

# PROJECTING THE FUTURE

A big conversation about the future of the project profession

FEEDBACK PAPER 3

AGEING AND DEMOGRAPHICS:  
THE 100-YEAR LIFE

SEPTEMBER 2020

#projectingthefuture

## INTRODUCTION

Projecting the Future was launched by APM in June 2019 as a 'big conversation' about some of the major trends reshaping the project environment and their implications for the future of the project profession.

This paper briefly summarises some of the contributions to that conversation. Those contributions include social media comments in response to APM posts, particularly from APM's network on LinkedIn; emails received from APM members and corporate partners in response to the Projecting the Future Challenge papers; perspectives presented at APM events during 2019-20; and a variety of blogs and articles from a range of authors that were published by APM during this period.

The summary is not comprehensive but it aims to give a flavour of the views and insights shared by those participating in the big conversation and some of the conclusions that the Projecting the Future Group have drawn as a result. These inputs have all fed into our overall views about the emerging themes and the big ideas shaping the future of the profession which are presented in our report on the adaptive professional, also published along in September 2020.

[www.apm.org.uk/projecting-the-future](http://www.apm.org.uk/projecting-the-future)



## THE SIX CHALLENGES



## WHAT OUR CHALLENGE PAPER SAID

- *"In the UK and around the world, people are living longer. Life expectancy is increasing, average ages are rising, and older people are becoming a bigger proportion of society... Longer life for more of humanity is a triumph... yet longer human lives could be one of the most transformative of the trends explored in Projecting the Future... Longer lives are much to be welcomed but adapting to them will be far from simple".*
- Late-life healthcare is set to be transformed by new technology over the coming years. It will have the potential to provide many more people with greater independence and better quality of life for longer. There will be major projects to reform social care and end-of-life care.
- The workplace will also be "profoundly affected": as people live longer, they will also work longer. And longer working lives will "make it imperative that professionals learn, train, retrain and relearn throughout their careers".

## KEY QUESTIONS WE ASKED

**What transformational projects will be needed to meet the needs of an ageing society?**

**How will more multi-generational workplaces and teams affect project professionals?**

**How will longer lives reshape how we think about careers and learning through life?**



## POINTS FROM THE BIG CONVERSATION

- Sophia Dimitriadis, research fellow at the International Longevity Centre UK, said that employers could make much more work viable at older ages. Later-life health problems tend to affect physical, not mental, capabilities, and flexible work is key for those with ill health or care needs – yet despite the long-standing legal ‘right to request’, research suggests that one in five older workers are scared to ask their employers to work flexibly. A lack of training and reskilling opportunities for older people currently makes redundancy and long-term unemployment more likely, while age discrimination is seen as the most significant barrier to older people participating more fully in work: while illegal, Dimitriadis said, “subtle” discrimination is common.
- Jo Stanford of the NHS, and a member of the Projecting the Future Group, reflected on the implications for the health service of its own ageing workforce. Key challenges include long term staff shortages; the impact of migration changes, with continued uncertainty about the system after Brexit; infrastructure; workforce gender inequality; the need to retain key workers (many leave within five years, yet it takes four years to train a healthcare professional); and lifestyle expectations. Stanford pointed to efforts to improve project management in the service in the face of these challenges: there are close to 9,000 project professionals in NHS England, with a 20% growth in job profiles – and growing recognition of the value of project management.
- Discussion at the APM Corporate Partners Forum identified numerous touchpoints with the other Challenge areas. New technology, better data and more integrated and automated systems will be hugely important for what one contributor described as “freeing people up to do the fundamental human stuff”.
- A sense of purpose was seen as critical for longer working lives, providing people with drive and motivation: faced with longer careers, people will think about how their work fits their purpose.
- Professionals will need to manage their own wellbeing: the aim has to be longer lives which are “positive” and healthy, not marked by illness and a poor quality of working life.
- Career transitions will be key over the span of longer careers. One contributor suggested that professionals need

to ask now what they will need to do to train up for their next career. Another suggested that project professionals’ skill sets might equip them particularly well to plan for extended careers with multiple transitions.

- The challenge of planning for retirement was raised by Ben Stafford of Just, the retirement financial services firm. Across the economy, he pointed out, there has been a shift “from employment and pension provision models that provided for employees to an individualised model that places almost all responsibility for career development and post-work life on the individual.” Yet, he said, “All available evidence shows that most people struggle with these things, especially long-term financial planning.” As a result there is a need for “a solid, effective framework to help equip people for the challenges of a 100-year life.”
- One APM member wrote that the difficulty is “the long-term coordination of the change. This is very reliant on the policy makers who are driven by short-termism and regaining power. How do we take this out of their hands and into the hands of the people that it will affect? It is a very difficult balancing act that needs... joined up thinking across the industry.”



## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE PROFESSION: EMERGING THEMES

- Individuals need to be prepared for long and varied careers. Many people’s working lives will span several transitions. Project professionals should consider how their project management skills could be applied to planning their careers. Substantial investment in professional development and significant retraining is likely to be a wise investment.
- Individuals will also need to manage their wellbeing. New technology will help people manage their health and prevent the development of illness, but individuals will also need to devote time to their health and wellbeing. Maximise your chances of enjoying, not merely enduring, a longer working life.
- Many projects will need to embrace the challenge of increasing longevity – especially if they are designed for long-term impact. Housing projects, for instance, should anticipate the increasing needs and size of a population, for instance through wrap-around services.
- Organisations should seek to avoid what Lynda Gratton and Andrew Scott describe as “the coming HR battle” as the established “lockstep” links between age, career stage and employment policies are challenged by demographic change. Employers should give employees greater flexibility – in their own work, and in balancing work with other aspects of their lives, such as parental care responsibilities. They should work with employees to redesign roles to maximise the contribution that older people can make, for example by managing the physical demands; support employee wellbeing at all life stages; and help employees make good decisions about saving for longer retirements. Organisations should also take a strategic approach to understanding workforce requirements and planning for future skills needs, especially for key professionals and specialist skillsets, including project management.
- For policy makers, it is essential to develop a comprehensive strategy to support people in retraining throughout life. Skills policy has often been weighted towards younger people: there urgently needs to be an expansion of support for people at all stages of life, enabling people to make career transitions later in their working lives, and allowing skilled people to remain economically active in the face of technological disruption. This support also has to extend across the labour market, including professionals with high

prior levels of education and training: technological change will undoubtedly hit many of their jobs in the years ahead, as well as those currently in lower skills roles.

- APM should ensure the relevance and accessibility of its qualifications, CPD and training offer to professionals at all stages of their careers, with understanding of how the needs of professionals at different career stages over the span of longer working lives may be changing from traditional requirements. The forthcoming review of the professional competence framework and CPD, beginning in late 2020, will be an opportunity to begin to consider this dimension. APM should consider the uptake of learning and development among project professionals in later career stages and monitor engagement levels.

