

# How do I choose a PRINCE2™ training course?

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This guide is designed to help you find the right PRINCE2 training course.

Whether you are choosing for yourself or for your organisation, your choice will be a significant investment of time and money. It may well be that you will never make this type of decision again.

So it is important that you choose the training that is best for you.

## About this Guide

The PRINCE2 training market is complex and dynamic. Suppliers come and go, some with good credentials, others with a poorer history.

From time-to-time the PRINCE2 Examinations Board makes changes to the exam system. The owners of PRINCE2, the UK Government's Office of Government Commerce (OGC) updates the Method; in fact, a major new refresh of PRINCE2 is expected to be published in 2009.

So this Guide will follow these changes through future versions. Our aim is to give you accurate and current advice. So check the publication date of this Guide to make sure you have the latest version.

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## Accreditation - What does that mean?

When people talk about 'Prince Training' they can mean number of things. Usually they mean **accredited** PRINCE2 Practitioner training. This normally takes the form of a four- to five-day course including two formal examinations.

Whether a PRINCE2 course and its supplier are accredited is likely to be important.

Why?

Most people want a formal qualification in PRINCE2; the training is merely a means to that end. By going through an accredited training course and taking certain public exams, you can get the PRINCE2 Practitioner Certificate. This entitles you to describe yourself as a '**Registered PRINCE2 Practitioner**'.

In certain parts of the project management job market this has become a valuable credential. However, it needs to be kept current; without taking a re-registration exam, the qualification lapses after five years.

So what is accredited, exactly? The accrediting body for PRINCE2 training is the APM Group Limited (APMG). APMG accredit:

- the **training course**, its design, whether it fulfils the curriculum set for the examinations;
- the **training organisation**, whether it has sufficient processes to handle the administration, maintenance and delivery of the training in a professional manner; and
- the **trainer**, whether they have 'real world' experience, have sufficient in-depth mastery of PRINCE2 to answer questions raised during a course and can adequately bring the subject to life.

Once accredited the course becomes 'accredited' and is allowed to use crown copyrighted material related to PRINCE2.

Once the organisation is accredited it becomes an **Accredited Training Organisation** (ATO) and is allowed to use the PRINCE2 logo in its marketing material, and to run PRINCE2 exam centres as part of their course events. (See the section below.)

Once the trainer is accredited they become an '**Approved PRINCE2 Trainer**'. An approved trainer (you've guessed it) can deliver an accredited course alone, as well as invigilate the formal PRINCE2 exams that may be part of the course.

## ATOs

You can find the current list of ATOs at <http://www.prince2.org.uk/TrainingOrganisations/ATOs/ATOListing.asp> .

Note that [www.prince2.com](http://www.prince2.com) is **not** an APM Group or OGC site. Don't be fooled; it is merely run by one ATO that insists it keeps the domain.

What about other organisations that are not ATOs but are advertising PRINCE2 training? They are likely to fall into one of three categories:

- **Affiliates**. These, like Cardiff University and Catalyst (Business Dynamics), are affiliated to an ATO, such as pearcemayfield, and

offer courses and PRINCE2 services delivered by the ATO. These are known to APMG and are registered to operate as an affiliate.

- **Aggregators/Wholesalers.** For example, Focus Projects offer places on our public PRINCE2 training events alongside those of other ATOs. The advantage here is that you have greater choice of place and date for a public course, but the big disadvantage is that you may not know which ATO you are booking with.
- **'Grey market'**. These are illegitimate vendors. They are not accredited, and are unlikely to have any external assessment of quality. They cannot offer a formal exam as part of their course and it is likely that they will refer you to a public exam centre - separate purchase and additional risk. At the time of writing APMG is energetically coming down on them. If you find a course advertised on e-Bay, for example, it could be dubious, unless it declares who the ATO or Affiliate it is that's selling.

So are all accredited courses the same?

Definitely not.

APMG takes pains that its accreditation scheme leaves some latitude for the creativity of the course designers. Accreditation gives a minimum quality assurance. (See the 'Beyond accreditation' section below.)

Are all trainers the same? Yeah, sure. They're all cyborgs...

Seriously, when I was the first Lead Assessor of PRINCE2 training for APM Group, I found adequate trainers, and great trainers. There were trainers that satisfied all the criteria laid down, but I wouldn't employ them in

**“APM Group’s accreditation leaves some latitude for the creativity of course**

pearcemayfield; for me, they lacked pizzazz and flair, the ability to give a learning experience that inspirational sparkle.

I've talked at length to the current APMG assessors and they aim to ensure through the assessment of trainers and materials that delegates can expect a repeatable experience from a particular ATO.

## Beyond Accreditation - What to look for

### Materials

If not all PRINCE2 courses are the same, how do you choose the best?

The materials they produce can give you a good indication.

For example, the course book; is it in full colour or is it tones of grey? If the latter, that's good cost-saving by the training organisation, but it is unlikely to stimulate your learning and help your recall in the exam. There is now quite a body of research that shows that colour is important in both cognition and recall.

Also, what is the format of the course book? Is it simply prints of PowerPoint slides? Again this is easy for the ATO to generate, but there are two problems for the learner with this:

1. Where is the added value of written documentation?
2. What works for you as a visual in the classroom discussion and what is effective as notes for reference some time afterwards are two very different things. They should correspond, but what is a suitable design for one, is not for the other.

Talking of which, are the slides all bullet points? This is not a very clever use of a visual medium in the classroom. Have you ever experienced 'Death by PowerPoint'? If so, you know what I am referring to here.

More than that, many training courses have a design driven by PowerPoint, and where the trainer uses each new slide primarily as an aide memoir of what they are to say next. PowerPoint is a useful tool but can produce fairly boring design. Also, do you want to look at visuals that aid your learning or are produced for the convenience of the trainer?

"This is all very well," you may be thinking as you read this, "but how do I find out in advance what the material looks like?" Well, search for examples on their web site. Failing that, call them and ask for illustrative samples. The reaction you get may tell you a lot.

## Method

Behind the materials, of course, is the method the training organisation uses to design its materials.

As we mentioned above, default use of PowerPoint, for example, is a method but is likely to produce a pretty dreary learning experience.

Some training organisations now use **Activity Based Learning** or **Accelerated Learning**. Here the design changes from being focused on what the trainer needs to deliver the course, to what the learner needs. In this kind of design, sessions are designed around the exercises and games that stimulate learning. Emphasis moves away from lecture mode to practical engagement with the subject by the delegates and the learning that arises from that.

Another aspect of your learning is that it is meant to be so much more than the training event itself.

There is the pre-course work: setting correct expectations, pre- course study and exercises to prepare you to gain the most out of the event.

After the course you have to put learning into practice for them to be consolidated into your experience and perhaps become a habit or standard practice for you. Is there any support from the training organisation to help you do this if you want it?

**“After all, your learning is so much more than the training event itself.”**

Then there is the whole area of evaluation of your performance in projects. It may be that through no fault of your own, you are not getting the results you want from the training you have received. Where are the measures that might indicate you need a different or supplementary kind of coaching? Does the training organisation provide that?

In the learning and development profession this is all called the learning cycle. Your training course is only part of it. Check to see whether the training organisation could support you through your whole learning cycle, rather than just 'sheep dipping' you through a training course, not caring what happens to you afterwards.

### Referees

A great way of finding out about these more qualitative matters is to ask someone who has been through the training with this organisation before you.

Be careful about just accepting written testimonials on the training company's web site or brochure. They should have these to give you some confidence, but they are no substitute for asking to speak to a real victim. You will find out far more anecdotally about the service you are likely to receive than by what the company presents to you in their advertising.

### Non-accredited training

Of course, accredited PRINCE2 training may not be suitable for you or your organisation. In fact, there are some very positive benefits for considering a non-exam based course:

1. Your organisation does not formally use PRINCE2 but uses a derivative of it.
2. You need a workshop to engage your senior managers who are in governance over projects managed the PRINCE2 way.
3. You do not need to be trained in all the aspects of PRINCE2 but merely in its essentials.
4. You and your organisation have identified that you have a specific training need within a PRINCE2 framework.

5. You and your organisation want to use an internal project as a case study, so that you can take outputs from the training and immediately use them.
6. You may use a particular computer tool to support projects (e.g. Microsoft Project) and want a training event that coaches you in both at the same time.

All these are excellent reasons for considering the non-accredited route. Taking the formal examinations out of the event does help you and the other delegates focus more on the practical aspects of topics, how you would apply them on real projects, but without the distraction of formal exams.

All that has been said previously about checking the quality of the training organisation still apply, though. The PRINCE2 and learning credentials of your supplier are just as important.

## Checklist

Here is a checklist to help you choose the right course for you. It summarises most of the rest of this document.

- Is the course run by a PRINCE2 Accredited Training Organisation?
- How many years has the ATO been providing accredited PRINCE2 training?
- Am I provided with pre-course material? If so, does the ATO tell me how much time I need to set aside to complete this work?
- Are there modular solutions?
- Does the price include the PRINCE2 manual and the Examination fees (Foundation and Practitioner)?
- Is the ATO able to provide me with recent pass rates at Foundation and Practitioner levels?
- Does the ATO have people involved in the development of the Method with OGC and APM Group?
- Will the course come with additional documentation (course book)? If so, can the ATO provide me with a sample of its contents and format?
- What design approach, if any, has the ATO used in designing its training?
- Are there plenty of games and exercises throughout the course?
- Does the ATO provide Activity-Based learning or Accelerated Learning?
- Does the ATO provide PRINCE2 e-learning solutions?
- Does the ATO provide non-accredited training in PRINCE2?
- Does the ATO provide additional diagnostics/questionnaires as parts of senior management briefings in PRINCE2?
- Can the ATO provide me with referees (people who have recently been on their training)?
- Can the ATO provide me and my organisation with full support throughout my learning cycle?
- Does the ATO also provide accredited training in MSP programme management if I need it?

## About the Author

I have tried to write this guide in what I hope is a personal, immediate and non-stuffy style. So you may want to know who I am and what authority I have to pronounce on these things.

I am the Chairman and founding director of pearcemayfield, a PRINCE2, MSP and Change Management Accredited Training Organisation.

My original involvement with PRINCE was with the first private sector organisation that used it, BT Yellow Pages, now Yell.com. I joined Yellow Pages in 1990, shortly after PRINCE was published and set up their Project Management Office to support project managers throughout Yellow Pages to use PRINCE well.

In 1992 the UK Government approached me asking if I would like to take part in a project to develop the eventual successor to PRINCE, PRINCE2. My role was to bring a community of practitioners together and regularly review what the authors were designing and writing. PRINCE2 was launched on 1st October 1996.

APM Group retained me during the late 90s as their lead assessor: I went around organisations that wanted to become ATOs and assessed them, their material and their trainers.

In 1999 I left APM Group, seeking to build my own company and do PRINCE2 training better.

Since then, I was invited back by OGC to help refresh Managing Successful Programmes that was published in September 2007. At the time of writing, my colleague, John Edmonds, is similarly helping to author the refresh of PRINCE2 that will become the 2009 edition.

I hope you have found what I have written in this guide helpful. If you have any comments or suggestions for improvement, I would be delighted to hear from you. My e-mail address is [patrick.mayfield@pearcemayfield.com](mailto:patrick.mayfield@pearcemayfield.com).

Good luck.

Patrick Mayfield

## Change History

Version & Date	Reason for Change
<b>0.1 – 1/4/08</b>	First draft.
<b>0.2 - 3/4/08</b>	Minor amends
<b>0.3 – 7/4/08</b>	Published version

