association for project management

apm

Practitioner Qualification

Candidate Guidance Notes

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Who is the APM Practitioner Qualification for?

The APM Practitioner Qualification is for individuals who want to show that they can effectively manage a non complex project across its whole lifecycle. The APM Practitioner Qualification is appropriate for individuals who have at least 3 years experience in responsible leadership functions of non-complex projects or have been a team member of a more complex project. Candidates wishing to take the Practitioner Qualification must also satisfy one of the following criteria for project management knowledge:

either
have passed the APMP qualification
or
can demonstrate good familiarity with the *APM Body of Knowledge* and have passed an equivalent qualification such as PMP®, ISEB Certificate in Project Management, Open University Project Management Module M865
or
can demonstrate that they have a good foundation knowledge of project management supported by evidence of relevant CPD

Note: Approved centres will be responsible for ensuring that all candidates put forward for assessment for this qualification can demonstrate the required foundation knowledge.

What is Assessed During the APM Practitioner Qualification?

The certification assesses a candidate's capability to manage a non complex project across all aspects of the project lifecycle. The Practitioner Qualification is not designed to assess overall competence as a project manager as this is not possible out of context of the project environment. It is an assessment at a given moment in time in a specific, but generally realistic environment.

The assessment of the candidates' capabilities takes place within the boundaries of a case study and is made against 30 assessment criteria (Appendix B), with particular emphasis on the criteria written in bold

Assessors are also looking for objective evidence of the desired behavioural characteristics of a project management professional, as defined in the *APM Body of Knowledge (Version 5)*, topic 7.7. Although these behaviours are not scored in the same way as other criteria, if the assessors believe that a candidate displays a serious and systematic deficiency in one or more behaviours, the candidate will fail the assessment. The characteristics are:

Open, positive attitude	Inventiveness
Common sense	Prudent risk taker
Open mindedness	Fairness
Adaptability	Commitment

All the areas of the *APM Body of Knowledge (Version 5)* addressed by the case study material and assessment criteria are outlined in Appendix A.

Assessors will collect evidence of a candidate's project management capabilities through the group activities and exercises as well as through the written examination. Candidates will be observed discussing and solving problems relating to the project case study. In addition, all candidates will be interviewed by their assessor on an individual basis during the assessment session.

How is the APM Practitioner Qualification Assessed?

The assessment session will typically take place over three days; starting at lunchtime or late afternoon on Day 1 and finishing at lunchtime or late afternoon on Day 3, depending on the chosen timetable. Only APM can approve modifications to timetable arrangements to accommodate client needs without jeopardising the structure and efficacy of the assessment process. This must be done in advance of the assessment session.

The assessment process fundamentally relies on all candidates attending each session on time. Lateness, for any reason, compromises the assessment process. For this reason, the assessment session is designed to be a residential event.

The assessment will comprise of:

Individual work – candidates will provide written answers in examination conditions to questions based upon the given case study and will also provide a written answer to a question about an issue in project management. This question will be related to one or more of the assessment criteria, and will be selected by the assessor from the pre-published list of questions which all candidates have access to. Candidates must ensure that their written scripts and other work submitted are legible. The assessors or facilitators may decide not to mark the scripts or other work judged to be illegible.

Group work (observed) – candidates will carry out group exercises in order to discuss and solve problems related to the case study.

Interviews – all candidates will be interviewed on an individual basis. The first part of the interview is an opportunity for the candidate to tell the assessor about their experience and capability as a project manager using examples from their experience to illustrate their views. This should be done via a presentation from the candidate which should last a minimum of 5 minutes and a maximum of 10 minutes. Each candidate should inform the assessor of the length of their presentation before they begin. Candidates may use a flipchart during this presentation but should not use pre-prepared visual aids. For the remainder of the interview, the assessor will engage the candidate in a dialogue by asking relevant questions that are case study bounded.

Candidates will be allowed to refer to the *APM Body of Knowledge (Version 5) Definitions* document throughout the assessment but not during the written work in Session 5. Assessors are responsible for the assessment of the candidate's performance and facilitators are responsible for marking written work. Facilitators are also required to share their findings with the assessors whilst determining evidence of the candidate's capability against the assessment criteria.

International Registration

Successful candidates will be registered with the International Project Management Association (IPMA) Level C qualification. In line with the stipulations of the Level C qualification, the APM Practitioner Qualification is valid for a period of five years. After five years, a candidate's certification must be re-certified by providing evidence of their Continuing Professional Development in project management.

How to Apply for the APM Practitioner Qualification

Candidates who have met the pre-entry requirements of project management experience and knowledge will need to register with an APM approved assessment centre. The registration documents required are:-

1. Two copies of the completed and signed APM Practitioner Qualification application form
2. Two copies of the completed APM self assessment form
3. Two copies of a project based CV outlining the candidate's experience in project management, with details of their responsibilities and involvement across the project life cycle.

Using these documents for reference, approved assessment centres are responsible for accepting applications on behalf of APM. If the candidate does not agree with the centre's assessment, the application will be referred to APM head office for arbitration.

Candidates with Special Needs

APM will do its utmost to accommodate candidates with special needs. Candidates should notify the approved assessment centre at the time of application in order to ensure that all appropriate considerations are given.

Advice and Guidance

Advice, support and guidance are available from any APM approved assessment centre or from the APM Professional Development department.

Association for Project Management
Ibis House, Regent Park
Summerleys Road
Princes Risborough
Buckinghamshire
HP27 9LE

Tel: 0845 458 1944
Web : apm.org.uk
Email: qualifications @apm.org.uk

Appendix A

Areas of the *APM Body of Knowledge* addressed by case study material and assessment criteria

Areas of the APM Body of Knowledge addressed by case study material and assessment criteria			
Project management in context	• Project management • Project context • Project sponsorship	**Planning the strategy**	• Project success and benefits management • Stakeholder management • Value management • Project management plan • Project risk management • Project quality management
Executing the strategy	• Scope management • Scheduling • Resource management • Budgeting and cost management • Change control • Information management and reporting • Issue management	**Techniques**	• Requirements management • Estimating • Configuration management
Business and commercial	• Business case • Procurement • Legal awareness	**Organisation and governance**	• Project life cycles • Concept • Definition • Implementation • Handover and closeout • Project reviews • Organisation structure • Organisational roles
People	• Communication • Teamwork • Leadership • Conflict management • Negotiation		

Appendix B

Practitioner Qualification Assessment Criteria

*All assessment criteria shown are important and contribute to the pass/fail decision for each candidate, however, a Practitioner Qualification will not be awarded to candidates who do not demonstrate at least a basic/partial capability in the assessment criteria shown in **bold**.*

1. Determine stakeholders and their influence and interests
2. Design the optimal project organisation
3. Analyse and understand project success criteria and business benefits
4. Analyse and understand project constraints and dependences
5. Identify project risks and assumptions
6. Identify project issues
7. **Demonstrate an understanding of project context and the overall business case**
8. Define the scope of the project
9. **Demonstrate a comprehensive application of project management planning**
10. **Apply a risk management process competently to the project**
11. Apply a quality management process competently to the project
12. Demonstrate an ability to incorporate best value approaches
13. Demonstrate an awareness of generic legal and contractual issues
14. Prepare for a negotiation with a supplier of critical services for the project
15. Analyse conflict situations and apply an appropriate style to resolve the issue
16. Objectively reflect on the performance of self and other team members
17. Present information clearly and factually
18. Answer questions relevantly and succinctly
19. **Optimise project plans to respond to a major change**
20. Apply effective change control and configuration management
21. Balance conflicting stakeholder expectations
22. **Demonstrate an ability to monitor project progress and take suitable controlling action**
23. **Plan and conduct a suitable post project evaluation review**
24. Objectively identify lessons to be learned separating causes from effects
25. Communicate succinctly in writing
26. Lead and influence a small team
27. **Work effectively as a team member**
28. Communicate verbally in an appropriate way (including listening)
29. Obtain information through use of appropriate questions
30. Present compelling recommendations to project sponsor (board/steering group)

Appendix C

APM Practitioner Qualification Essay Questions

Essay Questions

Assessors will select one of the following questions for the candidate to answer during the assessment session. No candidate will fail the Practitioner Qualification based on the answer provided to the question that is selected for them to answer; however, the answer will give valuable additional evidence to the assessment team to support the rating of project management capability against the Practitioner Qualification assessment criteria.

In all cases the candidate has 60 minutes to answer the question under examination conditions. No reference books are allowed.

The question is designed to assess the candidate's capability (applied knowledge) so it is important that answers are illustrated with examples from their experience of project management.

Each part of the selected question contributes equally to the overall rating so candidates should allocate their time accordingly and answer all parts of the question.

Question A

Consider a project you have managed or one you know well.

a) Describe key factors in determining and managing the project's context.

b) Critically analyse the methods used to ensure that stakeholder needs and expectations were understood and managed over the whole life cycle of the project.

c) Discuss the importance of understanding project constraints (things that must happen) and dependencies (things on which successful delivery of the project critically depend)

d) Describe the differences between project issues and project risks and your views on the ways in which issues and risks should be managed

Question B

Consider a project you have managed or one you know well.

a) Describe the organisation for the project, showing the rationale for both the project organisation and the fit of the project organisation into the wider organisation.

b) Critically discuss the project roles involved, highlighting positive and negative aspects of each role and their inter-relationships.

Question C

Consider a project you have managed or one you know well.

a) Clearly describe the similarities and differences between project success criteria (critical success factors or CSFs) and business benefits.

b) Using real examples to illustrate your argument, describe the usefulness of spending time to understand and differentiate success criteria and business benefits at the start of any project.

Question D

Consider a project you have managed or one you know well.

a) Critically analyse the business case for the project including the justification for investment and, in hindsight, comment on its strengths and weaknesses.

b) Describe the lessons you have learned about the purpose and importance of the business case to a project.

Question E

Consider a project you have managed or one you know well.

a) Define the methods used for capturing and managing detailed project implementation requirements.

b) Critically analyse these methods, defending the aspects you believe were successful and suggesting areas for improvement.

Question F

Consider a project you have managed or one you know well.

a) Critically analyse the project management plan (PMP) for the project and draw general conclusions (pros and cons) on its value and usefulness.

b) Comment specifically on the use of:

- Breakdown structures used
- Estimating methods used
- Time scheduling techniques used
- Resource allocation and management techniques used
- Budgeting methods used

Question G

Consider a project you have managed or one you know well.

a) Critically analyse the application of risk management over the entire project life cycle.

b) Discuss and justify your views on the most effective aspects of risk management.

c) From your experience what aspects of risk management do you consider under-utilised on projects.

Question H

Consider a project you have managed or one you know well.

a) Critically analyse the application of quality management over the entire project life cycle.

b) Discuss and justify your views on the most effective aspects of quality management.

c) From your experience, what aspects of quality management do you consider to be under-utilised on projects.

Question J

Consider a project you have managed or one you know well.

a) Describe the methods used for ensuring best value on the project.

b) Critically analyse these methods, defending the aspects you believe were successful and suggesting areas for improvement.

Question K

Consider a project you have managed or one you know well.

a) Discuss both the legal issues considered at the project outset and those unforeseen legal issues that arose during the project.

b) Discuss both the contractual issues considered at the project outset and those unforeseen contractual issues that arose during the project.

c) Give your views on the opinion that the project manager should have an awareness of legal and contractual issues on a project.

Question L

Consider a project you have managed or one you know well.

a) Describe the negotiation strategy, approach and techniques employed during the project and comment on whether you believe they were successful or not.

b) In your opinion should there be any differences in approach to internal and external negotiations. If you believe there should be differences explain why this is; if you believe they should be the same again explain why this is.

c) Based on your experience discuss when using a 'win-win' approach would not be the optimal way to proceed.

Question M

Consider a project you have managed or one you know well.

a) Critically analyse the change control processes adopted and the execution of these over the life of the project.

b) From your experience, what aspects of change control 'best practice' do you consider need to be improved on projects.

c) Discuss and justify your views on the role of configuration management in assuring the integrity of all project management deliverables.

Question N

Consider a project you have managed or one you know well.

a) Define the methods used for monitoring and reporting progress on the project considering scope, time, resources, cost, value, risk and quality.

b) Explain how these methods enabled controlling actions to be undertaken.

c) Critically analyse these methods (for both monitoring and controlling), defending the aspects you believe were successful and suggesting areas for improvement

Question P

Consider a project you have managed or one you know well.

a) Analyse and critique both the process used for the post project evaluation review and the outputs from the review.

b) Discuss the role of the post project evaluation review as related to project success criteria (critical success factors or CSFs) and to the realisation of the wider business benefits outlined in the project business case.

c) Many projects do not have a formal and effective post project evaluation review. Discuss your views on the effect of this fact on the management of future projects within an organisation. What are the likely impacts?

Question R

Consider a project you have managed or one you know well.

a) Critically analyse the effectiveness of general communication on the project – what were the strong points and what could have been improved.

b) Considering your own communication methods and skills, what do you believe to be your strengths and where do you believe you could improve.

c) Reflect on a time when you had to present a compelling recommendation to a project sponsor (board, steering group). Discuss the key things you considered in planning and in implementing your approach.

Question S

Consider a project you have managed or one you know well

a) Critically analyse the effectiveness of team-working on the project – discuss the positive aspects and what could have been improved.

b) Reflect on your experiences and performance as a leader. Describe your approach and style and the features of this that you believe have been effective.

c) The art of conflict management is to channel conflict so that the result is positive. Discuss your views on this statement giving examples from your experience to illustrate your points.

Note:
Any project information you provide in answering the question is for illustrative purposes only to support your answer. Please feel free to disguise any aspect that you consider to be commercially sensitive.