



INSTITUTE OF PROJECT PROFESSIONALS

Competency Framework

Eight competency areas, 44 elements, a five-level proficiency scale

1. Purpose and scope

The Institute of Project Professionals (IPP) Competency Framework defines the knowledge, skills and behaviours expected of project management professionals at each stage of their career. It is the foundation on which all IPP qualifications, assessments and membership grades are built.

The framework is organised into eight competency areas, each subdivided into individual elements. Every element is assessed against a five-level proficiency scale, from Aware through to Expert. The combination of area, element and level provides the granularity needed to drive meaningful development planning while remaining practical enough for day-to-day use.

The framework carries 44 elements across the eight areas, with three cross-cutting themes that make safety, digital and AI practice, and sustainability visible across the structure. Alongside the default career-level profiles, the framework carries specialist role ladders, beginning with the Planning specialism, so that deep disciplinary capability is expressed without inflating the generalist benchmarks.

The framework applies to all IPP qualifications, whose assessment criteria are drawn directly from framework elements; to IPP membership grades, whose requirements reference the expected minimum levels across areas; and to Calibrate, the IPP-aligned competency tracking platform, which uses this framework as its assessment layer.

The framework is reviewed annually by the Standards and Qualifications Committee.

2. Framework structure

2.1 The eight competency areas

The framework is organised into eight broad areas. Each area groups related knowledge, skills and behaviours. Areas 1, 4 and 7 each carry six elements; Area 3 carries six; the remaining areas carry five.

#	Competency area	Elements
1	Governance and Lifecycle Management	6
2	Stakeholder Engagement and Communication	5
3	Leadership and People	6
4	Requirements, Scope and Benefits	6
5	Integrated Planning and Scheduling	5
6	Budget, Cost and Commercial	5
7	Risk, Issue and Change Control	6
8	Quality, Assurance and Closure	5
	Total	44

2.2 Areas and elements

Area 1: Governance and Lifecycle Management

Element	
1.1	Lifecycle model selection and application
1.2	Stage gates, phase reviews and documentation
1.3	Governance structures and decision-making authority
1.4	Escalation and reporting
1.5	Compliance, audit readiness and assurance
1.6	Digital and AI-assisted practice

Area 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

Element	
2.1	Stakeholder identification and analysis
2.2	Stakeholder engagement planning and execution
2.3	Communication planning and delivery
2.4	Managing difficult or resistant stakeholders
2.5	Senior and executive engagement

Area 3: Leadership and People

Element	
3.1	Leadership style and situational awareness
3.2	Team building, motivation and performance
3.3	Delegation and accountability
3.4	Coaching, mentoring and developing others
3.5	Ethics, professional standards and conduct
3.6	Diversity, inclusion and psychological safety

Area 4: Requirements, Scope and Benefits

Element	
4.1	Requirements gathering and documentation
4.2	Scope definition and baseline management
4.3	Scope change control and creep prevention
4.4	Benefits identification and mapping
4.5	Benefits tracking and realisation
4.6	Sustainability, social value and responsible delivery

Area 5: Integrated Planning and Scheduling

Element	
5.1	Work breakdown and activity definition
5.2	Scheduling, sequencing and critical path
5.3	Resource allocation and levelling
5.4	Dependency and interface management
5.5	Plan monitoring, updating and re-baselining

Area 6: Budget, Cost and Commercial

Element	
6.1	Budget development and cost estimation
6.2	Cost tracking, forecasting and variance reporting
6.3	Earned value and financial performance metrics
6.4	Procurement strategy and supplier selection
6.5	Contract management and commercial governance

Area 7: Risk, Issue and Change Control

Element	
7.1	Risk identification and assessment
7.2	Risk response planning and mitigation
7.3	Issue management and escalation
7.4	Change request evaluation and governance
7.5	Baseline control and impact assessment
7.6	Health, safety and harm-risk management

Area 8: Quality, Assurance and Closure

Element	
8.1	Quality planning and standards definition
8.2	Quality control and non-conformance management
8.3	Reviews, audits and lessons learned
8.4	Transition, handover and acceptance
8.5	Administrative closure and knowledge retention

3. Element scope in focus

Three elements address subjects that cut across traditional project practice: digital and AI-assisted working, sustainability and social value, and safety. Their scope is defined in full below. Section 3.4 then records scope notes that apply to seven further elements.

3.1 Element 1.6: Digital and AI-assisted practice

Using digital and AI tools effectively, critically and responsibly in project work. Includes selecting and applying appropriate tools; verifying AI-generated output before relying on it; protecting confidential and personal data; understanding bias and limitations; and retaining human accountability for AI-assisted decisions and outputs.

3.2 Element 4.6: Sustainability, social value and responsible delivery

Considering environmental, social and ethical impact across the lifecycle and reflecting it in the business case, scope and benefits. Includes the triple-bottom-line lens; identifying and pursuing social value; weighing impact in trade-offs; responsible and inclusive design; and honest measurement and reporting without overstatement.

3.3 Element 7.6: Health, safety and harm-risk management

Identifying and managing risks of harm to people arising from a project and its delivery. Includes hazard identification and risk assessment; the hierarchy of control; awareness of the legal duties and reporting obligations that apply; designing safety into the lifecycle; and contributing to a positive safety culture.

3.4 Scope notes on existing elements

Seven elements carry explicit scope notes, recording aspects of practice that are within the element's scope and are assessed as part of it.

Element	Clarification
1.5 Compliance, audit readiness and assurance	Explicitly includes awareness of health, safety, environmental and data-protection duties, and assurance over them.
3.5 Ethics, professional standards and conduct	Explicitly includes the ethics of AI use (transparency, honesty about AI involvement) and responsible, sustainable conduct.
5.1 / 5.3 Planning and resourcing	Clarifies that safety and sustainability activities must appear in the schedule and budget like any other work: planned, resourced and costed, not assumed to happen for free.
6.4 Procurement strategy and supplier selection	Explicitly includes responsible and sustainable procurement and consideration of supply-chain practice, not price alone.
6.4 / 6.5 Procurement and contract management	Explicitly includes working knowledge of the forms of contract relevant to the practitioner's sector, in particular the programme and planning obligations they carry, and contributing to tender requirements and tender evaluation.
7.1 Risk identification and assessment	Explicitly includes quantitative risk analysis techniques, including quantified schedule and cost risk analysis (QSRA and QCRA), at the levels where a role runs or interprets them.
8.3 Reviews, audits and lessons learned	Explicitly includes measurement and reporting of sustainability and social-value performance, with evidence.

4. Cross-cutting themes

Three cross-cutting themes give each subject a visible, nameable identity without a new area. A theme tags an anchor element plus the elements the subject threads through. Calibrate can surface a theme as a single view across areas, and CPD can be tagged to it. Themes do not change how elements are assessed; they are a lens over the existing structure.

Theme	Anchor	Also threads through	Purpose
Safety and Wellbeing	7.6	1.5, 3.5, 5.1 / 5.3	Make safety and duty of care visible as one capability across risk, compliance, conduct and planning.
Digital and AI Practice	1.6	2.3, 5.5, 7.1, 3.5	Make responsible AI and digital tool use visible across communication, planning, risk and ethics.
Sustainability and Responsible Practice	4.6	1.1, 6.4, 8.3, 3.5, 3.6	Make environmental, social and ethical responsibility visible across lifecycle, procurement, assurance, ethics and inclusion.

5. Proficiency scale

Each competency element is assessed against a five-level scale. The scale is consistent across all eight areas and all qualification levels. Proficiency is determined by the combination of knowledge and demonstrated experience. Training alone is not sufficient to confirm a level.

Level	Label	What it means in practice
NR	Not Required	This competency is not applicable to this role at this level.
1	Aware	Has awareness of the competency. Not yet applying it independently.
2	Practised	Has working knowledge and applies the competency, primarily under supervision.
3	Competent	Applies independently in situations of moderate complexity.
4	Proficient	Applies independently in complex situations. Supervises and coaches others.
5	Expert	Recognised authority. Develops approaches and frameworks. Educates others.

Not Required (NR) is a valid level in organisational deployments where a competency area is not relevant to a particular role. For IPP qualification purposes, all areas are assessed at the applicable level. NR is not available in self-selectable specialist roles (see Section 6A); it remains available for employer-defined roles under an Enterprise licence.

6. Default role profiles

The default role profile matrix shows the minimum expected proficiency level for each competency area at each role. These are the benchmarks against which an individual's confirmed competence is compared in gap analysis and development planning. An individual's level in an area is the lowest level they hold across every element of that area, and an area in which any element is unrated has no level rather than a partial one. A benchmark published as a minimum is compared against a figure derived as a minimum, so an area cannot read at standard while an element within it sits below the benchmark. The matrix is set per area; every element inherits its area's minimum level by default. Organisations using Calibrate under an Enterprise licence may adjust these defaults.

Roles are grouped into three tracks: Delivery, Direction and Planning. A level is an ordinal within a track and is never compared across tracks. Early Careers is shared by the Delivery and Planning tracks: an individual at that stage has not yet chosen a discipline. Direction is entered deliberately from the senior roles of either track rather than reached by progression.

Expert marks the areas in which a role is the organisation's recognised authority, which for a director is the areas they are accountable for at board level. Programme Manager and Senior Programme Manager hold Expert in Requirements, Scope and Benefits, the discipline that distinguishes programme management from project management; Senior Programme Manager additionally in Stakeholder Engagement and in Integrated Planning. Project Director holds Expert in Governance and in Leadership; Programme Director additionally in Stakeholder Engagement, in Budget, Cost and Commercial, and in Risk, Issue and Change Control. Every other area at the most senior roles is benchmarked Proficient. Specialist depth is expressed through specialist role ladders (Section 6A), not through the generalist matrix.

Direction is a separate track rather than a continuation of the Delivery ladder. On a single ladder a director must equal or exceed the most senior delivery role in every area, which raises Expert until it no longer identifies an authority. The four-level certification model operated by IPMA separates the director grade from the project manager line for the same reason.

Delivery track

Competency area	Early Careers	Proj Support	PM Assistant	Junior PM	PM	Sr PM	Prog Mgr	Sr Prog Mgr
Governance & Lifecycle	NR	Awar	Prac	Comp	Comp	Prof	Prof	Prof
Stakeholder & Comms	NR	Prac	Prac	Prac	Comp	Prof	Prof	Expe
Leadership & People	NR	Awar	Prac	Prac	Comp	Prof	Prof	Prof
Requirements & Scope	NR	Awar	Prac	Prac	Comp	Comp	Expe	Expe
Planning & Scheduling	NR	Prac	Prac	Comp	Comp	Prof	Prof	Expe
Budget & Commercial	NR	Prac	Prac	Comp	Comp	Prof	Prof	Prof
Risk & Change	NR	Prac	Prac	Comp	Comp	Prof	Prof	Prof
Quality & Closure	NR	Awar	Prac	Comp	Comp	Comp	Prof	Prof

Direction track

Competency area	Proj Dir	Prog Dir
Governance & Lifecycle	Expe	Expe
Stakeholder & Comms	Prof	Expe
Leadership & People	Expe	Expe
Requirements & Scope	Prof	Prof
Planning & Scheduling	Prof	Prof
Budget & Commercial	Prof	Expe
Risk & Change	Prof	Expe
Quality & Closure	Prof	Prof

Awar = Aware, Prac = Practised, Comp = Competent, Prof = Proficient, Expe = Expert.

6A. Specialist role profiles: the Planning ladder

Specialist role profiles express deep capability in one discipline without inflating the generalist matrix. The first specialist ladder covers the Planning specialism, in four roles. Selecting a planner role in Calibrate changes the expected levels only: all eight areas stay visible, no area is ever hidden, and confirmed competence is unaffected. In self-serve, the member chooses the role; under an Enterprise licence, an employer-assigned role takes precedence.

Role	What the role does
Assistant Planner	Supports schedule development and maintenance under supervision. Builds and updates activities, logic and progress in the planning tool, and is learning the controls basics, including how schedules carry cost and risk.
Planner	Owns the schedule for a project or workstream of moderate complexity. Develops and maintains the baseline, runs critical path and progress analysis, cost-loads the schedule and contributes to schedule risk assessments under a Senior Planner's direction, and reports schedule status independently.
Senior Planner	Leads planning across a large or complex project, or several projects at once. Integrates cost and schedule, runs quantified schedule risk assessments (QSRA) and assesses the schedule impact of change, and coaches other planners.
Principal Planner	Sets the planning and controls approach across a portfolio or function. Owns the organisation's planning standards, methods and working instructions, leads schedule assurance, is the authority on time impact assessment and delay analysis, and develops planning capability, including mentoring and training planners.

Competency area	Asst Planner	Planner	Senior Planner	Principal Planner
Governance & Lifecycle	Aware	Prac	Comp	Prof
Stakeholder & Comms	Aware	Prac	Comp	Prof
Leadership & People	Aware	Prac	Comp	Prof
Requirements & Scope	Aware	Prac	Comp	Comp
Planning & Scheduling	Prac	Comp	Prof	Expe
Budget & Commercial	Aware	Prac	Comp	Prof
Risk & Change	Aware	Prac	Comp	Prof
Quality & Closure	Aware	Prac	Comp	Comp

Area 5, Integrated Planning and Scheduling, is the ladder's spine: it sits one level above every other area at every role and is the only area to reach Expert, at Principal Planner only. Expert in Planning and Scheduling appears nowhere in the generalist matrix: the specialist ladder is its only home. Area 4 is capped by design: benefits ownership sits with the client or sponsor, and the planner needs working knowledge to plan that activity, not ownership of it.

Each Planning qualification certifies one column of this ladder: the Award in Planning Essentials (APE) certifies the Assistant Planner's knowledge and is the entry bar to Planner; the Foundation Certificate in Planning (FCP) certifies the Planner column at Competent; the Practitioner Certificate in Planning (PCP) certifies the Senior Planner column at Proficient. Principal Planner has no taught qualification: Expert standing is evidenced through the Fellowship route. Role level is independent of membership tier; only qualifications and experience grant a tier, per the Membership Framework (IPP-GOV-003).

6B. How a qualification seeds a competency profile

Passing an IPP qualification seeds the holder's Calibrate profile with starting levels, so that a newly qualified professional does not begin from a blank record. A seed states what the qualification evidences about the person, not what their post requires: it is the same for a graduate and for a project director. The holder's position against their role target is drawn separately, and shows above target as well as below, in every area.

Two declarations govern a seed. The ceiling is the highest level a qualification can seed in an area, and it is the only limit. The band is the level one sitting seeds, from the examination score for the whole paper: one band at the pass mark and one at 80 per cent and above. A fail seeds nothing, a band never exceeds the ceiling, and a seed raises a recorded level and never lowers one. Seeded levels are marked pending reviewer validation.

Competency area	APME	FCPM	APE	FCP	PCP
Governance and Lifecycle Management	Aware	Competent	Aware	Practised	Competent
Stakeholder Engagement and Communication	Aware	Competent	Aware	Practised	Competent
Leadership and People	Aware	Competent	Aware	Practised	Competent
Requirements, Scope and Benefits	Aware	Competent	Aware	Practised	Competent
Integrated Planning and Scheduling	Aware	Competent	Practised	Competent	Proficient
Budget, Cost and Commercial	Aware	Competent	Aware	Practised	Competent
Risk, Issue and Change Control	Aware	Competent	Aware	Practised	Competent
Quality, Assurance and Closure	Aware	Competent	Aware	Practised	Competent

Qualification	Pass mark	At the pass mark	At 80 per cent and above
Award in PM Essentials (APME)	67%	Aware	Aware
Foundation Certificate in PM (FCPM)	70%	Practised	Competent
Award in Planning Essentials (APE)	67%	Aware; Integrated Planning and Scheduling Practised	Aware; Integrated Planning and Scheduling Practised
Foundation Certificate in Planning (FCP)	70%	Aware; Integrated Planning and Scheduling Practised	Practised; Integrated Planning and Scheduling Competent
Practitioner Certificate in Planning (PCP)	Pass, Merit, Distinction	Not seeded until its bands are declared	Not seeded until its bands are declared

Integrated Planning and Scheduling is the spine of the planning pathway and sits one level above every other area at every planning qualification. The Award in PM Essentials seeds Aware in every area at any passing score, because its ceiling is the floor of the scale. The Practitioner Certificate in Planning is graded Pass, Merit and Distinction on a written case study; its bands are declared when that assessment route is built, and until then it seeds nothing.

A qualification with no declared ceiling seeds nothing at all rather than seeding uncapped, so adding a qualification without declaring its ceiling cannot silently seed to Expert. Existing seeded levels are never lowered: a ceiling or band change reaches new passes only.

Seeding sets a starting point for development planning. It is not assessed competence: a level is confirmed only by reviewer-validated evidence, whatever a qualification seeded. Coverage is derived from the element tags carried by every item in a qualification's examination bank, so the assessment and the seed cannot drift apart by hand. A seed writes element levels and never an area level. A qualification's bank covers the elements it examines, which may be only part of an area, so the area level follows from those elements once every element in the area is rated and is never asserted from partial coverage.

7. Qualification mapping

IPP qualifications are assessed against specific elements of this framework. The table below shows the primary competency areas assessed within each qualification. Elements outside a qualification's primary areas create capacity for future assessment as the Standards Committee extends the mappings.

IPP qualifications are awarded by the Institute of Project Professionals and assessed under the Assessment Standards (IPP-ASM-001). They are the Institute's own qualifications. They are not regulated by Ofqual or by another statutory regulator, and no equivalence to a regulated qualification is claimed. Their levels of demand are designed with reference to RQF Levels 3 to 6 and to the APM qualification ladder; those frameworks are used as design benchmarks, not as claimed equivalences.

The Institute maintains a recognition register, under the Membership Framework (IPP-GOV-003), mapping qualifications awarded by other bodies, including APM, PMI and AXELOS, to IPP membership grades for admission purposes. The register records the Institute's own recognition of those qualifications. It does not imply recognition of IPP qualifications by those bodies.

IPP is independent of APM, PMI and AXELOS, and is not endorsed by any of them.

Each qualification has a formal title, used on the certificate and in this framework, and a customer-facing name used on the platform and in the accreditation submissions. Both refer to the same qualification. The customer-facing names are Project Management Award, Project Management Foundation, Planning Award, Planning Foundation and Planning Practitioner, corresponding to the reference codes IPP-PM-A, IPP-PM-F, IPP-PL-A, IPP-PL-F and IPP-PL-P.

Qualification	Level	Primary areas assessed
APME - Award in Project Management Essentials	Award	Areas 1, 2, 4, 5
AAE - Award in Agile Essentials	Award	Published before launch (2027)
ABCA - Award in Business Change Awareness	Award	Areas 2, 4, 7, 8
APE - Award in Planning Essentials	Award	Areas 1, 5, 6, 7
FCPM - Foundation Certificate in Project Management	Foundation Certificate	All 8 areas
FCAPM - Foundation Certificate in Agile Project Management	Foundation Certificate	All 8 areas
FCBC - Foundation Certificate in Business Change	Foundation Certificate	All 8 areas
FCP - Foundation Certificate in Planning	Foundation Certificate	All 8 areas, weighted to Areas 5, 6, 7
PCPM - Practitioner Certificate in Project Management	Practitioner Certificate	Areas 1, 4, 5, 7
PCAPM - Practitioner Certificate in Agile Project Management	Practitioner Certificate	Areas 1, 4, 5, 7
PCBC - Practitioner Certificate in Business Change	Practitioner Certificate	Areas 2, 4, 8
PCP - Practitioner Certificate in Planning	Practitioner Certificate	Areas 3, 5, 6, 7

Twelve qualifications across four pathways (Project Management, Agile, Business Change, Planning). Project Management is live; the other three launch from 2027. Foundation Certificates assess all eight areas; the Agile Award mapping is published before that assessment launches, in line with the Assessment Standards (IPP-ASM-001). Detailed weightings for the Planning qualifications are published in IPP-ASM-001.

8. Framework governance

8.1 Ownership

The IPP Competency Framework is owned by the Institute of Project Professionals. Responsibility for its maintenance sits with the Standards and Qualifications Committee, which meets quarterly to review proposed updates.

8.2 Review cycle

The framework is reviewed annually. Substantive changes to areas, elements or level definitions require a full Standards Committee review and consultation with qualification awarding bodies. Each edition of this document is published only after that review. The edition and date on the cover identify the framework in force; the revision in the footer identifies the rendering of it, and a revision never changes a competency area, a role, a level or a scale.

8.3 Alignment

The framework has been developed with reference to the APM Competence Framework (3rd edition) and the PMI Project Management Competency Development (PMCD) Framework. It is designed to be compatible with both, enabling professionals holding APM or PMI qualifications to map their existing competence against the IPP scale without duplication of effort.