

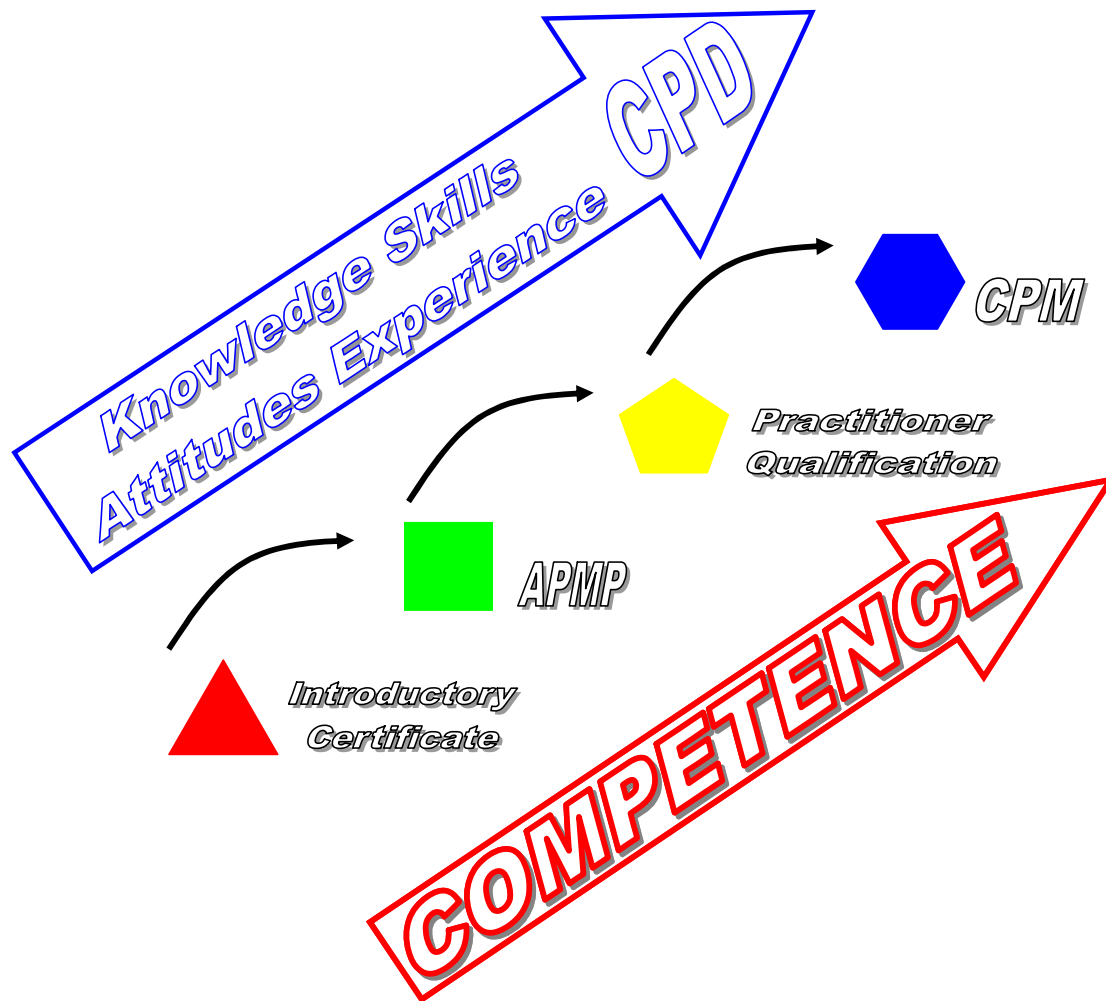
Building competence through APM qualifications

The APM finds itself today in a unique and in many ways enviable position. It is the only professional project management organisation that has a completely 'joined-up' qualifications ladder that can take an individual from basic knowledge through to proven workplace competency. Neither the North American based Project Management Institute (PMI), The Office of Government Commerce (OGC), The Chartered Management Institute (CMI) nor any other awarding body can boast this.

Competence itself is comprised of a number of dimensions. The bedrock of competence is undoubtedly knowledge. The APM tests basic knowledge through the new Introductory Certificate in Project Management and more advanced knowledge, plus a small amount of applied knowledge through the APMP or Foundation examination. However as we all know knowledge alone is not enough. Individuals need to know how to be able to do 'it' and in order to progress up the qualifications ladder they need to demonstrate this. APM tests capability through its assessment centre based qualification the Practitioner Qualification (APMPQ). The 'icing on top of the cake' for those who can actually demonstrate competence through proven experience is the Certificated Project Manager (CPM) qualification which assesses an individual's competence to manage a complex project. With the exception of the Introductory Certificate APM's qualifications map to Levels D (APMP), C (APMPQ) and B (CPM) of the International Project Management association's (IPMA) qualification structure.

APM qualifications are suited to all those involved in project management whatever industry or discipline they work in and whatever job they actually do. They do not favour those who work in construction or IT and they do not prejudice those without formal academic qualifications. It must always be remembered that in most cases the role of project manager is just that - a role and therefore project management qualifications need to recognise this. APM's unique suite of qualifications does.

So what else makes APM's qualifications ladder unique? Without doubt it is the assessment of capability via the APMPQ and competence via the CPM. APM's CPM qualification has been around for many years and relies upon a written account of a project that has been managed and an intense and demanding professional interview in order to assess competence. It is assumed that those who progress to CPM are already capable of managing a small or non-complex project. However the APMPQ is relatively new. Launched in 2002 it really broke the mould for project management qualifications. Based on a 2½ assessment event candidates are assessed against 30 criteria. In order to pass they need to satisfy their assessors that they have a broad level of capability across all 30 criteria with particular emphasis on seven important ones. Take up for the qualification has been relatively slow due to its unusual nature. It is not a training course, and hence candidates that take part are actually taught nothing but they learn a lot!



Not only is the APMPQ very different from any other qualification in what it assesses. It is also very different in that those that pass have actually demonstrated the ability to manage a small or non-complex project albeit in simulated environment. Every other mass-market project management qualification only assesses knowledge with a little application. Having said this these qualifications have formed the basis for many many companies to benchmark and qualify their project managers. The downside of this is that many project managers have only demonstrated their ability to retain knowledge not to manage a project. It is therefore no wonder that so many projects fail to meet their objectives and to deliver the benefits that they set out. This is because many in situ project managers are not capable just knowledgeable.

But all this is about to change and it's all thanks to APM. The APMPQ has given employers across all industries and business sectors the ability to check-out if their project managers can really do the job that they want them to while at the same time allowing them to follow a logical career development path. This does not mean that the existing knowledge based qualifications will disappear or become outmoded. Indeed they are a fundamental part of the career path themselves. It just means that they will be put in their place as a step on the ladder to demonstrative project management competence.