

APM Academic

ACCREDITATION

CASE STUDY



**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE

Introduction

Northumbria University is a research-rich, business-focused, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence.

Formerly Newcastle Polytechnic, it was formed in 1969 from the amalgamation of three regional colleges, all with their roots in meeting the practical and vocational training needs of local industry as far back as the 19th century.

Building on these foundations, it was awarded university status in 1995. By 2000 it was the largest university in the North East of England.

Today, Northumbria University has campuses in Newcastle upon Tyne, London and Amsterdam, and works in partnership with other higher education institutions across the world and with major employers.

The university is a high performer in research, teaching and attaining desired student outcomes. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 recorded that Northumbria had the biggest rise in research power of any university in the UK, moving from the 80s to 48th (*Times Higher Education*), and in 2017, it achieved a Silver Award in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) ranking. It also boasts a high employability rate for of graduates, with 96 per cent typically in a relevant role six months after graduation.

Alumni include former Labour government minister and solicitor general Dame Vera Baird; record-breaking Olympic runner Steve Cram and cyclist Victoria Pendleton; actor Kevin Whately; Spain's youngest minister Bibiana Aido; the designer behind Apple products such as the

iPhone, iPad and MacBook Pro, Jonathan Ive; singer and former teacher Sting (Gordon Sumner) and fashion designer Scott Henshall.

Opportunity for improvement

Northumbria University is presently aiming for postgraduate growth in its taught provision across all four faculties including in one of its 'focus' courses, the MSc in Project Management.

Responding to an opportunity within the higher education sector, Northumbria first offered its MSc in Project Management in 1994 and it was originally the first MSc programme within the previous Built Environment school. In 2000 a dual award in MSc Project Management was validated, allowing students from Chalmers University in Sweden to spend part of their study duration in Newcastle upon Tyne, though this has since ceased. A similar study opportunity is currently available to students from the ei.CESI engineering school in Nanterre, Paris.

In 2015, university leaders made a strategic decision to refresh all taught undergraduate and masters level courses, via a change programme known as the Programme Framework for Northumbria Awards (PFNA). This provided the impetus to bring the project management postgraduate course more in line with current APM standards.

"The PFNA programme provided the ideal opportunity to better equip our students with the knowledge, intellectual and professional skills, and personal values required for a successful future career in project management," said programme leader Dr Barry Gledson.

"This is because the programme is now fully aligned with the *APM Body of Knowledge 6th edition*, which can help them meet the academic requirements needed to become a full member (MAPM).

"We specifically focused on attaining APM academic accreditation because it is the largest – and we believe the best – professional chartered body for the project profession in Europe, it is closely aligned with the international standards of the International Project Management Association (IPMA), and most importantly, because our respective missions, to do good for society, clearly align."



APM mission:

"Inspiring communities to deliver meaningful change for societal benefit by advancing the art, science, theory and practice of project management".

Northumbria University mission:

"To create and apply knowledge for the benefit of individuals, communities and the economy. Through excellent research, teaching and innovation we transform lives, make a powerful contribution to cultural and economic development and regeneration, locally, nationally and globally."

Delivery of the re-vamped MSc in Project Management began in 2016 at Newcastle and London. September 2018 then saw the first intake of 20 students on the same course at Northumbria's overseas campus at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS). UK-based students have the option of studying either full-time, part-time (London only) or alternatively by distance learning. The Amsterdam course is currently full-time over 12 months.

The MSc programme is for those with ambitions to manage and lead projects from inception to completion using effective management strategies, and it is based on four PFNA pillars:

- embedding research-rich learning;
- technology-enhanced learning;
- assessment for learning and achievement;
- employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship.

It aims to fully engage students in the learning process, not only as recipients of knowledge but also as co-producers of knowledge through synergy between research and teaching.

All members of the project management programme teaching team are senior lecturers or above and are experienced project management practitioners and researchers. This mix of industry expertise and established track records in research is augmented throughout by guest lecturers bringing and sharing real-world experiences.

Future focus

Although sitting within the Mechanical and Construction Engineering Department of the Faculty of Engineering and Environment, the MSc in Project Management is a generic, vocational and cross-sector programme. It has been designed to equip students with the knowledge, intellectual and professional skills and personal values required for any successful future career.

The programme has one of the highest employability rates at the university, with graduates going on to careers across business and industry, from construction to healthcare. It also helps provide ideal preparation for advancing to PhD study for those intending to pursue a career in research.

"Because the programme was designed in line with the four key PFNA 'pillars', our approach to learning and teaching draws from theory, yet also makes use of authentic and relevant real-world scenarios to enhance student learning," said Dr Gledson.

"This helps our ambition to prepare students either for a career in research or to lead project management practice across any industry sector. In a world full of challenges, we expect our graduates to help by contributing effective solutions."

Entrants are expected to hold an appropriate undergraduate degree. Others may be considered if they can show professional membership – for example MAPM, qualifications such as the APM Project Management Qualification (PMQ – formerly APMP), experience and previous learning. Overseas students are also required to have an adequate English language qualification.



Above: Dr Barry Gledson Programme leader

The content, structure and outcomes of the modules on this course have been fully mapped to the *APM Body of Knowledge 6th edition*, the association's academic requirements, the *APM Competence Framework* and the *Five Dimensions of Professionalism* – breadth, depth, achievement, commitment and accountability.

Teaching is delivered through a mix of lectures, small group seminars, workshops, masterclasses and field visits. There is also a significant element of independent learning and self-motivated reflection.

Module topics range from the hard and soft skills required to successfully manage major project, programmes and portfolios to the feasibility and economics of a project, culminating in the student's own research project.

By the time they graduate, students should be able to:

- deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgments in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences;
- demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level;
- continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high standard.

They should also be able to demonstrate initiative and personal responsibility make decisions in complex and unpredictable situations, and learning skills required for continuing professional development.

The programme leader supports student learning at the programme level, with individual module tutors to monitor, engage and support student learning at module level.

Regular visits from external examiners provide independent academic and industry scrutiny of the programme. Currently these posts are held by Dr John Spillane, MAPM, and Dave Monswite, RICS, an associate director at global project and programme management consultancy Turner & Townsend.

Assessments are designed to give feedback as well as to monitor progress and achievement. The assessed projects test skills in ways that relate to current practice and include assignments, written reports, exams, group presentations and debates.

At the start of the course, students are encouraged to join APM, and invited to engage with its resources to ensure continuing professional development, and to attend the regular local and national APM events, often accompanied by members of the teaching team.



Student story

Steven Thirkle, PhD research student

Steven's interest in technology while at school initially sparked an ambition for a potential career in IT.

"The future was looking very likely to be highly dependent on technology and I thought that if I wanted to live comfortably, my chances would be good if I studied IT.

"But as time went on, I realised that it wasn't technology that piqued my interest, it was people. After completing a BSc in Business Information Management, I knew I wanted my future career to be working closely with people."

He first studied project management on his BSc and discovered an appreciation for the psychosocial aspect. This in turn led to studying for his MSc in Project Management at Northumbria University.

"My MSc experience was no less than superb and I am indebted to all of the lecturers on the programme. I incorporated my interests of wellbeing into the course, and the lecturers were incredibly supportive of this. Most of my projects were around mindfulness, as I was studying mindful leaders.

"The course is multidisciplinary, which I needed at the time as I was still unsure on my future. I took a great deal from it – a whole host of improvements to my professional and personal toolkit, confidence, presentation skills and, unquestionably, communication skills."

Steven is now studying for a PhD at Northumbria. Sponsored by the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust, he is looking at trauma informed care application and measurement strategies in the NHS mental health service.

"I would not be doing this if it wasn't for my experience on the MSc Project Management programme and the skills I learned will be invaluable in my future career."

|| The MSc Project Management course at Northumbria University has an excellent reputation, and the ongoing collaborations between Turner & Townsend and the programme team benefits both our organisations.

"For the university, we are able to support the students' learning through diverse activities such as providing guest lectures and bringing real-life project, programme, and portfolio management experiences into the classroom, which allows us to share the relevant challenges, solutions and lessons learned from appropriate project case studies. We also support and engage in a range of university research activities.

"For Turner & Townsend, it affords us access to the latest academic research and knowledge from the project management field, and promotes us as an employer of choice to the many high performing students.

"We also recognise, and welcome, how APM academic accreditation brings with it a range of additional benefits that will undoubtedly further support this partnership.

"Many of our current project managers originally studied at Northumbria and we are very proud of our ongoing close relationship with the university. We know that individuals graduating from Northumbria with this MSc will have received the very highest academic and practical teaching which is applicable to the modern world."

Mike Lamb

Director, Turner & Townsend Project Management Ltd.





Professor Dave Greenwood (left)
and Dr Claudio Benghi (right)

APM and Northumbria University

Northumbria University is a corporate affiliate of APM and has a long-standing involvement and participation with the association, particularly with the North East branch.

The branch committee currently includes two core members of the project management academic programme team, Dr Allan Osborne and Michelle Littlemore, as well as several student alumni who are now in key project management roles in industry.

As well as aligning and mapping the content of the MSc course to the *APM Body of Knowledge 6th edition* and the full suite of APM standards and competencies, students are encouraged to become members of APM and join in branch events, some of which are held at the university.

APM North East branch also sponsors an annual award for the best dissertation by a student on the university's MSc Project Management course – the APM NE Branch Dissertation Prize.

"As a university which prides itself in developing graduates who are research-informed and practice-ready, achieving APM accreditation for our MSc Project Management programme further recognises our provision is designed to meet the needs of the profession.

"Northumbria graduates studying project management from our campuses in or via online learning or go on to work in a variety of sectors all place great emphasis upon the importance and prestige of APM. We are delighted the association recognises the quality and breadth of our programme and look forward to working with APM to continually reflect the needs of the profession in our offer."

Dr Guy Brown,

London campus director, Northumbria University

Association for Project Management

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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.