

Susie Kay, APM's head of professional development, and **Peter Johnson**, the deputy director of skills at the OGC, discuss the need for proof of competence as project and programme management moves into a more demanding era.

A different professional perspective

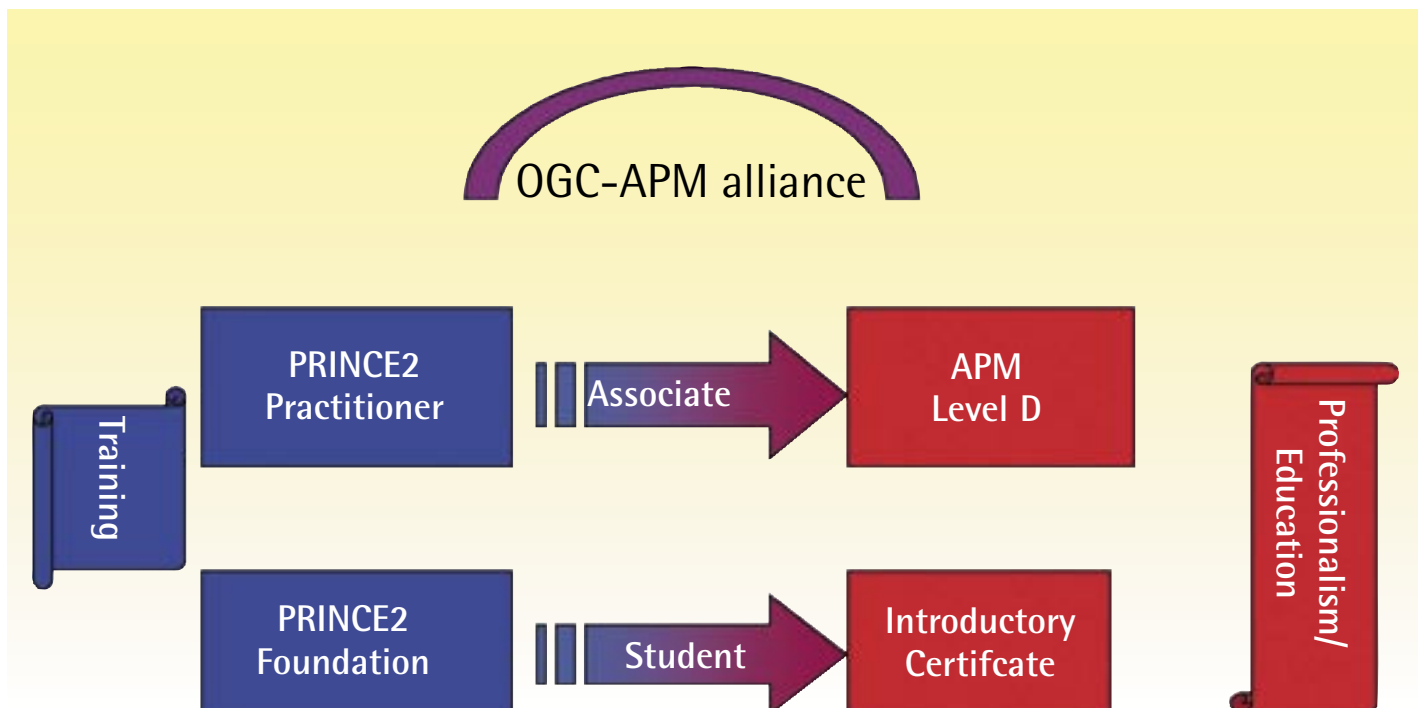
THOSE who are being fêted for having received one of APM's range of prestigious awards have scored a significant achievement for themselves, their organisation and their client.

When success is measured in such a public way, can we show whether these people are committed to professional development, to demonstrating that their competence is ongoing and not a fluke of fortunate circumstance?

The delivery of projects successfully is, perhaps, the major aim of the professional and their employers. However, the routes by which project managers achieve those successes should be a concern.

As we move towards a growing understanding that particular ranges of skills and competences are required at different levels and in diverse contexts, a new approach may be needed to our assumptions about how we 'grow' project management knowledge, competences and capability. How will we populate the growing number of very visible public projects as well as the obvious move towards project-based delivery within the UK?

There has been a significant investment in one-off or stand-alone qualifications,



with businesses expecting a return that is increasingly shown to be incomplete. Training of the 'just this one' or 'just in time' variety is unable to deliver the levels of professional capability and competence that commitment to long-term project and programme management education and development offers.

The differences between and benefits of education and training is an ongoing debate. So how do we advise all current and future project managers about the benefits which will accrue from a broader and continuous approach to their project management education?

The Association for Project Management (APM), and the Office for Government Commerce (OGC), agree that individual project and programme managers should be looking for qualifications or certifications appropriate to their circumstances and to the point they have reached in their careers.

This implies that all those offering advice and guidance about continuing professional development should be working together to ensure that individuals are made aware that knowledge-based qualifications are not the only option. Competence-based assessments

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may be appropriate when moving up the competence levels as part of an individual's commitment to continuing professional development. Such commitments are expressions of professionalism.

Joining professional organisations, such as APM, would help to gain maximum benefit from the networking and education opportunities on offer. Your peers are, after all, one of the richest sources of professional knowledge and experience.

APM and OGC are working together to promote an understanding that to be best equipped for working in a project management environment it would be advisable for an individual to achieve early complementary qualifications from both organisations.

OGC's PRINCE2 is an established methodology, and qualifications in this can be a fast way into a productive project or programme role in a low-risk environment. However, investing in the broader APMP qualification from APM would ensure that the practical method is underpinned with a broad theoretical knowledge derived from the *APM Body of Knowledge 5th edition*.
Current research into Rethinking Project

Management, outlined in the APM Yearbook 2006-07, also suggests that adherence to a knowledge-based approach – defining what a project manager knows rather than what they are capable of delivering – may not be the most appropriate way forward.

Trying to analyse the qualities of very good, excellent or exceptional project managers also raises questions as to the extent of nature and nurture in developing project managers.

Whatever your opinion on this thorny issue, it is true to say that the application of project management knowledge within the social and political context of the project will affect the approach and outcomes and should add that much needed extra value. An ability to analyse the project context and to deal with the many interpersonal issues within it are also highly desirable qualities in project leaders.

An ability to demonstrate the level and range of competences and how experience has refined understanding and delivery in the real world is the journey or progression from initially being part of the project team to the eventual ability to control and deliver complex projects.

If we were able to look 20 years into the future, where would you prefer us to be? APM

and OGC believe that together we can create an enviable world where every project and programme manager is a professional and every professional is suitably certificated.

In this new world employers can be confident that each project will be successful because of the calibre of project and programme managers that can be set to the task. These successful, competent professionals will reflect on their success and offer that understanding back to the profession as a whole for application by others. We also look

forward to improved portfolio, programme and project management leadership skills in board rooms, programme boards and project boards – but more of that in a later article.

For the moment, investing in project managers' competencies sounds like a good idea doesn't it?

- For further information on complementary qualifications, training and other CPD issues, contact Susie Kay
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"In a time of drastic change it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world which no longer exists."

Eric Hoffer