

PM WORLD TODAY - VIEWPOINT – FEBRUARY 2008

The Case for Chartered Status

By Mike Nichols, Chair, APM

Back in the January 2007 issue of *Project*, following my election as Chairman of the Association for Project Management (APM), I was asked to outline my vision for the organisation and the profession as a whole. It was a vision that would build on the development work of my predecessors. It reflected the profession I see around me: one that is of increasingly crucial importance for most organisations, but also for the successful development of the country and to tackle the big global challenges, such as climate change.

A key challenge for APM is to promote growing recognition of the importance of professional competence and awareness that effective project management requires a discrete set of professional skills.

Project professionals, such as APM members, are pioneers in their field. They are the first to recognise the value which project management offers. The central role project management plays has created an urgent need for recognition as a profession and increased competence of its practitioners. That is why we have decided to seek chartered status as soon as is practicable, as I had the privilege of announcing at the APM Project Management Conference in November.

A Royal Charter is granted by the Sovereign on recommendation of the Privy Council. Becoming a chartered body will mean the Queen recognises project management as a profession and has appointed APM as the authority to develop and act as guardian of it for the public good. In order to achieve this, we must be able to demonstrate that APM:

1. Is pre-eminent in its field, a unique profession "without significant overlap with other bodies"
2. Has members who are professionally competent
3. Is financially sound, with a track record of achievement
4. Acts in the public interest
5. Is of substantial size (say, more than 5,000 members).

We firmly believe that APM meets all these requirements. So the programme is focussed on persuading influential public and private sector organisations to support our petition to the Privy Council.

This three-year programme has three discrete phases. In the first phase, APM becomes a chartered body. The second phase establishes a register of chartered practitioners, who have achieved the required standard to be recognised as Chartered Project Professionals. This will grant them the status of other recognised professions - as in engineering and accountancy. The third phase is to plan how the APM can then accelerate its future development to take full advantage of being chartered.

The chartered programme will change the face of the profession. It will give APM regulating powers to provide a level of protection to users of project management services. Practitioners will be acknowledged as professionals, differentiating them from amateurs in the field, enhancing their status in the employment market and for many making project management a career of first choice. For organisations, chartered status will contribute to greater recognition of the importance of project management, aiding recruitment and retention of competent project management staff, raising standards and improving project performance.

In fact, some of APM's larger corporate members are so keen for APM to become chartered, that they are offering to contribute funding or other support for the initiative. For APM itself, becoming chartered will assist its drive to increase project management professionalism generally, and act as a strong stimulus to further improve its effectiveness and services to members, whilst attracting more members and increasing revenue to develop new products and services.

But, most important of all, the charter will result in improved competence and performance so as to give greater assurance to the general public that projects and programmes will be better managed and hence more successfully carried out. The programme will take us to the highest levels of government and the top tables of the world's largest companies. With their support, and the support of the APM membership, we will be able to demonstrate to the Privy Council that this is a profession that now requires a chartered body.

APM President, Martin Barnes, recently reflected that "Project Management is an idea whose time has come". Many of us have been managing complex change for many years. We recognise that the profile of the professional discipline has never been higher and that the relevance to today's society is in sharper focus than ever. So it is not surprising that APM's membership gave virtually unanimous support to becoming a chartered body and in principle for establishing a register of chartered project professionals at its AGM on 27 November.

Now, a year after I first outlined my vision in *Project*, I urge every project professional in the UK to back this move to chartered status.



Mike Nichols
Author



Mike Nichols is Chairman of the Association for Project Management (APM) in the UK, Board Member of the Major Projects Association and Member of the Standards Policy and Strategy Committee of the British Standards Institute. His 'day job' is Chairman & Chief Executive of the Nichols Group, a firm which specialises in advising on and managing major capital projects and business change initiatives. Mike has extensive experience of project and programme management in the transport, telecommunications, automotive and power industries. In particular, he directed a management contract for the first phase of the Hong Kong Mass Transit Railway and project managed the initial phase of the Docklands Light Railway in London, both completed on time and within budget. Last year Mike completed a strategic review of the Highways Agency's £12 billion Major Roads Programme for the Secretary of State for Transport in the UK. Prior to forming the Nichols group in 1975, he had a number of senior management jobs, including Executive Director of British Leyland and General Manager with British Oxygen Company. He has also led developments of new approaches in project, programme and risk management. Mike has a degree in Economics, is a Fellow of the Institution of Civil Engineers and Honorary Fellow of the Institute of Actuaries.