

Onboarding, the Power of Projects and the Exciting Future of Project Management and APM

Interview with Adam Boddison¹

Chief Executive Officer
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Introduction to the interviewee

Adam Boddison joined APM as chief executive officer (CEO) in September 2021. He has a non-executive director portfolio that includes being Chair of the Corporation at Coventry College and Trustee at two multi-academy trusts spanning 80 primary, secondary and specialist settings. These schools and colleges provide education for more than 45,000 children and young people. Adam is also a visiting professor at the University of Wolverhampton. Prior to joining APM, Adam held leadership roles in several membership organisations including as chief executive for nasen (National Association for Special Educational Needs), director for the LLENDiC (a higher education membership group), and as academic principal for IGGY (a global educational social network for gifted

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teenagers). Adam was also director of the Centre for Professional Education at the University of Warwick. He has published a range of books and articles and is a qualified clinical hypnotherapist.  [@adamboddison](https://twitter.com/adamboddison)

Interview

Q1. What are some of the ways you are ‘getting up to speed’ with APM, learning history, understanding policies and plans, meeting people? There seems to be a lot to learn; how are you doing?

Adam Boddison (Boddison): Developing knowledge and insights into the history of APM is a project in its own right, and that is certainly the way in which I have been approaching it. Much of my first six months in the role has been spent meeting with key stakeholders and building good working relationships. I have spent time getting to know APM staff, board members and volunteers, but I have also been listening carefully to other important stakeholders, such as our corporate partners, accredited providers and political associates. This process has given incredible insights into the project profession and I am grateful to all those who have supported me this far. Now that the pandemic is settling down, I am hoping to get out and about to meet more people in person.

Q2. Over the last three years, there have been a number of significant programmes and projects launched in response to the pandemic. Yet in many cases, programme and project management has received little or no visibility. Do you see that as a natural situation, or can APM raise the visibility and/or importance of PM in the eye of the public?

Boddison: One of our commitments at APM is to strengthen the concept of project management as a profession, and to give it the visibility it deserves. For too long project managers have been the unsung heroes, and we want to change that.

During the pandemic project managers have really stepped up and adapted projects quickly in response to the challenges presented to them. The vaccine rollout is a great example of a project done right and demonstrates the positive public impact projects can have in society. We want to see more projects benefit from this level of recognition and respect.

Q3. At the same time, we’ve seen a large public emphasis on programmes related to health and education, for example, new vaccines, new treatments, virtual learning, now returning children to schools. These are fields where project management has traditionally rather underserved. How might APM increase awareness, knowledge and application of PM in those sectors?

Boddison: Increasingly we are seeing project management come to the fore in these sectors and we are delighted to include representation from these sectors as part of our membership. We are working closely with our corporate partners and affiliates in these sectors, both nationally and internationally, including Health Education England, General Medical Council, IQVIA, Guys and St Thomas's hospital, AstraZeneca Operation, Department for Health and Social Care, Ministry of Education – Malaysia, Department of Education and training – Victoria, Australia, to promote project management and increase awareness, knowledge and application.

We also publish blogs and articles showcasing projects in these sectors, including the vaccine rollout for example. Also, it's a fact that many people managing projects in these sectors may be 'accidental' project managers so it's important they receive the training and development necessary to professionalise their skills. We would also like to see increases in the Chartered Project Professional (ChPP) standard in health and education.

Q4. Your name is Association FOR Project Management yet we still seem to focus on Project Managers. What is APM doing to look after the interests of supporting roles such as planners, schedulers, controls staff, etc?

Boddison: At APM we see our community as 'project professionals', which includes people who plan, schedule and control projects. It also extends to programmes and portfolios.

Our different learning resources, qualifications, publications, events, blogs and Specific Interest Groups (SIGs) are all made available to people engaged in the many different facets of project work.

Q5. How is APM improving the delivery of projects and programmes?

Boddison: We are delighted to see over 2,000 project professionals who have now achieved Chartered Project Professional status (ChPP). We are continuing to raise standards and professionalising the project profession in a number of different ways including:

- The Body of Knowledge
- A newly revised Competence Framework and self-assessment tool
- Qualifications
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
- Chartered (ChPP) status
- Apprenticeships
- Mentoring programme
- The Major Project Leadership Specialist Certificate which recognises the

skills and competences of those who lead major projects, programmes and portfolios.

There are a number of other ways in which we are helping to improve delivery including increasing the awareness and understanding of the effectiveness of projects and helping to enable 'buy-in' across organisations, moving away from the 'accidental project manager' and seeing professionals deliver projects, who have proven their knowledge, capability and competence.

We are also leading research into what makes projects and programmes successful (including our latest [Dynamic Conditions for Project Success](#) report) and making this available to corporate organisations and individuals. The [APM Community](#) also provides a space for collaboration and networking, so professionals can learn from each other.

Q6. APM has been at the forefront of developing formal Standards, both nationally through BSI and internationally through ISO, so the Independent Projects Authority (IPA) development of standards for PM in Government seems to cut across these efforts. What is APM's view of this?

Boddison: Standards such as BSi and ISO standards often inform the development of internal standards, and for organisations such as Government and IPA, it would be expected that they would tailor the standards they use to meet their internal needs.

The Project Delivery Standard is based on a number of other standards, including those from BSi, ISO, APM, PMI, Axelos, CMMI, ICOSE as well as internal government practices and methodologies.

The Project Delivery Standard is underpinned, by the knowledge, learning and development, competences and organisational maturity requirements to ensure the successful delivery of government projects.

As well as supporting the development of ISO and BSi standards, APM has its own standards and we work closely with the IPA. The Project Delivery Capability Framework (PDCF) and the Government Online Skills Tool (GOST) align to the APM Competence Framework.

In addition, the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) has launched a new academy to support the delivery of major government infrastructure projects, with a framework that includes APM qualifications and standards. The Government Projects Academy is aimed at improving project delivery skills for professionals across government, to increase the capacity and capability to improve the delivery of public projects. The Academy's framework includes APM's Project Fundamentals Qualification, Project Management Qualification, and Chartered Project Professional (ChPP) status.

Q7. This is an important year for APM with the new Strategy roll out and the 50th Anniversary. Please share plans to celebrate the Anniversary.

Boddison: It is an important year for APM as we look forward to marking our 50th anniversary and it's the perfect opportunity to showcase the important role that project management has played over the past five decades. APM has certainly come a long way since being founded in 1972!

We have a series of special launches and events planned in the coming months including our Power of Projects conference in June. As well as looking back over the past 50 years, we will use the anniversary as a springboard to look ahead at the next 50 years for the profession.

We also look forward to sharing our new strategy with members and stakeholders later in the year.

Q8. Looking to the future, now that the Royal Charter has been achieved, what do you see as next big goal for APM?

Boddison: Securing the Royal Charter was a milestone and one that deserves to be celebrated, but there is still more to do in terms of leveraging our chartered status. We now need to prioritise increasing the number of project professionals being recognised for their skill sets through chartered status.

I would also like to see project professionals having increased strategic influence at executive board level. Having greater voice in the c-suite will help ensure projects form a critical part of strategic development across a business or organisation. Similarly, it would be significant for most organisations to have a Chief Project or Transformation Officer. Ideally, we want to see project management given an equivalent status to marketing, finance and HR professionals across industry sectors.

Other priorities in our refreshed strategy include, improving diversity and inclusion within the profession, enhancing our international impact, and tackling climate change – projects will play a central role in helping the UK achieve net zero, so we have to enable that to happen

Q9. Can we expect PM to become a graduate only profession?

Boddison: One of the wonderful things about project management is the number of routes into it. If you have a degree, that's great and it will certainly open doors for you. But there are other ways too including:

- Apprenticeships
- Technical qualifications
- Working as an ‘accidental’ project manager

We’re also seeing a lot of people moving into project work from other careers. Whether or not these people have degrees, we can’t say, but what’s likely is that they don’t have a degree in project management.

The important thing to take from this is that project practitioners don’t necessarily have to have a degree, but they should aspire to have a professional qualification.

Q10. There are many project professionals from overseas seeking our Chartered qualification. What is APM’s policy about overseas engagement?

Boddison: In many ways, APM is already operating as an international organisation. We have a branch in Hong Kong, accredited training providers in Qatar and chartered project professionals in more than 30 countries. Similarly, a significant number of APM’s corporate partners are multi-national organisations. Moving forwards, we want to be even more proactive with our international business development and discussions are already underway to help us progress in this area.

We also make best use of technology to ensure that all of our products and services are available to project professionals anywhere in the world, our exams are taken on-line, and we have a virtual community platform. Anyone seeking chartered status can apply from anywhere in the world.

Q11. What do you see as the biggest challenge ahead for APM?

Boddison: I am a strong believer that project professionals are the leaders of the future, but this is both the biggest opportunity and the biggest challenge for APM. Project professionals are experts in change, transformation and delivery. Historically, successful leaders were primarily focused on business-as-usual activity with a relatively small proportion of their time focus on change and transformation. However, change and transformation are now prominent elements of most leadership roles, which is part of the reason why project professionals are in such demand. The challenge for APM is ensuring the project profession remains a profession in its own right and does not get lost within the wider chasm of organisational leadership.

Similarly, as the chartered membership body for the project profession, APM has to practice what it preaches, including meeting its environmental goals and innovation ambitions. Ultimately, APM has to address the skills gap, which maintains that a project management shortage could cost the global economy \$345 billion by 2030, with Europe among the most heavily impacted areas.

Q12. The pandemic has had a major impact on the world of work. How has it affected how APM operates? Have there been any lessons for PMs more broadly?

Boddison: More broadly than APM, I would argue that the pandemic has accelerated and amplified the successes and challenges that were already implicit within organisations. As a consequence of the pandemic, APM has embraced new new ways of working. For example, APM has moved its suite of qualifications online more quickly than we expected, and this is an area where further change and development is needed.

In relation to project managers more broadly, the pandemic has underlined the importance of adaptability as a pre-requisite for success. In practice, this involves learning lessons from previous, and applying them to future projects. Lessons learned, lessons applied...

Q13. For several years, APM has focused a lot of attention on climate change, the environment and sustainability. During the Covid pandemic, in addition to vaccines and health care, other social problems have become more visible, including homelessness, poverty, children's health, etc. The broad issue of Social Responsibility has been raised, even for professional bodies. Is APM looking at this issue more seriously now, and if so, are there any new ideas surfacing?

Boddison: We've seen projects and programme management delivering in these areas throughout COVID-19, and delivering at speed (examples from the National Audit Office -NAO's Delivering Programmes at Speed report):

- The Everyone In programme to support rough sleepers
- HMRC and the Treasury's COVID-19 employment support schemes
- The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme

Our role at the moment, is to harness the lessons of these programmes, understand what made certain projects succeed and others fail and, through our members, developing good practice to expand on these efforts.

Q14. How can the PM professional world better serve civil society, not just industry and government?

Boddison: APM is a registered charity and a chartered body, both of which place obligations on us to ensure our activities contribute to public benefit. Our mission is to inspire positive change – 'when projects succeed, society benefits'. In terms of how this is realised in practice, it is both direct and indirect. It is direct in the sense that we can help to ensure that projects designed to address social issues are more likely to be successful and achieve long-term realisation of benefits. It is indirect in the sense that if

we help publicly-funded projects more generally to be delivered more efficiently, then more public funding is available to address social issues.

On a local level we support community projects through volunteering and fundraising. For example, we give our employees one day off per year to support good projects in their local areas.

About the Interviewer



Miles Shepherd

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Miles Shepherd is an executive editorial advisor and international correspondent for PM World Journal in the United Kingdom. He is also managing director for MS Projects Ltd, a consulting company supporting various UK and overseas Government agencies, nuclear industry organisations and other businesses. Miles has over 30 years' experience on a variety of projects in UK, Eastern Europe and Russia. His PM experience includes defence, major IT projects, decommissioning of nuclear reactors, nuclear security, rail and business projects for the UK Government and EU. Past Chair, Vice President and Honorary Fellow of the Association for Project Management (APM), Miles is also past president and chair and a Fellow of the International Project Management Association (IPMA). He was a Director for PMI's Global Accreditation Centre and is immediate past Chair of the ISO committee developing new international standards for Project Management and for Program/Portfolio Management. Miles is immediate past Chair of the British Standards Institute (BSI) Committee on Project, Programme and Portfolio Management and has been involved in the development of UK's BSI 6079 for more than 25 years. He was involved in setting up APM's team developing guidelines for project management oversight and governance. Miles is based in Salisbury, England and can be contacted at miles.shepherd@m-sp-ltd.co.uk.