

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN  
**GUIDANCE FOR PROJECT BOARDS**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

It is sound practice for major initiatives, which could have a severely adverse impact on the institution if they were to fail or go awry, to be subject to a formal process of risk assessment. Accordingly, the Project Sponsor of each major initiative, in concert with the Project Board, is required to complete a Risk Assessment of that initiative for submission for formal approval to the Risk Management Committee and thence to the University Management Group. The Risk Assessment should normally be prepared and submitted at the same time as the project business case. Business planning good practice guidelines are available at <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/finance/documents/policiesandprocedures/busplan.pdf>

**2 RISK ASSESSMENT TEMPLATE**

To assist in the preparation of the Assessment the Project-level Risk Register template should be used. It follows the same format as the University Corporate Risk Register. The University Risk Management Policy and Procedures are available at: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/ppg/index.php?id=17&top=2>

**3 MONITORING OF RISK OVER THE PROJECT LIFETIME**

The completion of a risk assessment is only the beginning of the process of monitoring the risk environment of a project. Project Boards should, as a matter of routine, receive and consider their risk assessments at every meeting. In instances where anticipated risks become real, or where the risks associated with the project change significantly, this should be reported immediately to the University Management Group and to the Risk Management Committee.

**4 MAJOR PROJECTS**

It is a matter of judgement as to how “major” a Project has to be before a formal written risk assessment is required, though it is of course good practice that all Projects should be assessed in this way. As a rule of thumb, any Project with a potential financial impact of around £1M or more requires a formal written Risk Assessment. Projects with smaller budgets, but which could nonetheless impact adversely upon the University’s Strategic aims, should also comply. An example of the latter would be the introduction of the new VLE system, whose failure could be seriously detrimental to the University but whose implementation budget will not exceed £1M. The Risk Management Committee (or its Convener, acting on its behalf) will rule as to whether individual Projects below the threshold be required to submit written assessments.

**5 PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

Every Project should have a Sponsor who carries ultimate responsibility for ensuring that it meets University objectives and fulfils user requirements. The Project Sponsor is typically a very senior non-technical manager. This person will also be the project Risk Owner. A Project Director should also be appointed and should report to the Board. He or she is responsible for the ensuring that the Project meets time and budget targets and for providing technical direction and advice (Risk Manager). In large and complicated Projects, there should also be a Project Manager who reports both to the Project Director and to the Board. He or she carries day-to-day responsibility for delivering the Project, to time and budget, and for ensuring that external and internal task groups fulfil their responsibility. The Project Manager will typically be a technical specialist.

**6 PROJECT BOARD: FUNCTION AND GOVERNANCE**

Good practice suggests that every major Project should have a formally constituted Project Board, convened by the Project Sponsor. The Board is the body responsible for overall project control; for bringing together the various participants in the Project and the interest groups in

the University; for receiving progress and cost reports; and for providing the conduit between the day-to-day Project Management Team and the University's management and governance structures. The role of the Board is to support the Project Sponsor. All estate-related Project Boards should report regularly to the Advisory group on capital Expenditure. Appropriate reporting routes for other Boards should be determined on their creation.

## 7 PROJECT BOARD: COMPOSITION

A Project Board should normally comprise the Project Sponsor (as Convener); the Project Director; the Project Manager (if the Project is large and/or complex enough to warrant one); a Vice-Principal with no direct involvement in the given project; and a number of representatives of the client interest. It should have powers to co-opt. The composition of Boards should be proposed, for approval, to the University Management Group jointly by the Project Sponsor and the University Secretary (as the line-manager of the service support). It will be the responsibility of the Project Director to provide clerking services.

## 8 POST-IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT REVIEWS

Post-Implementation reviews of projects should commence around one year after completion. These allow judgements to be reached as to whether or not the project objectives were successfully achieved, whether performance was adequate against schedule and costs, and whether stakeholders are content with outcomes. The review should also highlight elements that have gone well and those that have gone badly, so that the University can learn from experience.

The reviews are intended to be 'light touch'. An appropriate senior University manager (with administrative support) will be identified to conduct each review. That person will be external to the project but have project management experience and be knowledgeable about the service area concerned. Together with the Project Sponsor and Project Director, he/she will identify key stakeholders for consultation, ask questions about the conduct and progress of the project, and produce a brief written report with key lessons learnt.

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