Undertaking Project Assurance Reviews

A briefing note for a Review Team Member (RTM)

Introduction

This note provides a Review Team Member (RTM) with key information about their role in a forthcoming assurance review and outlines the responsibilities and actions needed to enable full participation in a successful review. It acts as a reminder of the key points that were covered in the assurance reviewer training.

You will have been advised of which particular assurance review you are undertaking e.g. PVR, OGC Gateway, PAR, AAP. The note will not go into details about specific types of reviews, but is designed to provide you with information in increasing levels of detail, should you require it.

Throughout the briefing note, various documents are hyperlinked, press ctrl and click to access these. The entire document set can be found at: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/rtm-briefing-note-relevant-documentation>

If you require a particular subject, press ctrl and click in the content table below and this will take you to the relevant section in the note.

This briefing note is written primarily for High Risk project reviews arranged and managed by Cabinet Office Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA). However, this guidance can be adopted for reviews managed by departments under delegated authority. In such circumstances, the Departmental Assurance Coordinator (DAC) effectively replaces therole outlined for the IPA Operations Lead (OL).

Content and Checklist

The following list enables those with previous experience of assurance reviews to work at a checklist level, whilst those with less experience will find additional information within the various sections of the briefing note:

|  |  |
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|  | **SUBJECT** |
| 1. | [**The role of the RTM in an assurance review**](#RoleRTM) |
| 2. | [**Before the planning meeting**](#Before) |
| 3. | [**The planning meeting**](#Planning) |
| 4. | [**Between the planning meeting and the review**](#Between) |
| 5. | [**During the review**](#DuringReview) |
| 6. | [**Emerging findings**](#Emerging) |
| 7. | [**Writing the review report, including the Delivery Confidence**](#Report) **Assessment (DCA)** |
| 8. | [**Recommendations**](#Recommendations) |
| 9. | [**Confidentiality and disclosure**](#Confidentiality) |
| 10. | [**Feedback on RTL**](#Feedback) |
| 11. | [**Summary of key actions**](#Summary) |
| 12. | [**Where to find additional information**](#Additional) |
| 13. | [**Acronyms**](#Acronyms) |

# 1. The role of the RTM in an assurance review [[Back](#OLE_LINK3)]

The IPA OL has overall responsibility for arranging and managing the review. The Review Team Leader (RTL) is responsible for leading the review team and delivering the review and its report. The RTL acts as the owner of the review process, from the planning meeting, through the review itself to the successful delivery of the final report and for the provision of appropriate feedback.

Each RTM is an essential part of the assurance review team. They will have been selected because of their background, experience and specialist skills, which are needed to make the review successful.

It is essential that, having made the commitment to undertake the review, the RTM makes the time available to attend the planning meeting and carry out the pre-reading in advance of the review. During the review, the RTM must be fully focussed on the review, and should not agree to participate unless they are able to commit 100% to it.

Throughout the review, the RTM should work in partnership with the IPA and client organisation. Their responsibilities can be summarised as:

* Working with the RTL and the other RTMs to collect and evaluate evidence in order to assess whether the programme/project is being well managed and controlled and likely to lead to succeed.
* Supporting the RTL in writing and delivering the review report.
* Working together to check that the recommendations from any previous assurance review have been implemented.
* Ensuring there are no surprises for the SRO during the review by discussing emerging findings at the end of each day. Open and honest interaction with the SRO and other appropriate personnel is critical.
* The Review Team can recommend that the programme/project is not fit to proceed to the next stage, stopped, re-baselined etc. However, it is important to understand that they **do not** have the authority to stop the programme/project, The Review Team’s role is purely advisory.
* Participating in developing the overall assessment of the **Delivery Confidence status**, (where used), **(**[**see section 7**](#Report)**)**.
* Providing feedback on the RTL and accept performance feedback from the RTL.

# 2. Before the Planning Meeting [[Back](#OLE_LINK3)]

The RTL will make contact with the RTMs prior to the planning meeting, usually once they have made contact with the SRO (and Programme/Project Manager) to confirm the date, time and location of the planning meeting and agree a draft agenda.

If you are concerned about **potential conflicts of interest**,you should advise the RTL and the OL as soon as possible. The RTLwillanswer any queries or concerns the RTM may have about the forthcoming review.

**3. The Planning Meeting [**[**Back**](#OLE_LINK3)**]**

The planning meeting is an essential part of the assurance review process for a number of reasons. It may be the first time members of the Review Team will have met each other and worked with the RTL. It gives an opportunity for the Review Team to discuss how best to work together and establish a Code of Conduct applicable to the review, the Review Team and the SRO.

The planning meeting will also enable team members to familiarise themselves with the programme/project, identify the key potential issues that need reviewing and identify those stakeholders to be interviewed. Any concerns the PPM or the programme/project team may have, can be addressed.

The planning meeting is also used to finalise the logistics for the review, the interview schedules and the documentation requirements.

The planning meeting is normally divided into three parts (of approximately 1 hour each):

* **First session** - The Review Team initially meet with the OLto sort out the team dynamics, logistics and consider what approach they will adopt to ensure a successful review. The OL will outline the position and any concerns, if relevant.
* **Second session** - The SRO and programme/project representatives join the meeting. The SRO will provide an overview of the programme/project, outline the progress, challenges, risks and areas of concern they would like addressed during the review. This information will help the Review Team to familiarise themselves with the programme/project and identify the key potential issues to be addressed during the review. This will also enable any Terms of Reference for the review to be finalised and agreed and to identify the key stakeholders to be interviewed.
* **Third session** - The programme/project team and the Review Team finalise the interviewee list, documentation requirements and logistical matters for the review (the SRO is not required for this session).

A generic [**Planning Meeting Agenda**](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/rtm-briefing-note-relevant-documentation) is available to enable the RTL and the SRO or PPM to allow appropriate management of the meeting.

As the RTL is accountable for the review, they are expected to chair the planning meeting. The OL will normally attend to facilitate or assist where necessary, provide the latest view of the programme/project from an IPA/Cabinet Office/HMT perspective and ensure that the correct process for the review is followed.

It should be made clear to the SRO and the PPM that a review is not an audit and that the Review Team is there to help the programme/project succeed. It is important to acknowledge that assurance reviews are jointly owned by the department and IPA, or other delegated authority.

To help the Review Team, an [**Interview Schedule Template**](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/rtm-briefing-note-relevant-documentation) should have been made available to the project to complete and share with the Review Team at the planning meeting to confirm or amend as necessary, the list of participants for the review. The Review Team will also agree with the programme/project, which documents it will need to see in advance of the review and agree the logistics of getting those documents to the team. It is critical that the Review Team have

access to key programme documents within a time frame that allows for appropriate understanding to be gained.

The review should be seen as a partnership between the SRO and the Review Team to increase the programme’s/project’s chances of success. Being open and honest with the programme/project team is key to the success of the review and the Review Team should expect the same in return.

# *Code of Conduct*

The [**Code of Conduct**](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/rtm-briefing-note-relevant-documentation) is a statement of principles that the Review Team will adopt to ensure that a consistent professional approach is adopted throughout the review. The RTM will be expected to help develop and agree its adoption.

The Code of Conduct should be agreed between the Review Team at the start of the planning meeting, written down and discussed with the SRO. Establishing a Code of Conduct is essential to ensure that the Review Team and the SRO adopt uniform working practices and standards.

Typical items in a Code of Conduct include:

* Open and honest contributions
* Valuing diversity/difference
* Maintaining confidentiality
* Comments will be non-attributable
* Robust management of time
* Valuing best practice as well as identifying areas for improvement
* Independence and objectivity
* Team working
* Learning experience
* A commitment to providing a report that gives value to the project and its stakeholders
* Appropriate triangulation of evidence
* The review is a forward looking strategic review and is not an audit

**4.** **Between the planning meeting and the review [[Back]](#OLE_LINK3)**

At the planning meeting a number of key documents will have been identified for the Review Team to read in advance of the review. The Review Team will determine which documents all members should read and which should be allocated to an individual member so as to share the workload.

It is essential that Review Team members allocate sufficient time, prior to the review, to undertake this reading. The reading should help identify key areas of enquiry to probe.

The evidence from the reading will be triangulated with the evidence from the review interviews to help reach an overall conclusion on the Delivery Confidence [**[see Section 7]**](#Report) for the project.

5. During the assurance review [**[Back]**](#OLE_LINK3)

Throughout the review, the Review Team should collaborate with the SRO and key stakeholders. The Review Team should collectively be cognizant of the environment (political, operational, financial etc.), which the programme/project is in, to ensure that the appropriate approach and context is duly considered. Most assurance reviews adopt a “top-down” approach and the Review Team should avoid being drawn too far down into the detail.

Interviews should be open and frank discussions. The Review Team should not have pre-conceived ideas about the outcomes of the review. Views expressed by interviewees should be non-attributable and confidentiality should always be maintained.

Where workshops are used during a review, the RTM may be asked to lead the facilitation for a period and they will also support the team with note taking and time keeping. The RTL should ensure full participation of the participants and that the workload is shared fairly among the Review Team. Again views expressed should be non- attributable.

All the Review Team will be expected to fully participate in gathering information, be that through undertaking interviews or facilitating workshops. The RTL will agree with the RTMs, initially at the planning meeting, and then each day as the review progresses, the allocation of responsibilities.

During the review, the RTM will be expected to take notes and contribute to the evaluation of findings. Triangulation of the information obtained from the interviews and/or workshops, with the reading undertaken**,** together with their knowledge and experience, will enable the Review Team to draw conclusions and identify issues for the report. If they have specific experience or are considered to be a “subject matter expert”, their knowledge, experience and opinions will be vital in delivering a successful review.

There could be times during the review where the RTM may be required to support, advise and/or be coached about the assurance process, especially if they are new to the role. The RTL is expected to support the team members throughout the review.

**6.** **Emerging findings [[Back]](#OLE_LINK3)**

Whilst undertaking an assurance review, it is essential that an open and honest agenda and dialogue is maintained with the programme/project team and the SRO. It is essential throughout the review that the Review Team works in partnership with all stakeholders to ensure that the objectives are achieved.

Typically [**emerging findings**](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/rtm-briefing-note-relevant-documentation) meetings are held at the end of each day of the review. The Review Team should meet with the SRO, who may have with them someone from the programme/project team (it is suggested that this is the Programme/Project Director). It is recognised that a face to face meeting every day may not be practical and should this be the case, a discussion with the RTL will be required to find an alternative solution (e.g. a telephone conversation or a suitable deputy to stand in at the SRO’s discretion). However, the SRO must be available for feedback on the final day.

Emerging finding meetings are intended to enable the Review Team to share their early thoughts with the SRO on the way the review is progressing, ensure that the SRO is kept abreast of any emerging findings, clarify any points of uncertainty and discuss any misinterpretation or correct

any factual inaccuracies. They are also used to secure any additional information/evidence from the programme/project and to capture any additional matters for exploring in interview.

**7. Writing the review report, including Delivery Confidence Assessment (DCA) [**[**Back**](#OLE_LINK3)**]**

The review report will be based on a template that is provided by the IPA. Review reports will normally include a Delivery Confidence Assessment, with an associated RAG status based on the following definition:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Colour | Criteria Description |
|  | Successful delivery of the project/programme to time, cost and quality appears highly likely and there are no major outstanding issues that at this stage appear to threaten delivery. |
|  | Successful delivery appears probable. However, constant attention will be needed to ensure risks do not materialise into major issues threatening delivery. |
|  | Successful delivery appears feasible but significant issues already exist requiring management attention. These appear resolvable at this stage and, if addressed promptly, should not present a cost/schedule overrun. |
|  | Successful delivery of the project/programme is in doubt with major risks or issues apparent in a number of key areas. Urgent action is needed to ensure these are addressed, and establish whether resolution is feasible. |
|  | Successful delivery of the project/programme appears to be unachievable. There are major issues which, at this stage, do not appear to be manageable or resolvable. The programme/project may need re-base lining and/or overall viability re-assessed. |

Please consult **“**[**Delivery Confidence – Guide for Review Teams**](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/rtm-briefing-note-relevant-documentation)**”** for more detailed guidance on developing a Delivery Confidence Assessment.

The RTM will be expected to play a full part in helping to determine the Delivery Confidence Assessment from the evidence gained during the review. The RTL will normally take responsibility for presenting the draft review report to the SRO on the final day. The RTL may ask the RTMs, with their agreement, to present sections of the report. In some cases, the RTL may consult with IPA before discussing the report with the SRO.

At the presentation of the review report, the SRO should be asked to consider if there are any factual or grammatical corrections to be made and to advise the RTL accordingly. If there are significant factual changes, the RTL should consult with the RTMs about any subsequent changes to the report. The RAG status is non-negotiable. The final review report should be delivered to the SRO within 5 working days of the review concluding.

If the programme or project receives an overall Delivery Confidence RAG status of RED or AMBER/RED, and there is IPA involvement, the OL will be advised by the RTL, who will consider escalation to the appropriate parties.

Where a DCA is RED or AMBER/RED, the Review Team should discuss with the SRO, and other appropriate stakeholders, the need for a follow up Assurance of Action Plan (AAP) review to assess progress on action to address the critical recommendations.

8. Recommendations [[**Back**](#OLE_LINK3)]

In the report, recommendations can be made to help the project achieve its objectives or manage risks more effectively. The RTM is expected to help formulate the recommendations. To help prioritise these recommendations, each will be considered in light of its immediacy for action. Each recommendation should use the following descriptors to help the project focus which recommendations to address:

**Critical (Do Now)** – **To increase the likelihood of a successful outcome it is of the greatest importance that the programme/project should take action immediately.**

**Essential (Do By)** **– To increase the likelihood of a successful outcome the programme/project should take action in the near future.** *[Note to review teams – whenever possible Essential recommendations should be linked to project milestones e.g. before contract signature and/or a specified timeframe e.g. within the next three months.]*

**Recommended** **– The programme/project should benefit from the uptake of this recommendation.** *[Note to review teams – if possible Recommended recommendations should be linked to project milestones e.g. before contract signature and/or a specified timeframe e.g. within the next three months.]*

As a guide, it is suggested that between 6 to 8 recommendations are given in the review report.

The Delivery Confidence Assessment and RAG status are not directly linked to the level of priority given to all or any of the individual recommendations.

9. Confidentiality and disclosure [[Back](#OLE_LINK3)]

The SRO will be responsible for ensuring that action is taken to address the agreed recommendations**.** They are encouraged to share the report with those key stakeholders who may benefit from its findings. A copy of the report will always be sent to the IPA/DAC. IPA may distribute the report wider (e.g. to HMT and other areas of the Cabinet Office, such as Crown Commercial Services and Government Digital Services) if appropriate. A copy of the report will also be passed to the Review Team responsible for the next review.

All reviewers have an individual responsibility to ensure that all appropriately marked, sensitive or critical business information provided to them before and during the review, whether on paper or in electronic form, is secure at all times. The IPA require the Review Team to dispose of the review documents no later than 5 working days after the delivery of the final review report.

Please note that assurance reports are subject to FOI requests. In the unlikely event of the RTL or other parties being asked to respond to an FOI request, please contact IPA as soon as possible before action is taken. Should a report be released under FOI, any names of the review team will be redacted.

10. Feedback on RTL [[Back](#OLE_LINK3)]

The RTM is required to complete a [**Review Team Leader Feedback Form**](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/rtm-briefing-note-relevant-documentation) on the RTL. This is a 360-degree feedback process which is part of the ongoing quality assurance and accreditation process. As this is an open process, please ensure that you send a copy of the completed form to the RTL. The RTM is also encouraged to share their view of the RTL at the end of the review. The feedback form is not designed to be part of any internal appraisal process that exists in their organisation. Your comments are an important way of ensuring that reviewers can be developed, that assurance good practice is maintained, and that the IPA can learn from your experiences. Please also send a copy of the feedback to the Gateway helpdesk ([Gateway.Helpdesk@ipa.gov.uk](mailto:Gateway.Helpdesk@ipa.gov.uk)) for retention on the individual’s records.

In addition, the RTL is required to complete a feedback form on each RTM, whilst the SRO is requested to complete a feedback form on the performance of the review process and review team. The SRO feedback is copied to the RTL and RTMs for information, the RTM will also be copied into the feedback by the RTL.

11. Summary of key actions **[**[**Back**](#OLE_LINK3)**]**

The RTM will need to:

* Review relevant documents that IPA or the programme/project provide prior to the planning meeting and the review.
* Reacquaint themselves with the relevant guidance material e.g. Gateway review workbook.
* Discuss the context of the review and the logistics of the planning meeting when the RTL contacts them (at least 1 week before the planning meeting).
* Attend and participate in the planning meeting.
* Participate in the review process, obtaining evidence to support the conclusion and recommendations of the review.
* Participate in the emerging findings discussions with the SRO at key points throughout the review.
* Assist in the writing of the review report.
* Assist in the feedback to the SRO at the end of the review.
* Return the RTL feedback form to the Gateway Helpdesk ([Gateway.Helpdesk@ipa.gov.uk](mailto:Gateway.Helpdesk@ipa.gov.uk)) and to the RTL.

**12. Where to find additional information [**[**B****a****ck**](#OLE_LINK3)**]**

**Infrastructure and Projects Authority web pages:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/major-projects-authority>

**Assurance toolkit (includes guidance on the various types of assurance reviews):**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/major-projects-authority-assurance-toolkit>

**The OGC Gateway™ process:**

[http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100503135839/http://www.ogc.gov.uk/what\_is\_ogc\_gateway\_review.asp](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100503135839/http:/www.ogc.gov.uk/what_is_ogc_gateway_review.asp)

**OGC Gateway™ FAQs:**

[[ARCHIVED CONTENT] OGC - Gateway Frequently Asked Questions](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100503135839/http:/www.ogc.gov.uk/ogc_gateway_review_for_programmes___projects_gateway_frequently_asked_questions.asp)

**Gateway Helpdesk:**

E-mail: [Gateway.Helpdesk@ipa.gov.uk](mailto:Gateway.Helpdesk@ipa.gov.uk)

**Embedded Documents:**

As a reminder, the link to obtain **all** the documents referenced throughout this briefing note is:

<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/rtm-briefing-note-relevant-documentation>

# 13. Acronyms [[Back](#OLE_LINK3)]

Acronyms used in Gateway documentation include:

**PPM** -Programme/Project Manager

**RPA** - Risk Potential Assessment

**IPA** -Infrastructure and Projects Authority

**OL**  - Operations Lead

**RTL** - Review Team Leader

**RTM** - Review Team Member

**SRO** - Senior Responsible Owner

**PPM COE** - Programme & Project Management Centre of Excellence

**DAC** - Departmental Assurance Coordinator