



Government  
People Group

# Senior Civil Service Performance Management Framework

April 2026



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## How to use the Framework

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](#).

## Roles and Responsibilities in the Performance Management Process

6. **Individuals** - Members of the SCS are responsible for their performance throughout the year, and engaging with the policy and process fully. They should collate all the necessary evidence required to demonstrate they are performing at the standard required, and are responsible for drafting their objectives in agreement with their line manager, and notifying them of any need to update their objectives or making them aware if there are any reasons why they may not be able to achieve these.
7. **Line Managers** - Responsible for ensuring individual annual performance reviews are completed on time, and agreeing performance objectives with their direct reports ahead of time (and ensuring direct reports are doing this with their direct reports). To support these annual conversations, line managers are also responsible for ensuring quarterly conversations are taking place, and that dips in, or poor, performance is tackled as soon as it arises.
8. **Directors General** - Accountable for the timely completion of individual annual reviews and any local level moderation in their business area. Responsible for presenting data from their business area at the organisation level annual performance review, and cascading outcomes of the meeting to the SCS in their area of responsibility.
9. **Permanent Secretary** - Accountable for overall organisational approach to performance management, and therefore overall performance outcomes of the cadre. Must cascade their KPIs to Directors General, and the rest of the SCS cadre.
10. **HR Directors** - Accountable for preparing necessary data for departmental and cross-government performance meetings. Responsible for attending the annual cross-government consistency check to discuss organisational performance outcomes in light of those of wider government.
11. **Heads of Profession** (where applicable) - Responsible for providing technical and professional input into organisational annual performance reviews, in terms of assessing the consistency of both outcome and expectations.
12. Beyond the roles and responsibilities within the process, **all SCS** are responsible for driving an effective performance culture that ensures delivery for the government of the day. To that end, it is important that all SCS are aware of, and deliver against, clear expectations set by Ministers, and subsequently tackle underperformance and reward high performance against those expectations.

## Key Elements of the Performance Management Process

13. The performance management process is made up of a number of elements which are explored in more detail throughout this document. Each organisation **must** ensure that their performance arrangements include:



- a. **Expectation Setting:** At departmental level, this must take place at the beginning of the annual performance year, and aim to make clear the performance expectations and priorities for members of the SCS, in part, through cascading the objectives and Permanent Secretary KPIs set by ministers. At an individual level, this must include agreeing outcomes for the performance year, namely: **setting objectives** which must focus on both the what and the how, and agreeing how the individual will demonstrate the **minimum standards**.
  - b. **Regular performance conversations:** these must be conducted **at least 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 at a minimum at the mid-year and end year conversations**, to demonstrate progress of objectives.
  - c. **Performance assessment:** a performance rating recommendation for the whole performance year should be discussed between the individual and their line manager in the final quarterly conversation. The line manager will ultimately make the final decision on the recommended rating put forward for moderation.
  - d. **Performance Differentiation and Moderation:** following end-year performance conversations, boards meet to moderate SCS performance ratings as a whole in both localised panels by business unit and an overall departmental level moderation meeting by evaluating the distribution curve. It is best practice for departments to also implement mid-year consistency checks, operating as a lighter touch moderation, to evaluate the distribution of indicative ratings, including across protected characteristics. Departments must report on their overall end-year at the cross-government consistency check, which will take place in June each year.
14. In practice, it is strongly recommended that departments combine the **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.
15. To that end, we strongly recommend that departments implement an **Annual Performance Review** approach to performance management, including **Individual Annual Performance Reviews** which seek to assess delivery against objectives, and set objectives for the following year, and **Departmental Annual Performance Reviews** which assess the overall performance outcomes of the department, the efficacy of their performance process, and set expectations for the following year, including some consistency checking of objectives. Supplementary guidance for how departments may wish to implement these Annual Performance Reviews is available [here](#).
16. If not adopting the Annual Performance Review approach, a recommended timeline is set out below. This is recommended, but individual assessments **must** take place between 1 March and 30 April and departmental moderation **must** be completed by 30 June each year. A slightly amended version is set out in the supplementary guidance on Annual Performance Reviews, to illustrate how this process may vary if a department agrees to take that approach.



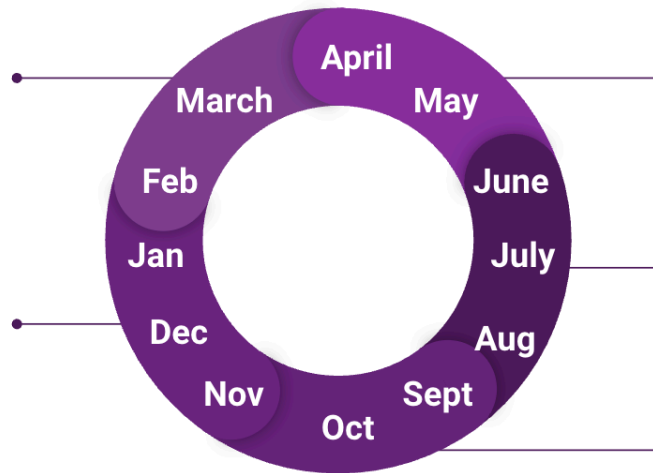
**February - March (end-year)**

Final quarterly meeting (end-year meeting) to take place with indicative marking.

Local moderation and department wide consistency checks to take place in end of March

**December - January**

Third quarterly meeting to take place



**April - May (start-year)**

Performance Expectation Setting meeting takes place. Individuals agree objectives, how they will demonstrate minimum standards

**June - July**

Cross Government Consistency check to take place end of June.

First Quarterly meeting to take place

**September - October (mid-year)**

Mid-year quarterly meeting. Consistency checking of Mid-year meetings

17. Each element of the performance management process is discussed in greater detail below.



## Expectation Setting

18. Each performance year must begin with expectation setting, at a departmental and individual level.

### Department Level Expectation Setting:

19. At a departmental level, the performance expectation setting **must** ensure:

- a. a consistent understanding of **government and ministerial priorities** set out in Permanent Secretaries KPIs, to be cascaded into individual objectives. This must include dip testing of objectives to ensure consistency and alignment to Permanent Secretary and Ministerial priorities. These may be subject to further dip testing at the request of the Cabinet Secretary, or Ministers
- b. agree the departmental approach to **minimum standards, assessment criteria for each rating, and behaviours**, which can then be communicated to all SCS so that they are aware of the expectations that they will be assessed against at the conclusion of the performance year
- c. 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

20. Departments should 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.

21. Departments may also wish to consider how they assess the consistency of objective setting, to ensure similar expectations are held across the organisation. Those adopting the recommended Annual Performance Review approach will notice the recommendation to dip test objectives, and this may be a beneficial approach for all departments to implement in terms of ensuring consistency of expectation setting.

22. 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 that department **must** adopt, but departments may build on these as necessary.

Performance Rating	Descriptors	Additional Guidance
<b>Exceeding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All behaviours beyond what was expected</li> <li>• Met minimum standards</li> <li>• Exceeding outcomes set in objectives.</li> </ul>	<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"> <li>• A member of the SCS who delivered exactly what was agreed</li> </ul>



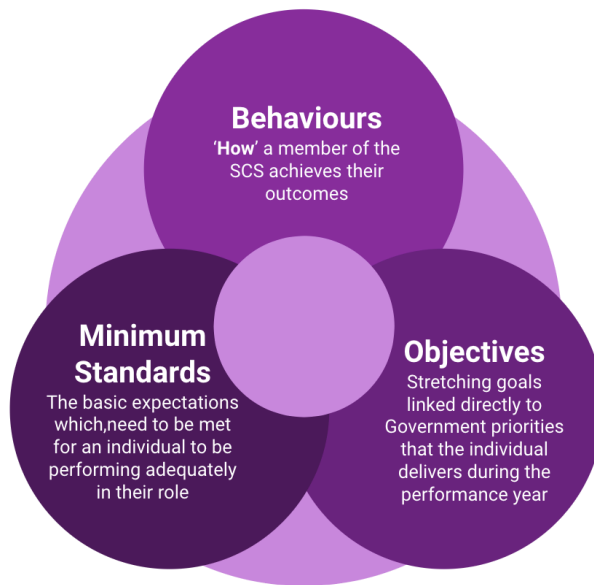
Performance Rating	Descriptors	Additional Guidance
		<p>in their objectives <b>should not be given this rating.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A member of the SCS who went above what was expected of them in the delivery of their objectives, but who did so not in line with the expected behaviours of their role, such as delivering at the expense of others or deliberately working in a silo at the expense of other projects , <b>should not be given this rating.</b></li> <li>• Any individual who did not meet the minimum standards <b>must not</b> be given this rating.</li> </ul>
<b>High performing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some behaviours beyond what was expected</li> <li>• Met Minimum Standards</li> <li>• Delivered beyond what was expected in some objectives</li> </ul>	<p>This is likely to be appropriate where the members of the SCS consistently performed above and beyond <b>some</b> of their agreed stretching objectives. They should have <b>at least achieved</b> 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 <b>not</b> be given this rating.</p> <p><i>Examples</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A member of the SCS who delivered exactly what was agreed in their objectives <b>should not be given this rating.</b></li> <li>• 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 <b>should not be given this rating.</b></li> <li>• 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 <b>should be given this rating.</b></li> <li>• Any individual who did not meet the minimum standards <b>must not</b> be given this rating.</li> </ul>
<b>Achieving</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviours as expected</li> <li>• Met Minimum Standards</li> <li>• Delivered as expected against all objectives</li> </ul>	<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"> <li>• A member of the SCS who delivered exactly what was agreed in their objectives <b>should be placed in this box.</b></li> <li>• 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 <b>may be given this rating</b> if it was felt that this was particularly inconsistent, or if they were not always demonstrating the expected behaviours.</li> <li>• Any individual who did not meet the minimum standards <b>must not</b> be given this rating.</li> </ul>



Performance Rating	Descriptors	Additional Guidance
<b>Partially met</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Behaviours not at standard expected, or inconsistent</li> <li>Did not deliver as expected against some objectives</li> <li>Minimum standards not met <u>regardless of other delivery</u></li> </ul>	<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 <b>must</b> 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, or that the individual failed to meet the minimum standards..</p> <p><i>Examples</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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, <b>should be placed in this box.</b></li> <li>A member of the SCS who did not demonstrate, or inconsistently demonstrated, the behaviours required of them to fulfil their objectives <b>should be placed in this box.</b></li> </ul>

**Individual Expectation Setting:**

23. At an individual level, expectations **must** be set across **three core components**, as set out below:



24. Line managers **must** ensure that all members of the SCS complete an Outcome Agreement form at the start of each performance year. A model Outcome Agreement Form is available, [here](#) although departments may choose to use their own form, provided this captures:

- How the individual will demonstrate that they have met the minimum standards in their role;
- What the individual will deliver in the performance year, flowing directly from the Prime Minister's priorities.
- How they will go about delivering this; and



- d. How they will measure whether or not they have met their objectives.

**Minimum Standards:**

25. 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.
26. This is a critical element designed to drive better outcomes and standards of senior leadership for the Civil Service. 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**.
27. 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.
28. During the start year expectation setting, departments may wish to give some consideration to how the standards should apply across the department. 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.
29. Crucially, a conversation between each member of the SCS and their line manager will 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 metrics and the evidence required to support this decision.
30. The **Minimum Standards** require all SCS to:



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 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 Civil Service Reform.



Find, attract and grow talent from all backgrounds and experiences. Builds an inspiring, dynamic environment that great people want to work in.



31. 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:**

32. Objectives must flow directly from the KPIs set for Permanent Secretaries, to ensure that they directly relate to the delivery of the Prime Minister's priorities for government and organisational objectives communicated to Secretaries of State. They should reflect what the individual is responsible for delivering during the performance year, with clear lines of responsibility and accountability by grade.

- a. In accordance with the separate policy, Permanent Secretaries must have their KPIs agreed by relevant ministers. This process will happen as soon as possible in the performance year, and usually is expected to be completed by May.
- b. Departments should give consideration to following a similar process and securing Ministerial sign-off for objectives of Directors General, in order to ensure alignment with key priorities.
- c. As part of expectation setting meetings, a sample of objectives **must** be dip tested for consistency and alignment to Permanent Secretary and Ministerial priorities. These may be subject to further dip testing at the request of the Cabinet Secretary, or Ministers.
- d. 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.

33. When setting objectives, **must** ensure:

- a. the relevance of the objectives to organisational and cross-government priorities by ensuring all objectives directly flow from KPIs set for Permanent Secretaries, to ensure the cascade of the Prime Minister's priorities
- b. the success measures, metrics or performance outcomes that can be used to assess performance against the objective, the level required to exceed expectations, and the tolerance for delays which would still constitute achieving the objectives
- 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.

34. 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.
35. 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.
36. The onus is on the job holder for drafting their objectives and deciding upon the associated behaviours. **It is the responsibility of the line manager to agree to the objectives of their direct reports.**
37. Should they wish, departments can also take team-based approaches to objectives, providing they fulfil the mandatory criteria set out in this framework.

### **Behaviours:**

38. 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.
39. 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:
- a. 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;
  - b. 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.

40. 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 Standard** - 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 Standard, which sets out expectations of 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.



## Regular performance conversations

41. 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 **must hold performance conversations at least quarterly**, although it is good practice to hold these more frequently, such as monthly. During these conversations:
- a. Line managers **must** evaluate 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 **must** 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' and 'how' 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 recording of these discussions must take place at the mid- and end-year points**.
    - i. They may 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.
  - c. **Managers must 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.
  - d. 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.
  - e. Managers and job holders should make time to discuss **development needs**, longer-term career aspirations.
42. 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. A good practice approach of this would be:
- a. monthly performance check-ins accompanied by more formal quarterly conversations, which **must** be recorded at the mid- and end-year points;



- b. regular collection of performance ratings, which **must** be done at minimum at the mid- and end-year points. This may be on a central database which can be tracked across the department;
- c. regular collection of data on formal poor performance, informal performance dips, and subsequent actions and outcomes to address these issues, which **must** be collected at mid- and end-year at minimum.



## Underperformance

43. 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 not performing to the expected level in the SCS and include provisions that act as a bridge to poor performance procedures.
44. 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.**
45. 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.
46. 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.
47. There are a variety of reasons for an ongoing dip in performance, including skills gaps, misunderstanding of expectations, and the impact of relationships at work. Line managers should consider training, coaching and mentoring, as well as ensuring they are clearly setting expectations and providing stretching work and necessary support.
48. **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:
- do not deliver required business outcomes or value for money
  - impair the standard, reputation and professionalism of the Civil Service
  - disrupt the flow of work and increase the workloads of their colleagues
  - cause resentment and lower morale
  - set a bad example to those they manage
  - impact on the leadership and direction of the team and the Civil Service.
49. If a member of the SCS is deemed not to be meeting the **minimum standards** at any point in the performance year, **or** is otherwise 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.

50. If, after a reasonable improvement period (recommended no longer than 3 months), the member of the SCS still requires **a performance development plan**, they must be **placed on formal poor performance measures** in accordance with 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.
51. 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.
52. 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

53. 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 **formal minimum standards decisions and box rating recommendations** (*Exceeding, High Performing, Achieving, Partially Met*) should be discussed between the individual and their line manager.
54. As with the quarterly conversation, the line manager **must** first make an assessment as to whether the **individual has met the minimum standards**. A binary *Met* or *Not Met* assessment must be given. If the individual receives a *Not Met* assessment, they must automatically receive a partially met overall marking for the performance year.
55. 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**. Rather than assigning a rating to each individual objective and behaviour, managers will instead evaluate performance as a whole. Equal weight should be given both to *what* and *how* these objectives were achieved to ensure a balanced focus on delivery and behaviours.
56. Job holders and managers must agree a written record of the discussion and this should be recorded on the Outcome Agreement Form. A model version of this form can be found on the SCS performance management [landing page](#) on gov.uk.
57. 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.
58. In-year and end-year non-consolidated awards should be given in line with the guidance set out in the SCS Pay Practitioners Guidance.
59. Should the individual wish to challenge their performance rating, they should follow organisational guidance on how this should be done. This may include using the existing organisational dispute resolution processes, or separate arrangements such as asking an independent party to review the evidence and the decision reached. In principle, decisions should be made at the lowest possible level, and it is preferable to reach an agreement through informal discussions as far as possible. We recommend that appeals should only be made on the grounds of procedural disputes, or if further evidence is available that was not available at the time of the original meeting. *Individuals should note that it is their responsibility to bring and present all evidence available at the time of the meeting, and failing to prepare for the meeting is unlikely to be effective grounds for appeal.*



## Performance differentiation and moderation

60. 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.
61. 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.
62. The following table sets out further detail on when individuals are to be considered in and out of scope of moderation, and where / at what grade they should be moderated at in relevant scenarios. As a matter of principle, if individuals move to another organisation after moderation but before any performance related payments are made, the new organisation **must** honour any relevant non-consolidated payment on behalf of the previous employer.

Scenario		Action taken with regards to moderation
<b>Permanent Changes</b>		
1	Promoted to an SCS grade, from an SCS or delegated grade, before 1st January	Moderate performance at the grade the individual has been promoted to.
2	Promoted within the SCS, from another SCS grade, on or after 1st January	Moderate performance at the lower grade, before the individual was promoted.
3	Promoted to SCS from delegated grade on or after 1st January	Not in scope for SCS moderation. Departments may moderate at delegated grade.
4	Appointed to SCS from outside the Civil Service before 1st January	Moderate for the period of the performance year worked.
5	Appointed to SCS from outside the Civil Service on or after 1st January	Not in scope. Performance conversation could take place but not moderated for this performance year.
6	Moves to a new organisation before 1st January	Moderate the individual in the new organisation, with input (e.g. feedback) from the previous organisation.
7	Moves to a new organisation on or after 1st January	Moderate the individual in the previous organisation, with input (e.g. feedback) from the new organisation.
8	Leaves Civil Service for any reason before 31st March	Out of scope for moderation.
<b>Temporary Changes</b>		
9	Temporary promotion to SCS from a delegated grade	An individual must have been working at an SCS for 60 working days in order to be eligible for inclusion. If the approach to delegated performance and temporary promotion allows, it is recommended that moderation takes place at the grade they spent the majority of the year.
10	Temporary promotion within the SCS (e.g. from SCS1 to SCS2)	Moderate at the grade where the individual spent the greater part of the performance year.



11	On loan between organisations	Moderate in the organisation where the individual spent the greater part of the performance year.
12	Planned absence such as a career break	Provided the individual has been in post for 60 working days of the performance year, they are eligible for moderation. In this instance, objectives should be refined to reflect the period of the year the individual is in post for, and the process should be condensed to allow for an annual review to take place before they go on leave and again when they return. If they are in post for 59 working days or less, they should not receive a performance rating and are out of scope for moderation.
13	Unplanned absence such as sickness absence	Provided the individual has been in post for 60 working days of the performance year, they are eligible for moderation. In this instance, the line manager should assess their performance for the period they were in post for, where possible and appropriate, engaging with the individual on this. If they are in post for 59 working days or less, they should not receive a performance rating and are out of scope for moderation.
14	Maternity Leave	Provided the individual has been in post for 60 working days of the performance year, they are eligible for moderation. In this instance, objectives should be refined to reflect the period of the year the individual is in post for, and the process should be condensed to allow for an annual review to take place before they go on leave and again when they return. If they are in post for 59 working days or less, they should not receive a performance rating and are out of scope for moderation.

63. 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.
64. 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.
65. Following these localised moderation panels, departments **must conduct overall departmental level moderation** meetings. In these overall moderation meetings, Directors General, Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Profession **must evaluate the overall distribution curve, 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.



66. 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%

67. 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 arbitrability. 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.
68. The distribution should only be reviewed during consistency check 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.
69. 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 far 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.
70. 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

71. 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
72. In addition, the Government People Group will collect data on an annual basis on formal and informal poor performance. To this end, departments should consider how they best illustrate their approach to managing poor performance in the SCS cadre, and should consider keeping a record of:
- the percentage and number of SCS receiving the lowest performance rating (*Partially Met*);
  - the number on Performance Development Plans;
  - the number subject to formal poor performance management procedures;
  - The number dismissed for poor performance; and
  - Any other indicators of moving poor performers out of the organisation (e.g. through Mutually Agreed Exits, or the number of non-regrettable leavers).
73. 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 must 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 acknowledge and incentivise as a result of this.
74. 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.
75. 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.