

APM Project Management Awards



WINNER'S

CASE STUDY



Category

Project Manager of the Year 2011

Winner

Paul Arnold, NATS

Sponsor



Overview

The project to deliver a new training centre (NTC) for the world-leading air traffic management company, NATS, was not just about construction and delivering technology, but about changing how the firm's Air Traffic Control (ATC) training community worked.

The NTC, based at the NATS Corporate and Technical Centre (CTC) near Southampton, was designed to replace outdated facilities at Hurn near Bournemouth and is a key part of the company's training and site consolidation strategies.

The project had multiple stakeholders with different priorities and was set against a background of tightening

purse strings dictated by the current economic climate. It also needed to be delivered against challenging deadlines.

As project manager, Paul Arnold was responsible for all this, and successfully delivered the project ahead of time and within budget.

Objectives

The main objective of the project was to replace outdated training facilities at Hurn with a new training centre. Due to budgetary constraints, the original plan to build a new building complex at this site had to be revised, and instead,



a project was put in place to consolidate operations at the company's CTC building complex and develop a new training centre at the site.

The project launched in early 2009 therefore entailed developing an £11m centre that would accommodate the NATS training organisation and infrastructure, and relocate it without interrupting the training process. It was expected to be completed by winter 2011/12.

As one of the company's flagship projects, the delivery of the NTC was also expected to take the lead in improving the organisation's overall project delivery performance, laying the foundations to drive continuous improvement across the business, especially in critical chain project management processes.

Resources

The scope of the £11m project included not just construction, but technology (ATC simulators), people aspects (change and relocation), transport and logistics.

For this complexity to be managed, the project team needed to include people from many different disciplines, bringing together specialists from both the construction and aerospace industries.

As project manager, Paul established an organisation structure that reflected the broad spectrum of stakeholders and included specialist functions such as people management, ATC training, system engineering and transition planning. He then built a strong team to reflect the key work streams, each with clear objectives and different skills and experience.

Challenges

The main challenges at the start of the project were people issues. The project had major implications for some NATS people, especially those relocating from Hurn, and existing CTC staff needing to make way for the new facility.

Added to this was the fact that the project was put in place at a time of great uncertainty. Cutbacks due to the recession were straining industrial relations generally, and a stop-start atmosphere before the launch of the project had left the NATS training community in particular very cynical. However, a positive relationship with the staff as a whole and their unions, and the support of the training community in particular, were crucial factors if the project were to deliver on time and on budget.

Additionally, within the multi-disciplined project team itself, there was also a great need to build relationships, particularly as the team was split between two locations.

And finally, on top of managing a demanding project, Paul and his project team were asked to pioneer a number of new processes and tools, including critical chain project management techniques, as part of the company's continuous improvement programme.

Co-ordination

With a multi-disciplined team split between different locations, communications and soft people issues were key success factors. Paul therefore established a people work package to integrate communications and soft people issues, including relocation. He worked closely with the work package manager to develop a stakeholder

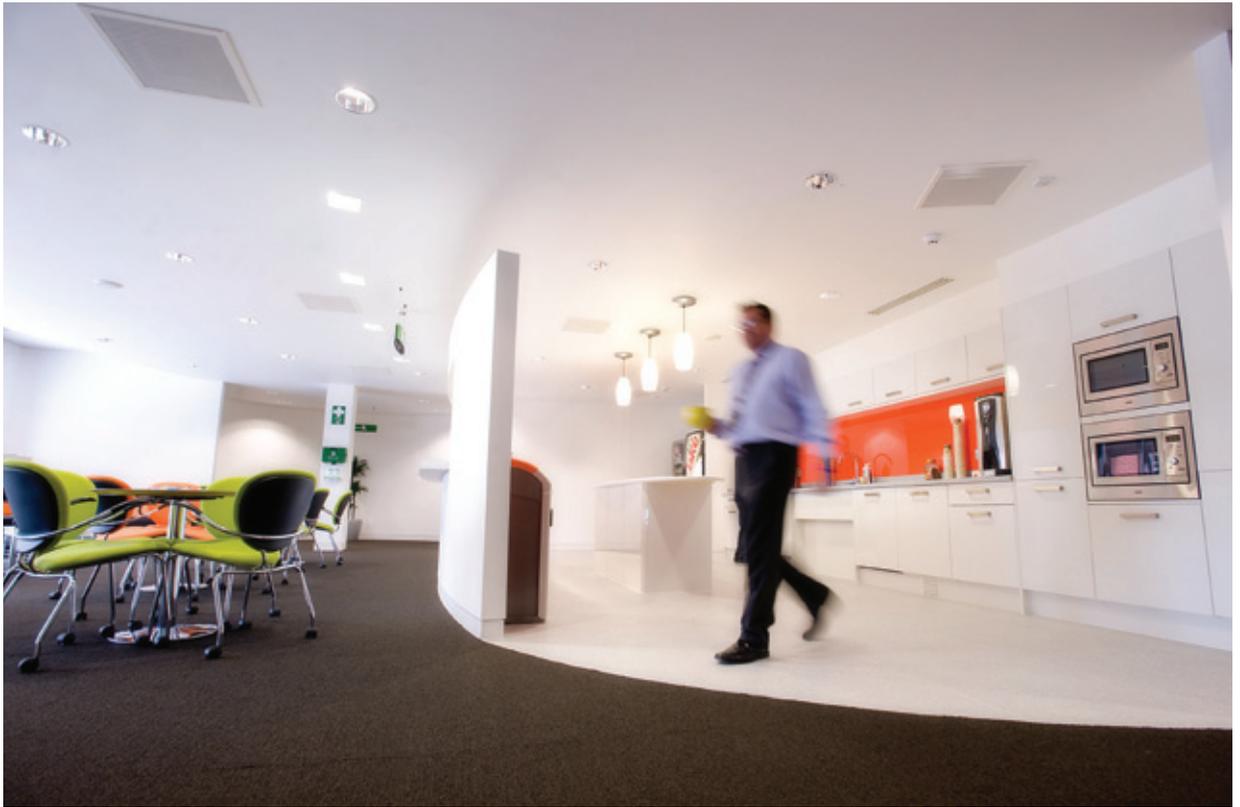
engagement strategy using a combination of company and project-specific communications tools to ensure that project teams, training staff and stakeholders received the right information at the right time.

He also ensured effective dialogue about the project's progress and issues based on open discussions and feedback, with supporting material distributed on the NATS intranet and in newsletters. This openness generated a culture of 'no surprises', which raised issues that might not otherwise have surfaced, and encouraged new ideas and improvements.

To help individuals achieve a better personal and professional performance, Paul additionally set up a coaching and mentoring scheme. This included a particular focus on people and facilities management work streams which were turned into development opportunities. Paul also ensured the project team learned lessons from previous major projects. As a result, skills were acquired more quickly and issues tackled more effectively.

Ensuring the training community was at the heart of the project was critical to success, and Paul immediately recognised this. He therefore set up a 'user group' of training staff that worked with the project team to design the NTC. This process transformed the mindset of the training community from initial resistance to eventual enthusiasm for the project.





Successes

The new training centre was completed ahead of schedule in August 2011 – instead of winter 2011/12 – and within budget, and the project achieved all its key objectives.

The ageing facilities and systems at Hurn have been replaced by a state-of-the-art ATC training centre at the NATS CTC.

Delivery of the new facility has meant that training can be integrated into NATS' existing HQ site, achieving greater efficiency through consolidation. And the project has ensured that the changes necessary for implementation had minimal impact on the company's ATC training process.

The project has also helped pioneer a number of new processes and tools for NATS, in particular acting as the lead project for using critical chain project management techniques. The benefits of this are twofold – not only has the successful use of these techniques enabled the project team to address resource and schedule constraints more effectively, but their pioneering work is expected to drive improvements in the company's ability to deliver complex projects in the future.



The APM Project Management Awards have been celebrating project management excellence since 1993 and the broad range of categories is designed to make entry possible for projects and companies of all sizes and complexity.

The awards reflect the invaluable contribution project managers make in all sectors of society and the event provides an opportunity for industry professionals to meet with colleagues and entertain guests as well as celebrate at one of the year's most exciting events.

Highly regarded in the project management industry, the awards reflect the dedication and talent that helps to shape the project management community and the world around us. The finalists, winners and sponsors of the awards attract national publicity for their achievement and involvement. Winning an award provides invaluable recognition and kudos to the careers of winners.

For more details on the awards and how to enter or attend, visit www.apm.org.uk/awards.asp or email awards@apm.org.uk

Association for Project Management

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

Telephone 0845 458 1944
International +44 (0)1844 271640
Facsimile +44 (0)1844 274509

Email info@apm.org.uk
Web www.apm.org.uk