

ASSURANCE GUIDANCE

BETTER INFORMATION, BETTER CONVERSATIONS, BETTER DECISIONS



What is Assurance?

Assurance is an independent and objective assessment that provides valuable information for decision-making by giving a level of confidence as to whether business outcomes will be achieved.

Guiding Principles:

Assurance should align with the following guiding principles:

- ✓ *Be risk and value-based*
- ✓ *Be impartial and independent*
- ✓ *Be planned from the outset of the project or programme*
- ✓ *Be forward looking by providing an assessment of 'Delivery Confidence'*
- ✓ *Be conducted to inform key decisions*
- ✓ *Be reviewed regularly to ensure that it continues to be fit for purpose.*

INDEPENDENT ASSURANCE REPORTS: EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

The executive summary may be the only part of an assurance report investors read and so it is critical that it contains what they need to know. Ultimately, the executive summary is there to assist investors make well informed decisions.

At a system level, the System Assurance team has a key role in ensuring the quality of assurance services provided to agencies by third party providers. As part of this role, we review the quality of assurance reports for high risk programmes and projects and, in particular, the content and presentation of findings and recommendations in executive summaries.

This guidance is drawn out of 'lessons learned' from our reviews of the quality of assurance reports. It sets out the characteristics of what a good executive summary looks like and is based on the GCIO's quality standards.

We encourage agencies to talk with the System Assurance team to benefit from the learnings of our scanning across the system.

What does a good executive summary look like?

1. An assurance report should always have an executive summary. A summary of findings, introduction or background are not the same as or an alternative to an executive summary.
2. Know the audience—independent assurance reviews are typically for senior executives—be brief and to the point i.e. what are the (few) key messages; and don't use technical language or overload with terminology.
3. Don't just 'cut and paste' findings and recommendations from the body of the report—it doesn't always tell the entire story about delivery confidence—reference sections in the report where necessary.



GCIO Assurance Services Panel:

The GCIO Assurance Services Panel (provides agencies with access to 26 highly qualified providers of Independent Quality Assurance (IQA) and Technical Quality Assurance (TQA) services for ICT-enabled projects and programmes.

The objective of the panel is to improve the quality, consistency and independence of Assurance Services provided to government agencies.

The GCIO Panel is mandated for all Public Service and non-Public Service departments as well as ACC, EQC, HNZC, NZTA, NZTE, NZQA, TEC and the 20 DHBs. Other agencies are encouraged and welcome to opt-in at any time.

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4. Clearly describe the purpose and scope of the review and why it is important—what questions are being asked by the review or other areas of concern identified by key stakeholders; what's in scope (and what's not) and why.
5. Outline the major findings that are most relevant to the review—these should be evidence and fact-based and not expressed as an opinion.
6. Outline the key recommendations—these are the recommendations that will 'make the difference'; don't concern the governing body with the low priority recommendations—they just create 'clutter'.
7. Outline the key decisions required and when these decisions are required by—prioritise and timeline the decisions for the governing body.
8. Include a management response if there is a disagreement over a finding or recommendation.

Quality review and support

System Assurance has published an Assurance Report Quality Review Checklist that you can use to do your own self-assessment of the quality of the assurance report / executive summary.

If the assurance report / executive summary does not meet these important standards then talk with your reviewer and have them make the necessary changes before accepting the report. We recommend that you do this at the time of factual accuracy checking of the report.

You can also contact the System Assurance team if you have any questions about the quality of the assurance report.

Additional resources

Additional resources are available on the [GCIO's website](https://www.ict.govt.nz/ict-system-assurance/gcio-assurance-services-panel/gcio-sub-panel-additional-resources/) (<https://www.ict.govt.nz/ict-system-assurance/gcio-assurance-services-panel/gcio-sub-panel-additional-resources/>) including:

- ✓ GCIO Assurance Report Quality Checklist
- ✓ GCIO Report Rating System

Contact us

If you have any questions about this guidance or the GCIO Panel, email us at:

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