

# PROJECT INITIATION

It is important to get project initiation right; this establishes the foundations for the project and can make the difference between a successful and unsuccessful project.

There is a lot to consider during project initiation which can be overwhelming. This toolkit has been designed to guide you through this process, one step at a time.



The purpose of project initiation is to get the project off to the best start, by talking to relevant stakeholders and gathering the right information to start planning the project in more detail. The project initiation process will allow the Project Board and Authority Group to decide whether or not the project should continue to the implementation stage, based on the forecasted benefits and whether or not it is aligned with the corporate or programme strategy.

### In this toolkit:

- ◆ The purpose of project initiation
- ◆ Project initiation activities
- ◆ IT considerations
- ◆ Top tips

**The final output of the initiation process should be a Project Initiation Document (PID).**

This will pull together all of the information gathered, and once approved should be a static reference document, to be updated only through an authorised change management process. The PID then acts as a baseline against which to assess progress.



# Project Initiation

## Project Initiation Activities



There are a number of things that the Project Manager and project team need to consider during initiation.

The diagram below shows the areas that require planning during initiation; there may be other things to consider depending on the type of project you are about to undertake.



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## Business Case & Benefits

A business case setting out why the project should be approved should already have been drafted by this stage; it is during initiation that this is refined further based on the information a Project Manager gathers.

As a project manager, you should also consider the benefits gained by undertaking the project. The Business Case should have already identified the key benefits, but now is the time to consider how these benefits will be measured and when they will be realised. A Benefits Monitoring Plan is a useful tool to keep track of the expected benefits and this should be reviewed regularly throughout the project to ensure that the project is on target to deliver those expected benefits. For more information, please see the “Benefits Realisation” toolkit.



## Project Organisation

A Project Manager is normally identified by the Project Executive during the start up of a project, as well as the creation of the Project Board. Ideally, the next step is for the Project Manager & Project Executive to meet up and select who should be part of the Project Team. However, it is important to acknowledge that this isn't always the case; sometimes a Project Team has already been identified and it the role of the Project Manager to lead this team and ensure that each member of the team understands their role and what is expected of them during the project.



## Project Scope

It is important to clearly define the project scope during initiation. Failing to do so can jeopardise the success of the project, as scope creep can lead to an increase in costs, a longer than planned project schedule and/or a decrease in quality of the finished product.



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### Project Risks

Although identifying and assessing risk is a continuous task throughout a project, initiation is an ideal time to get the project team together to identify and evaluate project risks, decide who should own them, how best to manage them, and how they should be monitored. Again, reviewing lessons from similar previous projects is a good place to start when identifying risks to a project. It is at this point that a risk register should be created, if it hasn't already been done so during start-up. For more information, please see the "Managing Risk" toolkit.



### Project Controls

It is during initiation that the Project Manager should agree the level of control required during the project by the Project Board. Project Controls include

- ◆ Frequency and format of reports – does your Project Board want a formal monthly report or weekly email updates?
- ◆ Number of project stages – your Project Board will need to approve the end of each stage and the plans for the next stage; the more complex a project, the more stages there normally are
- ◆ Tolerances (e.g. time, cost, quality) – are your Project Board happy to let you continue if you go a week/month over schedule or do they want to be informed as soon as the project is running a day late? Is there an agreed contingency in the budget for an overspend of 10%?
- ◆ Mechanism to escalate exceptions – how does your Project Board want to be informed of issues that need escalating? By telephone, email or emergency board meeting?



### Project Costs

Both project and post project costs should be specified wherever possible, along with the funding source. Training and media/publicity costs are often forgotten during initiation so make sure these are included where relevant. Any estimated costs should be realistic and clearly stated that they are subject to change.



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### Project Plan/Timescale

A project plan should establish the timescale and resource requirements of the project. The project manager should not develop a project plan in isolation; both the users(s) and supplier(s) need to be closely involved. A planning workshop can often be very useful to get all relevant stakeholders together in order to identify the products required, the tasks need to achieve them, and any dependencies between them. For more information, see the “Planning for your Project” toolkit.



### Key Deliverables

These are the products or services that are created as a result of the project e.g. a recommendations report, a new IT system, a new high performance computing service - and the quality criteria, quality checking method, and responsibility for sign off should be clearly stated for each one.



### Staff Resources

Managing staff resource during a project can be a challenge, especially when most project team members have a day job to do as well as having work to do for a project. Team members often have divided loyalties, and it is up to the Project Manager to make sure that this does not have a negative impact on the project. A good working relationship with a team member’s line manager is essential, as negotiation is often required to free up resource in order to carry out the required project work.



### Stakeholders

A stakeholder is anyone who will affect, or be affected by, the project. Stakeholders should be identified as early on in a project as possible, and this should be the responsibility of the project team, not just the project manager. Stakeholders will often contribute towards the planning of the project, and different groups of stakeholders will have to be managed in different ways depending on what they need from you and what you need from them. For more information, please see the “Identifying Stakeholders and Stakeholder Engagement” toolkit.



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## Communications

Once all of your stakeholders have been identified, you can then work out the best means of communicating with each individual stakeholder or stakeholder group. This means thinking about the type of communication required and its frequency. Post project communications also need to be planned; often a project comes to an end with no thought as to how the new product/service/system will be publicised to the end users, despite them being the main beneficiaries.

## IT Considerations



A large number of University projects have an IT component of some sort. Most are either

- ◆ IT projects commissioned specifically by IT Services and therefore fully resourced by IT Services staff
- ◆ Corporate Services or College projects with an IT element to them – these often have a member or IT Services on the project team

In both cases, the Project Manager should consider the IT staff resource requirements, and gain approval from the relevant line manager as soon as possible to ensure that the staff they need to carry out the work are available at the right time. The Project Manager should also ensure that

- ◆ the Data Centre team have been consulted (if hardware is to be located in one or both Data Centres)
- ◆ an IT Checklist has been completed where necessary
- ◆ a Carbon Assessment form has been completed



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### Decision Time!



Once all the project initiation process is complete, it is up to the Project Board and/or the Authority Group to decide whether or not the project should be approved to move forward into implementation. They will base their decision on the information presented to them by the Project Manager; if the Business Case is still valid, and the value of the benefits outweigh the cost & risk associated with the project then implementation will normally be given the go ahead to proceed.

#### Project Office top tips

- ◆ The Project Initiation process should include input from all relevant stakeholders, including the Project Board, project team and customers/end users; it should not be something the Project Manager undertakes alone
- ◆ Make your Communications plan a top priority! If you can get this right you will avoid a lot of the problems that failing projects encounter. A good communications plan will also ensure that all relevant stakeholders are involved in the initiation process
- ◆ When planning your project during initiation is it always useful to see if there are any lessons learnt available to review from other similar projects. These can be invaluable if you haven't undertaken a similar kind of project before, and can prevent you from repeating mistakes that have been made in past projects
- ◆ When in doubt, contact the Project Office! We are here to offer support and advice, and in many cases can put you in touch with other Project Managers who have worked on similar projects who will be able to share their knowledge with you

For more information and advice contact the Project Office: [projects@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:projects@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

