



GAC Accreditation Elevates a Program's Reputation and Industry Standing

The University of Manchester, United Kingdom

The University of Manchester's School of Mechanical, Aerospace, and Civil Engineering received accreditation from the Project Management Institute Global Accreditation Center for Project Management Education Programs (GAC) in March 2011 for its Master of Sciences in the Project Management Professional Development Program (PM PDP). The University of Manchester (UoM) believes that the GAC accreditation process has improved the program, provided distinct benefits to students, and elevated the program's reputation among industry leaders, potential students, and the professional community.

The Process: Continuous Improvement

The project management program at UoM decided to apply for accreditation when their industry-led steering committee recommended the process as a way to facilitate external validation and a means to creating a more effective and disciplined program. "The accreditation process forced us to reflect on many areas of the program that we had not revisited for some time and this indicated that there were gaps in several of our procedures," said Professor Andrew Gale, the program director.

UoM began working on the accreditation application in September of 2009, with a project team led by the program director, two dedicated staff members, and several additional members who provided resource and input at various stages of the process. "It was rigorous, challenging and, in many cases, forced us to get back to basics," said Gale. "At times it was resource intensive, especially in the run up to the on-site visit date. But, the structured review at the operational level was a good exercise."

The last step in the GAC accreditation process, the on-site visit by a team of volunteer evaluators also brought value to the program. Due to a series of recommendations that emerged from the on-site team during the visit, UoM revisited many of the educational objectives their modules were originally designed to address, and added or enhanced two modules in

quality and strategy. Additionally, the program planned to hire new faculty to teach these expanded modules.

UoM says that their experience with the professionalism and effectiveness of the on-site team encouraged them to be frank and forthcoming about gaps or weaknesses in the program's offerings during the self-assessment process. They recommend that other schools take advantage of the clear lines of communication, detail-oriented processes and flexibility that the GAC offers, and to apply a robust work schedule and consistent time management structure to the process.

Benefits for Students and Faculty

UoM expects that GAC accreditation will enhance their steadily growing enrollment of students, who range in age from their 20s to their 50s. Students work in a diverse array of fields, including aerospace, nuclear, construction, oil and gas, process, energys and IT, from which they bring varying levels of experience to the program.

"It is important that all project managers, independent of their academic experience, get the opportunity to develop their knowledge," says Gale. "Our students are challenging, engaged, working professionals who all share a common desire to learn." About 40% of the program's students have project management credentials.

In addition to the significant benefits of attending a credible, reputable accredited program at UoM, students also receive a direct benefit toward completing their Project Management Professional (PMP)[®] certificate—graduates receive 1,500 hours toward their PMP[®] credential.

The industry-led program at UoM will also see an additional increase in program faculty as a result of the GAC accreditation, augmenting the number of teachers in the program prior to accreditation. Within the university, UoM is a self-sufficient funded program. However, the GAC accreditation process helped raise awareness of the work involved in the success of the PM PDP program, particularly to the higher administrative offices, and resulted in commendations and agreements to participate in department events from the dean's offices.

Benefits to the Program from Enhanced Reputation and Standing

But the greatest benefit to the project management program at UoM thus far has certainly been its increased standing with external organizations. According to Professor Gale, UoM has "since engaged with other institutions which share similar views on the importance of being accredited, so it is fair to say that an increase in inter-programme activity will be a benefit. This may well have a positive impact on student numbers in the future." Students are beginning to take notice of this, citing the increased credibility of the program and the consistent emphasis on improvement and high standards mandated by GAC accreditation.

In addition to helping develop inter-program relationships, GAC accreditation has assisted the UoM program in significantly raising the program's profile among companies and industries that bring potential students, faculty, and advisors to the university. Potential partner companies are impressed by

the rigor and quality of the GAC accredited programs. The accreditation differentiates UoM's PM PDP from other programs and emphasizes its legitimacy and credibility. In one case, a partner company told UoM that the GAC accreditation would make it much easier to release funds for their employees to attend the program.

"GAC accreditation opens the way for new links with industry," says Gale. "It does serve to facilitate a critical review of the aims, learning objectives and strategic direction of the programme. And we feel, as a team, that we are part of a wider community of teaching and learning practice in the field of project management."

In UoM's stakeholder community, the importance of taking a proactive role that can transition to leadership when needed is paramount. "Accreditation from GAC is considered important in helping to legitimise and 'mainstream' our contribution," says Gale. "We are now in the accredited programs' community and seek to play a proactive and influential role."

Learn more about GAC accreditation at [GACPM.org](https://www.gacpm.org)