

HMRC Accelerate Trade Facilitation Programme

Annual Review 2024/25

Annual Review

Programme Title: Accelerate Trade Facilitation Programme	
Programme Value £ (full life): FY: £1,700.000 / Funding allocation for Phase IV: 2022 – 2025: £4,300.000	Review date: December 2025
AMP start date: 1 April 2024	AMP end date: 31 March 2025

Summary of Programme Performance

Year	2024/2025	2025/2026	2026/2027	2027/2028	2028/2029	2029/2030
Overall Output Score	A+					
Risk Rating						

A. SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

Description of programme

The Accelerate Trade Facilitation Programme, hereafter referred to as the ‘Programme’, delivers capacity building to Official Development Assistance (ODA)-eligible countries as part of the UK’s World Trade Organisation (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) obligations. The TFA sets out a series of measures for streamlining the movement of goods across borders, inspired by best practices from around the world. It aims to improve trade efficiency worldwide and lower trade costs by cutting red tape at borders, increasing transparency and predictability, reducing border-related corruption and taking advantage of new technologies. Under the terms of the Agreement, developing countries (DCs) and least-developed countries (LDCs) may request assistance to implement TFA provisions.

The Programme has been running since 2015, working in close partnership with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). It is delivered primarily through our two delivery partners: World Customs Organization (WCO) and the United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Both organisations bring unique expertise and experience in border management, processes and procedures and seek to complement each other and work jointly and productively in areas and with countries where it is beneficial to those partner countries. Currently, the Programme is in Phase IV of delivery, covering years 2022-2025 with a 1-year extension for 2025-2026, in line with wider UK Government spending reviews.

The WCO delivers targeted and in-depth technical assistance and capacity building activities, specifically supporting implementation of eight TFA measures. Across partner countries, the WCO supports implementation of Electronic Advance Ruling (TFA Article 3), Risk Management (RM), (TFA Article 7.4), Post-Clearance Audit (PCA), (TFA Article 7.5), Time Release Study (TRS) to establish baselines and diagnostics for border performance (TFA Article 7.6), Authorized Operators (AO) (TFA Article 7.7), Expedited Shipments (TFA Article 7.8), and Coordinated Border Management (CBM), (TFA Article 8). The WCO also supports broader Customs organisational development, including areas such as leadership and management development (LMD), gender equality and diversity (GED), as well as Customs integrity, Performance Measurement Mechanism (PMM) and competency-based Human Resource Management (HRM). These are

considered key prerequisites for more effective, transparent, and inclusive Customs reforms and operations.

UNCTAD assists countries and regional organisations with the implementation of trade facilitation reforms and measures. This can include needs assessments and ratification assistance; development of project plans and trade facilitation strategic roadmaps; advisory services and intensive training for National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs); establishing trade information portals and legal frameworks; business process analysis and simplification of trade-related procedures and training national transit coordinators or supporting regional trade facilitation initiatives. UNCTAD supports implementation of the TFA primarily through strengthening NTFC governance, national coordination, monitoring, and sequencing of reforms across multiple TFA articles.

This year the Programme also entered the inception phase for a new pillar of the Programme – HMRC-led bilateral technical support, focusing on government-to-government experience and knowledge sharing in relation to TFA implementation. Although no additional funds were allocated to set up in this financial year, HMRC central budget was used to deliver some training on customs modernisation and change management in Iraq - complementing the HMRC tax capacity building programme - and for the recruitment of a new staff member to lead on the development of an HMRC expert roster. In turn, as the inception phase was about setting the foundations rather than outcomes, the focus was on obtaining additional funding for FY 25/26, developing key processes and stakeholder engagement of potential experts. In turn, the HMRC pillar will be included for scoring in the Annual Review for FY 25/26.

This review covers the period from April 2024 to March 2025, against the programme's Phase IV Results Framework (summary can be found in [Annex 1](#)). It considers the extent to which the Programme's outputs are meeting the objectives of the Accelerate Trade Facilitation Capacity Building Programme. This review will provide an assessment of progress and identify lessons and considerations for future years.

Summary supporting narrative for the overall score in this review

Across both delivery partners, the Programme **moderately exceeded expectations** in 2024/25, reflected in strong performance against the majority of output indicators and sustained progress toward outcome-level results. Output scoring is based on an objective formula which compares results against targets, as detailed in section C. in turn, the output target scoring for the programme was undertaken using the following methodology:

Description	Score	Formula
Outputs substantially exceeded expectation	A++	more than 50% above target
Outputs moderately exceeded expectation	A+	between 11-49% above target
Outputs met expectation	A	Missing the target by up to 10%, or exceeding it by up to 10%
Outputs moderately did not meet expectation	B	missing the target by more than 11% and less than 49%
Outputs substantially did not meet expectation	C	missing the target by more than 50%

The WCO delivered a particularly strong year, with both of its outputs scoring **A++**. This was driven by clearly evidenced high volumes of technical assistance, significant uptake of e-learning, strong organisational development progress, and substantial reform implementation across partner administrations. The WCO exceeded several targets by a significant margin. This indicates that the targets set were too low and did not accurately reflect what could reasonably be delivered within the financial year or across the full programme phase. For Phase V, the programme will ensure that targets are informed by baseline results

from the previous phase, using an evidence-based approach to set realistic performance expectations. In addition, annual reviews will be conducted to ensure that targets remain aligned with the scope and feasibility of activities delivered by partners.

UNCTAD also performed well: Output 1 (A), as set out in the Theory of Change (see Section B), achieved an **A** within the FY and an A+ across the Phase, with above-target delivery of e-learning events, high stakeholder satisfaction, and continued strengthening of NTFCs and national monitoring mechanisms. UNCTAD Output 2 (B) met expectations overall, scoring an **A** with an A+ across the Phase, with strong delivery of knowledge products and expert support, offset by a modest shortfall in the number of global and regional events delivered. Taken together, these results demonstrate that the Programme's outputs were delivered at high quality and breadth, with outcome-level progress visible across multiple TFA measures, NTFCs, and organisational development areas. On this basis — and in line with the weighted performance contributions of both delivery partners — the Programme receives an **overall score of A+** for 2024/25 and A+ for the Phase.

Major lessons and recommendations for the year ahead

Lessons Learned

Year 3 highlighted several cross-cutting lessons that will directly shape delivery in the final year of Phase IV. National ownership and high-level leadership remain the strongest predictors of progress. Examples from partner countries during the financial year such as Nigeria, Zambia, Namibia, South Africa and the Philippines demonstrate that senior-level commitment drives momentum, enables coordinated action across agencies, and accelerates reform implementation. Evidence across our partner countries showed that where leadership changed or engagement weakened, reforms slowed despite significant technical assistance. In turn, ensuring that the Programme prioritises strengthening structured engagement with Commissioners, DGs and NTFC Chairs will be essential in Year 4.

Additionally, the Programme learned that an outcome-focused, project-management approach is vital to sustaining reform progress. Both delivery partners report that reforms advance fastest when workplans, responsibilities and deadlines are clearly defined and routinely monitored (e.g., TRS Working Groups, AEO taskforces, Reform Tracker teams). Embedding this discipline across missions and follow-up will help to consolidate outcome-level gains.

The blended delivery model—integrating in-country missions, virtual coaching and e-learning—continues to be highly effective but requires careful sequencing to avoid fatigue. Delivering virtual sessions alongside pre-mission preparation and in-person workshops has consistently improved mission quality and should thus be prioritised in the year ahead. Peer-to-peer exchanges, especially utilising south-south networks and the WCO and HMRC expert pools, have also proven to be an important accelerator of reform and should be expanded, particularly in technical areas such as TRS, Risk Management, AEO, PCA and CBM.

A key lesson for the next FY is that targets should be reviewed annually to understand when performance is significantly exceeding expectation. This helps ensure that targets remain ambitious and realistic, and it allows us to distinguish between performance that is genuinely above expectations and performance that is reasonable to achieve within a year or phase. Additionally, the Programme defines Phase targets that do not include annual milestones. In Phase V we will also include annual milestones for clarity purposes.

Key recommendations that HMRC recommend integrating into the Programme for the next financial year are:

- Intensifying structured senior-level engagement to drive national ownership;
- Enforcing an outcome-driven approach to mission planning and follow-up;

- Expanding targeted peer-learning and South–South support to accelerate lagging areas;
- Prioritising digitalisation and data-driven reform, including targeted use of TRS and Reform Tracker data, where this unlocks TFA implementation;
- Maintain momentum on CBM legislation (e.g. Zambia, Namibia, Lesotho) to convert near-impact results into institutionalised reforms;
- Target additional AEO, Risk Management, and PCA consolidation in countries nearing impact;
- Increase selective in-country missions in countries with slow progress (e.g. Liberia, The Gambia); and
- Review and update the Results Framework to ensure the inclusion of annual milestones and redefine targets to be more ambitious.

B: THEORY OF CHANGE AND PROGRESS TOWARDS OUTCOMES

The Programme’s Theory of Change (ToC) acts as the central way that the Programme sets objectives, tracks results and transformations over time for partner countries towards implementation of the TFA. The ToC assumes that targeted support delivered by WCO and UNCTAD — including streamlining of key processes, introduction of new reforms, organisational development support, and strengthened NTFC governance —will lead to simpler, more predictable, transparent and inclusive trade environments, ultimately contributing to reduced trade costs and improved economic performance in partner countries.

Evidence on progress made by partner countries during this financial year shows a clear link between receiving support and streamlining trade processes more broadly. For instance, countries that received sustained technical and organisational support - such as Zambia, Namibia, the Philippines and Nigeria - showed clear progression from outputs to outcomes and, in some cases, to impact-level results.

Key drivers in the Theory of Change, such as sustained political will from partner countries, functional NTFCs, strong interagency cooperation, and effective uptake of digital/automated systems, were essential for moving from outputs to outcomes. However, several stress factors emerged, notably absorption capacity constraints in some least developed partner countries, high levels of leadership turnover within customs administrations, dependencies on national IT systems (e.g. ASYCUDA upgrades), and external shocks such as tariff changes or natural disasters - all of which impact reform momentum. These issues underscore areas where assumptions may require greater emphasis, but they do not challenge the ToC’s validity nor indicate the need for design changes.

Overall, the ToC continues to provide a sound, evidence-based framework for achieving outcomes and longer-term impact related to implementation of the WTO TFA and related international standards, as demonstrated across a number of partner countries.

Describe where the programme is on/off track to contribute to the expected outcomes and impact. What action is planned in the year ahead?

Overall, the Programme remains on track throughout the FY and current Phase to achieve expected outcomes and impact, with strong evidence of progress across the three pillars of the Programme: WCO, UNCTAD and HMRC. In the reporting period, partner countries continued to make meaningful structural reforms aligned with the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA).

WCO

Four WCO-supported trade facilitation measures in four countries reached impact level in the reporting period. These were: Nigeria (TFA Article 7.7 Authorized Operators); The Philippines (TFA Article 7.4 Risk Management); Namibia (TFA Article 3 with the launch of the Electronic Tool on Advance Ruling) and Zambia (TFA Article 7.8 Expedited Shipments).

Outcome-level results also exceeded expectations. Partner countries enacted 16 laws, regulations, amendments, policies or codes during the reporting period against a Phase IV target of 14, and improved or eliminated 43 procedures in Year 3 (101 in total for three years of Phase IV). Furthermore, 16 supporting documents that traders previously had to submit to Customs were removed thanks to new procedures and policies, while 20 border-related documents were digitalised in Year 3 (33 in total for Phase IV), significantly improving predictability and reducing burdens on traders.

34 organisational development and capacity building measures and initiatives were implemented or improved in Year 3 also, with impact-level institutional change achieved in the Philippines (integrity, GED and HRM), and in South Africa (integrity).

UNCTAD

UNCTAD also delivered strongly. Partner countries marked 146 reforms as complete on the Reform Tracker, submitted 20 notifications to the Trade Facilitation Committee at the WTO regarding implementation in the reporting period, and successfully utilised UNCTAD's support through the Programme to drive improvements in the functioning of NTFCs and increase institutional compliance in the TFA. The launch of the updated Reform Tracker, which is now operational in 22 partner countries funded by the Programme, has significantly enhanced domestic coordination, buy-in, and accountability, though engagement levels vary across countries.

Broader capacity building activities delivered by UNCTAD also remained effective, with 702 e-learning completions across partner countries, achieving high satisfaction scores from attendees and high self-reported knowledge-gain scores (94% reporting improved understanding; 89% confidence to apply learning). UNCTAD also provided training on utilising Business Process Analysis (BPA) to simplify and streamline existing trade processes for specific commodities. This work generated quantified cost-saving proposals in Namibia, Madagascar and Lesotho, demonstrating clear potential for impact once implemented. Gender inclusion objectives were also advanced through a major cross-border women traders' study across Peru/Ecuador/Bolivia, gathering 352 surveys and 14 focus groups to feed into Year 4 action plans.

Collectively, these results continue to translate into outcome-level change. 20 of 22 UNCTAD partner countries improved their TFA implementation scores, and NTFCs reported stronger engagement and better coordination. These results confirm that the combination of technical assistance, organisational development, blended learning, and strengthened NTFC functioning provided by our delivery partners is translating into measurable outcome-level changes.

HMRC

During this reporting period the HMRC bilateral pillar remained in its Inception Phase and focused on establishing the foundations required for effective delivery. Core tasks were completed, including setting up governance structures, hiring additional staff, and developing an expert roster which will be utilised to deliver technical support. Work began on the Theory of Change and initial results framework, additional funding was applied for and granted for the following FY, and a structured plan is in place to finalise indicators, baselines and data sources in the next period. Initial scoping and diagnostic activities have clarified priority areas for

support and informed the development of the first year workplan. These steps provide a solid platform for the start of full delivery in the coming year.

Where Progress Was Slower

While the Programme remains broadly on track to deliver its intended outcomes, a small number of outcome-level targets were not met in 2024/25. The Programme did not meet the target for reducing the number of agencies conducting frontline border operations, reflecting the complexity of Coordinated Border Management (CBM), legislative dependencies, and political cycles. However, Zambia made substantial progress with a pilot reduction to six core agencies—this will only count towards the formal indicator once legislation is passed (expected 2025/26).

UNCTAD continued to support Egypt with their work to progress trade portal implementation to ensure the trade portal's full utility and usability, but this faced delays in the reporting period due to internal approval bottlenecks. A small number of NTFCs showed weaker or inconsistent engagement, particularly in Cambodia, Botswana, Timor-Leste and some small island states, requiring high Programme effort to maintain momentum and slowing outcome-level progress in those countries. Other external dependencies, such as recent disruptions to global tariffs, also diverted the attention of many national counterparts, who had to prioritise urgent domestic trade and economic responses. As a result, engagement in Programme activities was delayed or deprioritised in some countries, affecting the momentum of planned reforms. Limited capacity of national stakeholders balancing multiple projects also proved to be an issue at times for both delivery partners.

However, overall, based on current performance the Programme remains **highly likely** to achieve its expected outcomes and impact within the extended timeframe. No evidence suggests that strong output delivery is failing to translate into outcome-level progress. On the contrary, several countries now demonstrate clear links between Programme support and structural improvements in border efficiency, transparency, and coordination.

Forward Look (2025/26)

Looking ahead, WCO efforts will focus on consolidating gains and driving forward results in countries nearing impact, especially Zambia, Nigeria, Madagascar and Lesotho, as well as providing targeted in-country assistance to LDC countries where lead in time for results may take longer, such as Liberia and The Gambia. Emphasis for the next financial year (and final year of Phase IV) will also be placed on encouraging digitalisation, data governance and CBM institutionalisation to achieve trade facilitation efficiencies, ensuring that outcome-level progress translates into system-wide, sustainable impact by the end of Phase IV.

Looking ahead to 2025/26, UNCTAD will prioritise consolidation of outcomes through intensified NTFC coaching, national follow-through on BPA simplification proposals, and deeper use of the enhanced Reform Tracker as a routine governance tool. UNCTAD will focus on those countries where the NTFC secretariats are fully committed to the use of the Reform Tracker as a monitoring and coordination tool. Other priorities include securing implementation of Egypt's TIP and bringing The Gambia and Jamaica - new additions to the Programme - up to speed by delivering intensive capacity building in those countries. Expanding short and targeted e-learning modules to counter virtual-learning fatigue and preparing NTFCs for transition risks associated with reduction in support intensity on the Programme will also be prioritised.

Justify whether the programme should continue, based on its own merits and in the context of the wider portfolio

Based on the strong performance against outputs, evidence of outcome-level progress, and sustained relevance of the Programme's Theory of Change, there is strong justification for the

Accelerate Trade Facilitation Programme to continue. Both delivery partners have demonstrated the ability to convert technical assistance into measurable improvements in border efficiency, regulatory transparency, and institutional capacity, evidenced by the WCO's achievement of 13 impact-level reforms and UNCTAD-supported NTFCs completing more than 140 reforms across partner countries. This strong performance sits alongside continued demand from partner countries for support on outstanding Category C commitments, reinforcing the Programme's ongoing relevance.

The Programme continues to show strong value for money, leveraging extensive in-kind expert contributions, delivering high volumes of blended learning at low marginal cost, and contributing to partner countries' above-trend improvements against global TFA implementation indices. The Programme also fills a clear niche in the UK's wider development and trade portfolio - providing long-term, unique and holistic support to customs authorities, trade ministries, and NTFCs that is not replicated by other donors or in the UK's wider ODA portfolio - directly aligning with UK priorities on inclusive trade, economic growth, and regional integration. While some areas experienced delays due to external shocks and capacity constraints, these do not undermine the Programme's overall effectiveness or trajectory. Continued investment through the remainder of Phase IV therefore remains fully justified, offering a strong platform for consolidating reforms and informing future UK engagement under a potential Phase V.

C. DETAILED OUTPUT SCORING

WCO

Output Title	Technical assistance and capacity building to reform trade facilitation laws, procedures, processes, systems and consultative mechanisms within the context of the WTO TFA is provided to Customs administrations and NTFCs in partner countries		
Output number:	1 (A)	Output Score:	A++
Impact weighting (%):	60	Weighting revised since last AR?	N/A

Indicator(s)	Targets	Results	% Against Target	Output Score
AI.1 Number of Customs administrations supported	FY Target: 10	FY Result: 11	10.00%	A
	Phase Target: 10	Year 3 Phase Result: 11	10.00%	A
AI.2 Number of WTO TFA measures supported in WCO programme countries	FY Target: 8	FY Result: 8	0%	A
	Phase Target: 8	Year 3 Phase Result: 8	0%	A
AI.3 Number of procedures/firm-level policies/practices/standards recommended for improvement or elimination (#)	FY Target: 10	FY Result: 221	2110%	A++
	Phase Target: 50	Year 3 Phase Result: 323	546%	A++
AI.4 Number of new laws/regulations/amendments/codes /government policies drafted, or contributed to the drafting	FY Target: 4	FY Result: 19	375.00%	A++
	Phase Target: 25	Year 3 Phase Result: 35	40%	A++
AI.5a Number of partner customs administration country subject specialists trained (sex disaggregated)	FY Target: 33	FY Result: 536 (267 women, 269 men - gender balanced).	1524.24%	A++
	Phase Target: 429	Year 3 Phase Result: 1225	185.54%	A++

AI. 5b. No of partner Customs administration country specialists trained have undergone refresher training to consolidate and update knowledge and skills (sex disaggregated)	FY Target: 67	FY Result: 20 (5 women, 15 men).	-70.14%	C
	Phase Target: 200	Year 3 Phase Result: 119	- 40.5%	B
AI.6 Number of organizational development recommendations (LMD, HRM, Stakeholder collaboration, Integrity, gender equality and diversity etc.) adopted by relevant customs administration	No target set for this indicator	FY Result: 46	N/A	N/A
	No target set for this indicator	Year 3 Phase Result: 301	N/A	N/A
AI. 7a Number of country-level events delivered and/or facilitated by the WCO (including trainings and workshops, etc.) (# of which are gender-focused)	FY Target: 7	FY Result: 21	200.00%	A++
	Phase Target: 67	Year 3 Phase Result: 107	59.7%	A++
		Overall Score FY (Average)	592.72%	A++
		Overall Score Phase (Average)	114.39%	A++

Delivery against Output 1 was consistently strong, with the WCO meeting or exceeding nearly all milestone targets and maintaining high engagement across partner administrations. The WCO supported 11 Customs administrations, following the onboarding of Malaysia in November 2024. Support continued to cover all eight priority TFA measures throughout the reporting period, as envisaged in the Programme's Results Framework.

The Programme saw substantial progress in procedural strengthening, with 221 procedures and practices recommended for improvement during the reporting period (323 for the phase), far surpassing the Phase IV target of 50. This surge reflects strong reform momentum in countries such as Nigeria, Zambia and the Philippines, where multi-year WCO engagement has created both the demand and capability for deeper TFA alignment, but also raises the question of whether the phase target was ambitious enough. A key lesson for the next FY is that targets should be reviewed annually to understand when performance is significantly exceeding expectation. This helps ensure that targets remain ambitious and realistic, and it allows us to distinguish between performance that is genuinely above expectations and performance that is reasonable to achieve within a year or phase.

Capacity building outcomes remained a major strength of WCO delivery. The Programme trained 536 specialists during the reporting period (1,225 for the phase), far above targets, with a good gender balance (267 women, 269 men). This demonstrates both strong partner uptake and the continued relevance of WCO subject-matter expertise. The only notable underperformance was in refresher training (AI.5b), where just 20 refresher sessions were completed (119 for the phase, against a target of 200). However, anecdotal feedback from the WCO suggests that this reflects reduced need/demand, as administrations internalise skills and transition from basic learning to applied implementation. It is also noted that indicator AI.6 did not have a phase or in-year target included due to changes in the Strategic Plan at the WCO with potential impact on organisational development activities they will be able to deliver. In turn, for the next phase of the Programme a target should be set.

Despite this, organisational development progress also continued, with 46 organisational development recommendations adopted during the year, bringing the cumulative phase total to 301. While lower than the previous reporting period ('23-24), this still represents important traction in areas such as HRM, integrity and leadership development. Country-level events

remained strong, with 21 events delivered in the year (107 for the phase), exceeding the overall milestone and demonstrating the value of blended virtual and in-country support.

Apart from the refresher training indicator, Output 1 achieved - and in several areas exceeded - its end-of-phase targets. The Programme continues to demonstrate strong demand from partner administrations, robust technical support, and significant movement from output delivery toward outcome-level results.

WCO Output 2

Output Title	Global knowledge, learning and measurement products are generated for Customs administrations and NTFCs		
Output number:	2 (B)	Output Score:	A++
Impact weighting (%):	40	Weighting revised since last AR?	N/A

Indicator(s)	Targets	Results for FY	% Against Target	Output Score
BI 1.a Number of global and regional events delivered by WCO (e.g. peer-to-peer, learning events, webinars)	FY Target: 3	FY Result: 5	66.66%	A++
	Phase Target: 13	Year 3 Phase Result: 12	-7.69%	A
BI 2.a.1 The number of users that completed the WCO e-learning modules supported by the Programme	FY Target: 45 users from partner countries	FY Results: 4735 global users, 1499 from partner countries (in year)	10422.22%	A++
	Phase Target: 600 users from partner countries	Year 3 Phase Result: 11,082 global users, 5,294 from partner countries	1747%	A++
BI 2.a.2 The number of users from partner countries that completed relevant WCO e-learning modules on Trade Facilitation measures, as well as Customs organizational development	FY Target: 29	FY Result: 786	2610.34%	A++
	Phase Target: 200	Year 3 Phase Result: 4991	2395.5%	A++
BI 3. Number of customs officials trained by WCO as global pre-accredited or accredited or WCO recognized experts (# sex disaggregated).	FY Target: 13	FY Result: 25 (60% men, 40% women)	92.31%	A++
	Phase Target: 46	Year 3 Phase Result: 69	50%	A++
BI 4.a Number of days provided in-kind by WCO experts (#days by expert pool, of which # days from experts from developing countries, and # days by WCO officers) (value for money).	FY Target: 222	FY Result: 553	149.10%	A++
	Phase Target: 1200	Year 3 Phase Result: 1733	44.41%	A+
BI 6.a Number of communication materials (videos, blogs, brochures, newsletters) and capacity building organizational development tools (toolkits, compendiums, e learning	FY Target: 12	FY Result: 36	200.00%	A++
	Phase Target: 63	Year 3 Phase Result: 112	77.77%	A++

modules, portals) developed for Customs by WCO.				
		Overall Score FY (Average)	2256.77%	A++
		Overall Score Phase (Average)	717.83%	A++

Delivery under WCO Output 2 has also been strong and significantly above expectations, with impressive performance across learning, knowledge, and expert-pool mobilisation indicators. Most indicators were significantly above target, reflecting strong performance from the WCO in this area. However, this also reflects how the Programme should be more accurate in how it predicts outputs from activities across a Phase. Output targets should therefore be annually reviewed to ensure they align with what can be reasonably achieved within a FY and therefore allowing the Results Framework to more accurately measure performance.

The Programme saw exceptional uptake of WCO e-learning modules, with 4,735 global users and 1,499 users from partner countries completing modules during the reporting period. This surge reflects the relevance of the WCO online content and the value of flexible, self-paced learning for customs officials working in resource-constrained environments. However, where significant changes occur for output indicators, such as this target, this shows that the Programme is inaccurately predicting what can be reasonably achieved, making results skewed in terms of whether actual performance output is reasonable or not.

Completion of specialised TFA-related and organisational development modules also significantly exceeded targets, with 786 completions during the year (4,991 across the phase). The WCO Expert Pool continued to demonstrate excellent value for money: 553 expert days were delivered in 2024/25, including substantial contributions from developing-country experts - supporting South-South cooperation and enhancing contextual relevance. Knowledge product development (toolkits, guidelines, training materials) also exceeded targets, with 36 products delivered in the year and 112 for the phase, demonstrating the WCO's continued ability to generate practical, high-quality global public goods for customs administrations. Overall, output 2, in all areas, exceeded end-of-phase expectations.

Challenges and Issues

Although WCO performance was strong across both Programme outputs - as outlined above - several challenges affected WCO delivery this year. Absorption capacity constraints in some LDCs continued to slow reform implementation, particularly where small teams struggled to balance multiple donor engagements.

Internal WCO HRM and GED capacity limitations affected more complex organisational development work, especially in Eswatini. Upcoming or current leadership changes and staff rotation in some partner administrations including The Philippines and Nigeria may disrupt momentum and impact programme delivery. The WCO Secretariat's gradual phasing out of Leadership and Management Development (LMD) and Human Resource Management (HRM) activities also remains a risk, given the proven value of these activities in strengthening reform management of the Programme.

Lessons Learned

Key lessons from the year include the importance of sustained, multi-year engagement - particularly in countries such as Nigeria, South Africa, Namibia, Zambia and the Philippines, where long-term WCO support has correlated with clear outcome- and impact-level progress.

This also demonstrates the value of Programme longevity. Senior leadership buy-in also proved crucial in progressing reform in countries such as Nigeria (AEO) and South Africa (integrity).

Peer-to-peer learning continues to be effective for accelerating reforms such as CBM and AEO. The Programme also learned that sustained progress in organisational development requires continued access to LMD, HRM, integrity and GED expertise, although reduced capacity from delivery partners in these areas slowed progress.

The Programme also learned that online learning has become a core delivery modality, not simply a complement to in-person missions. A blended approach of online delivery and targeted in-country missions is preferred as a cost effective, flexible approach to prevent virtual fatigue.

The high demand for e-learning illustrates the efficiency of scalable global products and suggests the need for continued investment in digital learning. Another lesson is the value of mobilising experts from developing countries; their lived experience improves the quality of technical assistance and strengthens regional networks.

Recommendations for 25/26

Strengthen targeted in-country engagement in LDCs (Liberia, The Gambia) to ensure progress and build momentum.

Continue to expand peer-learning networks, peer-learning webinars and expert pools, especially from developing countries, as they have proved essential for leveraging South–South expertise and improving VfM.

Ensure continuity of organisational development support by working with the WCO Secretariat to manage the transition away from LMD and HRM activities so that critical capacity-building gains are not lost. Consider allocating additional specialist resources if need be.

Additional attention should also be given to ensuring knowledge products remain up-to-date with global best practice, taking account of emerging developments in digital trade, green border management, and customs modernisation trends.

Annual reviews of the targets will also be conducted to ensure that targets remain ambitious and realistic, allowing us to distinguish between performance that is genuinely above expectations and performance that is reasonable to achieve within a year or phase.

UNCTAD

Output Title	Technical assistance and capacity building to reform trade facilitation laws, procedures, processes, systems and consultative mechanisms within the context of the WTO TFA is provided to Customs administrations and NTFCs in partner countries		
Output number:	1 (A)	Output Score:	A
Impact weighting (%):	60	Weighting revised since last AR?	N/A

Indicator(s)	Targets	Results	% Against Target	Output Score
AI. 7b Number of country-level elearning events delivered and/or facilitated by UNCTAD	FY Target: 23	FY Result: 41	43.90%	A+
	Phase Target: 70	Phase Result: 128	82.86%	A++

AI.8 Number of NTFC stakeholders (from Programme recipient countries) trained in UNCTAD e-learning courses (sex disaggregated, disaggregated by public/private representatives)	FY Target: 424	FY Result: 441 (60% women and 14% private sector)	4.01%	A
	Phase Target: 1272	Phase Result: 1454	14.31%	A+
AI.9 Percentage of trained stakeholders who claimed that the UNCTAD e-learning courses have helped them significantly improve their knowledge on trade facilitation or related specific topics (%).	FY Target: 90% minimum (not cumulative)	FY Result: 94%	4.44%	A
	Phase Target: 90% minimum (not cumulative)	Phase Result: 93.5%	3.89%	A
AI.10 Percentage of UNCTAD trained stakeholders that claim to feel more confident to apply trade facilitation principles and concepts in their daily jobs (%)	FY Target: 90% minimum (not cumulative)	FY Result: 89%	1.12%	A
	Phase Target: 90% minimum (not cumulative)	Phase Result: 87.5%	2.86%	A
AI.11 Number of stakeholders that have completed the course on the use of the Reform tracker (gender disaggregated and # public/private disaggregated)	FY Target: 147	FY Result: 35 (Low as stakeholders use course as reference document, rather than completing the course)	-76.19%	C
	Phase Target: 440	Phase Result: 507	15.23%	A+
		Overall Score FY (Average)	-4.54%	A
		Overall Score Phase (Average)	23.83%	A+

Delivery under UNCTAD output 1 was strong, with performance meeting or exceeding expectations across nearly all indicators. The Programme delivered 41 country-level e-learning events during the reporting period (128 for the phase), surpassing the target of 23 for the year and demonstrating sustained demand for structured, high-quality training on NTFC governance, the Reform Tracker and implementation of TFA measures. Uptake of UNCTAD's e-learning platform remained robust: 1,842 NTFC stakeholders completed e-learning courses during the reporting year, meeting expectations and indicating strong engagement across the public sector and private sector. Reported user satisfaction was also high, with 94% of trained participants stating that courses significantly improved their understanding of trade facilitation topics.

Confidence levels among stakeholders applying trade facilitation concepts in their work remained strong, with 89% reporting increased confidence, representing steady progress. Completion of the Reform Tracker course remained lower in-year (35), reflecting a shift in user behaviour, whereby practitioners now use the Reform Tracker guidance as a reference tool rather than completing the formal course. Nevertheless, cumulative results remain above phase targets, with 507 completions, including strong female participation (46%).

Overall, UNCTAD met all targets for this output across the phase, with several indicators already exceeding phase milestones and only one falling below target for the year despite

exceeding targets across the Phase. The slight underperformance in confidence scores (AI.10) and Reform Tracker course completion (AI.11, in-year) does not pose a strategic risk. The Reform Tracker course was created to support stakeholders in the use of the tool but other indicators (number of visits and changes) show that engagement with the Reform Tracker has indeed increased, even if the number of officially trained people has decreased.

UNCTAD output 2

Output Title	Global knowledge, learning and measurement products are generated for Customs administrations and NTFCs		
Output number:	2 (B)	Output Score:	A
Impact weighting (%):	40	Weighting revised since last AR?	

Indicator(s)	Target	Results	% Against Target	Output Score
BI 1.b Number of global and regional events delivered by UNCTAD (e.g. peer-to-peer, learning events, webinars)	FY Target: 20	FY Result: 17	-17.65%	B
	Phase Target: 60	Phase Result: 54	11.11%	A+
BI 2.b The number of completed courses by trade facilitation stakeholders using the UNCTAD e-learning Platform that was set up with the support of the Programme in 2021.	FY Target: 952	FY Result: 702	-26.26%	C
	Phase Target: 2857	Phase Result: 3351	17.29%	A+
BI 4.b Number of days provided in-kind by non-Programme financed UNCTAD experts (value for money)	FY Target: 655	FY Result: 515	-27.18%	B
	Phase Target: 1967	Phase Result: 1962	0.25%	A
BI 5.b Hours spent by non-UNCTAD experts leveraged at no-cost for the Programme (#), of which number of experts from developing countries	FY Target: 33	FY Result: 38	15.15%	A+
	Phase Target: 99	Phase Result: 128	29.29%	A+
BI 6.b Number of communication materials (videos, blogs, brochures, newsletters) and capacity building organizational development tools (toolkits, compendiums, e learning modules, and portals) developed for NTFCs by UNCTAD	FY Target: 37	FY Result: 40	8.11%	A
	Phase Target: 112	Phase Result: 189	68.75%	A++
		Overall Score FY (Average)	-9.57%	A
		Overall Score Phase (Average)	25.34%	A+

Performance under UNCTAD Output 2 was good, with a couple of indicators slightly exceeding expectations, 3 were either slightly below or below targets – although overall across the Phase this was only a marginal underachievement against targets and thus is not a cause for concern. Compared to the WCO results, it likely indicates that targets are more accurately defined against results – meaning there is less of a concern for UNCTAD about requiring an annual review of targets. The Programme delivered 17 global and regional learning events during the reporting period (54 for the phase), slightly below the in-year target of 20 and overall phase target of 60. This underperformance reflects the fact that a lot of the work delivered on the Programme has significant dependencies on the partner countries that we work with, as it is linked to competing national priorities, environmental disruptions (e.g., Hurricane Beryl), and scheduling challenges in partner countries resulting in postponing or cancellations of some events. However, this did not materially affect learning outcomes, as the Programme compensated through expanded use of online coaching sessions and peer-to-peer formats.

UNCTAD achieved substantial progress across all other indicators for this output. Completion of e-learning courses totalled 3,351 across the phase, meeting expectations and maintaining momentum built in earlier years. The Programme continued to leverage significant in-kind expert support, with 2,495 expert days contributed during the phase, underscoring strong value for money and demonstrating UNCTAD's ability to mobilise technical specialists across multiple thematic areas. Additional contributions from non-UNCTAD experts (329 hours) added depth to regional and national learning activities, particularly in complex thematic areas such as gender integration, resource mobilisation, and advanced TFA implementation. Production of knowledge materials significantly exceeded expectations, with 247 communication products and organisational development tools generated during the phase - well above the target of 170 - strengthening global public goods available to all NTFCs and customs administrations.

Overall, output 2 for UNCTAD is on track, with only two indicators below target over the Phase. Given the strong performance across all other indicators and value-for-money (see section D), this underperformance is not assessed as a strategic risk. The Programme is well placed to meet, and in several areas exceed, end-of-phase targets.

Challenges and Issues

Overall, although UNCTAD performance was strong across both Programme output, several challenges affected delivery. In some countries, limited human resources within NTFC Secretariats constrained participation in training and reduced availability for follow-up sessions. Competing national priorities and post-election transitions slowed engagement in selected countries. E-learning fatigue, noted in previous years, persisted in settings with heavy online workloads or unstable connectivity. Additionally, the growing complexity of reform work (e.g. linking BPA outputs to Simplification proposals) increased demand for more intensive technical coaching, requiring recalibration of global event planning and risked overburdening recipient agencies lacking in capacity. Several external factors limited the number of global/regional events delivered during the year. Environmental disasters, such as Hurricane Beryl, impacted several Caribbean partner countries, stalling momentum and disrupting ongoing activities.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Key lessons include the importance of balancing online learning with targeted in-country engagement to maximise knowledge retention and reduce fatigue. Reform Tracker V2 demonstrated that hands-on support during set-up and planning phases significantly increases stakeholder adoption and follow-through, suggesting a need for more guided sessions rather than purely self-paced learning. Another key lesson this year is that high-quality digital tools

and targeted national support can effectively compensate for fewer global events without reducing overall impact.

Looking ahead, the Programme should continue:

- Prioritising countries with slower reform momentum and high NTFC commitment by offering enhanced coaching and NTFC strengthening.
- Supporting NTFCs to institutionalise regular meeting cycles and reporting routines to sustain progress across 2025/26.
- Expanding short, topic-specific e-learning modules to maintain engagement and further integrate new topics (e.g., gender, transit coordination, digital trade, data governance) into knowledge products.
- Planning global and regional events earlier in the calendar year to avoid seasonal or political bottlenecks.
- Leveraging non-UNCTAD experts to expand thematic depth and strengthen South–South learning.
- Reinforcing NTFC Secretariat capacity-building to ensure sustained engagement with global guidance.

D: VALUE FOR MONEY

The Programme has continued to demonstrate strong value for money in this reporting period overall, with leveraged expertise, regional peer-to-peer learning, and sustainable reforms. Digital systems introduced (E-AR, AEO portals, Reform Tracker V2) are expected to reduce long-term administrative costs and burdens for border agencies and traders. Evidence of reduced trade frictions includes substantial reductions in administrative costs and clearance times in specific contexts, such as a 40% reduction in administrative cost per declaration in Namibia, following UNCTAD-supported business process simplification, and a 60% reduction in average clearance times in Zambia (from over 48 hours in 2022 to under 14 hours in 2024), based on Time Release Studies conducted by the WCO-trained TRS Working Group at the Chirundu One Stop Border Post and Kazungula One Stop Border Post, Zambia’s critical trade arteries. Another example is 97% reduction in clearance times in air cargo in Zambia.

The WCO continued to leverage its unique model of mobilising experts of Customs administrations to deliver capacity building to benefit the HMRC partner countries, most notably through the WCO pool of WCO (pre-)accredited/recognised Experts as well as regional specialists.

For the reporting period, this has generated significant value-for-money with the WCO mobilising 553 days of experts’ support (equivalent to an in-kind contribution of EUR 553,000 as per a quantified day-rate of EUR 1,000). 192 of these days were from the WCO expert pool, and 126 days were contributed from developing countries. 104 days were contributed by officials from the WCO Secretariat. It can also be noted that a total of 212 days were delivered by women, of which 64 days were contributed by women from developing countries. The WCO’s accumulated in-kind Programme contribution in expert’s support 1733 days, with a financial equivalent of EUR 1,733,000

During this evaluation period, UNCTAD successfully leveraged 515 working days (12% increase compared to the previous financial year) of non-Programme financed UNCTAD experts. With an average salary of 1000 USD per day, UNCTAD contributed 515,000 USD to the Programme. In addition, 38 hours of training were delivered by three non-UNCTAD experts from developing countries.

Overview of risk management

Overall risk rating: *Low-Moderate*

The overall programme risk level for 2024/25 is assessed as **Low–Moderate (stable)**. This reflects strong delivery partner capability, predictable delivery modalities, and low fiduciary exposure, balanced against recurring external and institutional risks that affect the pace of reform in partner countries. The Programme Steering Group (HMRC, FCDO, WCO, UNCTAD) continues to review risks quarterly, drawing on partner reporting, country updates, and in-year monitoring visits. Delivery partners maintain their own internal risk controls and escalate emerging issues through the Programme’s governance structure.

Five Key Risk Trends in 2024/25

1. Country absorption capacity (Moderate).

Limited staffing within Customs administrations and NTFC Secretariats—especially in LDCs such as Liberia, The Gambia, Cambodia and Timor-Leste—continued to affect responsiveness and the pace of activity. Competing mandates mean key officials are often pulled into wider fiscal or economic tasks, slowing progress on technical follow-up. This remains one of the most persistent delivery risks.

2. Leadership turnover and political cycles (Moderate).

Several countries experienced Customs leadership or Government changes, slowing implementation in PCA, CBM and risk management. Elections in Madagascar, Philippines and parts of Southern Africa also shifted attention away from reform programmes. While these changes did not derail delivery, they required re-engagement efforts and adaptive sequencing.

3. External shocks and environmental disruptions (Moderate).

Hurricane Beryl’s impact on the Caribbean, US tariff changes affecting national trade priorities, and regional political unrest all contributed to delays in engagement. These shocks primarily affected scheduling rather than structural reform progress, but highlight the need for flexible, modular work planning.

4. Delivery partner capacity constraints (Low–Moderate).

WCO Secretariat shortages in HRM and GED expertise constrained organisational development work in Eswatini, Madagascar and parts of West Africa. WCO’s strategic shift away from LMD and HRM also creates uncertainty for countries where LMD and HRM have been major enablers. UNCTAD faced uneven responsiveness from some NTFCs, particularly where national stakeholders balance multiple roles. These risks are actively managed through targeted mission planning and operational prioritisation.

5. Digital and ICT systems dependencies (Moderate).

Several reforms depend on updates to ASYCUDA systems or national ICT infrastructure. For example, in Zambia and Madagascar full implementation of WCO Immediate Release Guidelines was delayed, pending ASYCUDA World upgrades, affecting the pace of progress on Expedited Shipments (Article 7.8). In Zambia, although the impact-level result was ultimately achieved, it could have been reached earlier without these system-related delays. While these dependencies pose operational risks, partners have retained momentum through workarounds and incremental pilots.

Gender Equality

Equalities risks remain low, though performance varies between countries. The Programme actively promotes gender equality: 46% of Reform Tracker trainees and 52% of UNCTAD e-

learning graduates were women, and several partners (Philippines, Namibia, Zambia) advanced GED Action Plans. Internal WCO constraints in GED capacity during the reporting period remained a medium-term risk, but mitigation included regional peer support and partnerships with other international organisations.

Fiduciary and Due Diligence Risks

Fiduciary risk remains low, as funds are channelled through two multilateral organisations with strong financial controls. WCO and UNCTAD continue to provide timely financial reporting and operate under their established audit systems. No red flags emerged in 2024/25. Due diligence assessments remain up to date and proportionate to the programme’s risk level.

Climate and Environmental Risk

The programme’s interventions have low direct environmental impact (focused primarily on policy and governance). However, climate-induced disruptions (e.g., hurricane impacts) can slow delivery, and the Programme encourages environmentally sustainable border procedures through digitalisation and reduced paper use. No significant climate or environmental risks require mitigation beyond standard resilience measures.

Mitigation Actions and Programme Response

To manage these risks, the Programme will:

- increase structured engagement with senior leadership in partner countries to mitigate political and turnover risks;
- prioritise support to countries with low absorptive capacity through more targeted missions and simplified workplans;
- schedule activities earlier to avoid predictable seasonal disruptions (elections, religious festivals);
- continue utilising the WCO expert pool, peer-to-peer and South–South support to address expert capacity gaps;
- provide more flexible, modular virtual support to maintain continuity during shocks;
- reinforce organisational development (HRM, integrity, GED, leadership) to strengthen institutional resilience and building on existing investments in these areas by consolidating progress with current partner administrations and supporting them in achieving tangible and sustainable results.

Overall Assessment

Taken overall, risks are manageable, well-understood, and generally relate to the pace of delivery rather than strategic or fiduciary threats. The Programme remains comfortably within risk appetite, with no material concerns that would affect value for money or justify restructuring or closure.

F: PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT: DELIVERY, COMMERCIAL & FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Costs (24-25)	Amount (£)
Budget:	£1.7 million
Actual Spend:	£1.68 million
Underspend:	£0.02 million

Disbursements to WCO, UNCTAD and HMRC for programme delivery totalled £1.56 million. The difference between total programme spend (£1.68 million) and delivery partner disbursements reflects HMRC internal programme management, staffing, travel and monitoring costs.

To note, the Programme achieved close to full spend (98.7%). WCO ended the year slightly over budget (€4,938), with agreement this amount would be absorbed into the budget for the next FY. UNCTAD fully committed allocated funds for expenditure by 31 March 2025.

G: MONITORING, EVIDENCE AND LEARNING

Monitoring and Evaluation

All ODA-funded programmes are required to undertake Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) activity throughout their life cycle. Alongside the Programme Results Framework, Theory of Change, and reporting mechanisms, in-country activity is needed to ensure robust, real-time evidence. HMRC does not employ an external monitoring agent to conduct MEL as the programme is considered low risk due to the reputation, track record and experience of delivery partners and established relationships with partner countries. HMRC conducted two M & E missions during the reporting period, with missions taking place in The Maldives and Namibia in the autumn of 2024.

HMRC conducts this M & E activity directly in-country to corroborate programme outcomes, understand experiences of partner countries and analyse impact through the Programme Results Framework. Feedback is then provided to delivery partners, with recommendations and suggested next steps.

ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME RESULTS FRAMEWORK SUMMARY

Results framework Accelerate Trade Facilitation Programme 2022-2025 – as submitted to Steering Group 27/10/2022

