

APM Academic

ACCREDITATION

CASE STUDY



OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

Introduction

Oxford Brookes University has over 150 years of history. What began as a small art school in a single room has developed into one of the UK's top modern universities with a local, national and international reputation for teaching and research excellence.

The Oxford School of Art opened in 1865 and five years later incorporated the School of Science. In 1891 it was taken over by the city council and renamed Oxford City Technical School, with John Henry Brookes as vice-principal. His goal was to make education available to all.

Following a move to a new site in 1949, there were more mergers and changes until in 1992 it was named Oxford Brookes University in honour of John Brookes.

Today it is ranked the UK's top 'young' university.

It attracts students from across the UK and more than 140 countries worldwide. There are currently some 18,000 on roll, of which 79 per cent are full-time. Supporting the needs of the students and the running of the university are 2,800 members of staff.

The university credits its achievements to its 'fantastic and dedicated' staff', together with the close community of students, alumni, partners and local supporters regarded as vital to future success.

Significant investment in the estate has already resulted in multi-award-winning facilities. This investment continues with a £220 million programme over the next decade.

The most recent achievements are number one status in the *Times Higher Education Young University Rankings 2019* and the second highest performing university for teaching.

For the third consecutive year, it was hailed as the UK's top university in the QS Top 50 Under 50 World University Ranking (for universities less than 50 years old) and was again the only UK institution to make the list.



Raising standards

Project and programme management is integral to delivering the university's ambitious strategy, including the 20-plus major change projects which span the Directorates and four faculties – Oxford Brookes Business School, the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Technology, Design and Environment.

There is a huge range of projects at any one time, including new IT systems, business change, high-value capital campus construction and academic research.

With far fewer dedicated professional project managers than there are projects, there is a broad spectrum of people who find themselves involved in managing projects as an add-on to their main roles. Until now, they had very limited support or training to carry out this aspect of their work.

The university recognised it needed to improve the standard of project and programme management. A small team – led by programme director Andy Ball and with programme development manager Catherine Pyke – was established to address the situation and establish a more professional approach to management and delivery.

The APM Project Fundamentals Qualification (APM PFQ) was at the core of the plan designed to further develop professionalism and best practice among those who become involved in projects.

"It made sense on many levels," said Catherine, who holds the APM Project Management Qualification (PMQ), is accredited in PRINCE2 and MSP and has delivered training to project managers in a previous role in local government.

"I have a strong personal preference for APM qualifications because they are a better fit for our organisation, with more flexibility, breadth and depth, a structured body of knowledge and resources that are readily available."



Personal story

Cameron Wardrop
Estates and Campaign Services
Contracts manager

"Completing the APM PFQ course was advantageous for me. It has accelerated my comprehension of project management and related academic theory, which assists my role and underpins my project planning and implementation."



Personal story

Paul Swanton
HR information systems manager

"My current role requires me to oversee certain system upgrades and developments and although I had experience with this I hadn't been the lead on this type of work so I knew there were areas I may not have considered and gaps in my knowledge.

"The PFQ provided me with the skill and knowledge to approach any project I may be required to manage from early concept through to final delivery. I now have the confidence to lead and the tools to ensure success and satisfaction in any future system upgrades and implementations."

A fundamental foundation

In order to deliver the APM PFQ, Catherine completed an ILM accredited 'train the trainer' course, boosted by support from the university's Learning and Development team to ensure high standards in booking, evaluation and administration.

It was a conscious decision to keep the training team small, said Catherine, who is course coordinator and the main trainer, with two colleagues also delivering modules. The two-day course was designed in-house to meet the particular project needs of the university as well as the APM PFQ syllabus and learning outcomes.

"This helps to ensure direct control over quality and the ability to respond immediately to feedback from course participants," explained Catherine. "It also helps to have active project practitioners as trainers, it keeps the training very practical and uses real university project case studies in the course."

The university has an established project management framework and toolkit which is embedded into the course. It shares common themes with the *APM Body of Knowledge 7th edition* and the *APM Competence Framework*, both of which are essential reference materials available to participants.

Training is delivered in a traditional classroom setting of around 12 people, giving them the opportunity to share experiences and meet others involved in project management.

Selection is based on an individual's responsibility for, or involvement with, university-related projects. Catherine meets with those due to attend to discuss their expectations and to assess their level of understanding and training needs. They are also asked to describe the project on which they are or will be working so that real case study examples can be used throughout the course to provide tailored context and project specific advice.

There are further meetings offered post-course for follow up advice and guidance on applying the learning to practice. Feedback is sought after every course and material is reviewed and updated in line with this feedback and APM developments.

An ILM accredited trainer has observed and assessed early course delivery to ensure the quality of training. An annual review is also planned so that the materials and course content remain relevant to the needs of Oxford Brookes.

The course is the foundation on which this fresh, committed approach to project management is being built among the several hundred faculty staff that will benefit. A project management community of practice has also been established for those keen to learn more. This includes peer support and monthly get-together to share experiences, best practice, lessons learned, trends and developments.

"Sometimes those working on projects may be the only person in their department involved in project

management and they can feel isolated," explained Catherine. "We are also available to give ad hoc advice whenever it is required."

There has been a 100 per cent APM PFQ success rate since the introduction the course in April 2019.

"It is already making a difference," added Catherine. "There is now a greater understanding of what project management is and the perception of it has improved. People can see that this is actually common sense."



Being able to formally accredit our budding project managers with the APM PFQ is helping us to improve the standards of project delivery across a broad cross-section of the university, as well as giving staff a qualification in a highly transferable discipline that they can apply to many areas of their working lives.

"Also, being accredited to deliver the training ourselves gives us flexibility and a cost effective method of disseminating good quality practice. This is another important way for our change team to add value to the institution."



Andy Ball

Programme director
Strategic change and
projects governance

Association for Project Management and Oxford Brookes University

Oxford Brookes University is a corporate affiliate member of APM. Course leader Catherine Pyke is APM PMQ qualified. As the APM Associate membership contact for the university she keeps abreast of latest developments and materials from APM to share with the rest of the team and project management community in the university.

The university's Project Management Framework and Toolkit shares common themes with the *APM Body of Knowledge 7th edition* and the *APM Competence Framework*. The PFQ training, the creation of the project management community of practice and the project toolkit are all aimed towards aspiring to the APM FIVE Dimensions of Professionalism, as well as the development governance and project assurance activities.

Information about APM events that may be of interest is shared among the project community and Andy Ball has also attended such over the past year.

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Catherine Pyke
Programme development
manager

Association for Project Management

Ibis House, Regent Park
Summerleys Road
Princes Risborough
Buckinghamshire HP27 9LE

Tel. (UK) 0845 458 1944
Tel. (Int.) +44 1844 271 640
Email info@apm.org.uk
Web apm.org.uk



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.