

APM Project Management Awards



WINNER'S

CASE STUDY



Category **Programme of the Year 2015**

Winner **Delivery of the Rotary Wing Strategy 2009-2015,
UK Ministry of Defence**

Sponsor



Overview

After acclaimed and extensive operational service in Iraq and Afghanistan, a new challenge faced the UK's fleet of military helicopters if it was to remain battle ready.

By the start of 2009, there was intense media interest in a perceived lack of operational aircraft, a pressing need to address equipment obsolescence and for decisions to be made on potential successor fleets.

All this was against a backdrop of the global financial crisis and pressures on Government spending, which meant that plans had to be modified rapidly or it would be increasingly difficult to sustain helicopter capability at the

required level in the future.

In addition to an estimated £1 billion deficit in equipment acquisition plans and rising equipment support costs, there was also little consensus between the Royal Navy the Army and the Royal Air Force on a helicopter forward plan.

Government ministers called for a holistic review to determine the most cost-effective future investment. This led to the Rotary Wing Strategy (RWS) and the first 5-year tranche of a programme to re-capitalise the UK's military helicopter types and drive support efficiencies to ensure delivery of a battle-winning, front line capability.

Objectives

The RWS programme was set strategic goals to achieve within the five years:

- Address forecast gaps in helicopter capabilities that otherwise would have occurred by 2020 without increasing capital investment beyond established budgets;
- Reduce the fixed costs of ownership of the overall UK military helicopter fleet through measures such as reducing the number of fleets and minimising the diversity of aircraft configurations within each fleet;
- Address key obsolescence and safety risks to sustain operational capability.

Challenges

There were a number of projects – each with its own scope and challenges – within a programme that was the first of its kind to be attempted by the UK MOD for the overall military helicopter capability.

New Wildcat and Chinook Mk6 helicopters were to be purchased while existing Puma, Apache, Chinook and Merlin helicopters required upgrading and modernising. Investment was needed to ensure training aids such as flight simulators reflected the upgraded fleet while maximising training effect and efficiencies.

Revised support arrangements for each of the core future helicopters had to be implemented and full ownership of all Merlins was to be transferred to the Royal Navy.

All this had to be achieved despite a change of Government, a strategic defence and security review, a global financial crisis and changes in the regulatory environment and framework following the creation of the Military Airworthiness Authority.

It also had to be done while maintaining the 'business as usual' military helicopter contribution at home and overseas.

Resources

A programme support office was established early to ensure project boundaries were understood and to support the initiation of projects and governance of the programme.

Dedicated project teams were established to deliver defined elements and ensure that the transition to deliver the strategy was coherent with 'business as usual'. A strong project management culture was established within each team through a monthly review drumbeat and forward-looking metrics aimed at avoiding future pitfalls. These arrangements also helped promote ownership of the promises made in business cases.

Coordination

There is a natural competitive rivalry between the different Armed Services that had led to discord and tension in the past. A clear and well-supported strategic narrative proved vital in helping to coalesce these differing views and in providing benefits to each of the armed services. It created inter-dependencies that unified customer action and created stability across the programme.

Lessons learned

The RWS programme was breaking new ground by taking a programme-level approach. There were lessons to be learned by the people involved and from the processes that were developed and refined and which are now seen as best practice.

More formal mechanisms have been used to capture and transfer lessons. Post-project Evaluations have been conducted, through which managers need to demonstrate as part of their project assurance reviews how they have reviewed and implemented lessons of their predecessors.

Taking a programme approach has also enabled the team to identify common risks, for which joined-up mitigations are now being explored. This work is also providing a key resource for projects as detailed planning for upcoming phases is undertaken.

Work was also undertaken during the life of the programme to build skills and competencies of those involved in acquisition.

Results

Through the programme approach, five potent new helicopter capabilities have been delivered to the UK's armed forces within the approved time and cost, while making substantial savings in supporting military equipment.

The £1 billion funding gap has been closed and £440 million has been saved from the forecast cost of supporting the fleet for the next five years without impacting upon military effectiveness. The support savings have been achieved through new long-term, incentivised support contracts and the work on this has laid the foundations for future savings.

The programme has also allowed learning and resources to be shared and driven skills development.

It represents a paradigm from which others within defence, and perhaps wider, can draw lessons.



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The awards reflect the invaluable contribution project managers make in all sectors of society and the event provides an opportunity for industry professionals to meet with colleagues and entertain guests as well as celebrate at one of the year's most exciting events.

Highly regarded in the project management industry, the awards reflect the dedication and talent that helps to shape the project management community and the world around us. The finalists, winners and sponsors of the awards attract national publicity for their achievement and involvement. Winning an award provides invaluable recognition and kudos to the careers of winners.

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