



**THE CHARTERED BODY FOR THE PROJECT PROFESSION**

# **PROJECTING THE FUTURE**

**A ONE-YEAR-ON UPDATE ON THE BIG CONVERSATION**

**THE ADAPTIVE PROJECT PROFESSIONAL**

**SEPTEMBER 2020**

**#projectingthefuture**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# PROJECTING THE FUTURE: THE CHALLENGE WE SET OURSELVES

## In the Projecting the Future launch paper published in June 2019, we wrote:

"We are in the early days of the fourth industrial revolution, driven by artificial intelligence, big data and robots. Climate change and sustainability demand that we radically rethink how our economy works, while the revolution in human longevity is ripping up long-standing norms about how we live and work.

The project profession, meanwhile, is starting to outgrow its roots as a niche technical discipline to become – well, what exactly?

Projects are how change happens, so the project profession will be centre stage in shaping the future.

But precisely what role will we play? In the context of a profoundly changed world, how do we truly thrive? If technology is ushering in the age of 'industry 4.0', how do we build 'project management 4.0'?

Answering those questions needs an outward-looking and far-reaching discussion about the future. Projecting the Future aims to kick-start that process".

In June 2019, the Association for Project Management (APM) launched Projecting the Future as a 'big conversation' about the future of the project profession.

One year on, this paper draws on what you told us during the conversation, and outlines the emerging conclusions we have drawn.

It considers some of the implications of the coronavirus pandemic which has reshaped the world so dramatically in 2020.

And it sets out eight key ideas to shape the future of the profession – with selected action steps for stakeholders across the profession.

**A separate paper, available on the APM website, summarises some of the key ideas and insights from each of the six Challenges discussed over the course of the big conversation.**

## CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

Projecting the Future has been defined by discussion and a spirit of collaboration about solving the challenges, and seizing the opportunities, ahead of the project profession. That will continue to be vital as we take forward the ideas and actions outlined here.

Stay up to date and contribute through APM's social media channels.

   **#projectingthefuture**

And find all the Projecting the Future papers on the APM website: [apm.org.uk/projecting-the-future](http://apm.org.uk/projecting-the-future)

## FOREWORD

In June 2019, the launch paper for Projecting the Future noted that the project environment is increasingly defined by two features: "widespread uncertainty, flux, and a sense that change is happening faster and faster", and the "increasingly common demand that projects deliver transformation". Today, that stands up well as a description of recent months and the sudden, dramatic effects of coronavirus.

## Now is the time to focus on the adaptive project professional

For many organisations, business as usual has been swept away by the pandemic. Many parts of the economy will never be the same again. There is no doubt that we face very challenging circumstances: but daunting as the road ahead may seem, we should face it with confidence. As I wrote in the launch paper, projects are how change happens. Projects have been an important part of the crisis response and will be every bit as important in reshaping, reviving and rebuilding the economy.

The ideas and recommendations presented here are the result of collaboration and conversation about some of the profound changes under way in our economy and society. At the outset of Projecting the Future, we said that these challenges demanded collaboration and the sharing of ideas – and at every stage of Projecting the Future, we have benefited hugely from the views, insights and expertise of a wide range of stakeholders.

APM has been listening closely, and your input has shaped the ideas presented here.

After the last 12 months of the 'big conversation', we believe now is the time to focus on the adaptive project professional. Change is set to be the defining characteristic of the decade ahead. Adaptation will be vital: both in how we help our organisations adapt to the changing world, delivering projects fit for the future, and in how we adapt ourselves, continually developing and evolving our skills and behaviours to keep pace with a fast-changing world.

The recommendations here start to move the conversation on to the questions of how we create this adaptive profession. APM will, of course, play its part – but success will demand more of the collective endeavour, across the profession as a whole, which has made Projecting the Future such a success. We need a shared view of how these ideas will enhance the status and impact of the project profession and improve the success rate of projects. In that sense, this paper needs to mark the start of a new set of conversations about our profession's future. Those will take place through the work being done by APM, but they need to keep going across the profession as a whole too.

This is the launchpad for the next phase of the project profession's development. The ideas here point the way forward for the profession to become more adaptive to our changing world. It falls to us all, together, to make it a reality.

**Tim Banfield**



Chair, Projecting the Future Group

## SUMMARY: EIGHT IDEAS TO SHAPE THE FUTURE

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### **1 Project management's future: the adaptive profession**

The project profession will be the profession at the heart of delivering and creating change in the years ahead and adaptability will be key.

### **5 Collaboration with other organisations – a challenge**

How can the project profession best collaborate with other organisations to develop innovative training and deliver better project outcomes?

### **2 Building the profession's pipeline – from starter to charter**

A strong talent pipeline offering new routes into the profession, both for young entrants and more mature professionals, will be critical.

### **6 Promoting the profession and building its impact**

Continuing to champion the importance and influence of the project profession as an agent of change across the economy and society.

### **3 Strengthening the culture of professionalism through life**

Longer working lives and technological disruption demand an ambitious new approach to supporting learning throughout life.

### **7 Building the evidence base for what works**

Developing research and sharing practical insights which help drive improvements in project management to meet the historic challenges that we face.

### **4 A seat at the table – shaping strategy as well as delivery**

Projects are how change is delivered, so they are critical to strategy: they need to be a bigger part of strategy development.

### **8 Embedding sustainability in projects**

Delivering net zero by 2050 will need projects to help transition to a cleaner economy, and to mitigate the effects of climate change.

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See page 12 for more detail on these ideas – and recommendations for action to start making them a reality.

## THE IMPACT OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY IN ADAPTATION

**The Projecting the Future launch paper in June 2019 described the world as VUCA: volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. Coronavirus has underlined how true that is.**

The coronavirus pandemic can also be looked at through the lens of the Cynefin framework developed by Dave Snowden, which we also shared. The framework identifies four different 'domains' or types of situation: Obvious, Complicated, Complex and Chaotic. We noted that project professionals are increasingly working in Complex and Chaotic situations – the implication being that established 'best practices' do not work in trickier situations. They demand instead that we act first, assess the effects of our actions, and make adjustments accordingly.

In the wake of the pandemic, 'complex' and 'chaotic' are good descriptions of the conditions facing many project professionals. So how has the coronavirus pandemic affected the project profession?

In the short term, it demanded a bias towards speed: building the Nightingale hospitals, developing tracking and tracing apps, and collaborating in innovative ways – as with 'Project Pitlane', which has seen Formula 1 racing teams come together to develop and produce new technology to ventilate critically-ill patients, or collaboration across nations, firms and universities to drive development of potential vaccines. Less visibly, organisations across the economy have had to quickly adapt to new realities. More than ever, 'change', at pace, is the dominant characteristic of work: adaptability will be key.

Will this experience change project management permanently? That is debatable. There are limits to the crisis-response approach. One is financial: many crisis response projects have had a 'money no object' approach – for example in some aspects of government response. Clearly, that is not sustainable. An urgent situation may also demand some short-circuiting of normal decision-making and consultation processes – again, something that is not desirable under more stable circumstances. More broadly, does this experience shape the discussion about different project management

methodologies? APM does not take a view on the relative merits of approaches such as waterfall vs agile: the important question is what is appropriate for the task at hand, and that will remain the case.

Of course, at an individual level, many project professionals' ways of working have been transformed overnight. Hot debate on the virtues and drawbacks of remote working, such as that at APM's Corporate Partner Forum in early March 2020, have been overtaken by the lockdown and consequent home working for many people. How much of the new working patterns will be retained?

## The six Challenges considered in Projecting the Future pre-date the pandemic and they will continue to shape the world in the years ahead

As the crisis plays out, society will need to respond to the other major challenges confronting us. The six Challenges considered in Projecting the Future pre-date the pandemic and they will continue to shape the world in the years ahead: the climate crisis has not gone away, the transformation of the economy by new technology has not halted. In some areas, the pandemic might act as a catalyst to accelerate the dynamics of change. In other areas, it may put the brakes on change, with financial constraints or changes in behaviour leading to projects being postponed or cancelled – or at the very least resulting in adjustments as aims are reviewed. (See box out on 'A bumpy road ahead'.)

One thing has remained constant from the start of our 'big conversation' – whatever the changes that emerge, project professionals will have a critical role to play in delivering the future.



## A bumpy road ahead

An APM survey published in early May 2020 revealed the impact of the coronavirus crisis and lockdown measures on project professionals.

**44%**

said coronavirus had led to their main project being delayed

**26%**

reported that deadlines had been missed and 29% said project goals were being reviewed as a result of the crisis

**77%**

anticipated further disruption ahead

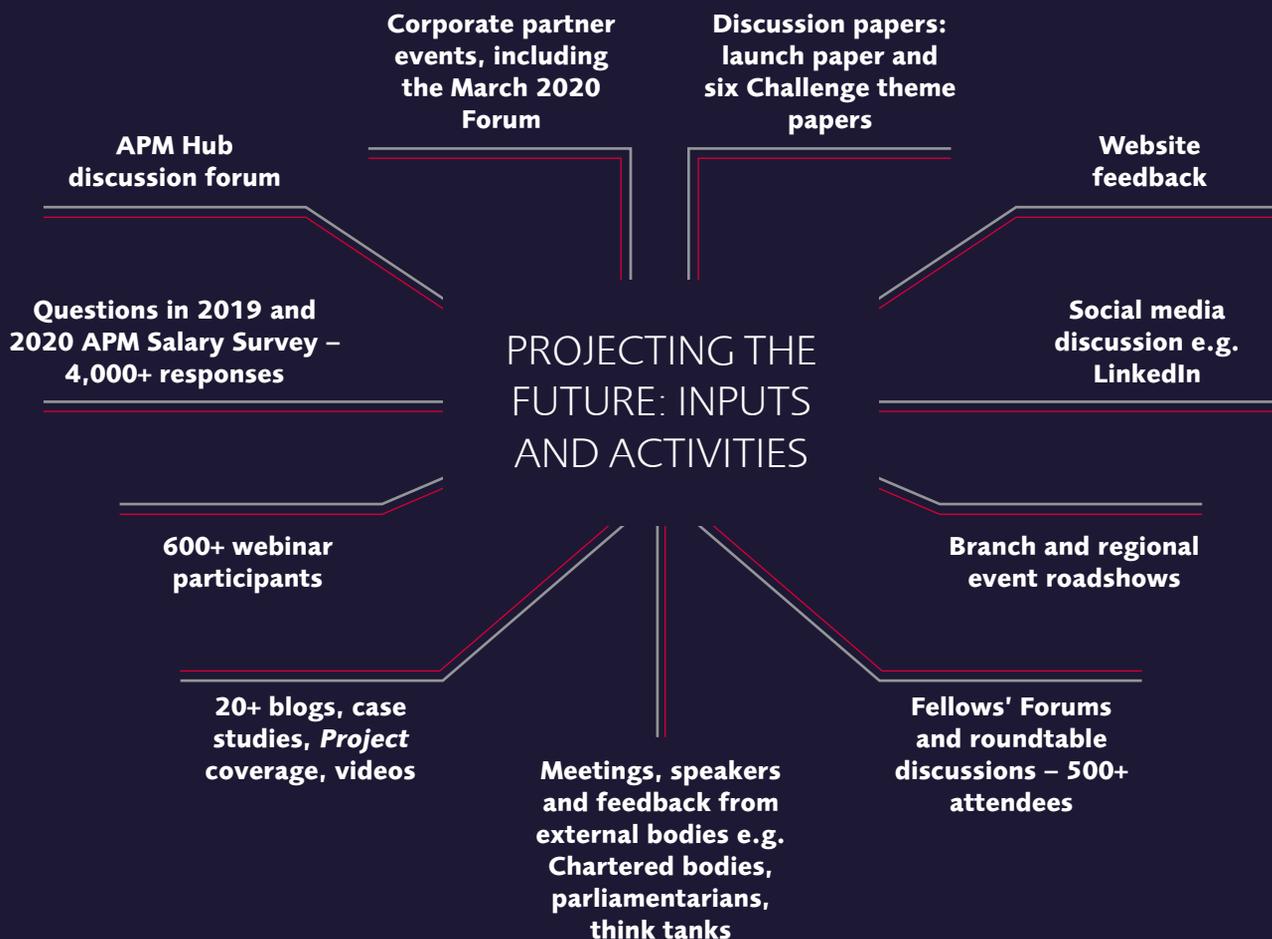
The research was carried out for APM by Censuswide, who surveyed 1,000 project professionals across industry sectors.

## THE BIG CONVERSATION – OUR PURPOSE AND APPROACH

Projecting the Future was created as a 'big conversation': a listening exercise, intended to draw together input from a wide variety of stakeholders and sources.

Our approach was content-led, with a series of papers addressing six 'Challenges' which we identified as pivotal to the profession's future. Find them all here: [apm.org.uk/projecting-the-future](https://apm.org.uk/projecting-the-future)

With 2,000 print copies distributed and more than 18,000 views online, the Challenge papers generated continued discussion across APM's social media channels, as well as at numerous APM events, conferences and webinars throughout 2019-20. They also underpinned targeted stakeholder engagement, especially with organisations outside APM's normal channels, reflecting the need to build the profession's profile more broadly.



## THE QUESTIONS WE ASKED

**We posed six over-arching questions in the launch paper:**

- 1** What role should the project profession play in business and society over the next decade?
- 2** What will project management look like in the future?
- 3** What skills and mindsets will be needed by project professionals in the future?
- 4** How should we manage the drivers of change?
- 5** What is the future role of APM?
- 6** Who else will help us shape change?

## THE SIX CHALLENGES



**THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION:  
ROBOTICS, DATA AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**  
80% of today's project management tasks could be automated by 2030



**CLIMATE CHANGE, CLEAN GROWTH  
AND SUSTAINABILITY**  
The UK aims to be a world leader in the green economy having adopted a target for net zero carbon emissions by 2050



**THE FUTURE OF WORK AND SKILLS**  
Four out of five UK businesses need more high-level skills in the years ahead



**DEMOGRAPHICS AND AGEING: THE 100-YEAR LIFE**  
10 million people alive in the UK today can expect to live to 100



**THE FUTURE OF MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT**  
The UK market for autonomous and connected vehicles could be worth £52bn by 2035



**URBANISATION, CONNECTIVITY AND  
BUILDING SMART CITIES**  
The world will have 43 megacities by 2030; global spending on smart cities could hit \$135bn by 2021

## WHAT YOU TOLD US

***"Adaptability is key. Organisations want to know how other sectors manage their projects – knowledge transfer and reach back is important. We need to recognise that there isn't 'one size fits all' – e.g. different levels of project plans. Project managers should feel empowered to challenge [existing] ways of working."***

***"The drivers of change will evolve. We will need to evolve the profession with them – and it is incumbent on us to recognise what skills and mindsets will need to be. With an open mindset, and a lifelong learning attitude, we will always be able to adapt."***

***"Modern project management is a huge game of whack-a-mole, so having the prioritisation skills to make the right decisions quickly and to be able to resolve challenges quickly are essential."***

***"Reflective practice should also be a key skill-set and encouraged. Currently, except if you are applying for RPP/ChPP, APM pays lip-service to this and should more positively encourage/require them."***

***"Role of the PM will be less and less the coordinator, as AI can do that for you. You need to be focussed on the softer, harder-to-learn skills that require application of human intelligence."***

***"The question we need to ask ourselves as a project profession is: 'Are project professionals just experts in the process of change or are we also consultants on the drivers for change?'"***

***"These papers are an excellent insight into the future of project management."***

***"We have to be the leaders of change, defining governance of change projects, helping the other professions in their changes in the new digital world. We need to work with the drivers of change not manage them, and apply discipline and rigour to the change process."***

## CONCLUSIONS: EIGHT IDEAS TO SHAPE THE FUTURE

**How does the project profession thrive in the years ahead? Our conclusions, based on the insights emerging from the Projecting the Future big conversation, include eight key ideas.**

### 1. Project management's future: the adaptive profession

In an era of unprecedented technological, social and environmental change, the project profession will be the profession at the heart of creating and delivering change. To deliver change successfully, project management's future is as the adaptive profession. Adaptive professionals need to be responsive to the shifting contexts in which they work. They need to be learning continually. They need strong meta-competencies – such as resilience, anticipating and creating change and building diverse teams. Rising skills needs include the ability to use and implement new technology, for example, data analytics; and more people-centred or 'soft' leadership and people skills, communications, collaboration, and managing increasingly complex stakeholder engagement.

### 2. Building the profession's pipeline – from starter to charter

The project profession needs to build a strong talent pipeline by embedding new routes into the profession for young entrants and pathways for more mature, mid-career switchers including returners to work or ex-service personnel. Employers and policy makers should build on the relatively new Project Apprenticeships (including at degree level) and other vocational routes, where there are hugely positive signs about their effectiveness in developing new entrants. Efforts to build awareness of the project profession as an increasingly desirable career should be redoubled, with collaboration between APM, schools, colleges and universities – with emphasis less on the processes of project management and more on the transformational, inspirational, benefits of projects. Increasingly, the pathway to chartered makes this a career for many who see the value in a profession that runs through the heart of so many organisations and varied sectors.

### 3. Strengthening the culture of professionalism through life

In the context of longer working lives and likely technological disruption to work, we urgently need improved support for professionals to train, retrain, and keep learning throughout their careers. Individuals need to recognise their own responsibility for investing in their learning and development throughout their careers, but employers must also take responsibility for developing their people, helping them adapt to changing economic needs and new ways of working. Policy makers should take an ambitious and creative approach to supporting this culture of professionalism: this may require greater flexibility in skills funding, the creation of skills accounts which empower individuals to manage their own learning, and more support for those retraining for different roles.

### 4. A seat at the table – shaping strategy as well as delivery

Projecting the Future has demonstrated the desire of project professionals to have a more influential role in shaping the strategy of projects, and the overall strategy of organisations running projects. In organisations with significant portfolios of projects, there should be a seat at the top table for those responsible for projects – perhaps building on the concept of the chief project officer (CPO), or by bringing more project management experience into the boardroom – to ensure that the importance of projects is recognised as a critical part of strategic development in today's fast-changing environment. The development of Chartered Project Professional (ChPP) and the increasing number of charter holders provides a leadership cohort which can give the profession greater visibility and parity of esteem with other professions for the first time. Going further, there is a need to identify the attributes and training needs for aspiring CPOs – what are the leadership characteristics, skill and attributes that project managers need to be leaders? – as well as to improve the recognition of project leadership more widely. Project professionals also have an obligation to stand up, call out and challenge poor practice when they see it.

## 5. Collaboration with other organisations – a challenge

Project management has a core set of skills and expertise but, as a profession, it is important that we exchange with other professions, employers and other organisations to take into account new and innovative ways of training, and to build a shared understanding of how best to improve the delivery of projects. Collaboration will be essential. What possible collaborations could help to broaden project professionals' competences beyond their core technical project management competences – for example in general leadership, digital skills, or personal capabilities such as resilience and managing mental health? On what else, and how, can the profession best collaborate with others? Let us know your thoughts.

# Project management's future is as the adaptive profession

## 6. Promoting the profession and building its impact

We need to continue to champion the virtues of project management and showcase its influence as an agent of change working across the economy and society. APM has a key role to play in this area, and should act as an umbrella for activity that includes corporates, government and other bodies. Chartered Project Professional status (ChPP) is key: it provides the profession with a distinct identity and sends a signal to both other professions and the wider community about the project profession's commitment to high standards. What ways can we use the chartered brand to support the raising both of standards and the profile of project management globally? How can we most effectively – whether it is individuals, organisations and employers or APM – support the project professional brand, particularly Chartered? And how can we put it on a global footing?

## 7. Building the evidence base for what works

There is a widespread appetite for an improved evidence base on effective techniques in project management and for sharing insights on what works in a rapidly changing world. It is recognised that too many projects fail to deliver on the desired outcomes, or overrun on time and budgets. How are the conditions for project success evolving, and how can their adoption be promoted more widely? How can the profession learn to draw the right lessons from experience when it faces a complex and chaotic world, where past 'proven' solutions might not work a second time? How can government use, and contribute to, an expanded evidence base as it seeks to raise standards of project management in order to deliver on its policy agenda?

## 8. Embedding sustainability in projects

If the UK is to deliver on its net zero target by 2050, project professionals will have a significant role to play, both in projects transitioning to a cleaner, greener economy, and in mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change. Sustainability needs to be an integral part of project management's toolkit, part of the thinking for new projects and retrofitted into existing projects where relevant. The way that the profession builds decarbonisation and net zero planning into the heart of existing and future projects will be a key test of its benefit to society.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION: KEY STEPS

**Ensuring that the project profession meets the challenges of the next 5-10 years demands action from individual professionals, organisations, policy makers and APM alike.**

This is not a comprehensive list of the steps needed to deliver on the eight ideas for the future: it is only the starting point, and the basis for further discussion and collaborative action.

### 1. For project professionals

- Build an adaptive mindset. In a VUCA world, you need to be ready to shape change, and to continually evolve and grow – personally and in what you deliver through your work. Develop 'meta competencies' – the over-arching skills that are separate from, but supportive of, the specific skills needed to do the job. These include the ability to continually learn, to adapt, being resilient, and anticipating and creating change.
- For many professionals, CPD and learning should focus on two key areas of skills which are expected to be critical in the next 5-10 years:
  - i) New technology. Develop your understanding of, and ability to use, new technology; both to increase effectiveness and productivity in how you work, and in how technology can help meet client and end-user needs.
  - ii) Leadership and people skills. In a complex world, interactions with others are critical: project professionals need to go beyond classic technical project management skills and build the ability to engage with, and provide leadership to, varied project stakeholders.
- Step up to lead. Project professionals who aspire to lead projects need to have curiosity, be prepared to think imaginatively, and develop 'out of the box' thinking. Building on their unique core expertise and technical skills, project professionals should develop a broader perspective on project and organisational aims, and how they can be achieved. Shape strategy not just delivery. Developing and leading more diverse teams will be crucial in the future, as will communication skills.

### 2. For organisations

- Bring project expertise more into the strategic discussion. For organisations with significant portfolios of projects, there should be a stronger voice for projects in the C-suite or at decision-making level. This may mean developing the notion of a Chief Project Officer (CPO), or exploring the potential for greater project expertise on boards. The aim is to improve results by ensuring that project expertise is part of deciding what to do – not just how it can be done.
- Recognise the pivotal role played by project professionals in developing strategy and the initiation of projects – so crucial to their success. Support the development of project professionals within the organisation and ensure they are central to the organisation's operating environment.
- Maximise project success rates by ensuring that the conditions for project success are increasingly embedded in organisations using the 12 key factors identified by APM. Leading organisations should support APM's forthcoming review of these factors, which will be an important contribution to the evidence base on effective project management.
- Commit to developing a diverse talent pipeline for the future through investment in project apprenticeships and supporting APM activity around student membership.
- Support those professionals who are further on in their careers in their continuing learning and professional development through support for CPD and qualifications, helping to make them as relevant as possible to the changing challenges of work. Make better use of experienced professionals' strengths, for example through mentoring, non-executive roles on project steering boards, or in project reviews and gateways.
- Organisations should improve how the benefits of projects, including social and environmental impact, are communicated and shared.





### 3. For policy makers and influencers

- Ensure that employers can create more opportunities for new entrants to the project profession by continuing to support the relatively new apprenticeships and raising awareness of the project profession's increasing relevance in a world where project are the means by which change is delivered. This should build on the highly encouraging early evidence from the first cohorts of project apprenticeships. Creating greater flexibility in how the apprenticeship levy can be used could also support more education leavers in getting into work.
- Support a culture of project professionalism through life by enhancing support for professionals in returning to education or training throughout life, recognising that today's professionals are likely to face job disruption throughout their careers. This may mean developing policies such as skills accounts, and turning Jobs Centres into Jobs & Skills Hubs, as proposed by the CBI. The economic disruption created by the coronavirus pandemic creates a moment of opportunity to kick-start this new approach to skills.
- Support government's ability to act as a smart client for major infrastructure. Government should support the Infrastructure and Projects Authority's (IPA) current programme to strengthen government's own project capacity. If government is to deliver on its ambitious agenda for national infrastructure, it also needs to support industry in achieving higher productivity levels. More widely, it should build the capacity of the project profession within government and key public services including health.

### 4. For APM

- Explore the potential for a skills audit across the UK economy, to establish the current skills base within the project profession and identify opportunities and gaps against future needs, providing a panoramic view on the future needs of our profession.
- Redouble our outreach programmes to schools, colleges and universities, building awareness of the project profession as an increasingly desirable career which runs through the heart of so many varied sectors and organisations.
- Undertake a major review of our professional competence framework, to support the development of the adaptive profession. Starting in autumn 2020, this work will link into a review of CPD provision, ensuring it is relevant and responsive to individual and organisational needs. To do this successfully, we need input from the wider profession, particularly from employers.
- Support work to improve perceptions of the project profession and establish the need for – and capacity of – the profession to take a seat at the top table of organisations. We will link into similar work being undertaken by the UK government under the aegis of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA).
- Work with other organisations to promote the profession and its impact, exploring where collaborations would be of most benefit.
- Use the Chartered brand to support the raising of standards, and the profile of project management, globally.
- To build the evidence base of what works, APM will update its influential 'conditions for project success' research from 2015, beginning in 2020. APM has also commissioned research on key topics such as the impact of technology, and will continue to work with partners to generate robust and practical research insights on what works.
- Building on the climate change statement we issued in early 2020, we will roll out a major multi-part climate change action plan, through which we will work in cooperation with the wider profession to support them in embedding sustainability in projects and delivering on net zero.

## PROJECTING A SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME: POSSIBLE BENCHMARKS FOR SUCCESS

**Tim Banfield, chair of APM's Projecting the Future Group, launched Projecting the Future at APM's conference in Manchester in June 2019. He suggested some possible benchmarks for success.**

### **The rise of the PM CEO**

There aren't many project management chief executives of organisations, in the public or private sectors. Over the next 10-15 years, I'd like to see more recognition that project professionals are the best people to lead the sort of change we need for organisations, and to make organisations successful. We urgently need more project experience in the boardroom too.

### **Demonstrating economic and social benefits from projects and taking a customer/end-user perspective**

The project profession creates change. Whether that's through the social security system, new housing, or bringing new products to market: all of that is about the end user's perspective. We've been very good at thinking about specifications and requirements, but we need to think about how we can better measure the economic and productivity benefits of projects, and demonstrate social impact.

### **PM is part of the strategy as well as the delivery**

Project management has to evolve to meet the needs of the fourth industrial revolution. It needs to be considered by organisations as a key part of strategy, not just the 'back room' technical side of how that strategy is delivered. That also means more consistent adoption of the conditions for project success.

### **Project profession seen as a desirable first career**

Many of us come into the project profession mid-career, but it should be seen as a profession of first choice. I have met many young people coming into the profession, for instance as apprentices, and their desire to do project management in a different way is awe-inspiring. The difference they can make to the culture of an organisation is fantastic. We need more and more people to say: "the project profession is where I want to spend my career".



## NEXT STEPS: HELP US TO PROJECT THE FUTURE

### **Engaging with the next steps**

Follow APM's social media channels to stay up to date on opportunities to input to work on the actions identified by Projecting the Future, and give us your views on the ideas in this paper.

   #projectingthefuture

### **Input to APM workstreams**

If you wish to contribute to a specific APM-led initiative flowing from this report, such as the competence framework review, please email [ptf@apm.org.uk](mailto:ptf@apm.org.uk) with a brief outline of your interest and the capacity in which you could contribute.

### **Summarising the big conversation**

We have produced a top-line summary of contributions and insights flowing from each of the six Projecting the Future Challenge areas, which is available online via [apm.org.uk/projecting-the-future](http://apm.org.uk/projecting-the-future)

### **The Golden Thread**

APM's groundbreaking 2019 research with PwC, showing the contribution of project management to the UK for the first time, has now been followed by two additional reports. One explores regional data, and the other homes in on three key sectors: healthcare, charities and SMEs. Find all three reports at [apm.org.uk/goldenthread](http://apm.org.uk/goldenthread)





**Association for Project Management**

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

Tel (UK) 0845 458 1944  
Tel (int) +44 1844 271 640  
ptf@apm.org.uk  
apm.org.uk

   **#projectingthefuture**