

APM Academic

ACCREDITATION

CASE STUDY



Introduction

As an integrated part of Oxford University, Saïd Business School blends the new with the old. It is a vibrant and innovative college offering cutting-edge programmes to meet today's global business challenges. It is also able to draw on the 800-year heritage and resources of a world-class university with a tradition of leadership development.

Founded in 1996, Saïd Business School is now regarded as one of the highest-ranking of its kind in the world, with a reputation for entrepreneurship and innovative business education. Through programmes and ideas with global impact, the aim is to educate people for successful business careers.

It is international and outward-looking, with participants coming from more than 50 countries.

Saïd Business School also carries out ground-breaking research to benefit and transform individuals, organisations, business practice and society.

The philosophy is 'to be a world-class business school community, embedded in a world-class university, tackling world-scale problems'.

Executive development programmes include an MBA, Executive MBA, a number of specialist MScs, a portfolio of custom solutions and open programmes, and accredited diplomas for executives.

Within the School is the internationally-acclaimed Major Projects Leadership Academy, the only one of its kind and specifically established to meet the need for major project leadership within the UK Government's Civil Service.



Tackling the challenge

In March 2011, the government launched the Major Projects Authority (MPA) – now the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) – with a clear remit to address key areas of improvement needed to assure the portfolio of the government's largest projects, delivering value for the taxpayer.

Major projects are classified as those which require spending above departmental limits, need primary legislation and are innovative or contentious.

Among the areas identified for improvement was project leadership within the Civil Service. To help to achieve this, the Major Projects Leadership Academy (MPLA) was established in partnership with Saïd Business School. The aim was for all senior responsible owners appointed to major projects to graduate from the MPLA and reverse the trend of outsourcing project leadership to the consultancy sector.

Explained David Pitchford, executive director of what was then MPA: "That (outsourcing leadership) means you're also outsourcing knowledge. At the end of the project, the contractor will walk out with the money and the knowledge.

"The Academy meets the need for major project leadership, both in terms of technical and commercial know-how and leadership capability, to return to Whitehall rather than being lost to the private sector.

"This ensures the people responsible for major projects are able to cope with the particular stresses and strains of leading a big project in the public sector; and it encourages agility against a backdrop of unfolding change in priorities, circumstances and political direction."

The team of experienced practitioners and academics at Saïd Business School developed a rigorous and challenging programme that requires both the full personal commitment of participants and their ability to engage their team and peers.

Student story



Fiona Spencer
Chief portfolio officer, Home Office

"I've been involved in all kinds of change and project delivery for over 20 years. Increasingly, as I moved into leading major projects, I've realised that there isn't a set formula for getting projects right – that big projects are often fiendishly complex and difficult and the standard manuals and methodologies don't have the answer.

"I was nominated for the Major Projects Leadership Academy (MPLA), graduating four years ago. It was hard work but well worth it, and I've gained a massive amount from the programme, both professionally and personally.

"I've gained a very thorough understanding of the technical and commercial aspects of project delivery, filled in some gaps and explored all sorts of new ideas for how to do projects better. But beyond this, I now have a much deeper understanding of major project delivery and why it's different.

"The programme has also given me a deeper understanding of my strengths and weaknesses as a project leader, and how I can use that to improve how I lead and how I can manage my own personal energy and resilience better. Above all it's made me realise that the answers in major complex project delivery aren't known – there's much more we can all do to push back the boundaries of what we know about successful project delivery. We now have a thriving community of MPLA graduates in my department and you can see it changing the shape of project delivery. We're building a new cadre of major project delivery leaders, with a shared understanding and vocabulary, more open to challenge, more aware of risk, hungry for further professional development – and with a real sense of being part of the growing government project delivery community."

Designed for leadership

The MPLA is designed for project directors and senior responsible owners (SROs) within the Civil Service, enabling them to succeed personally and professionally as well as improving their ability to lead major projects.

It is considered the project management 'driving licence' for civil servants who wish to manage Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP) projects. This portfolio is the largest, most innovative and high risk public sector programmes, representing more than 140 projects with a collective value of some £455bn.

A demanding modular programme of theory, practice and assessment empowers high-ranking civil servants from a range of project backgrounds who are managing or may be eligible to manage GMPP.

People in other key leadership roles are encouraged to participate, together with those in significantly influential positions in the wider operating environment such as those with financial or portfolio responsibilities.

While a bespoke course with core values based on the Civil Service Ethics Framework, the MPLA programme can be clearly mapped to the skills, professional standards and competencies of the Association for Project Management (APM), particularly in leadership and stakeholder management. It is underpinned by a competency framework which has many similarities with the APM Competency Framework.

The curriculum has been developed by the experienced team at Saïd Business School with input from those developing the new Civil Service competency framework and from project leaders to understand the important skills, knowledge and qualities required.

The *APM Body of Knowledge 6th edition* also provides some anchoring fundamentals to which the curriculum can refer, for example for definitions of project, programme and portfolio management.

Explained Harvey Maylor, associate professor in management practice: "As part of the APM academic accreditation process, we mapped the topic areas of the curriculum to the *APM Body of Knowledge*. There was significant overlap between the two at an appropriate level for the leaders of some of the country's largest and most complex major projects."

The course involves three, five-day residential modules delivered over 12 months and interspersed with a demanding schedule of preparation and assignments.

Before they begin, participants complete a bespoke psychometric evaluation and undergo a 360-degree feedback process. This helps them to understand their individual strengths and weaknesses, establish a development plan and understand how they might sustain their own levels of intensity over the project life cycle.

Each year, the MPLA allows over 100 major project leaders to develop their competence and capabilities. This means the UK government is building sufficient capability to lead the portfolio of major projects across government.

The success of the programme is measurable. Just two years ago only a third of major projects were found to deliver on time and on budget. This has now risen to nearly two-thirds.



Each module provides rigorous academic input and insights from the Oxford faculty and experienced practitioners to blend theory with practice in a way that allows participants to reflect upon and develop their own ways of working.

Master classes and major project reviews provide valuable 'lessons learned' that participants can transfer to their own work. The programme is also an opportunity to share experiences and to build networks beyond the academy, including the opportunity to join the Oxford Business Alumni Network – Saïd Business School's global business alumni network.

All participants are rigorously assessed. A panel made up of the academy director, chief executive and a permanent secretary considers participants' assignments and evidence of their improved skills, capability, and on-going professional development.



■ The application for APM accreditation was driven by continuing alignment with the Cabinet Office and the government Project Delivery Capability Framework and the need to ensure that the language of the Academy was consistent with that of government.

"Accreditation creates the link with APM as the chartered body for the project profession and the associated professionalisation of project management and leadership."

Harvey Maylor,

Associate professor in management practice,
Major Projects Leadership Academy

Student story



Dean Medcraft

Director, finance and operations/Cyfarwyddwr cyllid a gweithrediadau, economy, skills and natural resources/Grŵp yr economi, sgiliau a chyfoeth naturiol, Welsh government/Ilywodraeth Cymru

"Participating on the Major Projects Leadership Academy made me more insightful into major projects and programmes and the importance of having a good quality governance structure to support the senior responsible owner.

"It has allowed me to take forward a review across the three ministerial portfolios in the group that I work in to ensure that we have the right skills and capabilities to deliver our programmes.

"I realised that a further area in which I needed to develop was the importance of stakeholder engagement to deliver the ultimate benefit of specific programmes.

"On a wider note, the networking I have developed through course participation has really helped, both as a sounding board and a support mechanism for me personally, and this is ongoing."

Client testimonial

"Every department in government can now field MPLA graduates who are not only leading major projects as SROs and project directors, but are also creating the conditions for the success of our portfolios, programmes and projects. The MPLA offers world-class leadership development for our senior public servants. Oxford's role in building our capability in project leadership cannot be over stated. APM's accreditation of MPLA is an excellent and fitting tribute to the effectiveness and dedication of Saïd Business School. The Infrastructure and Project Authority's vision is to create the best project delivery system of any government in the world. In order to do that we need the best project leaders. The MPLA is producing those leaders."

Nick Borwell,

Director of project profession and standards, Infrastructure and Projects Authority



APM and Saïd Business School

Saïd Business School is a corporate affiliate of APM. Academy director Dr Paul Chapman has served on the APM board and as a trustee for more than four years. Associate professor Harvey Maylor is also a member of the association and both have contributed to APM papers and publications.

APM Body of Knowledge 6th edition has informed the MPLA curriculum and the programme has been mapped to APM skills, professional standards and competencies.

Saïd Business School is also working with APM to promote student membership to MPLA participants and is also examining ways in which APM can further contribute to and support residential sessions.

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FIVEDimensions 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.