

We know that you're experienced, but are you qualified?

Many contractors are increasingly hearing this question when they attend interviews for project management roles. Unlike the late 1990s when there were not enough staff to fulfil demand, organisations have assumed the balance of power, being able to choose the best contractors whilst still keeping rates low. Even as the market picks up, there seems to be no reduction in the appetite for professionally qualified staff.

There are a number of project management qualifications available, all with their own structures, approaches and acronyms. The aim of this article is to guide you through the maze of acronyms and help you to select a route that is right for you.

PRINCE2

PRINCE2 was launched in 1996 by The Office of Government Commerce (OGC) in partnership with the APM Group, which has developed and managed the accreditation of PRINCE2. The APM Group was established in 1993 as the trading arm of the Association for Project Management and became an independent organisation in 2000. It has offices in The Netherlands and Australia and its exams have been taken in about 25 countries over the years. Since PRINCE2 was introduced in 1996, some 75,000 people have been trained.

PRINCE stands for PProjects IN Controlled Environments and is a structured method for effective project management which has become the UK's de facto standard for organising, managing and controlling projects. It is a generic, best-practice approach for the management of all types of projects and has a reputation for offering a highly-effective, process-based approach to structuring and organising project delivery.

PRINCE2 has been adopted as the method of choice by the Government, a large number of local authorities and by the National Health Service. Commercial organisations too are keen users of PRINCE2 and are often required to use it if they want to work with any government agencies.

There are two levels of PRINCE2 qualification. Foundation level indicates to employers that you have knowledge of the structure and terminology of the method. Practitioner level indicates that you have understanding of the method and how to apply it to different project situations. The examinations are open to all and are recognised by UKAS, the UK Accreditation Service.

PMI

The Project Management Institute was founded in 1969 in the United States. It has developed a Member Code of Ethics for those involved in project management, and administers project management training and certification. The Institute claims a membership of more than 80,000 in 125 countries, covering different professions including IT, and aims to provide a controlled, integrated approach to project management through the certification, education, research, awards, publications and professional standards that it administers.

The PMI methodology is contained in its publication "A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge" (PMBOK). The PMBOK splits project management into five Process Groups and nine Knowledge Areas. The Process Groups cover initiating, planning, executing, controlling and closing a project. The Knowledge Areas describe the additional skills that project managers need to help them to manage a specific project. These include cost management, quality management and procurement management.

The key qualification offered by PMI is the Project Management Professional (PMP) certification. To achieve this level of certification, candidates must possess educational qualifications, have at least three years' experience and pass a four-hour, 200-question examination.

PMI has also introduced the Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM) qualification for aspiring project managers or those in other roles. CAPM candidates must first meet specific education and experience requirements and then pass an examination.

APM Body of Knowledge

The Association for Project Management focuses on the UK and Europe and is the largest independent professional body of its kind in Europe. It has over 13,500 individual and 240

corporate members throughout the UK and abroad. APM's focus is to promote and develop project management across all industries and sectors through activities including qualifications, accredited training, research, publications and events. The APM has 16 regional branches throughout the UK, Singapore and Hong Kong.

The qualifications offered by the APM are based around the APM Body of Knowledge that covers the 42 areas of knowledge required to manage any successful project. There are four levels of qualification.

The first level is the APM Introductory Certificate, designed for those wanting to understand the principles of project management excellence. The second level is the APMP, which demonstrates the fundamental knowledge of what is required to manage a successful project. It is a knowledge-based foundation level qualification enabling you to participate in projects ranging from individual assignments to large capital projects.

"Whilst nothing beats hard earned experience in managing and delivering IT projects, the end customer (whose money it often is) is not necessarily acronym literate. For these people, knowing that the person who is responsible for delivering this important piece of work is also (PRINCE2 or formally) qualified, is both important and confidence inspiring."

Derek Wreay, Managing Director, Wreay International

The third level is the APM Practitioner Qualification, for Project Managers, Project Co-ordinators and Team Leaders with more than three years' experience managing non-complex projects. Finally, the Practitioner Qualification is for any relatively experienced professionals looking to demonstrate their ability to manage projects successfully.

To assess the respective market demand for these qualifications, I undertook some informal research, using the Jobserve recruitment website.

My searches indicated that PRINCE2 was winning the marketing war in terms of project management certification in the UK. Searching for project management jobs generally and then applying AND: PRINCE2, PMI certification, APM certification showed that 20% of project manager roles requested PRINCE2 certification, 0.002% requested PMI certification and 0% requested APM certification.

Overall, all three qualifications mentioned are valuable, as certification will increase your marketability and develop respect for the skills associated with project management. Many people working in consulting environments who are not project managers would also benefit from a working knowledge of formal project management disciplines.

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For further information see

www.maven-training.co.uk, www.apmgroup.co.uk, www.pmi.org, www.apm.org.uk and www.jobserve.co.uk