What is the role of a Principal Development Manager?

# Vision:

The Principal Development Manager team will lead the transformation of CFT's software engineering capabilities to align with the CFT Technical Platform Vision. This role will:

* Foster autonomous, high-performing engineering teams capable of delivering robust efficient services.
* Drive the adoption of modular, decentralised architecture across CFT services.
* Implement strong technical governance and design principles within their jurisdiction.
* Reduce reliance on external contractors by upskilling civil servants and building in-house expertise.
* Champion GreenOps and cost-effective development practices.
* Reduce Technical Debt: Regularly assess and prioritise technical debt reduction to maintain service stability and improve platform performance.
* Enhance Developer Enablement: Provide tools, processes, and support to accelerate innovation.

The Principal Development Manager team vision will be achieved through the following behaviours:

## Building for success

* Source right-sized teams of engineers and/or engineering services so that products meet their service level commitments and, as relevant, agreed workload.
* Maintain access to HMCTS’s intellectual property (source code etc.) and to readily available development environments, to allow HMCTS to change its sourcing option rapidly (e.g. there is no dependency on individuals or MSPs).
* Ensure that technical documentation and training is in place for each product, to ensure that all engineers on a team can interchangeably participate in supporting it.
* Ownership and accountability – Principal Development managers have ownership of the services in their jurisdictions and accountability for Low Level Design decisions and associated technical risks.
* Guide the ways in which multiple teams work, promoting collaboration and knowledge sharing.
* Provide technical leadership, coaching, and mentoring across teams.
* Contribute to the developer community within HMCTS and beyond.
* Identify, test, and champion the adoption of emerging technologies in context.
* Use tooling to ensure that engineers are following agreed ways of working and best practices.

See - [**Modern development standards**](https://ddat-capability-framework.service.gov.uk/skills#modern-development-approach), [**Programming and build**](https://ddat-capability-framework.service.gov.uk/skills#programming-and-build-software-engineering), [**Systems design**](https://ddat-capability-framework.service.gov.uk/skills#systems-design), [**Information security**](https://ddat-capability-framework.service.gov.uk/skills#information-security) , and [**Systems integration**](https://ddat-capability-framework.service.gov.uk/skills#systems-integration).

## Reducing technical debt and service maintenance

* Conduct regular assessments with teams, use static analysis tools and as relevant commission work (e.g., Software Assurance Review), to identify areas of technical debt, non-functional work and maintenance tasks needed.
* Take a risk management approach to communicate this work to teams and stakeholders and prioritise based on risk attributes.
* Use source control (e.g., GitHub) and other tools to validate that each of the engineers in the product teams allocates a sufficient portion of their capacity to technical debt reduction/maintenance.

See - [**Development process optimisation**](https://ddat-capability-framework.service.gov.uk/skills#development-process-optimisation)**,** [**Service support**](https://ddat-capability-framework.service.gov.uk/skills#service-support)

## Developing talent

* Use the recruitment assessment process, DDaT and other tools to ensure that engineers reporting to you (as well as those working on products you are responsible for) have the right skills and knowledge (as expected for their level) to carry the tasks they are given and receiving GDD allowance for.
* Work with developers to create personalised development plans. Identify areas for growth and provide relevant training opportunities, leveraging what is available from formal and informal channels (MoJ apprenticeships/Roadmap.sh)
* Establish mentorship programs to facilitate knowledge transfer and foster culture of continuous learning.
* Create strong affiliation between engineers in the teams and the area of the business which they support, to improve appreciation of the sense of purpose in their work and develop their corporate identity

See - [**User focus**](https://ddat-capability-framework.service.gov.uk/skills#user-focus), [**Prototyping**](https://ddat-capability-framework.service.gov.uk/skills#prototyping), [**Modern development standards**](https://ddat-capability-framework.service.gov.uk/skills#modern-development-approach), [**Information security**](https://ddat-capability-framework.service.gov.uk/skills#information-security)

## FinOps (Financial Operations) and GreenOps

* Increase awareness of the financial and environmental impact of development decisions, ensuring that engineering and platform costs are known to product teams and stakeholders, with the aim to increase the cost efficiency and reduction in the environmental impact.

## Improving cost efficiency

* Identify bottlenecks and areas for improvement to improve delivery efficiency within squads.
* Use tooling to monitor the throughput of engineers in the team, aim to increase the productivity where possible (e.g. using innovation), and address causes leading to reduction in productivity (or insufficient productivity)

See - [**Development process optimisation**](https://ddat-capability-framework.service.gov.uk/skills#development-process-optimisation)

## Principal Development Managers OKR’s

### Objective 1: Develop High-Performing Engineering Teams

Key Result 1: Implement a structured mentorship program, pairing at least 3 engineers with senior mentors by Q3 2025.

Key Result 2: Conduct quarterly skills assessments and training sessions to ensure 75% of team members meet or exceed competency standards by the end of Phase 1.

### Objective 2: Implement Modular and Decentralised Architecture

Key Result 1: Become fully cognizant of the CCD decentrailised feature.

Key Result 2: Support at least one team with using the CCD decentrailised prototype tooling to investigate appropriateness in their services by Q3 2025.

Key Result 3: Facilitate architecture review sessions for all teams within your jurisdiction.

### Objective 3: Minimize Technical Debt and Enhance Service Stability

Key Result 1: Reduce technical debt across services by at least 30% through targeted refactoring initiatives by Q4 2025.

Key Result 2: Decrease the number of P1 and P2 service-related incidents by 25% within the next two quarters.

Key Result 3: Allocate at least 15% of sprint capacity to address technical debt and maintenance tasks consistently.

### Objective 4: Accelerate Delivery Efficiency

Key Result 1: Improve average lead time for feature delivery by 10% by optimising delivery pipelines by Q4 2025.

Key Result 2: Identify a reusable component/tool/library which can be developed/used and shared across teams by Q4 2025.

Key Result 3: Provide 1 training sessions on new tools and practices which will improve delivery efficiency.

### Objective 5: Promote Sustainable Development Practices

Key Result 1: Ensure cost tracking for all projects, ensuring that financial implications are assessed in project proposals.

Key Result 2: Reduce infrastructure costs per service by at least 10% through optimisation efforts by Q4 2025.

Key Result 3: Launch initiatives aimed at reducing the environmental impact of development practices, aiming for measurable improvements across services.

## Review process

To review OKR process we will be using a nested OKR review framework which balances strategic oversight with demand agility.

This will be as follows:

### Strategic Level (Quarterly Cycles)

We will operate on quarterly cycles with formal reviews every 3 months. This aligns with the industry standard for strategic objectives that require sustained effort and measurable progress over time.

### Tactical Level (Monthly Check-ins)

Within each quarter, we will conduct monthly progress reviews to track key results, identify blockers, and make tactical adjustments. This frequency prevents quarterly reviews from becoming overwhelming while maintaining momentum.

### Operational Level (Weekly Stand-ups)

Weekly team stand-ups will focused on immediate priorities, blockers, and resource needs. These shouldn't be formal OKR reviews but will be operational alignment sessions.

## Specific Review Framework for Principal Development Managers

Monthly Progress Reviews (60-90 minutes)

#### Structure:

* Progress Assessment (30 minutes): Review each key result's current status against targets, using specific metrics and evidence
* Blocker Resolution (20 minutes): Identify impediments and develop action plans with clear ownership and timelines
* Resource Planning (15 minutes): Assess team capacity, skill gaps, and support needs
* Forward Planning (15 minutes): Adjust tactics for the coming month while maintaining quarterly objectives

#### Key Elements:

* Use ‘continuous documentation’ rather than memory reconstruction - maintain ongoing records of achievements, and challenges.
* Incorporate ‘two-way feedback’ where Principal Development Managers share insights about process improvements, resource constraints, and team dynamics.
* Focus on leading indicators (mentorship program enrollment, architecture review completion) rather than just lagging indicators (incident reduction percentages).

Quarterly Strategic Reviews (2-3 hours)

#### Structure:

OKR Grading (45 minutes): Formal assessment of each objective using 0.0-1.0 scoring method.

Lessons Learned (30 minutes): Deep dive into what worked, what didn't, and why.

Strategic Adjustment (45 minutes): Refine or pivot objectives based on business changes and learning.

Next Quarter Planning (60 minutes): Set new key results and success criteria.

Success metrics for the review framework

*We will also track:*

Engagement levels: Are you/your teams actively participating and finding value?

Action item completion: What percentage of identified actions are completed by the next review?

Strategic alignment: Are teams making measurable progress toward the capability building and technical excellence goals?

Feedback quality: Are reviews generating actionable insights that improve team performance?