

Senior Responsible Owner

1. Context

Strong leadership with clear accountability is a key element of successful programme and project delivery. The purpose of this guidance is to set out clearly the requirements and supporting guidance for Senior Responsible Owners (SROs) of programmes and projects in the Change and Programme Management portfolio. The document recognises that the SRO is tasked with accountability while not having authority over all means of delivery and benefits realisation (within business areas or the broader university). While the role therefore relies heavily on consultation and influencing, there will remain areas where support of the SRO by the sponsoring body is required for successful delivery and benefits realisation; these areas are addressed in this document.

This document uses the term 'programme' to denote programmes and projects, and the guidance applies equally to both. Likewise, the term 'Programme Manager' refers both to programme directors and programme managers. The document is derived from the UK Government's [Infrastructure and Projects Authority SRO definition](#) and adapted for suitability within the University of Cambridge.

This guidance describes the role of the SRO and its relationship to other key leadership roles in programme delivery and the wider organisation. Clarity about these leadership roles reduces risk in terms of strategic programme governance and strengthens accountability, increasing potential for success in programme delivery.

2. Programme leadership and management practices

Programme leadership is important at all phases of the programme life cycle; its nature will evolve through the different phases. The key activities are:

- Identifying the need for a programme, providing oversight, authorising a programme or a stage within a programme, and reviewing outcomes
- Directing a programme
- Managing a programme, including initiation and closure
- Consulting and influencing the broader university
- Managing a project within a programme
- Sustaining post-programme operations

A specific programme delivery leadership role is responsible for each of these activities and for making sure that the activities work together effectively. This relationship can be seen in Table 1 below.

Programme delivery leadership role	Management practices
Sponsoring Body	Overseeing and authorising
Sponsor	Advocating, consulting, and influencing
Senior Responsible Owner	Directing
Programme Manager	Initiating, managing and closing programme
Change Manager	Planning, consulting, influencing, analysing
Project Manager	Initiating, managing, and closing a project
Service Owner	Sustaining, managing
Programme Board Chair	Organising, challenging, guiding

Table 1. Management practices of key leadership roles.

The SRO specifically provides definition and direction for a programme by taking ownership of the business case and objectives, successful delivery and benefits realisation on behalf of the organisation. It is also responsible for:

- Making decisions (informed by the Change & Programme Management Board - CPMB) regarding the future of the programme while considering changes to the overall needs of the university, technological context and prevailing risk
- Ensuring the programme remains justifiable and deliverable including ensuring that assurance reviews and approvals are undertaken at the right time
- Taking corrective and preventative actions if needed
- Ensuring that the solution meets the needs of the university
- Ensuring that the programme represents value for money and has continuing strategic fit and relevance
- Keeping the sponsoring body informed of progress, risks and issues and referring to them any decisions or escalations that are above the delegated authority of the SRO

3. Programme governance and delivery structure

The SRO is accountable to the sponsoring body (the CPMB), of which the programme sponsor is a member. The SRO is not accountable to the Planning and Resources Committee (PRC) although the SRO must obtain funding approval (based on the business case) from the PRC having had approval from CPMB. The programme manager represents the programme to the programme board. Line management (for example, within UIS, HR, or Finance) is responsible for providing suitably qualified resource needed by the programme but is not necessarily part of the governance or decision-making structure.

A summary of the governance structure is described in Figure 1 below, along with each body's relationship to the SRO role where appropriate. For clarity, each programme within the portfolio has only one sponsoring body, which is also the one governing body – the CPMB.

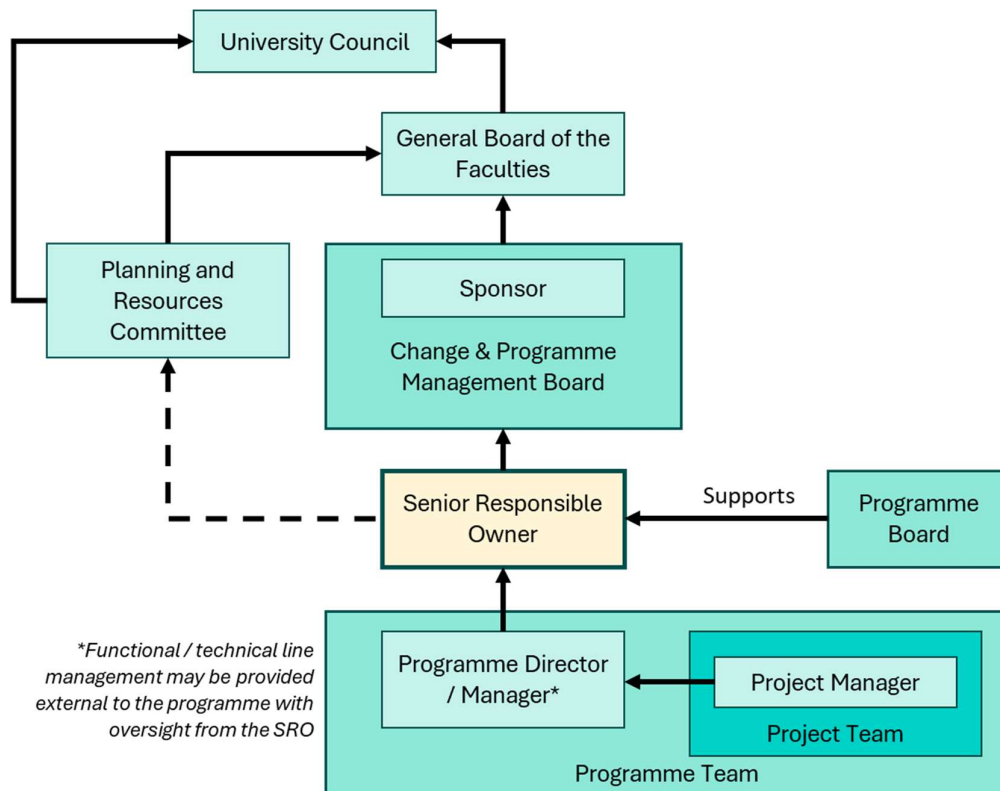


Figure 1. Governance and delivery structure.

3.1 Change and Programme Management Board

As a subcommittee of the University's General Board, the CPMB is the governing board and sponsoring body for all programmes and projects within its remit. It provides high-level oversight, challenge, and support, with particular focus on support in those areas where neither the SRO nor programme board has direct authority or ability to influence. It directs the development and management of the University's change programmes. It is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Resources & Operations and is further comprised of two Heads of Schools; one Head of an NSI; the Registry; the directors of UIS, Finance, HR, and Research; and the Pro-Vice-Chancellors for the service areas within which each of the change programmes resides (*membership and ToR are currently subject to review*). The Head of Strategic Change and Delivery is the Board secretary.

The sponsoring body owns the 'why' of the programme and ongoing service.

3.2 Sponsor

The sponsor, appointed by the CPMB, is the primary visible, active advocate for the programme with the ability to influence at a senior level across the university, supporting the SRO in achieving the programme benefits by securing university buy-in. The sponsor also works with the university to understand and consult, informing the SRO's benefits and business case. The sponsor does not own the benefits but works closely with the SRO who does. The sponsor also does not own the engagement plan but works closely with the change manager who does. The sponsor is a member of the sponsoring body, both challenging and supporting the programme in that capacity.

3.3 Senior Responsible Officer

The SRO, appointed by CPMB, is accountable to the sponsoring body for successful delivery of the programme and its benefits in line with the university's strategic intent. The SRO defines all benefits and is accountable for creating the conditions sufficient for their realisation in the wider university, in conjunction with the sponsor and sponsoring body. The SRO is an active advocate for the programme across the university, in coordination with the sponsor. The CPMB appoints the programme board chair who in turn appoints its members, at the SRO's recommendation. The SRO remains singularly accountable to the sponsoring body for delivery of the programme that meets the needs of the university as set out in the strategic intent.

3.3.1 Engagement

Depending upon the scale of the programme, the SRO may be a full-time role for much of the programme lifecycle. In appointing the SRO, the CPMB must ensure that the appropriate level and term of commitment is defined, documented and agreed by the SRO, sponsor and sponsoring body.

3.3.2 Tenure

The tenure of the SRO needs to be clearly set at the beginning. Where possible, SROs should be appointed to the whole life of the programme and where this is not possible or preferable, tenure should be tied to a specific milestone or phase.

The SRO continues to have enduring accountability for the conditions for benefits realisation once the outputs enter a business-as-usual environment upon programme conclusion unless ownership transfer to a service owner (for example) is agreed by the portfolio board at programme conclusion.

Note that the programme delivers the conditions for benefits to be realised but it is typically within the business-as-usual environment that benefits are realised, after programme conclusion. It is therefore vital that the SRO, through the programme manager, sets out a clear plan for benefits realisation that is agreed by the BAU environment far in advance of programme conclusion.

The rest of this document describes this role in more detail.

The SRO owns the 'what' of the programme and ongoing service.

3.4 Programme Board

The programme board provides first-tier programme assurance by holding the SRO to account and supporting the SRO's decision-making. It does this by providing oversight, guidance, challenge, and support to the programme, providing support particularly in those areas where the programme does not have direct authority throughout the university. However, the SRO ultimately makes decisions and directs the programme.

3.4.1 Programme Board membership

The programme board is composed of both those affected by the programme outputs and those who are providing expertise to meet the business requirement. In order to be effective, it is kept small, and each member is selected to fill entirely a defined role determined by the Programme Board chair.

3.4.2 Programme Board chair

The programme board chair is appointed by the CPMB. The chair owns the programme board meeting agenda, developed in consultation with the SRO. The chair forms the board membership and convenes and manages the flow of board meetings to ensure that the board is fulfilling its role and the meetings result in clear actions and decisions ultimately agreed by the SRO. In this way, the chair and wider board are enlisted to act as a 'critical friend' to the programme rather than decision-makers.

3.5 Programme Manager

The programme manager, appointed by and reporting to¹ the SRO, is accountable to the programme board for delivery of the programme according to the defined benefits, business case, and other constraints set by the SRO. More on the difference between SRO and programme manager is presented in Section 4.10 and Appendix 1.

The programme manager owns the 'how' of the programme delivery.

¹ The programme manager, and in fact most roles within the programme, may have a line manager distinct from the person directing activity within the programme. In this matrix format, line managers do not direct programme activities.

3.6 Change Manager

The change manager develops and owns the change and engagement strategy and plan. Change managers work closely with the programme manager, SRO and sponsor to ensure that the plan will deliver programme needs and, crucially, to ensure that engagement is coordinated both within the programme and across the portfolio and broader university.

The change manager owns the 'how' of programme engagement and communication.

3.7 Service Owner

Upon conclusion of the programme, the SRO may agree with the sponsoring body the transfer of ownership to a service owner who then becomes accountable for sustaining the conditions for benefits realisation and ongoing provision of the service.

The service manager owns the 'how' of the ongoing service provision.

4. The role of the Senior Responsible Owner

The Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) is accountable to the sponsoring body for a programme meeting its objectives, delivering the projected outcomes and creating the conditions for realising the required benefits. The SRO is the owner of the business case and accountable for all aspects of governance.

Responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Defining the programme's vision, benefits, and objectives in line with the strategic intent of the university
- Ensuring a real business need is being addressed
- Ensuring ongoing programme and service viability
- Ensuring that the programme and sponsor are engaging with key stakeholders according to the strategy set out by the change manager in consultation with the sponsor
- Providing the team with leadership, decisions and direction
- Ensuring the delivered solution meets the needs of the business and stakeholders as defined by the sponsor

4.1 Ownership of the business case

The SRO is the owner of the programme's business case and is responsible for ensuring that the programme meets its objectives, delivers the required outcomes, and creates the conditions for realising the required benefits. This not only means monitoring progress on the programme, but also the context within which the programme will deliver. Sometimes a valid programme can become redundant because the reason for its initiation no longer exists or has changed substantially. In this case, the SRO should consider whether to take the decision to stop the project.

While the programme manager may take responsibility for the drafting and developing the business case, the SRO is accountable for approving the business case and taking it through any internal and external business case approvals.

4.2 Ownership of benefits

The SRO is accountable not only for delivery but also for creating the conditions for the realisation of the benefits. This means that the SRO needs to understand what the benefits are, how delivery of the programme will lead to the required benefits, and how baselines and targets for the benefits are quantified and measured.

Linked to the business case, the SRO is accountable for understanding how any changes to the programme could affect the benefits and considering whether this means the programme continues to be valid.

The SRO is accountable for ensuring that the benefits are aligned to strategic intent.

The SRO remains accountable for the decisions they made, and the impact those had on the overall success of the investment, after the programme ends. However, the responsibility for benefits realisation may be devolved to another person or persons after programme closure. Because the SRO will continue to own the benefits and remain accountable for the conditions for their realisation, the SRO needs to understand who will own realisation of each benefit and how each will be tracked and reported on.

4.3 Ownership of requirements

The SRO owns the requirements for the programme by defining what success looks like and so providing a common understanding of the outcomes for all phases of the programme to the programme manager, programme team and stakeholders. This may involve the SRO having to negotiate and reach compromises with senior stakeholders who have conflicting requirements or needs. The SRO may also have to make decisions on the relative priority of requirements and consider which will be met and which will not, such as through defining a minimum viable product.

The SRO is accountable for ensuring that the solution delivered meets these requirements, achieves the outcome in the business case, and remains aligned to benefits realisation according to the targets defined in the business case.

4.4 Ownership of risks and issues

The SRO is the primary owner of all programme risks, ensuring risks are identified and effectively managed. The SRO ensures that the programme considers risks both within its control and out of its control to mitigate; anything that adds risks to programme success and benefits realisation must be addressed. Where risks and issues are outside the control of the SRO to address, the SRO escalates to the sponsoring body for support and resolution. Where satisfactory resolution is not possible, the SRO is responsible for reevaluating programme viability and seeking either to end the programme or obtaining approval for a revised business case as appropriate.

4.5 Championship and ownership of senior relationships

Championship of the programme to the broader university remains the responsibility of the programme sponsor. The SRO must champion the programme to ensure ongoing support from stakeholders internal to the programme and business area. This can include building relationships and collaborating with suppliers, delivery partners, and senior leaders in the business area. The SRO should use these relationships to make sure the objectives and benefits of the programme are communicated and understood and to address any concerns.

Careful alignment between the SRO, sponsor, and change manager is required to ensure a consistent and robust engagement plan (the plan being owned by the change manager).

4.6 Governance and assurance

The SRO is accountable for ensuring that the programme has in place a governance and assurance regime that is effective, proportionate, and appropriate. This will enable the programme to deliver successfully and allow them to discharge their duties in terms of accountability.

The SRO advises the programme board chair to assemble the programme board and is responsible for ensuring there is the right board representation throughout the life cycle of the programme. When designing the governance of the programme, the SRO needs to make sure they apply business area and CPMB-enacted governance arrangements, policies and procedures. This includes reporting on progress to the CPMB and following set business case assurance and approvals processes.

The programme board advises on an external assurance regime, ultimately defined by the SRO and agreed by the sponsoring body, who also agree assurance terms of reference.

Whilst the programme manager might recommend how governance is designed for a particular project within the programme and put such governance in place, it is the responsibility of the SRO to ensure that it is, and continues to be effective, proportionate and appropriate.

4.7 Delivery of objectives, outcomes and benefits

The strategic intent behind the programme must be understood by the SRO who, in turn, should ensure the vision and objectives for the programme are clarified and defined. These objectives and any performance criteria must be agreed as part of the business case.

The SRO needs to ensure that the programme manager has defined a programme's management and working practices so that they lead to the planned outcomes. In addition, the SRO will need to ensure that programme risk is managed throughout the programme lifecycle (see Section 4.4) by invoking appropriate stage gates, assurance reviews and decision points.

Finally, the SRO is responsible for ensuring successful transition to live service or operations. This includes delivery of the agreed programme outcomes and benefits or ensuring that accountability is transferred to appropriate business ownership, for example through the senior business owner, to ensure that benefits are realised after the programme has closed.

4.8 Extent and limit of authority

SROs will encounter limits to both authority and influence that hinder their ability to deliver the programmes for which they are accountable. For example, the SRO secures the budget, but budgets are approved by the PRC. The SRO makes resource demands, but fulfilment is subject to line management. The SRO creates the conditions for benefits realisation, but realisation is dependent on the wider university.

The sponsor is in place to aid both in influencing across the broader university. It should be recognised that influence rather than authority is the primary way in which topics outside the SRO's direct authority will be resolved. The sponsoring body is in place to resolve topics beyond the authority of the SRO and influence of the sponsor. This support requires a relationship of trust and transparency between the board and the SRO. Where the needs of the programme cannot be met by the university, the SRO clarifies and gains acceptance for the implications (which may include delays, extra cost, extra risk, or stopping the programme).

4.9 Relationship with the sponsoring body

The sponsoring body acts as the higher-level authority for a programme and is accountable to the General Board. The sponsoring body acts as the driving force for a programme, creating the link between the organisation and senior responsible owner, and provides:

- Top-level endorsement for the programme and its rationale and objectives
- Direction to the senior responsible owner, monitoring progress, providing support and addressing escalated risks and issues
- Decisions, or referring decisions, that are above the SRO's delegated authority
- Senior-level influence across the university as needed (primarily through the sponsor)

For the relationship between the sponsoring body and SRO to work, there needs to be a culture of transparency through the proportionate and timely reporting of progress. It is essential that all reporting includes the risks and issues to delivery. In turn, the sponsoring body must create a culture of trust and safety by championing SROs who are honest about issues, risks and delivery confidence.

Although directly accountable for their own programme, an SRO is also expected to support delivery of the change portfolio and broader university's overall strategic objectives. This means that they are expected to support the delivery of the university's totality of change by working with other programmes and the portfolio to manage:

- dependencies
- resources
- schedules
- funding
- successful stakeholder engagement

Sometimes this may mean slowing down the delivery of one programme to support delivery of another. While this may appear to be in tension with the SRO's personal accountability for delivery of their programme, it is entirely consistent with their responsibility to respond to changes in the operating context. If conflicting priorities between programmes cannot be resolved between the SROs concerned, however, they may ultimately need to be referred to the sponsoring body for a decision.

4.10 The relationship with the programme manager

The programme manager is a full-time role, accountable to the SRO for establishing the governance framework and for the day-to-day management of the programme, to deliver the outputs and desired outcomes and realise the benefits.

The duties of the programme manager include:

- ensuring the solution is designed and business case and plans prepared
- defining the approach, accountabilities, work scope and targets for the team
- monitoring, forecasting and reporting overall progress against the plan
- resolving risks and issues and controlling change (according to the change plan owned by the change manager)
- delivering the required outputs and outcomes
- monitoring and managing supplier performance
- engaging and communicating with stakeholders
- ensuring the programme is appropriately resourced and organised
- ensuring the budget requirements are defined and managed within agreed limits
- identifying and managing risks and issues
- escalating to the SRO to resolve issues beyond authority of the programme manager

The programme manager is responsible for all day-to-day decisions.

A programme manager may have several project managers reporting to them, with each being accountable to the programme manager for the day-to-day management of the programme assigned to them. The programme manager remains accountable for:

- ensuring all the responsibilities in the programme are adequately assigned and undertaken
- maintaining the reporting and relationship with the senior responsible owner

The key to a successful relationship between an SRO and a programme manager is understanding each other's role and agreeing how they want to work together:

- the SRO steers the programme
- the programme manager manages the programme

The level of trust between the SRO and the programme manager needs to be high and it is important that the SRO allows the programme manager the freedom to manage the programme within agreed tolerances while also providing appropriate challenge and support.

4.11 How the SRO supports the programme manager

The SRO is the owner of the programme and so needs to provide leadership to the programme manager through direction, guidance and support. This can be through providing contextual insight into the needs of the organisation and senior stakeholders to the programme, for example:

- Engaging the sponsor to use influence in and outside of the organisation to champion the programme to ensure ongoing support and to create the necessary conditions for success
- Interpreting information and providing clarification, especially in the context of the organisational priorities, to the programme manager to facilitate a focus on delivery
- Addressing issues or risks that are outside the authority of the programme manager to do so and escalate them as appropriate in a timely and efficient manner
- Providing support and direction to the programme manager through the change control process, especially where changes could impact the time, cost or quality of the programme
- Making decisions in a timely manner and provide the required authorisation for the programme manager to act

Appendix 1

Accountabilities	Senior Responsible Owner	Programme Manager
Leadership	Provides overall leadership, decisions, and direction.	Leads and manages the programme and the programme team on a day-to-day basis.
Design	Owens the overall design of the programme and the temporary organisation needed to deliver it.	Establishes the temporary organisation in line with the agreed design.
Delivery	Delivers the programme objectives and outcomes, and realisation of the benefits set out in the business case.	Creates and leads the programme to deliver the agreed outcomes within time, cost, and quality constraints.
Programme Management	Provides strategic guidance to the programme manager and sets key strategic delivery parameters.	Provides effective leadership and management controls. Sets programme controls and 'stop / go' decision points. Designs the programme structure and organisation appropriate to the stage of the programme. Sets appropriate delivery methodologies consistent with CPMB frameworks. Manages effective transition between programme phases.
Business Case	Owens the business case, ensures, and assures, ongoing viability. Must refer any significant concerns about viability to the CPMB through its programme board.	With the programme leadership, develops the business case and supports the SRO in delivering the business case objectives.
Budget	Secures budget against the business case throughout the life of the programme.	Develops the budget needs and delivery within approved budget.
Resources	Appoints the programme manager, agrees the responsibilities and authority of the role, and secures other resources necessary to deliver the programme.	Identifies skill requirements for all stages of the programme. Recruits resources within budget constraints and effectively deploys them. Builds the programme team; delegates roles and responsibilities, develops capability and fosters innovation by roll-modelling open two-way communication and empowering the team with ownership of their areas.
Benefits Realisation	Oversees and drives benefits realisation, including ensuring benefits ownership following closure of the programme.	Translates agreed business case benefits into programme outcomes and manages delivery of those outcomes.
Stakeholder Management	Influences and manages the environment into which the programme outcomes will be delivered, including relationships with key stakeholders, business owners and impacted parties.	Ensures stakeholder interests are identified and addressed. Manages stakeholder communications and ensures buy-in. Forms collaborative relationships with key stakeholders both internally and externally. Works collaboratively with the senior responsible owner to jointly manage senior stakeholders.
Risks and issues	Manages strategic risks in the operating environment.	Manages risks and issues and escalates to the senior responsible owner where appropriate.
Governance	Ensures appropriate programme governance is in place	Provides all reporting as required by the senior responsible owner. Establishes and manages quality assurance and change control
Assurance	Ensures appropriate assurance and agrees the level and frequency of assurance reviews.	Engages on assurance activities and reviews and acts on recommendations.
Guidance and Support	Available to the programme manager to coach, advise, provide strategic direction, assist with conflict resolution and make timely decisions.	Provides support, guidance and coaching for the programme team. Promotes effective individual and team performance.
Planning and Control	Agrees and owns the programme vision and success criteria with the programme manager. Ensures the strategic direction of the programme remains aligned with any changes in political or business priorities.	Develops and agrees the vision and measurable success criteria with the senior responsible owner. Develops and maintains the programme plan and integrates with other inter-dependent programmes. Monitors and controls programme progress and performance and reports regularly to the Senior responsible owner. Ensures appropriate standards, good practice and lessons learned are sought and applied. Ensures the product / transition deliverables are well defined and agreed with stakeholders. Ensures effective change control is in place to agree and document changes to programme scope and deliverables as agreed with the senior responsible owner and other stakeholders. Manages programme closure and sign-off.

Table 2. Comparison of SRO and programme manager accountabilities