

PRINCE2

PRINCE2 (an acronym for **PR**ojects **IN** **C**ontrolled **E**nvironments) is a de facto process-based method for effective project management.

This model of project management is used extensively by the UK Government. Aligned departments, including the NHS, are required to use this methodology to support any projects, contract or business initiatives affecting capital expenditure or realignment of resources. All of these require the appointment of a certified PRINCE2 practitioner, who assumes overall responsibility for 'sign off' of these projects.

The PRINCE2 methodology has been made available in the public domain and offers best practice process on project management to ensure that this vital area of business control is regulated and controlled.

Key features of PRINCE2:

- Focus on business justification
- Defined organisation structure for the project management team
- Project-based planning approach
- Emphasis on dividing the project into manageable and controllable stages
- Flexibility that can be applied at a level appropriate to the project.

History

PRINCE was established in 1989 by CCTA (the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency), since renamed the OGC (the Office of Government Commerce), as a method of controlling large technology-based projects.

When PRINCE was launched in 1989, it effectively superseded all other forms of project management within UK Government-funded projects. This was developed into PRINCE2, and the rights to PRINCE2 are retained by the Crown to ensure that it does not suffer from commercialisation or unwanted amendments.

How can PRINCE2 be of benefit?

For individuals, PRINCE2 certification is an invaluable asset, as this gives the ability to work with the public sector to manage key projects.

For organisations, PRINCE2's formal recognition of responsibilities within a project, together with its focus on what a project is to deliver (the why, when and for whom) provides the organisation's projects with:

- A common, consistent approach
- A controlled and organised start, middle and end
- Regular reviews of progress against plan
- Assurance that the project continues to have a business justification.

PRINCE2 qualifications and training

PRINCE2 training takes place over several days, and consists of two levels of qualification:

- **PRINCE2 Foundation:** this is a 'closed book' exam, and is suitable for those who are supporting projects, but do not need to lead them, or provide sign off support. This exam is usually preceded by extensive pre-course study and two or three days of classroom work with a qualified PRINCE2 tutor. The exam is marked electronically and centrally to ensure consistency. This exam must be successfully completed before undergoing PRINCE2 practitioner training.
- **PRINCE2 practitioner:** this is an extended, open book exam, requiring the candidate to successfully complete all stages of a project on paper. The exam has to be preceded by successful completion of the Foundation process, and several more days of classroom work before taking the examination, which again is marked centrally for consistency.

Pass marks are high for both exams to ensure that this qualification ensures a full working knowledge of the system, and the ability to apply the knowledge.

Practical uses

Any NHS project requiring amendments to contracts, staffing or involving expenditure above set levels require a PRINCE2 plan to monitor and oversee the project. This requires the appointment of a PRINCE2 practitioner level qualified person.

The NHS has trained a number of PRINCE2 practitioners, as well as many Foundation qualified support staff.

Retention of these staff members, and the need for them to be available, in the right place, at the right time has proved a challenge, and many key initiatives have been delayed for lack of a suitable PRINCE2 project manager, or funding to appoint an external one.

Current costs associated with appointing an external PRINCE2 practitioner level external consultant can be from around £500 per day for a long-term appointment, to £850 plus per day for shorter terms.