



National Infrastructure
& Service Transformation
Authority

Becoming an Assurance Reviewer for the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA)

This guidance provides information on how to become an Assurance Reviewer for NISTA, including details of the application process. The guidance is aimed at serving civil servants/public sector employees.

Applicants outwith the public sector can refer to the guidance but should contact gateway.helpdesk@nista.gov.uk for further information.

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1. Overview - What do NISTA Assurance Reviewers do?

The National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA) reviews the Government's most complex and high-risk projects, initiates and manages major project assurance, provides independent assessment of project performance at critical points in the life-cycle, allows projects to take appropriate corrective actions and informs central government of project risks. Review teams comprising independent delivery experts from across government and the private sector are brought together to scrutinise a project and make recommendations to improve the chances of successful delivery.

NISTA reviews carry significant weight and can change the course of major programmes, making better use of taxpayers' money, and in some cases, stopping failing programmes. They often inform key decisions, for example, approval of HMT funding, awarding of contracts or go-live of a new service. This is only possible with a strong community of active reviewers working on behalf of NISTA.

Reviewers directly contribute to the successful delivery of Government's most complex and high-profile projects. In releasing their staff to undertake reviews, departments make a significant investment in their people and the growth of Government's delivery capability. Reviews also give staff the opportunity to reflect on their own skills and how they can be improved. This peer to peer learning is key to growing a strong, government wide delivery capability.

Reviews are intense, hard work and incredibly rewarding. Meeting other reviewers and becoming an effective unit in a short space of time requires exceptional teamwork. Review teams are required to quickly absorb a wealth of information, probe teams to uncover potential issues and develop evidenced risk-based recommendations. As a reviewer you may interview permanent secretaries and ministers, as well as subject matter experts, providers and users, so you must have the confidence to question and challenge stakeholders as well as the experience to develop recommendations that will really make a difference.

"I get real satisfaction from the knowledge that I am participating in the successful delivery of some of the government's most challenging projects."

Following accreditation and training, you will participate in your first review as a "rookie" under the auspices of an experienced review team leader. With experience you can also progress to become a team leader yourself and lead larger, higher risk project reviews. Our most senior review team leaders advise the Mega Project Decision Panel (MPDP) which makes investment decisions on the highest risk projects such as Dreadnought, HS2 and Sizewell C.

As a reviewer you can take personal satisfaction in helping peers deliver their projects. Undertaking a review provides the opportunity to tackle a task from start to finish and deliver a high-quality outcome in a very short space of time. There's no better way to connect with other delivery professionals from across government and beyond, and to learn from their experience.



2. Criteria – What skills and experience does a reviewer need?

For all reviewer roles you must have a demonstrably strong background in delivering projects or initiatives, with practical expertise in one or more of the following core business areas:

- portfolio management
- project delivery
- digital delivery
- change & transformation management
- operations management
- policy
- energy & net zero
- estates, properties & facilities
- construction & infrastructure
- finance
- contracts
- commercial & procurement
- transport

You must also have the skills and the attitude to thrive in intense and sometimes challenging situations, incisively getting to the heart of issues, delivering difficult messages and being robust and resilient in the face of challenge and delivering and receiving feedback.

You should be:

- a team player who is content to be led by less senior staff where appropriate;
- able to draft logical, clearly expressed prose to a tight deadline;
- a sound communicator with the ability to engender trust and openness among peers; and
- a forward looking and objective independent thinker.



As a reviewer you will be expected to actively contribute to the effective delivery of the review and will be required to:

- complete the agreed pre-reading in advance of the review – most reviews set aside one day for pre-reading and project familiarisation;
- follow the Code of Conduct (defined at the planning meeting) throughout the course of the review;
- give your uninterrupted contribution for the entirety of the review, including the initial planning meeting. This means no disruption from your usual role;
- participate in interviews, particularly contributing knowledge of your particular specialist core skill area(s) and leading interviews where required; and
- contribute to (and in some areas lead on) the drafting of a clear and rigorous final report that includes evidence-based findings and challenging risk-based recommendations and, where appropriate, examples of exemplary practices.

A guide to the skills and experience required for each of the different reviewer roles is set out below.

Medium Risk Reviewers

Medium risk reviewers participate in the assurance of medium risk Government programmes and projects. Medium risk reviews are usually organised by your Departmental Assurance Co-ordinator (DAC) or Centre of Excellence (CoE) rather than NISTA and they offer the opportunity for you to work both within your own department and across the wider service.

Medium Risk Review Team Member (MR RTM)

Level	Middle/Junior Manager
Guideline period of relevant experience	5 years as a guideline and/or be on a project delivery career path.
Relevant experience	Practitioner experience and knowledge of project/programme management methodology and application. If less experienced, have strong support from your Head of Profession.
Experience in core areas*	Practitioner level/or possesses a good level of understanding, plus: • experience in roles with substantial responsibility, demonstrating an ability to manage non-standard problems and issues; • recent practical experience in delivering high value business change, savings driven, procurement based or unique and innovative projects or developing policy that was delivered through a medium risk change programme or project; • experience of engaging with, influencing and challenging senior stakeholders without disturbing wider relationships; and • the ability to assimilate and evaluate information from both documentation and interviews to reach conclusions.
Additional	Following successful participation in medium risk reviews, including obtaining positive feedback from the review team leader, medium risk review team members may apply for progression to medium risk review team leader and/or high risk review team member.

Medium Risk Review Team Leader (MR RTL)	
Level	Senior Manager
Guideline period of relevant experience	8 years as a guideline and/or be on a project delivery career path.
Relevant experience	Substantial experience, particularly in business/operational change, project/programme management with a typical value of £10+m. If less experienced, have strong support from your Head of Profession. Proven leadership and communication skills.
Experience in core areas*	Practitioner level/or possesses a good level of understanding, plus: • experience in roles with substantial responsibility, demonstrating an ability to manage non-standard problems and issues; • recent practical experience in delivering high value business change, savings driven, procurement based or unique and innovative projects or developing policy that was delivered through a medium risk change programme or project; • experience of engaging with, influencing and challenging senior stakeholders without disturbing wider relationships; and • the ability to assimilate and evaluate information from both documentation and interviews to reach conclusions.
Review experience	• Experience of participating in high or medium risk reviews, with positive feedback that supports progression to leader. • A sound understanding of NISTA good practice and key review processes.
Additional	Following successful participation in leading medium risk reviews, including obtaining positive feedback from the review team members, medium risk review team leaders may apply for progression to high risk review team member.

High Risk Reviewers

High Risk Reviewers participate in the assurance of complex high risk Government programmes and projects, both on the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP) and the Departmental Major Projects Portfolio (DMPP).

High Risk Reviewers may also be approached by NISTA to participate in intervention activity where a project is struggling to deliver and/or where specialist skills and knowledge is required.

High Risk Review Team Member (HR RTM)

Level	Senior Manager
Guideline period of relevant experience	8 years as a guideline and/or be on a project delivery career path.
Relevant experience	Recent and extensive experience, with a strong background in project/programme or portfolio management, or if less experienced, have strong support from your Head of Profession. Ideally a PDP Senior Practitioner.
Experience in core areas*	Expert proficiency in at least one of the core areas, plus: • experience which comprises a range of roles with accountability at senior level, demonstrating, an ability to manage complex and non-standard issues; • recent practical experience in leading an entire workstream/function, project, programme or portfolio of high complexity within the wider public sector, or in a similarly complex environment. • experience and evidence of engaging with, influencing and challenging senior stakeholders (such as Ministers, Director Generals and Permanent Secretaries) without disturbing wider relationships; and • the ability to assimilate and evaluate information from both documentation and interviews to reach conclusions; and/or • expert level subject matter expertise within one of the core areas.
Review experience	Experience of participating in medium risk reviews, with positive feedback is desirable but not essential.
Additional	Following successful participation in high risk reviews, including obtaining positive feedback from the review team leader, high risk review team members may apply for progression to high risk review team leader.

High Risk Review Team Leader (HR RTL)	
Level	Director
Guideline period of relevant experience	10 years as a guideline
Relevant experience	Recent and substantial experience as SRO or Programme Manager/Director of high risk/high spend or complex (with significant political interest) projects, programmes or enterprise-level portfolios (e.g. GMPP Programmes). Proven leadership and communication skills. Ideally a PDP Master Practitioner.
Experience in core areas*	Expert proficiency in one or more of the core areas, plus: • extensive and proven track record of successfully leading multiple projects, programmes or large portfolios across all phases of the project lifecycle. • experience of working in government or a similarly complex environment. • managed complex stakeholder relationships and networks, and in investing time in developing, maintaining and using them to support successful project delivery. • built trust, credibility and the authority to articulate, challenge and explain decisions to senior stakeholders. • the ability to assimilate and evaluate information from both documentation and interviews to reach conclusions.
Review experience	• Experience of participating in NISTA led high risk reviews or equivalent, with at least 3 pieces of positive feedback that supports progression to leader. • Familiarity with both MPRG requirements and HMT approvals processes.
Additional	Successful high risk review team leaders will be: • a peer of the SRO / Project Director of the programme they are reviewing, and have similar experience; • an experienced senior manager/team leader; • experienced in projects, change and delivery; • experienced and knowledgeable of assurance practices; • knowledgeable of the Public Sector environment; • good at fact finding / analytical skills; • able to coach, develop and maximise the strengths of review team members; • strong at influencing people. Telling “Truth to Power”; • good at report writing and presentation skills.

3. Application – Count me in, where do I sign?

Applicants should complete the NISTA Skills Form. The form includes space for a CV covering your roles over the last 10 years, and a brief pen portrait. The purpose of the skills form is to help you set out your skills and experience so that we can assess whether you meet the criteria to become accredited as a NISTA Assurance Reviewer, and if you do, what role you could take in a review team and the scale of programme and project you can most usefully review. Therefore, **it is important that your application adequately demonstrates your skills, experience and involvement in the delivery of projects and programmes and related areas of work.**

The pen portrait will be used as a method of quickly introducing you to the project team and other review team members, once accredited and assigned to a review.

When complete please pass the skills form to your line manager for their endorsement and completion of Section 4. This endorsement confirms to us that your line manager agrees to release you to undertake reviews and understands that you will need to be fully committed to the review for its duration.



For those applying for re-accreditation to progress to another reviewer role, you should also provide copies of feedback from at least the last three reviews you have participated in.

Dependent upon arrangements within your organisation, you should then forward the skills form (and review feedback where appropriate) to your departmental Centre of Excellence (CoE) or Departmental Assurance Coordinator (DAC). They will then check and seek endorsement from the Head of Profession of the application and provide any other supporting information which may be of relevance (such as confirming a PPM delivery career path) and will make a recommendation to the accreditation panel as to the level of accreditation they think your skills and experience warrant.

The NISTA Gateway Helpdesk (gateway.helpdesk@nista.gov.uk) can provide you with the relevant CoE or DAC contact details.

4. Accreditation – Congratulations, you're an accredited reviewer!

Accreditation panels for high risk applications are held every quarter. Medium risk panels are held every two to three weeks. Your CoE/DAC will pass your application to the NISTA Accreditation Team for presentation at the next available panel.

The panel is comprised of members of the NISTA Cluster Leads and will assess your application based solely on your skills and experience against the criteria set out above. The panel will look for evidence of delivery experience, soft skills and whether you have a particular subject matter expertise.

You will be contacted shortly after the panel with the outcome. If your application has not been successful you will receive feedback from the panel and you will either be asked to resubmit your application with some more information or you will be informed that you need to obtain more experience.

If your application is successful, you will receive an email confirming your status as a reviewer. If you have been accredited as a Medium Risk Review Team Member, your

CoE/DAC will be informed so that they can add you to their cadre of departmental reviewers and it is they who will contact you to arrange your participation in reviews. If you are accredited as a High Risk Review Team Member, in addition to your CoE/DAC being informed of the outcome and adding you to their cadre of reviewers, NISTA will add you to their reviewer database and will make contact as appropriate high risk review opportunities arise.

Accreditation lasts for three years and re-accreditation after the initial period is dependent upon your having been an active reviewer during the period, and securing positive feedback from your review team peers.

At the 35 month point, the NISTA Accreditation Team will contact you to ask if you wish to be recredited as a reviewer for a further three year period. If so, we will contact your CoE/DAC to obtain copies of your feedback and you will be asked to provide an updated skills form which will then be put to the next available accreditation panel. Your accreditation status will either be reconfirmed for another three year period (and you will be invited to attend a refresher training session) or will cease.

5. Progression – How do reviewers progress to different roles?

As a Review Team Member, you have the opportunity to progress to different reviewer roles. Progression can be from:

- Medium Risk Review Team Member to either Medium Risk Review Team Leader and/or High Risk Review Team Member;
- High Risk Review Team member to either Medium Risk Review Team Leader or High Risk Review Team Leader.

To submit an application for progression, you will need to be able to evidence that you have the required skills and experience, and have received positive feedback that supports progression from at least three reviews you have participated in. You should speak to your CoE/HoP/DAC as appropriate, and they will submit an application for re-accreditation (updated skills form) to us for consideration.

6. Training – A helping hand to get you started

If your application is successful, there is a training session to attend prior to taking part in a review. These sessions are delivered online and can be booked onto using the links below:

Becoming a Reviewer – this provides a run through of the assurance review process, from set up to delivery. It covers items such as the code of conduct which review and programme teams are expected to abide. The session is for new reviewers and those seeking refresher training, and following accreditation, can be booked onto here:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/assurance-reviewer-basic-training-tickets-1113532829669?aff=oddtcreator>

Member to Leader Workshop – this is a short workshop aimed at newly accredited medium and high risk review team leaders, or those considering applying for progression to the leader role. The workshop highlights the difference between the team member and team leader roles and covers in detail what is expected of a review team leader. Newly accredited team leaders will be invited to attend a workshop upon notification of their successful accreditation. For those thinking about applying for progression who wish to attend, you should contact your DAC initially. Sessions can be booked onto here:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/member-to-leader-assurance-reviewer-training-online-tickets-869089810017?aff=oddtcreator>

In addition, your DAC will provide you with any further information around any additional in-house training your department offers.

7. Any questions?

If you have any questions about becoming a reviewer, please contact the NISTA Gateway Helpdesk at gateway.helpdesk@nista.gov.uk. We'll be happy to help.