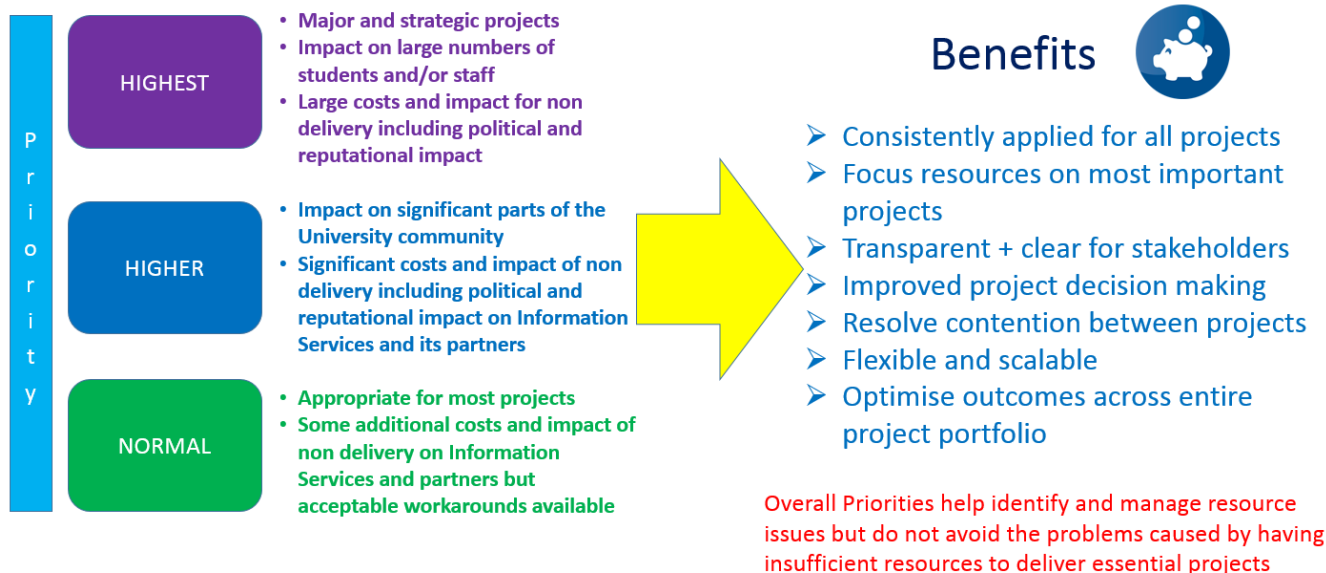


Setting and Managing Overall Priority for Projects

Optimising Delivery - Overall Priorities



Why do we need Project Overall Priority?

Within any project portfolio it is always helpful to be able to identify the highest priority projects. Agreement on project priorities is an important foundation for effective decision making. The benefits of establishing a consistent approach to project prioritisation include:

- Clarity and transparency for project stakeholders
- Consistent approach applicable to all projects and supported by the ISG PMO
- Priority information presented and reviewed alongside other project data e.g. RAG Status, Run/Grow/Transform, Costs, Benefits, milestones, risks
- Helps focus attention and resources on most important projects
- Improved project decision making

To ensure that the process of project prioritisation is transparent and understood by all stakeholders we have created this guidance which can be used to consistently determine project priorities.

Overall Priority Definition

Overall Priority for a project depends on a number of factors and can change during the lifetime of the project. Projects which have the highest overall priority over one period, for example in the run up to the start of term, may have a lower priority at other times.

Overall Priority is the current overall priority of the project based on an up date date assessment of both the importance of the project and the impact of non delivery taking into account the following factors:

- **Impact** - the current impact on the University and project stakeholders if the project fails to deliver considering any mitigation steps, such as workarounds, that are already be in place. The impact of failure may be considered higher where there are no acceptable workarounds available and/or where there are significant financial or reputational impacts of non delivery for the University
- **Probability** - the current probability that the project will fail to deliver considering any mitigation steps that are already be in place
- **Proximity** - how close we are to the delivery date for the project

We will set the Overall Priority based on a professional assessment by project stakeholders and supported by the ISG PMO. The Overall Priority for projects has three levels: **NORMAL**, **HIGHER** and **HIGHEST** These levels are defined as follows:

NORMAL Overall Priority Projects

This is the default priority and is appropriate for the majority (~60%) of ISG projects. Typically failure to deliver these projects will:

- Impact on the University community
- Involve some additional costs and/or loss of benefits

- Place the business of an organisational unit at risk but the risk is self-contained and manageable

The **NORMAL** Overall Priority group may also include projects where failure to deliver will have more significant impact on the University but where, at the time of the Overall Priority assessment, the risk of failure is well managed and/or the delivery date is far in the future. Such projects may rise to **HIGHER** or **HIGHEST** Overall Priority over time as the delivery date approaches and/or risk profile changes.

HIGHER Overall Priority Projects

These are projects where non delivery will have more significant impact. Typically these projects will be championed and/or sponsored by more senior University staff . Typically failure to deliver these projects will:

- Have significant impact on the University community
- Involve significant additional costs and/or loss of benefits
- Place the business of the University or an organisational unit at significant risk
- Potentially cause reputational damage to Information Services, the sponsoring partner and/or other organisational units

The **HIGHER** Overall Priority group may also include some projects where failure to deliver will have even more significant impact on the University but where, at the time of the Overall Priority assessment, the risk of failure is well managed and/or the delivery date is far in the future. Such projects may rise to **HIGHEST** Overall Priority over time as the delivery date approaches and/or risk profile changes.

HIGHEST Overall Priority Projects

Our highest priority group of projects. These projects will typically be championed by our most senior leaders. These projects may also be referred to as being major projects or as having strategic importance to the University. These projects will typically be directed by Project Boards or similar governance groups. Failure to progress these projects will:

- Have unacceptable impact on the University community, e.g. affect a large number of students, staff, visitors or alumni
- Involve unacceptable additional costs, e.g. the costs of providing an alternative solution or for additional goods and/or services which would not otherwise be required, and/or loss of benefits
- Place the business of the University at unacceptable level of risk, e.g. failure to meet a legislative requirement or deliver a contracted service
- Potentially cause reputational damage to the University

The **HIGHEST** Overall Priority group may also include some lower priority projects where, at the time of the Overall Priority assessment, the risk of failure has grown and/or the delivery date is very close.

How is Overall Priority assigned?

1. The Overall Priority is set initially during the Annual Planning process. There is a one-off exercise each year following the completion of annual planning where the Head of Project Services confirms the Overall Priority for every project in the plan for the following year. Where no determination can be made projects are assumed to have **NORMAL** Overall Priority
2. The Overall Priority is then reviewed by the Project Sponsor and Programme/Project Manager in consultation with the Project Sponsor and other senior project stakeholders when the project is initiated.
3. Project Sponsors may request a change in the Overall Priority for their project at any time in consultation with the the Project Manager and/or Programme Manager. The Project Manager/Programme Manger will document the proposed Overall Priority change using the Project Issue and Change Control Log (PICCL) or Programme Issue and Change Control Log (PRICCL) on the Project Web Site
4. For Applications Directorate projects all increases in Overall Priority require explicit approval from the Head of Project Services and the Applications Division Senior Management Team through WIS. Once the outcome of the request is known the PICCL/PRICCL should be updated and the new Overall Priority is recorded on the Projects Web Site. Approved changes are updated in ASTA by the ISG PMO
5. Decreases in Overall Priority (Current) for projects managed by Application Directorate do not require WIS approval
6. A list of all **HIGHEST** and **HIGHER** Overall Priority projects is published for the Applications Projects Meeting. and reviewed by the Head of Project Services and the Applications Division Senior Management Team. This review may result in requests to review the Overall Priority for one or more projects
7. Issues impacting on **HIGHEST** Overall Priority projects managed by Applications Division must be advised to the Head of Project Services as soon as the issue or conflict is identified
8. When a **HIGHEST** Overall Priority (Current) project has successfully completed its final delivery the Project Manager should reduce the Overall Priority via the PICCL process
9. Where a project is one of a number in a group of related projects, e.g. within a programme, the Overall Priority is not inherited from the other project in the and must be set individually

With any normal project portfolio we'd anticipate that ~60% of our projects would have **NORMAL** Overall Priority, ~30% would have **HIGHER** Overall Priority and ~10% would have **HIGHEST** Overall Priority. Any significant increase in the % of **HIGHEST** and **HIGHER** Overall Priority projects may lead to increased risks for project resourcing and delivery.

What are the indicators that your project should have higher than NORMAL Overall Priority?

At least some of the following will be true for your project:

1. The project is being championed by a very senior member of University staff such as the Principal, a Vice Principal, the CIO, a Head of College or Support Group, a Unit Director or Senior Academic
2. The project has a Project Board or other governance group
3. An ISG Senior Supplier has been allocated for the project
4. The project will contribute significantly to a strategic aim of the University e.g. Improving Student Experience
5. The project has a hard delivery deadline and there are few practical workarounds available to reduce the risk of non delivery
6. There are significant risks that the project delivery deadline will be missed due to resourcing conflicts
7. There are significant costs associated with missing the delivery deadline or some other project milestone
8. The project has many downstream dependencies i.e. other projects and/or business/service activities that are dependent on the outcomes of the project
9. There is significant potential for negative reputational impact on the University if the project misses a delivery deadline or other important milestone
10. Business partner and ISG priorities may seem significantly out of line. For example the business partner is highly motivated to deliver the project and is expressing concern about ISG commitment to progressing the project
11. Senior University staff are taking an increasingly active interest in the project as it progresses

Implications for Project Sponsors and Project Managers of HIGHEST and HIGHER Overall Priority Projects

HIGHEST or HIGHER Overall Priority status gives a project the enviable position of being able to trump other projects to secure resources. This means that the project is protected from resource conflicts and should be better able to meet its delivery milestones - this is one of the aims of the Overall Priority process. The impact on other projects can however be very significant. A thoughtlessly managed HIGHEST or HIGHER Overall Priority project can do a lot of damage to other projects and may adversely impact the reputation of Information Services and our business partners. It is vital that all staff involved in HIGHEST or HIGHER Overall Priority projects understand these impacts and discharge their project responsibilities accordingly. Experience in Project Services has helped us develop the following guidelines for managing HIGHEST and HIGHER Overall Priority projects:

1. **Best practice project management** - for a Highest Overall Priority project it is vitally important that you have a robust delivery and resource plan. This means paying even more attention than normal to planning, estimation, risk management and stakeholder engagement.
2. **Ensure shared priorities** - Ensure that the Project Sponsor, business partners and other key stakeholders share the agreed priority. There is no point in securing Highest Overall Priority status within Information Services only for the project to come off the rails due to a lack of stakeholder commitment. The Overall Priority for your project must be a shared priority across the University.
3. **Consider dedicated resources** - consider a dedicated project team to deliver your project i.e. staff who are only working on your project. This ensures that each member of the team is 100% committed to the project and will not be conflicted with other activities. Where this is not possible try to minimise the number of staff who are working simultaneously on multiple HIGHEST priority projects thereby creating single points of failure which may be very difficult to resolve.
4. **Minimise risk of failure through careful scheduling** - in particular carefully schedule the delivery of HIGHEST priority projects to reduce contention with other HIGHEST priority projects. For example although start of term should be avoided wherever possible and projects that are required for start of term should aim to deliver before the start of the change freeze to minimise contention and ensure project deliverables are fully proven in the LIVE environment before the critical period
5. **Prioritise deliverables** - Wherever possible prioritise deliverables and ensure that the most important items are delivered first. Also consider ways to shorten the timescales to reduce risk and impact of non-delivery
6. **Respond to changes** - when circumstances change or you have delivered and the urgency has passed reduce the Overall Priority. This change does not reduce our commitment to complete the project but will make a difference to other projects and better enable Information Services to optimise delivery right across our portfolio of projects.

Appendix 1 - Shared Process for Managing Overall Priority for ISG Projects

Managing Overall Priorities for ISG Projects



Notes

1. Overall Priority for projects being worked on by staff from >1 Directorate set by agreement with the relevant Directorate representatives.
2. The process for setting and managing Overall Priorities is fully supported by the ISG PMO.

Full presentation shared with the ISG SLT in March 2019

Appendix 2 - Applications Directorate Specific Guidance For Updating Overall Priority

1. When the Programme Manager raises a request for a new ASTA code for the project it is assumed that the project will have NORMAL priority
2. Once the project is in progress any change required to the Overall Project Priority should be agreed with the Project Sponsor and Head of Project Services before the request is put to WIS using the PICCL process. The PICCL must include the following information:
 1. Proposed new Overall Priority
 2. Existing Overall Priority
 3. Justification for the proposed change based on the guidance above.
 4. Agreement of the Project Sponsor, Programme Owner and Programme Manager with the proposed change
 5. Confirmation that the Business Partner is also prioritising the project at the same level. This MUST always be confirmed with the sponsor prior to submitting the priority change request - if partner not confirmed the priority change request will be rejected
 6. Business and/or technical implications if the proposed Overall Priority change is not agreed at this time
 7. Whether or not business partner and ISG resources have been secured for the project i.e. is the Overall Priority change an attempt to secure these resources?
3. Following discussions with the Head of Project Services the Project Manager/Programme Manager will update the PICCL with:
 1. the outcome of the discussion i.e. approval or rejection of the approved change
 2. the reason(s) for the decision
 3. the date the decision was made
4. The Project Manager/Programme Manager should then record the PICCL in the WIS note as for approval to WIS
5. Following review at WIS the ISG PMO will then change the Overall Priority for the project in ASTA
6. Reduction in Overall Priority can be processed by the Project Manager or Programme Manager at any time following consultation with the Project Sponsor. These changes do not need to go to WIS however any change to the Overall Priority (Current) must be documented in a PICCL and updated in ASTA by the ISG PMO

Note that Resource Managers are now able to see requested and assigned project resource requests and the associated Overall Priority for projects in ASTA. Where there is more demand than available resource the Resource Managers will now flag to the Project Managers of the project(s) that their requests may be impacted by a Resource/Schedule conflict. The normal Resource/Schedule Conflict process must be followed see [Resource Conflict Guidance](#).