Association for Project Management

APM Project Management Challenge 2023/24

Scotland Branch

Competition rules and guidance for participants

Because when projects succeed, society benefits

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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 Scotland Branch

Scotland Branch deliver a programme of activities aligned to the APM Strategy. Using the 27 competencies from the APM Competence Framework as a guide our programme aims to be diverse, inclusive and of interest to the full spectrum of our membership from Student/Entry-level through practitioner and up to Director/CxO level.

Where we can we focus our events on experience and lessons from key projects of Scottish interest and we work closely with Scottish Government, our Corporate Partners, Members, Affiliates and Higher Education Institutions to ensure we understand their needs and how we can work together for the benefit of all our members and the wider project profession within Scotland.

Our prestigious annual Project Challenge Competition provides development opportunities for newcomers to the profession whether from corporate companies or Higher Education Institutions, and we are actively looking at opportunities to further develop and enhance our activities in this area.

Our membership is widely dispersed, stretching from Dumfries and Galashiels in the south, to Wick in the north, and beyond when you factor in our members in the Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland Islands. Our principal concentration of members is focused on the principal cities of Edinburgh, Glasgow & Aberdeen and are drawn from a diverse background, including the Public & 3rd Sectors, Digital & ICT, Defence, Civil & Construction, Transportation & Aerospace, Energy & Utilities, Financial Services, Manufacturing and Retail.

Our challenge is to meet the professional project, programme & portfolio management needs of this diverse and geographically distributed population. We have been growing and now have over 2000 individual members across the membership grades. We also have over 50 Corporates with head offices in Scotland, and some 360 plus based outside Scotland with one or more offices in Scotland.

Previous Winners – 2022/23

Team Evolve from BAE Systems were the winners of Project Challenge in 2022/23. It was a challenging competition a large number of applications, with high standard submissions. All teams raised funds, awareness or built long lasting relationships with charities in our community while using project management principals.

The team members were:

Damon Cunningham, Fergus McGowan, Callum Wallace and Luke Conroy-Marlin.

The project goal was to provide a benefit to Erskine Veterans Home by enhancing their garden facilities to be more diverse and inclusive for all residents to enjoy. The charity and the team agreed a sensory style garden renovation was necessary to get the residents with dementia engaged, along with wheelchair access to flowering activities. The team set objectives and key performance indicators to meet their goals, including a fundraising strategy which involved a bake off, fitness challenge and general awareness.

Team Evolve developed an accessible sensory garden space for the Erskine Veterans Village in Bishopton, near Glasgow, and raised more than £3,000 to help fund the scheme.

Team Evolve informed they 'loved being part of the APM Challenge and getting the exposure to the full lifecycle of a project. The experienced gained has been invaluable for growth and personal development. We will take the knowledge and skills we obtained with us into our future careers'.

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 "Net Zero". *The capability to respond to, prepare for and take steps towards a greener future, reducing climate change and emissions in Scotland.*

Organisations today face a constantly changing and uncertain environment, making it essential to meet net zero targets and minimise impact on our environment. 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 can be from within the participating team's organisation or provided from an available pool of volunteers sourced by the APM committee. 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 Scotland APM 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:

    - 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 and presentations
        - **Attendance at finals night**

    - At each stage of the assessment judges will 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	
Competition Launch	Week commencing 9 October 2023
Teams to submit entry forms (Appendix 1)	3 November 2023
Phase 1: Development and submission of project proposal Teams develop and submit a project proposal – please see Appendix 2	3 Nov – 8 Dec 2023
Teams submit project proposal	8 December 2023
Project Clarifications – following review of proposal submissions teams may be contacted by the judges (telephone or conference call) to answer any clarifications that the judging panel may have.	Week commencing 8th January 2024
Phase 2: Mid-project review submission Midway through project delivery teams will have a review of their project status. This will be done through the submission of a progress update, through a progress report, as shown in Appendix 3. The highest scoring team(s) from Proposal submissions and mid-project review submissions will then be selected. Up to five finalist teams will be selected and they will progress to project delivery.	26 January 2024
Phase 3: Finalists announced to progress with Project Delivery The top teams will be selected as the Finalists. 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.	16 February 2024

Phases and milestones	
Phase 4: Submission of final report and presentation **Final Report:** 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. **Final Presentation:** Submit your presentation files in preparation for progress update presentations via project place: 1. The final slide deck for your presentation 2. A 150 second video of the project and team The presentation should be no longer than 10 minutes and should look to provide an overview of the project including its current status, how the benefits of the project will be realised and should include what lessons the team has learned from participating in project challenge. The final presentation should encompass the full breath of the project and the judges will be paying particular attention to the impact and effectiveness of activities not just adherence to project management process. The video should be an overview of the project, who you are as a team and look to focus in on both the impact you as a team have had and how you have applied benefits management within the project.	19 April 2024
Phase 5: Finals night Teams will present their project overview and post project learning to a panel of judges and a live audience. Presentations will last 10 minutes and will be followed by an opportunity for questions from the judges. Judges will mark teams presentations and collate scores from across the competition to determine winners, who will be awarded on the night.	TBC May 2024

Project timeline

	APM		Teams					
APM Project Challenge Timeline	**Oct**	**Nov**	**Dec**	**Jan**	**Feb**	**Mar**	**Apr**	**May**
Competition launch	w/c 9 Oct							
Deadline for team entries		03-Nov						
Teams Create project proposal **4 Weeks**		3 Nov - 8 Dec						
Teams submit proposal			08-Dec					
Judges review proposals			**8 Dec to 12 Jan**					
Project delivery by teams **12 Weeks**				8 Jan to 8 April				
Mid project review submission				**26-Jan**				
Finalists Announced					**16-Feb**			
Submission of final report and presentation							19-Apr	
Judges review final report							**20 Apr – 10 May**	
Finals Night								May-24

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:

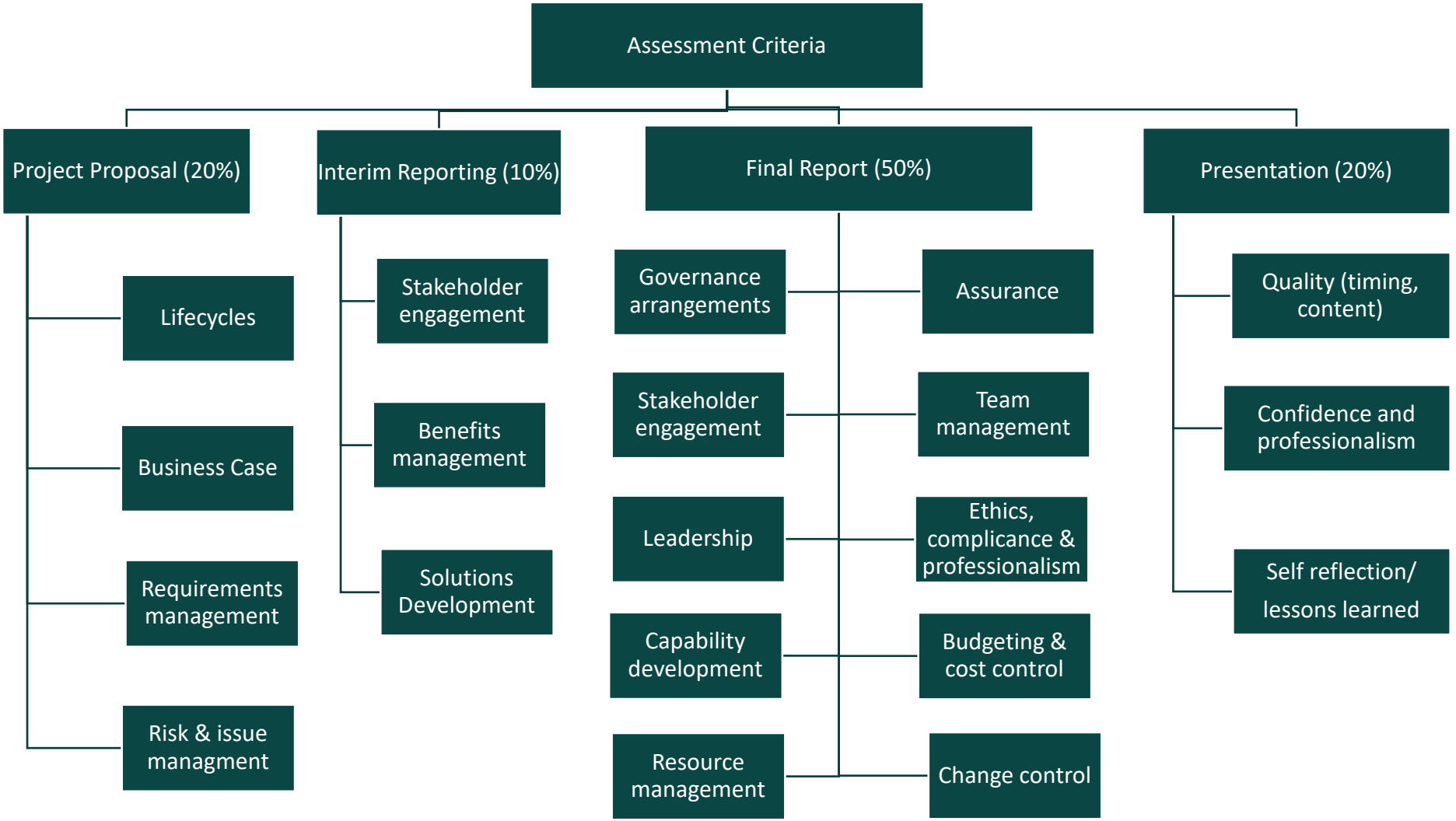
No evidence	0
Limited evidence	1
Some evidence	2
Clear evidence	3
Exceptional evidence	4

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

Phase	**Weighting**
Project Proposal	10%
Interim Report	20%
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. Teams should consider the format of any documents submitted to the Judges, with specific consideration being given to content, layout and readability.
9. Optional stages of down selection:
    a. Mid project progress reports will be reviewed by the Judges and highest scoring teams will be informed of their successful progression in the competition. Up to five finalist teams will be selected and they will progress to project delivery.
    b. The highest scoring teams following submission of the Project proposals and Mid project progress report will be selected as finalists.
10. Up to five finalist teams will be selected to present on finals night.
11. 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.
12. APM will provide finalists up to a maximum of £150 seed funding to teams. Spending will be reimbursed through APM's expenses portal and should be accompanied by full receipts for each claim.
13. 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.
14. Sponsoring organisations may not supply additional funding.
15. All team members of the finalist teams will be required to attend the finals night phase of the competition.

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. A template for structuring your proposal is included below. The proposal will be scored against the following competences: **1. Lifecycles:** The ability to structure and organise change initiatives. **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. **3. Requirements management:** The ability to prepare and maintain definitions of the requirements of change initiatives. **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.

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. You should consider the following competences during the development of your report: **1. Stakeholder engagement and communication management:** The ability to work with people, both internally and externally, to build support to achieve intended outcomes. **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. **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. 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.