

APM Academic

# ACCREDITATION

CASE STUDY



## Introduction

Reykjavik University (RU) is the largest private university in Iceland, with more than 3,500 students and a staff of over 500, including professors from 26 countries.

It comprises four schools – the School of Business, the School of Computer Science, the School of Law and the School of Science and Engineering. RU is committed to academic excellence and is at the forefront of research in Iceland in these focus areas. It is renowned for its programmes in the field of sustainable energy.

The university has an interdisciplinary approach designed to fit with today's society. It is fully bilingual

(English and Icelandic) and offers 20 master's programmes taught entirely in English, several PhD programmes and a number of undergraduate modules in English.

A 'hands-on' learning approach and collaboration with companies and institutions on authentic assignments aims to prepare students for the challenges they will meet after graduation.

It is chartered by the Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Icelandic Industries, and the Confederation of Icelandic Employers.



Professor Haukur Ingi Jónasson



## First rate focus

The Master of Project Management (MPM) degree programme was first available in Iceland in 2005 and it has been offered at the School of Science and Engineering in Reykjavik University since 2011. Behind the MPM programme is extensive research into what constitutes a first-rate management education with a special focus on project management.

(The research findings were published in the *Project Management Journal*, Volume 40, Issue 2, pages 59–69, June 2009: Helgi Thor Ingason and Haukur Ingi Jónasson, Contemporary knowledge and skill requirements in project management).

Designed by Professor Helgi Thor Ingason and Professor Haukur Ingi Jónasson, the ambition was to offer a first-class graduate education in project management with a practical outlook and which students from Iceland and other nations could study alongside their other professional responsibilities.

The philosophy was to intertwine traditional, technical project management themes with input from behavioural sciences, an approach that was confirmed as being on the right track with the publication in 2006 of the International Project Management Association (IPMA) Competence Baseline Version 3.0.

The vision was to build a strong foundation of professional project, programme and portfolio management that met international standards and with a focus on a practical and innovative application of methods from the humanities and from the social, engineering, management and natural sciences.

It is committed to keeping up with the highest standards in content, delivery, evaluation and quality assurance. Since its inception, the programme has been critically scrutinised for possible improvements based on experience, feedback from students and industry and the on-going development of the profession around the world.

To further strengthen this, it was decided to measure it against ambitious international standards. RU chose the *APM Body of Knowledge 6th edition* and the APM academic accreditation system because it regards APM as the single strongest and most established member association within IPMA.

Explained Professor Ingason: "Collaboration with APM is a vital step in the further development of our MPM programme and a prerequisite for opening it to foreign students wishing to pursue their project management graduate education at Reykjavik University."

The programme is also fully accredited by the Icelandic Ministry of Education, and complies with the standards of the Bologna Standard of European Higher Education.

Project management in Iceland has become strong in recent years and is now widely accepted as a discipline in its own right. Both the university and the Icelandic Project Management Association believe that Iceland holds the world record for the highest percentage per population of IPMA certified project management individuals, underlining the strength of awareness and understanding of project management.

The MPM programme has been evaluated by the National Centre for Project Management (NCPM) in the UK. The report stated:

'Fact finding reveals that the (RU) MPM programme is healthy and has made a significant contribution to advancing the state of project management in Iceland. Graduates are highly regarded by industry and the professional association, and report a significant improvement in their capabilities following graduation.

'The MPM qualification and the graduates of the programme operate on an international level and are equivalent to those expected from any leading international university.'

## International professionalism

The RU MPM aims to equip students who want to manage complex and demanding projects, portfolios and programmes with knowledge, qualifications and tools that are internationally recognised.

Teaching is largely based on contributions from visiting scholars and practising experts from industries, in addition to faculty members. The curriculum is informed by mapping against appropriate professional standards and equivalent academic courses from around the world, together with extensive dialogue with Icelandic industry.

Students also look at research methodologies and how knowledge has been created, with extensive references to research within the field of project management and all other fields deemed related and relevant. They are guided to current developments and to dig deeper by reading the research of others as well as conducting their own.

The two-year programme is tailored to meet the needs of working professionals, with teaching sessions on Fridays and Saturdays every other week and one Thursday a month. Evaluation is conducted at the end of each course and is based on individual and group assignments, participation and engagement within the classroom, real projects, peer evaluation and examination.

A maximum of 36 new students are accepted each year and should have a good first degree, at least three years' relevant work experience and good English. This creates a diverse group of capable students with mixed experience and backgrounds who are able to contribute to the learning.

At the heart of the programme is the context of projects, programmes and portfolios within organisations, with the importance of people and the profession underlined throughout.

From the beginning, the MPM programme has been developed with the IPMA Competence Baseline as a reference and informed by other international bodies of knowledge. It is aligned to APM's FIVE Dimensions of Professionalism in its breadth, depth, achievement, commitment and accountability as well as closely mapped to topics in the *APM Body of Knowledge 6th edition*. The latest version of the APM Competence Framework will also be a reference for the ongoing development of the course.

Professionalism and ethical principles are integrated in a direct and indirect way from beginning to end. A particularly notable innovation is the way in which the programme embraces the principle of reflective practice and personal development. Each student has one-to-one sessions with certified coaches to maximise the personal development opportunities offered by their studies, which they say is relevant and beneficial both to their studies and to their development as professionals working within industry. On successful completion, they should be able to:

- choose, define, organise, execute and close complex projects;
- manage projects, programmes and portfolios;
- create, build, manage and run project-oriented enterprises;
- use fundamental methods of cognitive behavioural psychology, positive psychology and psychoanalytic psychology for self-management;
- deploy essential theories of social psychology and group dynamics to manage project teams;
- deploy essential leadership theories to lead project teams and project-oriented organisations;
- apply contemporary knowledge regarding health and safety;
- apply contemporary knowledge regarding sustainability;
- establish and operate project management offices;
- choose the most appropriate IT solutions;
- understand the principles of agile philosophy and apply scrum as a project management method;
- explain and apply standards and apply methods in an organisational context;
- explain and apply bodies of knowledge;

- work with the fundamentals of interpersonal communication and executive coaching;
- make integrated decisions through ethical reflection and awareness of sustainable growth and development;
- manage strategic changes in healthy ways;
- manage complex negotiations and deal with conflict and crisis;
- use insights from anthropology, cultural studies and critical theory for managerial undertakings in diverse cultural settings.

As part of the promise to deliver a cutting-edge education in project, programme and portfolio management and their applications, the RU programme leaders constantly scan and interact with the international project management environment, leading to a course that is academically challenging, considers the links between technical and behavioural aspects of project management and that is industry relevant.

Said Professor Ingason: "I am very pleased with the success of our MPM programme from the time it started in 2005. It has been well received, we enjoy a steady number of applicants and we have a strong body of students representing a good cross section of ambitious and dynamic professionals from diverse backgrounds.

"By limiting the number of students in each class we can really focus on the individuals and help them in their personal growth. We have had a very good feedback from students and employers, confirmed by international audits. Our programme has helped to advance the state of project management in Iceland. Our graduates are highly regarded by in Iceland and also do well internationally."

APM's accreditation assessor said that the MPM course "could be regarded as an example of best practice in master's level project management education".



## Personal story

### Yngvi Rafn Yngvason

Yngvi had been working at the Icelandic Civil Aviation Administration (ICAA) for five years as a safety analyst when he applied for the MPM degree, with the full support of his employers.

"With a BSc degree in Computer Science, I had not anticipated to take a master's degree anytime soon. I saw the advertisement in the paper and my intuition urged me to apply.

"I was inspired by the context of the MPM degree, especially the courses on human behaviour and cultural differences. I had taken part in project groups related to my work as well as in my local church but the outcomes varied. I wanted to get to know both the technical, hard skills of project management as well as the human factor. The MPM degree at Reykjavik fitted perfectly.

"Fellow students on the course have become good friends, both through all the group projects as well as the personal work. The lecturers were first class and the degree has given us tools to both know ourselves better and to manage difficult situations when they occur.

"The MPM has helped me in my current job as a safety analyst at the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) in Cologne, Germany. I work a lot with people from all over Europe and to have the tools I gained from my studies helps me to both organise myself as well all my projects within the agency and with communication with all the stakeholders.

"The degree also supports me in the role of a confidential counsellor to the agency's staff as well as a family man. My future goals are to excel further in my work in aviation as well as to develop further as a project manager, husband, father and a friend."

## Testimonials

"At international prosthetics company Össur we have dedicated programme and project managers that oversee projects from conception to completion and who have studied for the MPM degree at Reykjavik University.

"Programme and project management is key to success in, for example, process improvement, new product development and change management. Understanding effective project management techniques helps us to carry out large-scale projects on time, on budget and with minimal disruption to the rest of the business.

"Accredited project managers are skilled in the techniques specific to dealing with one-off projects. This allows me to easily see the status of strategic programmes and projects because of clear targets, milestones, project plans and follow up processes. Project management helps us to complete the work systematically as everything is done in proper sequence from setting the goals of the project to implementing the strategies for achieving these goals."

**Jón Sigurdsson**, president, CEO Össur

"We are always looking for ways to benchmark our programme against the best in project, programme and portfolio management in the world. APM is a leader in its field, the strongest member association within IPMA and appointed the Best UK Association in the 2016 and 2015 Association Excellence awards.

"Mirroring the MPM programme against the APM competence baseline has been an important learning process. International accreditation by the association is an important step for us, as it confirms that we are on the right track and adds value to the MPM degree for our past, present and future students."

**Professor Helgi Thor Ingason**



## APM and Reykjavik University

Reykjavik University is a corporate member of APM and is an active participant in IPMA activities such as the Research Management Board and the IPMA Expert Seminars. (APM is the largest member association of IPMA.)

The MPM programme has been mapped to the *APM Body of Knowledge 6th edition* and aligned to the APM FIVE Dimensions of Professionalism. The APM Competence Framework will inform the on-going development of the course.

Many students are already members of the Icelandic Project Management Association, also an IPMA member association, and it is anticipated that APM accreditation will open up new opportunities for graduates to become members of the APM community, engage in activities such as webinars and take advantage of APM videos and presentations.

Professor Darren Dalcher, an Honorary Fellow of APM, is one of the visiting professors teaching the MPM at Reykjavik.

## Association for Project Management

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### **FIVE**Dimensions 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.