Programme Directors Training Course: Linked Contracts, Benefits and Delivery Control

22 – 26 March 2027
Rome

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Programme Summary

Programme direction of linked contracts is the subject of this one-week training course for programme directors, contract managers and delivery leads, ending in a programme delivery control file for one programme. Programmes often fail because contracts are managed one by one while the products they must deliver depend on each other. The programme moves from structure and governance to dependencies, product acceptance and benefits, then to delivery control and assurance, before joining the tools in one file. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this programme on programme direction of linked contracts to mixed-organisation cohorts.

The Business Case

Construction, energy, technology and public service programmes rely on several suppliers whose work must arrive in the right order. A late product from one contract can idle three others, and a benefit promised to a sponsor can disappear without anyone noticing. Programme directors who control interfaces and acceptance early keep decisions visible and avoid disputes late in delivery, because evidence of what was agreed and accepted already sits in one place.

- Schedule Disruption: Falls when dependencies between contracts are registered and reviewed.
- Benefit Leakage: Reduces when each benefit is traced to a product and an owner.
- Supplier Disputes: Decrease when acceptance criteria are agreed before delivery.

Principles and Evidence Base

- ISO 21503: Gives guidance on programme management, applied in Sessions 1 and 4 to governance roles and stage gate reviews.
- Managing Successful Programmes MSP: Describes programme governance, benefits and stakeholders, applied in Sessions 3 and 5 to the blueprint and benefits map.

Intended Participants

- Programme directors who answer to a sponsor for delivery across several contracts.
- Contract managers who administer supplier agreements that feed one programme.
- Delivery leads who coordinate handovers between suppliers and internal teams.
- Assurance and governance staff who review progress and report to a board.

Typical settings include construction, energy, technology and public services.

Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to evaluate how a programme differs from the contracts and projects within it.
2. Participants will be able to construct a dependency register across linked contracts.
3. Participants will be able to diagnose interface gaps that delay supplier handovers.
4. Participants will be able to design acceptance criteria that link products to benefits.
5. Participants will be able to prioritise risks, issues and escalations by programme impact.
6. Participants will be able to justify a delivery control file to a programme sponsor.

Programme Structure

Day 1: Programme Direction of Linked Contracts: Foundations

What does a programme add beyond the contracts and projects inside it?

- Programme Mandate Sheet
- Programme Structure Map
- Contract and Project Inventory
- Governance Role Matrix
- ISO 21503 Principles Checklist

Day 2: Dependencies Between Contracts

Which dependencies between contracts and suppliers can stall the programme?

- Dependency Register
- Contract Interface Matrix
- Supplier Handover Schedule
- Critical Path Link Review
- Change Impact Log

Day 3: Products, Acceptance and Benefits

How are products accepted and benefits traced back to them?

- Product Description Sheet
- Acceptance Criteria Grid
- Benefits Profile
- Benefits Map
- MSP Blueprint Review

Day 4: Delivery Control and Assurance

How does a programme director know delivery is on track?

- Tranche Plan
- Programme Risk and Issue Log
- Stage Gate Review Checklist
- Assurance Plan
- Escalation Route Chart

Day 5: Programme Delivery Control File for One Programme

Do the earlier tools join into a file a sponsor can rely on?

- Applying the Session 1 Governance Role Matrix
- Testing the Session 2 Dependency Register
- Checking the Session 3 Benefits Map
- Rehearsing the Session 4 Stage Gate Review
- Completing the Programme Delivery Control File

Methodology

The programme uses case analysis and structured exercises built on prepared material for two programmes, a hospital construction programme with five supplier contracts and a digital services programme with four. Each case holds contract extracts, delivery schedules, acceptance records and benefit statements. Participants work in groups, challenge each other's registers and defend their file before peers acting as a programme board.

- Suggested activity: Tracing one late product through three contracts and naming who is affected.
- Suggested activity: Rewriting an acceptance criterion that two suppliers read differently.
- Suggested activity: Running a stage gate review on a case with missing evidence.

Capstone Output

Each participant completes a programme delivery control file for one programme. It holds a governance role matrix, a dependency register, an acceptance and benefits map, a risk and issue log and an assurance plan. At work it is used to brief a sponsor, to set handover conditions with suppliers and to prepare each stage gate.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is a programme on programme direction of linked contracts suitable for managers new to programme work?

Yes. Programme direction of linked contracts is taught through prepared cases and templates. The programme assumes responsibility for contracts, delivery or reporting to a sponsor, but no earlier programme management role.

Which models does programme direction of linked contracts rest on?

Programme direction of linked contracts rests on ISO 21503 guidance on programme management and on the Managing Successful Programmes MSP framework, applied to prepared case material.

How is the file from programme direction of linked contracts used at work?

You use the programme delivery control file to brief your sponsor, set handover and acceptance conditions with suppliers, and prepare each stage gate review.

How does programme direction of linked contracts differ from a programme on single project management?

Programme direction of linked contracts concentrates on dependencies, acceptance and benefits across several contracts, while a single project programme concentrates on the plan, budget and team of one project.