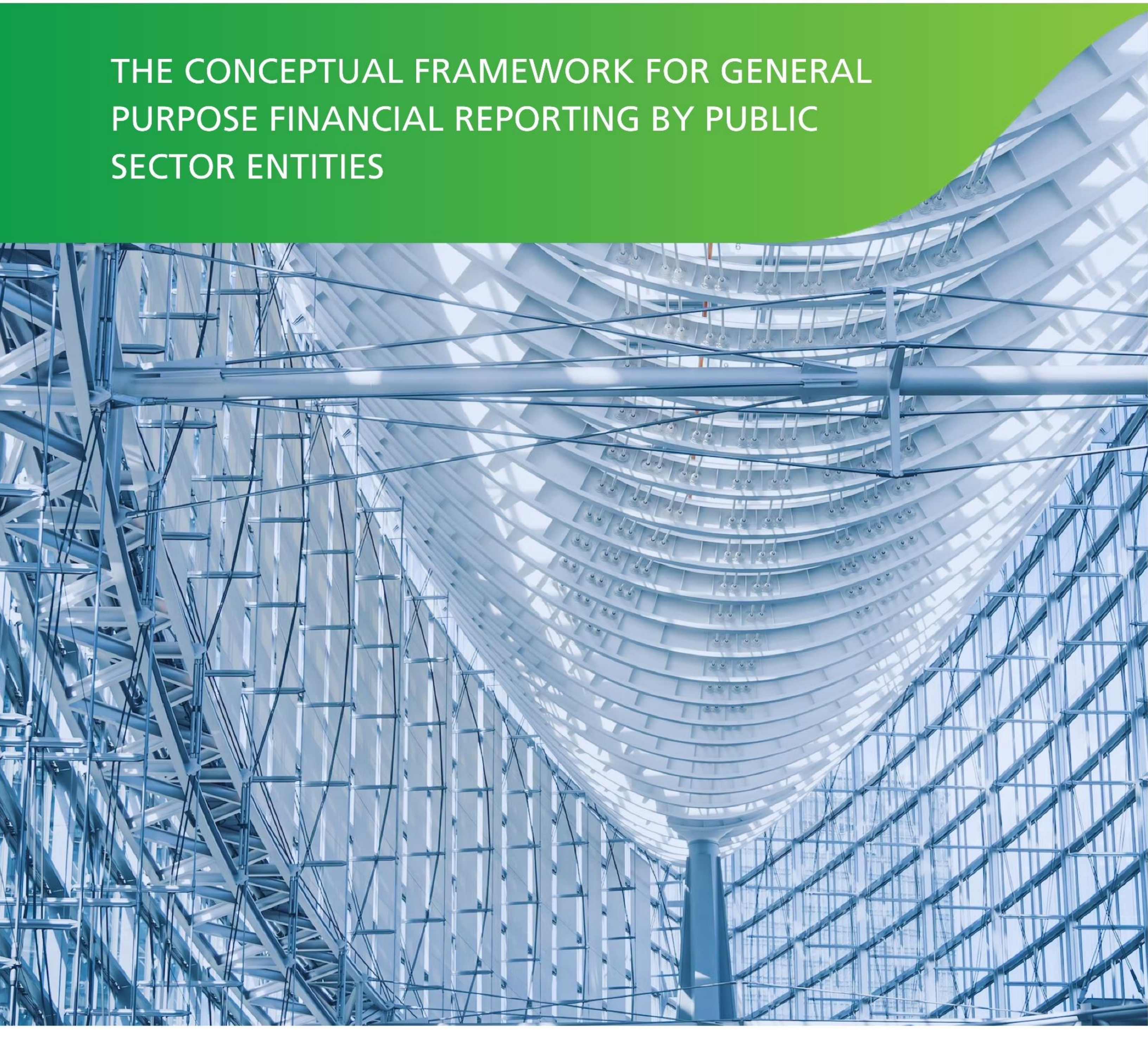
THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR GENERAL PURPOSE FINANCIAL REPORTING BY PUBLIC SECTOR ENTITIES



International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board®

This document was developed and approved in 2014 by the International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board® (IPSASB®) and was originally published in October 2014. In 2023, Chapters 3, 5, and 7 were updated.

The objective of the IPSASB is to serve the public interest by setting high-quality public sector accounting standards and by facilitating the adoption and implementation of these, thereby enhancing the quality and consistency of practice throughout the world and strengthening the transparency and accountability of public sector finances.

In meeting this objective, the IPSASB sets International Public Sector Accounting Standards® (IPSASs®) and Recommended Practice Guidelines (RPGs) for use by public sector entities, including national, regional, and local governments, and related governmental agencies.

IPSAS relate to the general purpose financial statements (financial statements) and are authoritative. RPGs are pronouncements that provide guidance on good practice in preparing general purpose financial reports (GPFRs) that are not financial statements. Unlike IPSAS, RPGs do not establish requirements. Currently all pronouncements relating to GPFRs that are not financial statements are RPGs. RPGs do not provide guidance on the level of assurance (if any) to which information should be subjected.

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THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR GENERAL PURPOSE FINANCIAL REPORTING BY PUBLIC SECTOR ENTITIES

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The Preface to the Conceptual Framework for General Purpose Financial Reporting by Public Sector Entities

Introduction

1. The *Conceptual Framework for General Purpose Financial Reporting by Public Sector Entities* (the Conceptual Framework) establishes the concepts that are to be applied in developing International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSASs) and Recommended Practice Guidelines (RPGs) applicable to the preparation and presentation of general purpose financial reports (GPFRs) of public sector entities[1].

2. The primary objective of most public sector entities is to deliver services to the public, rather than to make profits and generate a return on equity to investors. Consequently the performance of such entities can be only partially evaluated by examination of financial position, financial performance and cash flows. GPFRs provide information to users for accountability and decision-making purposes. Therefore, users of the GPFRs of public sector entities need information to support assessments of such matters as:

   - Whether the entity provided its services to constituents in an efficient and effective manner;
   - The resources currently available for future expenditures, and to what extent there are restrictions or conditions attached to their use;
   - To what extent the burden on future-year taxpayers of paying for current services has changed; and
   - Whether the entity's ability to provide services has improved or deteriorated compared with the previous year.

3. Governments generally have broad powers, including the ability to establish and enforce legal requirements, and to change those requirements. Globally the public sector varies considerably in both its constitutional arrangements and its methods of operation. However, governance in the public sector generally involves the holding to account of the executive by a legislative body (or equivalent).

4. The following sections highlight characteristics of the public sector that the IPSASB has considered in the development of the Conceptual Framework.

The Volume and Financial Significance of Non-Exchange Transactions

5. In a non-exchange transaction, an entity receives value from another party without directly giving approximately equal value in exchange. Such transactions are common in the public sector. The level and quality of services received by an individual, or group of individuals, is not normally directly related to the level of taxes assessed. An individual or group may have to pay a charge or fee and/or may have had to make specified contributions to access certain services. However, such transactions are, generally, of a non-exchange nature, because the amount that an individual or group of individuals obtains in benefits will not be approximately equal to the amount of any fees paid or contributions made by the individual or group. The nature of non-exchange transactions may have an impact on how they are recognized, measured, and presented to best support assessments of the entity by service recipients and resource providers.

6. Taxation is a legally mandated, compulsory non-exchange transaction between individuals or entities and the government. Tax-raising powers can vary considerably, dependent upon the relationship between the powers of the national government and those of sub-national governments and other public sector entities. International public sector entities are largely

[1] The public sector includes national and sub-national (regional, state/provincial, and local), governments and related governmental entities. It also includes international public sector organizations.

funded by transfers from national, regional and state governments. Such funding may be governed by treaties and conventions or may be on a voluntary basis.

7. Governments and other public sector entities are accountable to resource providers, particularly to those that provide resources through taxes and other compulsory transactions. Chapter 2, *Objectives and Users of General Purpose Financial Reporting*, discusses the accountability objective of financial reporting.

The Importance of the Approved Budget

8. Most governments and other public sector entities prepare budgets. In many jurisdictions there is a constitutional requirement to prepare and make publicly available a budget approved by the legislature (or equivalent). Legislation often defines the contents of that documentation. The legislature (or equivalent) exercises oversight, and constituents and their elected representatives hold the entity's management financially accountable through the budget and other mechanisms. The approved budget is often the basis for setting taxation levels, and is part of the process for obtaining legislative approval for spending.

9. Because of the approved budget's significance, information that enables users to compare financial results with the budget facilitates an assessment of the extent to which a public sector entity has met its financial objectives. Such information promotes accountability and informs decision making in subsequent budgets. Reporting against budget is commonly the mechanism for demonstrating compliance with legal requirements relating to the public finances. The needs of users for budget information is discussed in Chapter 2.

The Nature of Public Sector Programs and the Longevity of the Public Sector

10. Many public sector programs are long term and the ability to meet commitments depends upon future taxation and contributions. Many commitments arising from public sector programs and powers to levy future taxation do not meet the definitions of a liability and an asset in *Chapter 5, Elements in Financial Statements*. Therefore, such commitments and powers are not recognized in the financial statements.

11. Consequently, the statement of financial position and statement of financial performance cannot provide all the information that users need on long-term programs, particularly those delivering social benefits. The financial consequences of many decisions will have an impact many years or even decades into the future, so GPFRs containing prospective financial information on the long-term sustainability of an entity's finances and key programs are necessary for accountability and decision-making purposes as discussed in Chapter 2.

12. Although political control may change regularly, nation states generally have very long existences. While they may encounter severe financial difficulties and may default on sovereign debt obligations, nation states continue to exist. If sub-national entities get into financial difficulties, national governments might act as lenders of last resort or provide large scale guarantees. The main service delivery commitments of sub-national entities may continue to be funded by a higher level of government. In other cases public sector entities that are unable to meet their liabilities as they fall due may continue to exist by restructuring their operations.

13. The going concern principle underpins the preparation of the financial statements. Interpretation of the principle needs to reflect the issues discussed in paragraphs 11 and 12.

The Nature and Purpose of Assets and Liabilities in the Public Sector

14. In the public sector, the primary reason for holding property, plant, and equipment and other assets is for their service potential rather than their ability to generate cash flows[2] . Because of the types of services provided, a significant proportion of assets used by public sector entities is specialized—for example, roads and military assets. There may be a limited market for such

[2] Many public sector assets will generate cash flows, but this is often not the main reason for holding them.

assets and, even then, they may need considerable adaptation in order to be used by other operators. These factors have implications for the measurement of such assets. Chapter 7, *Measurement of Assets and Liabilities in Financial Statements*, discusses measurement bases for assets.

15. Governments and other public sector entities may hold items that contribute to the historical and cultural character of a nation or region—for example, art treasures, historical buildings, and other artifacts. They may also be responsible for national parks and other areas of natural significance with native flora and fauna. Such items and areas are not generally held for sale, even if markets exist. Rather, governments and public sector entities have a responsibility to preserve and maintain them for current and future generations.

16. Governments often have powers over natural and other resources such as mineral reserves, water, fishing grounds, forests and the electromagnetic spectrum. These powers allow governments to grant licenses for the use of such resources or to obtain royalties and taxes from their use. The definition of an asset and recognition criteria are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, *Recognition in Financial Statements*.

17. Governments and other public sector entities incur liabilities related to their service delivery objectives. Many liabilities arise from non-exchange transactions and include those related to programs that operate to deliver social benefits. Liabilities may also arise from governments' role as a lender of last resort and from any obligations to transfer resources to those affected by disasters. In addition many governments have obligations that arise from monetary activities such as currency in circulation. The definition of a liability and recognition criteria are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

The Regulatory Role of Public Sector Entities

18. Many governments and other public sector entities have powers to regulate entities operating in certain sectors of the economy, either directly or through specifically created agencies. The underlying public policy rationale for regulation is to safeguard the public interest in accordance with specified public policy objectives. Regulatory intervention can also occur where there are market imperfections or market failure for particular services, or to mitigate against factors such as pollution, the impact of which is not transmitted through pricing. Such regulatory activities are carried out in accordance with legal processes.

19. Governments may also regulate themselves and other public sector entities. Judgment may be necessary to determine whether such regulations create rights of, and obligations on, public sector entities that require recognition as assets and liabilities, or whether the public sector entity's ability to amend such regulations has an impact on how such rights and obligations are accounted for. Chapter 5 considers rights and obligations.

Relationship to Statistical Reporting

20. Many governments produce two types of ex-post financial information: (a) government finance statistics (GFS) on the general government sector (GGS) for the purpose of macroeconomic analysis and decision making, and (b) general purpose financial statements (financial statements) for accountability and decision making at an entity level, including financial statements for the whole of government reporting entity.

21. The overarching standards for macro-economic statistics are set out in the System of National Accounts (SNA). The SNA is a framework for a systematic and detailed description of the national economy and its components, including the GGS. These standards are then implemented at national or regional level, for example in the European Union through the European System of Accounts. GFS reporting guidelines include the International Monetary Fund's Government Finance Statistics Manual.

22. IPSAS financial statements and GFS reports have much in common. Both reporting frameworks are concerned with (a) financial, accrual-based information, (b) a government's

assets, liabilities, revenue, and expenses and (c) comprehensive information on cash flows. There is considerable overlap between the two reporting frameworks that underpin this information.

23. However, IPSASs and GFS reporting guidelines have different objectives. The objectives of financial reporting by public sector entities are to provide information about the reporting entity that is useful to users of GPFRs for accountability purposes and decision-making purposes. GFS reports are used to (a) analyze fiscal policy options, make policy and evaluate the impact of fiscal policies, (b) determine the impact on the economy, and (c) compare fiscal outcomes nationally and internationally. The focus is on evaluating the impact of the GGS and broader public sector on the economy, within the complete macroeconomic statistics framework.

24. The different objectives and focus on different reporting entities lead to the different treatment of some transactions and events. The removal of differences between the two accounting frameworks that are not fundamental to their different objectives and reporting entities, and use of a single integrated financial information system to generate both IPSAS-compliant financial statements and GFS reports can provide benefits to users in terms of report quality, timeliness and understandability. These matters and their implications were considered in the development of Chapters 2, 4, *Reporting Entity*, and 7, which discuss the objectives of financial reporting, the reporting entity and measurement.

CHAPTER 1: ROLE AND AUTHORITY OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Role of the Conceptual Framework

1.1 The *Conceptual Framework for General Purpose Financial Reporting by Public Sector Entities* (the Conceptual Framework) establishes the concepts that underpin general purpose financial reporting (financial reporting) by public sector entities that adopt the accrual basis of accounting. The International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board (IPSASB) will apply these concepts in developing International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSASs) and Recommended Practice Guidelines (RPGs) applicable to the preparation and presentation of general purpose financial reports (GPFRs) of public sector entities.

Authority of the Conceptual Framework

1.2 The Conceptual Framework does not establish authoritative requirements for financial reporting by public sector entities that adopt IPSASs, nor does it override the requirements of IPSASs or RPGs. Authoritative requirements relating to the recognition, measurement and presentation of transactions and other events and activities that are reported in GPFRs are specified in IPSASs.

1.3 The Conceptual Framework can provide guidance in dealing with financial reporting issues not dealt with by IPSASs or RPGs. In these circumstances, preparers and others can refer to and consider the applicability of the definitions, recognition criteria, measurement principles, and other concepts identified in the Conceptual Framework.

General Purpose Financial Reports

1.4 GPFRs are a central component of, and support and enhance, transparent financial reporting by governments and other public sector entities. GPFRs are financial reports intended to meet the information needs of users who are unable to require the preparation of financial reports tailored to meet their specific information needs.

1.5 Some users of financial information may have the authority to require the preparation of reports tailored to meet their specific information needs. While such parties may find the information provided by GPFRs useful for their purposes, GPFRs are not developed to specifically respond to their particular information needs.

1.6 GPFRs are likely to comprise multiple reports, each responding more directly to certain aspects of the objectives of financial reporting and matters included within the scope of financial reporting. GPFRs encompass financial statements including their notes (hereafter referred to as financial statements, unless specified otherwise), and the presentation of information that enhances, complements and supplements the financial statements.

1.7 The scope of financial reporting establishes the boundary around the transactions, other events and activities that may be reported in GPFRs. The scope of financial reporting is determined by the information needs of the primary users of GPFRs and the objectives of financial reporting. The factors that determine what may be encompassed within the scope of financial reporting are outlined in the next chapter.

Applicability of the Conceptual Framework

1.8 The Conceptual Framework applies to financial reporting by public sector entities that apply IPSASs. Therefore, it applies to GPFRs of national, regional, state/provincial and local governments. It also applies to a wide range of other public sector entities including:

- Government ministries, departments, programs, boards, commissions, agencies;
- Public sector social security funds, trusts, and statutory authorities; and
- International governmental organizations.

Basis for Conclusions

This Basis for Conclusions accompanies, but is not part of, the Conceptual Framework.

Role and Authority of the Conceptual Framework

BC1.1 The Conceptual Framework identifies the concepts that the IPSASB will apply in developing IPSASs and RPGs intended to assist preparers and others in dealing with financial reporting issues. IPSASs specify authoritative requirements. IPSASs and RPGs are developed after application of a due process which provides the opportunity for interested parties to provide input on the specific requirements proposed, including their compatibility with current practices in different jurisdictions.

BC1.2 The Conceptual Framework underpins the development of IPSASs. Therefore, it has relevance for all entities that apply IPSASs. GPFRs prepared at the whole-of-government level in accordance with IPSASs may also consolidate all governmental entities whether or not those entities have complied with IPSASs in their GPFRs.

Special Purpose Financial Reports

BC1.3 Standard setters often describe as “special purpose financial reports” those financial reports prepared to respond to the requirements of users that have the authority to require the preparation of financial reports that disclose the information they need for their particular purposes. The IPSASB is aware that the requirements of IPSASs have been (and may continue to be) applied effectively and usefully in the preparation of some special purpose financial reports.

General Purpose Financial Reports

BC1.4 The Conceptual Framework acknowledges that, to respond to users’ information needs, GPFRs may include information that enhances, complements, and supplements the financial statements. Therefore, the Conceptual Framework reflects a scope for financial reporting that is more comprehensive than that encompassed by financial statements. Chapter 2, *Objectives and Users of General Purpose Financial Reporting*, identifies the objectives of financial reporting and the primary users of GPFRs. It also outlines the consequences of the primary users’ likely information needs for what may be encompassed within the scope of financial reporting.

CHAPTER 2: OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF GENERAL PURPOSE FINANCIAL REPORTING

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Objectives of Financial Reporting

2.1 The objectives of financial reporting by public sector entities are to provide information about the entity that is useful to users of GPFRs for accountability purposes and for decision-making purposes (hereafter referred to as "useful for accountability and decision-making purposes").

2.2 Financial reporting is not an end in itself. Its purpose is to provide information useful to users of GPFRs. The objectives of financial reporting are therefore determined by reference to the users of GPFRs, and their information needs.

Users of General Purpose Financial Reports

2.3 Governments and other public sector entities raise resources from taxpayers, donors, lenders and other resource providers for use in the provision of services to citizens and other service recipients. These entities are accountable for their management and use of resources to those that provide them with resources, and to those that depend on them to use those resources to deliver necessary services. Those that provide the resources and receive, or expect to receive, the services also require information as input for decision-making purposes.

2.4 Consequently, GPFRs of public sector entities are developed primarily to respond to the information needs of service recipients and resource providers who do not possess the authority to require a public sector entity to disclose the information they need for accountability and decision-making purposes. The legislature (or similar body) and members of parliament (or a similar representative body) are also primary users of GPFRs, and make extensive and ongoing use of GPFRs when acting in their capacity as representatives of the interests of service recipients and resource providers. Therefore, for the purposes of the Conceptual Framework, the primary users of GPFRs are service recipients and their representatives and resource providers and their representatives (hereafter referred to as "service recipients and resource providers", unless identified otherwise).

2.5 Citizens receive services from, and provide resources to, the government and other public sector entities. Therefore, citizens are primary users of GPFRs. Some service recipients and some resource providers that rely on GPFRs for the information they need for accountability and decision-making purposes may not be citizens—for example, residents who pay taxes and/or receive benefits but are not citizens; multilateral or bilateral donor agencies and many lenders and corporations that provide resources to, and transact with, a government; and those that fund, and/or benefit from, the services provided by international governmental organizations. In most cases, governments that provide resources to international governmental organizations are dependent on GPFRs of those organizations for information for accountability and decision-making purposes.

2.6 GPFRs prepared to respond to the information needs of service recipients and resource providers for accountability and decision-making purposes may also provide information useful to other parties and for other purposes. For example, government statisticians, analysts, the media, financial advisors, public interest and lobby groups and others may find the information provided by GPFRs useful for their own purposes. Organizations that have the authority to require the preparation of financial reports tailored to meet their own specific information needs may also use the information provided by GPFRs for their own purposes—for example, regulatory and oversight bodies, audit institutions, subcommittees of the legislature or other governing body, central agencies and budget controllers, entity management, rating agencies and, in some cases, lending institutions and providers of development and other assistance. While these other parties may find the information provided by GPFRs useful, they are not the primary users of GPFRs. Therefore, GPFRs are not developed to specifically respond to their particular information needs.

Accountability and Decision Making

2.7 The primary function of governments and other public sector entities is to provide services that enhance or maintain the well-being of citizens and other eligible residents. Those services include, for example, welfare programs and policing, public education, national security and defense services. In most cases, these services are provided as a result of a non-exchange transaction[3] and in a non-competitive environment.

2.8 Governments and other public sector entities are accountable to those that provide them with resources, and to those that depend on them to use those resources to deliver services during the reporting period and over the longer term. The discharge of accountability obligations requires the provision of information about the entity's management of the resources entrusted to it for the delivery of services to constituents and others, and its compliance with legislation, regulation, or other authority that governs its service delivery and other operations. Given the way in which the services provided by public sector entities are funded (primarily by taxation revenues or other non-exchange transactions) and the dependency of service recipients on the provision of those services over the long term, the discharge of accountability obligations will also require the provision of information about such matters as the entity's service delivery achievements during the reporting period, and its capacity to continue to provide services in future periods.

2.9 Service recipients and resource providers will also require information as input for making decisions. For example:

- Lenders, creditors, donors and others that provide resources on a voluntary basis, including in an exchange transaction, make decisions about whether to provide resources to support the current and future activities of the government or other public sector entity. In some circumstances, members of the legislature or similar representative body who depend on GPFRs for the information they need, can make or influence decisions about the service delivery objectives of government departments, agencies or programs and the resources allocated to support their achievement; and
- Taxpayers do not usually provide funds to the government or other public sector entity on a voluntary basis or as a result of an exchange transaction. In addition, in many cases, they do not have the discretion to choose whether or not to accept the services provided by a public sector entity or to choose an alternative service provider. Consequently, they have little direct or immediate capacity to make decisions about whether to provide resources to the government, the resources to be allocated for the provision of services by a particular public sector entity or whether to purchase or consume the services provided. However, service recipients and resource providers can make decisions about their voting preferences, and representations they make to elected officials or other representative bodies—these decisions may have resource allocation consequences for certain public sector entities.

2.10 Information provided in GPFRs for accountability purposes will contribute to, and inform, decision making. For example, information about the costs, efficiency and effectiveness of past service delivery activities, the amount and sources of cost recovery, and the resources available to support future activities will be necessary for the discharge of accountability. This information will also be useful for decision making by users of GPFRs, including decisions that donors and other financial supporters make about providing resources to the entity.

Information Needs of Service Recipients and Resource Providers

2.11 For accountability and decision-making purposes, service recipients and resource providers will need information that supports the assessments of such matters as:

- The performance of the entity during the reporting period in, for example:
    - Meeting its service delivery and other operating and financial objectives;
    - Managing the resources it is responsible for;
    - Complying with relevant budgetary, legislative, and other authority regulating the raising and use of resources;

[3]. Exchange transactions are transactions in which one entity receives assets or services, or has liabilities extinguished, and directly gives approximately equally value to another entity in exchange. Non-exchange transactions are transactions in which an entity receives value from another entity without directly giving approximately equal value in exchange.

- The liquidity (for example, ability to meet current obligations) and solvency (for example, ability to meet obligations over the long term) of the entity;
- The sustainability of the entity's service delivery and other operations over the long term, and changes therein as a result of the activities of the entity during the reporting period including, for example:
  - The capacity of the entity to continue to fund its activities and to meet its operational objectives in the future (its financial capacity), including the likely sources of funding and the extent to which the entity is dependent on, and therefore vulnerable to, funding or demand pressures outside its control;
  - The physical and other resources currently available to support the provision of services in future periods (its operational capacity); and
- The capacity of the entity to adapt to changing circumstances, whether changes in demographics or changes in domestic or global economic conditions which are likely to impact the nature or composition of the activities it undertakes and the services it provides.

2.12 The information service recipients and resource providers need for these purposes is likely to overlap in many respects. For example, service recipients will require information as input to assessments of such matters as whether:

- The entity is using resources economically, efficiently, effectively and as intended, and whether such use is in their interest;
- The range, volume and cost of services provided during the reporting period are appropriate, and the amounts and sources of their cost recoveries; and
- Current levels of taxes or other resources raised are sufficient to maintain the volume and quality of services currently provided.

Service recipients will also require information about the consequences of decisions made, and activities undertaken, by the entity during the reporting period on the resources available to support the provision of services in future periods, the entity's anticipated future service delivery activities and objectives, and the amounts and sources of cost recoveries necessary to support those activities.

2.13 Resource providers will require information as input to assessments of such matters as whether the entity:

- Is achieving the objectives established as the justification for the resources raised during the reporting period;
- Funded current operations from funds raised in the current period from taxpayers or from borrowings or other sources; and
- Is likely to need additional (or less) resources in the future, and the likely sources of those resources.

Lenders and creditors will require information as input to assessments of the liquidity of the entity and, therefore, whether the amount and timing of repayment will be as agreed. Donors will require information to support assessments of whether the entity is using resources economically, efficiently, effectively and as intended. They will also require information about the entity's anticipated future service delivery activities and resource needs.

Information Provided by General Purpose Financial Reports

Financial Position, Financial Performance, and Cash Flows

2.14 Information about the financial position of a government or other public sector entity will enable users to identify the resources of the entity and claims to those resources at the reporting date. This will provide information useful as input to assessments of such matters as:

- The extent to which management has discharged its responsibilities for safekeeping and managing the resources of the entity;

- The extent to which resources are available to support future service delivery activities, and changes during the reporting period in the amount and composition of those resources and claims to those resources; and
- The amounts and timing of future cash flows necessary to service and repay existing claims to the entity's resources.

2.15 Information about the financial performance of a government or other public sector entity will inform assessments of matters such as whether the entity has acquired resources economically, and used them efficiently and effectively to achieve its service delivery objectives. Information about the costs of service delivery and the amounts and sources of cost recovery during the reporting period will assist users to determine whether operating costs were recovered from, for example, taxes, user charges, contributions and transfers, or were financed by increasing the level of indebtedness of the entity.

2.16 Information about the cash flows of a government or other public sector entity contributes to assessments of financial performance and the entity's liquidity and solvency. It indicates how the entity raised and used cash during the period, including its borrowing and repayment of borrowing and its acquisition and sale of, for example, property, plant, and equipment. It also identifies the cash received from, for example, taxes and investments and the cash transfers made to, and received from, other governments, government agencies or international organizations. Information about cash flows can also support assessments of the entity's compliance with spending mandates expressed in cash flow terms, and inform assessments of the likely amounts and sources of cash inflows needed in future periods to support service delivery objectives.

2.17 Information about financial position, financial performance and cash flows are typically presented in financial statements. To assist users to better understand, interpret and place in context the information presented in the financial statements, GPFRs may also provide financial and non-financial information that enhances, complements and supplements the financial statements, including information about such matters as the government's or other public sector entity's:

- Compliance with approved budgets and other authority governing its operations;
- Service delivery activities and achievements during the reporting period; and
- Expectations regarding service delivery and other activities in future periods, and the long term consequences of decisions made and activities undertaken during the reporting period, including those that may impact expectations about the future.

This information may be presented in the notes to the financial statements or in separate reports included in GPFRs.

Budget Information and Compliance with Legislation or Other Authority Governing the Raising and Use of Resources

2.18 Typically, a government or other public sector entity prepares, approves and makes publicly available an annual budget. The approved budget provides interested parties with financial information about the entity's operational plans for the forthcoming period, its capital needs and, often, its service delivery objectives and expectations. It is used to justify the raising of resources from taxpayers and other resource providers, and establishes the authority for expenditure of resources.

2.19 Some resources to support the activities of public sector entities may be received from donors, lenders or as a result of exchange transactions. However, resources to support the activities of public sector entities are predominantly provided in non-exchange transactions by taxpayers and others, consistent with the expectations reflected in an approved budget.

2.20 GPFRs provide information about the financial results (whether described as "surplus or deficit," "profit or loss," or by other terms), performance and cash flows of the entity during the reporting period, its assets and liabilities at the reporting date and the change therein during the reporting period, and its service delivery achievements.

2.21 The inclusion within GPFRs of information that assists users in assessing the extent to which revenues, expenses, cash flows and financial results of the entity comply with the estimates reflected in approved budgets, and the entity's adherence to relevant legislation or other authority governing the raising and use of resources, is important in determining how well a public sector entity has met its financial objectives. Such information is necessary for the discharge of a government's or other public sector entity's accountability to its constituents, enhances the assessment of the financial performance of the entity and will inform decision making.

Service Delivery Achievements

2.22 The primary objective of governments and most public sector entities is to provide needed services to constituents. Consequently, the financial performance of governments and most public sector entities will not be fully or adequately reflected in any measure of financial results. Therefore, their financial results will need to be assessed in the context of the achievement of service delivery objectives.

2.23 In some cases, quantitative measures of the outputs and outcomes of the entity's service delivery activities during the reporting period will provide relevant information about the achievement of service delivery objectives—for example, information about the cost, volume, and frequency of service delivery, and the relationship of services provided to the resource base of the entity. In other cases, the achievement of service delivery objectives may need to be communicated by an explanation of the quality of particular services provided or the outcome of certain programs.

2.24 Reporting non-financial as well as financial information about service delivery activities, achievements and/or outcomes during the reporting period will provide input to assessments of the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of the entity's operations. Reporting such information is necessary for a government or other public sector entity to discharge its obligation to be accountable—that is, to account for, and justify the use of, the resources raised from, or on behalf of, constituents. Decisions that donors make about the allocation of resources to particular entities and programs are also made, at least in part, in response to information about service delivery achievements during the reporting period, and future service delivery objectives.

Prospective Financial and Non-financial Information

2.25 Given the longevity of governments and many government programs, the financial consequences of many decisions made in the reporting period may only become clear many years into the future. Financial statements which present information about financial position at a point in time and financial performance and cash flows over the reporting period will then need to be assessed in the context of the long term.

2.26 Decisions made by a government or other public sector entity in a particular period about programs for delivering and funding services in the future can have significant consequences for:

- Constituents who will be dependent on those services in the future; and
- Current and future generations of taxpayers and other involuntary resource providers who will provide the taxes and levies to fund the planned service delivery activities and related financial commitments.

2.27 Information about the entity's anticipated future service delivery activities and objectives, their likely impact on the future resource needs of the entity and the likely sources of funding for such resources, will be necessary as input to any assessment of the ability of the government or other public sector entity to meet its service delivery and financial commitments in the future. The disclosure of such information in GPFRs will support assessments of the sustainability of service delivery by a government or other public sector entity, enhance the accountability of the entity and provide additional information useful for decision-making purposes.

Explanatory Information

2.28 Information about the major factors underlying the financial and service delivery performance of the entity during the reporting period and the assumptions that underpin expectations about, and factors that are likely to influence, the entity's future performance may be presented in GPFRs in notes to the financial statements or in separate reports. Such information will assist users to better understand and place in context the financial and non-financial information included in GPFRs, and enhance the role of GPFRs in providing information useful for accountability and decision-making purposes.

Financial Statements and Information that Enhances, Complements and Supplements the Financial Statements

2.29 The scope of financial reporting establishes the boundary around the transactions, other events and activities that may be reported in GPFRs. To respond to the information needs of users, the Conceptual Framework reflects a scope for financial reporting that is more comprehensive than that encompassed by financial statements. It provides for the presentation within GPFRs of additional information that enhances, complements, and supplements those statements.

2.30 While the Conceptual Framework reflects a scope of financial reporting that is more comprehensive than that encompassed by financial statements, information presented in financial statements remains at the core of financial reporting. How the elements of financial statements are defined, recognized and measured, and forms of presentation and communication that might be adopted for information included within GPFRs, is considered in other chapters of the Conceptual Framework and in the development of individual IPSASs or RPGs, as appropriate.

Other Sources of Information

2.31 GPFRs play a significant role in communicating information necessary to support the discharge of a government's or other public sector entity's obligation to be accountable, as well as providing information useful as input for decision-making purposes. However, it is unlikely that GPFRs will provide all the information users need for accountability and decision-making purposes. For example, while comparison of actual with budget information for the reporting period may be included in GPFRs, the budgets and financial forecasts issued by governments provide more detailed financial and non-financial information about the financial characteristics of the plans of governments and other public sector entities over the short and medium terms. Governments and independent agencies also issue reports on the need for, and sustainability of, existing service delivery initiatives and anticipated economic conditions and changes in the jurisdiction's demographics over the medium and longer term that will influence budgets and service delivery needs in the future. Consequently, service recipients and resource providers may also need to consider information from other sources, including reports on current and anticipated economic conditions, government budgets and forecasts, and information about government policy initiatives not reported in GPFRs.

Basis for Conclusions

This Basis for Conclusions accompanies, but is not part of, the Conceptual Framework.

Primary User Groups

BC2.1 In developing the Conceptual Framework, the IPSASB sought views on whether the Conceptual Framework should identify the primary users of GPFRs. Many respondents to the initial Consultation Paper[4] expressed the view that the Framework should identify the primary users of GPFRs, and the IPSASB should focus on the information needs of those primary users in developing IPSASs. The IPSASB was persuaded by these views.

Identifying the Primary User Groups

BC2.2 Conceptual Framework Exposure Draft 1, *Conceptual Framework for General Purpose Financial Reporting by Public Sector Entities: Role, Authority and Scope; Objectives and Users; Qualitative Characteristics; and Reporting Entity* (the Exposure Draft), identified service recipients and their representatives, and resource providers and their representatives as the primary users of GPFRs. It explained that, while the IPSASB will develop IPSASs and RPGs on the contents of GPFRs to respond to the information needs of these primary users, GPFRs may still be used by others with an interest in financial reporting, and may provide information of use to those other users.

BC2.3 Many respondents to the Exposure Draft expressed support for the identification of service recipients and their representatives and resource providers and their representatives as the primary users of GPFRs. However, others were of the view that the public, citizens or legislature should be identified as the primary or most important users of GPFRs of public sector entities. They explained that this is

[4] Consultation Paper, *Conceptual Framework for General Purpose Financial Reporting by Public Sector Entities: The Objectives of Financial Reporting; The Scope of Financial Reporting; The Qualitative Characteristics of Information Included in General Purpose Financial Reports; The Reporting Entity.*

because governments are primarily accountable to the citizens or their representatives and, in many jurisdictions, the legislature and individual members of parliament (or similar representative body) acting on behalf of citizens are the main users of GPFRs. Some respondents also expressed the view that only resource providers and their representatives should be identified as the primary users of GPFRs of public sector entities. They explained that it is unlikely that GPFRs would be able to respond to the information needs of all users, and resource providers are likely to have the greatest interest in GPFRs. Therefore, identifying resource providers as the primary user group will allow the IPSASB to focus more sharply on the information needs of a single user group. They also noted that GPFRs prepared to respond to the information needs of resource providers are likely to also provide information useful to other potential users.

BC2.4 The IPSASB acknowledges that there is merit in many of the proposals made by respondents regarding the identity of the primary users of GPFRs of public sector entities, particularly as they apply to governments in many jurisdictions. However, given the objectives of financial reporting by public sector entities, the IPSASB remains of the view that the primary users of GPFRs of public sector entities should be identified as service recipients and their representatives and resource providers and their representatives. This is because:

- Governments and other public sector entities are accountable to those that depend on them to use resources to deliver necessary services, as well as to those that provide them with the resources that enable the delivery of those services; and
- GPFRs have a significant role in the discharge of that accountability and the provision of information useful to those users for decision-making purposes.

As such, GPFRs should be developed to respond to the information needs of service recipients and their representatives and resource providers and their representatives as the primary users. In addition, the Conceptual Framework will apply to governments and a potentially wide range of other public sector entities in many different jurisdictions, and to international governmental organizations. Consequently, it is not clear that identification of other user groups as the primary users of GPFRs will be relevant, and operate effectively, for all public sector entities across all jurisdictions.

BC2.5 The IPSASB accepts that some information in GPFRs may be of more interest and greater use to some users than others. The IPSASB also accepts that, in developing IPSASs and RPGs, it will need to consider and, in some cases, balance the needs of different groups of primary users. However, the IPSASB does not believe that such matters invalidate the identification of both service recipients and their representatives and resource providers and their representatives as the primary users of GPFRs.

BC2.6 The IPSASB's views on the relationship between the primary user groups identified by respondents, and service recipients and resource providers are further elaborated below.

Citizens

BC2.7 The IPSASB acknowledges the importance of citizens, the public and their representatives as users of GPFRs, but is of the view that classifying citizens as service recipients and resource providers provides a basis for assessing their potential information needs. This is because citizens encompass many individuals with a potentially wide range of diverse information needs—focusing on the information needs of citizens as service recipients and resource providers enables the IPSASB to draw together those diverse interests and explore what information needs GPFRs should attempt to respond to. The IPSASB is also of the view that, in developing IPSASs, it is appropriate that it has the capacity to consider the information needs of a range of service recipients and resource providers who may not be citizens (including donors and lenders) and do not possess the authority to require a public sector entity to disclose the information they need for accountability and decision-making purposes.

Resource Providers

BC2.8 The IPSASB agrees that GPFRs directed at the provision of information to satisfy the information needs of resource providers will also provide information useful to other potential users of GPFRs. However, the IPSASB is of the view that the Conceptual Framework should make clear its expectation that governments and other public sector entities should be accountable to both those that provide them with resources and those that depend on them to use those resources to deliver necessary and/or promised services. In addition, it has been noted that in some jurisdictions resource providers are primarily donors or lenders that may have the authority to require the preparation of special purpose financial reports to provide the information they need.

BC2.9 As noted at paragraph BC2.4, the IPSASB has formed a view that both service recipients and resource providers and their representatives are primary users of GPFRs. The IPSASB is of the view that the Conceptual Framework should not exclude citizens who may be interested in GPFRs in their capacity as service recipients from the potential users of GPFRs, or identify their information needs as less important than those of resource providers. The IPSASB is also of the view that it is not appropriate that donors, lenders, and others that provide resources on a voluntary or involuntary basis to governments and other public sector entities be excluded as potential users of GPFRs, or that their information needs be identified as less important than those of service recipients.

The Legislature

BC2.10 The IPSASB is of the view that the legislature or similar governing body is a primary user of GPFRs in its capacity as a representative of service recipients and resource providers. The legislature, parliaments, councils and similar bodies will also require information for their own specific accountability and decision-making purposes, and usually have the authority to require the preparation of detailed special purpose financial and other reports to provide that information. However, they may also use the information provided by GPFRs, as well as information provided by special purpose financial reports, for input to assessments of whether resources were used efficiently and as intended and in making decisions about allocating resources to particular government entities, programs or activities.

BC2.11 Individual members of the legislature or other governing body, whether members of the government or opposition, can usually require the disclosure of the information they need for the discharge of their official duties as directed by the legislature or governing body. However, they may not have the authority to require the preparation of financial reports that provide the information they require for other purposes, or in other circumstances. Consequently, they are users of GPFRs, whether in their capacity as representatives of service recipients and resource providers in their electorate or constituency, or in their personal capacity as citizens and members of the community.

Other User Groups

BC2.12 In developing the Conceptual Framework, the IPSASB considered a wide range of other potential users of GPFRs, including whether special interest groups and their representatives, or those transacting with public sector entities on a commercial or non-commercial basis or on a voluntary or involuntary basis (such as public sector and private sector resource providers) should be identified as separate user groups. The IPSASB is of the view that identifying service recipients and their representatives and resource providers and their representatives as the primary users of GPFRs will respond appropriately to the information needs of subgroups of service recipients and resource providers.

BC2.13 The information provided by GPFRs may be useful for compiling national accounts, as input to statistical financial reporting models, for assessments of the impact of government policies on economic activity and for other economic analytical purposes. However, GPFRs are not developed specifically to respond to the needs of those who require information for these purposes. Similarly, while those that act as advisors to service recipients or to resource providers (such as citizen advocacy groups, bond rating agencies, credit analysts and public interest groups) are likely to find the information reported in GPFRs useful for their purposes, GPFRs are not prepared specifically to respond to their particular information needs.

The Objectives of Financial Reporting

BC2.14 Many respondents to the Exposure Draft agreed that the provision of information useful for both accountability and decision-making purposes should be identified as the objectives of financial reporting by public sector entities. Some respondents advocated that only accountability be identified as the single or dominant objective of financial reporting by public sector entities; other respondents advocated that decision making should be identified as the single objective. However, the IPSASB remains of the view that users of GPFRs of public sector entities will require information for both accountability and decision-making purposes.

BC2.15 Some respondents to the Exposure Draft advocated that the link between accountability and decision making be more clearly articulated and the public sector characteristics that underpinned the IPSASB's views on the objectives of financial reporting by public sector entities be identified. The IPSASB has responded positively to these proposals. The Framework has been restructured and clarifications added.

BC2.16 The explanation of accountability and its relationship to decision making and GPFRs has also been strengthened. In this context, the IPSASB acknowledges that the notion of accountability reflected in this Framework is broad. It encompasses the provision of information about the entity's management of the resources entrusted to it, and information useful to users in assessing the sustainability of the activities of the entity and the continuity of the provision of services over the long term. The IPSASB is of the view that this broad notion of accountability is appropriate because citizens and other constituents provide resources to governments and other public sector entities on an involuntary basis and, for the most part, depend on governments and other public sector entities to provide needed services over the long term. However, the IPSASB also recognizes that it is unlikely that GPFRs will provide all the information that service recipients and resource providers need for accountability and decision-making purposes.

The Scope of Financial Reporting—Financial Statements and Information that Enhances, Complements and Supplements the Financial Statements

BC2.17 Many respondents to the Exposure Draft expressed support for the scope of financial reporting and its explanation as proposed by the IPSASB, with some identifying matters for clarification and others noting that projects dealing with the broader scope issues would need to provide guidance on application of the qualitative characteristics such as verifiability and comparability. Other respondents did not support the scope of financial reporting being broader than financial statements, expressing concern that:

- The proposed broad scope dealt with matters which were outside the Terms of Reference of the IPSASB that were in effect at that time; and
- Guidance on matters outside the financial statements, such as non-financial and prospective information, is appropriately a matter for individual governments, or governing bodies or other authority.

Some respondents to the Exposure Draft also expressed concern that the scope was too sharply focused on the financial statements, and that additional guidance on non-financial information and sustainability reporting be included in the Conceptual Framework.

BC2.18 The IPSASB remains of the view that it is necessary that the Conceptual Framework reflect a scope for financial reporting that is more comprehensive than that encompassed by financial statements. This is because:

- The primary objective of governments and other public sector entities is to deliver services to constituents rather than to generate profits;
- Citizens and other eligible residents are dependent on governments and other public sector entities to provide a wide range of services on an on-going basis over the long term. The activities of, and decisions made by, governments and other public sector entities in a particular reporting period can have significant consequences for future generations of service recipients and future generations of taxpayers and other involuntary resource providers; and
- Most governments and other public sector entities operate within spending mandates and financial constraints established through the budgetary process. Monitoring implementation of the approved budget is the primary method by which the legislature exercises oversight, and citizens and their elected representatives hold the government's management financially accountable.

BC2.19 Consequently, the performance of public sector entities in achieving their financial and service delivery objectives can be only partially evaluated by examination of their financial position at the reporting date, and financial performance and cash flows during the reporting period. The IPSASB is of the view that, to respond to users' need for information for accountability and decision-making purposes, the Conceptual Framework should enable GPFRs to encompass the provision of information that allows users to better assess and place in context the financial statements. Such information may be communicated by separate reports that present financial and non-financial information about the achievement of the entity's service delivery objectives during the reporting period; its compliance with approved budgets and legislation or other authority governing the raising and use of resources; and prospective financial and non-financial information about its future service delivery activities, objectives, and resource needs. In some cases, information about these matters may also be presented in notes to the financial statements.

BC2.20 In making decisions about financial reporting requirements or guidance that extend the information presented in GPFRs beyond financial statements, the IPSASB will consider the benefits of the information to users and the costs of compiling and reporting such information.

Limiting the Scope of Financial Reporting

BC2.21 Some respondents who agreed that the scope of financial reporting should extend beyond the financial statements expressed concern that the scope as proposed in the Exposure Draft was too open ended and/or not adequately explained or justified—in some cases proposing that the scope be limited to enhancement of matters recognized in the financial statements.

BC2.22 The IPSASB has responded to these concerns by clarifying the linkages between the scope of financial reporting and users' information needs, and including additional explanation of the relationship between users' information needs and the information that GPFRs may provide in response. In addition, the IPSASB has clarified that the scope of general purpose financial reporting is limited to the financial statements and information that enhances, complements and supplements the financial statements. Consequently, what is included in the more comprehensive scope of financial reporting will be derived from financial statements, and limited to matters that assist users to better understand and put in context the information included in those statements.

Resource Considerations, Authoritative Requirements and Audit Status

BC2.23 Many respondents, whether supportive or opposed to the proposals in the Exposure Draft, expressed concern that dealing with "broad scope" issues would absorb too much of the IPSASB's resources and limit its ability to deal with financial statement issues. Some respondents to the Exposure Draft also:

- Advocated that the Conceptual Framework clarify that authoritative requirements would only be developed for financial statement matters, broader scope issues being the subject of guidelines; and
- Expressed concern about the audit implications of including non-financial information and prospective information in GPFRs.

BC2.24 While the IPSASB can develop IPSASs which include authoritative requirements, it is not inevitable that it will do so. For example, the IPSASB's publications also include RPGs and other documents intended to assist the financial reporting community to respond to particular financial reporting issues. All IPSASB documents which include authoritative requirements or guidance on the presentation of information in GPFRs, whether as part of the financial statements or enhancements to those statements, will be subject to full due process. Therefore, in developing authoritative or other guidance on the presentation of information that broadens the scope of financial reporting, the IPSASB will need to respond to constituent concerns about the proposed technical content and authority of the guidance.

BC2.25 The IPSASB acknowledges the concern of respondents regarding the deployment of the IPSASB's resources to broad scope issues. However, information presented in financial statements remains at the core of financial reporting and, therefore, will remain the primary focus of the IPSASs and RPGs developed by the IPSASB. Consequently, the standards development work program of the IPSASB will continue to respond to users' need for better financial reporting of transactions and other events that are reported in the financial statements.

BC2.26 The IPSASB is of the view that it is not the role of the Conceptual Framework, or the IPSASs and RPGs that may be developed consistent with the concepts reflected in the Framework, to attempt to establish the level of audit assurance that should be provided to particular aspects of GPFRs. The qualitative characteristics provide some assurance to users about the quality of information included in GPFRs. However, responsibilities for the audit of financial statements and other components of GPFRs will be established by such matters as the regulatory framework in place in particular jurisdictions and the audit mandate agreed with and/or applying to the entity.

CHAPTER 3: QUALITATIVE CHARACTERISTICS

CONTENTS

Introduction

3.1 GPFRs present financial and non-financial information about economic and other phenomena. The qualitative characteristics of information included in GPFRs are the attributes that make that information useful to users and support the achievement of the objectives of financial reporting. The objectives of financial reporting are to provide information useful for accountability and decision-making purposes.

3.2 The qualitative characteristics of information included in GPFRs of public sector entities are relevance, faithful representation, understandability, timeliness, comparability, and verifiability.

3.3 Pervasive constraints on information included in GPFRs are materiality, cost-benefit, and achieving an appropriate balance between the qualitative characteristics.

3.4 Each of the qualitative characteristics is integral to, and works with, the other characteristics to provide in GPFRs information useful for achieving the objectives of financial reporting. However, in practice, all qualitative characteristics may not be fully achieved, and a balance or trade-off between certain of them may be necessary.

3.5 The qualitative characteristics apply to all financial and non-financial information reported in GPFRs, including historic and prospective information, and explanatory information. However, the extent to which the qualitative characteristics can be achieved may differ depending on the degree of uncertainty and subjective assessment or opinion involved in compiling the financial and non-financial information. The need for additional guidance on interpreting and applying the qualitative characteristics to information that extends the scope of financial reporting beyond financial statements will be considered in the development of any IPSASs and RPGs that deal with such matters.

Relevance

3.6 Financial and non-financial information is relevant if it is capable of making a difference in achieving the objectives of financial reporting. Financial and non-financial information is capable of making a difference when it has confirmatory value, predictive value, or both. It may be capable of making a difference, and thus be relevant, even if some users choose not to take advantage of it or are already aware of it.

3.7 Financial and non-financial information has confirmatory value if it confirms or changes past (or present) expectations. For example, information will be relevant for accountability and decision-making purposes if it confirms expectations about such matters as the extent to which managers have discharged their responsibilities for the efficient and effective use of resources, the achievement of specified service delivery objectives, and compliance with relevant budgetary, legislative and other requirements.

3.8 GPFRs may present information about an entity’s anticipated future service delivery activities, objectives and costs, and the amount and sources of the resources that are intended to be allocated to providing services in the future. Such future oriented information will have predictive value and be relevant for accountability and decision-making purposes. Information about economic and other phenomena that exist or have already occurred can also have predictive value in helping form expectations about the future. For example, information that confirms or disproves past expectations can reinforce or change expectations about financial results and service delivery outcomes that may occur in the future.

3.9 The confirmatory and predictive roles of information are interrelated—for example, information about the current level and structure of an entity’s resources and claims to those resources helps users to confirm the outcome of resource management strategies during the period, and to predict an entity’s ability to respond to changing circumstances and anticipated future service delivery needs. The same information helps to confirm or correct users’ past expectations and predictions about the entity’s ability to respond to such changes. It also helps to confirm or correct prospective financial information included in previous GPFRs.

Faithful Representation

3.10 To be useful in financial reporting, information must be a faithful representation of the economic and other phenomena that it purports to represent. Faithful representation is attained when the depiction of the phenomenon is complete, neutral, and free from material error. Information that faithfully represents an economic or other phenomenon depicts the substance of the underlying transaction, other event, activity or circumstance—which is not necessarily always the same as its legal form.

3.11 In practice, it may not be possible to know or confirm whether information presented in GPFRs is complete, neutral, and free from material error. However, information should be as complete, neutral, and free from error as is possible.

3.12 An omission of some information can cause the representation of an economic or other phenomenon to be false or misleading, and thus not useful to users of GPFRs. For example, a complete depiction of the item "plant and equipment" in GPFRs will include a numeric representation of the aggregate amount of plant and equipment together with other quantitative, descriptive and explanatory information necessary to faithfully represent that class of assets. In some cases, this may include the disclosure of information about such matters as the major classes of plant and equipment, factors that have affected their use in the past or might impact on their use in the future, and the basis and process for determining their numeric representation. Similarly, prospective financial and non-financial information and information about the achievement of service delivery objectives and outcomes included in GPFRs will need to be presented with the key assumptions that underlie that information and any explanations that are necessary to ensure that its depiction is complete and useful to users.

3.13 Neutrality in financial reporting is the absence of bias. It means that the selection and presentation of financial and non-financial information is not made with the intention of attaining a particular predetermined result—for example, to influence in a particular way users' assessment of the discharge of accountability by the entity or a decision or judgment that is to be made, or to induce particular behavior.

3.14 Neutral information faithfully represents the economic and other phenomena that it purports to represent. However, to require information included in GPFRs to be neutral does not mean that it is not without purpose or that it will not influence behavior. Relevance is a qualitative characteristic and, by definition, relevant information is capable of influencing users' assessments and decisions.

3.14A Neutrality is supported by the exercise of prudence. Prudence is the exercise of caution when making judgments under conditions of uncertainty. The exercise of prudence means that assets and revenue are not overstated, and liabilities and expense are not understated. Equally, the exercise of prudence does not allow for the understatement of assets or revenue or the overstatement of liabilities or expense. Such misstatements can lead to the overstatement or understatement of revenue or expense in future reporting periods.

3.14B The exercise of prudence does not imply a need for asymmetry; for example, a systematic need for more persuasive evidence to support the recognition of assets or revenue than the recognition of liabilities or expense. Particular standards may contain asymmetric requirements where this is a consequence of decisions intended to select the most relevant information that faithfully represents what it purports to represent.

3.15 The economic and other phenomena represented in GPFRs generally occur under conditions of uncertainty. Information included in GPFRs will therefore often include estimates that incorporate management's judgment. To faithfully represent an economic or other phenomenon, an estimate must be based on appropriate inputs, and each input must reflect the best available information. Caution will need to be exercised when dealing with uncertainty. It may sometimes be necessary to explicitly disclose the degree of uncertainty in financial and non-financial information to faithfully represent economic and other phenomena.

3.16 Free from material error does not mean complete accuracy in all respects. Free from material error means there are no errors or omissions that are individually or collectively material in the description of the phenomenon, and the process used to produce the reported information has been applied as described. In some cases, it may be possible to determine the accuracy of some information included in GPFRs—for example, the amount of a cash transfer to another level of government, the volume of services delivered or the price paid for the acquisition of plant and equipment. However, in other cases it may not—for example, the accuracy of an estimate of the value or cost of an item or the effectiveness of a service delivery program may not be able to be determined. In these cases, the estimate will be free from material error if the amount is clearly described as an estimate, the nature and limitations of the estimation process are explained, and no material errors have been identified in selecting and applying an appropriate process for developing the estimate.

Understandability

3.17 Understandability is the quality of information that enables users to comprehend its meaning. GPFRs of public sector entities should present information in a manner that responds to the needs and knowledge base of users, and to the nature of the information presented. For example, explanations of financial and non-financial information and commentary on service delivery and other achievements during the reporting period and expectations for future periods should be written in plain language, and presented in a manner that is readily understandable by users. Understandability is enhanced when information is classified, characterized, and presented clearly and concisely. Comparability also can enhance understandability.

3.18 Users of GPFRs are assumed to have a reasonable knowledge of the entity's activities and the environment in which it operates, to be able and prepared to read GPFRs, and to review and analyze the information presented with reasonable diligence. Some economic and other phenomena are particularly complex and difficult to represent in GPFRs, and some users may need to seek the aid of an advisor to assist in their understanding of them. All efforts should be undertaken to represent economic and other phenomena included in GPFRs in a manner that is understandable to a wide range of users. However, information should not be excluded from GPFRs solely because it may be too complex or difficult for some users to understand without assistance.

Timeliness

3.19 Timeliness means having information available for users before it loses its capacity to be useful for accountability and decision-making purposes. Having relevant information available sooner can enhance its usefulness as input to assessments of accountability and its capacity to inform and influence decisions that need to be made. A lack of timeliness can render information less useful.

3.20 Some items of information may continue to be useful long after the reporting period or reporting date. For example, for accountability and decision-making purposes, users of GPFRs may need to assess trends in the financial and service delivery performance of the entity and its compliance with budgets over a number of reporting periods. In addition, the outcome and effects of some service delivery programs may not be determinable until future periods—for example, this may occur in respect of programs intended to enhance the economic well-being of constituents, reduce the incidence of a particular disease, or increase literacy levels of certain age groups.

Comparability

3.21 Comparability is the quality of information that enables users to identify similarities in, and differences between, two sets of phenomena. Comparability is not a quality of an individual item of information, but rather a quality of the relationship between two or more items of information.

3.22 Comparability differs from consistency. Consistency refers to the use of the same accounting principles or policies and basis of preparation, either from period to period within an entity or in a single period across more than one entity. Comparability is the goal, and consistency helps in achieving that goal. In some cases, the accounting principles or policies adopted by an entity may be revised to better represent a particular transaction or event in GPFRs. In these cases, the inclusion of additional disclosures or explanation may be necessary to satisfy the characteristics of comparability.

3.23 Comparability also differs from uniformity. For information to be comparable, like things must look alike and different things must look different. An over-emphasis on uniformity may reduce comparability by making unlike things look alike. Comparability of information in GPFRs is not enhanced by making unlike things look alike, any more than it is by making like things look different.

3.24 Information about the entity's financial position, financial performance, cash flows, compliance with approved budgets and relevant legislation or other authority governing the raising and use of resources, service delivery achievements, and its future plans is necessary for accountability purposes and useful as input for decision-making purposes. The usefulness of such information is enhanced if it can be compared with, for example:

- Prospective financial and non-financial information previously presented for that reporting period or reporting date;
- Similar information about the same entity for some other period or some other point in time; and
- Similar information about other entities (for example, public sector entities providing similar services in different jurisdictions) for the same reporting period.

3.25 Consistent application of accounting principles, policies and basis of preparation to prospective financial and non-financial information and actual outcomes will enhance the usefulness of any comparison of projected and actual results. Comparability with other entities may be less significant for explanations of management's perception or opinion of the factors underlying the entity's current performance.

Verifiability

3.26 Verifiability is the quality of information that helps assure users that information in GPFRs faithfully represents the economic and other phenomena that it purports to represent. Supportability is sometimes used to describe this quality when applied in respect of explanatory information and prospective financial and non-financial quantitative information disclosed in GPFRs—that is, the quality of information that helps assure users that explanatory or prospective financial and non-financial quantitative information faithfully represents the economic and other phenomena that it purports to represent. Whether referred to as verifiability or supportability, the characteristic implies that different knowledgeable and independent observers could reach general consensus, although not necessarily complete agreement, that either:

- The information represents the economic and other phenomena that it purports to represent without material error or bias; or
- An appropriate recognition, measurement, or representation method has been applied without material error or bias.

3.27 To be verifiable, information need not be a single point estimate. A range of possible amounts and the related probabilities also can be verified.

3.28 Verification may be direct or indirect. With direct verification, an amount or other representation is itself verified, such as by (a) counting cash, (b) observing marketable securities and their quoted prices, or (c) confirming that the factors identified as influencing past service delivery performance were present and operated with the effect identified. With indirect verification, the amount or other representation is verified by checking the inputs and recalculating the outputs using the same accounting convention or methodology. An example is verifying the carrying amount of inventory by checking the inputs (quantities and costs) and recalculating the ending inventory using the same cost flow assumption (for example, average cost or first-in-first-out).

3.29 The quality of verifiability (or supportability if such term is used to describe this characteristic) is not an absolute—some information may be more or less capable of verification than other information. However, the more verifiable is the information included in GPFRs, the more it will assure users that the information faithfully represents the economic and other phenomena that it purports to represent.

3.30 GPFRs of public sector entities may include financial and other quantitative information and explanations about (a) key influences on the entity's performance during the period, (b) the anticipated future effects or outcomes of service delivery programs undertaken during the reporting period, and (c) prospective financial and non-financial information. It may not be possible to verify the accuracy of all quantitative representations and explanations of such information until a future period, if at all.

3.31 To help assure users that prospective financial and non-financial quantitative information and explanations included in GPFRs faithfully represents the economic and other phenomena that they purport to represent, the assumptions that underlie the information disclosed, the methodologies adopted in compiling that information, and the factors and circumstances that support any opinions expressed or disclosures made should be transparent. This will enable users to form judgments about the appropriateness of those assumptions and the method of compilation, measurement, representation and interpretation of the information.

Constraints on Information Included in General Purpose Financial Reports

Materiality

3.32 Information is material if omitting, misstating or obscuring it could reasonably be expected to influence the discharge of accountability by the entity, or the decisions that users make on the basis of the entity's GPFRs prepared for that reporting period. Materiality depends on both the nature and amount of the item judged in the particular circumstances of each entity.

3.33 Assessments of materiality will be made in the context of the legislative, institutional and operating environment within which the entity operates and, in respect of prospective financial and non-financial information, the preparer's knowledge and expectations about the future. Disclosure of information about compliance or non-compliance with legislation, regulation or other authority may be material because of its nature—irrespective of the magnitude of any amounts involved. In determining whether an item is material in these circumstances, consideration will be given to such matters as the nature, legality, sensitivity and consequences of past or anticipated transactions and events, the parties involved in any such transactions and the circumstances giving rise to them.

3.33A GPFRs may encompass qualitative and quantitative information about service delivery achievements during the reporting period, and expectations about service delivery and financial outcomes in the future. Consequently, it is not possible to specify a uniform characteristic or a uniform set of characteristics at which a particular type of information becomes material.

3.34 Materiality is classified as a constraint on information included in GPFRs in the Conceptual Framework. In developing IPSASs and RPGs, the IPSASB will consider the materiality of the consequences of application of a particular accounting policy, basis of preparation or disclosure of a particular item or type of information. Subject to the requirements of any IPSAS, entities preparing GPFRs will also consider the materiality of, for example, the application of a particular accounting policy and the separate disclosure of particular items of information.

Cost-Benefit

3.35 Financial reporting imposes costs. The benefits of financial reporting should justify those costs. Assessing whether the benefits of providing information justify the related costs is often a matter of judgment, because it is often not possible to identify and/or quantify all the costs and all the benefits of information included in GPFRs.

3.36 The costs of providing information include the costs of collecting and processing the information, the costs of verifying it and/or presenting the assumptions and methodologies that support it, and the costs of disseminating it. Users incur the costs of analysis and interpretation. Omission of useful information also imposes costs, including the costs that users incur to obtain needed information from other sources and the costs that result from making decisions using incomplete data provided by GPFRs.

3.37 Preparers expend the majority of the effort to provide information in GPFRs. However, service recipients and resource providers ultimately bear the cost of those efforts—because resources are redirected from service delivery activities to preparation of information for inclusion in GPFRs.

3.38 Users reap the majority of benefits from the information provided by GPFRs. However, information prepared for GPFRs may also be used internally by management and result in better decision making by management. The disclosure of information in GPFRs consistent with the concepts identified in the Conceptual Framework and IPSASs and RPGs derived from them will enhance and reinforce perceptions of the transparency of financial reporting by governments and other public sector entities and contribute to the more accurate pricing of public sector debt. Therefore, public sector entities may also benefit in a number of ways from the information provided by GPFRs.

3.39 Application of the cost-benefit constraint involves assessing whether the benefits of reporting information are likely to justify the costs incurred to provide and use the information. When making this assessment, it is necessary to consider whether one or more qualitative characteristic might be sacrificed to some degree to reduce cost.

3.40 In developing IPSASs, the IPSASB considers information from preparers, users, academics, and others about the expected nature and quantity of the benefits and costs of the proposed requirements. Disclosure and other requirements which result in the presentation of information useful to users of

GPFRs for accountability and decision-making purposes and satisfy the qualitative characteristics are prescribed by IPSASs when the benefits of compliance with those disclosures and other requirements are assessed by the IPSASB to justify their costs.

Balance between the Qualitative Characteristics

3.41 The qualitative characteristics work together to contribute to the usefulness of information. For example, neither a depiction that faithfully represents an irrelevant phenomenon, nor a depiction that unfaithfully represents a relevant phenomenon, results in useful information. Similarly, to be relevant, information must be timely and understandable.

3.42 In some cases, a balancing or trade-off between qualitative characteristics may be necessary to achieve the objectives of financial reporting. The relative importance of the qualitative characteristics in each situation is a matter of professional judgment. The aim is to achieve an appropriate balance among the characteristics in order to meet the objectives of financial reporting.

Basis for Conclusions

This Basis for Conclusions accompanies, but is not part of, the Conceptual Framework.

Qualitative Characteristics of Information Included in General Purpose Financial Reports

BC3.1 In developing IPSASs, the IPSASB receives input from constituents on, and makes judgments about, information that best satisfies the objectives of financial reporting and should be included in GPFRs. In making those judgments, the IPSASB considers the extent to which each of the qualitative characteristics can be achieved. Disclosure and other requirements are included in IPSASs only when the information that results from their application is considered to satisfy the qualitative characteristics and the cost-benefit constraint identified in the Conceptual Framework.

BC3.2 Some respondents to the Exposure Draft issued in 2010 (the 2010 Exposure Draft) expressed concern about the application of the qualitative characteristics to all matters that may be presented in GPFRs, particularly those matters that may be presented in reports outside the financial statements. The IPSASB understands this concern. The IPSASB acknowledges that IPSASs and RPGs that deal with the presentation in GPFRs of information outside the financial statements may need to include additional guidance on the application of the qualitative characteristics to the matters dealt with.

BC3.3 IPSASs and RPGs issued by the IPSASB will not deal with all financial and non-financial information that may be included in GPFRs. In the absence of an IPSAS or RPG that deals with particular economic or other phenomena, assessments of whether an item of information satisfies the qualitative characteristics and constraints identified in the Conceptual Framework, and therefore qualifies for inclusion in GPFRs, will be made by preparers compiling the GPFRs. Those assessments will be made in the context of achieving the objectives of financial reporting, which in turn have been developed to respond to users' information needs.

BC3.4 Having in place accounting systems and processes that are appropriately designed and are operated effectively will enable management to gather and process evidence to support financial reporting. The quality of these systems and processes is a key factor in ensuring the quality of financial information that the entity includes in GPFRs.

Limited Scope Update of Conceptual Framework

BC3.4A In March 2020 the IPSASB initiated a Limited Scope Update of the Conceptual Framework. The Limited Scope Update proposed modifications to the guidance on materiality and the addition of guidance on the role of prudence in the context of faithful representation. The IPSASB approved an updated Chapter 3 in June 2023. The IPSASB started using updated Chapter 3 immediately once approved.

Other Qualitative Characteristics Considered

BC3.5 Some respondents to the 2010 Exposure Draft expressed the view that additional qualitative characteristics should be identified. Those qualitative characteristics included "sincerity," "true and fair view," "credibility," "transparency," and "regularity".

BC3.6 The IPSASB noted that "sincerity" as used in financial reporting has a similar meaning to "true and fair". The IPSASB took the view that sincerity, true and fair view, credibility, and transparency are important expressions of the overarching qualities that financial reporting is to achieve or aspire to. However, they do not exist as single qualitative characteristics on their own—rather, achieving these qualities is the product of application of the full set of qualitative characteristics identified in the Conceptual Framework, and the IPSASs that deal with specific reporting issues. Consequently, while important characteristics of GPFRs, they are not identified as separate individual qualitative characteristics in their own right. The IPSASB also took the view that the notion of "regularity" as noted by some respondents is related to the notion of "compliance" as used in the Conceptual Framework—therefore, regularity is not identified as an additional qualitative characteristic.

Relevance

BC3.7 The Conceptual Framework explains that financial and non-financial information is relevant if it is capable of making a difference in achieving the objectives of financial reporting. As part of its due process the IPSASB seeks input on whether the requirements of a proposed IPSAS or any proposed

RPGs are relevant to the achievement of the objectives of financial reporting—that is, are relevant to the discharge of the entity's obligation to be accountable and to decisions that users may make.

Faithful Representation

BC3.8 The Conceptual Framework explains that to be useful information must be a faithful representation of the economic and other phenomena that it purports to represent. A single economic or other phenomenon may be faithfully represented in many ways. For example, the achievement of particular service delivery objectives may be depicted (a) qualitatively through an explanation of the immediate and anticipated longer term outcomes and effects of the service delivery program, (b) quantitatively as a measure of the volume and cost of services provided by the service delivery program, or (c) by a combination of both qualitative and quantitative information. Additionally, a single depiction in GPFRs may represent several economic or other phenomena. For example, the presentation of the item "plant and equipment" in a financial statement may represent an aggregate of all of an entity's plant and equipment, including items that have different functions, that are subject to different risks and opportunities and that are carried at amounts based on estimates that may be more or less complex and reliable.

BC3.9 Completeness and neutrality of estimates (and inputs to those estimates) and freedom from material error are desirable, and some minimum level of accuracy is necessary for an estimate to faithfully represent an economic or other phenomenon. However, faithful representation does not imply absolute completeness or neutrality in the estimate, nor does it imply total freedom from error in the outcome. For a representation of an economic or other phenomenon to imply a degree of completeness, neutrality, or freedom from error that is impracticable for it to achieve would diminish the extent to which the information faithfully represents the economic or other phenomenon that it purports to represent.

Faithful Representation or Reliability

BC3.10 At the time of issue of the 2010 Exposure Draft, Appendix A of IPSAS 1, *Presentation of Financial Statements*, identified "reliability" as a qualitative characteristic. It described reliable information as information that is "free from material error and bias, and can be depended on by users to represent faithfully that which it purports to represent or could reasonably be expected to represent." Faithful representation, substance over form, neutrality, prudence and completeness were identified as components of reliability. The Conceptual Framework uses the term "faithful representation" rather than "reliability" to describe what is substantially the same concept. In addition, it does not explicitly identify substance over form and prudence as components of faithful representation.

BC3.11 Many respondents to the 2010 Exposure Draft supported the use of faithful representation and its explanation in the 2010 Exposure Draft, in some cases explaining that faithful representation is a better expression of the nature of the concept intended. Some respondents did not support the replacement of reliability with the term faithful representation, expressing concerns including that faithful representation implies the adoption of fair value or market value accounting, and reliability and faithful representation are not interchangeable terms.

BC3.12 The use of the term "faithful representation", or "reliability" for that matter, to describe this qualitative characteristic in the Conceptual Framework will not determine the measurement basis to be adopted in GPFRs, whether historical cost, fair value, cost of fulfillment, or another measurement basis. The IPSASB did not intend that use of faithful representation be interpreted as such. The measurement basis or measurement bases that may be adopted for the elements of financial statements are considered in Chapter 7, *Measurement of Assets and Liabilities in Financial Statements.* The qualitative characteristics will then operate to ensure that the financial statements faithfully represent the measurement basis or bases reflected in GPFRs.

BC3.13 The IPSASB appreciated the concern of some respondents that the use of a different term may be interpreted to reflect different, and even lesser, qualities to those communicated by the term reliability. However, the IPSASB took the view that explanation in the Conceptual Framework that "Faithful representation is attained when the depiction of the phenomenon is complete, neutral, and free from material error", and the elaboration of these key features will protect against the loss of any of the qualities that were formerly reflected in the use of the term reliability.

BC3.14 In addition, the IPSASB was advised that the term "reliability" is itself open to different interpretations and subjective judgments, with consequences for the quality of information included in GPFRs. The IPSASB took the view that use of the term "faithful representation" will overcome problems in the interpretation and application of reliability that have been experienced in some jurisdictions without a lessening of the qualities intended by the term, and is more readily translated into, and understood in, a wide range of languages.

Substance over Form and Prudence

BC3.15 Some respondents to the 2010 Exposure Draft expressed concern that substance over form and prudence were not identified as qualitative characteristics or that their importance is not sufficiently recognized or explained. Some also noted that prudence need not be incompatible with the achievement of neutrality and faithful representation.

BC3.16 The Conceptual Framework explains that "Information that faithfully represents an economic or other phenomenon depicts the substance of the underlying transaction, other event, activity or circumstance—which is not necessarily always the same as its legal form." Therefore, substance over form remains a key quality that information included in GPFRs must possess. It is not identified as a separate or additional qualitative characteristic because it is already embedded in the notion of faithful representation.

BC3.17 The IPSASB took the view that the notion of prudence is also reflected in the explanation of neutrality as a component of faithful representation, and the acknowledgement of the need to exercise caution in dealing with uncertainty. Therefore, like substance over form, prudence was not identified as a separate qualitative characteristic because its intent and influence in identifying information that is included in GPFRs is already embedded in the notion of faithful representation.

BC3.17A The International Accounting Standards Board (IASB) revised its approach to prudence in the *Conceptual Framework for Financial Reporting*, published in 2018 (the 2018 IASB Conceptual Framework). The IASB did not include prudence as a qualitative characteristic, but, in the context of faithful representation, explained that "neutrality is supported by the exercise of prudence" and that "prudence is the exercise of caution when making judgments under conditions of uncertainty". The IASB characterized the approach adopted in the 2018 Conceptual Framework as "cautious prudence".

BC3.17B The IPSASB also noted that prudence had been the subject of much discussion in the European Public Sector Accounting Standards project.

BC3.17C Because of the above developments, the IPSASB reconsidered the approach to prudence in the 2014 Conceptual Framework: in particular whether prudence should be included as a qualitative characteristic in its own right, or whether guidance on prudence should be included in the context of neutrality and faithful representation.

BC3.17D The IPSASB considered that prudence is insufficiently distinct from faithful representation to justify inclusion as an additional qualitative characteristic. Practical application of the IPSASB Conceptual Framework has also not identified that the non-inclusion of prudence as a qualitative characteristic is problematic.

BC3.17E The IPSASB acknowledged the case for retaining the approach in the 2014 Conceptual Framework on the grounds that an allusion to, and discussion of, prudence, adds little to the notion of neutrality, which itself conveys a lack of bias. However, the IPSASB concluded that clarifying that prudence entails caution in assessing uncertainty in the measurement of all elements would be beneficial and would respond to those who view the absence of references to prudence as a risk. The IPSASB is firmly of the view that caution should be applied consistently rather than focusing disproportionately on assets and revenue. The IPSASB therefore decided to include an explanation in paragraph 3.14A that, in the context of faithful representation, "neutrality is supported by the exercise of prudence", and that "prudence is the exercise of caution when making judgments under conditions of uncertainty". This is consistent with the approach of the IASB in its 2018 Conceptual Framework.

BC3.17F While most respondents to Exposure Draft (ED) 81, issued in February 2022, supported the proposed approach, a minority advocated the adoption of prudence as a qualitative characteristic. The IPSASB acknowledged this view but concluded that the consultation had not raised compelling reasons for the inclusion of prudence as a qualitative characteristic—in particular to substantiate a case that prudence is sufficiently distinct from faithful representation to justify inclusion as an additional qualitative characteristic. The IPSASB therefore confirmed the proposals in ED 81.

BC3.17G Some respondents to ED 81 considered that the contrast between symmetry and asymmetry had been insufficiently explained. The IPSASB agreed with this observation. The IPSASB did not consider that the principle in paragraph 3.14B that the exercise of prudence does not imply a need for asymmetry should be modified. Rather, there should be a clarification of what is meant by "asymmetry" in order to clarify the IPSASB's conclusion. The IPSASB confirmed that the most common attribute of asymmetry is that a higher standard of evidence is required for the recognition of assets and revenue than for liabilities and expenses. While there is no universally accepted definition of asymmetry the IPSASB also considered that the application of asymmetry might include:

- The non-recognition of all unrealized gains; or
- Permitting preparers to measure an asset at an amount lower than an unbiased estimate and a liability at an amount higher than an unbiased estimate under the measurement bases selected for the asset and the liability.

BC3.17H The IPSASB concluded that the introduction of such an approach would not result in information that is relevant and provides a faithful representation of an entity's financial position and financial performance. Therefore, such an approach would not meet the objectives of financial reporting identified in Chapter 2, *Objectives and Users of General Purpose Financial Reporting*.

Understandability

BC3.18 Although presenting information clearly and concisely helps users to comprehend it, the actual comprehension or understanding of information depends largely on the users of the GPFRs.

BC3.19 Some economic and other phenomena are particularly complex and difficult to represent in GPFRs. However, the IPSASB is of the view that information that is, for example, relevant, a faithful representation of what it purports to represent, timely and verifiable should not be excluded from GPFRs solely because it may be too complex or difficult for some users to understand without assistance. Acknowledging that it may be necessary for some users to seek assistance to understand the information presented in GPFRs does not mean that information included in GPFRs need not be understandable or that all efforts should not be undertaken to present information in GPFRs in a manner that is understandable to a wide range of users. However, it does reflect that, in practice, the nature of the information included in GPFRs is such that all the qualitative characteristics may not be fully achievable at all times for all users.

Timeliness

BC3.20 The IPSASB recognizes the potential for timely reporting to increase the usefulness of GPFRs for both accountability and decision-making purposes, and that undue delay in the provision of information may reduce its usefulness for these purposes. Consequently, timeliness is identified as a qualitative characteristic in the Conceptual Framework.

Comparability

BC3.21 Some degree of comparability may be attained by maximizing the qualitative characteristics of relevance and faithful representation. For example, faithful representation of a relevant economic or other phenomenon by one public sector entity is likely to be comparable to a faithful representation of a similar relevant economic or other phenomenon by another public sector entity. However, a single economic or other phenomenon can often be faithfully represented in several ways, and permitting alternative accounting methods for the same phenomenon diminishes comparability and, therefore, may be undesirable.

BC3.22 Some respondents to the 2010 Exposure Draft expressed concern that the explanation of the relationship between comparability and consistency might be read as presenting an obstacle to the on-going development of financial reporting. This was because enhancements in financial reporting often involve a revision or change to the accounting principles, policies or basis of preparation currently adopted by the entity.

BC3.23 Consistent application of the same accounting principles, policies and basis of preparation from one period to the next will assist users in assessing the financial position, financial performance and service delivery achievements of the entity compared with previous periods. However, where accounting principles or policies dealing with particular transactions or other events are not prescribed by IPSASs, achievement of the qualitative characteristic of comparability should not be interpreted as prohibiting the entity from changing its accounting principles or policies to better represent those transactions and events. In these cases, the inclusion in GPFRs of additional disclosures or explanation of the impact of the changed policy can still satisfy the characteristics of comparability.

Verifiability

BC3.24 Verifiability is the quality of information that helps assure users that information in GPFRs faithfully represents the economic and other phenomena that it purports to represent. While closely linked to faithful representation, verifiability is identified as a separate qualitative characteristic because information may faithfully represent economic and other phenomena even though it cannot be verified with absolute certainty. In addition, verifiability may work in different ways with faithful representation and other of the qualitative characteristics to contribute to the usefulness of information presented in GPFRs—for example, there may need to be an appropriate balance between the degree of verifiability an item of information may possess and other qualitative characteristics to ensure it is presented in a timely fashion and is relevant.

BC3.25 In developing the qualitative characteristics identified in the Conceptual Framework, the IPSASB considered whether "supportability" should be identified as a separate characteristic for application to information presented in GPFRs outside the financial statements. The IPSASB is of the view that identifying both verifiability and supportability as separate qualitative characteristics with essentially the same features may be confusing to preparers and users of GPFRs and others. However, the Conceptual Framework does acknowledge that supportability is sometimes used to refer to the quality of information that helps assure users that explanatory information and prospective financial and non-financial information included in GPFRs faithfully represent the economic and other phenomena that they purport to represent.

BC3.26 Some respondents to the 2010 Exposure Draft expressed concern about the application of verifiability to the broad range of matters that may be presented in GPFRs outside the financial statements, particularly explanatory information about service delivery achievements during the reporting period and qualitative and quantitative prospective financial and non-financial information. The IPSASB was of the view that the Conceptual Framework provides appropriate guidance on the application of verifiability in respect of these matters—for example it explains that verifiability is not an absolute and it may not be possible to verify the accuracy of all quantitative representations and explanations until a future period. The Conceptual Framework also acknowledges that disclosure of the underlying assumptions and methodologies adopted for the compilation of explanatory and prospective financial and non-financial information is central to the achievement of faithful representation.

Classification of the Qualitative Characteristics and Order of their Application

BC3.27 Some respondents to the 2010 Exposure Draft expressed the view that the Conceptual Framework should identify:

- Relevance and faithful representation as fundamental qualitative characteristics, and explain the order of their application; and
- Comparability, verifiability, timeliness, and understandability as enhancing qualitative characteristics.

They noted that this would provide useful guidance on the sequence of application of the qualitative characteristics and reflect the approach adopted by the IASB.

BC3.28 In developing the qualitative characteristics, the IPSASB considered whether some characteristics should be identified as fundamental and others identified as enhancing. The IPSASB also considered whether the order of application of the characteristics should be identified and/or explained. The IPSASB was of the view that such an approach should not be adopted because, for example:

- Matters identified as "fundamental" might be perceived to be more important than those identified as "enhancing", even if this distinction is not intended in the case of the qualitative characteristics. As a result, there may be unintended consequences of identifying some qualitative characteristics as fundamental and others as enhancing;
- All the qualitative characteristics are important and work together to contribute to the usefulness of information. The relative importance of a particular qualitative characteristic in different circumstances is a matter of professional judgment. As such, it is not appropriate to identify certain qualitative characteristics as always being fundamental and others as having only an enhancing or supporting role, or to specify the sequence of their application, no matter what information is being considered for inclusion in GPFRs, and irrespective of the circumstances of the entity and its environment. In addition, it is questionable whether information that is not understandable or is provided so long after the event as not to be useful to users for accountability and decision-making purposes could be considered as relevant information—therefore, these characteristics are themselves fundamental to the achievement of the objectives of financial reporting; and
- GPFRs of public sector entities may encompass historical and prospective information about financial performance and the achievement of service delivery objectives over a number of reporting periods. This provides necessary input to assessments of trends in service delivery activities and resources committed thereto—for such trend data, reporting on a comparable basis may be as important as, and cannot be separated from, faithful representation of the information.

Constraints on Information Included in General Purpose Financial Reports

Materiality

BC3.29 At the time of issue of the 2010 Exposure Draft, Appendix A of IPSAS 1 described materiality with similar characteristics to that described in the Conceptual Framework, but identified materiality as a factor to be considered in determining only the relevance of information. Some respondents to the Exposure Draft noted that materiality may be identified as an aspect of relevance.

BC3.30 The IPSASB has considered whether materiality should be identified as an entity-specific aspect of relevance rather than a constraint on information included in GPFRs. As explained in the Conceptual Framework, and subject to requirements in an IPSAS, materiality will be considered by preparers in determining whether, for example, a particular accounting policy should be adopted or an item of information should be separately disclosed in the financial statements of the entity.

BC3.31 However, the IPSASB took the view that materiality has a more pervasive role than would be reflected by its classification as only an entity-specific aspect of relevance. For example, materiality relates to, and can impact, a number of the qualitative characteristics of information included in GPFRs. Therefore, the materiality of an item should be considered when determining whether the omission or misstatement of an item of information could undermine not only the relevance, but also the faithful representation, understandability or verifiability of financial and non-financial information presented in GPFRs. The IPSASB was also of the view that whether the effects of the application of a particular accounting policy or basis of preparation or the information content of separate disclosure of certain items of information are likely to be material should be considered in establishing IPSASs and RPGs. Consequently, the IPSASB was of the view that materiality is better reflected as a broad constraint on information to be included in GPFRs.

BC3.32 The IPSASB considered whether the Conceptual Framework should reflect that legislation, regulation or other authority may impose financial reporting requirements on public sector entities in addition to those imposed by IPSASs. The IPSASB was of the view that, while a feature of the operating environment of many public sector (and many private sector) entities, the impact that legislation or other authority may have on the information included in GPFRs is not itself a financial reporting concept. Consequently, the IPSASB has not identified it as such in the Conceptual Framework. Preparers will, of course, need to consider such requirements as they prepare GPFRs. In particular, legislation may prescribe that particular items of information are to be disclosed in GPFRs even though they may not be judged to satisfy a materiality threshold (or cost-benefit constraint) as identified in the Conceptual Framework. Similarly, the disclosure of some matters may be prohibited by legislation because, for example, they relate to matters of national security, notwithstanding that they are material and would otherwise satisfy the cost-benefit constraint.

BC3.32A In 2018 the IASB amended IAS 1, *Presentation of Financial Statements*, and IAS 8, *Accounting Policies, Changes in Accounting Estimates and Errors*. The amendments clarified the definition of material in order to resolve difficulties that entities experience in making materiality judgments when preparing financial statements, and to align the definitions in both standards. Because of these changes the IASB made minor, but significant, amendments to Chapter 2, *Qualitative Characteristics of Useful Financial Information*, of its 2018 Conceptual Framework. First, an amendment complemented the guidance that information is material if omitting or misstating it could influence decision making with a reference to "obscuring information" as a further factor. A second amendment softened the threshold for entities in determining when information is material.

BC3.32B In its Limited Scope Update project initiated in 2020 the IPSASB considered both changes in the context of public sector general purpose financial reporting. The IPSASB concluded that the reference to "obscuring information" is relevant to the public sector, as it suggests that, amongst other practices, the inclusion of immaterial disclosures can have a negative impact on users, rather than just being unnecessary. This is a relevant consideration for both the financial statements and other GPFRs. The IPSASB also concluded that modifying the wording on adversely influencing users by adding the words "reasonably be expected to influence" imposes a more realistic expectation on preparers' assessments of materiality. The IPSASB therefore decided to adopt these changes in its Conceptual Framework and amended paragraph 3.32 accordingly. In ED 81, the IPSASB proposed the addition of a sentence that "where an entity judges that a material item is not separately displayed on the face of a financial statement (or displayed sufficiently prominently) an entity considers disclosure". The intention was to provide further useful guidance to preparers.

BC3.32C The majority of respondents to ED 81 supported the addition of "obscuring information" as a factor relevant to materiality. They also supported softening the threshold for determining when information is material. Some respondents requested that the Conceptual Framework include examples of how material information is obscured. The IPSASB considers that the role of the Conceptual Framework is to provide high-level principles rather than to include detailed examples; such examples risk diverting attention from the core principle and are better provided elsewhere in the IPSASB's literature.

BC3.32D A number of respondents expressed reservations about the additional sentence in paragraph 3.32. These reservations highlighted two points. First, some respondents felt that the sentence risked undermining the principle in paragraph 6.9 of Chapter 6, *Recognition in Financial Statements*, that "the failure to recognize items that meet the definition of an element and the recognition criteria is not rectified by the disclosure of accounting policies, notes or other explanatory detail". Second, some respondents felt that the sentence related to presentation and was therefore inappropriate for Chapter 3.

BC3.32E The IPSASB's intention was not to undermine the key principle that disclosure is not an alternative to recognition of an item that meets the definition of an element and the recognition criteria. However, the IPSASB accepted that the sentence risked such an interpretation. The IPSASB also accepted that issues of display and disclosure are addressed in Chapter 8, *Presentation in General Purpose Financial Reports*, and are inappropriate for Chapter 3. The IPSASB therefore decided not to include this additional sentence in the updated Chapter 3.

BC3.32F In the IASB's 2018 Conceptual Framework, materiality is an aspect of the qualitative characteristic of relevance, rather than a constraint on information in general purpose financial reports as in the IPSASB Conceptual Framework. In the Limited Scope Update the IPSASB did not reassess this classification. The IPSASB acknowledged that materiality can impact a number of qualitative characteristics.

BC3.32G In the Limited Scope Update the IPSASB acknowledged that in a number of jurisdictions, public sector entities are required to report on whether transactions have been recorded in accordance with governing legislation and regulations. In some jurisdictions such reports are referred to as a regularity assertion or statement. Auditors may be required to express an opinion on such statements, separate from that on the financial statements.

BC3.32H The IPSASB considered whether the Conceptual Framework should provide guidance on materiality considerations for regularity assertions/statements. Consistent with the reasoning in paragraph BC3.32, the IPSASB concluded that additional guidance is not justified.

Cost-Benefit

BC3.33 Some respondents to the 2010 Exposure Draft expressed concern that the text of the proposed Conceptual Framework does not specify that entities cannot decide to depart from IPSASs on the basis of their own assessments of the costs and benefits of particular requirements of an IPSAS. The IPSASB is of the view that such specification is not necessary. This is because, as noted in paragraph 1.2 of Chapter 1, *Role and Authority of the Conceptual Framework*, authoritative requirements relating to recognition, measurement, and presentation in GPFRs are specified in IPSASs. GPFRs are developed to provide information useful to users and requirements are prescribed by IPSASs only when the benefits to users of compliance with those requirements are assessed by the IPSASB to justify their costs. However, preparers may consider costs and benefits in, for example, determining whether to include in GPFRs disclosure of information in addition to that required by IPSASs.

BC3.34 Some respondents to the 2010 Exposure Draft also expressed concern that the proposed Conceptual Framework did not recognize that cost-benefit trade-offs may differ for different public sector entities. They were of the view that acknowledgement of this might provide a useful principle to be applied when considering differential reporting issues. The IPSASB considered these matters and determined that the Conceptual Framework should not deal with issues related to differential reporting, including whether the costs and benefits of particular requirements might differ for different entities.

BC3.35 In the process of developing an IPSAS or RPG, the IPSASB considers and seeks input on the likely costs and benefits of providing information in GPFRs of public sector entities. However, in some cases, it may not be possible for the IPSASB to identify and/or quantify all benefits that are likely to flow from, for example, the inclusion of a particular disclosure, including those that may be required because they are in the public interest, or other requirement in an IPSAS. In other cases, the IPSASB may be of the view that the benefits of a particular requirement may be marginal for users of GPFRs of some public sector entities. In applying the cost-benefit test to determine whether particular requirements should be included in an IPSAS in these circumstances, the IPSASB's deliberations may also include consideration of whether imposing such requirements on public sector entities is likely to involve undue cost and effort for the entities applying the requirements.

CHAPTER 4: REPORTING ENTITY

CONTENTS

Introduction

4.1 A public sector reporting entity is a government or other public sector organization, program or identifiable area of activity (hereafter referred to as an entity or public sector entity) that prepares GPFRs.

4.2 A public sector reporting entity may comprise two or more separate entities that present GPFRs as if they are a single entity—such a reporting entity is referred to as a group reporting entity.

Key Characteristics of a Reporting Entity

4.3 Key characteristics of a public sector reporting entity are that:

- It is an entity that raises resources from, or on behalf of, constituents and/or uses resources to undertake activities for the benefit of, or on behalf of, those constituents; and
- There are service recipients or resource providers dependent on GPFRs of the entity for information for accountability or decision-making purposes.

4.4 A government may establish and/or operate through administrative units such as ministries or departments. It may also operate through trusts, statutory authorities, government corporations and other entities with a separate legal identity or operational autonomy to undertake or otherwise support the provision of services to constituents. Other public sector organizations, including international public sector organizations and municipal authorities, may also undertake certain activities through, and may benefit from and be exposed to a financial burden or loss as a result of, the activities of entities with a separate legal identity or operational autonomy.

4.5 GPFRs are prepared to report information useful to users for accountability and decision-making purposes. Service recipients and resource providers are the primary users of GPFRs. Consequently, a key characteristic of a reporting entity, including a group reporting entity, is the existence of service recipients or resource providers who are dependent on GPFRs of that entity or group of entities for information for accountability or decision-making purposes.

4.6 GPFRs encompass financial statements and information that enhances, complements and supplements the financial statements. Financial statements present information about the resources of the reporting entity or group reporting entity and claims to those resources at the reporting date, and changes to those resources and claims and cash flows during the reporting period. Therefore, to enable the preparation of financial statements, a reporting entity will raise resources and/or use resources previously raised to undertake activities for the benefit of, or on behalf of, its constituents.

4.7 The factors that are likely to signal the existence of users of GPFRs of a public sector entity or group of entities include an entity having the responsibility or capacity to raise or deploy resources, acquire or manage public assets, incur liabilities, or undertake activities to achieve service delivery objectives. The greater the resources that a public sector entity raises, manages and/or has the capacity to deploy, the greater the liabilities it incurs and the greater the economic or social impact of its activities, the more likely it is that there will exist service recipients or resource providers who are dependent on GPFRs for information about it for accountability and decision-making purposes. In the absence of these factors, or where they are not significant, it is unlikely that users of GPFRs of these entities will exist.

4.8 The preparation of GPFRs is not a cost-free process. Therefore, if the imposition of financial reporting requirements is to be efficient and effective, it is important that only those public sector entities for which such users exist are required to prepare GPFRs.

4.9 In many cases, it will be clear whether or not there exist service recipients or resource providers that are dependent on GPFRs of a public sector entity for information for accountability and decision-making purposes. For example, such users are likely to exist for GPFRs of a government at the national, state or local government level and for international public sector organizations. This is because these governments and organizations generally have the capacity to raise substantial resources from and/or deploy substantial resources on behalf of their constituents, to incur liabilities, and to impact the economic and/or social well-being of the communities that depend on them for the provision of services.

4.10 However, it may not always be clear whether there are service recipients or resource providers that are dependent on GPFRs of, for example, individual government departments and agencies, particular programs or identifiable areas of activity for information for accountability and decision-making purposes. Determining whether these organizations, programs or activities should be identified as reporting entities and, consequently, be required to prepare GPFRs will involve the exercise of professional judgment.

4.11 The government and some other public sector entities have a separate identity or standing in law (a legal identity). However, public sector organizations, programs and activities without a separate legal identity may also raise or deploy resources, acquire or manage public assets, incur liabilities, undertake activities to achieve service delivery objectives or otherwise implement government policy. Service recipients and resource providers may depend on GPFRs of these organizations, programs and activities for information for accountability and decision-making purposes. Consequently, a public sector reporting entity may have a separate legal identity or be, for example, an organization, administrative arrangement or program without a separate legal identity.

Basis for Conclusions

This Basis for Conclusions accompanies, but is not part of, the Conceptual Framework.

Key Characteristics of a Reporting Entity

BC4.1 The concept of the reporting entity is derived from the objectives of financial reporting by public sector entities. The objectives of financial reporting by public sector entities are to provide information about the entity that is useful to users of GPFRs for accountability and decision-making purposes.

BC4.2 Reporting entities prepare GPFRs. GPFRs include financial statements, which present information about such matters as the financial position, performance and cash flows of the entity, and financial and non-financial information that enhances, complements and supplements the financial statements. Therefore, a key characteristic of a public sector reporting entity is the existence of service recipients or resource providers who are dependent on GPFRs of a government or other public sector entity for information for accountability or decision-making purposes.

Legislation, Regulation or Other Authority

BC4.3 The Exposure Draft did not specify which public sector entities should be identified as a reporting entity or group reporting entity and, therefore, be required to prepare GPFRs. It noted that the public sector organizations and programs that are to prepare GPFRs will be specified in legislation, regulation or other authority, or be determined by relevant authoritative bodies in each jurisdiction.

BC4.4 Some respondents expressed the view that while legislation or other authority may, in practice, specify which entities are to prepare GPFRs, the Conceptual Framework should focus on the concept of the reporting entity, identify key features of that concept and provide guidance on the principles and factors that should be considered in determining whether a reporting entity exists. The IPSASB was persuaded by these arguments and has refocused its discussion on an explanation of the concept of the reporting entity.

Interpretation and Application

BC4.5 Some respondents expressed concern that the characteristics of a reporting entity as explained in the Exposure Draft may be interpreted to identify particular activities or segments of an organization as separate reporting entities. These segments or activities would then be required to prepare GPFRs in accordance with all IPSASs. Some respondents also noted that it was not clear how the guidance in the Exposure Draft applied to public sector organizations other than governments including, for example, international public sector organizations.

BC4.6 The IPSASB has responded to these concerns. The Framework explains that preparation of GPFRs is not a cost-free process. It also:

- Includes additional guidance on the factors that are likely to signal the existence of service recipients or resource providers who are dependent on GPFRs of a government or other public sector entity for information for accountability or decision-making purposes; and
- Notes the likely implications of these factors for the identification of a range of public sector organizations, programs and activities as reporting entities, including government departments and agencies and international public sector organizations.

BC4.7 The Conceptual Framework acknowledges that in some cases it may be necessary to exercise professional judgment in determining whether particular public sector entities should be identified as a reporting entity. In exercising that judgement, it should be noted that, in certain circumstances, IPSASs respond to users' needs for information about particular programs or activities undertaken by a government or other public sector reporting entity by providing for separate disclosures within the GPFRs of that government or other public sector reporting entity[5]. Jurisdictional factors such as the legislative and regulatory framework in place and institutional and administrative arrangements for the

[5] For example, International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSASs) such as IPSAS 18, *Segment Reporting* and IPSAS 22, *Disclosure of Financial Information about the General Government Sector* provide a mechanism to satisfy users' need for information about particular segments or sectors of an entity without their identification as separate reporting entities.

raising of resources and the delivery of services are also likely to inform deliberations on whether it is likely that service recipients and resource providers dependent on GPFRs of particular public sector entities exist.

The Group Reporting Entity

BC4.8 The Exposure Draft outlined the circumstances that would justify the inclusion of an entity or activity within a public sector group reporting entity. It explained that:

- A government or other public sector entity may (a) have the authority and capacity to direct the activities of one or more other entities so as to benefit from the activities of those entities, and (b) be exposed to a financial burden or loss that may arise as a result of the activities of those entities; and
- To satisfy the objectives of financial reporting, GPFRs of a group reporting entity prepared in respect of a government or other public sector entity should include that government (or other public sector entity) and the entities whose activities it has the authority and capacity to direct, when the results of such direction can (a) generate financial or other benefits for the government (or other public sector entity), or (b) expose it to a financial burden or loss.

BC4.9 Many respondents to the Exposure Draft noted their agreement with the IPSASB's view of the criteria that should be satisfied for inclusion in a public sector group reporting entity. However, other respondents expressed their concern about the potential interpretation and application of the criteria in particular circumstances. In some cases, they noted that the Framework would need to provide additional application guidance if it was to be effective in dealing with circumstances not dealt with in IPSASs. A number of respondents also expressed the view that the criteria to be satisfied for inclusion in a group reporting entity were more appropriately addressed and resolved at the standards level, where those criteria and their consequences could be tested across a range of circumstances, and supported with specific examples of the circumstances likely to exist in many jurisdictions.

BC4.10 The IPSASB found these concerns persuasive. It has reconstructed and drawn together its discussion of the reporting entity and group reporting entity to focus on the principles underlying the identification of a public sector reporting entity—whether that reporting entity comprises a single public sector entity or a group of entities. The identification of the criteria to be satisfied for inclusion in a group reporting entity consistent with these principles will then be developed and fully explored at the standards level.

CHAPTER 5: ELEMENTS IN FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

CONTENTS

Introduction

Purpose of this Chapter

5.1 This Chapter defines the elements used in financial statements and provides further explanation about those definitions.

Elements and their Importance

5.2 Financial statements portray the financial effects of transactions and other events by grouping them into broad classes which share common economic characteristics. These broad classes are termed the elements of financial statements. Elements are the building blocks from which financial statements are constructed. These building blocks provide an initial point for recording, classifying and aggregating economic data and activity in a way that provides users with information that meets the objectives of financial reporting and achieves the qualitative characteristics of financial reporting while taking into account the constraints on information included in GPFRs.

5.3 The elements defined in this Chapter do not refer to the individual items that are recognized as a result of transactions and events. Sub-classifications of individual items within an element and aggregations of items are used to enhance the understandability of the financial statements. Presentation is addressed in Chapter 8, *Presentation in General Purpose Financial Reports*.

5.4 In some circumstances, to ensure that the financial statements provide information that is useful for a meaningful assessment of the financial performance and financial position of an entity, recognition of economic phenomena that are not captured by the elements as defined in this Chapter may be necessary. Consequently, the identification of the elements in this Chapter does not preclude IPSASs from requiring or allowing the recognition of resources or obligations that do not satisfy the definition of an element identified in this Chapter (hereafter referred to as “other resources” or “other obligations”) when necessary to better achieve the objectives of financial reporting.

Elements Defined

5.5 The elements that are defined in this Chapter are:

- Assets;
- Liabilities;
- Revenue;
- Expense;
- Ownership contributions; and
- Ownership distributions.

Assets

Definitions of an Asset and a Resource

5.6 An asset is:

A resource presently controlled by the entity as a result of past events.

5.6A A resource is:

A right to either service potential or the capability to generate economic benefits, or a right to both.

5.6B This section discusses three components of these definitions:

Rights (paragraphs 5.7A–5.7G);

Service potential and economic benefits (paragraphs 5.8–5.10); and

Present control as a result of past events (paragraph 5.11–5.13).

5.7 [Deleted]

Rights

5.7A Rights to service potential or to the capability to generate economic benefits take many forms, including:

(a) Rights that correspond to an obligation of another party (see paragraph 5.16C), for example:

(i) Rights to receive cash;

(ii) Rights to receive goods or services[6];

(iii) Rights to exchange resources with another party on favorable terms. Such rights include, for example, a forward contract to buy a resource on terms that are currently favorable; and

(iv) Rights to benefit from an obligation of another party to transfer a resource if a specified uncertain future event occurs (see paragraph 5.16A).

(b) Rights that do not correspond to an obligation of another party, for example:

(i) Rights over physical objects, such as property, plant and equipment or inventories. Examples of such rights are a right to use a physical object or a right to benefit from a leased object; and

(ii) Rights to use intellectual property.

5.7B Many rights are established by binding arrangement, legislation, or similar means. For example, an entity might obtain rights from owning or leasing a physical object, from owning a debt instrument such as a student loan, or from owning software or the right to use intellectual property. However, an entity might also obtain rights in other ways, for example:

(a) By acquiring or creating know-how that is not in the public domain, such as a traffic management plan; or

(b) Through an obligation of another party that arises because that other party has little or no realistic alternative to avoid a transfer of resources (see paragraph 5.15).

5.7C Some services—for example, employee services and services-in-kind—are received and immediately consumed. An entity's right to obtain the service potential or economic benefits produced by such services exists very briefly until the entity consumes the services.

5.7D Not all of an entity's rights are assets of that entity. To be assets of the entity, the rights must (i) have service potential or economic benefits beyond those available to all other parties (see paragraphs 5.8–5.10) and (ii) be controlled by the entity (see paragraphs 5.11–5.12A). Rights available to all parties without significant cost—for instance, rights of access to public goods, such as public rights of way over land, or know-how that is in the public domain—are typically not assets for the entities that hold these rights.

5.7E In principle, each of an entity's rights is a separate asset. However, for accounting purposes, related rights are often treated as a single unit of account that is a single asset (see paragraphs 5.26A–5.26J). For example, legal ownership of a physical object may give rise to several rights, including a right to:

(a) Use the object;

(b) Sell rights over the object; and

(c) Pledge rights over the object.

5.7F In many cases, the set of rights arising from legal ownership of a physical object is accounted for as a single asset. Conceptually, the resource is the set of rights, not the physical object. Nevertheless, describing the set of rights as the physical object will often provide a faithful representation of those rights in the most concise and understandable way.

5.7G The relationship between sovereign rights, resources and an asset is discussed in paragraph 5.13.

[6] Subsequent references to 'services' in the Conceptual Framework encompass 'goods' unless the context indicates otherwise.

Service Potential and Economic Benefits

5.8 Service potential is the capability of a resource to provide services that contribute to achieving the entity's objectives. Service potential enables an entity to achieve its objectives without necessarily generating net cash inflows.

5.9 Public sector assets that embody service potential may include recreational, heritage, community, defense and other assets that are held by governments and other public sector entities, and which are used to provide services to third parties. Such services may be for collective or individual consumption. Many services may be provided in areas in which market competition is limited or non-existent. The use and disposal of such assets may be restricted as many assets that embody service potential are specialized in nature.

5.10 Economic benefits are cash inflows or a reduction in cash outflows. Cash inflows (or reduced cash outflows) may be derived from, for example:

- An asset's use in the production and sale of services; or
- The direct exchange of an asset for cash; or
- Extinguishing or reducing a liability by transferring an asset.

Presently Controlled by the Entity as a Result of Past Events

5.11 An entity must have control of the resource. Control of the resource entails the ability of the entity to use the resource (or direct other parties on its use) so as to derive the benefit of the service potential or economic benefits embodied in the resource in the achievement of its service delivery or other objectives.

5.12 In assessing whether it presently controls a resource, an entity assesses whether the following indicators of control exist:

- Legal ownership;
- Access to the resource, or the ability to deny or restrict access to the resource;
- The means to ensure that the resource is used to achieve its objectives; and
- The existence of an enforceable right to service potential or the ability to generate economic benefits arising from a resource.

While these indicators are not conclusive determinants of whether control exists, identification and analysis of them can inform that decision.

5.12A Sometimes one party (a principal) engages another party (an agent) to act on behalf of, and for the benefit of, the principal. For example, a principal may engage an agent to arrange for the distribution of goods controlled by the principal to eligible beneficiaries. If an agent has custody of a resource controlled by the principal, that resource is not an asset of the agent.

5.13 The definition of an asset requires that a resource that an entity presently controls must have arisen from one or more past transactions or other past events. The past transactions or other events that result in an entity gaining control of a resource and therefore an asset may differ. Entities can obtain assets by purchasing them in an exchange transaction or developing them. Assets may also arise through non-exchange transactions, including through the exercising of sovereign powers. The power to tax or to issue licenses and to access or restrict or deny access to the benefits embodied in intangible resources, like the electromagnetic spectrum, are examples of public sector-specific powers and rights that may give rise to assets. In assessing when an entity's control of rights to resources arise the following events may be considered: (a) a general ability to establish a power, (b) establishment of a power through a statute, (c) exercising the power to create a right, and (d) the event which gives rise to the right to receive resources from an external party. An asset arises when the power is exercised and the rights exist to receive resources.

Liabilities

Definition

5.14 A liability is:

A present obligation of the entity to transfer resources as a result of past events.

5.14A For a liability to exist, three criteria must all be satisfied:

(a) The entity has an obligation (paragraphs 5.15–5.15F);

(b) The obligation is to transfer resources (paragraphs 5.16A–5.16F); and

(c) The obligation is a present obligation arising from one or more past events (paragraphs 5.17–5.17D).

Obligations

5.15 Public sector entities can have a number of obligations. Obligations are binding when an entity has little or no realistic alternative to avoid them.

5.15A Binding obligations can be legal obligations or non-legally binding obligations. Binding obligations can arise from both exchange and non-exchange transactions. An obligation must be to an external party in order to give rise to a liability. An entity cannot be obligated to itself, even where it has publicly communicated an intention to behave in a particular way. Identification of an external party is an indication of the existence of an obligation giving rise to a liability. However, it is not essential to know the identity of the external party before the time of settlement in order for an obligation and a liability to exist.

5.15B Many arrangements that give rise to an obligation include settlement dates. The inclusion of a settlement date may provide an indication that an obligation involves a transfer of resources and gives rise to a liability. However, there are many agreements that do not contain settlement dates. The absence of a settlement date does not preclude an obligation giving rise to a liability.

Legal Obligations

5.15C A legal obligation is enforceable in law. Such enforceable obligations may arise from a variety of legal constructs. Exchange transactions are usually contractual in nature and therefore enforceable through the laws of contract or equivalent authority or arrangements. There are jurisdictions where government and public sector entities cannot enter into legal obligations, because, for example, they are not permitted to contract in their own name, but where there are alternative processes with equivalent effect. Obligations that are binding through such alternative processes are considered legal obligations in the Conceptual Framework. For some types of non-exchange transactions, judgment will be necessary to determine whether an obligation is enforceable in law. Where it is determined that an obligation is enforceable in law, there can be no doubt that an entity has little or no realistic alternative to avoid the obligation and that a liability exists.

5.15D Some obligations related to exchange transactions are not strictly enforceable by an external party at the reporting date, but will be enforceable with the passage of time without the external party having to meet further conditions—or having to take any further action—prior to settlement. Claims that are unconditionally enforceable subject to the passage of time are enforceable obligations in the context of the definition of a liability.

5.15E Sovereign power is the ultimate authority of a government to make, amend and repeal legal provisions. Sovereign power is not a rationale for concluding that an obligation does not meet the definition of a liability in this Conceptual Framework. The legal position should be assessed at each reporting date to consider if an obligation is no longer binding and does not meet the definition of a liability.

Non-Legally Binding Obligations

5.15F Liabilities can arise from non-legally binding obligations. Non-legally binding obligations differ from legal obligations in that the party to whom the obligation exists cannot take legal (or equivalent) action to enforce settlement. Non-legally binding obligations that give rise to liabilities have the following attributes:

- The entity has indicated to other parties by an established pattern of past practice, published policies, or a sufficiently specific current statement that it will accept certain responsibilities;
- As a result of such an indication, the entity has created a valid expectation on the part of those other parties that it will discharge those responsibilities; and
- The entity has little or no realistic alternative to avoid settling the obligation arising from those responsibilities.

A Transfer of Resources from the Entity

5.16 [Deleted]

5.16A To satisfy the definition of a liability the obligation must have the potential to require the entity to transfer resources to another party (or parties). For that potential to exist, it does not need to be certain, or even likely, that the entity will be required to transfer resources—the transfer may, for example, be required only if a specified uncertain future event occurs. It is only necessary that the present obligation exists, and that, at least in one circumstance, it would require the entity to transfer resources.

5.16B An obligation can meet the definition of a liability even if the probability of a transfer of resources is low. Nevertheless, that low probability might affect decisions about the information provided about the liability and how the information is provided. Chapter 6 provides guidance on recognition and Chapter 7 provides guidance on measurement.

5.16C Obligations to transfer resources include, for example:

(a) Obligations to pay cash;

(b) Obligations to provide services or deliver goods;

(c) Obligations to exchange resources with another party on unfavorable terms. Such obligations include, for example, a forward contract to sell on terms that are currently unfavorable or an option that entitles another party to purchase resources from the entity;

(d) Obligations to transfer resources if a specified uncertain future event occurs; and

(e) Obligations to issue a financial instrument if that financial instrument will oblige the entity to transfer a resource.

5.16D Instead of fulfilling an obligation to transfer resources to the party that has a right to receive resources, entities may in some circumstances:

(a) Settle the obligation by negotiating a release from the obligation;

(b) Transfer the obligation to a third party; or

(c) Replace the obligation to transfer resources with another obligation by entering into a new transaction.

5.16E In the situations identified in paragraph 5.16D an entity has an obligation to transfer resources until it has settled, transferred, or replaced that obligation.

5.16F In a principal-agent relationship (see paragraph 5.12A), if the agent has an obligation to transfer resources controlled by the principal to a third party, that obligation is not a liability of the agent. In such a case the resources that would be transferred are the principal's resources.

Present Obligation as a Result of Past Events

5.17 A present obligation is binding. To satisfy the definition of a liability, it is necessary that a present obligation arises as a result of one or more past transactions or other past events and has the potential to require the entity to transfer resources from the entity.

5.17A A present obligation exists as a result of past events only if:

(a) The entity has already obtained service potential or economic benefits or taken an action[7]; and

[7] In the public sector a present obligation can arise from an obligation imposed by a higher level of government

(b) As a consequence, the entity will or may have to transfer resources that it would not otherwise have had to transfer.

5.17B In the public sector, obligations may arise at a number of points. For example, in implementing a program or service:

- Making a political promise such as an electoral pledge;
- Announcement of a policy;
- Introduction (and approval) of the budget (which may be two distinct points); and
- The budget becoming effective (in some jurisdictions the budget will not be effective until an appropriation has been effected).

The early stages of implementation are unlikely to give rise to present obligations that meet the definition of a liability. Later stages, such as claimants meeting the eligibility criteria for the service to be provided, may give rise to obligations that meet the definition of a liability. As noted in paragraph 5.15A an entity cannot be obligated to itself as a result of a public communication.

5.17C The point at which an obligation gives rise to a liability depends on the nature of the obligation. Factors that are likely to impact on judgments whether other parties can validly conclude that the obligation is such that the entity has little or no realistic alternative to avoid a transfer of resources include:

- The nature of the past event or events that give rise to the obligation. For example, a promise made in an election is unlikely to give rise to a present obligation because an electoral pledge very rarely creates a valid expectation on the part of external parties that the entity has an obligation that it has little or no realistic alternative to avoid settling. However, an announcement in relation to an event or circumstance that has occurred may have such political support that the government has little option to withdraw. Where the government has committed to introduce and secure passage of the necessary budgetary provision such an announcement may give rise to a non-legally binding obligation;
- The ability of the entity to modify or change the obligation before it crystallizes. For example, the announcement of policy will generally not give rise to a non-legally binding obligation, which cannot be modified before being implemented; and
- There may be a correlation between the availability of funding to settle a particular obligation and the creation of a present obligation. For example, where both a budget line item has been approved and linked funding is assured through an appropriation, the availability of contingency funding or a transfer from a different level of government, a non-legally binding obligation may exist. However, the absence of a budgetary provision does not itself mean that a present obligation has not arisen.

5.17D “Economic coercion”, “political necessity” or other circumstances may give rise to situations where, although the public sector entity is not legally obliged to incur a transfer of resources, the economic or political consequences of refusing to do so are such that the entity may have little or no realistic alternative to avoid an outflow of resources. Economic coercion, political necessity or other circumstances may lead to a liability arising from a non-legally binding obligation.

5.18 [Deleted]

5.19 [Deleted]

5.20 [Deleted]

5.21 [Deleted]

5.22 [Deleted]

5.23 [Deleted]

5.24 [Deleted]

5.25 [Deleted]

5.26 [Deleted]

Assets and Liabilities

Unit of Account

5.26A The unit of account is the right or the group of rights, the obligation or the group of obligations, or the group of rights and obligations to which recognition criteria and measurement concepts are applied.

5.26B A unit of account is selected for an asset or liability when considering how recognition criteria and measurement concepts will apply to that asset or liability and to the related revenue and expense. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to select one unit of account for recognition and a different unit of account for measurement. For example, arrangements may sometimes be recognized individually but measured as part of a portfolio of binding arrangements. For presentation and disclosure, assets, liabilities, revenue and expense may need to be aggregated or separated into components.

5.26C If an entity transfers part of an asset or part of a liability, the unit of account may change at that time, so that the transferred component and the retained component become separate units of account.

5.26D A unit of account is selected to provide useful information, which implies that:

(a) The information provided about the asset or liability and about any related revenue and expense must be relevant. Treating a group of rights and obligations as a single unit of account may provide more relevant information than treating each right or obligation as a separate unit of account if, for example, those rights and obligations:

(i) Cannot be or are unlikely to be the subject of separate transactions;

(ii) Cannot or are unlikely to expire in different patterns;

(iii) Have similar characteristics and risks; or

(iv) Are used together in the operational activities conducted by an entity to provide services or to produce cash flows and are measured by reference to estimates of their interdependent service potential or future cash flows.

(b) Information provided about the asset or liability and about any related revenue or expense must faithfully represent the substance of a transaction or other event from which they have arisen. Therefore, it may be necessary to treat rights or obligations arising from different sources as a single unit of account, or to separate the rights or obligations arising from a single source. Equally, to provide a faithful representation of unrelated rights or obligations, it may be necessary to recognize and measure them separately.

5.26E In selecting a unit of account it is also important to consider the cost-benefit constraint of financial reporting discussed in Chapter 3. In general, the costs associated with recognizing and measuring assets, liabilities, revenue and expense increase as the size of unit of account decreases. Hence, in general, rights or obligations arising from the same source are separated only if the resulting information is more useful and the benefits outweigh the costs.

5.26F One example of rights and obligations arising from the same source are binding arrangements, which establish both rights and obligations for each of the parties. If those rights and obligations are interdependent and cannot be separated, they constitute a single inseparable asset or liability and hence form a single unit of account.

5.26G Conversely, if rights are separable from obligations arising from the same source, it may sometimes be appropriate to group the rights separately from the obligations, resulting in the identification of one or more separate assets and liabilities. In other cases, it may be more appropriate to group separable rights and obligations in a single unit of account, treating them as a single asset or a single liability.

5.26H Treating a set of rights and present obligations as a single unit of account differs from offsetting assets and liabilities. Offsetting occurs when an entity recognizes and measures both an asset and liability as separate units of account, but groups them into a single net amount in the statement of financial position. Offsetting classifies dissimilar items together and therefore is generally not appropriate.

Binding Arrangements that are Equally Unperformed

5.26I Some binding arrangements, or portions of binding arrangements, may be equally unperformed whereby neither party has fulfilled any of its obligations or both parties have partially fulfilled their obligations to an equal extent. Such binding arrangements establish a combined right and obligation to exchange resources. The right and obligation are interdependent and cannot be separated. Hence the combined right and obligation constitute a single asset or liability. The entity has an asset if the terms of the exchange are currently favorable; it has a liability if the terms of the exchange are currently unfavorable. Whether such an asset or liability is included in the financial statements depends on both the recognition criteria (see Chapter 6) and the measurement basis selected for the asset and liability (see Chapter 7).

5.26J To the extent that either party fulfills its obligations under the binding arrangement, the binding arrangement changes character. If the reporting entity performs first under the binding arrangement, that performance is the event that changes the reporting entity's right and obligation to exchange resources into a right to receive a resource. That right is an asset. If the other party performs first, that performance is the event that changes the reporting entity's right and obligation to exchange resources into an obligation to transfer a resource. That obligation is a liability.

Net Financial Position, Other Resources, and Other Obligations

5.27 As explained in paragraph 5.4, in some cases, in developing or revising an IPSAS, the IPSASB may determine that to achieve the objectives of financial reporting a resource or obligation that does not satisfy the definition of an element defined in the Conceptual Framework needs to be recognized in the financial statements. In these cases, the IPSAS may require or allow these resources or obligations to be recognized as other resources or other obligations, which are items additional to the six elements defined in this Conceptual Framework.

5.28 Net financial position is the difference between assets and liabilities after adding other resources and deducting other obligations recognized in the statement of financial position. Net financial position can be a positive or negative residual amount.

Revenue and Expense

Definitions

5.29 Revenue is:

Increases in the net financial position of the entity, other than increases arising from ownership contributions.

5.30 Expense is:

Decreases in the net financial position of the entity, other than decreases arising from ownership distributions.

5.31 Revenue and expense arise from exchange and non-exchange transactions, other events such as unrealized increases and decreases in the value of assets and liabilities, and the consumption of assets through depreciation and erosion of service potential and capability to generate economic benefits through impairments. Revenue and expense may arise from individual transactions or groups of transactions.

Surplus or Deficit for the Period

5.32 The entity's surplus or deficit for the period is the difference between revenue and expense reported on the statement of financial performance.

Ownership Contributions and Ownership Distributions

Definitions

5.33 Ownership contributions are:

Inflows of resources to an entity, contributed by external parties in their capacity as owners, which establish or increase an interest in the net financial position of the entity.

5.34 Ownership distributions are:

Outflows of resources from the entity, distributed to external parties in their capacity as owners, which return or reduce an interest in the net financial position of the entity.

5.35 It is important to distinguish inflows of resources from owners, including those inflows that initially establish the ownership interest, and outflows of resources to owners in their capacity as owners from revenue and expense. In addition to the injections of resources and the payment of dividends that may occur, in some jurisdictions it is relatively common for assets and liabilities to be transferred between public sector entities. Where such transfers satisfy the definitions of ownership contributions or ownership distributions they will be accounted for as such.

5.36 Ownership interests may arise on the creation of an entity when another entity contributes resources to provide the new entity with the capacity to commence operational activities. In the public sector, contributions to, and distributions from, entities are sometimes linked to the restructuring of government and will take the form of transfers of assets and liabilities rather than cash transactions. Ownership interests may take different forms, which may not be evidenced by an equity instrument.

5.37 Ownership contributions may take the form of an initial injection of resources at the creation of an entity or a subsequent injection of resources, including those where an entity is restructured. Ownership distributions may be: (a) a return on investment; (b) a full or partial return of investment; or (c) in the event of the entity being wound up or restructured, a return of any residual resources.

Basis for Conclusions

This Basis for Conclusions accompanies, but is not part of, the Conceptual Framework.

Scope of Chapter

BC5.1 Respondents to the 2010 Consultation Paper, Elements and *Recognition in Financial Statements* (the 2010 Consultation Paper), questioned why the IPSASB was only addressing elements for the financial statements in this phase of the Conceptual Framework. They suggested that IPSASB should also develop elements for economic and other phenomena in the more comprehensive areas of financial reporting outside the financial statements. The IPSASB acknowledges the merits of these views and the need to develop such elements in the future. However, the IPSASB decided that in order to put its future standard-setting activities for the financial statements on a sound and transparent footing it is important to deal firstly with the development of elements for the financial statements.

BC5.2 The IPSASB acknowledges a view that cash inflows and cash outflows should be defined as elements of the cash flow statement. The IPSASB took the view that cash inflows and cash outflows are components of the elements identified in this Chapter, and that further guidance should be provided at standards level.

Limited Scope Update of Conceptual Framework

BC5.2A In March 2020 the IPSASB initiated a Limited Scope Update of the Conceptual Framework. The Limited Scope Update compared the definitions of an asset and a liability with the definitions in the IASB's Conceptual Framework, which was finalized in 2018 (2018 IASB Conceptual Framework). The guidance supporting the definitions was also reviewed to take account of experience in applying the Conceptual Framework in standards development and maintenance.

BC5.2B The Limited Scope Update also evaluated the case for including guidance on the unit of account and binding arrangements that are equally unperformed. The 2014 Conceptual Framework did not address these issues. The IPSASB approved an updated Chapter 5 in March 2023. The IPSASB started using updated Chapter 5 immediately once approved.

Assets

The Definition of an Asset

BC5.2C The definition of an asset in the 2014 Conceptual Framework was:

A resource presently controlled by the entity as a result of a past event.

BC5.2D The definition of an asset in the IASB's 2018 Conceptual Framework is:

A present economic resource controlled by the entity as a result of past events.

BC5.2E Neither the IPSASB nor the IASB definitions included wording that could be interpreted as recognition thresholds, such as "expected to flow".

BC5.2F The 2014 IPSASB and 2018 IASB definitions contain the same components—a resource/an economic resource; control; and a past event/past events. The only differences were:

(a) The IASB uses the term "economic resource", whereas the IPSASB uses the term 'resource'.

(b) The IASB attaches "present" to "economic resource", whereas the IPSASB Conceptual Framework attaches "presently" to control. The IASB's use of "present economic resource" mirrors a present obligation for a liability.

(c) The IASB uses "past events" (plural). The IPSASB used "past event" (singular). The IPSASB formulation was intended to indicate that there need be only one past event in order for the definition of an asset to be met.

BC5.2G The IPSASB considered the rationale for using the terms "resource" and "presently controlled". The IPSASB considers that a resource is inherently economic and that the use of "economic resource" might be confused with "economic benefits", because of the guidance that rights with service potential are resources as well as those with the capability to generate economic benefits. The term "presently controlled" reinforces the key point that control of a resource must be evaluated at the reporting date, rather than in the future. The prospect of control in the future is not sufficient to meet the asset definition. The IPSASB therefore reaffirmed the use and location of these terms.

BC5.2H The IPSASB considered that the use of the plural "past events" rather than the singular "past event" better conveys the point that resources can accumulate over time due to an initial past event and further past events. An example is a binding arrangement for the delivery of services to third party beneficiaries in which one party receives resources from another party in order to finance the arrangement. The resource recipient accumulates assets as it incurs eligible expenditure or completes specified activities in accordance with the binding arrangement. The term "past events" includes the scenario where a single past event gives rise to an asset.

BC5.2I The revised definition of an asset is therefore:

A resource presently controlled by the entity as a result of past events.

BC5.2J In the Limited Scope Update the IPSASB reviewed the sequencing of guidance and restructured the guidance so that it reflected the components of the definition of an asset more clearly.

A Resource

BC5.3 The 2014 Conceptual Framework provided guidance that a resource provides benefits to an entity in the form of service potential or the ability to generate economic benefits or both. In reaching its conclusions on the nature of a resource the IPSASB considered whether the benefits of the resource must have already flowed to an entity in order for a resource to exist. However, the IPSASB concluded that resources themselves embody benefits—benefits that can be accessed by the entity that controls the rights to these benefits. The IPSASB also considered the nature of the benefits (see paragraphs BC5.7 and BC5.8) and control (see paragraphs BC5.9–BC5.14).

BC5.3A The 2014 Conceptual Framework made a distinction between (i) service potential and the ability[8] to generate economic benefits that can arise directly from legal ownership of the resource and (ii) service potential and the capability to generate economic benefits that arise from other rights to use the resource.

BC5.3B The 2018 IASB Conceptual Framework considered but decided not to make the distinction outlined in paragraph BC5.3A. The IASB took the view that "ownership of a physical object arises because of rights conferred by law and that, although they differ in extent, the rights conferred by full legal ownership of a physical object and by a contract to use an object for 99% (or 50% or even 1%) of its useful life are all rights of one kind or another". The IASB also considered that there may be inconsistencies of what constitutes legal ownership in different jurisdictions or at different dates. In summary, the IASB guidance reflects a view that legal ownership is a particular form of right rather than a separate phenomenon.

BC5.3C The IPSASB acknowledged the view that physical ownership gives rise to a specific type of control and that this should be reflected conceptually. According to this view, from an accountability perspective, a conceptual approach, which might lead to underlying assets not being recognized as a single unit of account, risks not meeting the qualitative characteristic of understandability.

BC5.3D However, on balance, the IPSASB decided to adopt a more overtly rights-based approach. In particular, the IPSASB concluded that the view that legal ownership is a type of right rather than a separate phenomenon was persuasive.

BC5.3E The 2018 IASB Conceptual Framework acknowledged that in many cases, the set of rights arising from legal ownership of a physical object is accounted for as a single asset. The IPSASB inserted paragraph 5.7F providing guidance that describing the set of rights as the physical item will often provide a faithful representation of those rights in the most concise and understandable way.

BC5.3F The IPSASB considered whether it should augment the guidance on a resource with guidance drawn from the 2018 IASB Conceptual Framework. The IPSASB decided that the following guidance should be added on issues on which the 2014 Conceptual Framework had previously been silent:

[8] In the updated Conceptual Framework, the IPSASB uses the phrase 'capability to generate economic benefits', rather than 'ability to generate economic benefits'.

- Rights can be classified as those that correspond to an obligation of another party and those that do not correspond to an obligation of another party (paragraph 5.7A).
- Ways in which rights can be established (paragraph 5.7B).
- When services are received and immediately consumed, an entity's right to obtain the service potential or/and economic benefits produced by such services exists very briefly until the entity consumes the services. This is consistent with the approach to services in- kind at the standards level where certain services in-kind are received as an asset and immediately consumed (paragraph 5.7C).
- Not all rights are assets of an entity (paragraph 5.7D).
- In principle each of an entity's rights is a separate asset (paragraph 5.7E).
- In many cases, the set of rights arising from legal ownership of a physical object is accounted for as a single asset (paragraph 5.7F; also noted above in paragraph BC5.3E).

BC5.3G Some respondents to Exposure Draft 81 opposed the more overtly rights-based approach. In particular, they disagreed with the potential non-recognition of physical assets in their entirety in the financial statements. They considered that this undermines accountability.

BC5.3H The IPSASB acknowledged this point. Paragraphs 5.7E and 5.7F state related rights are often treated as a single unit of account that is a single asset and that, in many cases, the set of rights arising from legal ownership of a physical object is accounted for as a single asset. There may be cases where different entities have different rights over an asset. In the IPSASB's view the economics of such arrangements should be reflected in the accounting.

Unconditional Rights

BC5.4 Unconditional rights to resources typically result from binding arrangements that require provision of resources to the entity in the future. The IPSASB notes that there can be a large number of such rights and acknowledged that unconditional rights that represent service potential or the capability to generate economic benefits that are controlled by the entity as a result of a past event give rise to assets. Whether such assets are recognized depends on whether the recognition criteria have been satisfied. The IPSASB concluded that the consequences of application of the definition of an asset to unconditional rights should be addressed at standards level.

BC5.5 [Deleted]

BC5.6 [Deleted]

Service Potential and Economic Benefits

BC5.7 The term "service potential" has been used to identify the capability of an asset to provide services in accordance with an entity's objectives. The term "economic benefits" has been used to reflect the capability of an asset to generate net cash inflows. Some argue that economic benefits includes service potential. Others argue that service potential includes economic benefits—a further view is that the terms can be used interchangeably. The IPSASB considered whether the explanation of a resource should include a reference to both service potential and the capability to generate economic benefits.

BC5.8 The IPSASB noted that many respondents to the 2010 Consultation Paper and 2012 Exposure Draft, *Elements and Recognition in Financial Statements* supported inclusion of a specific reference to service potential as a characteristic of an asset, because of the service delivery objectives of most public sector entities. The IPSASB therefore concluded that the explanation of a resource should include both the terms "service potential" and "economic benefits". This approach acknowledges that the primary objective of most public sector entities is to deliver services, but also that public sector entities may carry out activities with the sole objective of generating net cash inflows.

BC5.8A In the Limited Scope Update the IPSASB reaffirmed the term "service potential" as an attribute of a resource. In the description of service potential in paragraph 5.8, the IPSASB changed the wording "the capacity to provide services" to "the capability to provide services", because of the ambiguity of "capacity". Capacity has the same meaning of ability, but in other usages can mean the adequacy, availability and volume of resources. The IPSASB acknowledged that in many languages "capacity" and "capability" will translate similarly. In addition, the IPSASB made a modification to the wording of economic benefits in the description of a resource in paragraph 5.8 and acknowledged that an item can have both service potential and the capability to generate economic benefits. Guidance on the treatment of such assets is provided at the standards level.

Control

BC5.9 The IPSASB considered whether control is an essential characteristic of an asset or whether other indicators should be identified as essential characteristics of an asset including:

- Legal ownership;
- The right to access, and to restrict or deny the access of external parties to, the resource;
- The means to ensure that the resources are used to achieve the entity's objectives; and
- The existence of enforceable rights to service potential or economic benefits arising from a resource.

The IPSASB acknowledges the views of those who argue that control may be difficult to apply in some cases because it requires judgment to assess whether control exists. In addition, control can be erroneously applied to a resource in its entirety and not to the individual benefits that accrue from the resource. However, notwithstanding such difficulties, the IPSASB concluded that control is an essential characteristic of an asset because the presence of control facilitates the association of an asset with a specific entity.

BC5.10 Legal ownership of a resource, such as a property or item of equipment, is one method of accessing the service potential or economic benefits of an asset. However, rights to service potential or the capability to generate economic benefits may exist without legal ownership of the underlying resource. For example, the rights to service potential or the capability to generate economic benefits through the holding and use of leased property are accessed without legal ownership of the leased asset itself. Therefore, legal ownership of the resource is not an essential characteristic of an asset. Legal ownership is, however, an indicator of control.

BC5.11 The right to access a resource may give an entity the ability to determine whether to:

- Directly use the resource's service potential to provide services to beneficiaries;
- Exchange the resource for another asset, such as cash; or
- Use the asset in any of the other ways that may provide services or generate economic benefits.

BC5.12 While access to a resource is crucial, there are resources to which an entity has access which do not give rise to assets, such as air. Therefore, the ability to access a resource must be supplemented by the ability to deny or restrict the access of others to that resource—for example, (a) an entity might decide whether to set an entrance fee to a museum and restrict access to those who do not pay the fee, and (b) government may control a natural resource under its land to which it can restrict the access of others. Legally enforceable claims to specific resources, such as a right of access to a road or a right to explore land for mineral deposits, could represent an asset to the holder. However, an entity may be able to access the service potential or capability to generate economic benefits associated with a resource in ways that do not require legal rights. The IPSASB took the view that the factors identified in paragraph BC5.9 are likely to be indicators of the existence of control rather than essential characteristics of the definition of an asset.

BC5.13 The IPSASB also considered whether the economic ownership approach is a viable alternative to the control approach. The economic ownership approach focuses on an entity's exposure to the underlying economic attributes that contribute to an asset's value to the entity. Some respondents to the 2012 Exposure Draft, in supporting the control approach, commented on the complexity of the economic ownership approach. The IPSASB concluded that the economic ownership approach is subjective and difficult to operate, and therefore rejected this approach.

BC5.14 The IPSASB considered whether an analysis of exposure to the risks and rewards of ownership is a useful indicator of control. The control approach focuses on the power of the entity to direct how the resource is used in order to benefit from the service potential and/or capability to generate economic benefits embodied in the resource. The risks and rewards approach focuses on an entity's exposure to the underlying economic attributes that contribute to an asset's value to the entity and the related risks. Consideration of the risks and rewards associated with particular transactions and events, and which party to any transaction or event bears the majority of those risks and rewards, may be relevant and useful in identifying the nature of the asset controlled by parties to the transaction or event. It may also be useful in determining how to quantify and associate the economic rights and obligations with particular parties. However, it is not of itself an indicator of the party that controls an asset. The IPSASB therefore decided not to include the risks and rewards of ownership as an indicator of control.

BC5.14A In the Limited Scope Update the IPSASB noted that the 2018 IASB Conceptual Framework included guidance on the principal-agent relationship. The 2014 IPSASB Conceptual Framework did not include guidance that in principal-agent relationships custody of a resource controlled by a principal does not give rise to an asset of the agent. While this is implicit in paragraph 5.11, the IPSASB considered that explicit guidance would be useful to underpin standards-level guidance and has therefore inserted a new paragraph 5.12A. The IPSASB included equivalent guidance for liabilities in paragraph 5.16F.

Past Events

BC5.15 Some respondents to the 2010 Consultation Paper and 2012 Exposure Draft argued that identification of a past transaction or other event which gives rise to the asset should be an essential characteristic of the definition of an asset. Others take the view that the identification of a past event is not necessary and should not therefore be an essential characteristic. They consider that such a requirement places undue emphasis on identifying the past event that gave rise to an asset. Such emphasis may be a distraction and lead to debates about which event is the triggering event instead of the more important issue of whether rights to resources exist at the reporting date. Those who take this view consider that the essential characteristic of an asset should be the existence of a resource. Some may accept that a past event provides useful supporting evidence of the existence of an asset, but not that it should be an essential characteristic.

BC5.16 Many respondents took the view that a past event should be identified as an essential characteristic of the definition of an asset. The IPSASB agrees with these respondents—in particular, that the complex nature of many public sector programs and activities means that there are a number of points at which control of a resource might arise. Therefore, the IPSASB concluded that identification of the appropriate past event is crucial in identifying whether an asset exists.

BC5.17 The powers and rights of government are particularly significant for the identification of assets. The power to tax and issue licenses, and other powers to access or to deny or restrict access to the benefits embodied in intangible resources like the electromagnetic spectrum, are examples of sovereign powers. It is often difficult to determine when such powers give rise to a right that is a resource and asset of the entity.

BC5.18 A government's power to establish a right to levy a tax or fee, for example, often begins a sequence of events that ultimately results in the flow of economic benefits to the government. The IPSASB considered two views of when an asset arises from the powers and rights of government to levy a tax or fee. The first view is that the government has an inherent power to tax at every reporting date and, therefore, that the general ability to levy taxes or fees is an asset. Proponents of this view accept that such an asset is unlikely to be capable of faithfully representative measurement, but argue that this should not deflect from an acknowledgement that government has a perpetual asset. The contrary view is that the power to levy taxes and fees must be converted into a right by legal means, and that such a right must be exercised or exercisable in order for an asset to come into existence. Many respondents to the 2010 Consultation Paper and 2012 Exposure Draft supported this latter view. The IPSASB agrees with these respondents. In particular, the IPSASB concluded that a government's inherent powers do not give rise to assets until these powers are exercised and the rights exist to receive service potential or economic benefits. The updated definition of an asset and supporting guidance does not affect either the discussion of sovereign powers and rights or the key principle that an asset arises when the power is exercised, and the rights exist to receive resources.

Liabilities

BC5.18A The definition of a liability in the 2014 Conceptual Framework was:

A present obligation of the entity for an outflow of resources that results from a past event.

BC5.18B The definition of a liability in the IASB's 2018 Conceptual Framework is:

A present obligation of the entity to transfer an economic resource as a result of past events.

BC5.18C As for the asset definition (see above paragraphs BC5.2A–BC5.2J) both IPSASB and IASB definitions contained the same or similar components—resources/an economic resource; outflow of resources/transfer of resources; and a past event/past events. The differences were:

(a) As in the asset definitions, the IASB uses the term "economic resource", whereas the IPSASB uses the term "resource". The IPSASB's reason for retaining the term "resource" is discussed in paragraph BC5.2G.

(b) The IASB definition replaced the term "outflow of resources" with "transfer of an economic resource". This was largely because of the linkage of the term an outflow of resources with the expectation of such an outflow and therefore potential confusion with a recognition threshold.

(c) As in the asset definition, the IASB uses "past events" (plural). The IPSASB used "past event" (singular). The IPSASB formulation was intended to indicate that there need be only one past event in order for the definition to be met.

BC5.18D The IPSASB was persuaded by the adoption of the term transfer of resources and considered the standards-level implications of the adoption of the term "transfer of resources" in the revised definition of a liability at the standards-level.

BC5.18E The IPSASB noted that the term "transfers" is defined in IPSAS 23, *Revenue from Non-Exchange Transactions (Taxes and Transfers)*. A project to replace IPSAS 23 was underway at the time that the Limited Scope Update took place. The IPSASB concluded that any ambiguities or inconsistencies between conceptual and standards levels could be mitigated by adjustments to new defined terms and the provision of guidance on what a transfer of resources involves. Such guidance is in paragraphs 5.16A–5.16E.

BC5.18F Consistent with the analysis for assets at BC5.2H the IPSASB considered that the use of the plural "past events" rather than the singular "past event" better conveys that present obligations that give rise to liabilities can accumulate over time due to an initial past event and further past events.

BC5.18G The revised definition of a liability is:

A present obligation of the entity to transfer resources as a result of past events.

BC5.18H Most respondents to Exposure Draft 81 supported the revised definition. Some respondents expressed unease about the term 'transfer of resources', which they felt had particular public sector connotations. The IPSASB felt that such reservations could be allayed through clear supporting guidance (see below paragraph BC5.19F). The IPSASB therefore decided to adopt this definition in the revised Chapter 5.

BC5.18I Similarly to the guidance on assets, the IPSASB considered the sequencing of guidance on liabilities and restructured the guidance so that it reflected the components of the definition of a liability more clearly. The revised structure also drew on the approach in the IASB's 2018 Conceptual Framework in describing the characteristics of an obligation more clearly and linking a present obligation to a past event. This necessitated a relocation of guidance. The revised guidance is in paragraphs 5.14A–5.17D.

BC5.18J There was strong support for the restructuring of the guidance on liabilities. No new issues arose from the consultation. The IPSASB therefore decided to adopt the restructured guidance in the revised Chapter 5.

A Present Obligation

BC5.19 In considering when obligations are present obligations, the IPSASB accepts that a legal obligation gives rise to a present obligation. In some jurisdictions, public sector entities are not permitted to enter into certain legal arrangements, but there are equivalent mechanisms that give rise to a present obligation. Such mechanisms are considered legally binding. The IPSASB then considered how to classify obligations that are not legal obligations. The IPSASB noted that "constructive obligation" is a term embedded in standard-setting literature globally and has been used in IPSASs. However, it has proved difficult to interpret and apply in a public sector context. Therefore, the IPSASB considered alternative terminology, for example the term "a social or moral duty or requirement." The IPSASB has concerns that the term "social" might be confused with political values and that the term "moral obligations" risks a perception that standard setters and preparers are arbiters of morality. Therefore, the IPSASB decided that making a distinction between "legally binding" and "non-legally binding obligations" is the most straightforward and understandable approach. The IPSASB considered and rejected the view that the term "non-legally binding obligations" might be interpreted as referring to obligations, the legality of which is questionable. Paragraphs BC5.30–BC5.34 discuss non- legally binding obligations and explain their meaning for the purposes of the Conceptual Framework.

A Transfer of Resources

BC5.19A The guidance on "an outflow of resources from the entity" in the 2014 Conceptual Framework was limited to statements that "a liability must involve an outflow of resources from the entity for it to be settled" and that "an obligation that can be settled without an outflow of resources from the entity is not a liability".

BC5.19B In IPSASB's Revenue project some constituents indicated that ED 71, *Revenue without Performance Obligations*, was not clear on what gives rise to a liability in a binding arrangement. It became evident that this lack of clarity was partly attributable to uncertainty over what constitutes an outflow of resources from the entity.

BC5.19C The IPSASB noted that the 2018 IASB Conceptual Framework includes guidance on the application of a transfer of resources. With appropriate changes for public sector terminology, this guidance has been added in paragraphs 5.16A–5.16E of Chapter 5:

(a) Paragraph 5.16A states that the obligation must have the potential to require the entity to transfer a resource to another party or parties. The transfer does not have to be certain or even likely and might be dependent on a specified uncertain future event occurring.

(b) Paragraph 5.16B states that an obligation can meet the definition of a liability even if the probability of a transfer of a resource is low.

(c) Paragraph 5.16C provides examples of obligations to transfer a resource.

(d) Paragraph 5.16D indicates that rather than fulfill an obligation to transfer a resource to another party, entities may sometimes negotiate release from the obligation, transfer the obligation to a third party or replace the obligation with another obligation by entering into a new transaction. This paragraph reflects that in the public sector an entity's ability to extinguish or reduce a present obligation other than by fulfillment may be limited.

(e) Paragraph 5.16E states that in the situations described in paragraph 5.16D an entity has an obligation to transfer a resource until it has negotiated release from the obligation, transferred the obligation, or replaced the obligation.

BC5.19D The IPSASB emphasized that the ability to extinguish or reduce a present obligation by methods other than fulfillment does not mean that an entity has a realistic alternative of avoiding a transfer of resources and therefore a rationale for non-recognition of a present obligation as a liability, which otherwise meets recognition criteria.

BC5.19E The 2014 Conceptual Framework included guidance that "if an obligation is contingent on future events occurring, there may be discretion to avoid an outflow of resources before these events occur". The IPSASB has deleted this guidance because it was inconsistent with the statement in paragraph 5.16A. that "to satisfy the definition of a liability the obligation must have the potential to require the entity to transfer resources to another party (or parties)".

BC5.19F The majority of respondents to ED 81 supported the enhanced guidance on "the transfer of resources". Some respondents felt that the term "transfers" has a particular connotation in the public sector, denoting transfers between different levels of government and transfers to individuals and households. They felt that there might be confusion between the broader usage in the Conceptual Framework and requirements and guidance at the standards level. The IPSASB acknowledged this point but felt that any confusion could be minimized by the use of clearly defined terms at the standards level.

BC5.19G A view was expressed in the consultation response that the Conceptual Framework should provide guidance on obligations related to the Treasury Single Account. The Treasury Single Account is an account or a set of linked accounts through which receipts and payments are transacted for all government departments. The IPSASB acknowledged that the Treasury Single Account is an important mechanism for central government financial administration in many jurisdictions. However, the IPSASB considered that the operation of the Treasury Single Account is too low-level a topic to be addressed in the Conceptual Framework.

Conditional and Unconditional Obligations

BC5.20 In the context of a present obligation, the IPSASB considered whether "conditional" and "unconditional" obligations, "stand-ready obligations" and "performance obligations" might be present obligations.

BC5.21 An unconditional obligation is one that stands on its own, independent of future events. Unconditional obligations give rise to liabilities if the definition of a liability is satisfied. A conditional obligation involves the possible occurrence of a future event, which may or may not be under the control of the reporting entity. The IPSASB concluded that it is possible for conditional obligations to give rise to liabilities as defined in the Conceptual Framework. Determining whether a conditional obligation satisfies the definition of a liability will involve consideration of the nature of the obligation and the circumstances in which it has arisen. Given the complexity of public sector programs and activities, identifying the past event (or events), which has (have) resulted in the entity having little or no realistic alternative to avoid an outflow of resources, often may not be straightforward. Guidance on whether conditional obligations that exist in particular arrangements or circumstances may give rise to liabilities consistent with the definitions identified in the Conceptual Framework is a standards-level issue.

BC5.22 A variety of terms are used to describe present obligations that may arise from, or exist in conjunction with, conditional obligations in particular circumstances. Amongst these are stand ready-obligations and performance obligations. The characteristics of these obligations and the conclusions reached by the IPSASB in the context of the Conceptual Framework are outlined below.

Stand-Ready Obligations

BC5.23 Stand-ready obligations are a type of conditional obligation. Stand-ready obligations require an entity to be prepared to fulfill an obligation if a specified uncertain future event outside the entity's control occurs (or fails to occur). The term stand-ready obligation is used to describe a liability that may arise in certain contractual circumstances, such as those related to insurance, certain financial instruments such as a derivative contract in a loss position, and for warranties where the entity has an obligation to transfer resources if a specified future event occurs (or does not occur). In such circumstances, there may be an identifiable past event and an outflow of resources from the entity, although the exact identity of the party to whom settlement will be made will not generally be known.

BC5.24 The 2010 Consultation Paper included a discussion of stand-ready obligations. Many respondents found the distinction between a stand-ready obligation and other conditional obligations ambiguous. The 2012 Exposure Draft explained that the term stand-ready obligation is not widely used in the public sector, does not work well in certain public sector circumstances, and suggested that whether a stand-ready obligation gave rise to a liability is a standards-level issue. Some respondents did not agree with the explanation in the 2012 Exposure Draft, and expressed a view that the Conceptual Framework should provide guidance for use at the standards level on whether stand-ready obligations can give rise to liabilities in certain circumstances.

BC5.25 A public sector entity's obligation to transfer resources to another entity in particular circumstances that may occur in the future includes, for example, as a potential lender of last resort and in support of programs that provide a wide range of social benefits. The existence of an obligation to transfer resources to another party in these circumstances may be dependent on ongoing satisfaction of a number of conditions of differing significance and nature that are subject to change by the government or public sector entity. The IPSASB is of the view that the circumstances in which liabilities arise as a consequence of the obligation of a public sector entity to transfer resources to other parties consistent with the terms of programs, and how such liabilities should be described and accounted for, should be considered at the standards level consistent with the principles established in the Conceptual Framework. The IPSASB decided that the Conceptual Framework should not resolve whether all obligations that might be classified as stand-ready meet the definition of a liability. The IPSASB also decided not to use the term "stand-ready obligation" in the Conceptual Framework.

Performance Obligations

BC5.26 A performance obligation is an obligation in a contract or other binding arrangement between an entity and an external party to transfer a resource to that other party. Performance obligations are often explicitly stated in a contract or other arrangement. Not all performance obligations are explicit. For example, a statutory requirement may give rise to an implicit performance obligation of a public sector entity that is additional to the terms of an agreement or contract.

BC5.27 A performance obligation also arises when an entity enters into an arrangement whereby it receives a fee and, in return, provides an external party with access to an asset of the government. The IPSASB concluded that it is not necessary to identify a specific external party for a performance obligation to arise, but it is important to analyze such obligations in order to determine whether they include a requirement to provide an outflow of resources. Obligations that require an entity to provide access to a resource, but do not entail a transfer of resources do not give rise to liabilities. However, obligations that require an entity to forgo future resources may be liabilities. Performance obligations are often conditional obligations. Determining whether such obligations give rise to liabilities is dependent upon the terms of particular binding agreements and may vary between jurisdictions. The IPSASB concluded that the circumstances under which performance obligations give rise to liabilities should be considered at the standards level.

Past Events

BC5.28 The IPSASB considered whether the definition of a liability should require the existence of a past transaction or other event. Some take the view that identification of a past event is not an essential characteristic of a liability, and that, consequently, there is no need for the definition of a liability to include a reference to a past event. These commentators argue that there may be many possible past events and that establishing the key past event is likely to be arbitrary. They suggest that the identification of a past event is not a primary factor in determining whether a liability exists at the reporting date. This view mirrors the opposition to the inclusion of a past event in the definition of an asset, which is discussed in paragraphs BC5.15–BC5.18.

BC5.29 The IPSASB acknowledges this view, but also noted that many respondents to the 2010 Consultation Paper and 2012 Exposure Draft consider that a past event is a characteristic of a liability. The IPSASB agrees with the view that the complexity of many public sector programs and activities and the number of potential points at which a present obligation might arise means that, although challenging, identification of the past event that gives rise to a liability is critical in determining when public sector liabilities should be recognized. The IPSASB reconsidered whether the definition of a liability should include a reference to past event(s) in the Limited Scope Update in 2020. The IPSASB reaffirmed the importance of past events and linked past events to present obligations.

An Incremental Transfer of Resources as a Result of Past Events

BC5.29A In developing proposals on revenue, the IPSASB acknowledged that the transfer of resources arising from a binding arrangement must be incremental in order to give rise to a liability. Paragraph 4.43 of the 2018 IASB Conceptual Framework provides guidance that the concept "as a result of past events" means that:

(a) An entity has already obtained economic benefits or taken an action; and

(b) As a consequence, the entity will or may have to transfer an economic resource that it would not otherwise have had to transfer.

BC5.29B This guidance establishes a principle that, in order to meet the definition of a liability, the past events must give rise to an incremental transfer of resources. An obligation, which can be fulfilled without an incremental transfer of resources, is not a present obligation and does not meet the definition of a liability.

Little or No Realistic Alternative to Avoid

BC5.30 Some respondents to the 2012 Exposure Draft expressed concerns that the phrase “little or no realistic alternative to avoid” in the description of a present obligation is open to different interpretations. They proposed removal of the words “little or” from this phrase in order to reduce the potential for misinterpretation. The IPSASB considered this proposal. The IPSASB was concerned that such a change might be interpreted as establishing a threshold test of virtual certainty in determining whether a present obligation exists. The IPSASB considers such a threshold too high.

BC5.31 Determining when a present obligation arises in a public sector context is complex and, in some cases, might be considered arbitrary. This is particularly so when considering whether liabilities can arise from obligations that are not enforceable by legal or equivalent means. In the context of programs to deliver social benefits there are a number of stages at which a present obligation can arise and there can be significant differences between jurisdictions, even where programs are similar, and also over time within the same jurisdiction —for example, different age cohorts may have different expectations about the likelihood of receiving benefits under a social assistance program. Assessing whether a government cannot ignore such expectations and therefore has little or no realistic alternative to transfer resources may be subjective. This gives rise to concerns that such subjectivity undermines consistency in the reporting of liabilities, and can also impact adversely on understandability. Some therefore take the view that an essential characteristic of a liability should be that it is enforceable at the reporting date by legal or equivalent means.

BC5.32 A converse view is that where a government has a record of honoring obligations, failing to recognize them as liabilities leads to an overstatement of that government’s net financial position. According to this view, if a government has a consistent record of raising citizen expectations through publicly-announced obligations to provide financial support—for example to the victims of natural disasters—and has met such obligations in the past, a failure to treat such obligations as liabilities is not in accordance with the objectives of financial reporting, and leads to the provision of information that does not meet the qualitative characteristics of faithful representation and relevance.

BC5.33 On balance, the IPSASB agrees with those who argue that, in the public sector, liabilities can arise from binding obligations that the entity has little or no realistic alternative to avoid, even if they are not enforceable in law. The IPSASB decided to use the term “non-legally binding obligations” for such obligations in the Conceptual Framework. However, the IPSASB acknowledges the views of those who are skeptical that liabilities can arise from obligations that are not legally enforceable. Consequently, paragraph 5.15F of this Chapter identifies the attributes that a non-legally binding obligation is to possess for it to give rise to a liability.

BC5.34 The wide variation in the nature of public sector programs and operations, and the different political and economic circumstances of jurisdictions globally, means that categorical assertions of the circumstances under which obligations not enforceable in law become binding and give rise to present obligations are inappropriate. However, the IPSASB is of the view that present obligations are extremely unlikely to arise from election pledges. This is because electoral pledges will very rarely, (a) create a valid expectation on the part of external parties that the entity will honor the pledge, and (b) create an obligation which the entity has no realistic alternative but to settle. Therefore, the Conceptual Framework includes a presumption that liabilities do not arise from electoral pledges. However, it is accepted that in practice a government with a large majority will be better placed to enact intended legislation than a minority government, and that there may be infrequent circumstances where a government announcement in such circumstances might give rise to a liability. In assessing whether, in these circumstances, a non-legally binding obligation gives rise to a liability the availability of funding to settle the obligation may be an indicator. This is discussed in paragraph 5.17C.

Sovereign Power to Avoid Obligations

BC5.35 The sovereign power to make, amend and repeal legal provisions is a key characteristic of governments. Sovereign power potentially allows governments to repudiate obligations arising from both exchange and non-exchange transactions. Although in a global environment such a power may be constrained by practical considerations, there are a large number of examples of governments defaulting on financial obligations over the last century. The IPSASB considered the impact of sovereign power on the definition of a liability. The IPSASB concluded that failing to recognize obligations that otherwise meet the definition of a liability on the grounds that sovereign power enables a government to walk away from such obligations would be contrary to the objectives of financial reporting and, in particular, may conflict with the qualitative characteristics of relevance and faithful representation. Many respondents to the Consultation Paper and the Exposure Draft supported this position. The IPSASB therefore concluded that the determination of the existence of a liability should be by reference to the legal position at the reporting date.

Commitments

BC5.36 Commitment accounting procedures are a central component of budgetary control for public sector entities in many jurisdictions. They are intended to assure that budgetary funds are available to meet the government's or other public sector entity's responsibility for a possible future liability, including intended or outstanding purchase orders and contracts, or where the conditions for future transfers of funds have not yet been satisfied. Commitments which satisfy the definition of a liability and the recognition criteria are recognized in financial statements, in other cases information about them may be communicated in notes to the financial statements or other reports included in GPFRs. The IPSASB concluded that commitment accounting might be addressed in the future when dealing with elements for the more comprehensive areas of general purpose financial reporting outside the financial statements.

Unit of Account and Accounting Principles for Binding Arrangements that are Equally Unperformed

Unit of Account

BC5.36A The 2018 IASB Conceptual Framework describes unit of account as 'the right or the group of rights, the obligation or the group of obligations, or the group of rights and obligations, to which recognition criteria and management concepts are applied'.

BC5.36B The IPSASB took the view that unit of account was a standards-level issue during the development of the 2014 IPSASB Conceptual Framework and there was no guidance on unit of account. Since 2014 the importance of decisions on the unit of account has been highlighted in a number of projects and led the IPSASB to reevaluate the case for high-level guidance.

BC5.36C The IPSASB decided that guidance in the Conceptual Framework would be beneficial in informing standards-level requirements and guidance on unit of account. The IPSASB drew on the 2018 IASB Framework for this guidance, which is in paragraphs 5.26A–5.26J. The guidance on consideration of how the selection of a unit of account provides useful information in the 2018 IASB Conceptual Framework is in the context of the qualitative characteristics of relevance and faithful representation. The IPSASB took the view that other qualitative characteristics may need to be taken into account in assessing whether information is useful in determining the unit of account.

BC5.36D There was considerable support for the Conceptual Framework providing guidance on the unit of account. The only significant issue to arise was the location of the guidance on accounting for binding arrangements that are equally unperformed (see paragraph BC5.36H). The IPSASB decided that Chapter 5 should address unit of account.

BC5.36E The IPSASB considered whether the unit of account for recognition could differ from the unit of account for measurement. The IPSASB acknowledged that it is possible that items might be recognized on an individual basis and measured on a group basis. An example is where financial instruments might be recognized individually but measured as a portfolio. Where different units of account are applied for recognition and measurement the reason(s) will be explained in the Basis for Conclusions of the individual standards.

Binding Arrangements that are Equally Unperformed

BC5.36F The 2014 IPSASB Conceptual Framework does not include guidance on executory contracts. In the Limited Scope Update, the IPSASB evaluated whether guidance should be added to the Conceptual Framework.

BC5.36G The 2018 IASB Conceptual Framework describes an executory contract as "a contract or a portion of a contract, that is equally unperformed—neither party has fulfilled any of its obligations, or both parties have partially fulfilled their obligations to an equal extent".

BC5.36H The IPSASB noted that the term “contract” has been problematic in some jurisdictions. This is because some public sector entities may not have powers to enter into contracts, although they may be able to enter into other binding arrangements. Consequently, the term “contract” has not been used widely in the Conceptual Framework. At the standards level the term “binding arrangement” has been generally used. The IPSASB has used this term in the Conceptual Framework. The IPSASB concluded that the principles of accounting for binding arrangements that are equally unperformed could be incorporated in the section on Unit of Account and that a separate section was unnecessary.

BC5.36I Most respondents to ED 81 supported the inclusion of guidance on accounting for binding arrangements that are equally unperformed. However, a number disagreed with the location of this guidance in the section of Unit of Account. They considered that the implications of the guidance extended beyond considerations related to unit of account to include areas such as the definition of an asset and a liability. They encouraged the IPSASB to relocate the guidance to a separate sub-section. The IPSASB accepted the views of these respondents and decided to relocate the guidance to a separate sub-section in paragraphs 5.26I and 5.26J.

Net Financial Position, Other Resources and Other Obligations

BC5.37 This section of the Basis for Conclusions outlines the IPSASB’s approach to models of financial performance to be reported in the financial statements, and specifically the treatment of deferred inflows and deferred outflows.

Consultation Paper, Elements and Recognition in Financial Statements

BC5.38 The 2010 Consultation Paper discussed two contrasting approaches to financial performance:

- An approach that measures financial performance as the net result of all changes in the entity’s resources and obligations during the period. This was described as the asset and liability-led approach; and
- An approach that measures financial performance as the result of the revenue inflows and expense outflows more closely associated with the operations of the current period. This was described as the revenue and expense-led approach.

BC5.39 The 2010 Consultation Paper noted that the two different approaches could lead to different definitions of the elements related to financial performance and financial position. The revenue and expense-led approach is strongly linked to the notion of inter-period equity. Inter-period equity refers to the extent to which the cost of programs and providing services in the reporting period is borne by current taxpayers and current resource providers. The asset and liability-led approach is linked to the notion of changes in resources available to provide services in the future and claims on these resources as a result of period activity.

BC5.40 A further section of the 2010 Consultation Paper discussed Other Potential Elements and pointed out that, if IPSASB adopted the revenue and expense-led approach, IPSASB would need to address deferred flows. Under this approach, deferred flows are items that do not meet the proposed definitions of revenue and expense, but which are nevertheless considered to affect the financial performance of the period. The Consultation Paper identified three options for dealing with such flows:

- Defining deferred inflows and deferred outflow as elements on the statement of financial position;
- Broadening the asset and liability definitions to include items that are deferrals; or
- Describing deferred flows as sub-classifications of net assets/net liabilities (subsequently referred to as the residual amount).

BC5.41 The 2010 Consultation Paper had two specific matters for comment on these areas. The first asked constituents to indicate whether they preferred the asset and liability-led approach or revenue and expense-led approach and to indicate their reasons. The second asked whether deferred inflows and deferred outflows need to be identified on the statement of financial position. If respondents supported identification on the statement of financial position they were asked to indicate which of the three approaches in paragraph BC5.40 they supported.

BC5.42 The responses to these specific matters for comment were inconclusive. A small majority of respondents expressing a view favored the asset and liability-led approach. However, a number of respondents who supported the asset and liability-led approach also indicated that they favored identifying deferrals on the statement of financial position. The IPSASB took these views into account in the development of the 2012 Exposure Draft.

Exposure Draft, Elements and Recognition in Financial Statements

BC5.43 The 2012 Exposure Draft expressed a view that it is important to be able to distinguish flows that relate to the current reporting period from those that relate to specified future reporting periods. The 2012 Exposure Draft therefore proposed the following definitions of a deferred inflow and a deferred outflow:

- *A deferred inflow is an inflow of service potential or economic benefits provided to the entity for use in a specified future reporting period that results from a non-exchange transaction and increases net assets; and*
- *A deferred outflow is an outflow of service potential or economic benefits provided to another entity or party for use in a specified future reporting period that results from a non-exchange transaction and decreases net assets.*

BC5.44 The two key features of these definitions were:

- The proposed elements were restricted to non-exchange transactions; and
- The flows had to be related to a specified future period.

BC5.45 The IPSASB's rationale for including these characteristics were as risk-avoidance measures to reduce the possibility of deferred inflows and deferred outflows being used widely as smoothing devices, and to ensure that deferred inflows and deferred outflows are not presented on the statement of financial position indefinitely. The Exposure Draft included two Alternative Views. The first Alternative View considered the meaning of net financial position to be unclear in light of the combined impact of deferred inflows and deferred outflows. The second Alternative View disagreed with the view that deferred inflows and deferred outflows should be identified and recognized as separate elements and expressed a view that these flows meet the definitions of revenue and expense.

BC5.46 Many respondents disagreed with defining deferred inflows and deferred outflows as elements. Some expressed reservations about the implications for alignment with the IASB's Conceptual Framework, and International Financial Reporting Standards more generally. A number of respondents considered that the proposed approach did not reflect economic reality and that it would be more difficult to determine an objective basis for deferring revenue and expense under the revenue and expense-led approach. Nevertheless, a number of respondents also expressed the view that information on flows relating to particular reporting periods has information value.

BC5.47 The rationale for restricting the definitions to non-exchange transactions was challenged as conceptually weak both by respondents who favored defining deferred inflows and deferred outflows as elements and those opposed to these proposed elements. Respondents also disagreed with the restriction to specified time periods, because it would potentially lead to the different accounting treatment of very similar transactions dependent upon whether a specific period was identified—a grant without conditions receivable by an entity to finance its general activities for a five year period would have met the definition of a deferred inflow, whereas a similar grant for a future unspecified period would have met the definition of revenue.

Finalizing the Elements Chapter

BC5.48 The IPSASB considered that it needed to balance the limited support for the proposals on deferred flows in the 2012 Exposure Draft, and the perceived needs of users for information about flows relating to particular reporting periods.

BC5.49 The IPSASB therefore considered five options (A–E below) in responding to input from the due process and its perception of users' information needs:

A. Defining deferred inflows and deferred outflows as elements in a more principles-based manner and not specifying the financial statements in which the elements are to be recognized. As such, the Conceptual Framework would not predetermine the presentation of the elements;

B. Deriving the definitions of revenue and expense from the asset and liability definitions;

C. Broadening the asset and liability definitions;

D. Accepting that certain economic phenomena that do not meet the definition of any element may need to be recognized in financial statements in order to meet the objectives of financial reporting; and

E. Reporting inflows and outflows that provide service potential or economic benefits, but do not affect assets and liabilities as defined in the Conceptual Framework and reporting inflows and outflows that do not affect revenue and expense.

BC5.50 The IPSASB did not consider that defining deferred inflows and deferred outflows as elements in Option A is justified in light of the objections that respondents had made to the proposals in the 2012 Exposure Draft. The IPSASB therefore rejected Option A.

BC5.51 The IPSASB considered two variants of Option B. In the first variant deferred flows would be taken directly to surplus/deficit, while in the second variant deferred flows would initially be taken to residual amount and then recycled to surplus/deficit in the period that time stipulations occur.

BC5.52 The IPSASB considers that taking deferred flows directly to surplus/deficit under the first variant of Option B may not produce information that is representationally faithful of an entity's sustainable performance and therefore does not meet the objectives of financial reporting. The second variant of Option B relies on recycling and, in the view of some IPSASB members would have implicitly introduced the notion of "other comprehensive income" into the Conceptual Framework. The IPSASB has strong reservations about such a development. For these reasons the IPSASB rejected Option B.

BC5.53 The IPSASB noted that Option C would require changes to the definitions of an asset and a liability so that:

- The definition of an asset would include resources that an entity does not control; and
- The definition of a liability would include obligations that are not present obligations.

The IPSASB considers that such changes would distort the essential characteristic of an asset—that an entity controls rights to resources—and the essential characteristic of a liability—that an entity has a present obligation for an outflow of resources. In the view of the IPSASB this would make assets and liabilities less easily understandable. Adoption of such an option would also be a departure from globally understood definitions of an asset and a liability. For these reasons the IPSASB rejected Option C.

BC5.54 Option E was a hybrid approach that involved components of the other four options. It would allow reporting of inflows and outflows that provide service potential or economic benefits, but would not affect the definitions of an asset and liability and the reporting of inflows and outflows that do not affect revenue and expense as defined in the Conceptual Framework. The idea of this approach was to acknowledge that further conceptual thinking on financial performance is necessary.

BC5.55 Option D is broader than Option E because it is not necessarily restricted to deferred flows, but could encompass broader economic phenomena—for example obligations that are not present obligations, because, although they contain performance obligations, it is not clear that they require an outflow of resources. Option D acknowledges that there may be circumstances under which the six elements defined in the Conceptual Framework may not provide all the information in the financial statements that is necessary to meet users' needs. In the view of the IPSASB it is transparent to acknowledge that other items may be recognized. Unlike Option A, Option D does not involve defining additional elements, and, unlike Option C, Option D does not involve modification of generally understood definitions of an asset and a liability.

BC5.56 The IPSASB concluded that Option D provides the most transparent approach. The overarching term "other economic phenomena" is used in the introductory section of this chapter to describe such items and the more detailed terms "other obligations" and "other resources" are used subsequently. Option D also enhances the accountability of the IPSASB because the circumstances under which other obligations and other resources will be recognized will be determined at standards level and explained in the Bases for Conclusions of specific standards.

Financial Statements

BC5.57 Net financial position is the aggregate of an entity's net assets (assets minus liabilities) and other resources and other obligations recognized in the statement of financial position at the reporting date. Where resources and obligations other than those that meet the definition of the elements are recognized in the financial statements, the amounts reported as net assets and net financial position will differ. In these circumstances, the interpretation of net financial position will be determined by reference to the nature of the other resources and other obligations recognized in the financial statements under the relevant IPSAS.

BC5.58 The IPSASB considered whether it should use both the terms "net assets" and "net financial position" in the Conceptual Framework. The IPSASB acknowledges a view that net assets is a generally understood term. However, the IPSASB considered that using both terms could be confusing and therefore decided to use the term "net financial position" to indicate the residual amount of an entity.

Revenue and Expense

Gross or Net Increase in "Net Financial Position" in Definition of Revenue

BC5.59 The IPSASB considered whether the definition of revenue should specify that the increase in net financial position is "gross" or "net". The IPSASB acknowledges that a gross approach might not be appropriate in areas such as the disposal of property, plant, and equipment where such an approach would require the full disposal proceeds to be recognized as revenue, rather than the difference between the disposal proceeds and the carrying amount. Conversely, a net approach might be similarly inappropriate in certain circumstances—for example, the sale of inventory. The IPSASB concluded that whether the increase in net financial position represented by revenue is presented gross or net should be determined at standards level, dependent on which treatment better meets the objectives of financial reporting.

Distinguishing Ordinary Activities from Activities outside the Ordinary Course of Operations

BC5.60 Some standard setters structure their definitions of elements so that, for example, inflows and outflows arising from transactions and events relating to activities in the ordinary course of operations are distinguished from inflows and outflows that relate to activities outside the ordinary course of operations. An example of this approach is to define revenue and expense as elements that relate to an entity's "ongoing major or central operations", and to define gains and losses as elements that relate to all other transactions, events and circumstances giving rise to increases or decreases in net assets[9].

BC5.61 The IPSASB acknowledges that distinguishing transactions and events related to the ordinary course of operations from transactions and events outside the ordinary course of operations can provide useful information for users of the financial statements. Therefore, it may be useful to adopt the terms "gains and losses" to reflect inflows and outflows from transactions and events outside the ordinary course of operations. However, the IPSASB is of the view that, conceptually, gains and losses do not differ from other forms of revenue and expense, because they both involve net increases or decreases of assets and/or liabilities. The IPSASB also noted that many respondents to the 2010 Consultation Paper and 2012 Exposure Draft shared this view. Therefore, the IPSASB decided not to define gains and losses as separate elements.

Ownership Interests in the Public Sector

BC5.62 As discussed in more detail in BC5.66-BC5.68, the IPSASB considered whether, and, if so, under what circumstances, ownership interests exist in the public sector and whether transactions related to ownership interests should be excluded from the definitions of revenue and expense. Because transactions with owners, in their role as owners, are different in substance to other inflows and outflows of resources the IPSASB concluded that it is necessary to distinguish flows relating to owners from revenue and expense. Therefore, ownership contributions and ownership distributions are defined as elements and excluded from the definitions of revenue and expense.

[9] See, for example, Financial Accounting Standards Board, Statement of Financial Accounting Concepts No. 6, *Elements of Financial Statements*.

Surplus or Deficit in the Reporting Period

BC5.63 This chapter states that the difference between revenue and expense is the entity's surplus or deficit for the period. The IPSASB considered whether it should provide explanatory guidance on the interpretation of surplus or deficit. The IPSASB discussed a view that public sector entities have operating and funding models. According to this view a surplus provides an indicator of the ability of the entity to:

- Reduce demands for resources from resource providers;
- Increase either the volume and/or quality of services to recipients;
- Reduce debt (where an entity has debt-raising powers); or
- A combination of these factors.

BC5.64 Conversely a deficit provides an indicator of:

- The need to increase demands on resources from resource providers;
- Reduce either the volume and/or quality of services to recipients;
- Increase debt (where an entity has debt-raising powers); or
- A combination of these factors.

BC5.65 The IPSASB acknowledges that there is a need for greater clarity on the meaning of surplus or deficit in the public sector, and therefore that aspects of the above approach might be developed further in the future. However, the IPSASB considered the concept of an operating and funding model or business model is not well developed in the public sector, and that developing an operating and funding model appropriate for all public sector entities is problematic. Therefore, the IPSASB decided not to include guidance on the interpretation of surplus or deficit in the Conceptual Framework.

Ownership Contributions, and Ownership Distributions

BC5.66 The IPSASB considered whether net financial position is a residual amount, a residual interest or an ownership interest. The IPSASB acknowledges the view that the interest of resource providers and service recipients in the long-term efficiency of the entity, its capacity to deliver services in the future and in the resources that may be available for redirection, restructuring or alternative disposition is similar to an ownership interest. The IPSASB also accepts that the terms "residual interest" and "ownership interest" have been used in some jurisdictions to characterize third parties' interests in net assets. The term "residual interest" indicates that service recipients and resource providers have an interest in the capability of the entity to finance itself and to resource future operations. The term "ownership interest" is analogous to the ownership interest in a private sector entity and, for some, indicates that the citizens own the resources of the public sector entity and that government is responsible to the citizens for the use of those resources. Some supporters of this approach argue that it emphasizes the democratic accountability of governments.

BC5.67 The IPSASB is of the view that the term "residual interest" may also suggest that service recipients and resource providers have a financial interest in the public sector entity. Similarly the term "ownership interest" may suggest that citizens are entitled to distributions from the public sector entity and to distributions of resources in the event of the entity being wound up. The IPSASB therefore concluded that the terms "residual interest" and "ownership interest" can be misunderstood or misinterpreted, and that net financial position is a residual amount that should not be defined.

BC5.68 However, the IPSASB acknowledges that part of net financial position can in certain circumstances be an ownership interest. Such instances may be evidenced by the entity having a formal equity structure. However, there may be instances where an entity is established without a formal equity structure, with a view to sale for operation as a commercial enterprise or by a private sector not-for-profit entity. An ownership interest can also arise from the restructuring of government or public sector entities, such as when a new government department is created. The IPSASB therefore considered whether ownership interests should be defined as an element. The IPSASB acknowledges the view that identifying the resources (or claims on future resources) attributable to owners provides information useful for accountability and decision-making purposes. The IPSASB concluded that such interests can be identified through the sub-classification of net financial position. However, the IPSASB also concluded that it is important to distinguish inflows of resources from owners and outflows of resources to owners, in their role as owners, from revenue, expense, other resources and other obligations. Therefore, ownership contributions and ownership distributions are defined as elements. Detailed guidance to support the assessment of whether certain inflows and outflows of resources satisfy the definitions of ownership contributions and ownership distributions will be developed at standards level, as appropriate.

CHAPTER 6: RECOGNITION IN FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

CONTENTS

Recognition Criteria and their Relationship to Disclosure

6.1 This chapter identifies the criteria that must be satisfied in order for an element to be recognized in the financial statements. Recognition is the process of incorporating and including in amounts displayed on the face of the appropriate financial statement an item that meets the definition of an element and can be measured in a way that achieves the qualitative characteristics and takes account of the constraints on information included in GPFRs.

6.2 The recognition criteria are that:

- An item satisfies the definition of an element; and
- Can be measured in a way that achieves the qualitative characteristics and takes account of constraints on information in GPFRs.

6.3 All items that satisfy the recognition criteria are recognized in the financial statements. In some circumstances, an IPSAS may also specify that, to achieve the objectives of financial reporting, a resource or obligation that does not meet the definition of an element is to be recognized in the financial statements provided it can be measured in a way that meets the qualitative characteristics and constraints. Other resources and other obligations are discussed in Chapter 5*, Elements in Financial Statements*.

6.4 Recognition involves an assessment of uncertainty related to the existence and measurement of the element. The conditions that give rise to uncertainty, if any, can change. Therefore, it is important that uncertainty is assessed at each reporting date.

Definition of an Element

6.5 In order to be recognized as an element an item must meet the definition of one of the elements in Chapter 5. Uncertainty about the existence of an element is addressed by considering the available evidence in order to make a neutral judgment about whether an item satisfies all essential characteristics of the definition of that element, taking into account all available facts and circumstances at the reporting date.

6.6 If it is determined that an element exists, uncertainty about the amount of service potential or ability to generate economic benefits represented by that element is taken into account in the measurement of that element (see paragraphs 6.7 and 6.8). Preparers review and assess all available evidence in determining whether an element exists and is recognized, whether that element continues to qualify for recognition (see paragraph 6.9), or whether there has been a change to an existing element.

Measurement Uncertainty

6.7 In order to recognize an item in the financial statements, it is necessary to attach a monetary value to the item. This entails choosing an appropriate measurement basis and determining whether the measurement of the item achieves the qualitative characteristics, taking into account the constraints on information in GPFRs, including that the measurement is sufficiently relevant and faithfully representative for the item to be recognized in the financial statements. The selection of an appropriate measurement basis is considered in Chapter 7, *Measurement of Assets and Liabilities in Financial Statements.*

6.8 There may be uncertainty associated with the measurement of many amounts presented in the financial statements. The use of estimates is an essential part of the accrual basis of accounting. A decision about the relevance and faithful representativeness of measurement involves the consideration of techniques, such as using ranges of outcomes and point estimates, and whether additional evidence is available about economic circumstances that existed at the reporting date. Disclosures can provide useful information on estimation techniques employed. There may be rare instances in which the level of uncertainty in a single point estimate is so large that the relevance and faithful representativeness of the measure is questionable even if disclosures are provided to explain estimation techniques. Under these circumstances the item is not recognized.

Disclosure and Recognition

6.9 The failure to recognize items that meet the definition of an element and the recognition criteria is not rectified by the disclosure of accounting policies, notes or other explanatory detail. However, disclosure can provide information about items that meet many, but not all the characteristics of the definition of an element. Disclosure can also provide information on items that meet the definition of an element but cannot be measured in a manner that achieves the qualitative characteristics sufficiently to meet the objectives of financial reporting. Disclosure is appropriate when knowledge of the item is considered to be relevant to the evaluation of the net financial position of the entity and therefore meets the objectives of financial reporting.

Derecognition

6.10 Derecognition is the process of evaluating whether changes have occurred since the previous reporting date that warrant removing an element that has been previously recognized from the financial statements, and removing the item if such changes have occurred. In evaluating uncertainty about the existence of an element the same criteria are used for derecognition as at initial recognition.

Basis for Conclusions

This Basis for Conclusions accompanies, but is not part of, the Conceptual Framework.

Recognition and its Relationship to the Definition of the Elements

BC6.1 The IPSASB considered whether recognition criteria should be integrated in definitions of the elements. The IPSASB acknowledges the view that the inclusion of recognition criteria in definitions of the elements enables preparers to consider all the factors that must be taken into account in evaluating whether an item of information is recognized as an element in the financial statements. However, the IPSASB is of the view that while there is overlap in factors to be considered in determining whether an item satisfies the definition of an element and whether that element qualifies for recognition, recognition should be considered as a distinct stage in the financial reporting process. This is because recognition is broader than whether the definition of an element is satisfied. The IPSASB also noted that few respondents to the Consultation Paper and Exposure Draft supported the integration of recognition criteria in element definitions. After considering the input from the due process, the IPSASB concluded that the definitions of elements should not include recognition criteria.

BC6.2 In determining whether an element should be recognized there are two types of uncertainty that need to be considered. The first is uncertainty about whether the definition of an element has been satisfied. The second is measurement uncertainty—whether the element can be measured in a manner that achieves the qualitative characteristics. Measurement uncertainty is considered if it is determined that the definition of an element has been met. While recognition is viewed as a distinct stage in the accounting process, matters relevant to an assessment of uncertainty over the existence of an element will have been considered in determining whether the item satisfies the definition of an element.

Satisfying the Definition of an Element

BC6.3 The IPSASB considered whether, in dealing with uncertainty over the existence of an element, standardized probability threshold criteria should be adopted, or whether all available evidence should be used to make neutral judgements about an element's existence.

BC6.4 Standardized evidence thresholds filter out items that have a low probability of resulting in an inflow or outflow of service potential or the ability to generate economic benefits. Such items may have high monetary values, even though the probability of existence may be low. Some consider that it is more appropriate to disclose such items rather than to recognize them. Threshold criteria are also justified on cost grounds, because only after a preparer has formed an initial judgement about whether those threshold criteria have been met does that preparer consider how that element should be measured.

BC6.5 The IPSASB formed a view that the adoption of thresholds for recognition purposes risks omitting information that is relevant and faithfully representative, because similar information items may be treated in different ways dependent upon relatively small differences in the probability of a flow of benefits. The IPSASB acknowledges that such risks can also exist for approaches which do not specify thresholds for recognition. This is because preparers will make their own assessments of the circumstances or "the threshold" that justifies recognition, and those assessments can change for different items and over time. However, the IPSASB concluded that, on balance, an approach that is based on an assessment of all available evidence in determining whether an element exists and takes account of uncertainty about the flows of service potential or the ability to generate economic benefits in measurement is a more appropriate response to the uncertainty faced by preparers of financial statements. It is more likely to result in the recognition of information that satisfies the qualitative characteristics than the establishment of an arbitrary threshold that must be adhered to. Guidance may be provided at standards level on dealing with circumstances in which there is significant uncertainty about whether an element exists in particular circumstances, and therefore whether it would satisfy the criteria for recognition.

BC6.6 The IPSASB explored whether uncertainty about the existence of an element is specific to certain characteristics of assets and liabilities—in particular for assets whether an entity controls rights to a resource and for liabilities whether an entity has little or no realistic alternative to avoid an outflow of service potential or economic benefits. The rationale for such a view is that these are the essential characteristics of an asset and a liability where uncertainty is likely to arise.

BC6.7 The IPSASB is of the view that, uncertainty relates to more than just these characteristics. There might also be uncertainty about the existence of a present obligation and a past event for liabilities and, for assets whether a resource that generates future economic benefits or service potential presently exists, rather than a future resource or future right to a resource. As noted in paragraph BC6.2, these matters will also have been considered in determining whether an item satisfies the definition of an element.

Derecognition

BC6.8 The IPSASB considered whether the same criteria should be used for initial recognition and derecognition. Many of the respondents to the Consultation Paper and the Exposure Draft supported the use of the same criteria for derecognition as for initial recognition. The IPSASB concluded that adopting different recognition criteria would conflict with the qualitative characteristic of consistency as it would result in the recognition of items with different standards of evidence for their existence. Therefore, the same recognition criteria should be used for initial recognition and derecognition.

CHAPTER 7: MEASUREMENT OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES IN FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

CONTENTS

Introduction

7.1 This Chapter identifies the measurement concepts that guide the IPSASB in the selection of the most commonly used measurement bases for IPSAS and for preparers of financial statements in selecting measurement bases for assets and liabilities where there are no requirements in IPSAS.

The Objective of Measurement

7.2 The objective of measurement is:

To select those measurement bases that most fairly reflect the cost of services, operational capacity, and financial capacity of the entity in a manner that is useful in holding the entity to account, and for decision-making purposes.

7.3 The selection of measurement bases for assets and liabilities contributes to meeting the objectives of financial reporting in the public sector by providing information that enables users to assess:

- Cost of services—the cost of services provided in the period in historical or current terms;
- Operational capacity—the capacity of the entity to support the provision of services through physical and other resources; or
- Financial capacity—the capacity of the entity to fund its activities.

7.4 The selection of measurement bases also includes an evaluation of the extent to which the information provided achieves the qualitative characteristics while taking into account the constraints on information in financial reports. The following subsections provide guidance on measurement at recognition (initial measurement) and measurement subsequent to recognition (subsequent measurement).

Initial Measurement

7.5 Initial measurement for an asset is at transaction price plus transaction costs unless there are no reliable transaction price data available, or there is another more representationally faithful measurement basis. Transaction price is the consideration given to acquire, construct or develop an asset. Transaction costs for assets are incremental costs that are directly attributable to the acquisition, construction, or development, of an asset and would not have been incurred if the entity had not acquired, constructed, or developed the asset. Transaction price plus transaction costs is the historical cost for an asset.

7.6 Initial measurement for a liability is at transaction price minus transaction costs unless there are no reliable transaction price data available, or there is another more representationally faithful measurement basis. Transaction price is the consideration received to assume an obligation. Transaction costs for liabilities are incremental costs that are directly attributable to the incurrence of a liability and would not have been incurred if the entity had not incurred the liability. Transaction price minus transaction costs is the historical cost for a liability.

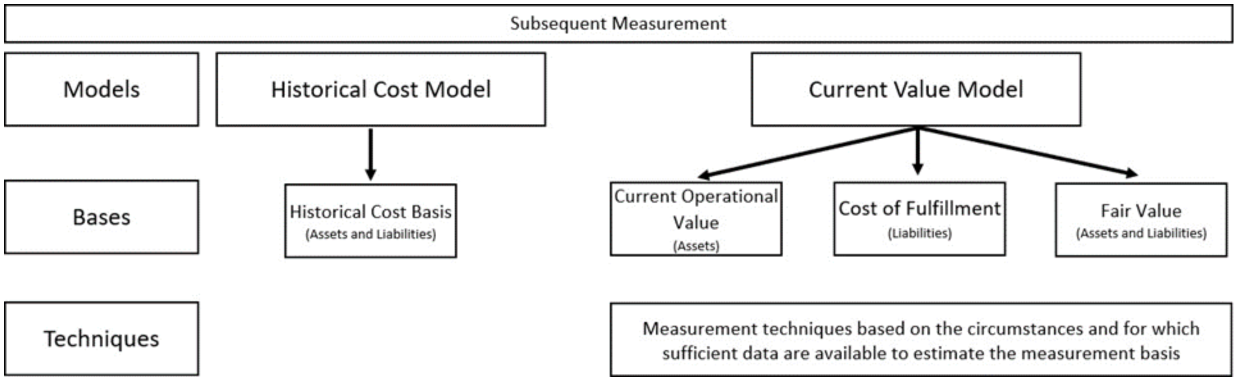
7.7 For both assets and liabilities, where there are no transaction price data available or if the transaction price does not faithfully present relevant information about the asset and liability of the entity' in a manner that is useful in holding the entity to account, and for decision-making purposes, a deemed cost is used.

Subsequent Measurement

7.8 Subsequent to initial measurement there are three levels of measurement:

- Measurement models;
- Measurement bases; and
- Measurement techniques.

Diagram 1: The subsequent measurement framework and the relationship between the three levels



7.9 **Measurement models** are the broad approaches for measuring assets and liabilities for inclusion in the financial statements.

7.10 Under the historical cost model, assets and liabilities are measured at historically-based amounts. Changes in value due to price changes are not reflected, except for impairments for assets and where an obligation becomes onerous1 for liabilities.

7.11 Under the current value model, assets and liabilities are measured using information updated to reflect price changes to the measurement date.

7.12 **Measurement bases** are specific ways of measuring assets and liabilities under the selected measurement model. Measurement bases provide information that best meets the qualitative characteristics while taking into account the constraints on information in financial reports.

7.13 Subsequent measurement may be either on the historical cost measurement basis or on one of the measurement bases under the current value model (see paragraph 7.15).

7.14 **Measurement techniques** are methods to estimate the amount at which an asset or liability is measured under the selected measurement basis. The selection of a measurement technique depends on factors such as the characteristics of an asset or a liability and the availability of observable data. Guidance on measurement techniques is provided at the standards level.

The Selection of Measurement Models and Measurement Bases

7.15 It is not possible to identify a single measurement model or measurement basis that best meets the measurement objective at a conceptual level for all circumstances. Therefore, the Conceptual Framework does not propose a single measurement model or measurement basis (or combination of bases) for all transactions, events, and conditions. It provides guidance on the selection of a measurement model and a measurement basis for assets and liabilities from those bases most commonly used in order to meet the measurement objective. It may be necessary to select measurement bases from different measurement models in order to meet the measurement objective.

7.16 The following measurement bases for assets are identified and discussed in terms of the information they provide about (a) the cost of services delivered by an entity, (b) the operational capacity and the financial capacity of an entity; and (c) the extent to which they provide information that meets the qualitative characteristics while taking into account the constraints on information in financial reports:

- Historical cost;
- Current operational value; and
- Fair value.

7.17 Value in use is used solely for the impairment of assets, and therefore is discussed separately in paragraphs 7.57–7.62.

7.18 The following measurement bases for liabilities are identified and discussed:

- Historical cost;

- Cost of fulfillment; and
- Fair value.

7.19 The next two sub-sections discuss classifying measurement bases as entity or non-entity specific and entry-based or exit-based.

Entity-Specific and Non-Entity-Specific Measures

7.20 Measurement bases may be classified according to whether they are "entity-specific" or "non-entity-specific". Measurement bases that are entity-specific reflect the economic, legal and other constraints that affect the possible uses of an asset or the fulfillment of a liability by an entity. Entity-specific measures may reflect economic opportunities that are not available to other entities and risks to which other entities are not exposed. Non-entity-specific measures reflect general market opportunities and risks. The decision on whether to use an entity-specific or non-entity-specific measurement basis is taken by reference to the measurement objective and the qualitative characteristics. Tables 1 and 2 classify the measurement bases for assets and liabilities as entity-specific or non-entity-specific.

Table 1: Classification of Measurement Bases for Assets as Entity-Specific or Non-Entity-Specific

Measurement Basis	Entity-Specific or Non-Entity-Specific
Historical cost	Entity-specific
Current operational value	Entity-specific
Fair value	Non-entity-specific

Table 2: Classification of Measurement Bases for Liabilities as Entity-Specific or Non-Entity Specific

Measurement Basis	Entity -Specific or Non-Entity-Specific
Historical cost	Entity-specific
Cost of fulfillment	Entity-specific
Fair value	Non-entity-specific

Entry and Exit Values

7.21 Measurement bases provide either entry or exit values. For assets, entry values reflect the cost of acquisition, construction, or development. Exit values are based on the economic benefits from sale. Current operational value and historical cost are entity specific measures for assets and are entry values. Fair value is a market-based, non-entity specific measure, and is an exit value.

7.22 For liabilities, entry values relate to the transaction or event under which an obligation is incurred. Exit values reflect the amount required to fulfill or transfer an obligation. For example, historical cost is an entity specific measure for liabilities and is an entry value, Cost of fulfillment is an entity specific measure and fair value is a market- based, non-entity specific measure; both measures are exit values.

7.23 Identifying whether measurement bases provide entry or exit values supports the determination of the approach to transaction costs. Entry-based measurement bases normally include transaction costs on the acquisition, construction, or development of an asset and on the incurrence of a liability. Exit-based measurement bases normally include transaction costs on sale of an asset or fulfillment or transfer of a liability.

Level of Aggregation or Disaggregation for Measurement

7.24 In order to present assets and liabilities in the financial statements in a way that provides information that best meets the measurement objective and achieves the qualitative characteristics, it may be necessary to aggregate or disaggregate them for measurement purposes. In assessing whether such an aggregation or disaggregation is appropriate, consideration is given to:

- Guidance on unit of account in Chapter 5;
- The materiality of aggregation or disaggregation; and
- The costs of aggregation or disaggregation compared with the benefits in terms of the extent to which the aggregation or disaggregation meets the objectives of financial reporting.

Measurement Bases for Assets

7.25 This section discusses the following measurement bases for assets:

- Historical cost;
- Current operational value; and
- Fair value.

Historical Cost

7.26 Historical cost for an asset is:

The consideration given to acquire, construct, or develop an asset at the time of its acquisition, construction, or development plus transaction costs.

7.27 Consideration is the cash or cash equivalents, or the value of other resources given. Historical cost is an entity-specific measurement basis reflecting the costs incurred in acquiring, constructing, or developing an asset. Subsequent to initial measurement, the historical cost for certain assets may be allocated as an expense to reporting periods in the form of depreciation or amortization. Depreciation and amortization represent the consumption of the service potential or ability to generate economic benefits provided by such assets over their useful lives. Consistent with the historical cost model, following initial measurement, the carrying amount of an asset is not changed to reflect changes in prices, except where related to impairment (see below paragraph 7.28).

7.28 Under the historical cost model, the amount of an asset may be reduced by recognizing impairments. Impairment is the extent to which the service potential or ability to generate economic benefits provided by an asset has diminished due to changes in economic or other conditions, which is distinct from the consumption of an asset. This involves an assessment of the recoverable amount of an asset. Depreciation, amortization, and impairment may also be relevant to measurement bases under the current value model (see paragraph 7.35). Conversely, the amount of an asset may be increased to reflect the cost of additions and enhancements or other events, such as the accrual of interest on a financial asset.

Cost of Services

7.29 Where historical cost is used, the cost of services reflects the amount of the resources expended to acquire, construct, or develop assets consumed in the provision of services. Historical cost generally is based on the transactions actually entered into by the entity. As the costs used are those carried forward from an earlier period without adjustment for price changes, they do not reflect the current cost of assets when the assets are consumed. As the cost of services is reported using past prices, historical cost information will not facilitate the assessment of the future cost of providing services if cumulative price changes since acquisition, construction, or development are significant. Where budgets are prepared on the historical cost basis, historical cost information demonstrates the extent to which the budget has been executed.

Operational Capacity

7.30 If an asset has been acquired, constructed, or developed in an exchange transaction, historical cost provides information on the resources available to provide services in future periods, based on their acquisition cost. At the time an asset is acquired, constructed, or developed, it can be assumed that the value to the entity of its service potential is at least equal to the cost of its acquisition, construction, or development. When depreciation or amortization is recognized, it reflects the extent to which the service potential of an asset has been consumed. Historical cost information shows that the resources available for future services are at least equal to the amount at which they are stated. Where an asset has been acquired, constructed, or developed in a non-exchange transaction, the transaction price will not provide information on operational capacity that meets the qualitative characteristics while taking into account the constraints on information in financial reports (also see paragraph 7.7).

Financial Capacity

7.31 The amount at which assets are stated in financial statements assists in an assessment of financial capacity. Historical cost, less depreciation or amortization, and any accumulated impairment losses can provide information on the amount of assets that may be used as effective security for borrowings. An assessment of financial capacity also requires information on the amount that could be derived from use of the asset and received on sale of an asset and reinvested in assets to provide different services. Historical cost does not provide this information when significantly different from current values.

Application of the Qualitative Characteristics

7.32 Paragraphs 7.29–7.31 explain the areas where historical cost provides relevant information with confirmatory or predictive value. Application of historical cost is often straightforward because transaction information is usually readily available. As a result, amounts derived from the historical cost model are generally representationally faithful in that they represent what they purport to represent-that is, the cost to acquire, construct, or develop an asset based on actual transactions. As application of historical cost generally reflects resources consumed by reference to actual transactions, historical cost measures are generally verifiable and understandable, and can be prepared on a timely basis.

7.33 Historical cost information is comparable to the extent that assets have the same or similar acquisition, construction, or development dates. Historical cost does not reflect the impact of price changes, so it is not possible to compare meaningfully the amounts of assets that were acquired, constructed, or developed at different times when prices differed.

7.34 In certain circumstances, the application of historical cost necessitates the use of allocations-for example where:

- Several assets are acquired in a single transaction;
- Assets are constructed or developed by the entity itself and overheads and other costs have to be attributed; and
- The use of a flow assumption, such as first-in-first-out, is necessary when many similar assets are held.

To the extent that such allocations are arbitrary, they reduce the extent to which the resulting measurement achieves the qualitative characteristics.

Measurement Bases for Assets under the Current Value Model

7.35 Measurements under the current value model reflect the economic environment prevailing at the reporting date. Depreciation, amortization, and impairment, which are discussed in the context of the historical cost measurement model in paragraphs 7.27 and 7.28, are also relevant to current value measurement bases in certain circumstances. Additions and enhancements may affect measurements under current operational value and fair value.

7.36 Where an asset is used for service provision and also generates economic benefits, an entity that is using the current value model makes a judgment whether an asset is primarily held for operational capacity or financial capacity and selects the current operational value measurement basis, or the fair value measurement basis based on that analysis. In making such a judgment an entity has regard to the appropriate unit of account. Guidance on unit of account is provided in Chapter 5.

Current Operational Value

7.37 Current operational value is:

The amount the entity would pay for the remaining service potential of an asset at the measurement date.

7.38 Current operational value presents an entity-specific measurement of an existing asset held for its operational capacity. Current operational value reflects:

- The amount the entity would pay for the remaining service potential of the asset in the least costly manner.
- The remaining service potential of the asset taking into account the current condition of the asset.
- The asset's existing use and location.

7.39 An asset supports an entity delivering services in its existing use. 'Existing use' is the way an existing asset is used, rather than an alternative use, and generally reflects the policy objectives of the entity operating the asset. Current operational value therefore assumes that an asset will continue to be used for service delivery rather than being sold.

Cost of Services

7.40 The cost of services is reported in current terms when based on current operational value. Thus, the amount of assets consumed is related to the value of the assets at the time they are consumed- and not, as with historical cost, at the time they were acquired, constructed, or developed. This provides a basis for a comparison between the cost of services and the amount of taxes and other revenue received in the period-which are generally transactions of the current period and measured in current prices-and for assessing whether resources have been used economically and efficiently. It may also provide a useful basis for comparison with other entities that report on the same basis, as asset values will not be affected by different acquisition, construction, or development dates, and for assessing the cost of providing services in the future and future resource needs. This is because future costs are more likely to resemble current costs than those incurred in the past when prices were different.

Operational Capacity

7.41 As indicated in paragraph 7.40, current operational value provides a measure of the resources available to provide services in future periods based on current policy, as it is focused on the current value of assets and their remaining service potential to the entity.

Financial Capacity

7.42 Current operational value does not provide information on an asset's ability to generate economic benefits or the amounts that would be received on its sale. It therefore may not facilitate an assessment of financial capacity.

Application of the Qualitative Characteristics

7.43 Current operational value focuses on the amount the entity would pay for the remaining service potential of an asset which supports the achievement of an entity's policy objectives. Current operational value therefore provides information that is both relevant and faithfully representative.

7.44 Current operational value information is comparable within an entity, as assets that provide equivalent service potential are stated at similar amounts, regardless of when those assets were acquired, constructed, or developed. Different entities may report similar assets at different amounts because current operational value is an entity-specific measure that reflects the opportunities available to the entity to obtain an asset to achieve an entity's policy objectives. These opportunities may be the same or similar for different entities. Where they are different, the economic advantage of an entity that is able to acquire, construct or develop assets at lower cost is reported in financial statements through lower asset values and a lower cost of services. This reinforces the ability of current operational value to provide relevant and faithfully representative information. The extent to which current operational value measures meet the qualitative characteristics of timeliness, understandability and verifiability depends on the nature of the asset and the estimation techniques used.

Fair Value

7.45 Fair value for an asset is:

The price that would be received to sell an asset in an orderly transaction between market participants at the measurement date.

7.46 Fair value is appropriate where the asset is being held primarily for its ability to generate economic benefits or with a view to sale. The extent to which fair value meets the objectives of financial reporting and the information needs of users partially depends on the quality of the market evidence. Market evidence, in turn, depends upon the characteristics of the market in which the asset is traded.

7.47 In principle, fair value measurements provide useful information because they fairly reflect the value of the asset to the entity. In an orderly market (see paragraph 7.49), the asset cannot be valued at less than fair value, as, disregarding transaction costs, the entity can obtain at least fair value by selling the asset. The asset cannot be valued at more than fair value, as the entity can obtain the same ability to generate economic benefits by purchasing the same or a similar asset in the market.

7.48 The usefulness of fair value may be more questionable when the assumption that markets are orderly does not hold. In such circumstances it cannot be assumed that the asset may be sold for the same price as that at which it can be acquired. Although the purchase of an asset provides evidence that the value of the asset to the entity is at least equal to its purchase price at that time, operational factors may mean that the value to the entity may be greater. Hence, fair value may not reflect the value to the entity of the asset, represented by its operational capacity. Therefore, fair value may not be useful for operational assets that an entity intends to continue to use for service delivery.

Orderly Markets

7.49 Orderly markets have the following characteristics:

- There are no barriers that prevent the entity from transacting in the market;
- There is sufficient frequency and volume of transactions to provide price information; and
- There are many well-informed buyers and sellers acting without compulsion, so there is an assurance of "fairness" in determining current prices-including that prices do not represent distress sales.

An orderly market is one that is run in a reliable, secure, accurate and efficient manner. Such markets deal in assets that are identical and therefore mutually interchangeable, such as commodities, currencies, and securities where prices are publicly available. In practice few markets, if any, fully exhibit all of these characteristics, but some may approach an orderly market.

Fair Value where Markets Cannot be Assumed to be Orderly

7.50 Markets for assets that are unique and rarely traded are unlikely to be orderly: any purchases and sales are individually negotiated, and there may be a large range of prices at which a transaction might be agreed. Therefore, participants will incur significant costs to purchase or to sell an asset. Where markets are not orderly, it is necessary to use a measurement technique to estimate the price at which an orderly transaction to sell the asset would take place between market participants at the measurement date under current market conditions. Such measurement techniques require inputs that are directly or indirectly observable, where possible, or unobservable where observable inputs cannot be identified.

7.51 Fair value permits a return on assets to be reported. However, public sector entities for which the IPSASB develops and maintains standards do not generally carry out activities with the primary objective of generating profits, and services are often provided in non-exchange transactions or on subsidized terms. Consequently, there may be limited relevance in a reported return derived from fair value.

Cost of Services

7.52 Fair value reflects the asset's ability to generate economic benefits and the price expected to be received on sale. Therefore, when an asset is primarily held for its operational capacity, fair value provides less useful information for the cost of services than current operational value, which can reflect the value of an asset in its existing use.

Operational Capacity

7.53 The usefulness of information on the fair value of assets held to provide services is limited. If fair value is significantly lower than historical cost, fair value is likely to be less relevant than the historical cost of such assets in providing information on operational capacity. Fair value is also likely to be less relevant than current operational value, as the highest and best financial use principle that underpins fair value is inappropriate for assets primarily held for operational capacity.

Financial Capacity

7.54 An assessment of financial capacity requires information on an asset's ability to generate economic benefits and the amount that would be received on sale of an asset. This information is provided by fair value. Fair value is therefore an appropriate measurement basis where assets are held for sale or where assets previously held for their operational capacity are surplus to operational requirements.

Application of the Qualitative Characteristics

7.55 Values determined in orderly markets can be readily used for financial reporting purposes. The information will meet the qualitative characteristics-that is it will be relevant, representationally faithful, understandable, comparable, and verifiable. As such information can be available quickly, it is also likely to be timely.

7.56 The extent to which fair value measurements meet the qualitative characteristics will decrease as the quality of market evidence diminishes and the determination of such values relies on estimation techniques. As indicated above, fair value is only likely to be relevant to assessments of financial capacity and not to assessments of the cost of services and operational capacity.

Value in Use

7.57 Value in use is applicable for assessments of impairment. Impairment testing involves determining whether the amount at which an asset is stated on the statement of financial position is recoverable.

7.58 Value in use of a cash-generating asset is the present value of the estimated future cash flows expected to be derived from the continuing use of the asset and from its sale at the end of its useful life. This requires the discounting of cash flows to a present value.

7.59 Value in use of a non-cash-generating asset is the asset's remaining service potential at the measurement date. The estimation of service potential requires the use of techniques, which are dependent on the nature of the asset and, because of its applicability to impairment, the indicator of impairment.

7.60 Value in use for cash-generating assets is complex and subjective, as it requires the projection of cash flows from an entity perspective. Further complexity arises where assets are deployed in combination with other assets. In such cases, value in use can be estimated only by calculating the present value of the cash flows of a group of assets, rather than on an individual basis. Allocations are then made to individual assets. Such allocations may be arbitrary, thereby having an adverse impact on faithful representation.

7.61 Value in use for non-cash-generating assets is also complex, as it requires entity-specific estimates of an asset's remaining service potential.

7.62 Paragraph 7.36 discusses the situation where an asset is used for service provision and also generates economic benefits, noting that an entity that is using the current value model makes a judgment whether an asset is primarily held for operational capacity or financial capacity, and selects the current operational value measurement basis or the fair value measurement basis accordingly. This factor and the complexity and subjectivity discussed above mean that value in use in both a cash-generating and non-cash-generating context is likely to be applicable only to accounting for losses or reversals of losses related to impairment.

Measurement Bases for Liabilities

7.63 This section discusses the measurement bases for liabilities. This section does not repeat all the discussion in the section on assets. It considers the following measurement bases:

- Historical cost;
- Cost of fulfillment; and
- Fair value.

Historical Cost

7.64 Historical cost for a liability is:

The consideration received to assume an obligation minus transaction costs, at the time the liability is incurred.

7.65 Consideration is the cash or cash equivalents, or the value of other consideration given. Under the historical cost model initial measures are adjusted by using a technique to reflect factors such as the accrual of interest, the accretion of a discount or amortization of a premium.

7.66 Where the time value of a liability is material-for example, where the length of time before settlement falls due is significant-the amount of the future payment is discounted so that, at the time a liability is initially measured, it represents the value of the amount received. The difference between the amount of the future payment and the present value of the liability is amortized over the life of the liability, so that the liability is stated at the amount of the required payment when it falls due.

7.67 Historical cost is appropriate where liabilities are likely to be settled at stated terms. However, historical cost cannot be applied for liabilities that do not arise from a transaction, such as a liability to pay damages for a tort or civil damages. It is unlikely to provide relevant information where the liability has been incurred in a non-exchange transaction, because it does not provide a faithful representation of the claims against the resources of the entity. It is also difficult to apply historical cost to liabilities that may vary in amount, such as those related to defined benefit pension liabilities.

Cost of Fulfillment

7.68 Cost of fulfillment is:

The costs that the entity will incur in fulfilling the obligations represented by the liability, assuming that it does so in the least costly manner at the measurement date.

7.69 Where the cost of fulfillment depends on uncertain future events, all possible outcomes are taken into account to estimate cost of fulfillment, which aims to reflect all those possible outcomes in an unbiased manner.

7.70 Where fulfillment requires work to be done-for example, where the liability is to rectify environmental damage-the relevant costs are those that the entity will incur. This may be the cost to the entity of doing the remedial work itself, or of contracting with an external party to carry out the work. However, the costs of contracting with an external party are only relevant where employing a contractor is the least costly way of fulfilling the obligation.

7.71 Where fulfillment will be made by the entity itself, the cost of fulfillment does not include any surplus, because any such surplus does not represent a use of the entity's resources. Where the cost of fulfillment is based on the cost of employing a contractor, the amount will implicitly include the profit required by the contractor, as the total amount charged by the contractor will be a claim on the entity's resources.

7.72 Where fulfillment will not take place for an extended period, the cash flows need to be discounted to reflect the value of the liability at the measurement date.

7.73 Cost of fulfillment is generally relevant for measuring liabilities except in circumstances where the entity can obtain release from an obligation at an amount lower than the cost of fulfillment.

Fair Value

7.74 Fair value for a liability is:

The price that would be paid to transfer a liability in an orderly transaction between market participants at the measurement date.

7.75 Fair value may be appropriate, for example, where the liability is attributable to changes in a specified rate, price or index quoted in an orderly market. However, in cases where the ability to transfer a liability is restricted and the terms on which such a transfer might be made are unclear, the case for fair value is weaker. This is particularly the case for liabilities arising from obligations in non-exchange transactions because it is unlikely that there will be an orderly market for such liabilities.

Basis for Conclusions

This Basis for Conclusions accompanies, but is not part of, the Conceptual Framework.

Background to the Development of the Conceptual Framework and its Updating

BC7.1 The *Conceptual Framework for General Purpose Financial Reporting by Public Sector Entities* (The Conceptual Framework) was approved in September 2014. The development of the Conceptual Framework included a number of consultation papers and exposure drafts. On approval the IPSASB did not commit to a review of the Conceptual Framework within a specified timeframe. Although views were expressed that the Conceptual Framework should be a "living document" subject to regular updates, there was a broader view that it should be allowed to "bed down" for a significant period. Over-frequent amendments to the Conceptual Framework could also undermine the accountability that it imposes on the IPSASB in explaining approaches developed at the standards level.

BC7.2 In 2018, after having applied the 2014 Conceptual Framework in standards development for over three years, the IPSASB considered that a limited review of certain aspects of the Conceptual Framework would be appropriate. The IPSASB's project on Measurement was a principal factor. In addition, the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB) was about to issue its finalized Conceptual Framework with post-2014 developments on measurement of potential relevance to the public sector. The IPSASB therefore proposed a Limited-scope Update project in the consultation on its Strategy and Work Plan in 2018. The proposed project received significant support from respondents for the reasons outlined by the IPSASB. The IPSASB initiated the project in March 2020. Exposure Draft (ED) 76, *Conceptual Framework Update: Chapter 7, Measurement of Assets and Liabilities in Financial Statements*, was issued in April 2021. The IPSASB considered the points raised by respondents to the exposure draft in finalizing the revised Chapter 7. The revised Chapter 7 became applicable when approved.

BC7.3 The IPSASB decided that the initial focus of the 2014 Conceptual Framework should be on measurement of the elements for the financial statements in order to put future standard setting activities for the financial statements on a sound and transparent footing. While a few respondents to the Consultation Paper, *Measurement of Assets and Liabilities in Financial Statements* in 2010 (the 2010 Consultation Paper), questioned this approach, the IPSASB considered that the original rationale for restricting the scope of this phase was sound and reaffirmed it. The Limited-scope Update project initiated in 2020 did not reopen this issue and continued to focus on the financial statements.

The Objective of Measurement

BC7.4 In developing the 2014 Conceptual Framework the IPSASB considered whether a specific measurement objective should be developed. The IPSASB initially took the view that a separate measurement objective was unnecessary because a measurement objective might compete with, rather than complement, the objectives of financial reporting and the qualitative characteristics of financial reporting. Accordingly, the 2013 Exposure Draft, *Measurement* of Assets and Liabilities in Financial Statements (the 2013 Exposure Draft), proposed factors relevant to the selection of a measurement basis consistent with the objectives of financial reporting and the qualitative characteristics but did not include a measurement objective.

BC7.5 Consistent with this approach the 2013 Exposure Draft proposed that the Conceptual Framework would not seek to identify a single measurement basis (or combination of bases) for all circumstances. The IPSASB acknowledged that proposing a single measurement basis to be used in all circumstances would clarify the relationship between different amounts reported in the financial statements-in particular, it would allow the amounts of different assets and liabilities to be aggregated to provide meaningful totals. However, the IPSASB is of the view that there is no single measurement basis that will maximize the extent to which financial statements meet the objectives of financial reporting and achieve the qualitative characteristics.

BC7.6 The 2013 Exposure Draft included an Alternative View which proposed a measurement objective on the grounds that a Conceptual Framework that does not connect the objective of measurement with the objectives of financial reporting is incomplete and would limit the ability of the IPSASB to make consistent decisions about measurement across financial reporting standards and over time. Further, in the absence of a measurement objective, the Alternative View considered that there is a risk that different and/or inappropriate measurement bases could be used to measure similar classes of assets and liabilities. The Alternative View proposed the following measurement objective:

To select those measurement attributes that most fairly reflect the financial capacity, operational capacity, and cost of services of the entity in a manner that is useful in holding the entity to account, and for decision-making purposes.

BC7.7 Many respondents, while generally in favor of the approach in the 2013 Exposure Draft, supported the Alternative View. The IPSASB also acknowledged the view that the Conceptual Framework's approach to measurement should be aspirational and that the Conceptual Framework should identify a single measurement model or measurement basis underpinned by an ideal concept of capital[10]. The IPSASB accepts that a concept of capital related to operating capability is relevant and could be developed for public sector entities with a primary objective of delivering services. However, adoption of such a measurement objective involves a virtually explicit acknowledgement that current cost measures are superior to historical cost measures in representing operational capacity when financial position is reported. For the reasons discussed in paragraphs BC7.25–BC7.27, the IPSASB considers that historical cost measures often meet the measurement objective and therefore should be given appropriate emphasis in the Conceptual Framework.

BC7.8 Subsequently, the IPSASB was persuaded by the views of those who argued that a measurement objective is necessary in order to guide standard-level decisions on the selection of measurement bases. However, the IPSASB noted that assets and liabilities contribute to the financial performance and financial position of entities in different ways and that such an assessment should be based on the extent to which they contribute to operational capacity and financial capacity. The IPSASB concluded that linking a measurement objective to an ideal concept of capital might unduly restrict the choice of measurement bases. The IPSASB therefore rejected the view that adoption of the measurement objective should be based on an ideal concept of capital and reaffirmed its view that a mixed measurement approach is appropriate for standard setting in the public sector.

BC7.9 The IPSASB considered whether the measurement objective proposed in the Alternative View was appropriate. Some respondents argued that the proposed measurement objective was too aligned to current value measures. However, the IPSASB formed a view that the reference to "cost of services" provides a sufficient link to historical cost, because the cost of services can be determined using both historical cost and current value measures. The IPSASB therefore adopted the following measurement objective with only a minor modification from that proposed in the Alternative View:

To select those measurement bases that most fairly reflect the cost of services, operational capacity, and financial capacity of the entity in a manner that is useful in holding the entity to account, and for decision-making purposes.

BC7.10 The IPSASB also noted that the disadvantages of using different measurement bases may be minimized by:

- Selecting different measurement bases only where this is justified by economic circumstances, thereby ensuring that assets and liabilities are reported on the same basis where circumstances are similar; and
- Requiring transparent presentation and disclosure to ensure that the measurement bases used, and the amounts reported on each basis are clear.

BC7.11 The IPSASB reaffirmed the need for a measurement objective and the existing wording during the Limited-scope Update project.

Initial Measurement

BC7.12 Some respondents to ED 76 expressed a view that the IPSASB had not distinguished measurement at recognition (initial measurement) from measurement subsequent to recognition (subsequent measurement). The IPSASB therefore decided to insert a sub-section dealing with initial measurement. This clarifies that initial measurement is at transaction price unless no transaction price data are

[10] Such concepts of capital include invested money capital, current cash equivalents and physical capital.

available or there is another more representationally faithful measurement basis. In such a case, a deemed cost is used on which requirements and guidance are provided at the standards level.

BC7.13 Historical cost is the transaction price plus transaction costs for an asset or minus transaction costs for a liability. Transaction costs can be significant, and their omission might impair the usefulness of the financial statements. The IPSASB considered the correct approach for transaction costs for a liability. The IPSASB agreed that deducting transaction costs from the transaction price is appropriate as it reflects the economics of the liability. For example, an entity borrows 1,000,000 CU of which transaction costs amount to 100,000 CU. The historical cost is 900,000 CU. This is because immediately after receiving the 1,000,000 CU, the transaction costs of 100,000 CU are repaid to the counterparty, leaving the entity with 900,000 CU. The transaction costs of 100,000 CU are included in the interest expense over the term of the instrument as the carrying amount of 900,000 CU is accreted to 1,000,000 CU on the settlement date.

The Subsequent Measurement Framework

BC7.14 Chapter 7 of the 2014 Conceptual Framework did not explicitly identify measurement levels. The IASB's 2018 *Conceptual Framework for Financial Reporting* distinguishes three measurement levels:

(a) Measures or Categories of Measurement Bases (the latter term is used in the IASB's Basis for Conclusions);

(b) Measurement Bases; and

(c) Measurement Techniques.

BC7.15 The IPSASB considered that distinguishing different levels, and building on the IASB's approach, would provide an analytical framework to inform the development of measurement requirements and guidance. As the distinction between measures and measurement bases might be ambiguous, the following three levels were adopted for ED 76 and ED 77, *Measurement:*

(a) **Measurement Models:** broad approaches for measuring assets and liabilities for inclusion in the financial statements.

(b) **Measurement Bases**: specific ways of measuring assets and liabilities that provide the information that best meets the qualitative characteristics under the selected measurement model.

(c) **Measurement Techniques**: methods to estimate the amount at which an asset or liability is measured under the selected measurement basis.

BC7.16 In identifying measurement models and measurement bases, the IPSASB reaffirmed the view in the 2014 Conceptual Framework that there is not a single measurement basis that best meets the measurement objective. Consistent with this view, the IPSASB concluded there is not one measurement model that best meets the measurement objective. Consequently, the IPSASB identified the historical cost model as one of the two models. and retained historical cost as a measurement basis for both assets and liabilities.

BC7.17 Some respondents to ED 76 challenged the term "Measurement Hierarchy" because hierarchy implies a prioritization of measurement models, measurement bases and measurement techniques. It was not the IPSASB's intention to imply such a prioritization. The IPSASB therefore decided to rename the "Measurement Hierarchy" as the "Subsequent Measurement Framework". This change also emphasized that the Conceptual Framework refers to subsequent measurement rather than initial measurement.

BC7.18 The IPSASB considered whether to identify and discuss measurement techniques in the Conceptual Framework. The IPSASB concluded that a detailed analysis of measurement techniques is not appropriate for the Conceptual Framework and that guidance should be provided at the standards level. Therefore, in its discussion of the Subsequent Measurement Framework, the Conceptual Framework explains that measurement techniques are needed to operationalize current value measurement bases. However, the Conceptual Framework does not identify or analyze specific techniques. Guidance on measurement techniques is provided at the standards level.

Entity-Specific and Non-Entity-Specific Values, Observability in a Market, Entry and Exit Values

BC7.19 The 2014 Conceptual Framework classified measurement bases as: (i) entity-specific or non- entity-specific, (ii) whether they provide information that is observable in an orderly market; and (iii) whether they provide entry or exit values. The IPSASB considered that the distinction between entity-specific and non-entity-specific measurement bases and the relationship with the measurement objective and qualitative characteristics is meaningful. It indicates whether measurement bases reflect the expectations of market participants and impacts the selection of a measurement basis.

BC7.20 The IPSASB decided that the characteristic of observability in a market is relevant to the selection of a measurement technique once a measurement basis has been selected, rather than directly to the measurement basis itself. Consistent with the conclusion in paragraph BC7.18 that detailed guidance on measurement techniques is more appropriately addressed at the standards level, the IPSASB decided not to retain a discussion of observability in a market in the Conceptual Framework, but to refer to the "availability of observable data" as an example of a factor in the selection of a measurement technique.

BC7.21 For assets, entry values reflect the cost of acquisition, construction, or development. Exit values are based on the economic benefits from sale. For liabilities, entry values usually reflect the amount at which a liability is incurred and exit values reflect the amount required to fulfill or transfer a liability. In rarer cases, entry values reflect the amount at which a liability is assumed and exit values reflect the amount to release an entity from an obligation.

BC7.22 IPSASB is of the view that the key factor in the selection of a current value measurement basis is the measurement objective; in particular, whether an asset is primarily held for its operational or financial capacity and the characteristics of a liability. The IPSASB concluded that the distinction between entry and exit values is useful in deciding whether a measure includes transaction costs, and, if so, whether on the acquisition or sale of an asset or incurrence or settlement of a liability. The Conceptual Framework therefore includes a high-level discussion on entry and exit values but does not provide a tabular classification of specific measurement bases as entry or exit.

Approach to Identifying Measurement Bases Addressed in the Conceptual Framework

BC7.23 In revising Chapter 7 the IPSASB identified two approaches to the identification of, and guidance on, measurement bases. The first approach would provide guidance on a large number of measurement bases regardless of whether they are used in current standards-level literature or whether it is likely that that they will be used in the development of future standards. The second approach would focus on the most commonly used measurement bases.

BC7.24 In ED 76 the IPSASB decided to adopt the second approach as it considered that this approach is more helpful for the IPSASB in its standards development and for preparers of financial statements in determining accounting policies for transactions and events for which there are no standards-level requirements and guidance. The IPSASB reconsidered this approach in the light of the views by some respondents to ED 76 who advocated the broader approach. The IPSASB acknowledged the case for providing guidance on a more comprehensive range of measurement bases but concluded that the benefits of a more concise approach outweighed any disadvantages. In particular, the IPSASB concluded that the inclusion of measurement bases that might be rarely, and in some cases, never used at the standards level could be confusing to users. The IPSASB also acknowledged that the fact that a measurement basis is not discussed in Chapter 7 does not preclude its adoption at the standards level. In such cases the reason for adoption of such a measurement basis will be explained in the Basis for Conclusions of the standard.

Measurement Bases for Assets

Historical Cost

BC7.25 Historical cost is a measurement basis applied in many jurisdictions. Many respondents to the Consultation Paper and the Exposure Draft that preceded the 2014 version of the Conceptual Framework advocated the continued widespread use of historical cost as a measurement basis, mostly in combination with other measurement bases. They supported this view by reference to the accountability objective and the understandability and verifiability of historical cost information. They also noted that, because historical cost is widely adopted in combination with other measurement bases, its continued use avoids the implementation costs that would arise if a future revision of a current standard that requires or permits historical cost were to require the use of a different measurement basis.

BC7.26 Some respondents considered that historical cost information provides a highly relevant basis for the reporting of the cost of services because the link between historical cost and the transactions actually undertaken by the entity is important for an assessment of accountability. In particular, historical cost provides information that resource providers can use to assess the fairness of the taxes they have been assessed, or how the resources that they have otherwise contributed in a reporting period have been used.

BC7.27 The IPSASB agreed that, in many contexts, it is relevant to provide information on the transactions actually carried out by the entity and accepted that users are interested in the cost of services based on actual transactions. Historical cost provides information on how much services actually cost in the reporting period, rather than how much they will cost in the future; pricing decisions based on historical cost information may promote fairness to consumers of services.

BC7.28 The IPSASB also acknowledged the views of those who consider that the use of historical cost facilitates a comparison of actual financial results with the approved budget. The IPSASB accepts that budgets may often be prepared on a historical cost basis and that, where this is the case, historical cost enhances comparison against budget.

BC7.29 The IPSASB also acknowledged a contrary view: that assessing and reporting the cost of providing services in terms of the value that has been sacrificed in order to provide those services provides useful information for both accountability and decision-making purposes. As historical cost does not reflect the value of assets at the time they are consumed, it does not provide information on that value in circumstances where the effect of price changes is significant. The IPSASB concluded that it is important that the Conceptual Framework responds to both these contrasting perspectives.

BC7.30 In finalizing the revised Chapter 7 the IPSASB reviewed the wording of the definition of historical cost. The IPSASB decided that the definition could be simplified and clarified by:

(a) Adding "construct" to "acquire and develop" and "construction" to "acquisition and development", as construction is a way of creating an asset;

(b) Removing the phrase "which is the cash or cash equivalents, or other consideration given" because it is unnecessary; and

(c) Including "transaction costs" as a component of the definition and providing a description of "transaction costs". This is because the IPSASB was persuaded by the argument that, for many transactions, transaction costs are a significant component of the amount of initial measurement.

Current Operational Value

BC7.31 The 2014 Conceptual Framework included replacement cost as a current value measurement basis, envisaging that it would be appropriate for specialized assets. As noted in paragraph BC7.39 the IPSASB adopted the IASB's exit-based definition of fair value in the updated Conceptual Framework. The cost approach, a measurement technique for fair value in IFRS 13, *Fair Value Measurement*, has some similarities to replacement cost. These inter-related factors necessitated the development of a measurement basis that can be applied to assets held primarily for operational capacity.

BC7.32 The IASB's 2018 Conceptual Framework included current cost as a measurement basis for both assets and liabilities. The IPSASB considered whether current cost should be adopted as a current value measurement basis for assets that are primarily held for operational capacity (see paragraph BC7.100 for a discussion of current cost for liabilities). The IPSASB formed a view that a measurement basis similar to current cost is relevant in a public sector context, potentially for specialized and non-specialized assets held for operational capacity. However, rather than the cost of an equivalent asset in the IASB's definition of current cost, the IPSASB formed a view such a measurement basis should reflect an asset's value in its existing use. The IPSASB decided to use the term 'current operational value' for this measurement basis.

BC7.33 Current operational value was developed for assets primarily held for their operational capacity. For non-specialized assets, it can be supported by market-based measurement techniques with similarities to market value. For more specialized assets, measurement techniques to determine the value of the asset may be applied. ED 76 therefore proposed current operational value as a measurement basis for assets primarily held for operational capacity with the following definition:

The value of an asset used to achieve the entity's service delivery objectives at the measurement date.

BC7.34 ED 76 also included an alternative view (AV). The main points of the AV were that:

- The definition was unclear mainly because of the ambiguity of the word 'value';
- The lack of clarity in the definition risked not achieving the qualitative characteristics of financial reporting; and
- The definition should have focused on the cost of replacing an asset used for its service potential.

BC7.35 The AV proposed the following definition:

The cost to replace the service potential embodied in an asset at the measurement date.

BC7.36 Most respondents to ED 76 supported the view that fair value is inappropriate for assets that are primarily held for their operational capacity and therefore that a public sector specific current value for assets should be developed. Some respondents shared the view of the AV that the proposed definition was unclear. Other respondents considered that the rationale for current operational value should be clearer.

BC7.37 The IPSASB responded to these points by adopting a definition which focuses on both an asset and the service potential of an asset:

The amount the entity would pay for the remaining service potential of an asset at the measurement date.

BC7.38 Guidance clarifies the assumptions that underpin current operational value. These assumptions are stated in paragraph 7.38. They indicate that measurement under current operational value estimates the amount an entity would pay for the remaining service potential of an asset in the least costly manner. Current operational value is based on the asset in its existing use and in its existing location.

Fair Value

BC7.39 Shortly before the 2014 Conceptual Framework was finalized the IASB approved IFRS 13. IFRS 13 adopted an explicitly exit-based definition of fair value. This differed from the definition of fair value in the IPSASB's literature, which was aligned with the pre-IFRS 13 definition of fair value. The IPSASB decided to rename its fair value definition as "market value". The aim was to avoid two global standard setters using the term "fair value" with different definitions in future standards development. Unlike the revised IASB definition of fair value, market value could be appropriate for non-specialized physical assets held for operational capacity as well as assets held for financial capacity. Since 2014, the IPSASB's standards-level work, especially that on financial instruments, had led the IPSASB to conclude that a non-entity-specific current value measurement basis is necessary for both assets and liabilities. This view was reflected in IPSAS 41, *Financial Instruments*, and in the illustrative exposure draft in Consultation Paper, *Measurement*.

BC7.40 Therefore, the updated measurement chapter therefore includes fair value for both assets and liabilities, based on the IASB's exit-based definition of fair value. Because of its exit-based nature and the assumptions that underpin it, the IPSASB concluded that fair value is inappropriate for assets primarily held for their operational capacity. The IPSASB is aware that fair value has been adopted in some jurisdictions as a current value measurement for such assets and has been adapted for these assets by, for example, reinterpreting the "highest and best use" principle. The IPSASB concluded that such adaptations would mean losing consistency with the IASB's guidance.

Measurement Bases and Approaches for Assets not included in the Updated Conceptual Framework

BC7.41 The following measurement bases and approaches for assets in the 2014 Conceptual Framework have not been included in the updated version:

- Market value;
- Replacement cost; and

- Net selling price.

BC7.42 Value in use was included as a measurement basis in the 2014 Conceptual Framework. It has not been included as a measurement basis in the updated Conceptual Framework, which includes a general discussion of value in use.

BC7.43 The following measurement bases were considered for inclusion in the 2014 Conceptual Framework but rejected:

- Symbolic value;
- Synergistic value; and
- Equitable value.

BC7.44 The IPSASB did not further consider these measurement bases in the Limited-scope Update project to revise Chapter 7.

BC7.45 In developing the 2014 Conceptual Framework the IPSASB also considered and rejected the deprival value model, which is an approach to select a measurement basis, rather than a measurement basis in its own right.

Market Value

BC7.46 Market value for assets was defined in the 2014 Conceptual Framework as:

The amount for which an asset could be exchanged between knowledgeable, willing parties in an arm's length transaction.

BC7.47 In light of the decision to include fair value and current operational value as measurement bases under the current value model, the IPSASB considered whether it was necessary to retain market value as a measurement basis for assets. The IPSASB considered that fair value is the current value measurement basis that best meets the measurement objective where assets are held for financial capacity and for determining the amount of a liability that can be transferred to a third party under current market conditions. Current operational value is the current value measurement basis that best meets the measurement objective where assets are held for operational capacity, because it does not include a "highest and best use" market- based assumption, and, as an entity-specific measurement basis, it does not reflect the expectations of market participants. The IPSASB therefore concluded that it was not necessary to retain market value as a measurement basis. Market-based techniques can be used to operationalize the fair value and current operational value measurement bases. Guidance on these techniques is provided at the standards level.

BC7.48 The large majority of respondents to ED 76 supported the IPSASB's reasons for the non- retention of market value. The IPSASB confirmed that market value should not be included in the revised Chapter 7.

Replacement Cost

BC7.49 Replacement cost was defined in the 2014 Conceptual Framework, as:

The most economic cost required for the entity to replace the service potential of an asset (including the amount that the entity will receive from its disposal at the end of its useful life) at the reporting date.

BC7.50 In light of the decision to include current operational value as the most appropriate current value measurement basis for operational assets, the IPSASB considered whether it was necessary to retain replacement cost as a measurement basis. The IPSASB considered that the rationale for including replacement cost as a measurement basis in the 2014 Conceptual Framework was convincing, in particular that an appropriate measurement basis for specialized assets should provide information on the cost of the service potential that is attributable to the asset. As noted above, current operational value is a measurement basis that can be applied to both specialized and non-specialized assets. Measurement techniques can be selected appropriate to the nature of the asset.

BC7.51 Most respondents to ED 76 supported the non-retention of replacement cost. Those who opposed or expressed reservations about the change considered that it had been insufficiently explained or that current operational value had not been adequately developed in ED 76. Both of these reservations were addressed in the finalized Chapter 7.

BC7.52 The IPSASB acknowledged these points, which were taken into account in the development and finalization of current operational value (see paragraphs BC7.31–BC 7.38). There was also a view that fair value is appropriate for non-operational assets. As noted in paragraph BC7.40 the IPSASB confirmed its view that fair value is inappropriate for assets primarily held for their operational capacity and that there should be a public sector specific current value measurement basis for such assets.

BC7.53 Some of the respondents who supported the approach proposed in ED 76, explicitly acknowledged the IPSASB's view that replacement cost would duplicate the new measurement basis and its retention would be confusing. At the standards level, the cost approach, which reflects aspects of replacement cost, is also being brought into both current operational value and fair value as a measurement technique at the standards level. The IPSASB therefore confirmed its view that replacement cost should not be included in the updated Chapter 7.

Net Selling Price

BC7.54 Net selling price is an entity-specific measurement basis that was defined in the 2014 Conceptual Framework as:

The amount that the entity can obtain from sale of the asset, after deducting the costs of sale.

BC7.55 In its project on non-current assets and discontinued operations, the IPSASB considered whether net selling price should be included as an alternative measure to fair value less costs to sell in determining the recoverable amount of assets held for sale where a sale is on negotiated rather than market terms. The IPSASB rejected inclusion of net selling price, largely on accountability grounds, concluding that fair value is more appropriate for the determination of the recoverable amount of an asset, as it generally meets the qualitative characteristics of financial reporting better than net selling price.

BC7.56 The IPSASB considered the case for an entity-specific, current value measurement basis for assets, as an alternative to fair value where there is not an orderly market, such as a distressed or negotiated sale. In some jurisdictions events such as financial crises and pandemics have increased the likelihood of such sales. Sale prices will be affected by the impact of such events on general market conditions and therefore reflected in fair value measurements. Aside from general price effects, when sale price is estimated at below fair value it is important that the impact of such a decision on an entity's financial position and financial performance is made fully transparent by disclosing the extent of the losses likely to be made on sale. This can be achieved by showing the difference between an asset's fair value and the sale price. The IPSASB therefore concluded that, in light of the limited information provided by net selling price, its retention in the IPSASB Conceptual Framework was unnecessary.

BC7.57 Following comments from respondents to ED 76, the IPSASB further analyzed the case for and against retention of net selling price. The IPSASB noted that:

- Net selling price is not defined in the IASB's 2018 Conceptual Framework.
- Net realizable value is used in IPSAS 12, Inventories. However, despite superficially similar terminology, net realizable value, which is not included in the IASB's 2018 Conceptual Framework, is much closer to the IASB's current definition of fair value than net selling price.

BC7.58 The IPSASB concluded that the case for retention of net selling price is not persuasive and confirmed that it should not be included in a revised Chapter 7.

Value in Use

BC7.59 Value in use was defined in the 2014 Conceptual Framework as:

The present value to the entity of the asset's remaining service potential or ability to generate economic benefits if it continues to be used, and of the net amount that the entity will receive from its disposal at the end of its useful life.

BC7.60 The IPSASB considered whether to retain value in use as a current value measurement basis for assets in the Conceptual Framework.

BC7.61 The IPSASB noted that the definition of value in use in the 2014 Conceptual Framework was not consistent with that in the IASB's Conceptual Framework, because it is not limited to the cash-generating context and includes a reference to "service potential". Since approval of the Conceptual Framework the IPSASB has placed increased emphasis on the consistent use of terminology and definitions by global standard setters.

BC7.62 The IPSASB acknowledged the importance of value in use in assessments of impairment losses (including reversal of impairment losses or impairment gains). The IPSASB also noted that value is use requires complex and subjective projections of cash flows generated by an asset, or of the service potential provided by an asset. Complexity increases where assets generate cash flows in combination with other assets.

BC7.63 The IPSASB further acknowledged that some assets both generate cash flows and are used in the delivery of services. In such circumstances the IPSASB reaffirmed that, for financial reporting purposes, preparers of financial statements need to make a professional judgment of the primary purpose for which an asset is held. Under the current value model, where assets are primarily held for operational capacity, current operational value is applied; where assets are primarily held for financial capacity fair value is applied. The continued applicability of value in use is therefore likely to be limited to impairment.

BC7.64 In light of the above factors, the IPSASB decided to replace the definition of value in use with a limited discussion in the proposed updated Chapter 7 in ED 76.

BC7.65 Most respondents to ED 76 supported the IPSASB's proposed revised approach. Respondents who opposed the IPSASB's proposal to reduce the number of measurement bases discussed in the Conceptual Framework (see paragraphs BC7.23 and BC7.24) advocated retention on the grounds that value in use should be available to the IPSASB and preparers of financial statements for transactions and events apart from impairment. No examples of such circumstances were provided.

BC7.66 Conversely, it was suggested that value in use should not be addressed in the Conceptual Framework because its applicability is limited to impairment and that guidance should be limited to the standards level.

BC7.67 The IPSASB concluded that, while its wider future application cannot be ruled out, value in use's relevance is likely to be limited to impairment. The IPSASB also concluded that the importance of value in use to impairment justifies the inclusion of guidance in the Conceptual Framework. The IPSASB therefore decided to retain the approach in ED 76.

BC7.68 Some respondents suggested that the IPSASB should clarify the differences between value in use and current operational value. The IPSASB noted that value in use is an exit value and therefore includes the proceeds of sale as a component of the measure. Current operational value is an entry value and therefore does not include the proceeds of sale. As the public sector entities for which the IPSASB develops standards hold most assets for service delivery this analysis reinforced the IPSASB's view that these assets are likely to be measured at current operational value.

Symbolic Values

BC7.69 In some jurisdictions, certain assets are recognized on the statement of financial position at symbolic values, typically one unit of the presentation currency. This treatment is adopted in order to recognize assets on the face of the statement of financial position when it is difficult to obtain a valuation. Supporters of symbolic values consider that they provide useful information to users of financial statements and facilitate a linkage between asset management and accounting processes.

BC7.70 The IPSASB acknowledged that such an approach is intended to provide useful information. However, in the development of the 2014 Conceptual Framework, the majority of IPSASB members took the view that symbolic values do not meet the measurement objective, because they do not provide relevant information on financial capacity, operational capacity, or the cost of services. The majority of the IPSASB concluded that the decision whether to recognize an item as an asset should be made following an assessment of whether the item meets the definition of an asset and recognition criteria in *Chapter 5, Elements in Financial Statements*, and Chapter 6, *Recognition in Financial Statements*. The IPSASB did not further consider the issue of symbolic values in the Limited Scope Update project.

Equitable Value and Synergistic Value

BC7.71 The IPSASB considers that the development of conceptual and standards-level projects evaluates the requirements and guidance in International Valuation Standards (IVS) and Government Finance Statistics. In its Limited Scope Update project, the IPSASB evaluated two concepts in IVS as potential measurement bases in the Conceptual Framework-equitable value and synergistic value.

BC7.72 IVS defines equitable value as the estimated price for the transfer of an asset or liability between identified knowledgeable and willing parties that reflects the respective interests of those parties.

BC7.73 IVS defines synergistic value as the result of a combination of two or more assets or interests where the combined value is more than the sum of the separate values.

BC7.74 Equitable value has similarities to net selling price and synergistic value relates to unit of account. The IPSASB considered net selling price in the Limited Scope Update project and decided not to retain this measurement basis (see above paragraphs BC7.54–BC7.58). The IPSASB therefore concluded that including equitable value and synergistic value as specific measurement bases in the Conceptual Framework was unnecessary. The IPSASB did not further consider equitable value and synergistic value in the Limited Scope Update project.

Deprival Value Model

BC7.75 The 2011 Conceptual Framework Consultation Paper, *Measurement of Assets and Liabilities in Financial Statements*, discussed the deprival value model as a rationale for selecting a current value measurement basis. Some respondents expressed reservations-in particular that the model would be costly and impose a disproportionate burden on preparers of financial statements to have to consider a number of possible measurement bases for each asset that is reported. A number of respondents also considered that it is overly complex. A view was also expressed that the deprival value model unduly exaggerates the qualitative characteristic of relevance and neglects the other qualitative characteristics.

BC7.76 Although the IPSASB recognized that the deprival value model has been adopted successfully in some jurisdictions, the IPSASB acknowledged such reservations in whole or part. The IPSASB therefore included the deprival value model in the 2013 Conceptual Framework Exposure Draft, *Measurement of Assets and Liabilities in Financial Statements.* That Exposure Draft proposed the deprival value model as an optional method of choosing between replacement cost, net selling price, and value in use where it had been decided to use a current measurement basis, but the appropriate basis could not be identified by reference to the objectives of financial reporting and the qualitative characteristics.

BC7.77 While a minority of respondents to the 2013 Conceptual Framework Exposure Draft were highly supportive of the deprival value model, many respondents continued to express reservations about the model's complexity. The IPSASB also acknowledged a technical ambiguity in the deprival value model-if net selling price is higher than replacement cost a development opportunity might be indicated and that users should be provided with this information, which the deprival value model would not do. Due to these factors the IPSASB decided not to include the deprival value model in the Conceptual Framework. The IPSASB did not further consider the deprival value model in the Limited-scope Update project.

Measurement Basis for Liabilities in the Updated Conceptual Framework

Fair Value

BC7.78 Paragraphs BC7.39 and BC7.40 discuss the inclusion of fair value for assets in the updated Conceptual Framework. Consistent with the analysis for assets the IPSASB decided that fair value is an appropriate measurement basis for many liabilities depending on their characteristics. The updated measurement chapter therefore includes fair value as a measurement basis for liabilities.

Cost of Fulfillment

BC7.79 The 2014 Conceptual Framework defined cost of fulfillment as:

The costs that the entity will incur in fulfilling the obligations represented by the liability, assuming that it does so in the least costly manner.

BC7.80 In its 2018 Framework the IASB included fulfilment[11] value defined as:

The present value of the cash, or other economic resources, that an entity expects to be obliged to transfer as it fulfils a liability.

BC7.81 In light of this development, the IPSASB considered whether to (a) adopt the term 'fulfillment value' rather than cost of fulfillment while retaining the original definition of cost of fulfillment (b) adopt the term 'fulfillment value' and the definition in the IASB Framework; or (c) follow another approach.

BC7.82 A number of respondents to the IPSASB's 2019 Consultation Paper, Measurement, pointed out that fulfillment value reflects a risk premium, whereas cost of fulfillment is silent on risk premia. A risk premium, which is also known as a risk margin or risk adjustment, is the price for bearing the uncertainty inherent in the cash flows. The IPSASB concluded that using the term 'fulfillment value' with a definition different to that of the IASB was inappropriate. The IPSASB also decided that the inclusion of a risk premium should be determined at the standards level.

BC7.83 The IPSASB concluded that the existing definition of cost of fulfillment should be retained in ED 76. The IPSASB acknowledged that the term itself is similar to fulfillment value but concluded that provided it is clear that cost of fulfillment does not imply inclusion of a risk premium the term should be retained with its existing definition rather than adopting a new term such as 'cost of settlement'.

BC7.84 The IPSASB also considered whether the definition should retain the assumption that the obligations represented by the liability are fulfilled in the least costly manner. The IPSASB acknowledged that there may be circumstances where, for transparent public policy reasons, liabilities may not be fulfilled in the least costly manner. However, the IPSASB took the view that, from an accountability perspective, the assumption should be retained and concluded that the definition of cost of fulfillment should not be modified. It is possible that there may be cases where a reporting entity decides to fulfill an obligation in a manner that is not the least costly. In such circumstances it is important that for accountability purposes this is disclosed.

BC7.85 There was strong support for cost of fulfillment by respondents to ED 76. Consultation on ED 76 did not identify issues previously unconsidered by the IPSASB. The IPSASB therefore confirmed the retention of cost of fulfillment.

Measurement Bases for Liabilities not included in Updated Conceptual Framework

BC7.86 The following measurement bases and approaches for liabilities in the 2014 version of the Conceptual Framework have not been included in the updated version:

- Market value;
- Assumption price; and
- Cost of release.

Market Value

BC7.87 Market value for liabilities was defined in the 2014 version of the Conceptual Framework as:

The amount for which a liability could be settled between knowledgeable, willing parties in an arm's length transaction.

BC7.88 In light of the inclusion of fair value the IPSASB concluded that the retention of market value was unnecessary, as it would overlap with fair value and its inclusion would be confusing.

BC7.89 Following consultation on ED 76 the IPSASB confirmed that there was no case for retaining market value.

Assumption price

BC7.90 Assumption price was defined in the 2014 Conceptual Framework as:

[11] The IPSASB uses the word 'fulfillment'. The IASB uses the word 'fulfilment'. This reflects usage respectively in North America and the United Kingdom. Hereafter the word 'fulfillment' is used.

The amount which the entity would rationally be willing to accept in exchange for assuming an existing liability.

BC7.91 Assumption price is an entity-specific measurement basis included in the 2014 Conceptual Framework. It has not been used in the IPSASB literature at the standards level as of 2021. It has some similarities to current cost for liabilities, as defined by the IASB in its 2018 Conceptual Framework, but refers to a liability of a counterparty, rather than a liability of the reporting entity.

BC7.92 The IPSASB assessed the case for retention of assumption price. The inclusion of assumption price (along with cost of release discussed in paragraphs BC7.96–BC7.100) was on the grounds that there may be limited circumstances where it might meet the measurement objective, for example in the case that a government takes on liabilities at concessionary rates.

BC7.93 The IPSASB concluded that the number of occasions in which public sector entities would accept a monetary amount for assuming a liability are limited, albeit potentially material. In such circumstances fair value could be used as the measurement basis. Therefore, the IPSASB concluded that there is not a strong case for retention of assumption price.

BC7.94 Following comments from respondents to ED 76 the IPSASB reconsidered the case for and against the retention of assumption price. The IPSASB noted that:

- Neither the IASB's 2010 Conceptual Framework nor the 2018 Conceptual Framework defined or described assumption price.
- In those limited cases where there is an "assumption price" it would be the same as historical cost. Following assessment of a day one gain or loss, it would then be superseded by cost of fulfillment in the year-end financial statements.

BC7.95 The IPSASB therefore confirmed that assumption price should not be retained in the Conceptual Framework.

Cost of Release

BC7.96 Cost of release was defined in the 2014 version of the Conceptual Framework as the amount of an immediate exit from an obligation-either the amount a creditor will accept in settlement of its claim, or a third party would charge to accept the transfer of the liability from the obligor. Cost of release is entity-specific and does not assume an orderly market. At the standards level the measurement requirements and guidance in IPSAS 19, *Provisions, Contingent Liabilities and Contingent Assets*, include a grey letter reference to 'transfer(ing) an obligation at the reporting date' (IPSAS 19.45) which supplements the black letter reference to 'the best estimate of the expenditure required to settle the present obligation at the reporting date' in IPSAS 19.44. This reference in IPSAS 19.45 is consistent with cost of release.

BC7.97 The IPSASB noted that the IASB had concluded that it was unnecessary to include cost of release in its 2018 Conceptual Framework because it is relatively unusual for entities to obtain release from liabilities, rather than fulfilling them.

BC7.98 The 2014 Conceptual Framework justified the inclusion of cost of release on the grounds that there may be limited circumstances where it might meet the measurement objective. The IPSASB concluded that standards development since 2014 has not identified sufficient examples of circumstances where cost of release is appropriate to justify retention. The IPSASB therefore decided not to include cost of release in the updated Chapter 7 of the Conceptual Framework.

BC7.99 Following comments from respondents to ED 76 the IPSASB reconsidered the case for and against the retention of cost of release. The IPSASB noted that:

- The IASB considered cost of release in the development of the Measurement chapter of the 2018 Conceptual Framework but did not include it for the reasons identified above. The IPSASB considered that instances of entities obtaining release from liabilities, rather than fulfilling them, are similarly rare in the public sector.
- Cost of release gives rise to accountability and audit/assurance issues related to the qualitative characteristic of verifiability. Negotiations with a counterparty or third party are likely to be sensitive and confidential. Unless there is a binding arrangement with a counterparty or third

party, the basis for determining cost of release may be questionable. From an accountability perspective cost of release gives rise to public interest considerations, as it may be of questionable propriety for public sector entities to settle obligations other than by fulfilling them.

- The responses to the Consultation Paper, Measurement, issued in April 2019 had indicated little support for including guidance on cost of release.

BC7.100 The IPSASB therefore confirmed that cost of release should not be retained in the Conceptual Framework.

Current Cost

BC7.101 Paragraph BC7.32 discusses current cost as defined by the IASB for assets in its Conceptual Framework. Noting that in the IASB's Conceptual Framework the definition of current cost includes liabilities as well as assets, the IPSASB considered whether to include current cost as a measurement basis for liabilities. Current cost for liabilities is the consideration that would be received for incurring or taking on an equivalent liability at the measurement date. The IPSASB acknowledged that such a measurement basis might provide useful information for managerial purposes but considered that its practical application for financial reporting is limited, as cost of fulfillment better meets the qualitative characteristics of financial reporting The IPSASB therefore concluded that current cost for liabilities should not be included in the Conceptual Framework.

Own Credit Risk

BC7.102 The Conceptual Framework Consultation Paper, *Measurement of Assets and Liabilities in Financial Statements*, sought the views of respondents on the treatment of an entity's own credit risk and changes in value attributable to changes in an entity's own credit risk.

BC7.103 The majority of respondents who commented on this issue considered that it is more appropriate to deal with it at the standards level rather than in the Conceptual Framework. The IPSASB concurred in this view and therefore did not include a discussion of own credit risk in the Conceptual Framework. The IPSASB noted that where a market-based value is used to measure a liability it is necessary to consider the treatment of the entity's own credit risk. The IPSASB did not redeliberate this issue in the Limited-scope Update.

CHAPTER 8: PRESENTATION IN GENERAL PURPOSE FINANCIAL REPORTS

CONTENTS

Introduction

8.1 This Chapter sets out the concepts applicable to the presentation of information in GPFRs, including financial statements of governments and other public sector entities (entities).

8.2 Presentation is linked to Chapters 1 to 4—the objectives of financial reporting, users' needs, the qualitative characteristics, constraints on information included in GPFRs and the reporting entity all influence presentation decisions. For information reported in the financial statements, presentation is also linked to the definitions of the elements, recognition criteria and measurement bases identified in Chapters 5 to 7-—for example:

- The definition of the elements affect the items that can be presented in the financial statements;
- Application of the recognition criteria affects the location of information; and
- The selection of measurement bases impacts the information presented on measurement methodologies.

Language in which Financial Statement and Other GPFRs are Issued

8.3 The language (or languages) in which financial statements and other GPFRs are issued supports achievement of the objectives of financial reporting and the qualitative characteristics. All translated versions need to be faithful to the original language version. The translated version is made available to meet the needs of users with reference to:

- Legal requirements in the entity's jurisdiction; and
- Translation costs and benefits.

Presentation

8.4 Presentation is the selection, location and organization of information that is reported in the GPFRs.

8.5 Presentation aims to provide information that contributes towards the objectives of financial reporting and achieves the qualitative characteristics while taking into account the constraints on information included in GPFRs. Decisions on selection, location and organization of information are made in response to the needs of users for information about economic or other phenomena.

8.6 Chapter 1 explains that GPFRs are likely to comprise multiple reports, each responding more directly to certain aspects of the objectives of financial reporting and matters included within the scope of financial reporting. In addition to the financial statements, GPFRs provide information relevant to, for example, assessments of an entity's service performance and the sustainability of its finances. The objectives of financial reporting, applied to the area covered by a particular report, guide presentation decisions for that report.

8.7 Presentation decisions may:

- Result in the development of a new GPFR, the movement of information between reports, or the amalgamation of existing reports; or
- Be detailed decisions on information selection, location and organization within a GPFR.

Presentation Decisions are Interlinked

8.8 Decisions on information selection, location and organization are interlinked and, in practice, are likely to be considered together. The amount or type of information selected could have implications on whether it is included in a separate report or organized into tables or separate schedules. The following three sections separately focus on each presentation decision.

Information Selection

8.9 Decisions on information selection address what information is reported:

- In the financial statements; and
- In GPFRs outside the financial statements (other GPFRs).

8.10 As Chapter 2, *Objectives and Users of General Purpose Financial Reporting*, explains, the objectives of financial reporting are to provide information about the entity that is useful to users of GPFRs for accountability and decision-making purposes. Chapter 2 describes the types of information that users need to meet the objectives of financial reporting. That description guides decisions on whether particular types of reports are needed. This Chapter focuses on the selection of information to be presented in GPFRs, including financial statements and other reports.

Information Selection—Nature of Information

Nature of Information in Financial Statements

8.11 Users' information needs identified in Chapter 2 underpin information selection for the financial statements. Those needs include information about the financial position, financial performance and cash flows of an entity in order to:

- Enable users to identify the resources of the entity and claims on those resources at the reporting date;
- Inform assessments of matters such as whether the entity has acquired resources economically, and used them efficiently and effectively to achieve its service delivery objectives; and
- Inform assessments of financial performance and the entity's liquidity and solvency.

8.12 The financial statements may also provide information that assists users in assessing the extent to which:

- An entity has met its financial objectives;
- Revenues, expenses, cash flows and financial results of the entity comply with approved budgets; and
- An entity has adhered to relevant legislation or other authority governing the raising and use of public monies.

8.13 The financial statements do not report comprehensively on an entity's service performance. However information in the financial statements may provide information relevant to the financial aspects of service performance such as information about:

- Revenue, expenses and cash flows related to services; and
- The assets and liabilities that inform users' evaluations of, for example, an entity's operational capacity or financial risks that could impact on service provision.

8.14 Other reports in GPFRs present information additional to the financial statements. Such information could, for example, include:

- Information on the sustainability of an entity's public finances;
- Financial statement discussion and analysis; or
- Service performance information.

Information Selected for Display or Disclosure

8.15 Information is selected for display or disclosure in GPFRs. Information selected for display communicates key messages in a GPFR, while information selected for disclosure makes displayed information more useful by providing detail that will help users to understand the displayed information. Disclosure is not a substitute for display.

8.16 Repetition of information in a GPFR needs to generally be avoided. However, the same information may be both displayed and disclosed. For example, a total displayed on the face of the financial statements may be repeated in the notes, where the notes provide a disaggregation of the displayed total. Similarly the same information may be presented in different GPFRs in order to address their different aims.

Information Selected for Display

8.17 Every GPFR contains key messages that are communicated, so every GPFR contains displayed information. Displayed information is kept to a concise, understandable level, so that users can focus on the key messages presented and not be distracted by detail that could otherwise obscure those messages. Displayed information is presented prominently, using appropriate presentation techniques such as clear labeling, borders, tables and graphs.

8.18 The items displayed on the face of the financial statements provide information about such matters as the reporting entity's financial position, financial performance and cash flows.

8.19 Assessment of whether an item satisfies the recognition criteria is one of the key mechanisms in determining whether information is displayed on the face of the statement of financial position or statement of financial performance and/or disclosed either in the notes or elsewhere in the GPFRs. In other cases, for example a statement of cash flows, displayed information will also support achievement of the objectives of financial reporting.

8.20 Developing requirements for the display of line items and totals involves balancing the standardization of displayed information, which facilitates understandability, with information that is tailored for entity-specific factors. The aim of both standardized display requirements and entity-specific information is to ensure that information necessary to meet the objectives of financial reporting is available for all entities, while allowing information to be displayed in a manner that reflects the nature and operations of specific entities.

Information Selected for Disclosure

8.21 Disclosed information is likely to include:

- The basis for the displayed information, such as applicable policies or methodologies;
- Disaggregations of displayed information; and
- Items that share some but not all of the aspects of displayed information—for example disclosures on items that meet some, but not all, of the characteristics of the definition of an element[12] or disclosures on items that meet the definition of an element, but not the recognition criterion.

8.22 The level of detail provided by disclosed information contributes to achievement of the objectives of financial reporting, without being excessive. Disclosed information, like displayed information, is necessary for achievement of the objectives of financial reporting.

8.23 Information disclosed in the notes to the financial statements:

- Is necessary to a user's understanding of the financial statements;
- Provides information that presents the financial statements in the context of the entity and its operating environment; and
- Generally will have a clear and demonstrable relationship to information displayed on the face of the financial statement(s) to which it pertains.

8.24 Information disclosed in the notes may also include:

- Entity-related factors that could influence judgments about reported information (for example, information about related parties and controlled entities or interests in other entities);
- The basis for what is displayed (for example, information on accounting policies and measurement, including measurement methods and measurement uncertainties where applicable);
- Disaggregations of amounts displayed on the face of the statements (for example, a break-down of property, plant and equipment into different classes);

[12] Chapter 5, *Elements in Financial Statements*, explains that other resources and other obligations that do not meet the definition of elements may be recognized in order to contribute to the objectives of financial reporting.

- Items that do not meet the definition of an element or the recognition criteria, but are important to an understanding of the entity's finances and ability to deliver services— for example, information about events and conditions, that might affect future cash flows or service potential, including their natures, possible effects on cash flows or service potential, probabilities of occurrence, and sensitivities to changes in conditions; and
- Information that may explain underlying trends affecting displayed totals.

Principles Applicable to Information Selection

8.25 Decisions about what information needs to be displayed and disclosed involve consideration of:

- The objectives of financial reporting;
- The qualitative characteristics and constraints on information included in GPFRs; and
- The relevant economic or other phenomena about which information may be necessary.

8.26 Information selection results in information that contributes to meeting the objectives of financial reporting, as applied to the area covered by a particular report, and provides the appropriate level of detail. Decisions on information selection involve information prioritization and summarization. Information selection avoids information overload that reduces understandability. Too much information may make it difficult for users to understand the key messages, and, consequently undermines achievement of the objectives of financial reporting.

8.27 Preparers, applying pronouncements and their professional judgment, are responsible for ensuring that information that meets the objectives of financial reporting and achieves the qualitative characteristics is provided in the GPFRs that they prepare.

8.28 Decisions on information selection require continuing and critical review. Information identified for possible selection is reviewed as it is developed and considered for presentation, with particular reference to its relevance, materiality and cost-benefit, although all the qualitative characteristics and constraints are applied to decisions on information selection. Past decisions may require reconsideration because new information may make existing information requirements redundant with the result that those items no longer achieve the qualitative characteristics and/or the constraints.

8.29 All material transactions, events, and other items reported are presented in a manner that conveys their substance rather than their legal or other form so that the qualitative characteristics of relevance and representational faithfulness are achieved.

8.30 The benefits to users of receiving information need to justify the costs to entities of collecting and presenting that information. In making this assessment it is important to consider how individual items impact on the overall view presented and the nature of the information presented. Items that may appear to have little benefit when viewed in isolation could have much greater benefit in contributing to the complete set of information presented.

8.31 Information needs to be presented on a sufficiently timely basis to enable users to hold management accountable and to inform users' decisions.

8.32 GPFRs may include additional information derived from sources other than the financial information system. The qualitative characteristics apply to such information. The date of delivery of any such additional information needs to be as close as possible to the financial statements' reporting date, so that reported information will be timely.

Principles for Selection of Information for Display and Disclosure

8.33 Decisions about display or disclosure apply to both the financial statements and other GPFRs. The objectives of financial reporting are applied to the area covered by a particular report to guide the identification of information for display or disclosure. The identification of information for display and disclosure in a particular GPFR may involve the development of:

- Classification principles;
- A list of broad types of information that are displayed and a similar list of broad types of information that are disclosed; and/or

- Lists of specific information that preparers must display or disclose.

8.34 Decisions about selection of information to be displayed and disclosed are made:

- With reference to each other rather than in isolation; and
- To effectively communicate an integrated set of information.

8.35 Selection decisions with respect to information in other GPFRs are made after carefully considering the relationship of the other GPFRs to the financial statements.

Information Location

8.36 Decisions on information location are made about which:

- Report information is located within; and
- Component of a report information is located.

8.37 The location of information has an impact on information's contribution to achievement of the objectives of financial reporting and the qualitative characteristics. Location may affect the way that users interpret information and the comparability of information. Location may be used to:

- Convey the relative importance of information and its connections with other items of information;
- Convey the nature of information;
- Link different items of information that combine to meet a particular user need; and
- Distinguish between information selected for display and information selected for disclosure.

Principles for Allocation of Information between Different Reports

8.38 Factors relevant to decisions about allocating information between the financial statements and another GPFR include:

- Nature: Whether the nature of the information, for example historical versus prospective, supports including the information either in the same or a different GPFR, because of considerations related to, for example, comparability and/or understandability;
- Jurisdiction-Specific: Whether jurisdiction-specific factors, such as legal provisions, specify requirements on information location; and
- Linkage: Whether or not the additional information envisaged needs to link very closely to information already included in an existing report. The linkages between all information need to be assessed, not only linkages between new and existing information.

8.39 The factors above, which are expressed from the perspective of adding information to an existing set of information, also apply to considerations of whether the grouping of existing information could be improved, which is discussed in the section on information organization.

8.40 A separate GPFR may be necessary when:

- Additional user information needs, not satisfied by an existing report, are identified; and
- A separate GPFR to meet those needs is more likely to achieve the objectives of financial reporting and the qualitative characteristics than including information in an existing report.

Principles for Location of Information within a Report

8.41 Paragraph 8.17 of this Chapter states that displayed information is presented prominently, using appropriate presentation techniques—location is one way to achieve this. Information location within a report ensures that displayed information is given appropriate prominence and is not obscured by more detailed and extensive disclosed information.

8.42 The location of information in the financial statements contributes to communicating a comprehensive financial picture of an entity.

8.43 For the financial statements, displayed information is shown on the face of the appropriate statement, while disclosures are in the notes. Distinguishing displayed information and disclosed information through location ensures that those items that directly relate to communicating matters, such as an entity's financial position, financial performance and cash flows, can be highlighted, with further more detailed information provided through disclosure in the notes.

8.44 For other GPFRs, displayed information may either be located separately from disclosed information or located in the same area, but distinguished from disclosed information and given prominence through the use of another presentation technique.

Information Organization

8.45 Information organization addresses the arrangement, grouping and ordering of information, which includes decisions on:

- How information is arranged within a GPFR; and
- The overall structure of a GPFR.

8.46 Information organization involves a range of decisions including decisions on the use of cross-referencing, tables, graphs, headings, numbering, and the arrangement of items within a particular component of a report, including decisions on item order. How information is organized can affect its interpretation by users.

Nature of Information Relevant to Organization

8.47 Decisions about the organization of information take into account:

- Important relationships between information; and
- Whether information is for display or disclosure.

Types of Relationships

8.48 Important relationships include, but are not restricted to:

- Enhancement;
- Similarity; and
- Shared purpose.

8.49 *Enhancement*: Information in one place in a GPFR may be enhanced through information provided elsewhere. For example, budget, prospective and service performance information enhances information in the financial statements. Tables and graphs may be used to enhance the understanding of narrative information. Links to information reported outside the GPFRs may enhance the understandability of information reported in GPFRs.

8.50 *Similarity*: A relationship of similarity exists where information reported in one place is based on information reported elsewhere in the GPFRs, and the information either has not been adjusted or has had relatively minor adjustments. For example, if service performance information includes the cost of services, or the value of assets used in different services, then it may be helpful to show how those totals relate to expense and assets reported in the financial statements. Another example is the relationship between the total expense reported against budget and total expense reported in the statement of financial performance. A reconciliation between the two different amounts can enhance users' understanding of an entity's finances.

8.51 *Shared purpose*: A relationship of shared purpose exists where information reported in different places contributes to the same purpose. An example is where different statements and disclosures provide information needed for assessments of accountability for services delivered. Information about (a) the actual and budgeted cost of different services, (b) financial and non-financial resources used in the provision of different services, and (c) future provision of different services may be included in different places. To make the relationship between the information in different places clear, it may be appropriate to organize the information by using techniques such as common headings and referencing.

8.52 Relationships may exist between information in different:

- GPFRs;

- Components within a GPFR; and
- Parts of a single component.

Grouping of Information

8.53 The three factors noted in the section on information selection as being applicable to decisions on information location—linkage, nature of information and jurisdiction-specific considerations—also apply to considerations of whether the grouping of existing information could be improved. Decisions on effective grouping of information consider linkages between information sets, the nature of the different information sets, and, to the extent appropriate, jurisdiction-specific factors.

Principles Applicable to Information Organization

8.54 Information organization:

- Supports achievement of the objectives of financial reporting; and
- Helps reported information meet the qualitative characteristics.

8.55 Information organization:

- Helps to ensure that key messages are understandable;
- Clearly identifies important relationships;
- Gives appropriate prominence to information that conveys key messages; and
- Facilitates comparisons.

8.56 Related information is linked through the use of consistent headings, presentation order, and/or other methods appropriate to the relationship and type of information. Where links are to information reported outside the GPFRs it is important that:

- Links to information from other sources do not undermine a GPFR's achievement of the qualitative characteristics; and
- The issuance date of any such linked information is as close as possible to the financial statements' reporting date so that reported information will be timely.

Comparability

8.57 Information organization takes into account the benefits of consistent presentation over time. Consistent presentation supports users' ability to understand information and facilitates their access to information. It helps to achieve the qualitative characteristic of comparability.

Principles for Information Organization within the Financial Statements

8.58 Information displayed on the face of the financial statements is usually organized into numeric totals and sub-totals. Its organization provides a structured overview of such matters as the reporting entity's financial position, financial performance and cash flows.

8.59 For the financial statements, relationships may exist between:

- Subsets of displayed amounts or changes in displayed amounts and their impact on an entity's financial position, financial performance and/or cash flows;
- Different displayed amounts in different financial statements, which all reflect the impact of a common external event, or contribute together towards an understanding of an aspect of the entity's financial position or financial performance; and
- Displayed amounts and related note disclosures that provide information that explains or could otherwise support users' understanding of displayed items.

8.60 The organization of information in financial statements includes decisions on:

- The type and number of statements;
- Disaggregation of totals into meaningful subcategories;

- Ordering and grouping of items displayed within each statement;
- Identification of aggregates (additive and subtractive); and
- Identification of other information for inclusion on the face of the statement.

8.61 Information disclosed in the notes to the financial statements is organized so that relationships to items reported on the face of the financial statements are clear. The notes are an integral part of the financial statements.

Principles for Organization of Information within Other GPFRs

8.62 As is the case for the financial statements, information organization in other GPFRs helps to ensure that key messages conveyed by displayed information are understandable. Presentation that clearly identifies important relationships is likely to enhance the extent to which a report:

- Meets the objectives of financial reporting; and
- Achieves the qualitative characteristics.

8.63 Linking related information helps users to find important information. Some information is more understandable when organized into graphs, charts, tables, ratios or key performance indicators. Other information may be presented more effectively in narrative form. Information organization supports users' understanding of linkages between information within the same GPFR.

8.64 Information organization facilitates comparisons such as making clear when items are similar or dissimilar. Inter-period comparability is facilitated by avoiding changes to the way that information is organized for the same entity from year to year unless such changes enhance relevance and understandability. Inter-entity comparisons are facilitated when different reporting entities organize the information they present in similar ways.

Basis for Conclusions

This Basis for Conclusions accompanies, but is not part of, the Conceptual Framework.

Concepts Applicable to Presentation in GPFRs

BC8.1 This Chapter describes concepts applicable to presentation in GPFRs, including both financial statements and additional information that enhances, complements, and supplements the financial statements. During development of this Chapter some respondents to the Consultation Paper, *Presentation in General Purpose Financial Reports* (the Consultation Paper), and the Exposure Draft, *Presentation in General Purpose Financial Reports* (the Exposure Draft), argued that the IPSASB should focus exclusively on the financial statements. Some respondents who supported the proposed more comprehensive approach considered that the resulting concepts should also be sufficiently detailed to address issues particular to financial statements.

BC8.2 The IPSASB considers that effective presentation of information in both financial statements and other GPFRs is very important in meeting the objectives of financial reporting. Presentation of information in other GPFRs raises particular challenges for the IPSASB and preparers, which makes the development of applicable concepts essential to guide the development of presentation requirements in both IPSASs and RPGs. Nevertheless, the IPSASB acknowledged the need to provide concepts that are sufficiently detailed for application to the financial statements. Therefore this Chapter describes presentation concepts for all GPFRs, and sets out the concepts applicable to financial statements in more depth.

Presentation in the Financial Statements

BC8.3 The further detail provided on financial statements responds, as noted above, to the need to ensure that the concepts proposed are applicable to the financial statements. However, this Chapter does not propose the number or type of financial statements that should be specified in IPSASs and RPGs. This approach acknowledges that, internationally, some preparers treat the "primary" financial statements as a minimum requirement, with flexibility for the preparer to add further statements—for example, additional statements that list commitments or public sector debt— to the financial statements required by IPSASs. It is also consistent with the need to avoid over-specification at the Conceptual Framework level.

BC8.4 This Chapter also does not attempt to identify a list of information that should be included in the financial statements, including the notes. This means that the presentation concepts applicable to the financial statements will remain relevant as changes occur in areas such as:

- The type of information required to adequately meet the objectives of financial reporting;
- The information technology available to present information in GPFRs; and
- The type of economic or other phenomena on which financial statements present information.

Language in which Financial Statements and Other GPFRs are issued

BC8.5 Some respondents to the Exposure Draft expressed a view that the language (or languages) in which the financial statements and other GPFRs are issued has implications for whether they will support achievement of the objectives of financial reporting and achieve the qualitative characteristics. Responding to this concern the IPSASB decided that this Chapter should address the language(s) in which GPFRs are issued. The quality of any translation will impact on the usefulness of a GPFR to users who depend on that translation. The quality of translation should be sufficient to ensure that the translated version(s) are faithful to the original language version. A faithful translation enables users to obtain the same understanding as that of an original language speaker reading the original language version.

Presentation, Display and Disclosure

BC8.6 During development of this Chapter descriptions of "presentation", "display", "disclosure", "core information", and "supporting information" were proposed. Respondents had different views on whether the descriptions were appropriate. There was significant support for the description of presentation, which covered the selection, location and organization of information. Some respondents opposed the introduction of such descriptions, because they considered that the terms "presentation" and "disclosure" have been widely used by standard setters and have generally accepted meanings. Some respondents to the Exposure Draft advocated the alignment of the IPSASB's terminology with the presentation terminology for the financial statements under development by the International Accounting Standards Board in its project to update its Conceptual Framework.

BC8.7 The IPSASB considers that having terminology that applies to all information included in GPFRs, rather than just the financial statements, may prevent full alignment with terminology that relates only to the financial statements. If the term "presentation" applies to information that conveys key messages in the financial statements, then extending the same term to other information included in GPFRs changes the meaning of the term. The term "display" signals that information that conveys key messages can be selected for either the financial statements or other information included in GPFRs.

BC8.8 The IPSASB is of the view that the distinction between presentation and disclosure used in some jurisdictions, where presentation applies to the process of reporting information on the face of a statement and disclosure applies to the process of reporting information in the notes, is inadequate for presentation concepts for GPFRs. Distinctions focused on the financial statements have limited usefulness and may be confusing for other GPFRs outside the financial statements. In the context of the financial statements, display and disclosure support a clear distinction between the process of reporting information on the face of a financial statement—display—and that of reporting information in the notes to the statements—disclosure. For these reasons the IPSASB retained the descriptions of presentation, display and disclosure proposed in the Exposure Draft with revised explanations.

BC8.9 The description of presentation proposed in the Consultation Paper included both what presentation is—information selection, location and organization—and what presentation should do—it should meet the objectives of financial reporting, the needs of users, and achieve the qualitative characteristics. After further consideration the IPSASB decided that separation of these two areas would better facilitate consideration of presentation issues. Therefore presentation is described as information selection, location and organization. There is also a description of what presentation aims to achieve, which is to provide information that contributes to the objectives of financial reporting, and achieves the qualitative characteristics while taking into account the constraints on information included in GPFRs.

BC8.10 Some respondents considered the distinction between core and supporting information proposed in the Consultation Paper implied that information in the notes to the financial statements is less important than information on the face of a statement and that it created a hierarchy. Although the IPSASB did not intend to imply that supporting information is less important than core information the IPSASB acknowledged such concerns. The IPSASB therefore reconsidered the need for a distinction between core and supporting information and concluded that incorporating the ideas related to these two types of information into the descriptions of display and disclosure within each GPFR would be more appropriate. Consequently the terms core information and supporting information were not retained in the Exposure Draft and the descriptions of display and disclosure were revised to explain what types of information would be displayed and what disclosed, without the implication that one type of information is more important than the other. This approach is reflected in this Chapter.

BC8.11 The IPSASB also considered whether all GPFRs contain both information for display and information for disclosure, and whether it is possible to have a GPFR that only contains information for disclosure. Because key messages exist for each type of GPFR, and information to convey those key messages needs to be displayed, the IPSASB concluded that all GPFRs contain both information for display and information for disclosure.

Overall Approach to Presentation

BC8.12 The Consultation Paper proposed an approach to presentation of:

- Focusing on user needs to identify presentation objectives;
- Applying the qualitative characteristics to presentation decisions; and
- Identifying separate presentation concepts—the proposed concepts were Concept 1: Select information that meets user needs, satisfies the cost-benefit test, and is sufficiently timely; Concept 2: Locate information to meet user needs; and Concept 3: Organize information to make important relationships clear and support comparability.

The Consultation Paper also proposed that presentation objectives should be established at the standards level, for application to particular reports or reporting topics.

BC8.13 Respondents generally agreed that the needs of users and achievement of the qualitative characteristics were important for presentation decisions. They supported the development of presentation objectives, but advocated that such objectives should be included in the Conceptual Framework, rather than just at standards level. Although they generally agreed that separate presentation concepts should be developed, a significant number of respondents disagreed with the three presentation concepts proposed. Some respondents disagreed with the way that the three presentation concepts emphasized particular qualitative characteristics or constraints on information included in GPFRs. They argued that other qualitative characteristics or constraints should be addressed. Others argued that the concepts added little, if anything, to the discussion of the qualitative characteristics and constraints on information included in GPFRs in Chapter 3*, Qualitative Characteristics*.

BC8.14 On balance the IPSASB concluded that a simpler, more focused approach, which directly applied the concepts in Chapters 1–4 to presentation decisions was appropriate. The IPSASB is of the view that decisions on information selection, location and organization are made in response to the needs of users for information about economic or other phenomena. Presentation decisions are made to seek to achieve the objectives of financial reporting, and they involve application of the qualitative characteristics and constraints on information included in GPFRs.

BC8.15 Presentation decisions may be either (a) decisions that may result in development of a new report, movement of information between reports, or the amalgamation of existing reports; or, (b) detailed decisions on information selection, location and organization related to information within a report. It is useful to distinguish between these two types of presentation decisions in the context of the more comprehensive scope of financial reporting discussed in Chapter 2. Both types of decisions are important and there is no intention to convey a hierarchy. The difference is one of breadth or sequencing of decisions—for example, a decision to create a new report conveys that a broad set of information will be presented. The subsequent, more specific decisions will address what is presented within that report and are equally important.

BC8.16 The need to distinguish between the display and disclosure of information is a further important aspect of the IPSASB's overall approach to presentation. An example of a detailed decision within a report is a decision about whether information should be displayed on the face of a financial statement or disclosed in the notes.

Presentation Objectives

BC8.17 As stated above, in the Consultation Paper the IPSASB proposed the development of "presentation objectives" to guide presentation decisions. Although many respondents supported identifying presentation objectives the IPSASB decided against the inclusion of presentation objectives in this Chapter, because they would create an unnecessary additional layer of objectives beneath the objectives of financial reporting in Chapter 2. Development of a second layer of presentation objectives could be confusing and detract from the objectives of financial reporting. This approach was proposed in the Exposure Draft and was generally supported by respondents.

Application of the Qualitative Characteristics and Constraints

BC8.18 During development of this Chapter many respondents supported application of the qualitative characteristics to presentation decisions. However, some respondents expressed reservations that the constraints on information included in GPFRs had not been properly integrated into the overall approach to presentation. The IPSASB agrees that the constraints apply to presentation decisions. They are therefore included in the overall approach to presentation and in subsequent discussion of the application of the three presentation decisions.

Presentation Concepts

BC8.19 After considering respondents' concerns about the three presentation concepts proposed in the Consultation Paper and possible further changes to address those concerns, the IPSASB concluded that the ideas in the three concepts were adequately addressed through application of the qualitative characteristics and constraints on information included in GPFRs to presentation decisions. Therefore, in the Exposure Draft the IPSASB replaced the three presentation concepts proposed in the Consultation Paper with a revised description of the application of the qualitative characteristics and constraints on information included in GPFRs to presentation decisions. Respondents to the Exposure Draft generally supported the direct application of the concepts established in Chapters 1–4, rather than development of an intermediary set of either presentation concepts or presentation objectives.

Information Organization: Links to External Information

BC8.20 Chapter 2 of the Conceptual Framework explains that users of GPFRs may also need to consider information from other sources, including reports on current and anticipated economic conditions, budgets and forecasts, and information about government policy initiatives not reported in GPFRs. The IPSASB considered whether GPFRs should include links to such information. Although the IPSASB acknowledged the risk that such information may not achieve the qualitative characteristics, the IPSASB concluded that such links can support understandability. Therefore, provided information from external sources does not undermine achievement of the qualitative characteristics the IPSASB concluded that GPFRs might include links to such information.

Appendix A

Conceptual Framework Due Process Publications

Title	Date Issued	Consultation Period Ended
Consultation Paper, *The Objectives of Financial Reporting; The Scope of Financial Reporting; The Qualitative Characteristics of Information Included in General Purpose Financial Reports; The Reporting Entity*	September 30, 2008	March 30, 2009
Consultation Paper, *Elements and Recognition in Financial Statements*	December 15, 2010	June 14, 2011
Consultation Paper, *Measurement of Assets and Liabilities in Financial Statements*	December 15, 2010	June 14, 2011
Exposure Draft 1, *Role, Authority and Scope; Objectives and Users; Qualitative Characteristics; and Reporting Entity*	December 15, 2010	June 14, 2011
Exposure Draft, *Key Characteristics of the Public Sector with Potential Implications for Financial Reporting*	April 29, 2011	August 31, 2011
Consultation Paper, *Presentation in General Purpose Financial Reports*	January 29, 2012	May 31, 2012
Exposure Draft 2, Elements and *Recognition in Financial Statements*	November 7, 2012	April 30, 2013
Exposure Draft 3, *Measurement of Assets and Liabilities in Financial Statements*	November 7, 2012	April 30, 2013
Exposure Draft 4, *Presentation in General Purpose Financial Reports*	April 17, 2013	August 15, 2013

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