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1. PURPOSE

1.1 To provide a framework in which decisions to invest in, initiate and control IT projects and programmes in the University can be effectively made.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 The University requires all institutions to ensure that IT projects and programmes are initiated and managed effectively throughout their lifecycles. For those of greatest significance to the University as a whole (Sec 3.6 refers), a governance framework has been developed to enable strategic investment decisions to be made as well as to provide appropriate assurance that University objectives are being met throughout the project or programme lifecycle.

2.2 This framework explains the University’s gated review process and arrangements for the scrutiny and approval of all spending proposals relating to significant projects and programmes. This framework will ensure that good practice is applied consistently across the University, clearly aligning the assurance and approvals processes.

2.3 A scaled version of this process can also be considered in relation to projects and programmes that do not need to be overseen by the ISC.

3. DEFINITIONS

3.1 Projects, programmes and portfolios can be defined as follows:

- **Project**: a temporary organisation that is created for the purpose of delivering one or more business products or capabilities, according to an agreed business case.
- **Programme**: a series of planned measures, related events and coordinated activities (often a collection of projects) in pursuit of long-term goals.
- **Portfolio**: a collection of projects and programmes designed to achieve strategic or enterprise objectives.

![Diagram](image.png)

*Figure 1: Image adapted from The Information Paradox and John Thorp to demonstrate the relationship between projects, programmes and portfolios*
ISC Project and Programme Governance: DECISION MAKING PROCESS

3.2 A programme can also be described as a temporary, flexible organisation created to co-ordinate, direct and oversee the implementation of a set of related projects and activities in order to deliver outcomes and benefits related to the organisation’s strategic objectives1.

3.3 Sometimes large projects are referred to as programmes. In practice, the key differences between programmes and projects are:

- programmes focus on the delivery of outcomes and projects usually focus on the delivery of outputs
- programmes are comprised of enabling projects and activities
- programmes usually have a longer life span, may consist of a number of tranches and take several years to deliver
- programmes are usually more complex and provide an umbrella under which their enabling projects can be co-ordinated and delivered

3.4 **Change**: The term ‘change’ can be used variously to describe:

- **Change Control**: the process through which all requests to change the baseline scope of a project, programme or portfolio are captured, evaluated and then approved, rejected or deferred².
- **Change Management**: a structured approach to moving an organisation from the current state to the desired future state³. The majority of projects (whether IT-based, or not) will require a degree of change. The predominant function of some projects is to deliver organisational change.

3.5 **Upgrade**: An upgrade is where one or more improvements are made to existing IT. The improvement could relate to any aspect of the IT and can vary in scale and complexity from very small and simple to wide-ranging and complex. Many upgrades can be delivered as part of normal operation (business as usual), but more complex upgrades may require a project or programme structure to deliver them effectively.

3.6 **Significant**: A project or programme will be deemed significant, and thereby require the attention of the ISC or one of its sub or system committees, where it meets the following criteria (expect where a submission to the contrary is made to, and accepted by, the ISC based on risk appetite):

   a. The overall costs cannot be met by the requesting institution(s)⁴ in totality and additional funding will be required; or
   b. Where the total implementation costs⁵ exceed £1m; or
   c. Where the work being delivered carries a high degree of reputational risk.

3.7 Appendix B – Project and Programme Sizing, provides more general information in relation to the sizing of projects and programmes. It is envisaged that the vast majority of projects and programmes deemed ‘significant’, as defined above, will be considered “Heavyweight”.

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1 As defined in MSP (Managing Successful Programmes) [https://www.axelos.com/best-practice-solutions/msp](https://www.axelos.com/best-practice-solutions/msp)
2 As defined by the APM (Association for Project Management) [https://www.apm.org.uk/body-of-knowledge/delivery/scope-management/change-control/](https://www.apm.org.uk/body-of-knowledge/delivery/scope-management/change-control/)
3 As defined by the APM (Association for Project Management) [https://www.apm.org.uk/body-of-knowledge/delivery/scope-management/change-management/](https://www.apm.org.uk/body-of-knowledge/delivery/scope-management/change-management/)
4 For “Institution”, read School, Department, NSI, faculty etc.
5 Implementation costs cover CAPEX and OPEX for the duration of the project or programme from initiation through to the deliverables being accepted by the relevant operational team(s).
4. DECISION MAKING PROCESS

4.1 This section sets out the purpose and scope of the decision making process to assist institutions to progress initiatives from initial concept through to delivery and transition into regular service. The objective of this process is to scrutinise and approve investment in projects and programmes from the perspective of delivery of optimum value for money. An appropriate level of critical examination must be undertaken in order to effectively manage University risk and investment. Whilst investment is often associated with a process that involves some form of procurement, projects and programmes delivering ‘in-house’ solutions (where most, or all, of the cost is derived from the use of University staff and resource) should also be assessed via this decision making process where they meet the thresholds set out below.

4.2 The decisions referred to in this section are to be made by the [Project or Programme] Board, reporting to the Steering Group (the Information Services Committee (ISC) or one of the ISC’s sub or system committees6, where the ISC has devolved some or all of its decision making powers). The Board shall seek Steering Group approval to progress through the stage gates identified below. Steering Groups and Boards may have multiple projects and programmes reporting to them simultaneously.

4.3 This process applies to all University institutions seeking to undertake a significant IT project or programme.

4.4 The process consists of six decision making points, with the fourth being repeatable to reflect the agreed milestones within a specific project or programme. Where the delivery stage is expected to last a significant length of time, it is expected that an End Stage Report demonstrating progress will be provided every six to nine months to enable the Steering Group to decide whether to continue with the work. An assurance review may be undertaken (see Section 6) in place of an End Stage report being submitted. It is expected that the requesting institution will have undertaken an assessment themselves prior to a submission at the first decision point to ensure the need and justification for the project and programme has been thoroughly considered. The six decision making points are:

![Figure 2 – ISC Project and Programme Governance Decision Points](image)

4.5 The table below provides further information on what is expected at each stage as well as the supporting documentation required to enable a decision to be made.

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6 Information on Boards, and Steering Groups/role of ISC and its sub and systems committees can be found in the document: “ISC Projects and Programmes Governance: STRUCTURE”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision Making Point</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Required Documentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Strategic Justification</td>
<td>Assessment of the strategic context of the proposal against the wider aims and objectives of the University. Consideration of a long list of options to agree an optimum short-list for analysis in the next Stage. Provisional approval of the estimated timescales and funding envelope. Approval of further work being undertaken to move to decision point 2.</td>
<td>Strategic Outline Case (SOC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Detailed Options Appraisal</td>
<td>Assessment of the short-list of options to identify a preferred option based on cost benefit analysis. This will include assessment of risk, procurement approach, commercial and contractual issues, initial designs, hosting approaches and Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) screening questions and plans. Approval of further work being undertaken to move to decision point 3.</td>
<td>Outline Business Case (OBC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Approach Validation</td>
<td>Assessment of the effects of the preferred option (cost, timeframe, risks, deliverables) to test the validity of the approach. This should incorporate a whole life consideration of cost and risk beyond the life of the project or programme to ensure any resulting service is sustainable in the longer-term. Consideration of more detailed designs and plans covering future Stages and a full Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA). Approval of further work being undertaken to move to decision point 4.</td>
<td>Full Business Case (FBC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Delivery</td>
<td>Assessment of work undertaken in the previous Stage to monitor progress and expenditure against the approved budget. An assessment of the work planned for the next Stage will also be undertaken. This decision point can occur multiple times (ideally every 6-9 months) within one project or programme to enable progress against defined milestones to be monitored and decisions made on future work.</td>
<td>End Stage Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Acceptance</td>
<td>Assessment of the deliverables against the project or programme’s original objectives with a view to deciding whether to ‘accept’ them and enabling them to transfer into service.</td>
<td>End Stage Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. End Review</td>
<td>Assessment of what was delivered by the project or programme against that which was originally agreed. An opportunity to consider lessons learnt. Approval to close the project or programme.</td>
<td>End of Project/Programme Review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.6 At each decision point, the Steering Group will make a decision as to whether to approve the project or programme moving on to the next stage. Guidance on the documentation required to support this process can be found in the supporting document: “ISC Projects and programmes Governance: DOCUMENTATION GUIDE”.

4.7 When considering progressing a project or programme through a specified decision point, Steering Groups should give thought to whether to make provisional allocations of funds whereby specific funding is only released as the project or programme meets specified milestones.

4.8 In making such decisions, consideration should be given to user needs to ensure that there is a compelling case for investment at the conceptual stages of a project or programme and that the likelihood of meeting the user needs case be assessed at all future stages through to project or programme closure. Further information on considering user needs can be found in the supporting document: “ISC Projects and Programmes Governance: USER NEEDS”.

4.9 Board and Steering Group decisions are to be communicated to the Project or Programme Manager in writing as soon as possible but always within five working days.

4.10 Projects and programmes funded wholly or in majority through a research grant will be overseen by the ISC where the total expenditure exceeds £1m and where a University body (such as the UIS or Library) provides part, or all, of the delivery. In these circumstances, progress through Decision Making Points 1-3 is not required where the grant’s sponsor or founder has agreed terms and conditions with the University in relation to anticipated spend and associated deliverables. However, the ISC will still require a high level project or programme plan to enable future consideration of documentation submitted at Decision Making Points 4-6.

4.11 It is expected that the majority of decisions will be made during a regular meeting of the Steering Group, however, there may also be occasions where decisions can be taken outside of regular meetings, out of committee. It will be for the chair of the relevant committee to agree to such a course of action. Where this is agreed, relevant committee members will be sent papers enabling them to make a decision and the chair will provide a timeframe in which members must make and communicate their decisions to the secretariat.

4.12 For projects and programmes that do not need to be overseen by the ISC, a proportionately scaled process can be adopted. For example, decision making points (“Gates”) 1-3 can be rolled into one through the development and consideration of a single business case, rather than a SOC, OBC and FBC in turn. In these circumstances, the level of detail and assessment required in the business case to inform a decision to invest will need to be proportionate to the scale of the investment proposed and the appetite for risk. The Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) will decide upon the scale-back required accordingly for such projects.

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7 A description of the SRO role can be found in the supporting paper entitled “ISC Project and Programme Governance: BOARDS”
5. **COSTS EXCEEDING £2M**

5.1 Where the cost of a project or programme is estimated to exceed £2m, a submission will need to be made, in parallel, to the Planning and Resource Committee through the Capital Projects Process (see Appendix A - Capital Projects Process). The Capital Projects Process comprises three stages; Registration -> Concept -> Full Case. Further guidance on purchasing is providing by the Finance Division.

6. **ASSURANCE REVIEWS**

6.1 In addition to the reviewing and approval process which Boards will exercise and the visibility of projects and programmes that the Steering Groups will receive through the decision making process, a range of assurance reviews can be commissioned in order to assess current project or programme status. Such reviews will provide a point in time assessment resulting in an indication as to how likely it is that the project or programme will deliver against its objectives within the agreed parameters. The assessment will also highlight significant risk and issues and make recommendations.

6.2 Assurance reviews can be undertaken at any stage within the project or programme lifecycle but associating them with one of the decision points outlined above may provide more tangible and useful results.

6.3 There are a number of options for such reviews:

   a. **Checkpoint Review**: this is a review normally undertaken by someone within the institution in which the majority of the work is being undertaken. The review will normally comprise a review of key project or programme documentation and a range of meetings with key stakeholders, for example, SRO, project or programme manager, some members of the Board and others with key parts to play in the project or programme’s success. The review will normally take one to two weeks and result in a brief report providing an overall [RAG – Red/Amber/Green] status and making recommendations.

   b. **Internal Assurance Review**: this is a review undertaken by a member of staff within the University, but from outside the impacted institution(s) and not from within the project or programme’s Board or team. Such a review will likely take a more formal stance and require a more in-depth review of project documentation and a range of interviews with most Board members, project team members and key stakeholders. The review should conclude within one to two weeks, but may take longer for more complex projects or programmes. The resulting report will be more in depth than for a Checkpoint Review and will provide a greater level of assurance as to the likelihood of success.

   c. **External Assurance Review (or audit)**: this is a review undertaken by an external body with experience of project or programme assurance reviews or audits. These reviews will normally be of a similar detail to Internal Assurance Reviews and so require a similar level of interaction with the Board and team. Resulting reports should attract a high level of confidence from the University.

6.4 Assurance reviews will carry a cost. Whether the cost incurred in relation to undertaking a Checkpoint Review or Internal Assurance Review will depend on agreements made between

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8 [http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/planning/cpp/CPP_guidance.pdf](http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/planning/cpp/CPP_guidance.pdf)
8 [http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/purchasing/guides/](http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/purchasing/guides/)
the institution providing the resource and the project. The costs of undertaking an External Assurance Review (or audit) can be considerable depending on the 3rd party commissioned to undertake the work. Projects and programmes are advised to make provision for such costs within initial budget forecasting.

6.5 The table below highlights who can commission assurance reviews:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF REVIEW</th>
<th>COMMISSIONED BY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Checkpoint Review</td>
<td>Project or programme manager or member of the Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Internal Assurance</td>
<td>SRO, Board or Steering Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. External Assurance</td>
<td>SRO, Board or Steering Group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix A - Capital Projects Process

[Diagram of Capital Projects Process]

[Link to PDF file: http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/planning/cpp/CPP_process.pdf]
### Appendix B – Project and Programme Sizing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Heavyweight</th>
<th>Middleware</th>
<th>Lightweight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Risk profile</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business criticality</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Non-critical</td>
<td>Non-critical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impacted by legislative requirements?</td>
<td>Likely</td>
<td>Possible</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will the development impact existing critical business processes?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. existing systems or services the development may impact</td>
<td>4+</td>
<td>Up to 3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery schedule</td>
<td>Fixed or can tolerate only minor impacts</td>
<td>Can tolerate minor impacts</td>
<td>Can tolerate major impacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>