

Making it happen

Student and adviser awareness of the project profession



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Foreword

Project professionals make things happen. Until recently, however, this was an 'invisible' profession to the potentially large number of young people who aspire to make things happen. A key task for us is to raise the profile of the profession with those on the early stages of their career path.

The chief executive of the Civil Service, John Manzoni, gave a keynote speech on Civil Service reform in 2018 in which he emphasised that, as the Civil Service places greater emphasis on functional skills, so the importance of project management – and project leadership – is becoming more apparent. This is not limited to the public sector since this “influences how the Civil Service interacts with the private sector and how this percolates down to decentralised and other parts of the public sector.”

Like many professions, the project profession has an ageing workforce. APM's latest salary survey indicates that more than 40 per cent of the workforce is over 45, with just five per cent under 25. That creates a challenge for talent pipelines as the project profession is, arguably for the first time, in a position to promote itself as a career of first choice.

The recent launch of a Degree Apprenticeship, the popularity of the Associate Project Manager Apprenticeship standard and the introduction of individual chartered status all complement the greater visibility of projects given by emerging economies and major infrastructure projects.

This report, produced by APM with research conducted by Opinium, offers useful insight in to attitudes towards project management (as a proxy for the project profession) – from students, and from teachers/careers advisers, major influencers of student career choices.

The good news is that there is clear appetite from students to be a project professional, showing itself to be a more popular choice than other professions that have engaged more extensively with the education sector, such as law and architecture. The chartered message resonates with teachers who are more likely to promote careers that have this endpoint.

There are good opportunities but we must not be complacent about the size of the challenge. Only together can we drive interest in our profession and celebrate the growth of a younger workforce just as we will celebrate the growth of the Chartered Project Professional community.

As the project profession becomes a recognised discipline in its own right, I look forward to seeing the professional body promote the opportunities for those at the start of their career, as well as those who already have several years' experience or another career.

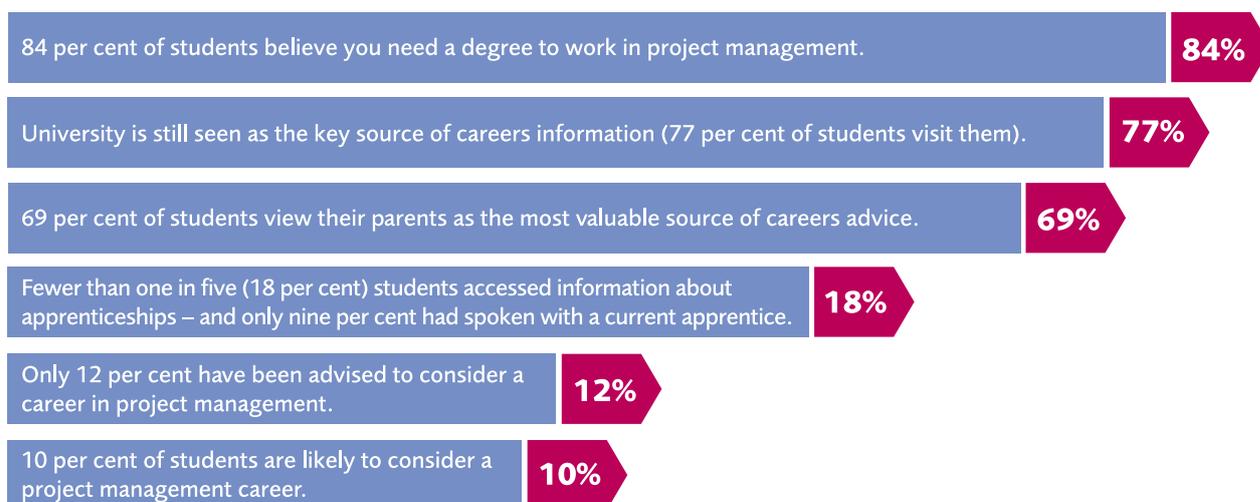
John McGlynn, chair of APM

Summary

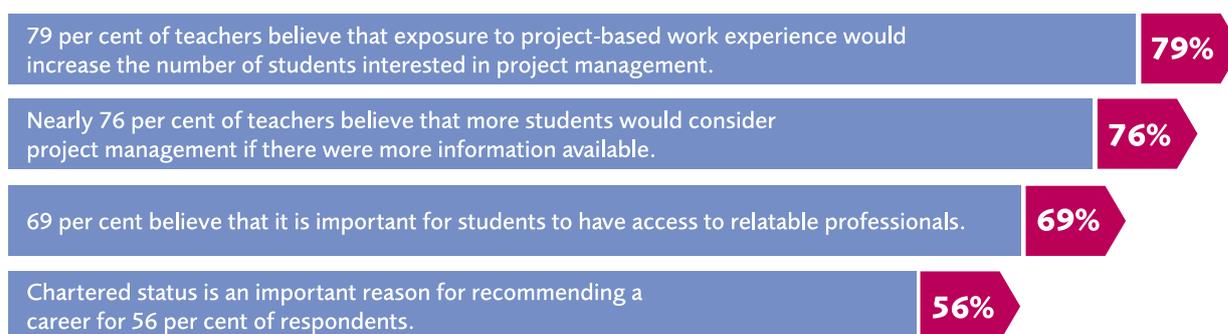
This report, produced by APM with research conducted by Opinium, offers useful insight in to attitudes towards project management (as a proxy for the project profession) – from students and from teachers/careers advisers, two of the major influencers of student career choices.

Key findings

Students (16–21)



Teachers/careers advisers





Opportunities

- There is a clear need to show the breadth of sectors in which project managers work.
- Like other sectors, it is important to explain and highlight the apprenticeship opportunities as well as the university route.
- Students, teachers and advisers will benefit from easy-to-understand guidance on the project profession.
- There is positive sentiment about project management – to deliver on this interest, there need to be more work placements and insight events for students in school, college and universities.
- Gatsby benchmarks* mean that it is easier to engage with the education sector than before.

Conclusions

- Continue to build links with schools, colleges and universities to inspire.
- Offer more work experience opportunities for students to experience the profession.
- Reach out to influencers – parents, teachers and careers professionals.
- Continued promotion of apprenticeships (and the new degree apprenticeship) as a debt-free route in to employment while also highlighting the university option.
- Work with schools to evidence Gatsby benchmarks.
- APM – build on *Parent's Guide to Apprenticeships* and write student-friendly guidance on project management which can also be understood and read by teachers and careers staff.
- APM – use a range of media to promote the profession.
- APM – work more closely with employers to build networks of relatable professionals to inspire students and their influencers.
- APM – increase reach of engaging activities in the education sector.

* Gatsby benchmarks are a framework outlining what makes the best school and college careers provision

1. A stable careers programme; 2. Learning from career and labour market information; 3. Addressing the needs of each pupil; 4. Linking curriculum learning to careers; 5. Encounters with employers and employees; 6. Experiences of workplaces; 7. Encounters with further and higher education; 8. Personal guidance.



79 per cent of teachers believe that exposure to project-based work experience would increase the number of students interested in project management.



Introduction

The Association for Project Management (APM) is the chartered body for the project profession with more than 25,000 members. As part of its chartered remit it has an objective to attract and develop the next generation of project professionals. APM produces guidance for its members and employers on apprenticeships and promotes careers in the project profession to students in schools, colleges and universities.

Those about to enter the workforce are facing unprecedented challenges. A sluggish UK economy has seen more young people stay at home for longer after graduation; graduate debt is at an all-time high, with employers looking at supplementing or supplanting their graduate schemes with apprenticeship offers; and there is confusion about the value of a degree compared with the value of an apprenticeship programme, with more universities offering students transferable skills and other qualifications as well as a degree.

In spite of the rising costs of university (more than £50,000 according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies*), it is still clearly a popular choice for teenagers. Students, teachers and careers professionals appear to share the popular view that a degree is more likely to result in career success than another route. This approach will certainly be appropriate for some, but not others for whom an applied route is a better option.

Our research, in association with Opinium, of sixth form and university students, as well as careers advisers, explores attitudes towards project management and more broadly attitudes towards how careers information is accessed in this changing environment. It would appear that the university route continues to dominate.

What is encouraging is that project management as a career choice is a popular choice for many students – indeed, it features in the top 10 of the options presented to them and the word clouds that feature later in the report show the positivity that both students and teachers/careers advisers feel about the profession.

Project management and the wider project profession have been seen by some as part of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) agenda. While there has been some value in adopting that position, the advent of chartered status and a clear apprenticeship pathway including a degree apprenticeship offers an opportunity for the project profession to emerge and celebrate itself in its own right.

This report indicates huge potential for project management to be a key profession of the future. It also offers an evidence base for the activity set out at the end of the report.

*Institute of Fiscal Studies report, higher education funding in England: past, present and options for the future, 2017

Students' career expectations and information

Key findings

- Nearly four out of five students (77 per cent) said a university visit was a key way to get careers information.
- Fewer than one in five (18 per cent) accessed information about apprenticeships and only nine per cent had spoken with a current or former apprentice.
- Only 48 per cent of students had an interview with a careers adviser.
- Just over half of students (57 per cent) had undertaken a week's work experience and recognised that this is an effective way to make informed career choices.

University still a big draw – for parents too

"I want the best for my child" can often translate to "My child needs to go to university". Apprenticeships have changed and expanded considerably over recent years and the imposition of the apprenticeship levy on larger companies should be encouraging students, teachers and parents to at least undertake some research on them.

Traditionally, schools' careers guidance has one eye on league tables; the more students who attend a Russell Group university, the more kudos the school will receive. In the absence of a league table measure around employment it will be interesting to see what impact the Gatsby benchmarks have on the way in which apprenticeships are promoted to both students and parents, but the signs appear to be encouraging.

Gatsby benchmarks

- A stable careers programme
- Learning from career and labour market information
- Addressing the needs of each pupil
- Linking curriculum learning to careers
- Encounters with employers and employees
- Experiences of workplaces
- Encounters with further and higher education
- Personal guidance

There is some way to go. According to a recent Sutton Trust survey, 40 per cent of young people aged 11–16 said that they had never discussed apprenticeships with a teacher at their school. It is no surprise that such a small number of our surveyed students – just 18 per cent – had sought information about apprenticeships.

In addition to parental attitudes, another cause for this is likely to be the experience of those involved in teaching – the vast majority of the teaching profession are graduates and will understandably draw from their own experience. Another cause, in the short term at least, is that not every school has a dedicated careers professional to give a wide range of advice. Again, the Gatsby benchmarks will improve this situation. Additionally, APM's *Apprenticeship Guide*, written with parents in mind, has been well received.

Apprenticeship perceptions

Attitudes towards apprenticeships are not helped by the changes resulting from the introduction of the apprenticeship levy on larger companies. This, and the disengagement of small businesses from the process, has seen a drop in apprenticeship starts overall (although the number of project management apprentices has in fact increased – and sits within the top 10 per cent of starts).

This will, hopefully, be a short-term blip before we see many high-quality apprenticeships available and many high-quality former apprentices talking to current students about their experience of the programme and how it differs from a graduate scheme.

We are already seeing the emergence of students as customers rather than just users of education. As more pass through the apprenticeship and degree apprenticeship route free of debt and in full-time employment – and talk to influencers and younger students making their own post-school choices – there will be a more robust and reflective decision-making process, particularly around what constitutes value for money. There are now more options for those who want a career that rewards in terms of pay, prospects, social value and impact.

For those who are able to access work experience it is clear that this is a helpful way to understand better what role/job sector would be suitable. Once again, the Gatsby benchmarks make clear the value of engagement with employers and the benefits work both ways.

Students and project management

Key findings

- 10 per cent of students are likely to consider a project management career.
- Project management is viewed positively by students – 50 per cent of students described it as 'challenging' and 28 per cent as 'creative' – higher than accounting, construction and engineering.
- More information would make 54 per cent of students more likely to consider project management.

An attractive-sounding career

Perhaps the most pleasing finding from the research was the attitude that students have towards project management, given its relative lack of promotion in schools, colleges and universities.

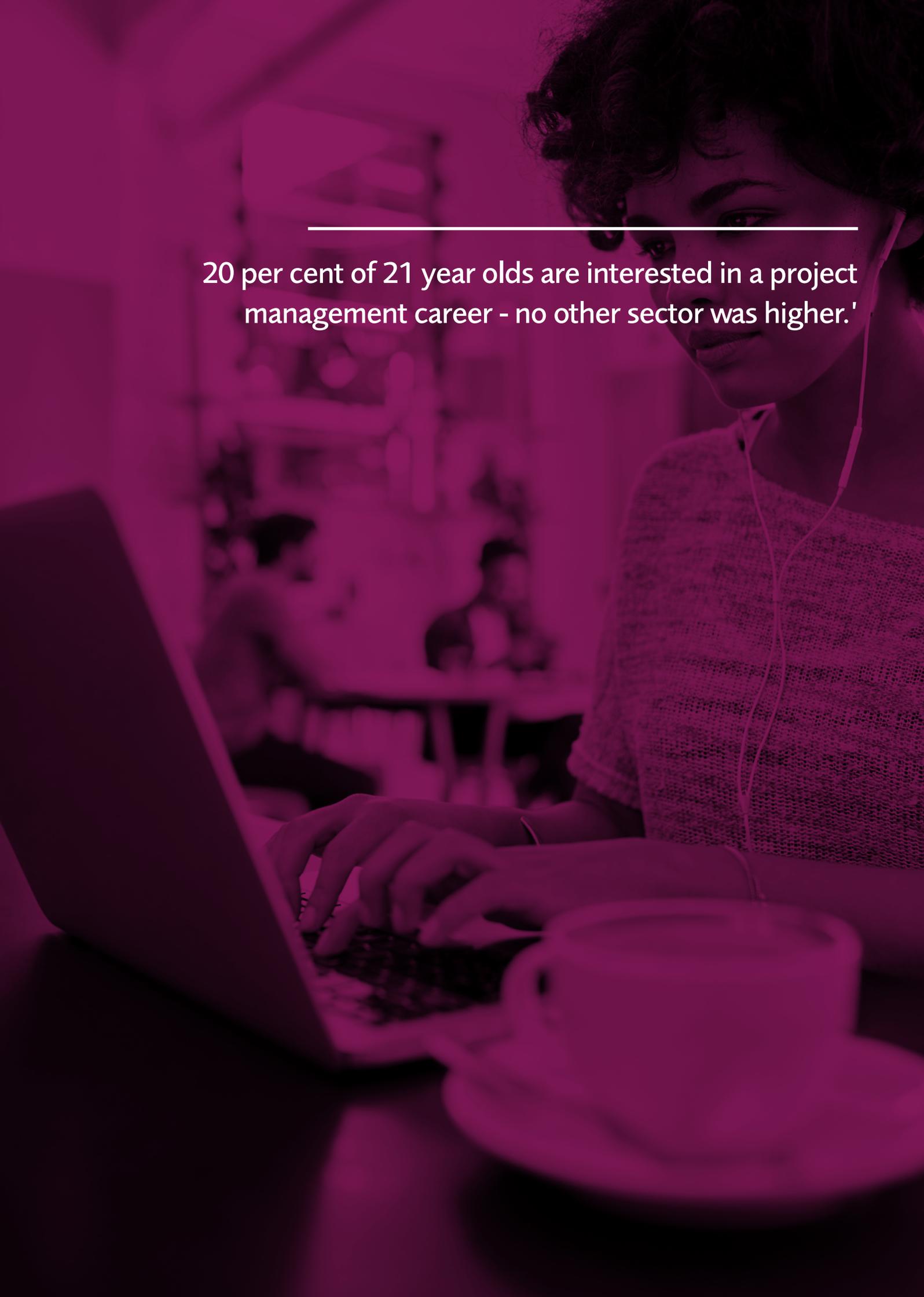
Of the 30+ different areas of work presented to students, 10 per cent said that they would consider project management. While the percentage does not seem high, this needs to be seen in the context of the highest-ranking discipline, teaching, which saw 21 per cent expressing an interest in it. Teaching has benefited from a high-profile, cross-media campaign for a number of years – as has scientist, which ranked second at 17 per cent and engineer, fourth at 15 per cent (2018 is the Year of Engineering).

Unlike these areas, the gender split for project management was very even with 11 per cent of males and nine per cent of females expressing their interest in it. This compares with 24 per cent of males and just eight per cent of females with an interest in engineering.

Looking more closely at the numbers, the response rates do vary according to age, with just five per cent of 16 year olds interested in a project management career – but 20 per cent of 21 year olds interested in it – the highest percentage of this age group. This shows is that there is more to do with a younger student group – particularly those at school – without losing sight of older students' appetite for engaging with the profession.



20 per cent of 21 year olds are interested in a project management career - no other sector was higher.'



Top 10 roles/sectors	
1. Teacher	Top for 17, 18, 19 and 20 year olds
2. Scientist	Top for 21 year olds
3. Manager	Top for 21 year olds
4. Engineer	
5. Accountant	Top for 16 year olds
6. Advertising/PR	
7. Investment analyst	
8. Journalist	
9. IT professional	
10. Project manager	Top for 21 year olds

Information for informed choices

The findings do reveal that, while there is a lot of positivity about project management, there is not necessarily a lot of knowledge about what it entails. The recent growth of APM's guidance and networks focusing on students will help to change this.

There is a relatively narrow sense among students of where you can work as a project professional:

1. Construction.
2. Business services.
3. Engineering.
4. Marketing/research.
5. Technology.

There is an opportunity here for APM and the profession to work together to bring information and opportunity to interested students.

Perhaps the second key challenge, on top of presenting the profession in an engaging way, is offering opportunities for students to experience the world of projects. This is the ideal way for employers to promote their early careers opportunities to a willing local supplier, and for students to learn more about what they like/don't like in the world of work. Project management is a valuable skill that is relevant across all sectors.

Information can take many forms, and an effective introduction to the world of projects is an activity on site with a practitioner, ideally from a similar age range to the students. This relatability and insight in to apprenticeships, university life and the transition to employment can only be helpful, irrespective of the career choices made afterwards.

For those who do choose the project profession, there is a strong sense of purpose and fulfilment. APM's *2018 Salary Survey* shows that more than 60 per cent of those surveyed have a positive outlook about the prospects for the profession over the next five years.

Teachers/advisers and project management

Key findings

- More than three-quarters of respondents (76 per cent) think that more students would consider a career in project management if there was more information about it.
- Awareness of apprenticeship routes among respondents was low – only 34 per cent were aware of a project management apprenticeship.
- Teachers recognise the value of a Chartered designation when it comes to working in a profession – 63 per cent recommend it.

Some awareness but could do better

Given the predominantly graduate composition of the teaching profession, it should not come as any surprise that a minority of respondents were aware of the breadth of apprenticeship opportunities. Only 34 per cent knew that there is a project management standard. This is a shame, particularly since the project management Level 4 apprenticeship is in fact one of the most popular standards, growing as overall numbers are falling. Interestingly, there is a significant gender discrepancy (13 per cent) in awareness levels. Once again it is not surprising that, in the list of occupations where respondents were asked to indicate whether or not there is an apprenticeship available, the trades ranked high, the professions low.

Armed with this information, it is only to be expected that a very small number of respondents had recommended that students undertake a project management apprenticeship – just nine per cent – as against advising students on a career in project management (19 per cent).

Similarly, there is a low level of awareness about the project profession. APM's marketing campaigns will connect more directly with teachers and advisers to improve visibility and understanding of the profession.

Respondents felt more confident when making suggestions on what could be done to inspire higher levels of interest in the project profession. The top three recommendations, reflecting in part the Gatsby benchmarks, are:



As for what words they would associate with the profession, here is what they said which reflects the students' responses:



There is a similar, albeit slightly broader, sense among teachers compared to students of where you can work as a project professional:

1. Construction.
2. Engineering.
3. Manufacturing.
4. Business services.
5. Technology.

Conclusions and next steps

With more work delivered through projects, learning project management as a life skill increases productivity, which benefits the individual, the organisation, and by extension, the economy.

It is important that the value of project management is seen as being both horizontal (spanning a variety of occupational routes as a modular approach) as well as vertical (as a management discipline).

- Continue to build links with schools, colleges and universities to inspire.
- Offer more work experience opportunities for students to experience the profession.
- Reach out to influencers – parents, teachers and careers professionals.
- Continued promotion of apprenticeships (and the new degree apprenticeship) as a debt-free route in to employment while also highlighting the university option.
- Work with schools to evidence Gatsby benchmarks.
- APM – build on parent's guide to apprenticeships and write student-friendly guidance on PM which can also be understood and read by teachers and careers staff.
- APM – use a range of media to promote the profession.
- APM – work more closely with employers to build networks of relatable professionals to inspire students and their influencers.
- APM – increase reach of engaging activities in the education sector.

APM: our skills work

APM is a newly-chartered professional body with a new commitment to engaging with a wider audience and a range of ways. It is well placed to work collaboratively with employers to promote the profession and the valuable skills that project management offers.

Apprenticeships

APM has supported the development and launch of an apprenticeship and degree apprenticeship related to the project profession. It also sits on the employer review group for these apprenticeship standards.



Guidance

APM has authored guidance on apprenticeships for employers and parents, identifying the latter as a group that benefits from clear and concise content on an area that has changed considerably in a generation.



Outreach

APM has recently set up two ambassador networks, one for graduates and one for current/former apprentices working in the project profession. These ambassadors deliver and support APM outreach events that introduce students and teachers to the world of projects, using a range of media.

To support this outreach activity please contact APM's education manager caspar.bartington@apm.org.uk

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