

Department for Transport consultation: transport labour market and skills

In your view, what skills does the transport sector need in the future?

We have seen a rise in demand for project professionals across all sectors, but particularly in transport. Our latest member survey showed that while 78% of all members were increasing the number of projects they were working on, this rose to 86% in transport.

This demand is further shown by the recent Transport Select Committee report into major transport infrastructure projects, which called on the Government to address “specific skills gaps, such as in transport engineering and project management” (HoC, 2021). It goes on to say this should be done through apprenticeships and training programmes, both of which Association for Project Management (APM) provides.

The pace at which the sector is changing means that a diverse, resilient, and flexible workforce is needed to meet the demands of the future. Diversity of thought will be vital in future-proofing projects and ensuring they deliver change for the communities that use them. As project managers are responsible for project delivery, their role inevitably involves facilitating the removal of barriers to users in both project teams and in project outputs/outcomes. Levelling up through accessible infrastructure, technology and processes will only come about if teams and projects are inclusive.

To deliver cost effective projects on scope, on time and on budget, both now and in the future, we must also emphasise technical capability alongside cognitive flexibility, something transport has, perhaps, struggled to address in the past.

Technology and data in transport project management is about identifying and using the correct digital tools to manage and complete projects. We believe that now, and in the future, skills in the latest applicable digital technology (also for simulation and modelling) will be crucial, as will our approach to artificial intelligence (AI).

The rise of automation shows no signs of slowing down but a key skill that automation cannot currently replicate is emotional intelligence. So, an emphasis on interpersonal skills such as empathy, conflict resolution and negotiation will enable people to effectively engage with stakeholders and build and lead teams.

Interpersonal skills were one of the nine dynamic conditions for project success identified in recent APM research (APM, 2021). All nine conditions will be relevant for future transport projects:

- interpersonal skills
- training and certifications
- team ethos
- technology and data
- contracts
- knowledge management
- agility
- sustainability
- diversity

The rapid rise of digital technologies also mean that the workforces of the future will need cognitive flexibility as we increasingly handle substantial amounts of data to conceptualise complex ideas in periods of change.

More specifically to the transport sector, the core skills of transport and traffic engineering, including traffic modelling and highway design, will need to be grounded in sustainability. Traffic modelling will also need to focus on active travel, not just vehicular, as transport projects have a vital role to play in achieving net zero.

How, in your view, can current qualification and training routes be made more accessible for those who want to pursue a career in the transport sector

Project management is often seen as a second or third career so we would welcome attempts to make the profession more accessible. Often, project management is viewed as an add on to another area of study e.g., business studies so young people do not learn about the basics until later in their educational journey. This is disappointing, as the skills needed for project management are also highly transferable and useful in other roles e.g., interpersonal skills, organisation, planning.

Within APM we have looked at accessibility of our own range of products, for example moving qualifications online and on-demand, reviewing our website's accessibility and supplying audiobooks of core textbooks to those that need them.

What, in your view, are effective ways to attract young people and career changers into a career in the transport sector

To effectively address this, we recommend:

- Highlighting the opportunity for development within a structured programme, particularly at post-16 and HE/FE.
- Flag all the separate roles available to people working in transportation, including project management.
- Provide financial assistance, bursaries, and scholarships - support with funding for relevant degrees or other qualifications.
- Engaging students and their parents through outreach in schools, colleges, universities, technical colleges.
- Partnerships with academy trusts and other education providers.

APM provides apprenticeships in project management and we have seen that although in principle apprenticeships help make careers more accessible, in practice the inconsistent approach to careers advice and guidance at school age limits the initial impact.

Indeed, we have seen a slight decrease in the number of education-leaver apprentices during Covid. Despite this, we are working to promote the value of project management as a first career and expect to see this increase again over the next few years. The increase in project management degrees and graduate schemes will also support this.

What, in your view, are the barriers to further increasing diversity, inclusion and social mobility in the transport sector?

As noted above, diversity is one of the dynamic conditions for project success (APM, 2021) so it is vital to focus on removing barriers.

We are concerned that underrepresentation in senior management could be a barrier. If women and people from ethnic minorities are underrepresented in senior management, they tend to make up a disproportionate amount of the workforce in low-skilled, low-paid areas (PWC, 2017).

Furthermore, much of the clustering of women and people from minority groups within certain occupations is rooted in cultural factors that begin at an early age. These stereotypes and assumptions can be compounded by concerns over the likelihood of being hired or fitting in.

APM would also like to see changes to the way schools approach workplace skills. We want to see greater support for teachers to understand workplace requirements and teach the skills needed by business, including project management. This should help with the transition from school to workplace.

But we also want to see better support for pupils with neurodiverse conditions whose diversity does not always fit in with the rigid ways in which we examine pupils. Ernst & Young's *the value of dyslexia* report points out that in education and employment, there can be a negative perception of dyslexia which can influence dyslexic individuals from reaching their full potential (Ernst & Young, 2018).

This perception extends to individuals with ADHD, autistic spectrum condition and Tourette syndrome, all of whom experience lower rates of employment than the general population (BPS, 2017). We need to reassess the way these conditions are treated at school and in the workplace to enable the transport industry to harness the advantages of these conditions.

How, in your view, can barriers to diversity, inclusion and social mobility in the transport sector be reduced?

At APM we are trying to reduce barriers, particular through our mentoring programme. This has the capability to drive better outcomes for all project professionals, by having relatable role models, as well as a reverse mentoring opportunity that allows new entrants or those from diverse backgrounds to educate more senior professionals as well as gain valuable career insights.

APM's Women in Project Management group is committed to empowering women and demonstrating how project management can be a leading profession for gender diversity and equality. And we are working with educational institutions to promote the project profession, encouraging women and girls to choose project management as a career.

We all have a role to play in reaching out to people who may not have considered a career in our sector. In turn, publicly demonstrating commitment to diversity will help to convince people that transportation is a sector where they can realise their potential.

The brightest and best candidates will actively seek out organisations that have a decent reputation for diversity and inclusion. It is therefore important to ensure that diversity and inclusion are at the core of our employer brands.

Even if we are not where we want to be on diversity today, there are opportunities to acknowledge the issues and set out plans for progress, this includes ensuring accessibility not only into the industry, but also that the infrastructure, technology and processes we create are accessible for all. Such openness can make a favourable public impression.

Final comments

Project management was identified as a major skills gap in the recent House of Lords Select Committee on Risk Assessment and Risk Planning's report *Preparing for Extreme Risks* (HoL, 2021).

This called for the Government to “bolster its skills base in the areas of analysis, emergency planning and project delivery and make more use of systems thinking and Futures techniques when conducting risk assessments and developing policy.”

We welcome this opportunity to help deliver, in part, on that recommendation, although we are seeing skills gaps across all sectors, not just transport. We remain happy to be involved in future discussions within transport and beyond.

References

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