Cabinet Office

Project Assessment Review: MPA Guidance for Departments

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This document is also available to download from: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/major-projects-authority

Contents

Executive Summary

The **Project Assessment Review (PAR)** is a flexible assurance review used by the MPA whenever bespoke Terms of Reference are required to meet the specific assurance needs of a Major Project.

A bespoke assurance approach is always required when the review is commissioned to inform an HM Treasury **Major Projects Review Group (MPRG)** panel meeting, but a PAR can also be included in a Major Project's **Integrated Assurance and Approvals Plan (IAAP)** if the MPA and project team are in agreement that the MPA's standard assurance reviews (Starting Gate and Gates 0 to 5 in the OGC Gateway™ review process) are not applicable due to exceptional characteristics of the project and/or of the assurance requirement. The PAR is also the review used whenever the MPA is required to carry out further investigation and analysis of a project that is in difficulty.

Independent assurance from the MPA is normally commissioned by the **Senior Responsible Owner (SRO)** of the project, but a PAR can alternatively be instigated by senior officials outside of the project or department, and even by ministers. This means there can be wider stakeholder interest in a PAR, and a wider circulation of the final report, than is the norm for other MPA assurance reviews. Nevertheless, all PARs are carried out in partnership with the project team.

Preparing for a PAR normally involves an initial **Assessment Meeting** between the SRO and the MPA Project Specialist, and later a more detailed **Planning Meeting** between the SRO and project team and the review team. The MPA aims to schedule the on-site period of the PAR to start between 10 and 12 weeks after the Assessment Meeting.

A PAR normally takes place over five days in the department's offices; this may be reduced at MPA discretion to three days if the agreed scope is no more broad or complex than is normally addressed by a Gate review. On occasion a PAR may last up to 10 days when scheduled to inform an MPRG panel meeting.

PAR review teams consist of two MPA-accredited assurance reviewers and a departmental representative who is independent of the project team and able to provide an understanding of the wider departmental context, culture, and strategic direction. Participation of the departmental representative is proven to contribute to the quality of PAR findings and recommendations.

The option of holding an **Issues Workshop** between the review team and the project team on the first morning of the on-site period is discussed at the Planning Meeting, at which the scope of the review is finalised. This workshop is not a mandatory element of the PAR, but its purpose is to flush out and explore the key issues in greater depth and breadth than is usually possible in other MPA assurance reviews. The workshop can help to cut down the number of interviews then required, and/or to deepen the focus on key areas of questioning.

The review team spends the rest of the on-site review period interviewing project team members, stakeholders and suppliers, with a focus on assessing the project's Delivery Confidence and on exploring whatever topics were agreed at the Planning Meeting as being in scope. The review team will meet with the SRO regularly throughout this period to avoid the SRO receiving unwelcome surprises at the end of the review. The findings and recommendations of the PAR review team will be included in a draft report discussed at the end of the formal review, which will be finalised with the SRO ideally within a week of the end of the on-site review period.

Introduction

This document

This document is a guide to the Major Projects Authority's **Project Assessment Review (PAR)**. This flexible assurance tool will be of greatest relevance to Senior Responsible Owners, Project[1] Directors, and Project Management Offices when planning integrated assurance and approvals for projects in their department[2], and/or commissioning independent assurance from the **Major Projects Authority (MPA)**.

This document should be read in conjunction with the ***Which MPA Assurance Review?*** guidance document, which enables project teams to compare the range of assurance reviews available from the MPA, in order to identify whether or not a PAR is appropriate for the assurance requirements of an individual project.

The Project Assessment Review

The Project Assessment Review (PAR) is a flexible assurance tool used by the MPA when bespoke Terms of Reference are required when reviewing a project in the **Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP)[3]** – see the **Why?** section for more detail.

The differences between a PAR and Gates[4] 0 to 5 provided within the OGC Gateway™ review[5] process are explained in the **What?** section.

A PAR is carried out in partnership with the project team and will include an assessment of **Delivery Confidence**.

Further information

Guidance on integrated assurance and approvals for **Major Projects** can be downloaded from the MPA's assurance toolkit page on the Cabinet Office website:

http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/major-projects-authority-assurance-toolkit

Definitions for key terms and a glossary of acronyms are provided at the end of this document.

[1] The word 'project' is used throughout this document to represent both projects and programmes.

[2] The word 'department' is used throughout this document to represent any central government body that may commission independent assurance reviews from the MPA, including agencies and NDPBs.

[3] See Definitions section for an explanation of what a 'Major Project' is.

[4] Gate 0 is a repeatable assurance review specifically designed for programmes, whilst for projects the Gates are numbered 1 to 5 and are designed to provide appropriate assurance at key points in a project's lifecycle.

[5] OGC Gateway™ is hereafter referred to in this document as 'Gateway', for the purposes of simplicity.

Why?

A PAR is used by the MPA when a bespoke review is required to meet specific assurance requirements. Outlined below are the main reasons why a PAR may be appropriate.

Planned assurance uses

A PAR can be incorporated into a project's **Integrated Assurance and Approvals Plan (IAAP)** for the following reasons:

1. The review is commissioned to inform an HM Treasury **Major Projects Review Group (MPRG)** panel meeting[6].
2. There is a requirement to inform a **Treasury Approvals Point (TAP)** after the **Full Business Case (FBC)** has been approved, but at a time in the project lifecycle when there is no relevant Gate within the Gateway review process[7].
3. The project has especially challenging complexities and/or components that are not adequately covered by a Gate and/or require a bespoke approach in order to provide the necessary depth and/or breadth of assurance.
4. In exceptional circumstances when the non-standard delivery methodology used on the project is not suited to the series of discrete and consecutive stages upon which the Gateway review process is based.

Consequential assurance uses

Alternatively a PAR can be used to implement investigation for consequential assurance purposes, in order to inform external support or intervention to assist a project that is in difficulty. For example:

5. When a planned assurance and/or approval process has recently identified poor Delivery Confidence and as a consequence the need to carry out further investigation and analysis.
6. In special circumstances, e.g. when ministers, the (parent) department, MPA and/or other key stakeholders have significant concerns about the likelihood of successful delivery, and further investigation and analysis is therefore required.

Other uses

Finally, a PAR may also be commissioned, in exceptional circumstances, over and above the project's IAAP arrangements, even when there is no specific issue to be addressed. For example:

7. The project has not had any independent assurance from the MPA for more than nine months and a PAR is needed to inform the **Annual Report on Major Projects** that is required of the MPA from 2012 onwards.

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[6] For more information on the MPRG process see the ***Major Project Approvals and Assurance Guidance (April 2011)*** on the MPA's assurance toolkit webpage.

[7] For more information on the Gateway process, see: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100503135839/http://www.ogc.gov.uk/what_is_ogc_gateway_review.asp.

8. Ministers require a review of a number of GMPP projects to identify cost savings, e.g. to inform a Spending Review, as was the case for the Major Projects Review in 2010.

Why a PAR may not be the appropriate review

A PAR should <u>not</u> be used if the assurance requirement does not fit one of the above criteria. In particular, it should not be used for the following purposes:

1. For planned assurance of a programme that is not known to be in difficulty – a Gate 0 will normally continue to be appropriate in this case, because it is designed to be repeatable.
2. When there isn't a Gate that is an exact fit to the assurance need, e.g. for planned or ad hoc assurance or for general health-check purposes that are not at a specific Gate point – in exceptional cases a hybrid Gateway review can be arranged, but this is not a PAR.
3. When a longer review and/or a larger review team is required than is allowed for under the MPA's Gateway resourcing standard – in these circumstances the MPA Project Specialist supporting the (parent) department to assure its Major Projects can apply discretion by appropriately adapting the Gateway resourcing standard to meet the assurance need.

What?

The PAR is a flexible assurance tool used by the MPA when bespoke Terms of Reference are required. This is the fundamental difference between the PAR and the MPA's off-the-shelf Gate reviews within the Gateway process, which are aligned to key points in a project's delivery lifecycle.

Examples of what a PAR can provide include:

- A deep investigation of known issue areas
- A broad strategic analysis across a number of complex issues and/or cross-government dependencies
- Identification of potential cost savings.

The PAR has several other features that differentiate it from other independent assurance reviews provided by the MPA. These are:

1. A PAR is the assurance review used by the MPA to inform MPRG panel meetings, and can therefore be commissioned by the Chair of the MPRG (who is normally a Treasury Director General).
2. Due to its bespoke nature, a PAR can be used to carry out the breadth and depth of exploration and analysis required to inform external support and/or intervention for a project in difficulty. In this instance, the PAR is being used for "consequential assurance" purposes.
3. Independent assurance from the MPA is normally commissioned by the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) of the project, but a PAR can alternatively be instigated by senior officials outside of the project or department, and even by ministers - see commissioning section under **Who?** for more detail. This means there can be wider stakeholder interest in a PAR, and a wider circulation of the final report, than is the norm for other MPA assurance reviews.
4. Starting Gate and Gateway reviews are delivered over three days, but a PAR normally takes place over five days in the department's offices, although this may be reduced at MPA discretion to three days if the agreed scope is no more broad or complex than is normally addressed by a Gate review. On occasion a PAR may last up to 10 days when scheduled to inform an MPRG panel meeting.
5. A PAR review team should include a **departmental representative** who is independent of the project team and able to provide an understanding of the wider departmental context, culture, and strategic direction; their participation contributes to the quality of the findings and recommendations. See the review team section under **Who?** and commissioning section under **How?** for more detail.
6. On the first morning of the on-site review period an **Issues Workshop** is normally held between the review team and the project team. The purpose of this is to flush out and explore the key issues in greater depth and breadth than is usually possible in other MPA assurance reviews. The workshop can help to cut down the number of interviews then required, and/or to deepen the focus on key areas of questioning. See the issues workshop section under **How?** for more detail.
7. The PAR report template includes a section for the SRO to include a personal commentary on the review in the final report.

When?

The timing for a PAR that is commissioned within the integrated assurance and approvals regime will normally be known well in advance, as a PAR is most likely to be planned by the project team (and subsequently arranged by the MPA) to inform a Treasury Approval Point or MPRG panel meeting that is recognised as a key milestone for the project.

PARs that are arranged as “consequential assurance” (to investigate and analyse a project that is in difficulty) are less predictable, as they are organised on an ad hoc basis.

Lead times to set up a PAR have to accommodate the availability of departmental participants and of review team members, and therefore vary. However, the MPA aims to have all PARs start ten to twelve weeks after an initial Assessment Meeting carried out by the MPA with the department - see **How?** section for more detail.

Who?

Senior sponsor

For a review to be organised by the MPA it must be formally agreed with, and is normally commissioned by, the project's Senior Responsible Owner (SRO). This is still the case even when the need for a PAR is first identified externally, e.g. if the project is in difficulty and delivery is at risk. For the purposes of the review team, therefore, the SRO is normally the "senior sponsor" for the review they are delivering. The SRO must sign off the scope of the PAR in writing, and will be required to:

- attend the detailed planning meeting
- be available throughout the on-site review period, particularly for the final feedback session
- share the final review report widely within their organisation to pass on lessons learned and to enable action to be taken on the recommendations.

When a PAR is commissioned in response to a request from outside of the project team, it means that the MPA has an additional stakeholder or stakeholders for the review, who may also be viewed as sponsoring it. Examples include:

- Chair of the Treasury's Major Projects Review Group
- Ministers, including one or both of the joint Chairs of the Efficiency and Reform Group Board, i.e. the Minister for the Cabinet Office and/or the Chief Secretary to the Treasury
- Treasury Spending Team
- Senior officials in the centre of government with a specific interest in the project, e.g. Infrastructure UK, Government ICT, Government Procurement Service
- Parent department's Permanent Secretary.

In exceptional circumstances the MPA itself may commission a PAR.

Whoever initially instigated the review, the PAR report template provides an opportunity for the SRO to add some personal commentary on the review in the final report.

See **Why?** section for more information on potential external sponsors for a PAR.

See the commissioning section under **How?** for more detail on how the commissioning process works.

In your organisation

Most departments have a **Portfolio Management Office (PMO), Programme and Project Management Support Unit (PPMSU), Programme and Project Management Centre of Excellence (CoE)**, or equivalent. Members of this central corporate team will have had previous experience of working with the MPA on arranging integrated assurance for Major Projects, including PARs, and will be able to advise on general requirements and on any departmental expectations of SROs and their project teams. A representative of this team should be involved before, during and after every PAR, as they are key local stakeholders with a wider interest in the development and visibility of your organisation's overall delivery portfolio.

Your organisation is likely also to have a **Departmental Assurance Coordinator (DAC)**, **Departmental Gateway Coordinator (DGC)** or equivalent, usually located in one of the above corporate teams, who may be able to support and/or advise the project team on the logistics and paperwork involved when arranging a PAR.

In the Major Projects Authority

The **Project Specialist** who manages MPA liaison with your (parent) department is your first point of contact in the MPA. Your local PMO or DAC can put you in touch with them.

The Project Specialist liaises with your organisation's DAC (or equivalent) and with the project team to schedule PARs and any other independent assurance provided by the MPA. The Project Specialist works with an MPA **Resource Leader (RL)** to resource each review with appropriate reviewers.

The Project Specialist also has a stakeholder and customer relationship management role on behalf of the MPA and therefore has a significant interest in the progress, findings, recommendations and quality of the PAR delivered to the project, and will review the PAR report before it is submitted to the SRO as the final version.

In the Review Team

The MPA will provide a team of two or three senior reviewers accredited for their skills and experience of tackling Major Project delivery issues. Normally reviewers will be members of the MPA's civil servant reviewer pool. In exceptional circumstances, when this pool cannot provide a reviewer with the experience and availability to deliver a particular PAR, an MPA-accredited private sector consultant may be included in the review team, charged at a standard daily rate. The cost for this is invoiced by the MPA to the department, unless the PAR has been commissioned to inform an MPRG panel meeting.

In addition to reviewers provided by the MPA, PAR review teams normally include a departmental representative who is independent (and not in the reporting line) of the SRO and the project team. Departmental representatives have been proven to add value to the review findings and recommendations by contributing an in-depth understanding, throughout the review process, of the broader organisational context, e.g. by explaining to review team colleagues the strategic direction, corporate landscape, processes and terminology, and the nuances of departmental culture. This involvement reduces the need for additional clarification and discussion of issues raised by interviewees, which would otherwise be a demand on project team capacity.

Each PAR team is led, as a first among equals, by an experienced **Review Team Leader (RTL)**. This person is responsible for managing the review team to deliver an effective assurance review process, through the planning stages and the review itself, to provision of the final report to the SRO, and feedback to the MPA.

How?

A PAR includes eight steps:

1. Commissioning
2. Assessing the assurance requirements
3. Planning the review
4. Issues workshop
5. Interviewing
6. Reporting
7. Quality assurance
8. Actioning the recommendations

Each of these steps is described below.

1. Commissioning

PARs are normally commissioned by the SRO through submission of a completed **Risk Potential Assessment (RPA)** form to the MPA[8].

The RPA requires the SRO to consider the consequential impact should the initiative fail to deliver its objectives to time, cost and/or quality. This assessment covers five key areas of potential impact:

1. Political
2. Public
3. Financial
4. Operational business and commercial change
5. Dependencies.

The RPA then requires an assessment of the project's complexity, in the following areas:

1. Strategic profile
2. Delivery challenge
3. Capacity and capability
4. Scale.

The combination of scores against all of these factors provides an overall risk potential rating – this is used by the MPA Project Specialist and Resource Leader when assessing the assurance requirements and the level of skill and experience required in the review team.

2. Assessing the assurance requirements

The MPA Project Specialist will arrange an **Assessment Meeting** with the SRO to discuss, with reference to the RPA, the scope of the review and its likely timing. The aims of this meeting are to:

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[8] This form is available to download from: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/major-projects-authority-assurance-toolkit

1. Understand the key characteristics of the project, including the nature and scale of the risks involved, and any particular handling sensitivities.
2. Identify where the project is in its lifecycle, especially the next Treasury approval scheduled in the project's **Integrated Assurance and Approvals Plan (IAAP).**
3. Identify the purpose, parameters, and priorities of the review, i.e. an outline scope, which may include 'exam questions' to be answered, and/or a hypothesis to be tested.
4. Identify which elements of the scope cannot be covered by the standard MPA **Delivery Confidence Assessment**, and will therefore require a bespoke approach.
5. Agree who is the senior sponsor for the review and who is the primary recipient of the report – for planned assurance both of these are usually the SRO.
6. Agree an initial list of interviewees.
7. Agree the length of the review and size of review team.
8. Agree the provisional timing for the review and any key dependencies that may affect it.
9. Agree preferred dates for the more detailed planning meeting with the review team.

All this information will enable the MPA to start sourcing reviewers from its accredited reviewer pool.

3. Planning the review

The project team will, with support from their local Departmental Assurance Coordinator and in discussion with the MPA, continue identifying suitable interviewees, arranging the timetable and logistics for the on-site period of the review, and will provide appropriate pre-reading for the review team (e.g. relevant web-links and key project documents), notifying the review team of any security implications around the documents supplied.

The purpose of the **Planning Meeting** is then for the review team to meet the SRO and the project team to:

1. Introduce the project team and the review team to each other.
2. Finalise the scope and priorities of the PAR
3. Agree whether or not to include an Issues Workshop in the review and, if so, what will be covered and who will attend
4. Finalise the interviewee list
5. Settle the logistics of the review which will fall to the department to organise (engaging interviewees, timetabling, booking rooms, security passes, ICT equipment, etc).

It is important that the scope of the PAR is defined clearly, is achievable within the review period, and is agreed by the SRO in writing before the review starts. This will enable the review team to deliver a report that addresses the key areas of concern, and provides appropriate assurance and relevant recommendations on the way forward.

The Review Team Leader (RTL) will chair the Planning Meeting and will liaise thereafter with the department on the detail. As they may not have met beforehand, the review team will normally want some time together before meeting the SRO and his/her colleagues. The formal meeting with the project team need take no more than two hours; it should include at least an hour with the SRO, including agreement of the scope and code of conduct for the review.

Establishing a code of conduct (a statement of professional principles applicable to everyone involved) at the outset of any assurance review is essential to ensure that the review team and their departmental contacts adopt uniform working practices and standards. This in turn will clarify mutual expectations in advance and will help to prevent any cultural differences from affecting the quality and effectiveness of the review. Some typical items for an assurance review code of conduct include:

1. Challenging but constructive style from the review team (critical friend approach)
2. Robust management of time
3. Confidentiality and non-attribution of interview comments
4. Openness and honesty from all participants
5. No surprises at the end – regular feedback to the SRO throughout.

It is the responsibility of the hosting department to arrange for security passes and escorting for the review team for the Planning Meeting and throughout the review process, and to arrange for provision of any ICT equipment required by the review team for drafting and presenting the PAR report.

4. Issues Workshop

A unique feature of the PAR is the option to begin it with a workshop to flush out and explore the key issues to be investigated during the review, in a greater depth than is normally possible in the Planning Meeting and/or Gate review. It is chaired by the RTL and attended by the review team, SRO and project team members. Workshop discussions include:

1. A review of who has instigated the PAR and why, to ensure a common understanding of perceptions and assumptions – this is particularly important if it was not the SRO.
2. Exploration of the anecdotal, qualitative and quantitative evidence around the areas of concern, to identify whether they are cause or effect (including external issues that appear to be outside of project team control), and any solutions already attempted or identified.
3. Summarise and assess impact of other risks and issues identified by the project team that may impact, or are adversely affecting, Delivery Confidence.

Individual members of the project team may be asked to complete a template questionnaire in preparation for this workshop.

5. Reviewing

The review team spends the remainder of the on-site review period interviewing key stakeholders, usually on an individual basis. The purpose of the interviews is to:

1. Build a broad picture of the project from a spectrum of key parties, e.g. different levels of seniority and role within the project team, departmental stakeholders and service providers (especially commercial/procurement), private sector suppliers, external stakeholders, etc
2. Explore key risk and issue areas, particularly with specialists who have more detailed knowledge than the project team

3. Fill any information and knowledge gaps for the Delivery Confidence Assessment and around the remaining areas of the agreed scope
4. Challenge and explore from different perspectives the review team's emerging assumptions and findings.

PAR interviews are all carried out on a non-attributable basis to encourage candour. The SRO should support the RTL in ensuring that all interviewees are informed of this at the outset to encourage full and frank discussion throughout the review.

The SRO should be satisfied that the review team is there to help the project to succeed. However, in order to deliver an effective and high quality PAR the review team may well have to give the SRO some difficult and/or unwelcome messages. The interview schedule and the SRO's diary should therefore be arranged so that the review team can provide regular feedback to the SRO during the course of the review.

The RTL is responsible for keeping the MPA Project Specialist informed of progress during the review, and should ensure that any specific MPA concerns are raised with the SRO and, as appropriate, covered in the report. This engagement is particularly necessary on PARs that were instigated by stakeholders other than the SRO.

On occasion, the scope of a PAR may change during the course of the review and/or as feedback is given to the SRO each day. If significant issues outside of the original scope arise during the course of the review, the RTL will discuss with the SRO and the MPA Project Specialist whether or not to cover these in the final report. The RTL is required by the MPA to record in writing any agreed change in scope, and to notify the MPA Project Specialist of it, **before** implementing the change.

The SRO should be available to meet the review team on the final day on-site. By agreement, other members of the SRO's team or organisation may also be present at this final feedback session.

6. Reporting

The RTL will draw together a draft report, using a template provided by the MPA, which reflects the findings, including Delivery Confidence Assessment, recommendations from the review team, and any issues raised in discussions with the MPA Project Specialist and the SRO during the review. This draft report is shared with the SRO and MPA Project Specialist, and the SRO is also given the opportunity to add their own comments on the review in the relevant section of the report.

The RTL is then responsible for completing and delivering the final report, normally within a week of the on-site review period being completed.

The project team must advise the review team of the appropriate protective marking of the draft and final versions of the PAR report.

In some instances the SRO may seek a return visit from the RTL; for example to present the findings to a departmental main board or programme board. The RTL has discretion to agree this so long as the additional requirement and, where applicable, payment for any additional consultancy time, is agreed by the MPA before any firm commitment is made.

7. Quality Assurance

The MPA always seeks feedback from the SRO after delivering an assurance review. For the PAR, however, additional quality assurance is required to what is the norm for other MPA reviews, for the following reasons:

1. The high degree of tailoring in comparison with other MPA reviews
2. The greater likelihood of HM Treasury, MPRG and/or ministerial audiences for PAR reports
3. The higher profile and potential impact of PAR recommendations, especially for "consequential assurance" PARs.

Quality management for PARs will therefore consist of:

1. Inclusion of an optional SRO comments section in the PAR report template (this proved to be valuable during the Major Projects Review of 2010).
2. MPA quality assurance of all final PAR reports before they are sent to the SRO.
3. Requesting SRO completion of short feedback forms (as for Gateway reviews and Starting Gate), exploring how beneficial the PAR was and the performance of the review team.
4. An MPA Project Specialist telephone call to the SRO within a week of receiving the feedback form, which is an opportunity to discuss additional and/or more sensitive topics that the SRO may not have put in writing.
5. Review team members completing feedback forms on each other's performance and contribution during the review (as for Gateway reviews and Starting Gate).

Honest feedback from review sponsors is essential in helping the MPA maintain the quality of its assurance reviews, and for training, supporting and managing the accredited reviewer pool. The feedback forms and quality discussions are confidential and are neither circulated nor published by the MPA. If you are the senior sponsor for a PAR, please complete and return the form immediately, while the review experience is still fresh.

8. Actioning PAR report recommendations

The PAR report will always provide a set of recommendations, the implications of which are outlined in the table overleaf.

Agreement of the final PAR report will always trigger further action, but the specific actions taken, and who by, will depend largely on:

1. Who commissioned the PAR, i.e. whether it was the SRO, external officials, or a minister
2. Whether the PAR was commissioned to address known and/or suspected issues or was a planned assurance review
3. The specific findings and Delivery Confidence Assessment in the report.

Generic actions after completion of a final PAR report

PAR Delivery Confidence Assessment	Required departmental actions	MPA actions
Red or Amber/Red	SRO circulation of the PAR report to project team and departmental stakeholders. Urgent production of an action plan to address the PAR findings and recommendations. Submission of the action plan to the MPA. Commissioning of an **Assurance of Action Plan (AAP)** review from the MPA. If appropriate, the project team giving evidence at an MPRG panel meeting and/or participating in a **Case Conference** (see right). Ongoing progress discussions with the MPA Project Specialist until the project is back on track.	Escalation of the report and subsequent AAP findings to MPA management and/or MPA Board for discussion. Sharing of the report with Treasury Spending Team colleagues and other key stakeholders, especially those who commissioned the PAR – can include ministers. If the PAR was not originally scheduled to inform an MPRG panel, the MPA may escalate the project to the MPRG for discussion. Decisions made by the MPRG panel can include: • Stopping the project • Re-scoping the project • Allowing the project to continue, but with conditions imposed. The MPA may hold a Case Conference to identify and prioritise assistance, support and/or other intervention required to help improve the project's Delivery Confidence. Further intervention may be planned on a case by case basis until Delivery Confidence is sufficiently improved. Provision of the final report to the review team delivering the next MPA assurance review for the project.
Amber to Green	SRO circulation of the PAR report to project team and departmental stakeholders. Implementation of the PAR report recommendations. Informal progress discussions with MPA Project Specialist.	Provision of the report to Treasury Spending Team colleagues. Ongoing monitoring by the MPA Project Specialist. Provision of the final report to the review team delivering the next MPA assurance review for the project – they will explore whether and how the PAR recommendations were implemented.

Disclosure and confidentiality - PAR reports

The clients for, and owners of, a PAR report are normally both the SRO who has commissioned the review (and therefore his or her department) and the MPA. There are additional clients for the report if the review was instigated by senior officials outside of the owning department, e.g. the Treasury's Major Projects Review Group (MPRG), or ministers.

Whether or not he or she commissioned the PAR, the project's SRO is expected to share the PAR report more widely within his or her organisation and, where appropriate, with other stakeholders essential to development and delivery of the project. This reinforces the SRO's ability to ensure that the findings are well understood and the recommendations are followed up effectively.

All reviewers will dispose of copies of the report and earlier drafts in any format e.g. electronic or paper, together with any notes and supporting documents, no later than seven days after delivery of the final report.

The MPA will retain a copy of the PAR report for its own records. The MPA may, in consultation with the owning department, draw on information in the report to fulfil the Cabinet Office's own responsibilities in relation to the Government's Major Projects. The MPA may therefore share the report with others in the Cabinet Office and with HM Treasury, including spending teams and ministers.

Information about or for a PAR review, or in a PAR report, will be subject to the FOI Act 2000 and to the Environmental Information Regulations (EIRs) 2004. SROs are responsible for compliance with requirements under the Government's transparency agenda to publish information in PAR reports, and for making decisions on prior redaction related to commercial, policy, personal data or other sensitivities justifiable under the FOI Act 2000.

Decisions on FOI requests made to the Cabinet Office or to the MPA for disclosure of PAR information will be taken on a case-by-case basis, and the MPA will consult the owning department before reaching a disclosure decision.

If a department receives an FOI request for PAR information it is important that they consult the MPA immediately. This is to ensure coordination of approach in respect of the MPA's overall interest as owner of the PAR process. The MPA also has an insight in dealing with such requests and will be able to assist departments in responding.

Definitions

Major Projects Authority

In January 2011 the Prime Minister wrote to members of the Cabinet confirming the mandate for a new Major Projects Authority in the Cabinet Office. The MPA represents a sea change in the oversight of central government's Major Projects, at both an individual and a portfolio level. It aims to address the findings from the NAO report ***Assurance of High Risk Projects (June 2010)*** and from the Major Projects Review undertaken during summer 2010. The MPA is a collaboration between the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury with the fundamental aim of significantly improving the delivery success rate of Major Projects across central government[9].

Major Project

A Major Project is defined as any central government funded project or programme that requires HM Treasury approval during its life (as set out in Delegated Authority letters) and/or is of special interest to the Government[10]. From April 2011 all Major Projects are included in the **Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP)**, which is the main focus of the MPA's activities.

Integrated assurance and approval

Integrated assurance and approval is the planning, coordination and provision of assurance activities and approval points throughout the policy to delivery lifecycle of a project, proportionate to levels of project cost and risk[11]. Introduction of the integrated assurance and approvals regime by the MPA is the Government's response to the NAO report on ***Assurance for High Risk Projects (June 2010)***, which highlighted four key elements required in an integrated assurance regime:

Plan	From April 2011 all projects on the GMPP are required to have a robust **Integrated Assurance and Approval Plan (IAAP)** in place.
Perform	The MPA provides independent assurance for the Government's Major Projects, and has introduced the **Project Assessment Review (PAR)** alongside its standard assurance reviews (Starting Gate and Gates 0 to 5) to enable a flexible response to meet exceptional assurance requirements.
Report	All projects and programmes fulfilling the criteria for a Major Project from April 2011 are registered in the **Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP)** and required to report to the MPA on a quarterly basis.
Control	The aim of this element is to act on the information received from individual assurance activities and/or GMPP reports. If the MPA receives reliable intelligence that a Major Project is at risk, it will instigate **"consequential assurance"**, e.g. further investigation, additional support, intervention and/or escalation, as appropriate, to get it back on track.

9 More information can be found via: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/major-projects-authority

10 For more detail see the joint HM Treasury and Cabinet Office ***Major Project approval and assurance guidance (April 2011)***, which is available from the MPA's assurance toolkit webpage: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/major-projects-authority-assurance-toolkit

11 Guidance on integrated assurance and approvals is available from the MPA's assurance toolkit webpage.

Delivery Confidence Assessment

Delivery Confidence is the confidence in a project's ability to deliver its aims and objectives:

- Within the timescales
- Within the budget
- To the quality requirements including delivery of benefits, both financial and non-financial.

All as laid down in the most recent formally approved mandating document, e.g. the business case.

The assessment of Delivery Confidence reflects:

- Specific issues that threaten delivery to time, cost and quality, and jeopardise the delivery of benefits
- The review team's professional judgement of the likelihood of the project succeeding even though there may be no definitively clear evidence either way
- The resilience of the project to overcome identified shortcomings or threats.

Delivery Confidence is influenced by:

- The project's use of established best practice
- Generic indicators of project health. These include:
  - Aims and scope
  - Governance
  - Skills and capability
  - Key processes
  - External dependencies
  - Business capacity to change.

The assessment of Delivery Confidence is given at the end of a PAR in the report provided to the SRO of the project. The definitions used for this assessment are outlined in the table below.

Definitions of Delivery Confidence

RAG rating	Criteria description
Green	**Successful delivery of the project to time, cost and quality appears highly likely** and there are no major outstanding issues that at this stage appear to threaten delivery significantly.
Amber/Green	**Successful delivery appears probable**; however, constant attention will be needed to ensure risks do not materialise into major issues threatening delivery.
Amber	**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.
Amber/Red	**Successful delivery of the project 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 whether resolution is feasible.
Red	**Successful delivery of the project appears to be unachievable.** There are major issues on project definition, schedule, budget, quality and/or benefits delivery, which at this stage do not appear to be manageable or resolvable. The project may need re-scoping and/or its overall viability reassessed.

Glossary of acronyms used

Acronym	What it means
CoE	Centre of Excellence
DAC (or DGC)	Departmental Assurance Coordinator (may alternatively be called a Departmental Gateway Coordinator)
DCA	Delivery Confidence Assessment
FBC	Full Business Case
GMPP	Government Major Projects Portfolio (consists of approximately 200 Major Projects at any one time)
IAAP	Integrated Assurance and Approval Plan required of all Major Projects
MPA	Major Projects Authority in the Cabinet Office
MPRG	Major Projects Review Group in HM Treasury
NAO	National Audit Office
NDPB	Non Departmental Public Body
PAR	Project Assessment Review
PMO	Portfolio/Programme/Project Management Office
PPMSU	Programme and Project Management Support Unit
RL	Resource Leader in the MPA
RTL	Review Team Leader
SRO	Senior Responsible Owner of the project being reviewed
TAP	Treasury Approval Point

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