

# UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS TACKLES PROJECT PIPELINE OVERLOAD WITH A PMO FIT FOR A POST COVID FUTURE



The University of Leeds, established in 1904, is one of the largest higher education institutions in the country. A member of the Russell Group of UK universities, it is renowned globally for its teaching and research and is in the top 100 in the QS World University Rankings. Its aims are to help shape a better future for humanity, tackle inequalities, and achieve societal impact and drive change across the world.

## The Challenge

Manage an explosion in the IT PMO pipeline resulting from Covid lockdown; improve processes for prioritising projects and setting expectations amongst project sponsors; streamline and simplify project reporting to minimise time wasting interactions between PMO and senior management; enhance governance compliance; enable better delivery team working practices; ensure the PMO is robust for uncertain levels of demand in the future.

### Location

Leeds,  
United Kingdom

### Industry

Higher Education

### Products

Programme, Project, Portfolio  
and Change Management  
Consulting

## I Teaching Transformation

Like all UK higher education institutions, in 2020 the University of Leeds had to rapidly replace its system of face-to-face lectures and seminars with online learning programmes in response to Covid lockdown.

The impact on the university's IT Project Management Office was dramatic. "The portfolio went mad," says PMO Manager, Stacey Forman. "Our workload was more than doubling, and priorities had to be suddenly changed to meet pressing new project demands. Our staff and internal processes were under huge pressure to cope, and of course we had no idea whether things would get worse before they got better."

The expanding portfolio was a watershed moment for the PMO. Stacey Forman and the IT management team decided it was time to review its processes and governance procedures, and the effectiveness of its reporting. "We needed to bring PPM expertise on board to help us create a really robust response to this transformation in our workload," says Stacey Forman.

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We wanted our PMO to be fit for the future.

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## I Model PMO

The university had a technical support contract with CPS, a multi-award-winning Microsoft Gold Partner. As project, portfolio and change management is at the core of its consulting practice, CPS was also well positioned to help with the PMO's challenges and advise on improvements. In Summer 2020, CPS was engaged to provide hands-on support for the PMO to help deal with the extra project demands, and also to assess the current 'as is' operations.

CPS then proposed a target 'to be' model for the PMO and a roadmap to achieve it, with continuing hands-on support for the PMO running in parallel. Key to that work package were recommendations for new pipeline prioritisation and triaging processes, capacity and resource management, data quality improvements, and streamlined reporting dashboards.

The university also wanted advice on the PMO delivery teams' working practices. An Agile Scrum methodology had been introduced, and the teams needed structuring for the change. CPS consultants are fluent in Agile techniques, and a Scrum specialist coach worked with the teams to provide a new model for project delivery designed for an Agile approach, including management of small requests.

## I Revolution

Stacey Forman says that the hybrid CPS package of recommendations and hands-on support for the PMO has revolutionised its performance.



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There are so many improvements, but I would single out the way that all project proposals are now submitted through a single 'front door' and assessed by triage group.

**Stacey Forman**  
IT PMO Manager  
at University of Leeds

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"Decisions are transparent and clear, so everyone knows what is happening to their project and they are properly ranked. We've also established prioritisation groups to look at local backlogs and agree what projects are important to submit to the PMO in the first place."

The PMO team and senior management particularly like the new reporting processes, says Stacey Forman. "We've got a proper highlight report that works well, is easy to use on the system, and provides a wealth of information via Power BI. So now we can quickly and easily provide what executive management wants, and that eliminates a lot of interaction that wastes everyone's time."

Stacey Forman says the hands-on support provided by the consultancy team has also been "incredibly helpful". As well as recommending and implementing new processes while helping to manage the workload, the CPS team has boosted the morale of PMO with their enthusiasm and can-do attitude.

CPS has recently extended its role to provide temporary operational and capacity management support, as the university plans to turn the IT department PMO into an enterprise PMO.

“ Working with CPS has been an overwhelmingly positive experience. As well as the quality of their work at every stage, and their ability to get on top of all our challenges, the compassionate support from each member of the consulting team has made it incredibly rewarding.

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Stacey Forman  
IT PMO Manager  
at University of Leeds

## Business Benefits

- More efficient and effective PMO processes
- Greater clarity about priority projects
- Simple but comprehensive reporting



## The Results

A new model PMO has been designed, based on improved pipeline and triaging processes, capacity and resource management, data quality improvements, and streamlined reporting dashboards. Portfolio backlog has been managed effectively. PMO staff and project sponsors have clarity about priority levels and project status. Simpler but more comprehensive reports minimise unnecessary interactions. A new Agile model for project delivery is deployed.

## For More Information



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