

Nomination for UCISA Staff Development Award 2008

Connecting People and Projects at the University of Nottingham

Contact Details

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Abstract

Operating within a complex and ever-changing technical environment, Information Services (IS) at the University of Nottingham, serves the needs of 40,000 library/IT users. IS is expected to ensure the University operates competitively, responding quickly to new technologies and developments in the sector. To meet these needs, IS developed a comprehensive programme management methodology and project management training course to ensure IS could successfully implement new initiatives on the University's behalf. The development of an all-inclusive programme framework and 1-day training course designed specifically for IS requirements has provided over 200 staff with core skills, tools and techniques in project management. In 2007 the framework and training were expanded to incorporate further activity from other Central Support Services within the University.

Submission Outline

The aim of this submission is to describe the background, initiation, development and establishment of a programme management framework within IS and related training course in project management.

The programme management framework and training course arose from a need to ensure that IS staff possessed the skills and capabilities to deliver projects professionally in a competitive, fast-moving environment. This submission outlines the benefits and opportunities created in IS as a result of the introduction of the programme management framework and bespoke training course.

When first introduced in 2005, the overall aim of the programme framework and training course was to achieve the following outcomes:

- To better enable significant numbers of staff to manage, with confidence, the successful delivery of projects within the organisation.
- To enable staff to enrich their skills and gain new experiences in project management, team membership and programme co-ordination.

Nomination for UCISA Staff Development Award 2008

Scope of the Project

IS at the University of Nottingham has always been engaged in a certain amount of project activity. In 2005, the department was experiencing an increase in the number of projects requiring delivery, that were of greater complexity and necessitated completion to strict time, quality and budget criteria. Although there were some success stories, there were equally a number of projects that were characterised by late-delivery or which ran over budget. Some staff who lacked the specific skills in order to best manage the large-scale, cross-University project activity that was becoming the norm.

IS recognised, in order to deliver projects effectively and efficiently, staff needed the core skills, tools and techniques of project management to better enable them to manage activity on the University's behalf. To support existing and potential new Project Managers, IS took a decision to consolidate all project activity across its 3 divisions into a programme management framework, supported by dedicated roles (Sponsors, Programme Co-Ordinators, Programme Manager) and a centralised Programme Office. A key part of the programme framework was deemed to be the support roles outlined above and also the offering of regular project management training courses. Previously, limited training had been offered to a small number of senior staff, run by external providers. It was felt that the creation of a bespoke 1-day training course in project management, developed by IS staff on behalf of IS staff, was key in taking forward the successful management of projects within IS.

Led by the IS Senior Management Team, an all-inclusive programme management framework was established within IS, with centralised reporting and monitoring mechanisms via a new Programme Office. Key support roles were identified (Sponsors, Programme Co-Ordinators) with the latter role open to all staff above Grade 3 to undertake on a voluntary basis. Applicants were sought and appointed for the Programme Co-Ordinator roles by highlighting the staff development opportunities of supporting a variety of cross-IS projects and gaining wide exposure to a range of project activity. In addition, the Director of Customer Services, Section Head of Enterprise Applications and Programme Manager combined expertise to develop a bespoke training course, the aims of which were to:

- Communicate to IS staff the core theory and techniques of project management to better enable them to deliver activity to agreed time, cost and quality criteria
- Draw upon real-life projects from within IS and using good practice examples to advise and train new Project Managers

Overall, via the introduction of a programme management framework, supporting roles and bespoke training, IS aimed to develop existing staff across a range of levels to gain fundamental skills as Project Managers, Programme Co-Ordinators and project team members. By better enabling staff to deliver complex project activity on behalf of IS and the wider University, it was hoped that this would lead to job enrichment and provide the means for staff to further develop themselves by working outside their normal remit in all areas of project/programme management.

Nomination for UCISA Staff Development Award 2008

Wider Relevance

Relationship to wider staff development activity in the IT/IS department:

Participation in IS project activity is extended to many members of IS, either directly as Project Managers or Programme Co-Ordinators or indirectly as project team members or contributors. The IS project management training course is offered 4 times annually and constitutes a regular part of the departmental training programme offered within IS (available to all levels/grades of staff). No other project management courses are offered by IS – the course is unique and is one of the most heavily attended sessions run within IS (up to 75 staff attending per annum). From 2007, the training course has also been attended by Central Support Services staff from elsewhere in the University – creating a common framework whereby IS staff can work in partnership with colleagues from other parts of the organisation.

Linkages to CPD programmes, probation, appraisal, staff retention initiatives:

The IS programme management framework and project management training course offers IS staff the opportunity to engage in project/programme management activity and receive project management training, something which would may not normally come within the remit of the majority of staff roles. By participating in project activity, this offers a development opportunity for many staff, enabling them to work at cross-divisional or cross-University levels and be engaged in activity outside the scope of their normal work. Being involved in project activity can lead to job enrichment and enable staff retention and for any IS staff member engaged in the delivery or support of a project, this is usually reflected in their annual Performance Review with their Line Manager (measured via individual goals) which could result in special contribution bonuses or pay increases.

Applicability to other Institutions:

Although the programme management framework and training course in project management were initially developed to support staff delivering project activity within IS, over 3 years the framework has developed significantly, is now more mature and applicable to colleagues from across University Central Support Services. Both the programme framework structure and training course format/content have elements that could be applied to other departments/institutions. The training is broken into a mix of taught segments and practical exercises which could easily be adopted and applied to other HE Institutions (using their own project examples) who were implementing a programme management framework/project management methodology. The framework itself has generic elements (roles, documentation, workflows) that could also be applied to other institutions wanting to establish more centralised/managed ways of delivering project activity.

Performance Indicators

Objective:

As outlined previously in Project Scope, namely:

“to better enable significant numbers of staff to deliver complex project activity on behalf of IS and the University by providing appropriate development opportunities through the instigation, development and establishment of a all-inclusive programme management framework and related training course in project management, available to all IS staff”.

Nomination for UCISA Staff Development Award 2008

Achievements:

In the 3 years in which it has been operational, the IS programme management framework has provided opportunities for 70 IS staff and 5 non-IS staff to be directly engaged as Project Managers, over 20 staff have volunteered as Programme Co-Ordinators and the IS training course in project management has been delivered to over 200 staff. Both the programme framework and training course have continually been refined in response to evaluation/feedback and to reflect changing staff requirements as the programme management framework matures and as more real-life examples of completed projects were incorporated into the training course.

Were these achieved?

The original objective to implement a programme management framework and supporting training course for IS staff has been achieved. Since the instigation of the framework and training in February 2005, the number of staff involved in the programme framework has increased year upon year; a wider variety of staff from across all grades are now engaged in project activity. IS has a number of project managers who are now "expert" in this function having undertaken 5+ projects and now also has a number of "experienced" Programme Co-Ordinators with 3 years experience supporting projects and programmes. The adoption of the programme framework is now seen as something "IS staff do" and is well engrained into the organisational culture.

How were they measured?

A mixture of self-evaluation, questionnaires and written evaluation are employed to gauge the success of the programme framework and project management training. Periodically, targeted questionnaires and discussion forums are extended to those involved in the programme framework to capture feedback and share experiences. At the end of the IS training course in project management, all attendees are requested to complete an evaluation form. Evaluation forms are analysed, feedback is disseminated and the programme framework and training course are continually adapted to incorporate suggestions for improvement/ feedback to provide an improved and up-to-date learning experience – See Appendices 2 and 3 for delegate quotes and an overall summary of evaluation feedback.

Number of Staff and Experiences of persons involved?

As previously outlined, over 200 staff have attended the IS course in project management, 70 staff have been directly engaged in Project Management, 20 in Programme Co-Ordination and 100+ as project team members/administrators. Participants in the programme framework have been very varied with representatives from all 3 IS divisions, across a range of grades (from members of IS Leadership Team, Section Heads, Team Leaders, IT Group Leaders, Support staff and Supervisory staff). Since 2007 non-IS staff have also been engaged as project managers/team members within the IS framework (with representatives from the Graduate School, International Office, Planning & Management Information, Research & Innovation Services).

Project Benefits

Benefits to user community, department and institution & how was the user experience impacted upon:

As a result of the IS programme management framework and project management training course the number of projects delivered successfully (i.e. to time, budget and

Nomination for UCISA Staff Development Award 2008

quality standards) has improved significantly within IS – there are now approximately 30-35 large-scale projects completed in IS per annum. IS, the University and the user community have benefited overall from the improved delivery of well defined and well executed projects run by confident and capable project managers and teams.

Were staff career opportunities improved?

As a result of participation in the IS programme management framework and related project management training course, many staff within IS have been able to develop their skills in project management, either within their existing role or through new appointments in IS. The availability of the IS project management training course to all IS staff and number of opportunities to be involved in project activity means that anyone within IS can contribute to successful project outcomes and make a difference to their own ways of working. Over the last 3 years a number of staff have received direct promotion (to Project Manager, Programme Manager, Team Leader, Director, Group Leader) following their participation in the programme management framework – see Appendix 1 for case studies. Overall, the implementation of a programme management framework and availability of regular project management training for IS staff has provided the means for many colleagues across IS to be involved in project management, cross-divisional and cross-University and has opened up role enrichment and networking opportunities across the 3 IS Divisions for an increasingly number of staff year upon year.

Supporting Statement

The need to properly manage strategic developments across a wide and complex establishment is a challenge that faces all organisations. It is a well known fact that 80% of projects fail and continually fail for the same reasons (to complete on time, to budget and quality standards). Therefore it is imperative that staff are adequately trained to properly manage the pertinent issues around developments. The IS programme framework and related training has ensured a high success rate of project delivery at Nottingham, for a diverse range of activity – from developing the infrastructure for our overseas campuses to establishing Learning Hubs in our libraries. Through the development of a bespoke framework, IS is enhancing the skill sets of our staff, enabling them not only to succeed with the rigors and challenges of projects but also enhancing their management capabilities in their normal operational roles.

This would not have been possible to achieve without the work of the Programme Office. The whole process of project management training and programme co-ordination is now a prized role at Nottingham with individuals seeing it as a definite advantage on their CV as part of their individual career path. The constant reviews undertaken of the programme and training ensures that content is always relevant, up-to-date and is a constant forefront at all of our strategic developments. The success of the programme and training can be measured not only by the number of completed, on-time, to cost, quality projects, but also in the fact that the University of Nottingham more widely has now asked IS to train other members of Central Support Services in project management.

In my view, this has been a major success in not only enabling Nottingham to complete its strategic programme but also in advancing the skills of our individual staff and, in turn, providing a success factor that enables IS to acquire a fair slice of strategic funding for further developments.

Nomination for UCISA Staff Development Award 2008

Appendix 1 – Case Studies

CASE STUDY 1 - Project Manager – IT Systems

Training - attended February 2005

Development Pathway – April 2005, promotion to full-time IS Project Manager, January 2008, role further extended to encompass Team Leader responsibilities

Project Pathway – Programme Co-Ordinator for 6 months, has now managed 5+ projects of varying complexity within IS

CASE STUDY 2 - Faculty Team Leader – Research & Learning Resources

Training - attended February 2005

Development Pathway – successfully applied for Faculty Team Leader post following divisional reorganisation in Spring 2007

Project Pathway – Programme Co-Ordinator for 3 years, project team member for 3+ projects, covered Project Manager role in Project Manager absence, now covering Project Manager on maternity leave

CASE STUDY 3 - Portal Developer – Portal Team

Training - attended June 2005

Development Pathway – 2005/06 project team member, 2006 covered Programme Manager role, 2007 part-time Project Management, 2008 promotion to full-time IS Project Manager

Project Pathway – Programme Co-Ordinator for 1 year, has now managed 2 projects of different complexity within IS

CASE STUDY 4 - Team Leader – IT Support

Training - attended June 2005

Development Pathway – 2005 project team member, Programme Co-Ordinator, 2006 - 2008 Project Manager, promotion to Team Leader role in Spring 2006

Project Pathway – Programme Co-Ordinator for 3 years, has now managed 5 projects of varying complexity within IS

CASE STUDY 5 - Counter Supervisor – Library Customer Services

Training - attended May 2006

Development Pathway – 2005/07 project team member, Programme Co-Ordinator 2006, Project Manager 2007

Project Pathway – Programme Co-Ordinator for 2 years, has now managed 1 divisional project within Customer Services division

Nomination for UCISA Staff Development Award 2008

Appendix 2 – Delegate Feedback

- “I have certainly gained a great deal from the day and would seriously look at Project Management as a potential career move. Of course I'm not basing that on a one-day course, but completing the course has allowed me to put what has until now been an 'interesting muse' into a proper perspective. And convinced me that I could do it”
- “Thanks for the course yesterday I really enjoyed it”
- “Many thanks for the training. It was very informative”
- “Congratulations on a day well done. A truly excellent experience”
- “The project management day yesterday was very useful thanks, particularly as it had direct relevance to current and imminent projects
- “And thanks to the both of you too. Both XX and I found it very useful - as a refresher for me and a steep learning curve for XX who already has a Priority 1 Project to manage”
- “A very well run and worthwhile course”

Nomination for UCISA Staff Development Award 2008

Appendix 3 – Evaluation Summaries

MARCH 2008

- **Evaluation Summary** - The vast majority of attendees stated that they agreed "strongly" or "agreed" when asked if information was presented clearly and concisely on all aspects of the course elements.
- **Specific Feedback** - cross-group working would have been beneficial, workshops and interaction useful, more in-depth follow-up for those involved specifically as Project Managers, time constraints v huge content of the session (lot to take in, suggest run the course over a longer period or more time on individual elements), good refresher course, review of lessons learned/PIR content would have been useful, mix of expertise/background of participants (IS and CSS) useful for sharing good practice/different perspectives and cross University working, more emphasis on estimating/cost monitoring, estimates and project schedule were useful, good broad content, will adapt forms/templates for own use

DECEMBER 2007

- **Evaluation Summary** - vast majority of attendees stated that they agreed "strongly" or "agreed" when asked if information was presented clearly and concisely on all aspects of the course elements.
- **Specific Feedback** - concepts were clearly explained and should be easy to implement in my environment, no excessive jargon, good understanding of forms & templates, liked the end activity as it brought the whole day together, useful to get in-depth knowledge of full processes, bit more time spent on the network to help understanding, useful real-life relevant exercises & examples/ helped put theory into a practical situation, network was very useful, balance of presentation & exercises was good, how use network in the "real world"?, useful to have all documents in one place, made a daunting topic interesting, engaging, made concepts accessible to a novice, made me aware I could Project manage and may well follow this up, good to gain a common language with IS project management teams, getting to know different participants, clearer view on how all the strands within a project fit together, group work essential to understanding concepts, good pace
- **Recommendations** - Another session for advanced project management, make tasks more specific/less complex as time is very limited, the whole PM process should be presented to new staff

SEPTEMBER 2007

- **Evaluation Summary** - all attendees stated that they agreed "strongly" or "agreed" when asked if information was presented clearly and concisely on all aspects of the course elements
- **Specific Feedback** - format of group work/presentations, variety of delegates, mix of presenters, detailed project planning/setting up projects, understanding IS methodology, learning from others, workshop environment, relevant exercises, gave more confidence completing paperwork, enthusiasm, work breakdown structure, little overwhelming if haven't project managed, off-shoot courses would be useful, more detail on exit documentation, IS information not so useful for non-IS staff

Nomination for UCISA Staff Development Award 2008

- **Recommendations** - separate course for non-IS participants on project fundamentals, beware of IS jargon!, course on managing project teams/staff, more work on stakeholder analysis

JUNE 2007

- **Evaluation Summary** - generally attendees stated that they agreed "strongly" or "agreed" when asked if information was presented clearly and concisely on all aspects of the course elements
- **Specific Feedback** - covering the basics was useful, good real life examples, good exercises, being able to ask questions about IS projects, involvement in group/practical activities, project documentation, relevant content, put all the steps/processes into place, hands-on approach, combination of theory & practice through group work. Least useful - Sections using charts/tools (MS Project) could be a separate course, IS Communications (had heard before), documentation
- **Recommendations** - frequent refresher courses for Project Managers, course was fast-paced (could profile needs of delegates before attending and target more), more time for the last exercise, introductory courses to give a standard knowledge base before this course

MARCH 2007

- **Evaluation Summary** - generally attendees stated that they agreed "strongly" or "agreed" when asked if information was presented clearly and concisely on all aspects of the course elements
- **Specific Feedback** - start to finish approach, real and practical examples (not all theory), good tasks, processes involved in keeping a project on track, time estimation, useful information pack, applicable to our environment, useful methodologies, clear and complete overview, right amount of time devoted to the subject, good general/practical session, time away from the office focusing upon projects, issue management, good slide presentations. Least useful - risk assessment exercise (*note - we will be revisiting this session*)
- **Recommendations** - more information on change management (*note - we will look to include for future courses*), proposed further estimating training, possibly more documentation on completing an example project, question and answer session on problem-solving/sharing good practice (*note - this will be considered*)