# APM Project Management Challenge 2023/24 Thames Valley Branch

Competition rules and guidance for participants

# Table of contents

# About the competition

The APM Project Management (PM) Challenge is an annual competition aimed at corporate employees, apprentices, or graduates with fewer than three years' experience in the project management profession; and students who are currently enrolled in a course at a Higher Educational Institute (HEI) at the time of the challenge.

The competition aims to improve the participant's project management skills in a real-life environment with the support of a mentor. It's run over several months and culminates in a final awards evening, where teams provide a short presentation on their project. At this event the winners are selected and announced.

# About APM

In our changing world, project professionals are at the forefront of delivering change and the environment for delivery is becoming ever more complex. The project profession needs to be better understood, to have consistent standards and to set the highest bar.

We're APM: Association for Project Management. We're the only chartered membership organisation representing the project profession in the world. We set the standards for the profession and raise its profile. We're a registered charity, delivering learning opportunities and developing qualifications, conducting research and providing resources. We run events, share best practice and give the project management community – individuals, our volunteers and corporate partners – the opportunity to connect and collaborate.

We know that better project delivery is about achieving your desired outcome. We believe that's about more than process alone. When doing so will make a difference, we challenge the status quo and champion the new. So, in a complex and shifting world, we help the project profession deliver better, because when projects succeed, society benefits.

# Delivering a Better Future: APM's Strategy

In a changing and challenging world, the project profession has never been more important.

Project professionals are at the forefront of delivering in the face of change, or delivering change itself. The environment for project delivery is complex. The project profession needs clear, consistent leadership to build the profile it warrants, challenge the status quo where it matters and set the highest standards.

Our strategy reflects our role and responsibilities as the only chartered membership organisation for the project profession in the world. Since the introduction of our previous strategy in 2017, we've celebrated many significant milestones. However, the world has also experienced unprecedented challenges.

To meet the needs of a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world, we must continue to adapt and evolve. Through continued innovation and flexibility, we can build on current strengths and enable the project profession to deliver positive change for individuals, businesses and communities.

# Our vision

"A world in which all projects succeed."

Our vision encapsulates all that we want to achieve as the only chartered membership organisation for the project profession. It's the goal that we strive for. We recognise this vision is ambitious and challenging, but we also believe it's achievable. By inspiring people to understand how to plan and deliver projects successfully, we can truly change the world.

# Our mission

"To advance the science, theory and practice of project and programme management for the public benefit."

Our mission expresses how we'll achieve our vision. It's also our charitable objective. We'll share our insight and expertise to advance the collective knowledge of the project profession. Our commitment to support education, training, qualifications and standards will enable project professionals to be at their best, so that more projects are successfully delivered and achieve their planned benefits.

# Our strategic themes

The environment for project delivery is complex. The project profession needs strong, consistent leadership to build the profile it warrants, challenge the status quo where it matters and set the highest standards.

Our mission and charitable objects are underpinned by four strategic themes that provide us with clear direction.

1.      APM provides leadership of the profession

2.      APM is a professional body for all project professionals

3.      APM identifies and enables the right skills for the project professional

4.      APM is an outstanding professional body

To read more about our strategy please visit https://www.apm.org.uk/about-us/apm-strategy/

# About Thames Valley Branch

The Thames Valley Branch delivers a range of activities aimed at supporting APM's strategy. We offer regular events providing the opportunity to network with peers. These usually focus on a topical theme associated with the profession of project management and often have a direct link to the APM Body of Knowledge.

Some activities which the branch has delivered over the past year have included topic lead CPD events for project managers at all stages of their careers; engagement with local educational institutions to promote awareness of APM; and presentations to organisations with project management staff, outlining the benefits of membership and how APM can provide development for teams.

Our branch has almost 5000 members dispersed across an area that extends from Aylesbury in the north, to Petersfield in the south, and from Swindon to Kingston-upon-Thames.

Lead by an active group of volunteers, the opportunities for engagement with our branch, are diverse and inclusive. Our volunteer team work together to develop activities aimed at achieving the overall vision of APM.

We are actively focused on creating opportunities to support the development of those starting out with their career in project management. Our prestigious annual Project Management Challenge competition provides a great development opportunity for newcomers to the profession, whether from corporate companies or Higher Education Institutions.

# APM Project Management Challenge objectives

The APM Project Management Challenge competition is designed to support the learning and development of inexperienced individuals and teams who are at the start of their project careers. Improving individual project management competence, through hands-on experience, lies at the heart of the competition. Additionally, some branches may encourage participants to deliver a project which provides social benefit, highlighting a key element of our charitable goals – "Because when projects succeed, society benefits".

# Benefits to participants

- Provide a realistic environment to develop and practice professional competences associated with project management.

- Offer an opportunity to be mentored and work alongside experienced project professionals.

- Develop knowledge of the success criteria required to deliver a winning or successful project.

- Develop a better understanding of the personal qualities required to become an effective project manager and leader.

- An opportunity to enhance the learning experience within the corporate and further education environments.

- A high-visibility example of successful project management delivery and implementation which should also provide beneficial publicity for the corporate team sponsors.

- The opportunity to develop presentation skills by developing and delivering a presentation to a room of peers and employers.

# Theoretical frameworks

The competition encourages the use of the following resources to inform project development and support participant learning:

## APM Body of Knowledge

The APM Body of Knowledge  is a foundational resource, providing the concepts, functions and activities that make up professional project management. It seeks to reflect the developing profession, recognising project-based working at all levels, and across all sectors for influencers, decision makers, project professionals and their teams. It should be used as an academic reference text to inform the approach and methodologies used by teams.

## APM Competence Framework

The APM Competence Framework sets out the competences required for effective project, programme, portfolio management and project management office (PMO). The framework consists of 29 competences based around outcomes that project professionals need to achieve. Each competence includes a series of criteria covering knowledge and the application.

The marking schedule for the competition will align with the competence framework, as outlined in the marking criteria section of this document. This framework should be used as a core reference for teams undertaking the competition.

# Competition theme

The theme for this year's competition is "Resilience". *The capability to respond to, prepare for and reduce the impact of disruption caused by the drifting environment and complexity*

*Organisations today face a constantly changing and uncertain environment, making it essential to be resilient in order to survive and thrive. Projects are recognised as vehicles to deliver change, reduce risks and improve overall performance.*

Teams are reminded to follow guidance for the Project Proposal to ensure their project objectives are SMART and the project is suitably challenging and deliverable.

# Roles and responsibilities

- **PM Challenge Lead –** this is the committee volunteer who manages the planning and delivery of PM Challenge in their region. They will be the main point of contact for volunteers and participants during the activity, including mentors and team. They will brief the judges at each milestone and oversee the scoring and feedback process throughout. This person can act as a judge alongside other volunteers.

- **Project Sponsor** – key contact within the company or university who offers support for the project at initial submission stage. The sponsor should be sourced by the team in advance of submitting their entry.

- **Mentor** – mentors should be from within the participating team's organisation. The mentor acts as a coach during the process, offering experience and insight for any challenges or questions the team may have. A guide to mentoring, as well as a mentoring agreement (please see attached document), will be supplied to each mentor ahead of the project delivery phase.

- **Judging Panel** – judges are selected from the volunteer pool within the branch, or volunteers known to the committee. They are responsible for assessing and scoring projects at each stage of the competition. The Judges will be expected to:

    o Provide written and verbal feedback at the following stages of the competition:

        ▪ Judges review proposals

        ▪ Feedback to teams on project proposals

        ▪ Mid phase review of projects

        ▪ Review final reports

        ▪ **Attendance at finals night**

    o At each stage of the assessment judges should refer to the marking criteria and use this as the basis for assessing submissions.

- **Project Teams** – teams should have 3 to 6 members and are comprised of graduates, apprentices or trainees who have less than three years of experience in a project role, or students who are undertaking study during the period in which the competition runs.

# Timelines and deliverables

| Phases and milestones | |
|---|---|
| **Teams to submit entry forms** (Appendix 1) | w/c 30 October |
| **Phase 1: Development and submission of project proposal** <br><br> Teams develop and submit a project proposal – please see Appendix 2 | 6 Nov – 4 Dec |
| **Teams submit project proposal** | w/c 4 December |
| The judging panel, review and score the proposals submitted against agreed criteria. | 11 Dec – 2 Jan |
| Judges to provide feedback to teams. <br><br> TVB reserve the right to down select teams to avoid excessive demands on the Judges' time. | 2 Jan – 5 Jan |
| **Phase 2: Project delivery** <br><br> Teams selected will be asked to initiate and deliver proposed projects. An experienced project professional will be assigned to each team as a mentor for the remaining duration of the competition. APM will provide teams with seed funding up to a maximum of £150 per team. | 8 Jan – 8 April |
| **Phase 3: Mid-project review** <br><br> Midway through project delivery teams will have a review of their project status. This will be done through the submission of a progress update, either virtually or through a progress report, as shown in Appendix 3. | w/c 19 Feb |
| **Phase 4: Submission of final report** <br><br> All teams should submit a final report which outlines the key achievements, including how the benefits of the project will be realised and lessons learned through participating in project challenge. Refer to Appendix 4 to view the structure and layout of these reports**.** These projects will be reviewed and scored in advance of the finals night to form part of the overall mark. | 8 April |
| Judges review and score final reports. | 8 – 29 April |
| **Phase 5: Finals night** <br><br> Teams will present their project overview and post project learning to a panel of judges and a live audience. Presentations will last around 10 - 15 minutes and will be followed by an opportunity for questions from the judges. Judges will mark teams and collate scores from across the competition to determine winners, who will be awarded on the night. <br><br> **Storyboard competition:** Teams who have not been selected as finalists will be invited to produce a storyboard to showcase their project on the night and to allow the audience to hear about the scope and outcomes of their chosen | TBC May |

| Phases and milestones | |
|---|---|
| projects. Posters will be judged by a volunteer panel and a winning poster will be awarded on the evening.<br><br>The key criteria for assessment of the storyboards will be coherence of the end to end imaging in the storyboard (graphics), coverage of key milestones and outputs (deliverables) and the overall storytelling of the project (impact on client). | |

# Project timeline

| | | | APM | | Teams | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| APM Project Management Challenge timeline | July - Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Competition launch | | | w/c 2 Oct | | | | | | | |
| Deadline for team entries | | | 30-Oct | | | | | | | |
| Teams Create project proposal **4 Weeks** | | | | 6 Nov - 4 Dec | | | | | | |
| Teams submit proposal | | | | | 04-Dec | | | | | |
| Judges review proposals **4 Weeks** | | | | | 11 Dec - 2 Jan | | | | | |
| Feedback on project proposals | | | | | | **2-5 Jan** | | | | |
| Project delivery by teams **12 Weeks** | | | | | | 8 Jan to 8 April | | | | |
| Mid phase review – Interim Report | | | | | | | **w/c 19 Feb** | | | |
| Write up and submission of final report | | | | | | | | | 08-Apr | |
| Judges review final report **3 Weeks** | | | | | | | | | **8 - 29 April** | |
| Optional down selection of finalists | | | | | | | | | | |
| Finals Night | | | | | | | | | | |

# Marking criteria and assessment

As part of their role judges will mark each of the team deliverables during the competition. The marking criteria and assessments provide tools for judges to:

- assess each report fairly and consistently against criteria.

- work with a standard marking and assessment process.

- provide constructive feedback following the interim review stage on the status of the project.

- provide meaningful feedback to the project team about the project report.

The assessment of each project will be undertaken using agreed assessment criteria and specific competencies, as shown on the following page. Definitions for each of the criterion are described in the relevant appendices.

A full description of the competence framework and guidance on the application of the criteria can be viewed at https://www.apm.org.uk/resources/find-a-resource/competence-framework/

When scoring projects, judges will measure and score the understanding or application of criteria in work presented as follows:

| No evidence | 0 |
|---|---|
| Limited evidence | 1 |
| Some evidence | 2 |
| Clear evidence | 3 |
| Exceptional evidence | 4 |

The weighting of each stage of the competition is as follows:

| Phase | Weighting |
|---|---|
| Project Proposal | 20% |
| Interim Report | 10% |
| Final Report | 50% |
| Finalist Presentation | 20% |

Feedback will be provided on each submission; however, scores are not shared with teams during the course of the competition.

## Competences
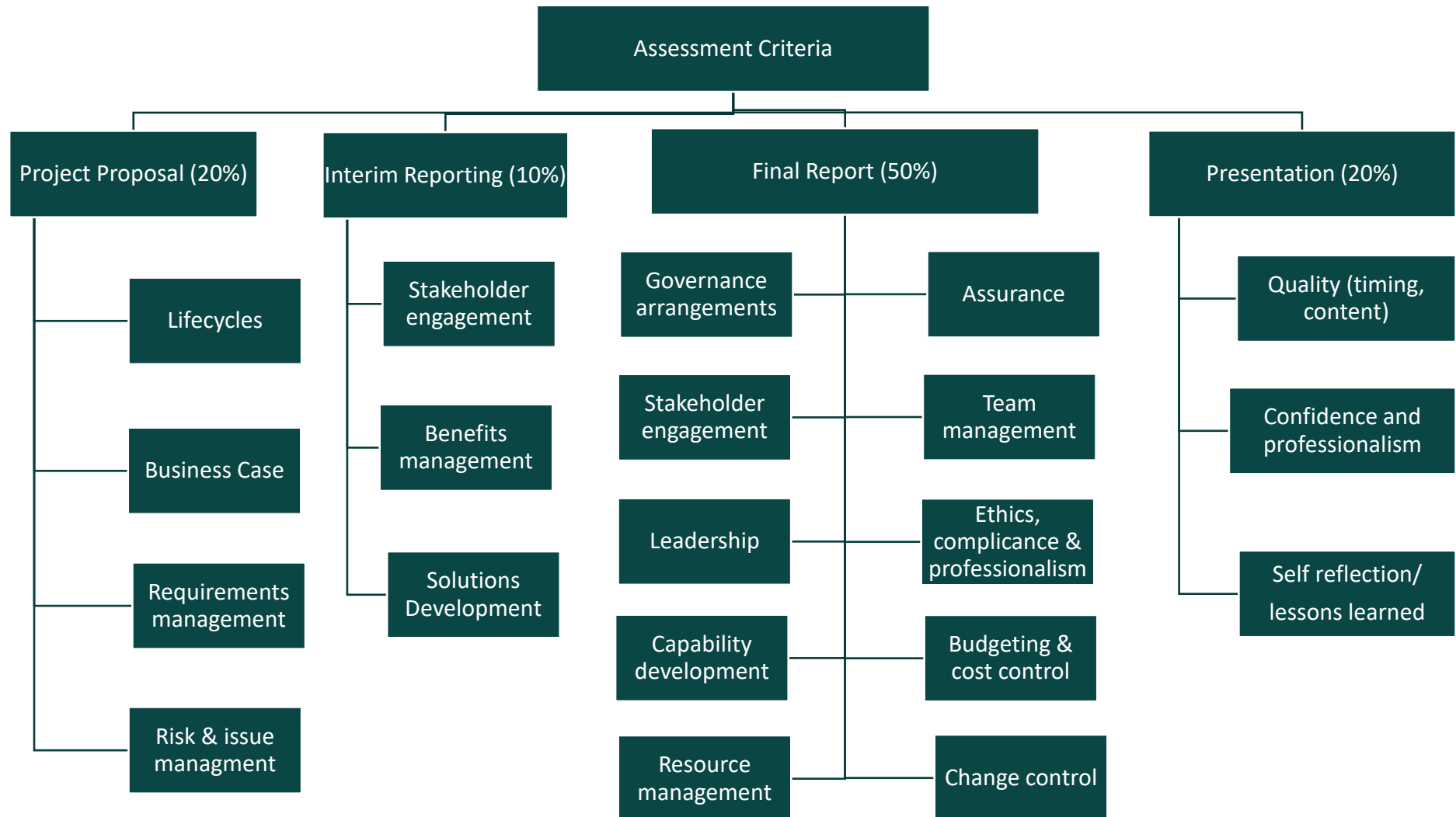
# Competition rules

1. The choice of project is up to each team; however, teams should ensure that their project aligns to the theme of the year.

2. APM reserves the right to limit the number of teams from a single organisation within each region. If it is deemed that teams will need to be eliminated at the start of the competition, team entries will be reviewed with a view to reducing the overall numbers. Therefore, organisations should be prepared to prioritise their teams.

3. Corporate entries should be limited to teams comprising apprentices, graduates or trainees with up to three years' full or part time project management experience.

4. Student entries must be enrolled and attending a course at the University at the time.

5. Teams should comprise of a minimum of three and maximum of six members per team.

6. Teams should ensure that individual team members are available to participate for the duration of the competition.

7. Teams will be required to submit/attend the following:

    a. Competition entry form – Appendix 1

    b. Project proposal – Appendix 2

    c. Mid project progress report – Appendix 3

    d. Final report – Appendix 4

    e. Finals night

8. Project proposals will be reviewed by the Judges and teams informed of their successful entry into the competition.

9. Teams should consider the format of any documents submitted to the Judges, with specific consideration being given to content, layout and readability.

10. If over 12 teams enter the competition TVB reserves the right to down select teams to avoid excessive demands on the Judges' time.

11. Up to four finalist teams will be selected to present on finals night.

12. Each of the finalist teams will be required to prepare and deliver a 10-minute presentation which will be followed by up to five minutes of questions from the Judges and other guests.

13. APM will provide finalists up to a maximum of £150 to teams. Spending will be reimbursed through APM's expenses portal and should be accompanied by full receipts for each claim.

14. Any additional funding, should be accounted for within project reports, including how it was secured, and the source. The initiative and creativity shown by teams in sourcing additional funds will be considered in when allocating points during judging.

15. Sponsoring organisations may not supply additional funding.

16. All team members of the finalist teams will be required to attend the finals night phase of the competition.

17. Teams will require the support of a Mentor. A mentor can be provided by the sponsoring organisation, or, if a team is unable to source a mentor, they should advise APM, who will identify an appropriate individual to act as a mentor on their behalf.

## Appendix 1

**APM Project Management Challenge Entry Form**

| APM Project Management Challenge Entry Form | |
|---|---|
| **Team information** | |
| Team name | |
| Organisation (Company/University/Etc.) | |
| Name of charity or community project (If known) | |
| **Team members**– Please list name and email address for each team member | |
| Participant 1 | |
| Email contact 1 | |
| Participant 2 | |
| Email contact 2 | |
| Participant 3 | |
| Email contact 3 | |
| Participant 4 | |
| Email contact 4 | |
| Participant 5 | |
| Email contact 5 | |
| Participant 6 | |
| Email contact 6 | |
| **Project Sponsor** | |
| Contact name | |
| Email address | |
| Role in company | |

| | |
|---|---|
| We confirm that no member of this team has more than 3 years of project management/project controls working experience. | ☐ |

# Appendix 2

## APM Project Management Challenge Project Proposal

| Title | **APM Project Management Challenge – Proposal Submission** |
|---|---|
| **Purpose** | The proposal should provide a persuasive synopsis of your team's project including an outline, high-level schedule of how you will achieve your objective. |
| **Composition** | Project teams are expected to provide a proposal that makes a persuasive and realistic argument for delivering their project of choice. The proposal must be no more than 3,500 words, including titles and headings. A template for structuring your proposal is included below.<br><br>The proposal will be scored against the following competences:<br><br>**1. Lifecycles:** The ability to structure and organise change initiatives.<br><br>**2. Business case**: The ability to prepare, gain approval of, refine and update business cases that justify the initiation, investment and/or continuation of change initiatives in terms of benefits, costs and risks.<br><br>**3. Requirements management:** The ability to prepare and maintain definitions of the requirements of change initiatives.<br><br>**4. Risk and issue management:** The ability to identify and monitor risks (threats and opportunities); to plan and implement responses to those risks and respond to issues that affect a change initiative. |

## Proposal template

| Project overview | |
|---|---|
| **Objectives** | |
| **Project scope and deliverables** | |
| **Risks and opportunities** | |
| **Project schedule** | |
| **Budget** | |
| **Planned resources** | |
| **Success Criteria/ KPIs** | |

# **Appendix 3**

## **APM Project Management Challenge – Interim report**

Please use the template below to provide a progress report to the judges. Your report should be no longer than one page. This should be submitted by 19 February.

| Project team | |
|---|---|
| Date of report | |
| Mentor name | |
| Please summarise the status of your project. | Please include details of the organisation you are working with, and an overview of progress made to date. This should be a summary, of no more than 1 500 words.<br><br>You should consider the following competences during the development of your report:<br><br>**1. Stakeholder engagement and communication management:** The ability to work with people, both internally and externally, to build support to achieve intended outcomes.<br><br>**2. Benefits management:** The ability to identify and agree the benefits of your project and determine how they will be measured, monitored and managed throughout a change initiative until they are realised.<br><br>**3. Solutions development:** The ability to determine the optimal solution to satisfy agreed requirements. |

# **Appendix 4**

**APM Project Management Challenge – Final Report Format and Content**

| Title: | APM Project Management Challenge – Final report |
|---|---|
| **Purpose:** | The final report will be used by the judging panel to assess how each competing team has reflected on the execution and delivery of a successful project, taking into consideration how the individual members of each team have developed their overall project management experience and competence. |
| **Composition:** | The project final report must include an Executive Summary. The project final report should identify how the project was delivered in comparison to the intentions defined in the project plan and any plans for completion of the project (if not completed by the final report submission date). |

Evidence of the following criteria will be scored during marking:

1. **Governance arrangements:** The ability to establish and maintain governance structures that define control of deployment for delivery of change initiatives, and that align with organisational practice.

2. **Assurance**: The ability to provide confidence to the governance board that a change initiative is on track to deliver the objectives and intended value.

3. **Stakeholders**: The ability to work with people, both internally and externally, to build support to achieve intended outcomes.

4. **Team management**: The ability to select, develop and manage individuals to create and sustain teams.

5. **Leadership**: The ability to empower and inspire others to deliver successful change initiatives by providing vision, direction, feedback and support, so that people can do their best work.

6. **Ethics, compliance and professionalism:** The ability to embody, promote and maintain a trusted profession and to navigate the cultural, legal and regulatory environment.

7. **Capability development:** The ability to assess organisational maturity in relation to a change initiative and the wider organisation.

8. **Budgeting and cost control:** The ability to develop and agree budgets for change initiatives and understanding where costs fall over time.

9**. Risk and issue management:** The ability to identify and monitor risks (threats and opportunities); to plan and implement responses to those risks and respond to issues that affect a change initiative.

10. **Change control:** The ability to manage variations and change requests in a controlled way.

| Format / presentation: | The report should be well structured, with a clear table of contents, concise sections and good use of graphics and appendices. The report must be based on a post project/ implementation review or lessons learnt meeting and must include a section detailing these reflections. |
|---|---|
| | It must be no more than 6,000 words, including the words used in screenshots, tables, graphics, appendices and schedules, but excluding appendices. Failure to adhere to this word limit will result in reduction in assessment points. |
| | The Project Board is looking for quality, not quantity. This must be delivered as a Word document with a clear word count statement. Embedded Power Point and XLS pictures should be kept to a minimum, |
| | Appendices: up to a maximum of 8 pages in total may be submitted. |
| Quality checking method: | Before submission it is recommended that the report undergoes a formal Quality Review by the whole project team and Final sign-off and approval from the Project Sponsor. |