

# Tick@lab project – Project planning

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## Abstract

This article is based on a dissertation submitted as part of the IAT HE Level 6 qualification. It discusses the implementation of the purchase and establishment of a software programme that will manage the record keeping required under the authority of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA) including software that will enable the production of the required returns and reports.

As well as overall management of the project, the article covers the planning, budget management, stakeholder engagement, difficulties during the progress of the project and perhaps more importantly lessons learned.

**Keywords:** Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, management, planning budgeting

## Introduction

This report is part of an IAT Level 6 project.

The project will take place to address the current animal returns database. I have decided that the current animal returns software is not fit for purpose. The system is hard to use and has a high learning curve. The project looks to address the lack of options with regards to reports created in the software for end of year returns. The current system also has poor training integration and a lack of editing options. Training records also need to be centralised and easier to access. The project will be undertaken over the course of 3 months. I feel this is an adequate amount of time to implement the new system, we are also time bound to have this up and running for the new year.

## Background

The current system has been in place for the past 6 years and we have had numerous issues with software bugs in the first few years. After these errors were resolved we then had issues with the systems poor layout. Feedback from users suggested our current system was not user

friendly. The software also had continued faults and crashes that made it difficult to use. The end of year returns for the Home Office always seemed to be more difficult than necessary considering the software is there for the reason of making this task more streamlined and simplified. This software is specifically designed to make the job of reporting the Home Office animal returns easier. We found over time the system was causing tension and stress which led to errors in data entry. I found the system made things more difficult as you could not trust the numbers you would get back. This put pressure on me at the end of the year and would cause me to waste numerous hours manually checking over numbers and having to double check software generated data. The system caused me personal stress as I was its main user for the unit. The current system was also due to stop being supported with the company who provided the software saying they would no longer support updates, meaning if the system crashed, we would have no support from them to fix the issue.

## Outline the goals of the Project. List the Project objectives, ensuring these are SMART

There are a few aims this project will attempt to achieve.

### Objective 1

Find and implement a centralised user-friendly IT platform for the ordering of animals.

**Specific.** We must find an easy-to-use animal returns database which enables us to order animals onto the system.

**Measurable.** Users will be able to use the software to create an animal order, this will then alert a technician that an order must be placed with the supplier.

**Achievable.** This is achievable as there are many 'off the shelf' software packages which can be bought specifically for this process.

**Timebound.** Selecting the software package needs to be done fairly fast to enable the software to be ready to use as soon as possible.

**Objective 2**

Find a user friendly and accountable IT platform which enables the efficient and accurate production of Home Office returns and reports as required under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA). End of year Home Office reports with retrospective severity scoring being the most important feature.

**Specific.** The software must include a Home Office returns function with the ability to carry out reports including most importantly the end of year Home Office returns.

**Measurable.** At the end of the year, we will be able to produce an end of year returns usage report.

**Achievable.** As there are many platforms made for this specific purpose this will be achievable.

**Realistic.** Yes, the software should be able to tally together the data entered and create a report that can be submitted to the Home Office.

**Timebound.** The database can be tested at BETA stage to ensure the database works as it should and test runs of reports will be made to ensure by the end of the year this feature will work correctly to produce the returns.

**Objective 3**

Establish a centralised and accessible point for recording and maintaining the training and competency records of personal licence holders.

**Specific.** Training and competency records will be centralised via the IT platform.

**Measurable.** Each user profile will contain the training records and competency of each Personal License Holder (PIL) it will also keep track of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points that have been awarded under the IAT CPD scheme. These profiles will be used to check training and competency by Project Licence Holders and maintained by the Named Training and Competency Officer (NTCO).

**Achievable.** The software will have a section to enter this data and this will be successful if the data is maintained and updated correctly.

**Realistic.** Training records will be copied over from the current system. The system’s software should ensure the records are kept but paper records will also be kept as a failsafe.

**Timebound.** As we have a small unit with only around 10 staff copying over the data should not take a long period of time. Some elements can be transferred via Excel from the current system which will save time.

**Objective 4**

Plan and put into practice a training programme and sessions for staff on the new platform to enable them to build their confidence using the new resource.

**Specific.** The aim is to train the users so they can, order animals, put them onto an experiment and then return the animal onto the system once they are used to tally towards our end of year returns.

**Measurable.** Users will be able to navigate the software themselves and be able to carry out the basic required functions of the new system.

**Achievable.** This will be achievable but users may learn at different speeds and require extra training or support as a result.

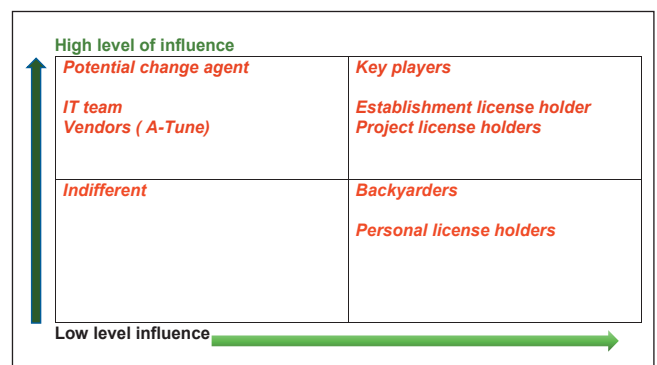
**Realistic.** The first training session should help indicate if this is a realistic aim within the 1-month timeframe. The software has been chosen because of its ease of use but you must consider peoples’ skill level on computers.

**Timebound.** Offering multiple online TEAMS meetings for training will give people options to attend, blocking out peoples’ time in advance will help ensure they get the training time required and additional help if needed.

**Organisational Context**

Identifying this will start with discussing stakeholders, their level of interest and influence. Support this with a map or grid. Briefly outline your commitment to stakeholder engagement.

Initially it is essential to first identify the stakeholders and their level of involvement and influence. As I have identified the main objectives, I can decide who the key stakeholders will be. The main stakeholders for this project will be Establishment Licence Holder (ELH), Project licence and Personal licensees. The Establishment Licence Holder and Project Licence Holders (PPL) will have a large interest in the project as they are responsible for the Project Licences and animals used in the unit. This IT platform will make their jobs easier. The ELH will have a lot of influence and having them on board is vital the projects success. Personal License Holders (PILs) will have an interest as this will also help them day to day and take the stress away when it comes to record keeping. IT will play an important role but could cause potential issues, things like servers and test environments would have to be created by them. There are a lot of legal processes for the new software to go through to be approved. This could potentially be an issue that could obstruct the project.



**Figure 1.** Stakeholders categories.

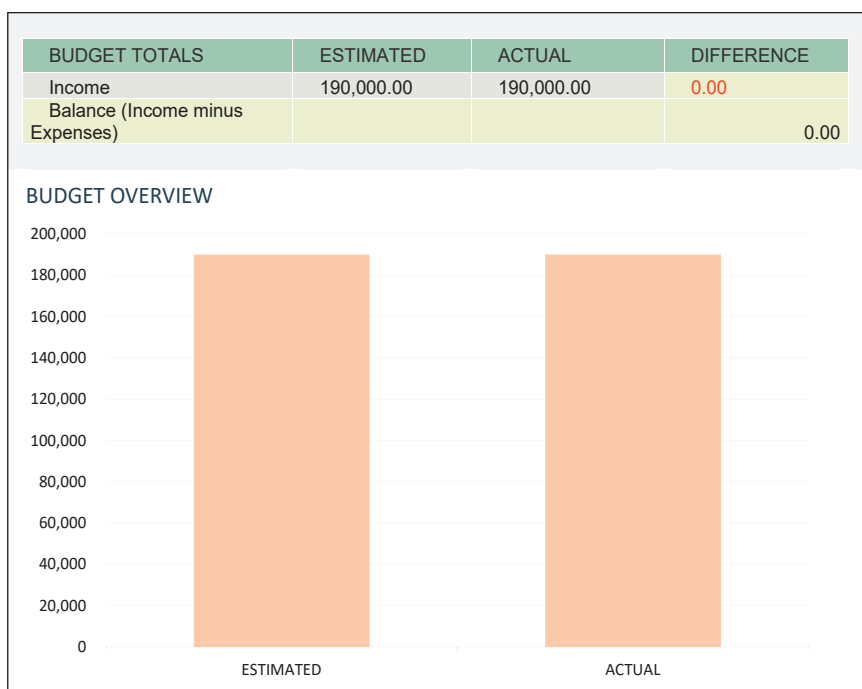
A Gantt chart (shown below) helped me organise the project and define timelines to stakeholders. I also needed to ensure the correct stakeholders are involved from the beginning and I used stakeholder mapping to do this. This will identify who the most and least important people were regarding the project.

	Start date	End date	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN
<b>Data entry</b>	01/10/2021	01/21/2021				
<b>Superuser training</b>	01/10/2021	03/10/2021				
<b>Training users</b>	01/21/2021	01/01/2022				
<b>IT meetings and project support</b>	01/10/2021	30/01/2022				
<b>System testing /bug testing</b>	01/10/2021	01/02/2022				
<b>Go live with continued IT support</b>	01/01/2022					

### Risk register

Likelihood	High Impact	Medium Impact	Low Impact
<b>Very likely</b>			
<b>Likely</b>	COVID-19 staffing issues (ensure team is aware of progress so others can step in, in other staff members' absences).		Miscommunication (ensure meetings and emails are sent out throughout the project keeping stakeholders in the loop).
<b>Unlikely</b>	Not entering data on time (working to strict deadlines and communicating with stakeholders).	IT issues (software will need to be tested through BETA versions).	

### Budget



### What are the 5 highest operating expenses

EXPENSE	AMOUNT
Software purchase	100,000.00
Annual database and server costs	50,000.00
Annual running cost from provider	30,000.00
Training costs of staff time and recourses	10,000.00
Maintenance and repairs	4,600.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>194,600.00</b>

## Project planning

### Method statement

An implementation plan for this project was needed and to do that I considered all options available to me. I needed to involve the team first as they will be key to the project working effectively.

To implement the plan using existing management tools was very useful. I used the 5 Cs to help me. The 5 Cs will help structure the plan.

### Consider

The project looks to utilise the dedicated software as a way of recording the number of animals used on the project licenses in our facility. The Home Office requires us to return this in the form of a report which the software should make easier to complete. Within each project license, each protocol will have a severity limit which is captured in the report and ensures compliance with this limit.

The Home Office does not specify how this data is stored just that the information must be recorded, as there are dedicated applications to make this record keeping as straightforward as possible, the aim of this project is to find the software that best suits our facility and implement it to make life easier for Project Licence and Personal Licence Holders at the end of each year when these reports are due.

I aimed to have an area to input training records and record competency for the procedures for each protocol within each license. The aim is for everyone to be able to easily access their own training records but also cross reference others to ensure they are signed off as competent to work on a specific procedure on any give license. This will specifically benefit the Project Licence Holders, ensuring that nobody breaches the licence. The system should be able to alert the manager to the fact the user is unable to carry out a specific procedure or let them know training needs refreshing.

The benefit of having this type of software will be to ensure everything from ordering animals to reporting numbers at the end of the year is as straightforward as possible. The system should highlight to users potential breaches of licence by blocking orders if animal use limits are nearly reached for example.

### Consult

I needed to engage with the stakeholders of the project from the outset, I sent out my plan to the key stakeholders and set up meetings to ensure support

from the correct people. This engagement helped the plan succeed. I needed to create good working relationships with these key stakeholders. I also required feedback from all current users as this would help me create the right software package that is useful to us moving forward.

### Crunch

I needed to pick the correct software application that met the needs of our unit. This must include bolt on features for training and competency.

### Communicate

I had to provide briefings on what will happen. Communication was key in clarifying what was needed in the project and how the project would be a success. It will be important to communicate as issues will arise and lack of communication will lead to lots of problems throughout the project.

### Check

I needed to inform PPL holders, PIL holders and animal unit staff about all the changes in place that would affect day to day working. They needed to learn to use a new system but I needed to ensure they were aware of the benefits as, whilst the initial period may seem like a lot of work, the result would be having a software that saves time and money.

## Another useful tool is PESTLE

Collecting information was a key part of the problem-solving process. There are many techniques that can be used to help identify what information to collect. One of these techniques is called PESTLE analysis.

PESTLE is an acronym, (Figure 2) and PESTLE analysis is a technique used to understand the impact of outside factors on a location, business or organisation.

It allows an individual or organisation to understand the 'big picture' of the environment they are situated in.



Figure 2. PESTLE Explained.<sup>1</sup>

## Stakeholder engagement

As communicating with the stakeholders was vital for the success of the project, I used a theory of effective communication to ensure this. While there will be different levels of interest and influence everyone has a role to play. To help with this, I used the HELPER theory.

### HELPER

- HEAR each member's contribution.
- ELABORATE with additional positive examples.
- LOOK at all members' ideas for improvement.
- PROMOTE additional suggestions for improvement.
- EMPOWER the team – Don't dictate.
- RECOGNISE overall positive behaviours, results and contribution.

## Risk register

Risk ID	Date Identified	Category	Risk	The risk is caused by	Effects of risk	Mitigation action in place	Impact level	Start Date	End Date	Results of mitigation action	Final impact level
1	10/10/21	Health & Safety Risk	COVID-19 staffing issues.	The ongoing pandemic.	Lack of staff to meet deadlines.	Good communication, clear deadlines. To train more staff to cover for the unavoidable staff absences caused by COVID-19. Use a shift structure at work to ensure not all team members are in contact meaning back up will always be available.	Medium	10/10/21	10/11/21	Project objectives made clear, meetings ensured everyone was on same page.	Low
2	10/10/21	Financial Risk	Not entering data on time.	Software not working/ user error.	Home Office returns being late	Running manual Excel spreadsheet to ensure numbers are up to date. IT implemented BETA testing environments. Training taken by all users and access to troubleshooting database or helplines.	High	11/11/21	30/01/22	Animal use numbers were kept up to date by manual input.	Medium
3	22/11/21	Financial Risk	IT issues leading to having two annual payments for two software applications.	IT failures such as deadline issues or servers crashing.	Huge financial cost.	To ensure the old system was no longer used animal use numbers were kept up to date by manual input.	High	10/10/21	20/01/22	Ensured we had back up so old software would not be needed for returns.	Medium
4	10/10/21	Quality / Performance Risk	Miscommunication (ensure meetings and emails are sent out throughout the project keeping stakeholders in the loop).	Lack of calls, emails meetings.	Delays due to inactivity. Deadlines missed.	Weekly meetings scheduled via teams at start.	Medium	10/10/21	30/01/22	People kept up to date, issues brought up in timely manner. Issues resolved at root faster.	Low

Resourcing people’s time needed to be closely managed but should be possible if there are regular meetings and things were continuously monitored and constant feedback given throughout the project. Stakeholders invited to these meeting will be:

**IT inhouse**

- Hight interest.
- Important role implementing new system.
- Implement server and secure data.

**IT vendor**

- High influence and interest.
- Want to ensure smooth installation on software.
- Provide training to master users and users.

**Establishment license holder**

- High influence and interest.
- Key player must be involved throughout process.

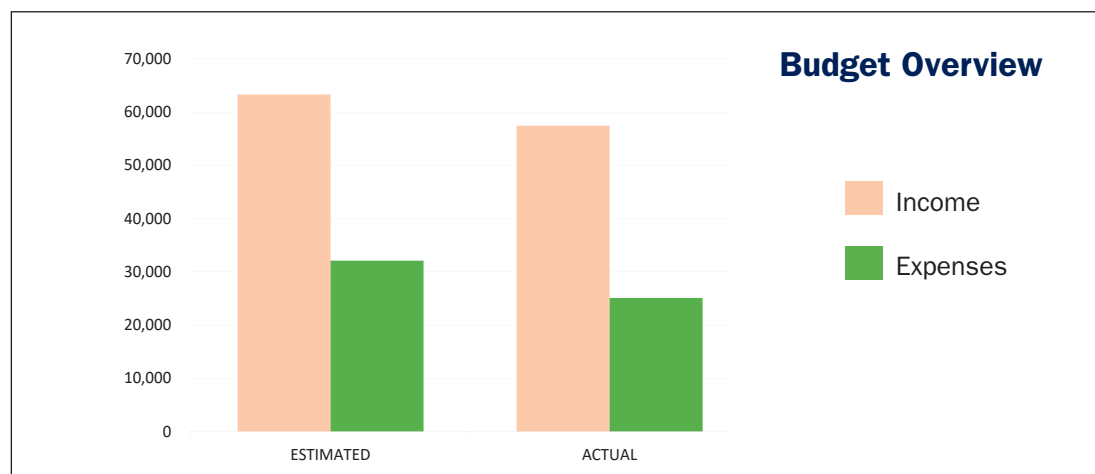
**Researchers**

- **Interest will be higher once system is live.**
- **Must be updated routinely as change will affect them.**

Progress reports were given throughout the project via TEAMS or in person depending on the ongoing COVID-19 situation. We were able to update everyone on progress but also give essential feedback. This feedback was both negative and positive to ensure the project objectives were met. Email updates, phone calls and training sessions either in person or inhouse were required to execute to plan.

**Budget**

MONTHLY BUDGET			Date
BUDGET TOTALS	ESTIMATED	ACTUAL	DIFFERENCE
Income	63,300.00	57,450.00	-5,850.00
Expenses	32,100.00	25,100.00	7,000.00
Balance (Income minus Expenses)	31,200.00	32,350.00	1,150.00



**What are my top 5 highest operating expenses?**

EXPENSE	AMOUNT	% OF EXPENSES	15% REDUCTION
Supplies	4,500.00	17.9%	675.00
Data transfer	4,500.00	17.9%	675.00
Taxes	3,200.00	12.7%	480.00
Training inhouse	2,500.00	10.0%	375.00
Interest	2,200.00	8.8%	330.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>16,900.00</b>	<b>67.3%</b>	<b>2,535.00</b>



## Ethics committee approval

I needed to go to our institutional Animal Welfare and Ethics Review Board (AWERB) for approval, as this project was vital for Home Office returns and training. This could be fast tracked through AWERB approval and a special meeting was arranged for sign off of this. As a system already exists this should be approved without issue. I presented the uses of the software with its benefits and explained that it would help generate important reports and assist with end of year returns.

## Implementation and Evaluation

### Implementation

#### Delivery methodology

I found a user-friendly software package after first having had three different companies come in and present their software. My team and I then picked the one we thought suited our needs the most. This was a-tune's tick@lab. This software contained 3 key parts that met my project objectives. Easy to use, training and competency section and also creates software reports to help with Home Office returns.

This milestone was achieved on time and was quite straightforward and the budget was also agreed upon ahead of our deadline. I did run into some delays throughout the project.

There were some issues with IT in this project. Our IT team are based in Belgium and they were very meeting driven. There were delays in parts of the software builds being made and we had to wait, sometimes a few days, for responses to emails and calls.

Due to COVID-19 and other sicknesses there were delays in training. I contracted COVID-19 and my absence delayed one of the main training sessions leading to it having to be rearranged.

Meetings were scheduled very late UK time and as my working day begins at 6am with 1 hour's time difference between the UK and Belgium, it was sometimes hard to agree on times. They also have different Public Holidays from those in the UK which caused some issues.

However we did have some good communications between key stakeholders and this improved throughout the project.

Training was also good and we had online training for major users and 'in person' training for the rest of the users which went well.

## Results

I delivered a new animal returns system with training and competency sections. All details were entered into the system to ensure the data on the system was tailored to our needs. This new software enabled me to have all data relating to animal numbers and training records in one place. This helps us to complete the returns required under ASPA to the Home Office at the end of the year as required. I can also show people's training records with ease if I need to create reports or show records for any audits that are required.

I have been able to train users and show them how to use the system. I used the training I got as a major user and my experience with entering all of the master data onto the system. This enabled me to gain a good understanding of the system at an early stage.

Our training records and animal numbers for this year have also been entered which means the project has exceeded expectations.

## Stakeholder engagement

### Information technology

There were some issues with communication and IT, who were very process driven and this resulted in many additional meetings. I ended up having to mention this as we were having lots of meetings but sometimes no actions were taken by IT resulting in yet more meetings.

I found I did have to push IT in Belgium via email to move on with parts of the project.

### Establishment licence holder

There was very good engagement with the ELH throughout the project. I was able to use her influence to move things forward as sometimes my lower position in the hierarchy meant I was sometimes overlooked. I used my connection with the ELH to progress things when I felt progress was being delayed for no reason.

### Project licence holders

I had no real issues with PPL holders, they were involved mostly in the training sessions. I had the full support of the PPLs as once the system was in place their lives would be easier.

## Budget management

The budget for the project was well defined from the beginning, as we were purchasing a package deal for the system it meant that once everything was agreed, it

## Updated Risk register

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was easy to stick to the budget. I found that what was more of an issue was people's time and allowing for me to be away from my regular duties for longer periods of time than initially thought. This adds a lot of money to the budget if you take into account people's salaries and absence from their day-to-day responsibilities. I was able to use the establishment licence holder to help me ensure the budget was kept to the initial amount.

## Evaluation

### Methodology analysis

I wanted to ensure this project was delivered on time and was successful but there were areas that could have run slightly more smoothly than they did. I could not account for illness and COVID-19 was issue



throughout the project. Just ensuring that there was enough cover and arming people with enough of the correct information was vital.

I ensured that meetings were set at appropriate times and that everyone was clear on what was expected of them in the project.

When it comes to training sessions, I feel that people work a lot better face to face than in online sessions. It was difficult to maintain interest for extended periods of online training. Sessions were a lot better when face to face. I had to do a lot of the master data and major user training online and people found it very tough retaining the information. The in-person training sessions we had for users was much better as people seemed engaged and remembered a lot more of what they had been shown.

I used the results of the questionnaires to help better understand what worked from other people perspectives throughout the process.

### Stakeholder feedback

I sent some questionnaires to the stakeholders and while at the time of writing I am still waiting for responses, the questions asked were:

### Establishment licence holder

- How did I communicate?
- Did I engage people?
- Would you change anything?
- What went well with the project?
- What went not so well?
- What would we change for the next project?

### Information Technology (IT)

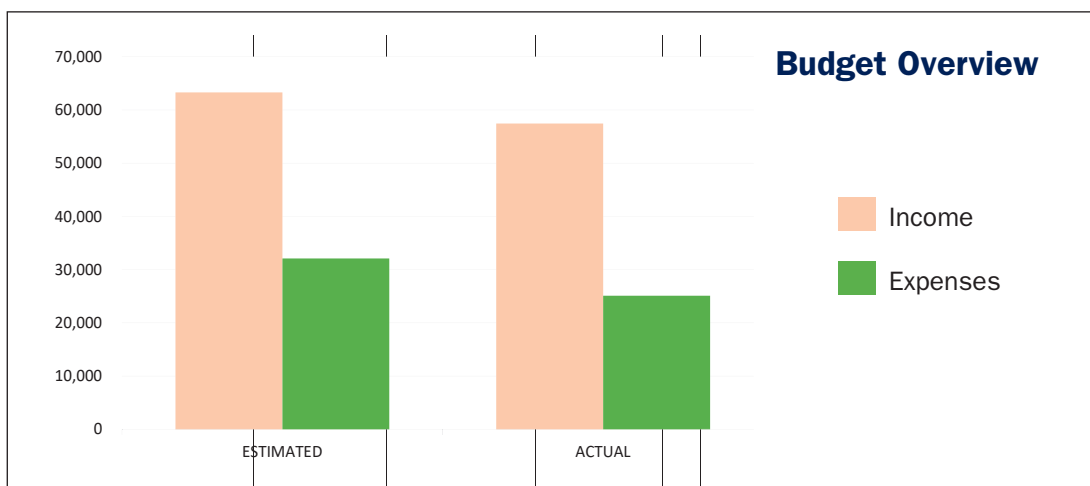
- Were my routes of communication sufficient (emails, calls, meetings)?
- How did I communicate?
- Did I respond to questions in a timely manner?
- Would you change anything?
- What went well with the project?
- What went not so well?
- What would we change for the next project?
- Do you think we had too many meetings?

### Personal Licence Users

- Was training sufficient?
- Were you involved enough in the process?
- Would you change anything for future projects?
- What went well?
- What did not go well?

### Budget analysis

COMPANY			
MONTHLY BUDGET			Date: 01/02/22
BUDGET TOTALS	ESTIMATED	ACTUAL	DIFFERENCE
Income	63,300.00	57,450.00	-5,850.00
Expenses	32,100.00	25,100.00	7,000.00
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## What were my top 5 highest operating expenses?

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COMPANY			
MONTHLY BUDGET			Date: 01/02/22
OPERATING EXPENSES	ESTIMATED	ACTUAL	DIFFERENCE
Training in-house	3,000.00	2,500.00	500.00
Input time (time away from regular duty)	4,000.00	2,000.00	2,000.00
Travel	500.00	500.00	0.00
Training online	1,000.00	750.00	250.00
Data transfer	4,100.00	4,500.00	-400.00
Other	1,000.00	750.00	250.00
<b>Balance (Income minus Expenses)</b>	<b>13,600.00</b>	<b>11,000.00</b>	<b>2,600.00</b>

## Reflection

To help me evaluate lessons learnt from this project I used a tool called the traffic light technique.

## Traffic Light Technique

### RED What should we stop doing?

I think too many meetings were an issue in this project and that this made me take unnecessary time away from my day-to-day duties and added extra stress and tension to my job.

### AMBER What do we need to consider continuing with or perhaps stopping?

Meetings are however important; it would be good to define why the meeting is happening in the first place? Ask why the meeting is happening and how productive the meeting will be depending on where we are in the project. Project updates are important but can be relayed via email update rather than always hour-long sessions so using different methods for the updates to ensure less time is wasted.

### GREEN What did we do well and should be imparted to others?

Working as a team is of vital importance in a project and in this project, I used people who I found helpful and understood as the project moved on who would and would not help me achieve the projects goals.

I did fall into a few project management pitfalls.

#### *Over-dependency on one person*

I took on a lot initially alone and really should have used other key stakeholders more in the beginning.

#### *Poorly defined roles*

While I would not say the roles were poorly defined in this project some people tried to take the lead when it was not their place to do so and I should have been more proactive in establishing who was needed and when.

## Personal experience

### *Get to know people involved in the project*

It is important to know the team you will use and their strengths and weaknesses including your own. I am not always good at leading discussions and I used my Establishment Licence Holder sometimes to take the lead at certain moments through the project.

### *Learn to read people*

In the initial planning of the project make sure you meet all of the stakeholders and try and gauge their stance or personality in the project.

### *Less influence does not mean less help!!*

Just because someone is maybe towards the bottom of the influence chart does not mean they cannot be as useful to you in your project.

### *You cannot do it all alone!*

Teamwork is vital when approaching a project and I feel this cannot be emphasised enough!

I found being responsible for the project quite stressful but also very rewarding. It was something I had not previously undertaken and I think that I would have a lot more confidence in my abilities going into another project. The management tools used were helpful in structuring the plan for the project. I realised the people you involve and how you interact with them is very important. Gantt charts I found very useful as they provide a visual background on time frames and constraints.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> PESTEL – Picture sourced from [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk).