowledged that in some organisations it may not be possible to separate these meetings (such as where the SCS cadre is too small, or there is insufficient resources to do both levels). As such, organisations may need to add to the process described below in order to meet the requirements of the framework.

21. At organisational level, the review of the previous year's performance outcomes will be largely concerned with assessing the shape of the performance curve. Organisations may wish to consider how their own outcomes compared to that of the cross-government expected distribution (15% *Exceeded*, 20% *High Performing*, 60% *Achieved*, 5% *Partially Met*), although should note that this is not a forced distribution and so performance ratings should not be changed to fit the curve. Instead, any reflections should be used to inform the organisation's approach to performance management for the coming year. In addition, and where data allows, organisations should also consider:

- a. Outcomes by grade; and
- b. Outcomes by protected characteristic.

22. Organisations **must** also consider how poor and underperformance has been managed in the previous performance year. This should include reviewing data on:

- a. the percentage and number of individuals receiving the lowest performance rating (*Partially Met*);
- b. the number on Performance Development Plans;
- c. the number subject to formal poor performance management procedures;
- d. The number dismissed for poor performance; and



- e. Any other indicators of moving poor performers out of the organisation (e.g. through Mutually Agreed Exits, or the number of non-regrettable leavers).

23. Organisations should also consider how far the performance distribution curve marries against the overall organisational performance. It should follow that if an organisation is delivering well against business plans and ministerial priorities, the SCS cadre on the whole would be achieving and potentially exceeding their objectives. Where organisations are facing challenges or not performing as expected, this would also likely be reflected in the number of poor or underperforming SCS.

Review of organisational approach to managing performance

24. From the discussion of performance outcomes, and in particular reflecting on how this marries against the overall organisational performance and the shape of their distribution, organisations should consider the effectiveness of their performance management process.

25. As a matter of principle, good performance management processes should allow the organisation to:

- a. Set individual objectives which directly cascade from KPIs set for Permanent Secretaries to ensure that they directly relate to the delivery of the Prime Minister's priorities for government priorities and organisational objectives communicated to Secretaries of State.
- b. Enable continuous improvement through development conversations, aimed at continuing to raise the overall standard of performance
- c. Incentivise and reward high performance, particularly those delivering beyond what is required and those who are making real impact for citizens and against organisational objectives
- d. Identify and manage poor performance in a timely manner - helping individuals improve to meet the required standard, or enabling a timely exit from the organisation for those who are unable to achieve the standard

26. Organisations should reflect on elements most relevant to their workforce and performance outcomes. As part of this process, they could also consider reviewing:

- a. Bonus payments, both in terms of distribution, value, and the use of in year awards for in the moment recognition
- b. Any themes emerging from grievance and appeal processes
- c. The use of, and interaction with, other management practices, including talent, mutually agreed exits and recruitment.
- d. Any changes to central policy and how these may be implemented by the organisation.

Expectation Setting

27. Following from the conversations on the organisation's approach to managing performance, and in order to remain consistent with the requirements of the Framework, the meeting **must** then be used as an opportunity to reflect on the expectations for the coming year. This may include:

- a. Reviewing the guidance on what constitutes an *Exceeded*, *High Performing*, *Achieving* or *Partially Met* rating (building on the minimum requirements in the framework as necessary)



- b. Reviewing organisational business plans, ministerial priorities and whether there needs to be any new areas of focus, including supporting skill and resource building in certain areas, or re-establishing of expectations on certain areas of delivery

28. This part of the meeting should also include **dip testing a sample of outcome agreement forms**. These should be checked for consistency of baseline expectations, including assessing to ensure a consistent amount of stretch and challenge between individuals in different business areas, consistent opportunities for reward and recognition, and consistent understanding of what would constitute failing to deliver outcomes and therefore poor performance. This should also consider how far these align with the expectations that have been set for the coming year, including checking that each set of objectives have a clear line to business objectives and ministerial priorities. Directors General must come prepared to present the sample of outcome agreement forms from the SCS in their business area.



Annex - Model Documentation

Annex A - Suggested Structure for Individual Annual Performance Review

Welcome:

- Line manager to explain the purpose of the annual performance review, the structure of the meeting and check that the individual has understood the roles and responsibilities in and ahead of this meeting.

Review and assess performance for the previous year:

- Line manager to ask the individual to set out how they have delivered against the minimum standards:
 - “What evidence is there that you inspired your team to deliver this year?”
 - “How did you operate within the bounds of [X] control and ensure maximum value for money in delivering [X]?”
 - “What feedback did you receive from [X, Y, Z] stakeholders in other government departments and partner organisations as a result of working together across the system?”
- Line manager to ask the individual to set out how they have delivered against their delivery objectives, including *how* they achieved this
 - “You set out to deliver [X] at the start of the year, how would you assess your success?”
 - “What evidence is there to indicate your success?”
 - “You noted the need to engage with external stakeholders, how do you know this engagement was successful?”
 - “What barriers did you face and overcome?”
 - “[X element] of the project was delayed / not delivered to the required standard / caused concern for customers. How do you think that affected the overall impact of the project?”
- Line manager to communicate indicative performance rating with the individual. Individuals may wish to reflect on this and share any further comments with the line manager.

Setting Expectations for the following performance year:

- Individuals should complete the Outcome Agreement Form (**Annex B**) as part of this conversation. This may be completed in preparation for the discussion.
- Line Manager to ask the individual to set out how they will continue to demonstrate that they will meet the minimum standards for the coming year. This may be a continuation of their current practice, or may need to be updated to reflect any contextual changes.
 - “Will you continue to demonstrate that you have met the minimum standards in the same way this year, and so I should continue to expect to see evidence of [X]?”



- “In light of the headcount reductions in your area this year, how do you think we should assess evidence that you have met the leadership and management minimum standard?”
- Line manager to review any changes in organisational or ministerial priorities that may affect the individual’s area of work.
 - “With the appointment of [X], I think it is important that we review [X]. How do you see this impacting your work priorities?”
 - “The Government has set a clear intention for greater use of technology and digital innovation. How do you think this may affect your priorities for the next year?”
 - “I have been asked by Minister [X] to lead a new project on [X]. How could your team support me with this?”
- Line manager to ask the individual to set out their business delivery objectives for the coming year. Again, this may be a continuation of current work, or reshaping priorities in light of wider changes. It should also include, for each, a discussion of what they will deliver, how they will deliver it, and how success will be measured.
 - “As we enter the new performance year, what are your key milestones in the next phase of project [X]?”
 - “What needs to be true in your area by the end of the performance year for [X] ministerial priority to be delivered?”
 - “How will you meet these targets?”
 - “Who do we need to engage on this, and how will you go about doing that?”
 - “Are there any different skills you should consider, or barriers that you anticipate needing to overcome?”
 - “I note you have said you will deliver these milestones by [X], I would consider it exceptional performance if you were to achieve this [X] months early, although in light of barriers acknowledging some reasonable slippage of [X] wouldn’t affect the outcome.”
- Line manager to explore with individuals any development or further support they may need.



Annex B - Outcome Agreement Form

This form is in two parts:

- Minimum Standards
- Delivery Objectives

Both sections must be completed by the individual, discussed with the line manager, and put forward for validation at the Annual Organisational Reviews to ensure these are consistent with the expectations set across the SCS in each organisation.

Line Managers must review objectives set to ensure they include all the information as required by this form, and are consistent with others in the business area.

Minimum Standards:

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 and therefore must be met for a member of the SCS to be deemed as performing adequately in their role.

A conversation must take place at the start of the year between you and your line manager to agree how these standards will be demonstrated in a way which is relevant to your role. You should agree how you will determine whether you have 'met' these minimum standards. This should include how the demonstration will be evidenced and measured, so that tangible evidence can be discussed at the end of the year.

Delivery against these is assessed as 'met' or 'not met'. Those who receive a '**not met**' marking for the minimum standards **must be automatically deemed to be 'partially met' in their overall performance, regardless of how they perform against their objectives.**

Minimum Standard Descriptor	How will this be demonstrated in <i>my</i> role? What <i>evidence</i> will there be that I have met this?	Met / Not Met
Prioritise value for money and efficiency for the taxpayer, including delivering savings in your department and making trade-offs where necessary to benefit the Wider Civil Service. Be accountable for spend in accordance with HMT guidance on managing public money, spend controls and delegations.		
Ensure high-quality delivery of government priorities through proactive management which values expertise. Hold teams to account for performance. Build and empower productive teams by removing barriers to delivery and championing innovation.		
Take responsibility for, and show pride in, Civil Service culture and high		



<p>performance. Set an example for your teams, ensuring your leadership is grounded in the high standards and values embodied in the Civil Service Code. Ensure the Civil Service Code is well understood, and adhered to across your teams. Lead cross-government initiatives beyond your remit, and empower teams to contribute to the long-term vision. Take an active leadership role to deliver reform of the Civil Service.</p>		
<p>Find, attract and grow talent from all backgrounds and experiences. Builds an inspiring, dynamic environment that great people want to work in.</p>		

Delivery Objectives:

At the beginning of the performance year you should identify your objectives; *what* you need to achieve over the year; *how* these will be achieved; and the *success indicators* for how these will be measured. This should also give due consideration to what tolerance is acceptable if objectives are not met, and what would constitute exceeding an objective.

At the end of the performance year, your manager will formally assess your performance in absolute terms against the objectives and success indicators set out in this form. Based on that review, they will assign a rating, which will be moderated across the organisation.

You are responsible for building up a portfolio of evidence during the year on how you have performed against objectives, and how you have achieved the success indicators.

Objectives **must:**

- Have a direct correlation with the organisation's business objectives
- Be measurable. Objectives should upfront consider how success will be demonstrated and measured, in tangible terms. Consideration should also be given upfront to the tolerance levels on these measures, and what would constitute exceeding the objectives. This will enable fair and transparent moderation of objectives across the organisation, and more meaningful performance conversations with your line manager.
- Be discussed and signed off by line managers, who will dip tests across the organisation to ensure consistency of expectation
- Be kept under regular review. If organisational plans change and require the individual to deliver different outcomes this must be reflected in the objectives and

It is recommended that each member of the SCS has **no fewer than 3 and no more than 6** objectives.



Objective - <i>What</i>	Behaviours - <i>How</i>	Success Indicators - <i>Measure</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What specifically will you deliver? What are you accountable / responsible for? • How does this correlate to the organisation's business objectives? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who do you need to engage, how will you go about this? • What skills will you, and others, need to demonstrate in order to achieve the objective? How will you go about addressing any skills gaps? • What barriers or risks do you anticipate? How will you plan for or mitigate these? • How will you motivate, draw on and deliver through others, whilst promoting good leadership and management practices? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When will this be delivered? What is the tolerance for delays that would still constitute success? How far ahead of time would constitute exceeding this objective? • What tangible evidence / outcome will you use to demonstrate that this has been achieved? What tolerance is there for any shortfalls, and what would constitute exceeding the objective? • How will you evidence your behaviours and relationships with others? What evidence could you collect, and what metrics would indicate success?
EXAMPLE:		
<p>To publish a White Paper on the future of Probation Services by November 2026</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in the development of project-delivery skills within my Directorate in order to ensure accountability and responsibility is built in to deliver against set milestones and the team are working towards a shared aim. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Reskill existing team, avoiding the need for further investment in resources. • Engage cross-government with the Home Office, and MHCLG on the scope of review and ensure joined-up ambition in this area. • Build and maintain strong partnerships across institutional barriers to consult with local authorities and relevant social enterprises to identify innovative approaches and alternative perspectives on existing approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White Paper to be published by 30 November 2026. 1 month tolerance for issues outside of the team's control. If published before November, in line with the required standard, this will have exceeded expectations. • Team reskilling sessions to take place before 1 May 2026. Allow some slippage in mop-up sessions until the end of June, but output should increase by end of June - evidenced through increase in delivery of activity against shared project plan and reporting on proof points. • Monthly meetings with the Home Office and MHCLG. Chair Round Tables with local authorities and social enterprises. Minutes used as evidence. • People Survey scores to increase in L&D and engagement in work. No decline in resource / workload



		questionnaires. Exceeding if these scores also increase.

Overall Performance Rating:

Assessment:

Use this section to capture a note of the discussion that resulted in the performance rating.



Annex C - Annual Organisational Review - Model Agenda

Attendees:

- Permanent Secretary (Chair)
- All departmental DGs
- Departmental Heads of Profession
- HR Director(s)/Chief People Officer
- Head of SCS Performance Management
- Head of SCS Reward

Papers:

- Departmental Performance Curve and data pack, including:
 - Breakdown by grade
 - Breakdown by protected characteristic
- Data on outcomes for under performers
- Sample of Outcome Agreement Forms
- Departmental performance policy and expectation / standards
- (Proposed amendments to SCS Performance Management process for 2027-28)

Item	Discussion	Lead
1.	2025-26 Performance Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assessment of the performance distribution overall, by grade and by protected characteristic. ● Review performance distribution against cross-government expected distribution ● Data on outcomes for under performers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● HRD to present
2.	2026-27 Performance Expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review departmental policy, with specific focus on the expectations for each rating. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● HRD to present
3.	Proposed Amendments to SCS Performance Management for 2026-27 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflect on any changes to central policy ● Reflect on any changes required as a result of departmental review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● HRD to present
4.	Validation of expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sample of the Outcome Agreement Forms to be dip tested and discussed, with particular emphasis on how these draw from organisational plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● DGs to present a sample from their business areas