**Centre of Expertise for Programme and Project Management**

**Guidance for completion of the Risk Potential Assessment form**

**What is the RPA for?**

The Risk Potential Assessment (RPA) is designed to provide a standard set of high-level criteria for assessing the risk potential of a proposed programme or project in a strategic context. The RPA is used to initiate the assurance process, which includes Gateway™. Once agreed, the completed form should be sent to the departmental P3O.

The RPA assessment is an indicator of risk potential and is not an exhaustive risk analysis model. However, it can be the starting point for a more exhaustive risk assessment of a programme or project. The RPA enables a conversation to be had about the risks and responsibilities that:

* the SRO has for delivery, and
* the programme or project has in respect of visibility, reporting and assurance in a wider portfolio management context.

The RPA can also help the programme or project to identify areas where specific skill sets, commensurate with the level of complexity, may be required.

**How to use this RPA**

The assurance process is applicable to a wide range of programmes/projects including policy driven, business or organisation, property/construction, procurement/acquisition or ICT enabled change initiatives. The RPA should be completed early in the life of a programme or project, irrespective of its type and should be reviewed and updated prior to initiating all subsequent assurance reviews.

Gateway reviews will be mandatory for programmes and projects with a high risk RPA outcome. Programmes and projects which are assessed as high risk at the outset will be subject to the Gateway review process until programme/project closure. There is no requirement to complete an RPA at each stage gate for a high risk programme or project. Requests for Gateway reviews should be made using the Gateway Request form.

Internal Peer Reviews (IPRs) are recommended to be carried out on programmes and projects with low and medium risk RPA outcomes. IPRs should continue to be managed by the SRO and the relevant departmental P3O.

It is recognised that the assessment of a programme or project risk may increase over time, therefore it is expected that medium risk projects should complete an RPA at key milestones to ensure the risk level has not increased. If the risk potential level does increase (i.e. moves to high risk at any time), the programme or project will be subject to the Gateway review process from that stage until programme or project closure.

The risk potential assessment requires the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO), supported by the programme/project manager, to consider the programme/project from two perspectives; firstly by a strategic assessment of the Consequential Impact, should the programme/project fail to deliver its objectives or outcomes (see Table A); followed, if appropriate, by an assessment of Complexity (see Table B).

Each table is made up of a series of assessments, with the result indicated by marking **X** in the appropriate box between Very Low (VL) and Very High (VH). Those assessments are made using the knowledge and judgement of the SRO and programme/project team and should be considered in the light of a programme/project’s strategic context. Examples have been provided as a guide to what might be considered for VL or VH assessments. For each assessment a short explanatory note of the reasoning for each mark should be given (where appropriate) in the text box to provide an audit trail of the considerations.

For **Table A,** having considered each strategic impact area an overall assessment is required to determine the Consequential Impact Assessment. This is based on the holistic assessment of all of five areas in total; there is no formula or calculation involved. The overall assessment should be shown by marking an **X** in the final section of Table A. An explanatory note must be given in the text box provided to give the reasoning for the overall assessment (A6).

Having completed Table A, **if** the overall **Consequential Impact Assessment** is considered to be **VERY LOW** completion of Table B is **optional** and the completed RPA must be sentto your departmental P3O to discuss with the programme/project what assurance activity might be most appropriate.

Following completion of the Consequential Impact Assessment (Table A), completion of the Complexity Assessment (**Table B**) is required where appropriate. This largely follows the same format as Table A, but for convenience is broken down into four Complexity Areas. Having assessed each complexity factor in each of the four complexity areas, an assessment is then required to determine a summary assessment for each area. Again an **X** should be marked in the appropriate score box and explanation given in the notes box.

At the end of Table B there is a table headed **Complexity Assessment Summary** where the area summary assessments results should be recorded. Consideration should now be given to reaching an **Overall Complexity Assessment** for the programme/project, based on the four area assessments. Again there is no scoring or formula for determining this; it is the holistic assessment of the programme/project. The Overall Complexity Assessment is recorded in the final section of Complexity Assessment Summary (B5) with an **X** marked in the appropriate box. An explanatory note must be provided to support the overall complexity assessment for audit trail purposes.

Having completed the Consequential Impact Assessment (Table A) and the Complexity Assessment (Table B), the overall **Risk Potential Assessment** for the programme/project is determined by plotting the respective assessments on **Table C**.

Using the overall results from the Impact and Complexity Assessments and the respective axes of Table C, mark an **X** in the appropriate cell where the respective assessments intersect. This will then indicate what level of Gateway Review may be required, Low, Medium or High Risk review. The overall level of Gateway review (L/M/H) should then be noted in Box 19 on the front page of the RPA.

The Senior Responsible Owner must agree the completed RPA, after which the completed RPA should then be sent to the departmental P3O for validation.

The departmental P3O should independently validate the RPA and be satisfied that it fairly reflects the programme/project’s strategic profile within the organisation’s change portfolio and then forward to the Commercial Delivery Group for agreement. If the RPA is deemed to be inaccurate then a discussion with the SRO should be held to reach a consensus. When an RPA is agreed the Commercial Delivery Group will recommend an Internal Peer Review or instigate the Gateway review process by arranging a Gateway Review Assessment Meeting. Please note that a minimum of 10 weeks will normally be required between the Assessment Meeting and the date of the Gateway review.

The initial RPA assessment will normally be used throughout the life of the Gateway review process, even though it might decline during the project lifecycle. Should the RPA marking increase, the higher assessment may take precedent. Departments, in discussion with their P3O, should undertake periodic reviews of their project portfolios to ensure consistent and appropriate use of the RPA in setting risk levels and hence the appropriate assurance regime.

The RPA will again be reviewed at the Gateway Review Assessment Meeting to ensure there have been no material changes since the RPA was completed. Following the assessment meeting the constitution of the review team will be determined.

As the environment in which programmes/projects operate can be different, there may be other aspects of a programme/project that might significantly be covered by the RPA which affects the impact or complexity assessments. These additional aspects, if considered material to the overall impact or complexity assessments, should be reflected with explanatory notes in the overall assessments in Tables A & B respectively.

If you have further questions about the use or completion of the RPA, please contact the the Commercial Delivery Group by email at [CDG@finance-ni.gov.uk](mailto:CDG@finance-ni.gov.uk) or by telephone on 028 9081 6105.