**Order Schedule 20 (Order Specification)**

**Bid Pack**

**Attachment 3 – Statement of Requirements**

Contract Reference:CCZZ24A06

**Provision of a systematic review and meta-analysis on the relationship between skills and productivity (Government Skills, Project A)**

**A systematic review and meta-analysis of evidence on the link between workforce**

**skills and productivity, and its relevance for the UK civil service and public sector**

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# 1. PURPOSE

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* 1. This project will carry out a systematic review and meta-analysis of robust, relevant evidence on the link between workforce skills and productivity. This synthesis is needed because the current evidence base on the nature of the relationship between skills and productivity is very heterogeneous, and therefore it is not yet sufficiently clear what is known (and thus can and should be acted on in practice) and is not yet known (and should therefore be the focus of further research and evaluation) - particularly in relation to government and the public sector.
	2. This project will generate new knowledge of how far, why and under what conditions skills can be a driver of public sector productivity, by delivering a comprehensive and up-to-date systematic review and meta-analysis of the existing evidence base on workforce skills and productivity, with a particular focus on what it can and cannot tell us about the relationship between skills and public sector productivity, taking a complex systems perspective.
	3. It is intended to contribute evidence to inform future policy making; it will not make policy recommendations.
	4. The review will facilitate improved skills investment decision-making in the future, by delivering accessible and usable policy and practice guidance (based on the systematic review and meta-analysis) to support improved evidence-based decision making on where to best direct investments in workforce training, upskilling and reskilling to have the greatest positive impact on productivity. We intend to use this evidence to inform future decisions about workforce skills within the civil service in particular, and expect to particularly disseminate this evidence to leaders and decision makers in the public sector after it is completed in March 2025. We also expect the completed research to be of use to policy makers on workforce skills more generally, and to leaders and decision makers in all sectors across the economy, as a secondary audience.
	5. This is one of four projects we are commissioning as part of an integrated programme of evidence synthesis and evaluation ongoing since 2021, developing high quality and actionable evidence on the links between effective learning and development interventions, workforce skills, and productivity. Interested suppliers are welcome to bid for one or more of the projects.

# BACKGROUND TO THE CONTRACTING AUTHORITY

## 2.1 The Government Skills and Curriculum Unit (GSCU) is part of the Government People Group (GPG), and exists to equip ministers and the civil service with the skills, knowledge and networks needed to deliver now and in the future.

2.2 The role of GSCU is:

1. Assessing the skills needed across the civil service, understanding current skill levels and identifying priorities for development.
2. Providing access to training for departments and professions through efficient commercial frameworks.
3. Providing access to learning products for civil servants through user-friendly digital platforms, and pointing people to recommended learning.
4. Strengthening leadership skills across the Civil Service and wider public sector.
5. Deepening the collective capability of the national security community.
6. Supporting accelerated leadership development for civil servants with the highest potential to progress.
7. Recruiting and developing high performing graduate recruits through the Fast Stream.
8. Strengthening and diversifying the pipeline for the civil service through apprenticeships, internships and outreach.
9. Developing and delivering evidence-based learning products where it is efficient and effective to do so across government and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions.
10. Building and sharing our knowledge base of ‘what works’ for civil servant learners across the full range of our activities, under what conditions, and why.

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# BACKGROUND TO REQUIREMENT/OVERVIEW OF REQUIREMENT

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## GSCU is completing a programme of work under the current spending review settlement (until March 2025) which sets out the skills that the government needs, and the most effective ways to deliver a skilled civil service. We are also developing the evidence base on government skills to inform the next spending review. It is essential that this work is evidence-based for maximum impact and value.

## GSCU is responsible for over 3,000 cross-government interventions to develop skills. It is important that we have an evidence-based understanding of the overall relationship between workforce skills and productivity, and different interventions for developing and utilising workforce skills as a driver of productivity, to ensure value-for-money from the spend on skills development.

## Given the acknowledgement across the political spectrum of the productivity challenges facing the UK economy and the public sector, and the need for government to deliver for citizens under changing conditions, it is important that we work towards a better understanding how and under what conditions investing in skills development can be a driver of public sector organisational performance, delivery, efficiency, and productivity.

* 1. More widely, productivity has been identified as a critical opportunity for the UK economy, and work is underway across the civil service in partnership with other organisations and stakeholders to develop policies and interventions which are productivity generating. Workforce skills have been identified as one driver of productivity. This is the wider context for the chosen focus of our requirement
	2. The civil service is a large workforce (currently around 530,000), and is a key influence on the wider public sector workforce (almost 6m people). By investing in, and acting on, the evidence base for skills we can have an influence on productivity in the wider economy and society.

## To support our goals around skills policy, productivity, and effective interventions to develop workforce skills, GSCU is commissioning four discrete research projects, each of which will be procured through a separate bidding process:

* + 1. **Project A (this project)** - a systematic review and meta-analysis of the evidence on the link between skills and productivity.
		2. Project B - a systematic review of what features are associated with effective professional learning and development (driving improvements in knowledge, skills and/or networks; business performance; productivity) in a civil service context.
		3. Project C - a randomised control trial and process evaluation of an intervention to improve civil servants’ core writing, advising and briefing skills.
		4. Project D - a randomised control trial and process evaluation of an intervention to improve civil servants’ core digital and data skills.
	1. To support these projects, GSCU has been awarded ringfenced grant funding. It is a requirement for this grant that work is concluded by March 2025. Publication and dissemination may take place after this point.
	2. Each project will lead to discrete outputs associated with that project. Together, these outputs will inform GSCU’s work as set out above. We also expect to collaborate with suppliers on discrete dissemination and impact work associated with each specific project, to maximise the impact of this research investment, as set out below.
	3. There is no obligation for suppliers on Project A to collaborate with other suppliers engaged on other projects set out above. If you wish to, or are willing to do so, you may choose to indicate this in your proposals.

## Interested suppliers may bid for one or more of the above projects, based on their interest, capability and capacity. We do not have a preferred number of suppliers across the four projects, but it is important to note these are separate bid processes. To be considered for a specific project you must respond to the associated bid document. This bid document is for Project A.

## PROJECT A: Skills and Productivity Systematic Review

* 1. The purpose of Project A is to:
		1. Build robust evidence on how far, why and under what conditions skills can be a driver of public sector productivity, by delivering a comprehensive and up-to-date systematic review and meta-analysis (where possible) of the existing evidence base on workforce skills and productivity, with a particular focus on public sector productivity, taking a complex systems perspective.
		2. Contributed to future skills decision-making, by delivering accessible and usable policy and practice guidance (based on the systematic review and meta-analysis) to support improved evidence-based decision making options for directing investments in workforce training, upskilling and reskilling to have the greatest positive impact on productivity - particularly in the civil service and wider public sector.
	2. This synthesis is needed because the current evidence base on the nature of the relationship between skills and productivity is very heterogeneous, and therefore it is not yet sufficiently clear what is known (and thus can and should be acted on in practice) and is not yet known (and should therefore be the focus of further research and evaluation).
	3. The heterogeneity of current literature on skills and productivity has three dimensions, which make it challenging to interpret without a new synthesis such as the one we propose. Nonetheless, this heterogeneity also creates opportunities to learn something from a synthesis which makes analytical use of the different approaches and contexts represented in this literature, as this project will do, because it adopts a complex systems lens.
		1. **Heterogeneity of measures used for both *skills* and *productivity***, make it difficult to interpret the overall conclusions to draw from this evidence, and identify its relevance for specific workforce questions. For example, there is a fundamental difference between evidence which tells us that further and higher qualifications are a driver of productivity (e.g. [DfE, 2023](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63f4bee8d3bf7f62eaaf2e75/Skills_and_UK_productivity.pdf)) and evidence that a lack of specific in-work digital and technological skills hampers productivity (e.g. [Aston, 2020](https://www.lbpresearch.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/White-paper-UK-Produvtibity-Skills-Full.pdf)) in terms of the policy action we might take in response to that evidence - one points to investment in secondary, further and higher education, whereas one points to investment in in-work training and recruitment to address skills gaps. Our new systematic review and meta-analysis would address this issue by scrutinising the measures and definitions used in generating findings, taking these into account in the synthesis and its recommendations.
		2. **Heterogeneity of methods, including units of analysis and research contexts.** The existing evidence differs significantly in terms of the methods used and (related to this), units of analysis. A specific challenge is a lack of evidence on the drivers of productivity developed within the UK public sector ([The Productivity Institute, 2022](https://www.productivity.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Making-Public-Sector-Productivity-Practical-Capita-Report-August-2022-FINAL.pdf)). This difference again makes it difficult to draw clear conclusions from the evidence, and interpret its applicability to the specific questions about public sector skills outlined in the strategic case. Our systematic review would not only appraise the overall quality of evidence for inclusion, but would also group, sort and navigate the different types of evidence to make clearer recommendations. It would also make analytical use of this heterogeneity by mapping the evidence against what it tells us about different parts of the public sector skills system and how they relate to one another to influence productivity.
		3. **Heterogeneity of underlying assumptions and theories of change about how skills can drive productivity.** One of the most fundamental issues with the current evidence base on skills and productivity is that the nature of any relationship between skills and productivity is far from clear - a top level quantification of a relationship between workforce skills and productivity does not explain *why* that relationship exists ([Warwick Institute for Employment Research, 2009](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/publications/2009/gambin_et_al_2009_skills.pdf)). Crucially, most existing studies begin from an assumed relationship between one specific input (e.g. training spend; educational level) and output (a measure of productivity), which is operationalised in their research questions and outcome measures. We need to therefore recognise that existing studies only tell us about one or two dimensions of the complex relationship between skills and productivity, rather than capturing the whole of this relationship and the mechanisms and interventions which can influence it.   A key feature of our evidence synthesis is that it focuses not just on identifying the existence and magnitude of any relationship between skills and productivity, but it focuses on building strong theory on *why* that relationship exists and the *nature* of it, at the level of the public sector system, not individual atomised interventions. This not only provides a strong theory of change for policy and decision making, it also adds to the academic stock of knowledge to assist with future research and economic forecasting.
	4. The most significant limitation of the current evidence is that it generally focuses on discrete elements of the overall skills and productivity system (e.g. a single sector, region, skill, type of worker or type of skills development intervention) rather than adopting a **complex systems lens**. This is a missed opportunity because a ‘wicked’ system level problem like productivity and skills cannot be solved through isolated interventions and foci, but require a joined up approach ([CIPD, 2023](https://community.cipd.co.uk/cipd-blogs/b/peter_cheese/posts/the-productivity-puzzle))**. It is our intention that the successful supplier adopts a complex systems lens ([Petticrew et al., 2019](https://gh.bmj.com/content/4/Suppl_1/e000899)), for this systematic review in order to contribute to knowledge and practical action by joining up evidence to create a system level view on the relationship between productivity and skills**.
	5. The benefit of adopting a **mixed methods approach** to the systematic review is that it allows us to offer **quantitative estimates of the nature and magnitude of the relationship between skills and productivity**, and **provide a qualitative account of *how, why and under what conditions* (at system level) these relationships can be the case, and where and how their inputs and outcomes can be produced across different parts of the public sector system**.

# DEFINITIONS

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Expression or acronym | Definition |
| GPG  | Government People Group |
| GSCU | Government Skills and Curriculum Unit (The Authority) |
| GSR | Government Social Research |

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# SCOPE OF REQUIREMENT

## The Supplier shall be required to plan, carry out, report and disseminate a systematic review, including, a statistical meta-analysis (providing this is feasible, based on the evidence identified in the planning/scoping phase), on the connection between skills and productivity, using robust, high quality international evidence. When we refer to a systematic review, we refer to a review of external evidence which uses a standardised set of codified stages, including a robust and systematic search and selection criteria for evidence, considering and addressing risk of bias, extractions and synthesising of data and findings. All stages are conducted in a systematic way, and following standard reporting guidelines. When we refer to a meta-analysis we refer to a review of quantitative evidence which uses specialised techniques to arrive at statistical estimates that enable comparison across evidence sources, and provide quantitative conclusions on the nature and magnitude of a pooled effect.

* 1. GSCU has developed an initial brief to outline our proposed approach. As part of the bid process you should set out your approach to meeting this brief, and appraise its suitability for the research questions, based on your experience and expertise, suggesting alternatives where appropriate. It is important to emphasise that this brief is not set in stone, and we expect to iterate the methodology with the chosen supplier as part of the first phase of work (see milestones below).
	2. Our strong preference is that the synthesis of evidence identified for this systematic review will include a statistical meta-analysis. However, we are aware that the nature of the existing evidence base may mean that meta-analysis is not possible. We would expect the supplier to have the relevant expertise and capability to advise on the use of meta-analysis as well as being able to propose and deliver alternative synthesis approaches should meta-analysis not be possible. Review approaches must be appropriate to the nature of the evidence that will be used for this review, given its focus on the link between skills and productivity
	3. As a minimum, this systematic review and meta-analysis should produce the outputs specified below. In our evaluation of the bids we will take into account your approach to generating impact from the findings.
	4. GSCU is supportive of academic publications being generated from the systematic review, but cannot fund any aspect of the academic publication process through the grant funding allocated to this project.

## The review must be pre-registered. This should be on the [government evaluation registry](https://evaluation-registry.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/signin/?next=/). GSCU supports pre-registration on other appropriate platforms alongside, as long as the information across all platforms is consistent and kept up to date.

* 1. None of the work associated with Project B, C and D is in scope of this project. Your bid for this project will be evaluated separately and independently of any other bids you may choose to make for other projects (if relevant). If you wish to bid for more than one project, and want to make a case for efficiencies or common processes across projects, you should set out very clearly how this would work in relation to this specific project in your proposal, including how any delivery risks would be mitigated. As we have issued separate tenders, our evaluation of bids for this project can only take into account the evidence provided against the work in scope for this project. We cannot take into account any evidence that you provide in other bids when evaluating your bid for this project, so it is important you ensure that you include all relevant information in this bid and do not cross-refer to other bids.
	2. This project uses research literature only and does not involve any primary data collection or sharing of any secondary data between the contracting authority and the supplier.

# THE REQUIREMENT

## The Supplier will be required to scope and plan the project, building on the scoping and planning work already carried out by GSCU. We expect this to involve:

## Reviewing the planning work already done by GSCU.

## Holding one-to-one or group discussions with key stakeholders in the work to understand their expectations and the way the evidence will be used. We anticipate that this may involve around 15 stakeholders, plus the immediate GSCU project team.

* + 1. Agreeing defined research questions for the review. These should reflect the purpose of the review, and incorporate a complex systems lens. Our current proposed review questions are:
			- RQ1: Is there a relationship between the skills of government and public sector workers and public sector productivity?
			- RQ2: What systemic conditions and contexts influence the nature of the relationship between public sector skills and productivity?
			- RQ3: What types of skills interventions and levers can bring about systemic change towards higher productivity, and through what mechanisms do they have their effect?

We would expect to further develop these research questions with our contracted research partner, and in response to their fuller scoping of the available evidence.

* + 1. Using an appropriate Systematic Review planning framework to develop criteria for including studies in the review. This should be agreed and iterated with GSCU and incorporate a complex systems lens. We have developed a skeleton criteria below for illustrative purposes only. However, we would expect the supplier to work with us to develop this framework further.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Criteria  | Description |
| Population | The review is interested in the skills and productivity of in-work adults.  |
| Concept | The review will investigate the link between skills and productivity, including whether this link exists as a direct or indirect relationship, under what conditions the link holds, what the mediating factors are in this relationship, and the skills interventions and/ or levers that can affect a systemic shift in productivity. We are aware of some challenges in operationalizing both of these concepts. For example, in our initial scoping work we have found research studies that use qualification levels as a proxy for skills level, while others take measures of skills gaps in a particular section of the economy. Similarly methods of productivity are often operationalised differently for different studies. There is also a particular challenge in finding an appropriate measure for public sector productivity given that outputs are not always quantifiable across public sector organisations and functions. In relation to mediating factors, we know that there is an emerging body of evidence investigating the relationships between skills utilisation on productivity, as well as skills development and other factors associated with ‘fair work’ practices, and innovation. Our expectation is that the supplier would draw on expertise, stakeholder consultation and literature from the initial scoping phase to define and operationalise these concepts and mediating factors more accurately. |
| Context | The review is primarily interested in the links between skills and productivity for the UK civil service and wider UK public sector.To arrive at this analysis, we expect an appropriate range and breadth of evidence on the link between skills and productivity, including econometric and intervention evaluation evidence. It will be important for the supplier to develop an evidence or theory based case for the inclusion and exclusion of evidence which focuses on contexts other than the UK and/or the public sector, so its relevance to the primary context is clear and can be taken into account when arriving at findings, interpretations and recommendations. |

* + 1. Developing a methodology and producing a draft protocol for the systematic review and meta-analysis, reflecting an appropriate, robust and recognisable method for the systematic review and meta-analysis.
		2. We anticipate that the supplier will incorporate a **Complex Systems lens** ([Petticrew et al, 2019](https://gh.bmj.com/content/4/Suppl_1/e000899)) in their approach to their review. A complex systems systematic review is similar to a traditional systematic review, in that it uses **robust, systematised methods to search, appraise and synthesise high quality evidence** to capture the overarching relationship between an input or intervention (in this case, skills, and skills development) and an outcome (in this case, productivity). It is different because it **asks more complex questions of the evidence** (e.g. at what level and place in the system does this change take place? How does the change happen? What knock-on effects can it have in other parts of the system? What contexts and conditions can influence the nature of this causal relationship?). This adds value because it **helps us to understand how to change a system, or an intractable system level problem (like productivity)**. It can also be more inclusive to different types of evidence, both because it takes a **mixed methods approach**, and because this method **seeks out difference, in order to arrive at the best possible model for how the input or intervention can create change in a complex system, under varying conditions** ([Petticrew et al, 2019](https://gh.bmj.com/content/4/Suppl_1/e000899)). This is appropriate to the topic of skills and productivity, both because it is a ‘wicked’ system-level challenge, and because the current evidence base is heterogenous, as explained above.
		3. We also note the importance of carefully defining the ‘system’ when adopting a complex systems lens (which links to setting inclusion/exclusion criteria), and this is undertaken as part of the planning and scoping work in this type of review. An advantage of this approach is that it generates high levels of stakeholder engagement from the outset, as they would be involved in defining and mapping the system and defining the relationships, mechanisms and interventions which are of greatest interest and perceived relevance ([Petticrew et al, 2019](https://gh.bmj.com/content/4/Suppl_1/e000899)).
		4. In the case of this review the complex system we are referring to is the UK public sector, which has a workforce of [5.93 million](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/publicsectorpersonnel#:~:text=There%20were%20an%20estimated%205.93,more%20than%20in%20December%202022.) people covering a large variety of organisations performing different functions at different levels. We may need to consider the interactions of this system with other systems, such as the wider UK economy, regions, professions etc. It is important that the way the system is defined, bounded and handled analytically is done in a way which adds insight, rather than just adding unnecessary complexity to the review.
		5. Within this, the UK Civil Service has its own features, with a workforce of over 500,000 people employed in a number of departments, agencies, and professions, geographies and grades.
			- Departments/ Agencies: The government is made up of 24 ministerial departments, 20 non-ministerial departments and over 400 associated agencies, each with its own distinct mandate and/or function. A list can be found [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations).
			- Professions: these are cross-government groupings of civil servants with common specialist skills.All civil servants are a member of at least one profession, regardless of which department or agency they are working in. More information can be found [here](https://www.civil-service-careers.gov.uk/professions/).
			- Grade structure: the civil service is organised in a [grade structure](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainer/grade-structures-civil-service), covering all levels from entry-level administrative roles to the most senior civil servants.
			- Location: civil servants are spread [all over the UK](https://www.civil-service-careers.gov.uk/our-locations/) in government hubs, offices and operational environments like contact centres or prisons.
		6. We also expect the review to include quantitative **meta-analysis**, but the specific methods of meta-analysis which will be possible will only be fully clear once our research partner has scoped the evidence and measures current research uses more fully.
		7. The supplier should carry out initial scoping literature searches, to test the feasibility of the proposed review and meta-analysis methods, and produce a final protocol, for pre-registration. We note that, as is typical of such studies, we would not expect significant changes to a review method after a protocol is pre-registered, so the scoping change should be sufficiently robust and comprehensive to ensure the feasibility of what is pre-registered. The protocol should follow standard, recognisable reporting guidelines and systematic review and meta-analysis methodologies, and GSCU will agree these with the supplier during the scoping stage, for example, [PRISMA guidelines](https://www.prisma-statement.org/).
		8. Given the complex systems lens, we expect this phase to involve defining or developing an appropriate conceptual framework to structure the review, including a clear understanding of ‘the system’ that is of interest, and where its boundaries lie (i.e. what is and is not of interest for this review, in relation to the system). It should also include defining which complex systems concepts will be helpful to use in the review, and which add unnecessary complexity or are not helpful and should be avoided. It may help identify where uncertainties lie. We anticipate this process to be done in a participatory way with stakeholders as part of the briefing above, and would agree this as project kick off. We expect this process to assist with clarifying review questions, inclusion/exclusion criteria at this early stage, as well as to be used throughout the review process, including mapping where evidence does or does not exist, to different levels and in different forms throughout and at the end of the process.
		9. Developing a final project plan and project management approach, based on the agreed methodology and protocol. This should include time and task management tools such as a Gantt chart; a schedule of meetings with the project team and stakeholders; agreed deliverables and review periods for GSCU to respond; a risks and issues register; project documentation to ensure the recording and replicability of the research undertaken; quality assurance procedures and how the results of these will be shared.
		10. The project will be pre-registered on the Government Evaluation Registry. If the supplier wishes to use any other pre-registration platforms in addition to this, or publish the protocol in a journal, this can be discussed with GSCU during the scoping stage and built into the plan (although we note that work associated with academic publication can’t be supported through the funding for this project).

## We note that, unlike some projects, as this evaluation is grant funded, a broad plan and scope for the study has already been drawn up, and the overall scope and purpose of the project is fairly tightly defined. It is important that bids, and the ultimate approach to the project decided as part of scoping and planning, are consistent with the approved grant proposal (which will be shared with the appointed supplier).

* 1. Carry out the Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis in a way which is fully consistent with the pre-registered protocol. We expect this to include, but not be limited to:
		1. Carrying out systematic, reproducible literature searches using a range of appropriate databases and strategies, including sourcing unpublished literature to ensure comprehensiveness and reduce risk of publication bias. This should include the consistent and comprehensive application of an appropriate and systematic set of keywords/subject headings etc. Logging all searches undertaken and their results, and maintaining up to date lists of all the literature identified. Ensuring that this has been quality assured - we suggest that a minimum of 10% of the documentation should be reviewed by an appropriately qualified reviewer to check for any errors or inconsistencies, and that a suitably qualified person such as a academic librarian with experience in supporting systematic reviews would review the search strategy. We expect to agree this with the supplier as part of the planning phase above.
		2. Appraising and selecting appropriate studies for inclusion in the review and meta-analysis from the studies identified through the searches, using an appropriate, robust and reproducible inclusion and exclusion pathway, based on clear, specific criteria, including criteria associated with methodological rigour. Logging the inclusion and exclusion process, including how many studies were included/excluded at each stage of the pathway. We expect that studies included in the Systematic Review may differ from those included in the Meta-Analysis, due to the specific requirements for carrying out a Meta-Analysis. This implies that differing inclusion/exclusion pathways may be needed for each part of the study. This should include appropriate inter-rater reliability checks for inclusion/exclusion, and resolving any discrepancies. Ensuring that this process has been quality assured - we suggest that an inter-rater reliability level of 90% should be targeted for inclusion and exclusion, for example, based on a suitable percentage of papers. The inclusion and exclusion pathway should be reviewed by an appropriately qualified reviewer, for example an academic librarian with experience in supporting systematic reviews. We expect to agree the details of this quality assurance with the supplier as part of the planning phase above.
		3. Recording and appraising the characteristics of the included literature in a systematic way. Again, a minimum of two reviewers should be used with inter-rater reliability checks being carried out of an appropriate percentage of the studies, to an adequate level (we suggest 90%).
		4. Carrying out appropriate risk of bias assessments, logging these, and addressing these as far as possible, noting where risks of bias remain and ensuring this is clear in later reporting. Quality assurance should be carried out on this process, with a suitably qualified person reviewing the assessments completed and steps taken - we will agree this with the supplier as part of the planning phase.
		5. Carrying out a systematic and reproducible process of data extraction for the Systematic Review. Given the complex systems lens we propose for this project, this should be based on a conceptually valid, recognisable definition or model of complex systems/systems thinking that forms the foundation for decisions about what should be extracted and how it should be handled. Again, more than one reviewer should be involved, with inter-rater reliability checks being carried out and documented, and the process quality assured.
		6. Synthesising the extracted data in a valid, systematic and appropriate way, to generate findings. A method for quality assuring this phase of the process will be required, and we will agree this as part of the planning phase.
		7. Carrying out the steps required for the quantitative meta-analysis, following a replicable and systematic approach, which is fully documented, including any code used in statistical tests. The code and analysis carried out should be checked and quality assured by at least one other suitably qualified person, and this process should be recorded.
		8. Recording any issues, risks or problems which arise during the research process, and how these were addressed, including where any changes to the originally published protocol were required, and justifying these changes methodologically. Ensuring this is clear in later reporting. If substantial changes are needed to the pre-registered protocol, we would expect these to be reviewed with a suitably qualified external person/group, such as the Cabinet Office Evaluation and Trials Advice Panel. Any changes should be agreed with the authority and advisory group (below).
		9. Communicating with the Project Team and Advisory Group (below) on a regular basis, including gaining agreement for any deviations from the published protocol.
		10. Sharing records, or portions of records, by email and in meetings, with the supplier, for the purposes of the supplier being kept update about the progress of the work, and being appraised of the quality standards of the work, including being able to see evidence of quality assurance processes which have been followed, any issues which arose and any mitigating steps followed. The supplier will carry out their own spot checks at each key milestone, for the purposes of quality assurance. For example, we may apply the inclusion/exclusion pathway to a small percentage of the identified studies, or follow up a percentage of references in the report to check accuracy of reporting. This is to ensure we have met our internal obligations about quality assurance. The level of detail we go into will be lower where the process and quality assurance are well documented, timely and satisfactory.
	2. Report on findings. This should constitute the following, as a minimum:
		1. A high quality final report, publishable on Gov.UK. This should follow suitable reporting guidelines for systematic reviews and meta-analyses, as outlined above. It should not exceed 75 pages in length, excluding reference list and annexes.The report should be checked, proof read and quality assured before it reaches GSCU for clearance. GSCU would expect to feedback on up to two drafts of the report, assuming the supplier acts on feedback.
		2. A short, summary report for non-technical stakeholders (up to 20 pages, including any design features, images, infographics etc.) to accompany the main report, publishable on Gov.UK.
		3. Two to three interim, accessible and engaging briefing papers, at appropriate project milestones (excluding the pre-registration protocol). The exact length, nature and focus of these will be agreed with GSCU.
		4. Consistent with the complex systems approach we are seeking, it is typical to include systems mapping in final reporting. How this should be incorporated and reported, and wider applications it may have, will be agreed with GSCU during the scoping phase.
		5. A set of policy advice for government based on the findings of the systematic review.
		6. A decision support toolkit for leaders and managers to support effective decision making on skills-development investment in the public sector (with applicability to commercial and third sector organisations, although this is not our primary focus).
		7. Two dissemination workshops, plus lighter touch support for further dissemination activity (presentations, publications, communications, training) led by GSCU with our partners across the public and private sectors.
		8. We expect similar content may be used in different ways across the outputs specified above.
		9. GSCU is supportive of wider academic publication and dissemination of the research. This would be agreed within the scoping phase. We note that we are unable to fund additional work associated with producing academic publications.
	3. Close down and handover the project.
		1. Hand over and/or permanently archive key documentation/records, publishing these with the project outputs as supplementary material and on the Evaluation Registry (and any other repositories or registries which may be relevant, subject to the final project scope agreed with the supplier), unless there is a material reason not to. This process and its scope should be agreed as part of the scoping stage.
		2. Sharing of any key information or methodological learnings which have not been included in the final report, but are relevant for GSCU to know. This may include advising on potential future research work, based on evidence gaps.
		3. Participating in a lessons learned exercise at the end of the project, in the form of a 60-120min workshop, so all parties can take forward lessons learned from the process, methodologically and in terms of researcher/civil service collaboration.
		4. Agree any involvement the Supplier may wish to have or be able to offer in terms of supporting future dissemination and impact work associated with the project. This would be costed separately, at the end of the project, as it is likely to take place after the end of this grant.

# KEY MILESTONES AND DELIVERABLES

## The following Contract milestones/deliverables shall apply:

*We are open to discussing changes in interim milestones, providing the overall delivery date can be met. Please feel welcome to propose alternative milestones in your proposals.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Milestone/ Deliverable | Description | Timeframe or Delivery Date |
| Initial planning meeting | A meeting between the supplier team and the GSCU team to: re-agree overall timeline and deliverables roles and responsibilities, clarify points etc.The output of this meeting will be a project plan and all project management documentation, to be produced by the supplier. This will be shared and discussed with GSCU, and final versions shared with both sides. | Meeting to be held within week 1 of contract award. Project management and planning materials to be agreed with GSCU by 3 weeks after contract award. |
| Scope requirements, produce systematic review protocol and pre-register the project | To meet this milestone, suppliers will be expected to produce: a full protocol for the systematic review,an initial delivery plan, and pre-register the project on the ETF database, as well as on any other suitable pre-registration databases. The protocol and delivery plan should be based on the activities outlined in section 6.1, including comprehensive review of existing documentation, and stakeholder consultation to refine and agree the final research questions for this review. The supplier should also conduct initial work to understand and incorporate a complex systems lens into the development of the approach, research questions and inclusion criteria.During this phase, the supplier should carry out initial scoping searches to test sensitivity and specificity of search terms across key research repositories. In order to produce a Systematic review protocol document, including final RQs, inclusion/exclusion criteria, literature search terms, plans for data extraction, analysis and reporting.The delivery plan should trigger a refresh of the project plan and project management approach, including time and task management tools, to ensure these are up to date and detailed.  | By approximately 2 months after contract award. |
| Completion of systematic review and meta-analysis, including 2-3 interim briefing reports.  | In this phase, the supplier should carry out the systematic review and meta-analysis in line with the pre-registered protocol. We expect that in order to meet this milestone, suppliers will undertake all the activities as outlined in section 6.2 above. To ensure that emerging findings can be shared with stakeholders throughout the life of the project we expect the supplier will also produce 2-3 interim briefing papers in order to meet this milestone. The subject and content of these briefing papers is not set but we expect these to be up to 4 pages and written for a non-technical audience of senior government stakeholders. Ideas for the subject/content of these briefing papers can be suggested by the supplier as part of the bidding process and/or responsively to need/interest as it arises during the project.  | By approximately 7 months after contract award |
| Delivery and sign-off of final outputs, and project closedown | Upon completion of the systematic review activities, the supplier should deliver a set of final deliverables for sign-off by GSCU. Deliverables for this phase include: * final technical systematic review report, produced in line with recognised reporting standards
* a set of policy guidance for government based on the findings of the systematic review
* a decision support toolkit for leaders and managers to support effective decision making on skills development investment in the public sector
* one or more dissemination workshops led by the evaluation provider, with further dissemination activity led by GSCU with our partners across the public and private sectors.

Further details on the activities we expect suppliers to undertake to meet this milestone can be found in sections 6.3 and 6.4 above.We note that final publication of the outputs can occur after March 2025, as long as the final versions for clearance have been delivered to GSCU. | Within approximately 9 months of contract award. Outputs must be delivered by end March 2025.Potential suppliers should note that the final deadline for this work is fixed due to the conditions of the grant funding for this work. Extensions beyond March 2025 are therefore highly unlikely.  |
| Dissemination | Dissemination and impact activities will be led and coordinated by GSCU after the end of the contract.There may be scope for some separately costed and contracted dissemination and impact activities with the supplier. These would be discussed during project close down and separate contracts tendered if relevant. | After March 2025. |

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# MANAGEMENT INFORMATION/REPORTING

##

## 8.1 The Supplier will report to GSCU’s Project Lead for this evaluation project, who will be the main point of contact for the Supplier for support and to review progress.

## 8.2 The Supplier is expected to provide fortnightly updates on progress against the workplan by email with any relevant supporting documents. We expect that it will usually be beneficial to have a fortnightly progress review meeting, but that at some stages of the process it may be appropriate to have a slightly longer duration between meetings, and at some stages we may need more frequent meetings. The frequency of meetings will be agreed and updated quarterly. Both sides should make themselves available for ad hoc meetings required to resolve urgent queries or issues.

##  More detailed update meetings should be scheduled aligned with the milestones in the table above. We expect these to be longer than the regular check in meetings above, and are likely to involve the whole project team and some key stakeholders. Appropriate paperwork or slides should be provided to support these meetings.

 The supplier will be responsible for scheduling meetings, for recording and circulating minutes and for maintaining an action log which is regularly reviewed, with actions being escalated where need be.

8.3 The supplier is also expected to engage with the project advisory group, which will be set up to govern this project. The steering committee will comprise of suitably qualified and informed civil servants who do not work for GSCU, and one or more independent academic advisors. Technical experts and stakeholders/evidence-users will be represented. Arrangements for this engagement (frequency, timeframe etc) will be agreed at the outset of the project. In addition, the Evaluation Taskforce and HM Treasury will be updated at key milestones throughout this project, and will assist with ensuring the project continues to be consistent with the parameters of the funding. Suppliers may be required to attend occasional update meetings and may request peer review or advice from the Evaluation Taskforce or Trials Advice Panel, via GSCU, if desired. The supplier will be responsible for scheduling advisory group meetings, producing and circulating paperwork, keeping and circulating minutes, and maintaining and monitoring an action log, using contact details provided by GSCU. The advisory group are expected to maintain confidentiality about commercially sensitive information and unpublished research, and any potential conflicts of interest can be explored and resolved at project kick off. External (outside Government) advisors will not be appointed until after the supplier is appointed, to reduce the risk of conflicts of interest.

8.4 The supplier should inform GSCU in a timely way of any unforeseen circumstances which may affect delivery and/or seeking clarification or support promptly (within 24hrs of an issue arising).

8.5 Reporting will be as per 6.3 above. We note that GSCU is the final arbiter of whether work is of publishable standard, based on GSR principles. The GSR Head of Profession for Cabinet Office would arbitrate any disagreement that may arise on this matter, if relevant.

8.6 As noted in the requirements set out above, recording and reporting of quality assurance processes planned and completed is required. As a minimum this should take place at the project milestones, but may need to be more frequent at certain stages.

# VOLUMES

## This section is not used.

# CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

## The Supplier will be expected to continually improve the way in which the required Services are to be delivered throughout the Contract duration.

## The Supplier should present new ways of working to the Authority during agreed Contract review meetings, within the scope of the overall timeline and budget agreed. and the scope of the funds and overarching research design.

## Changes to the way in which the Services are to be delivered must be brought to the Authority’s attention and agreed prior to any changes being implemented.

# SUSTAINABILITY/ SOCIAL VALUE

* 1. The Potential Bidder will also be expected to MAC 6.1: Demonstrate action to identify and tackle inequality in employment, skills and pay in the contract workforce.

Illustrative examples include but are not exclusive to:

○ Inclusive and accessible recruitment practices, and retention-focussed

activities.

○ Offering a range of quality opportunities with routes of progression if appropriate, e.g. T Level industry placements, students supported into higher

level apprenticeships.

○ Working conditions which promote an inclusive working environment and promote retention and progression.

○ Demonstrating how working conditions promote an inclusive working environment and promote retention and progression.

# QUALITY

## All project processes must be quality assured and all outputs should be quality assured before being submitted to the Authority. Suppliers should indicate in their bids what processes and/or frameworks they would use for quality assurance, for example, by following PRISMA guidelines and aligning specific quality assurance procedures against this. In the event of a suppliers’ proposed framework being less comprehensive than the standard Government Social Research framework, the Government Social Research framework will apply (we can share this with successful suppliers). An indication of quality assurance requirements is set out in the requirements above, but quality assurance should be comprehensive, robust and tailored to the specific risks, issues and demands of the project, including making adaptations to the agreed approach, in consultation with GSCU, where required. Recognised quality assurance processes associated with systematic reviews and meta-analyses should be employed.

* 1. The supplier must act promptly and appropriately on any findings of the quality assurance process, to take appropriate remedial action to ensure quality standards are maintained.
	2. Risks to quality should be identified, documented and addressed within the risk register and regular review meetings. Any trade offs between timely delivery and quality should be clearly flagged to GSCU so informed decisions can be taken.

## The Potential Bidder should refer to the guidance and standards set out in the [Magenta Book](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/879438/HMT_Magenta_Book.pdf) when designing and delivering the studies, with consideration given to ensuring that the design, execution, analysis and reporting are conducted to the appropriate standards and are fit-for-purpose. As outlined above, they should also adopt and conform to appropriate reporting guidelines.

* 1. The study will be pre-registered on the Evaluation Taskforce Evaluation Registry. This should include a protocol for the systematic review after the design is finalised (below). The supplier will provide all necessary information in a timely manner to ensure the registry entry is up-to-date. The supplier may also choose to preregister the study on another platform, with GSCU’s written permission. In the event the study is pre-registered elsewhere, it is the supplier’s responsibility to ensure that preregistration information is consistent across both platforms.

## Any quality risks, potential biases, methodological trade-offs and limitations must be fully specified throughout, including in final reporting.The supplier will take steps to manage and mitigate these as far as possible.

## Specific quality acceptance criteria for project milestones will be based on quality considerations outlined in section 6.2.3.

## The research will be expected to meet the requirements of the [Government Social Research (GSR) Professional Guidance: Ethical Assurance for Social Research in Government](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ethical-assurance-guidance-for-social-research-in-government) or equivalent.

* 1. Principles of Open Science, such as reproducible analytical pipelines by sharing code, will be followed, as will the GSR publication protocol.
	2. Relevant reporting guidelines for systematic reviews will be followed. An appropriate set of guidelines will be agreed based on the final methodology agreed with the supplier.
	3. Guidance and advice from the advisory group, other peer reviewers, Evaluation Task Force or knowledgeable others involved with the project should be taken into account and acted on. If a decision is taken not to follow this advice, a rationale should be given and the decision agreed with the authority.

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# PRICE

## 13.1 The bidder should provide an overall price for all deliverables, including a breakdown showing the separate pricing for the requirements.

##  13.1.2 The price, including any expenses, should not exceed £100,000.00 (ex VAT).

## 13.2 Prices are to be submitted via the e-Sourcing Suite [Attachment 4 – Price Schedule] excluding VAT and including all other expenses relating to Contract delivery.

# STAFF AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

## The Supplier must demonstrate (e.g. by providing a track record and biographies) that the organisation and the specific staff deployed on the research have demonstrable track record and expertise in the following areas:

* Planning and carrying out high quality, pre-registered Systematic Reviews which follow standardised reporting guidelines.
* Planning and carrying out high quality, pre-registered meta-analyses which follow standardised reporting guidelines.
* Experience of planning and project management of systematic reviews and meta-analyses of a similar scale and complexity, including adapting research designs based on initial scoping, in advance of pre-registration.
* Reporting findings and analysis to a high standard of clarity and rigour for specialist and non specialist audiences.
* Knowledge and understanding of the two topics which this review focuses on: workforce skills and productivity. This should include knowledge and understanding of how these constructs can be operationalised and measured, and how to appraise these.
* Knowledge and understanding of theory and research practice based on complex systems/systems thinking, and experience of applying these concepts into research methods and outputs.
* Experience of carrying out the above tasks with a focus on government or the wider public sector (either as a client and/or a research context) would be an advantage but not essential.

##

## The Supplier must demonstrate they have appropriate capacity to deliver the Requirements within the time allocated (please note that as this is a fixed term grant, contract extensions are highly unlikely), and have anticipated and addressed potential risks to delivery as far as reasonably possible.

* 1. Please indicate in your proposals how you would manage any staffing changes, for example in the event of illness, resignation or other unavailability.
	2. If you will use research associates or contingent labour of any kind in the delivery of this contract, please indicate how suitably qualified staff will be recruited and retained for the duration of the project. If staff members are not yet known, please provide information on the role scope and skills and experience you would stipulate within the recruitment process.

## The Supplier shall ensure that staff understand the Authority’s vision and objectives and will provide excellent customer service to the Authority throughout the duration of the Contract.

14.6 The Supplier shall ensure that staff understand the Authority’s vision and objectives and will provide excellent customer service to the Authority throughout the duration of the Contract.

14.7 The supplier will meet agreed deadlines, with the agreed deliverables, to the specified standard, including evidence of appropriate quality assurance processes having been carried out and documented, and any issues addressed (based on the Requirements and agreed project workplan). If deadlines need to be renegotiated for a valid reason, the supplier will raise this with the authority at the earliest opportunity. The authority must agree to all deadline changes.

14.8 The supplier will identifying and escalate and risks, issues or queries within the timeframe stipulated above, and taking action agreed with GSCU to address these within 24hrs of a discussion being held with GSCU about the issue.

14.9 The supplier will act on all actions within the actions log assigned to the Supplier within the amount of time mutually agreed and recorded in the action log and agreed with GSCU.

# SERVICE LEVELS AND PERFORMANCE

15.1 Service Level Agreements and Service Credits are not used for this contract.

15.2 Supplier performance will be assessed based on milestone-based invoicing, as set out above, during which customer service as set out in section 14 above will be taken into account.

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# SECURITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY REQUIREMENTS

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## The Call-Off terms and conditions shall apply. Specifically:

* 1. All Supplier staff involved in the delivery of the requirement must meet as a minimum all of the requirements within section 7 of the RM6187 Management Consultancy Framework Three (MCF3) Core Terms.
	2. All Supplier staff who will have access to any HMG OFFICIAL data will be required to have Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS clearance).
	3. Cabinet Office and departmental policies and standards regarding the use of the target data will be followed at all times.

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# PAYMENT AND INVOICING

## Payment can only be made following satisfactory delivery of pre-agreed certified products and deliverables.

## Before payment can be considered, each invoice must include a detailed elemental breakdown of work completed and the associated costs.

## Invoices should be submitted to:

 APinvoices-CAB-U@gov.sscl.com

# CONTRACT MANAGEMENT

## 18.1 Contract management processes will be undertaken by the Supplier to ensure the following objectives are met:

## The desired outcomes of the contract are being achieved

## Data about service delivery is collected and used to inform service development

## Risks are identified and managed effectively

## 18.2 The Supplier will work collaboratively with the Authority to establish contract management practises to ensure aims and objectives of the contract are realised.

## 18.3 Review meetings will be held between the Supplier and The Authority. The Authority will determine the frequency of these meetings. The review meetings will use management information, reports and feedback from stakeholders to ensure delivery is on schedule and to identify and agree any performance improvement objectives for the upcoming period.

## 18.4 Attendance at review and other meetings shall be at the Supplier’s own expense.

## 18.5 Both parties will actively engage in sharing knowledge.

# LOCATION

## The location of the Services will be carried out at the Supplier’s premises or virtually.