

# ACCREDITATION

## CASE STUDY



## COBHAM

### Introduction

Founded by aviation pioneer Sir Alan Cobham in the 1930s, Cobham plc is a global technology and services innovator respected for providing solutions to some of the greatest challenges.

Cobham's range of technologies and services help solve challenging problems across commercial, defence and security markets, specialising in meeting the growing demand for data, connectivity and bandwidth. Cobham products have earned a reputation for protecting lives and livelihoods, often in extreme environments, from deep space to the depths of the ocean.

With more than 11,500 employees across five continents, and customers and partners in over 100 countries, Cobham offers rewarding project and programme management positions in: wireless data communications, satcom, defence electronics, air-to-air refuelling, aviation services, and life support and mission systems. In order to run these varied programmes, it has more than 270 named project and programme managers spread across the globe, plus many more people who practise project management as part of other roles.

## Striving for excellence

Cobham's Project and Programme Management Function is responsible for establishing functional excellence through best practice and identifying, developing and retaining talented project and programme managers (PMs) and project management office (PMO) staff.

Strategic objectives for the function are agreed by Cobham's Group Executive and are cascaded down to each business unit through the Project and Programme Management (PPM) Council, which is responsible for setting and maintaining strategic direction for the function, and ultimately for delivering that strategy within their business units. The council consists of project leads for each unit as well as cross-functional representatives to ensure the wide variety of projects are all represented.



## A competence framework and defined career paths

Cobham has an established competence framework which provides a clear and transparent definition of the competencies people need to successfully fulfil its projects and programmes. Cobham took best practice models from APM, as well as organisations from the United States and Australia, and developed a framework that is a combination of technical and leadership competencies.

The framework consists of 57 competencies, a number of which relate to leadership and are common to all functions within the company. From this, the level of competence for each role in the PPM job family was

quantified, establishing common standards that are applied around the world, so there is a common language and expectation. The framework enables line managers to more easily identify the competencies needed for someone to be successful in a role, so that they can better assign people to projects. This is good for the business and good for individuals, as they can be matched to projects they are best suited to, with any support they might need. Project managers are regularly assessed against the competence framework, which forms the basis of their ongoing personal development review, ensuring it is central to wider development activities.

Pauline Howell, Senior Vice President of Talent Development confirms "Competency frameworks enable our people to understand the skills, knowledge and experience required to undertake a particular role within Cobham, supporting the identification of career development activities, and helping leaders ensure they are assigning their team members to projects and programmes appropriately."

Building on this competence framework, a job family featuring five levels and three inter-related career pathways has been established, which reflects the different skills and competencies project managers need in order to successfully deliver the wide range of projects and programmes within Cobham. The framework is fully aligned to APM, and US and Australian professional bodies, and is designed to enhance the understanding of an individual's competence and capabilities, identify where they sit within the job family, and help them to achieve their development and career goals.

## Nurturing talent

Cobham runs a corporate talent programme with two key groups; the first focuses on leaders and the second on professional disciplines, including project and programme management. Functional Excellence, the talent programme for project and programme management, is aimed at identifying, acquiring, assessing, developing and retaining talented professionals in this area of critical expertise.

As part of the talent programme, Cobham PMs participate in a three-day development centre, where they complete a variety of exercises covering different subsections of the project and programme management competencies. Over the course of the three days they are assessed by individual professionals including external business psychologists and experienced project management assessors. As an outcome, each person receives two detailed reports, one against the leadership competencies, and one against the set of PPM competencies.

Brian Lowicki, Vice President, Cobham Mission Systems, New York, USA has seen the majority of his team undertake the three-day development centre and is a strong advocate of the process. He says "The Cobham project and programme management talent development centre provides a stimulating experience

that yields rich, detailed feedback for personal and functional development. Candidates are able to use verbal, numerical, and abstract testing combined with individual and team exercises to challenge and demonstrate strengths and provide feedback for development planning. In Cobham Mission Systems, we have taken advantage of the development centres to identify individual and team development needs. These opportunities are used in our ongoing personal development review process to provide training and growth opportunities for our team."

In 2014, Cobham established a virtual training academy to help people develop and progress through its job family. The academy combines face-to-face courses delivering professional qualifications with on-the-job learning through mentoring, coaching and secondments. With courses available at each of the five levels; project managers can build up their capability as they progress through the function. APM courses are delivered as part of these levels and 210 members of staff currently hold APM professional qualifications. This figure is set to increase further as achieving professional qualifications has become a pre-requisite of roles and each PM must be trained up to the level they sit within the job family.

Amber Smith, PMO Manager at Cobham Antenna Systems, Marlow, UK states "The PMQ qualification has added a valuable depth of understanding to my role and the support I provide project managers. Before I started the course I wasn't sure how much would be relevant to me but now, I can see how my role has benefitted. I have

a greater sense of why we do things the way that we do them and their broader context, and am able to make decisions that add greater value. I don't think I could have gained this knowledge in such a succinct way elsewhere, and though the course was hard work it was really engaging; passing the exam has given me a great sense of achievement."

## A culture of ongoing development

Continuing professional development (CPD) is a core aspect of everyone's role and it is embedded in the many learning and development activities available. All PMs are encouraged to keep a log of their CPD activities which is reviewed as part of the certification process, with project managers required to demonstrate they are actively involved in the profession in order to progress through Cobham's job family.

The CPD opportunities identified through the development centres form part of an individual's twice-yearly personal development review. Progress against these objectives contributes to their final rating, which ultimately feeds into the annual pay review process. This provided a valuable incentive to individuals to be as informed and active in the profession as possible. PMs at all levels are encouraged to attend APM events, conferences and local special interest groups to share best practice.



## A focus on communication

Comprehensive communications plans are in place and the Enterprise Programme Management Office (EPMO) is responsible for delivering central communications activities, including articles in the Cobham internal magazines, news items on the website and monthly team briefs delivered to each business unit. The communications plan enables all stakeholders to keep up to date and aligned through project rollouts, as activities become embedded within each business unit.

Cobham created its SharePoint site which is a central communications hub where all staff within the organisation can look at training and development activities, information on governance policies, lifecycle management, and tools and processes. The site also includes links to professional bodies, information on the benefits of membership and access to the *APM Body of Knowledge*.

## What APM accreditation means to us

"We recognise that consistently delivering customer expectations is the bedrock upon which Cobham will grow, so receiving APM accreditation for our capability building programme is a tangible demonstration that we're on the right track. It is going to help us attract, develop and retain talented project and programme managers who can work with people around the globe to deliver projects better than our competition, time and time again."

**Mandy Savage**, Senior Vice President Lifecycle and Programme Management



## Personal story

Donna Sinnick joined Cobham in 1997 and since then her career has progressed to the role of Programme Director looking after all air-to-air fuelling programmes, and her recent appointment as VP Programmes in the business unit.

"Back in 2002 I completed an HNC in Production Engineering in order to provide myself with a solid base managing an engineering team and this, coupled with my APM professional courses and an Open University course have bolstered my learning and development. The nature of the industry means we are developing at the forefront of technology and it relies on us managing complex interdependencies and driving a very clear scope to deliver successful programmes."

Like many other staff Donna has attended Cobham's project and programme management three-day development centre, designed to assess competencies and leadership skills.

"The development centre was a good learning experience and an excellent opportunity to focus on my personal development. The outcome was a comprehensive development plan, which linked neatly to my development plan from the Cobham High Potential Programme (a programme that focuses on developing leadership over a two-year period). Cobham's continued investment in people secured me a place on an Essential of Leadership residential course at the London Business School, which is one of the world's leading business schools.

"I have undertaken formal APMP (now known as PMQ) training which has enabled me to benchmark myself and develop as a member of the project and programme management community. The training I've received has also exploited my personal strengths and enabled me to develop other competencies, all of which have translated into my working practice immediately."



## Client testimonial

"Initially as the leader of the Enterprise Programme Management Office (EPMO) and now as an internal client, I've witnessed at first-hand the detail that has gone into evaluating, supporting and training the global Cobham PPM community. It is also abundantly obvious that the EPMO led by Mandy Savage is bringing many years of major programme and portfolio experience to bear, inspiring and motivating both young and mature PMs to continually improve. This huge investment in developing capability in the function is clearly paying dividends with demonstrable results achieved in several of our most complex development programmes.

The EPMO have planned and successfully implemented a highly impressive Lifecycle, Project & Programme Management standard operating framework across the entire Cobham business, which is tailored to meet the demands of a technically diverse business such as ours.

A pragmatic framework of seven different types

and three categories of project/programme have been established which enables us to manage our portfolio better and take a more structured approach to the development of our people. This framework is comparable to others I have researched within benchmark organisations such as Shell and BAE Systems, so I'm delighted that the efforts of the extended team have been recognised with APM Accreditation.

This is a big change programme with much more to be done, but it is rewarding to hear customers commenting positively about the improvements that they have seen so far. I'm confident that it will help us to retain and attract talent and further grow the business.

There's lots more to do, but we're definitely on the right path to define 'standard work' and achieving the elusive goal of a better work/life balance for the PM community."

**Julian Hellebrand**, Former sector President  
Cobham Mission Systems

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### **FIVE**Dimensions of Professionalism

#### **APM Corporate Accreditation**

APM Corporate Accreditation will help you stand out as an exemplar in the development of project management professionals. It provides assurances to your customers and suppliers and allows you to attract and retain the best project management talent in the country.

APM Corporate Accreditation recognises the commitment of organisations and professional development services to the defined APM FIVE Dimensions of Professionalism, each of which is supported by an APM standard:

#### **Breadth**

The *APM Body of Knowledge* defines the knowledge needed to manage any kind of project. It underpins many project management standards and methods including the National Occupational Standard in Project Management.

#### **Depth**

The *APM Competence Framework* provides a guide to project management competences. It is part of your professional toolkit; mapping levels of knowledge and experience to help you progress your skills and abilities.

#### **Achievement**

APM qualifications take your career in new and exciting directions. They are recognised across the profession and aligned with IPMA's 4 level Certification Program.

#### **Commitment**

Continuing Professional Development helps develop your project management practice. A targeted development plan will enhance your project management career.

#### **Accountability**

The APM Code of Professional Conduct outlines the ethical practice expected of a professional. Becoming an APM member shows your commitment to the Code and sets you apart from others.