# Digital Projects Assessment Board (DPAB) terms of reference

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**Context**

The Digital Projects Assessment Board (DPAB) is the governance function that assesses, approves and monitors project progress on behalf of the Digital Communications team within University of Bristol Directorate of External Relations.

**Purpose**

DPAB was formed to provide oversight and control of incoming and in-process requests for work, so that all significant workstreams within Digital Communications can be supported to continually deliver business value, demonstrating this value through effective and clear benefits realisation.

**Membership**

On inception, DPAB was formed from the management team within Digital Communications. Membership will be reviewed annually and may be modified according to business need.

**Composition**

- Head of Digital Communications (L)
- Deputy Head of Digital Communications (K)
- Digital Manager (x4) (J)

**Roles and responsibilities**

**Roles**

**Chair** – Head of Digital Communications (delegates to Deputy Head if absent)

**Secretary** – Deputy Head of Digital Communications (delegates to a Digital Manager if absent)

**Responsibilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROLE</th>
<th>RESPONSIBILITY</th>
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</table>
| **Chair** | 1. The Chair has the executive role so is ultimately responsible for the outcome of all decisions  
2. Ensures the Secretary has the appropriate materials available so that the group can work effectively  
3. Considers all incoming, continuing and completing work in context of the wider Directorate of External Relations function  
4. Ensures the work being done by Digital Communications is delivering business value and that all workstreams can demonstrate this value through effective and clear benefits realisation  
5. Has primacy and right of veto |
| **Secretary** | 1. To provide the appropriate materials so that the group can work effectively  
2. To book appropriate space to allow the group to meet and conduct its business effectively  
3. To record the business of the group in the appropriate record-keeping format (spread sheet)  
4. To communicate changes to DPAB processes as needed to the correct audiences as appropriate |
5. To maintain the active projects Trello board
6. To maintain the project process Trello board and workflow slide

Conduct

Frequency of meetings
Weekly on Wednesday 11:00-12:00.

Quorum
- Either Head of Digital Communications or Deputy Head must attend
- At least two Digital Managers must attend
- Digital Managers unable to attend should nominate a deputy from amongst the Digital Officers within Digital Communications, briefing them in advance and providing support as needed
- If not quorate, those attending can provide input to decision-making by Head of Digital Communications or Deputy Head that can take place between meetings
- If unable to contact either Head of Digital Communications or Deputy Head, all decision-making is postponed until the next quorate meeting.

Transaction of business

Workflow
DPAB provides oversight and control of incoming and in-process requests by following a process workflow (see Fig 1. Digital Communications – Project Process). This workflow is fully documented on Trello and is explained in the following section, Stages.

Digital Communications - Project Process

Fig 1: Digital Communications – Project Process
## Stages

The Digital Communications Project Process has six stages, each of which has a decision point or ‘gate’ at which decision-making to stop, start or continue is taken.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project Brief (Assessment)</strong></td>
<td>ALL requests for work that cannot be considered a break-fix/support incident MUST be brought to DPAB to assess (see project definitions for guidance).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Project Brief form must be completed in advance of a DPAB meeting so that the request can be assessed.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DPAB has the following decisions available to it at this stage:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Agree that the request warrants further investigation and assign a Digital Manager to follow up with the requesting party</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Request further information before deciding. A Digital Manager will be assigned to follow up and to supply additional information at the next meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Decline to commit resource now, but agree that the work is deemed to be of merit so could be scheduled in at an appropriate future date</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Decline to commit resource, directing the requesting party to other channels/methods/external resource</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DPAB considers meritorious work to have clear business objectives and clear, measurable key results (KPIs) as Digital Communications is committed to continually delivering business value.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If the decision is either 1 or 2, work is assigned to the appropriate role at DPAB, usually a Digital Manager although the Head of Digital Communications or Deputy Head may wish to speak to the requesting person first before making an offline decision.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If the decision is 3 or 4, the appropriate role (usually Deputy Head) contacts the requesting party.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>All results of DPAB’s assessment should be communicated back to the requesting party as soon as possible following the meeting, either directly by a Digital Manager or via a formal email from the Deputy Head (Secretary).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project Proposal (Discovery)</strong></td>
<td>All project requests that are approved by DPAB and then enter into the project process must first conduct a thorough discovery phase.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>There is a checklist that ensures that:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Roles and responsibilities are clear and communicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The business objective is sound and that the requested work can be attributed to it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>A baseline ‘as is’ state is captured and that the ‘to be’ state achieved following project delivery can be measured against it so that benefits can be realised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The most appropriate, cost-effective method is employed to fulfil the business objective (e.g. this may not be through building a new website in T4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The scope of work is agreed up-front, a definition of done is mutually agreed with the sponsor and the scope is constrained to work that is directly addressing the business objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>A decision point is reached where the project team (Digital Manager) assesses preparedness for the team to continue to Project Delivery</td>
</tr>
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</table>

If the decision point made by the project team is that they are ready to proceed to Project Delivery, approval must be sought from DPAB first – see Project Approval (Contract) below.

### Project Approval (Contract)

The [Project Approval form](#) must be completed in advance of a DPAB meeting so that the request to proceed to Project Delivery can be assessed.

The form should be completed once all the necessary information is known and collated. It is recommended that all parties meet to complete it and that the project’s Sponsor attends to provide their approval.

DPAB will assess the results of the discovery phase and provide approval for the project team to proceed to Project Delivery if satisfied that the Project Proposal (Discovery) is complete and that, most importantly, there is genuine business benefit to continuing to resource the work.

DPAB has the following decisions available to it at this stage:

1. Agree to the Project Approval request and assign a Digital Manager to the work
2. Request further information before deciding. The Digital Manager assigned to the discovery phase will follow up to supply additional information at the next meeting
3. Decline to commit resource now, but agree that the work is deemed to be of merit so could be scheduled in at an appropriate future date
4. Decline to commit resource to continuation of the project, agreeing to share the output of the discovery phase with the requesting party

| **Project Delivery (Alpha, Beta, Go-Live)** | All projects approved by DPAB must conduct the Project Delivery stage.

However, how a project's products/outputs are produced/developed isn't dictated by DPAB.

This is because delivery method will vary depending upon specific project requirements and attempting to document all the various possibilities in a formal project process adds unnecessary bureaucracy.

The Project Delivery stage refers to Alpha, Beta and Go-live as these are standard development and release stages in an Agile project ([https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/agile-delivery](https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/agile-delivery)).

If the decision point made by the project team is that they have delivered the project according to the definition of done established in the Project Proposal (Discovery) phase (including Quality Assurance), approval must be sought from DPAB to formally close the project – see Project Closure (Acceptance into Service) below. |
|---|---|
| **Project Closure (Acceptance into Service)** | The Project Closure (Acceptance into Service) form must be completed in advance of a DPAB meeting so that the request to formally close the project can be assessed.

The formal closure of a project is critical as it allows all parties to acknowledge that work is complete and to agree an appropriate review period to assess benefits

This period needs to be of sufficient length to collect enough data to make assessment at the Project Benefit Review (Completion) stage meaningful.

DPAB has the following decisions available to it at this stage:

1. Agree to the Project Closure (Acceptance into Service) request and time interval for benefits realisation
2. Request further information before deciding. The Digital Manager assigned to the delivery stage will follow up to supply additional information at the next meeting
3. Decline closure based upon context and/or dispute over the benefits realisation time interval |
4. Decline closure because the Sponsor disagrees that the project has been delivered

In the event of DPAB declining closure, the matter will be escalated to the Head of Digital Communications, or Deputy Head for action.

If the decision to close the project is approved, the Secretary notes the agreed review period and a counter is set to remind DPAB at the agreed date.

**Project Benefit Review (Completion)**

Benefits realisation is the formal conclusion to the Digital Communications Project Process and, as such, is as important as any of the preceding stages.

The [Project Benefits Review form](#) must be completed in advance of a DPAB meeting so it can assess benefits and decide whether to proceed with a follow-on project to address failure or build upon success of the completed project, or not.

After assessing benefits realisation, DPAB has the following decisions available to it at this stage:

1. Agree to a follow-on project, entering the Digital Communications Project Process at the Project Proposal (Discovery) stage
2. Request further information before deciding. The Digital Manager assigned to the Project Closure stage will follow up to supply additional information at the next meeting
3. Decline a request for a follow-on project

**Exceptions**

There are cyclical workstreams (e.g. recruitment cycles) that require Digital Communications support. These are high-profile and business critical, so they are tracked by DPAB but do not proceed as normal projects do through the stages as they aren’t within DPAB’s direct control. See also [project definition](#).

**Incoming requests**

All incoming requests are assessed as follows:

1. What is the problem we are being asked to solve?
2. Is there a clear business objective?
3. Is sponsorship/support going to be available from an appropriately senior role?
4. Is the requested work a priority for the requesting org unit?
5. Is there a dedicated budget to support the request?

**Escalation**

DPAB makes decisions collectively, drawing upon experience from across the management team.
The Chair has primacy and right of veto and a remit to consider all requests for work in the context of Directorate of External Relations and beyond.

Any disputes should first be communicated to the Secretary who will report these to the Chair for consideration outside of DPAB.