



PLANNING EDUCATION, ACCREDITATION AND INTER-PROFESSIONAL LINKS

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Abstract

Planning education is changing with the changing vision on the needs of society for the 21st century. The core ideas of planning centres on: (a) spatial – the management of competing uses of land and the making of places; (b) sustainable – that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs; (c) integrative – that takes account of the wider set of issues plus bringing together a range of professional skills and disciplines to influence spatial planning delivery mechanisms; and (d) inclusive – that recognises a wide range of people and opinions that shape planning. Planning is also value driven and action oriented. Professional status of planners comes through providing critical thinking that aims at achieving outcomes and not just procedures, emphasising locational relationships and inter-relationships of the sectoral on the spatial and focusing on what could and should be done based on ethics, values and facts. Based on this the paper outlines the proposed content of planning education. Accreditations of planning schools are then discussed based on the new RTPI recommendation of partnership agreements that are less regulatory and more constructive. Under this topic the qualities possessed by effective planning schools are discussed. Good examples of inter-professional links are then examined with a view towards encouraging similar programs in other Commonwealth countries.

Keywords: Education, Accreditation, Skill, Knowledge, Planning Schools

INTRODUCTION

The Commonwealth's 1.7 billion people account for 30 per cent of the world's population distributed among 54 member countries of whom 50 are developing countries and 32 are small states each with less than 1.5 million people. More than half of the Commonwealth's 1.7 billion people are under 25 years of age. So trying to present a paper relevant to the planning education, accreditation and inter-professional links relevant to a mosaic of nations with different levels of economic development and cultures is very challenging. Against this canvas

we see the planning profession itself undergoing tremendous changes according to the level of economic development in each country.

The RTPI, with membership of 14,500, residing and working in over 90 countries, and probably the oldest of the professional planning bodies in the Commonwealth, has undertaken a large scale review of the planning profession to gear it for the tasks of the 21st Century which sees the planning profession changing perceptively from a government initiated regulatory infrastructure to that of a consultative process that is more integrative and inclusive. Extensive reference is made to the various reports that set out the new ideas on planning education and accreditation.

PLANNING EDUCATION

The Field and Nature of Town Planning

Town Planning embraces all forms of development and land use activities. It operates in all social strata and on several inter-related spatial levels – local, rural, urban metropolitan, regional, national and international. It is **concerned with the promotion, guidance, enhancement and control of development in the constantly changing physical environment in the interest of the common good but respecting the rights of the individual.**

It makes provision for the future; helps reconcile conflicts of interest; projects physical and social change; facilitates the harmonious evolution of communities; and initiates action for the optimum use of resources. It is both a management and creative activity. It is catalyst in conserving and developing the present and future structure and form of urban and rural areas. It contributes to the creation of the present and the future character of social, physical, economic, organization and environmental quality.

Town Planning is rarely an independent process; it must take account of external decisions. It works through and negotiates with the decision making mechanisms of society's political institutions and public and private sectors. Public participation is an indispensable element in the process. By virtue of its direct involvement with people and their day to day activities, Town Planning inevitably has strong political overtones¹.

¹ Extract from appendix A of the European Council of Town Planners Charter (1988), as quoted in "The Education of Planners – Policy Statement and General Guidance for Academic Institutions offering Initial Professional Education in Planning", RTPI, March, 2001

This may be summarized as:

“Planning contributes to the management of change in the built environment. Effective planning may take many forms, but requires knowledge about urban and regional change, the physical and natural environment, and the social and economic environment, combined understanding and skill in applying this knowledge to policy formulation, implementation and project development in complex political/institutional contexts.”²

The role of planning is therefore to **improve people’s quality of life** be it in the context of rural, metropolitan, regional, national or international levels. In developing countries, in the race to catch up with developed countries, **change** in the built environment is a permanent feature of any management. Planning education therefore has to identify the **WHAT, HOW & WHY** of **CHANGE** in the following:

- Geographical levels of development—rural, urban, regional etc.
- Physical & natural environment
- Socio-economic development
- Skills in the application of knowledge in these fields to policy formulation & implementation
- Techniques of project development and management
- Obtaining political approval, support and resources in the political and institutional contexts

A New Vision for Planning

In June 2001 the RTPI published a paper entitled “**A New Vision for Planning: Delivering Sustainable Communities, Settlements and Places – The Need for Action**” that sets the “context for a dialogue with ...members and others about the way planning should evolve”. The New Vision is built around the core ideas of planning, that is:

- **Spatial** – the management of the competing uses for space & the making of places that are valued & have identity.
- **Sustainable**³ – addresses how planning can mediate between the short term economic and financial benefits, and the medium and long term, social and environmental implications.

² RTPI March 2001: The Education of Planners p.2

³ Defined as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”

- **Integrative** – take account of a wider set of issues, full range of public, corporate and community strategies and initiatives, bringing together wider range of professional skills and disciplines to influence spatial planning and delivery mechanisms.
- **Inclusive** – recognizing the wide range of people involved in planning by respecting differences of opinion, recognizing social and spatial inequalities, withstand independent scrutiny and negotiate through a process of arbitration resulting in shared commitment.

In all the above matters Planning is:

- Value driven – identifies, understands & mediates conflicting sets of values.
- Action oriented – driven by the twin activities of mediating space & making of place.

Based on this *New Vision for Planning RTPI Education Commission* published a lengthy Report⁴ in January 2003 that sets out clearly and with well reasoned confidence the field of planning that gives us the right to claim professional status. The key elements of their observations are:

- ✓ Critical thinking aimed at **achieving outcomes not just procedures.**
- ✓ Space emphasizing **locational relationships** & the impacts and **interrelationships of the sectoral on the spatial** and vice versa.
- ✓ Place – a **focus on outcomes, quality, form and identity** as experienced by occupants.
- ✓ Action or intervention – a deliberative process **focusing on what could and should be done based on ethics, values and facts.** Requires management skills appropriate to securing outcomes.

It does **not** view planning as a governmental activity whose legitimacy depends on statute or regulation, nor in-built economic, social or environmental privilege; but sees planning as necessary and inevitable within any society with aspirations beyond subsistence. Because of its richness and complexity, it calls for a **cadre of people with knowledge, skills and competence to facilitate it.** Therefore the Commission's report insists that the "idea of spatial planning needs to be at the centre of RTPI's requirements for the education of the professional planner, and its thinking about the education of non-professionals who as users of space and place are all active participants in the field of planning".⁵

⁴ RTPI Education Commission – Final Report, January, 2003

⁵ RTPI Education Commission, January 2003, p.3

To achieve these key observations it sets out the future educational, qualifications and training policies of RTPI:

- To specify and validate an educational, training and qualifications framework
- To ensure that such framework reflects growing global and international context for planning
- To create conditions for professional planners trained elsewhere to validate their competence in the UK context
- To provide an educational continuum that allows access to & supports progression from different joining levels for planning interested manpower
- To continue to sponsor & enhance the support for planning education at generic, undergraduate & postgraduate levels
- To ensure that the educational framework has minimum barriers to entry for those who start without a firm commitment to planning; and that it attracts mid-career entrants to promote maximum inclusivity, opportunity and flexibility
- To ensure that RTPI's policies support and validate the development of the skills, knowledge and competencies of practitioners throughout their working lives

The other points made by the Report are:

- ❖ For initial planning education RTPI should provide **indicative guidance than prescriptive course content criteria.**
- ❖ **Shift education policy** from specifying **input requirements towards stressing the outputs**; the outputs expressed in the form of competencies that should be developed through a structured programme of acquiring theoretical and practical knowledge.
- ❖ Assessment of Professional Competence (**APC**) **should be managed by the planning schools** under guidelines & standards specified by RTPI.

Planning Content

Against the backdrop of the Vision statement RTPI has stated that the education of a Town Planner must consist of four components:

- A. **Knowledge** about the various elements that a planner should know.
- B. **Competency** in a range of skills to form relationships across these areas of knowledge.
- C. **Value dimensions** of planning work & ethical responsibilities of the planner.

D. Specialised studies.

A) The **knowledge** required relates to:

- The nature, purpose and methods of planning (theories of planning; historical thoughts in planning; planning methods; roles & relationship of planner).
- Environment and development (forms of natural environment; forms of built environment; the development process; how to manage the natural and built environment).
- The political, institutional and legal context of planning practice (planning systems; law, procedures, organization and governance of planning practice; related areas of policy).
- Specialized areas in the planning field (knowledge in depth in chosen areas of planning).

B) The **competency** required refers to:

- **Planning related skills to:**
 - i. Produce strategies, policies & plans for sustaining and shaping physical environment and the activities it supports.
 - ii. Manage change in the spatial & physical environment and its component activities & facilitate the implementation of development.
 - iii. Communicate spatial & planning related information.
- **Planning related transferable skills in:**
 - i. Problem definition.
 - ii. Data collection, investigation & research.
 - iii. Quantitative & qualitative analysis & appraisal.
 - iv. Aesthetic and design awareness & critique.
 - v. Postulating & evaluation of alternative futures.
 - vi. Collaborative & multidisciplinary working.
 - vii. Weighing evidence, problem solving & decision making.
 - viii. Negotiation, mediation & advocacy.
- **Generic transferable skills in:**
 - i. project & resource management
 - ii. people & organization management & leadership
 - iii. creativity
 - iv. flexibility & adaptability

- v. written, oral, graphic & multi-media communication
- vi. using information technology

C) Awareness of **value dimensions** of planning work & ethical responsibility.
Appreciation & respect for:

- i. Issues of equal opportunity (with respect to race, gender & disability), social justice, economic welfare & efficiency the use of resources;
- ii. Issues of sustainability & sustainable development in protecting & exploiting natural & human resources;
- iii. the role of government & public participation in a democratic society & the balancing of the individual & collective rights and interests ;
- iv. The diversity of cultures, views and ideologies, including respect for the diversity of different values and perspectives, and acknowledgement of their importance in decision making;
- v. Significance of social & cultural heritages;
- vi. The ethics of professional practice & behavior, including the relationship to clients (including politicians), other professionals and the public; use of the Code of Professional Conduct;
- vii. The interconnected social, economic and political dimension.

D) **Specialised studies** refer to:

- An area of planning or related “knowledge in depth” building on the core studies of the course
- Development of appreciation of what “knowledge in depth” means & developing skills in addressing & using knowledge at this level
- Specialized studies enable joint routes to planning & other professional qualifications e.g. Architecture & Planning, Planning & Landscape Architecture, Planning & Environmental Management

The course form, length and mode of study distinguish “**first cycle**” undergraduate programmes and “**second cycle**” graduate programmes. The undergraduate program may extend over four academic years resulting in the award of a Bachelor’s degree at Honours level or equivalent. Half of this time should be devoted to ‘spatial planning’ element and one quarter of time to the ‘specialist element’ (that includes some element of individual investigative work resulting in the submission of a dissertation or major project equivalent .A variation of undergraduate programme is the three year undergraduate degree

covering only the 'spatial element' but those desiring to become Chartered Town Planners must complete the 'specialist element' at graduate level in the same planning school or at another planning school.

The graduate programme must complete both the spatial and specialist elements possibly in **one calendar year or alternately complete each element in a year taking a total of two academic years.**

After completion of the accredited academic qualification two years' practical experience leading to an Assessment of Professional Competence (APC) is required to become a Chartered Town Planner.

Dual professional routes are increasingly being offered by universities with emphasis on cross-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary studies (e.g. dual routes in Architecture and Planning). This is to be welcome provided the curriculum covers all the three planning elements.

ACCREDITATION

The role of national professional planning bodies is to provide guidelines on the content and competency development of that profession and to regulate the professional conduct and practice of various levels of manpower involved in the practice of that profession. Accreditation generally refers to the professional recognition of education providers with their courses, facilities and the staff engaged in the delivery of the programmes based on established standards and levels of provision. The content, competency standards and provision levels of planning education are not intended to be static but in a rapidly changing society, dynamic professional demands, changing technology and international outlook in a globalised world planning education should adapt to changes in the operating context of planning. Therefore new concepts of accreditation are evolving in each Commonwealth country to suit the local requirements.

- In the UK the RTPI Education Commission has recommended **partnership agreements** be established to manage relations between the Institute and the planning schools based on the mutual understanding and trust that has been established over the years. It seeks to make the **accreditation process less regulatory and more constructive**. The partnership is a form of agreement between the planning schools, the RTPI, and possibly representatives of employers with the following conditions included:

- ✓ 5 years' duration, with provision to roll forward annually;
- ✓ a clear statement of the planning school's education focus, its strategy for development and investment to be made in that research undertakings, capability and expected outputs, development of teaching methods and engagement with professional practice;
- ✓ support to students through student membership of RTPI and preparation for the Assessment of Professional Competence (APC)⁶;
- ✓ the planning schools' commitment to support continuing professional development and provision of modules for advanced certificates⁷;
- ✓ an outline of the planning school's marketing strategy and the commitment made by RTPI to support general marketing; and
- ✓ each agreement to be administered by a panel or board on which RTPI, the planning school & the employers are represented—their task to oversee the contract terms are being kept and that the planning school is achieving satisfactory standards in terms of student performance to be presented for Assessment of Professional Competence (APC).

The agreement would relate to the planning school and not the course. Therefore any new or revised course developed by the planning school covering the 3 basic elements of planning education⁸ would qualify from the outset. This increases the flexibility of the planning school to respond to changing market conditions.

⁶ Lead responsibility for APC rests with the planning school & RTPI to be closely involved in the transition to this approach. Consists of 2 years' of structured programme (to be agreed with the employer) of active spatial planning work, programme of life long learning & CPD, with minimal administrative tasks. After 2 years' experience candidate to prepare report on how the candidate has developed his knowledge & skills and submitted to the planning school. This is part of the RTPI accreditation procedures.

⁷ RTPI is required to introduce 'advanced certificates' that declare the holder to be a person with special knowledge and expertise in a recognized field of spatial planning: e.g. urban design, regeneration practices, community planning development management, development economics, land-use transport planning, strategic planning, planning research, management etc.

⁸ Elements of planning education consists of (1) an understanding of what spatial planning is & the skills which underpin it, (2) an in-depth understanding of an area of specialize within spatial planning, and (3) an assessment of professional competence (i.e. fitness to practice).

The advantages of the new approach over the old are summarized as:

- offers the planning school and their students greater certainty about the continuity of accreditation;
- improves the planning school's investment in staffing and research;
- improves the basis of student support through to qualification;
- increases flexibility in the development of courses;
- gives 'end users' (employers) a larger role & greater confidence in the accreditation process; and
- reduce the administrative effort in the long run from both RTPI and the planning school.

For new planning schools the accreditation is proposed to be based on specific courses, as being done at present. But, RTPI is urged to "partner" the planning school from the outset to help develop the frameworks that enables full partnership agreements.

There are also proposals prepared for international accreditation of planning schools by the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in May 2002 on behalf of the Commonwealth Association of Planners.⁹ The writer is not aware of the outcome of the proposals.

QUALITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE PLANNING SCHOOL

Relevant to the accreditation process are qualities that go towards making an effective planning school.

- a) School Organisation.
- b) Academic & Research Strengths in Defined Fields of Planning.
- c) Links between the School & Planning Practice.
- d) Professional Involvement.
- e) Resources.

a) School Organisation:

- The organization of the school must have management and monitoring procedures to review the needs, effectiveness and development of the course.

⁹ See Appendix 2: A Proposal for International Accreditation of Planning Schools by the Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP), Prepared by the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, May 2002.

- Effective consultation with student opinion.
- Planned staff development policies.
- Strong relationship with planning practice.

Indicators: Manual of management and monitoring procedures; mechanism for student consultation; staff development plan; and written plan for relationships with planning practice.

b) Academic & Research Strengths in Defined Fields of Planning:

- Provides challenge to staff and students in their specialist studies.
- Staff composition can be planned on a mix of defined fields.
- Sets appropriate performance expectations for students.

Indicators: Staff qualifications; publications; research income; research rankings; research council recognition for courses and research students; and staff development policy.

c) Links between School & Planning Practice:

- Provides focus to planning knowledge.
- Leads to appreciation of skills.

Indicators: Staff qualifications and experience; relevant staff research (on planning methods); staff consultancy/involvement in planning aid; involvement of practitioners in teaching; role of practitioners in advising school; and sandwich and other placements.

d) Professional Involvement:

- School to be concerned about the profession and its development.
- Majority of the staff should become MIP members.
- Head of Department should be an MIP member or fellow.
- At least one External Examiner should be an MIP member.
- School must have links to local branches of MIP, if there is one.
- Encourage student involvement in branch affairs through student membership of MIP.
- School should provide guidance on career development within the profession.

Indicators: Calendar of professional seminars in school; strategic plan to open / maintain a local chapter of MIP; Plan to involve students in local branch activities

e) Resources:

- **Academic Staff:** Staff-student ratios to reflect importance of skill development and project work
- **Support Staff:** Technical, clerical, administrative staff needed for document management, information technology, graphics, photography and use of AVA equipment.
- **Library and Document Collection:** Access to a broad range of material in design, social, natural, engineering and management sciences. Access to collections of specialist material produced by practicing agencies & allied professions.
- **Computing and IT Equipment:** Access to computing facilities enables report production, data-management, statistical analysis, spatial analysis of data sets, GIS manipulation, map-based work and CAD.
- **Other Equipment:** Facilities for graphic work, video use and production, and photography.
- **Accommodation:** Space for project work, for design teaching and IT computing work.

Inter-Professional Link

Professional bodies represented in the Built Environment fold are **architecture, urban planning, building, housing, surveying and landscape**. All of these professional fields aim at creating a living environment that seeks to promote a better quality of life. Since their intention is the same there is a need to establish links among the professional bodies to better appreciate each other's profession, network among their members to organize continuous professional development programmes and also to serve the clients, be it public or private in a more 'holistic' manner. This way they can provide better value for the money rather than lowest cost.

Inter-Professional Links in the Malaysian environment is limited to the representatives of the various professional bodies serving in the numerous Federal, State or Municipal government organized committees and advisory bodies where the professionals offer their comments and advice to third parties but do not themselves work together to enhance their professions as is being done elsewhere. Therefore we need to look at some overseas examples to

provide indicators for the promotion of inter-professional co-operation locally and other commonwealth countries.

Better Together Project

A key recommendation of the United Kingdom Urban Task Force Report¹⁰ (1999) was the establishment of: *"joint working between professional institutions, education providers and employers to develop a plan of action for improving the skills-base in urban development over the next five to seven years"*.

In response to this a project was mooted by the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL) from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Higher and Further Education and Employment. Project bids were invited from higher education institutions that demonstrated high quality in their educational provision, as judged by the teaching quality assessment exercise. Among the bids Sheffield Hallam University, Kingston University and Oxford Brookes University have been chosen to work collaboratively with **RICS, RTPI, CIH, CIOB** and **RIBA** represented on the project's steering committee. The project aims to explore how inter-professional collaboration in the built environment can be fostered and reflected in the built environment curriculum. Their *working definition* of inter-professional education is *'a learning process in which different professionals learn from and about each other in order to develop collaborative practice'*. It is commonly known as 'Better Together' project.¹¹ See Appendix 1 for details of this project flow.

The key beneficiaries of the output of this project will be all built environment schools and their students, the professional institutes, employers and wider community groups

Project LINK

Linking Teaching with Research and Consultancy in the Disciplines of Planning, Land and Property Management, and Building¹² (or 'LINK' for short) is a project being undertaken by Oxford Brookes University, The University of the West of England, University of Westminster and Sheffield Hallam University, into the what, where and how of Linking Teaching with Research and Consultancy in the three disciplines. It began in **September 2000**

¹⁰ See the Report in <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm>

¹¹ See <http://www.bettertogether.ac.uk/background.cfm>

¹² See <http://www.brookes.ac.uk/schools/planning/LTRC/about.htm>

and is due to be completed by **September 2003**. From October 2003 the project enters a new phase of transferability where it will work with one other discipline in each of the institutions to embed the findings of the project in those disciplines. Linking teaching to research and consultancy **enriches** students' knowledge of their subject. Linking teaching to research and consultancy **embeds** skills and capabilities which enhance graduate employability. The project is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Department for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment under the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning.

The Centre for Education in the Built Environment (CEBE)¹³

CEBE aims to assist the whole UK Higher Education Built Environment community to further improve educational quality to ensure that the UK continues to remain innovative in the provision of education and training nationally and internationally.

CEBE is one of 24 Subject Centres which comprise part of the Higher Education Academy¹⁴. The primary purpose of CEBE is to provide discipline based support for learning and teaching in the built environment subject communities of Architecture, Landscape, Urban Planning, Housing and Transport, Construction and Real Estate. The Centre aims to:

- Support built environment academics in maintaining and enhancing the quality and effectiveness of their teaching.
- Facilitate knowledge brokerage through the identification, analysis and dissemination of information on good educational practices.
- Stimulate and facilitate a culture of communication and dialogue on innovative teaching between built environment educators.
- Provide opportunities for staff development.
- Review and encourage discipline based research on learning and teaching.

For teachers in any of the built environment subject areas, the Centre can provide:

- Resource materials and current information on developments in built environment education.

¹³ See The Centre for Education in the Built Environment (CEBE) in <http://www.cebe.ltsn.ac.uk/index.html>

¹⁴ See Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) :The Higher Education Academy in <http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/>

- Contact with other colleagues with similar interests through networks, discussion and focus groups.
- Registers of identified experts and expertise.
- Up-to-date approaches to learning and teaching (including the use of C&IT).
- Advice to enable teachers to design and develop ideas for learning, teaching and assessing.
- Arrange visits, demonstrations and workshops to aid staff development.
- Publish regular newsletters

The Australian Council of Building Design Professionals (BDP)

This is an organization of professional associations united to achieve better practices, policies, legislation and regulation for the design of the built environment. The professions represented here belong to the Architects, Engineers, Quantity Surveyors, Landscape Architects and Planners. Member organizations retain their individual identities, policies and positions but are able to promote a unified position through BDP that exerts a powerful influence for the design professions.

Continuing Professional Education conducted by BDP member organizations are open to the other association members to ensure that building and urban design practitioners participate in an ongoing program of self-education and improvement.

The above examples shows that the professionals in the built environment education sector needs to collaborate to explore solutions to common problems, seek solutions and share one's own teaching success with others in the profession to elevate the whole field to new levels of achievement in a competitive world.

Appendix 1: Project Timetable: Better Together

Links	Item	Details	Date
Project background Resources	Project start date		15 November 2000
	Milestone 1	Report on External Users' Priorities in Inter-Professional Education.	July 2001
	Interim Milestone	Initial collection of materials from partner institutions.	February 2002
	Milestone 2	1 st set of working examples of inter-professional teaching materials.	June 2002
	Milestone 3	2 nd set of working examples of inter-professional teaching materials.	October 2002
	Milestone 4	On-Line guide to inter-professional education.	October 2003
	Milestone 5	Report on the professional accreditation of inter-professional education.	October 2003 (deferred to 2004)
	Milestone 6	Final project report.	November 2003
	Original Project end date		14 November 2003
	Final Project end date		31 March 2004

Source: <http://www.bettertogether.ac.uk/background.cfm>

Appendix 2: 1st Proposal

A Proposal for International Accreditation of Planning Schools by the Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP)

Towards a New Vision for Planning Education in the Commonwealth

Commonwealth countries share certain commonalities in terms of history and language, but, many countries also share similar development challenges that relate to issues such as accelerated urbanization, poverty, informality, lack of adequate services, skewed patterns of land ownership, institutional constraints, and environmental degradation. In terms of planning, many of the laws, procedures and systems, and much of the substantive content, have been derived from Great Britain. This is an important heritage that provides some commonality between countries, but it is also a limitation in terms of the particular issues and contexts that planning must respond to in many Commonwealth countries. There is an urgent need for planning education in the Commonwealth to be more contextually responsive at the same time it draws strength from its historical roots. Any system of international accreditation for Planning Schools should recognize and support the evolving nature of planning in post-colonial Commonwealth.

The Need for International Accreditation of Planning Schools

The internationalization of professional activity, and of academic endeavour, is an important trend that should be actively supported by an organization such as the Commonwealth association of Planners (CAP). The mobility of professionals, academics, and students, and the transferability of skills across national boundaries, needs to happen within a framework that provides for negotiated norms regarding the standards and content of training. The intention should not be to promote uniformity but rather to ensure that, within the context of diversity, there is sufficient agreement and understanding to allow movement and exchange to take place.

Within the Commonwealth there are member countries that have mechanisms in place for the setting of standards and the accreditation of academic institutions and programmes. In general, these are based on the British model, although there are important variations. Cross border accreditation and recognition is however only limited to the agreements between the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and professional bodies in countries including Canada and Australia. There is a need for a far wider multi-lateral agreement between Commonwealth members for the mutual recognition of educational and training processes, and the registration of planning professionals. This agreement should

take account of the diverse contexts of the Commonwealth countries, and of the different forms in which planning happens within these countries. The simple extension of an existing system to other countries will not necessarily provide the most appropriate mechanism for accreditation.

Principles of Accreditation

The objectives of a system of accreditation should be to:

- Provide a basis for expanding international collaboration involving professionals and academics;
- Provide a framework for the cross border transferability of professional skills, and,
- Provide a mechanism to promote the upgrading and maintenance of academic and professional standards.

The following principles should inform the development of a system of accreditation:

- The accreditation process should be based on an agreed set of norms and standards that should be consistently and rigorously applied;
- There should however be proper recognition of the contextuality of planning and planning education, and the accreditation process should therefore not attempt to impose a common view of planning across the Commonwealth.
- Where possible, the Commonwealth accreditation process should link with and support national accreditation processes; and,
- The accreditation process should be as uncomplicated as possible, and should take account of the resource constraints of the international body and of local institutions.

Proposed Process for Accreditation

The following process is proposed:

- i. An International accreditation Panel (IAP) be elected at the next meeting of the commonwealth Association of Planners. This panel should have fair representation from across the Commonwealth. The function of this Panel should be to:
 - Set policy and standards regarding the accreditation of planning programmes in tertiary educational institutions;
 - Draw up guidelines for conducting accreditation visits;

- Compile and maintain a list of persons eligible for appointment to Accreditation Committees, and of institutions and associations that may compile and maintain local lists;
 - Appoint members of Accreditation Committees
 - Provide the Chairpersons from amongst its membership for local Accreditation Committees;
 - Confirm and formalize the granting and withdrawal of accreditation to planning programmes; and,
 - Issue annually a list of programmes that are accredited by CAP
- ii. Planning Schools/Programmes should be invited to apply for accreditation on a form that would provide the IAP with introductory information about the School/Programme.
 - iii. The IAP should appoint one local representative and one international representative to make a Preliminary Visit to School to assess readiness for a full accreditation visit, and to provide guidance to the School in preparing for such a visit. That should happen within six months of the initial application.
 - iv. The IAP should select a Local Accreditation Panel for the visit ensuring:
 - A mix of practicing and academic members (with the possible inclusion of laypersons representing employers and other interest);
 - That at least one third of members are international;
 - The Chairperson is a member of IAP; and
 - Where possible the CAP accreditation visit is linked to a national accreditation process.
 - v. Within six months after a Preliminary Visit the School should provide the IAP with full documentation following the required format
 - vi. Within three months after the receipt of this documentation the School should be visited by the Local Accreditation Panel, which should spend at least three days at the School.
 - vii. The Local accreditation Panel should be empowered to disclose to the School a preliminary recommendation on accreditation to the School (although a recommendation may be deferred in unusual instances).
 - viii. The recommendation should be confirmed by IAP.
 - ix. The School should be re-visited by a Local Accreditation Panel within five years of the initial visit to confirm the extension of international accreditation.
 - x. Schools should be provided flexibility to adjust and adapt their programmes between accreditation visits, but substantial changes should be reported to the IAP.

Categories of Accreditation

The following categories are recommended:

Full Accreditation – This is awarded for a period of five years, although it may be extended on an annual basis if there are no evident factors that may affect accreditation.

Provisional accreditation – This will be awarded when a programme is considered to have inadequacies that affect the quality of the degree, but that may realistically be remedied within a reasonable period of time. Provisional accreditation may be awarded for a period of one or two years, and may be converted to a full accreditation after a re-evaluation visit by a full panel or a reduced number of members drawn from the original panel. It may also be awarded to a new programme within an accredited School, subject to review at the next accreditation visit.

If the decision is **not to award accreditation**, or to **withdraw accreditation**, on the basis of inadequacies that cannot be rectified within reasonable period of time, there needs to be clear statement as to what is required to attain accreditation in the future, and CAP should provide support to the School to achieve the necessary standards.

Validation Criteria

Major validation criteria relate to:

- Content of the Academic Programme,
- Quality Assurance, and
- School Equipment and Resources

Content of the Academic Programme

It is important that there is flexibility in determining appropriate content, and that there is adequate recognition to local content and approaches. However, there are areas of content that are widely accepted in the Commonwealth and elsewhere as fundamental to planning education, and that are necessary for international transferability of qualifications. In evaluating the academic content the Panel should consider the following questions:

- i. Is there an adequate intellectual; and theoretical basis for the planning that is taught in the school? (i.e., Are the major historical traditions, debates, and approaches in the area of planning theory adequately covered? Is this theory properly related to local context? Is there adequate integration between the teaching of theory and practice?

- ii. Is there an adequate coverage of technologies, techniques, and methodologies used in planning?
- iii. Is there an adequate legal and institutional knowledge? (Note that whilst the focus is on local planning law and institutions, the programme should provide an adequate understanding of general principle, and of different international example/approaches/debates to allow for transferability)
- iv. Is there an adequate understanding of professional practice and of planning ethics?
 - v. Does the programme give sufficient attention to the development of analytical, communication, presentation and other generic skills?
 - vi. Does the programme promote creative, strategic and integrative thinking?
 - vii. Does the programme include an adequate practical and studio-based component?
- viii. Does the programme include the opportunity for independent research?
- ix. Is there sufficient linkage with related disciplines including, for example, sociology, economics, geography, architecture, and civil engineering?
 - x. Is the pedagogical approach appropriate? (i.e. Is there a proper progression from a simple to a more complex understanding of planning, and is there adequate support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds?)
- xi. Is there an adequate balance between attention to local content, and attention to debates and ideas of global concern?
- xii. Does the programme cover scales of planning from local to regional, and preferably to national and international, and does it provide an adequate comparative understanding of planning systems internationally?
- xiii. Is there sufficient attention to the developmental issues faced by most Commonwealth countries?

Quality Assurance

Key questions that need to be asked include:

- i. Are admission criteria of a sufficient high standard?
- ii. What is the quality of teaching, research, leadership, and management within the School?
- iii. Does the learning process include a sufficient diversity of teaching methods?
- iv. Are marking standards consistent with accepted norms?

- v. Are methods of assessment adequate?
- vi. Is there sufficiently rigorous process of external examination?

School Equipment and Resources

The key questions here include:

- i. Is there a sufficient number of adequately qualified staff to support the student numbers?
- ii. Is the bulk of the programme taught by full-time staff members who are accessible to students?
- iii. Are members of staff sufficiently involved in research and professional activities?
- iv. Is there adequate quality space for lecturing, studios, seminars, and for administration and research?
- v. Do staff and students have adequate access to computers and appropriate software?
- vi. Do staff and students have adequate access to library resources?
- vii. Is the School sufficiently provided for in terms of finance?
- viii. Is the university supportive of the school, and where is the School placed in terms of the academic planning of the institution?

The IAC should be tasked with negotiating and developing appropriate norms for each of the above. In addition to the issues above, which could be measured against reasonably objective validation criteria, the panel should also consider questions that address the ethos and morale of the School.

Conclusion

Finally, it should be noted that there are critical issues that have not been addressed in this proposal. The most important of these is the financing of the accreditation process. It is a common practice in some countries for the School under consideration to bear costs; however, many Schools in the Commonwealth have very limited financial resources.

Draft Proposal Prepared at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in May, 2002

Appendix 2: 2nd Proposal

Discussion Draft – GLOBAL PLANNING EDUCATION ASSOCIATION NETWORK (GPEAN)

AN INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM OF RECOGNITION OF PLANNING SCHOOLS AND/OR STUDENTS:

MOTIVATION AND A WAY FORWARD

Paper prepared by Vanessa Watson, Bruce Stiffler and Roberto Rodriguez for GPEAN.

Background

The Global Planning Education Association Network (GPEAN), a nine member network representing planning schools in most parts of the world, discussed international credentialing of planning education at its 2003 annual meeting in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, and decided to initiate a multi-year process of discussion on the issue. This document sets out a motivation for international credentialing and discusses some possible ways in which such a system could be established. Finally a programme of action for member planning school associations, intended to lead to possible actions on international credentialing, is laid out.

Motivation

Many countries and regions have their own systems of accrediting planning schools, but increasingly planning schools from various parts of the world are seeking accreditation by one of the main country-based accrediting bodies, the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and the US Planning Accreditation Board (PAB), in order to gain a degree of international recognition. Such requests can place accreditation bodies in a difficult position as the basis for evaluation is often unclear, contexts differ significantly, and applicant schools are faced with the heavy cost of travel and subsistence for the accrediting team. These requests are occurring, on the one hand, as a result of the increasing international mobility of planning graduates who wish to work in various parts of the world; and on the other hand, as a result of the lack of accreditation systems in certain countries where planning schools nonetheless see the value of accreditation both to themselves and their students.

Some system of international consultation and/or evaluation could help to improve the quality of planning education in those parts of the world where no

system of accreditation is currently in place, and would offer important quality assurance to potential employers of planning graduates in all parts of the world. Such a system could be preferable to the present ad hoc one, which in any event may perpetuate a one-way relationship between ‘first world’ accrediting bodies and planners from elsewhere, and perhaps bias planning education towards the concerns of countries in the North. International consultation and/or evaluation would offer the opportunity to consider criteria for planning education from a truly international and multi-cultural perspective.

It is also of significance that other related professions, such as engineering, have taken the decision to establish an international accreditation system. It appears to be an issue that planners will have to confront at some stage.

Possible approaches to international consultation and/or evaluation

There are many possible “models” of international consultation and/or evaluation. Among these are:

- Some form of international accreditation based on international (or regional) criteria and employing visits to schools/departments by an international team. A key issue here is how the cost of travel and subsistence is funded, particularly in poorer countries.
- International determinations of Substantial Equivalency undertaken by one or more existing accrediting organizations.
- Curriculum-wide international (or regional) consultation leading to advice to be considered by institutions under review. This might include site visits.
- International approval of certain specific ‘conversion’ courses (referring to a unit of instruction and not a full programme leading to a degree), offered to planning graduates and examined at a particular centre within a country. The RTPI is currently considering this option for commonwealth countries. The RTPI would approve the content and examination of two courses offered locally to planning graduates, would require two years of structured practical experience (in their local context), and would subject the applicant to an Assessment of Professional Competence. This approach could offer a model to be followed by an international accrediting agency.
- Development of distance learning methodologies to deliver course content electronically to applicants and to conduct an examination in their home countries. Such content would have to be developed in discussions with local associations and existing accreditation bodies.

Any system of international accreditation would have to be sensitive to the vast differences in resources and contexts across the globe, along with possible fears by planning schools in poorer countries that they would be subjected to unachievable 'first world' standards. Key issues for planners and planning educators in countries of the South are very different to those in the North, and this understanding would need to be accommodated in the establishment of performance criteria. Resource constraints and inequalities also mean that an accreditation programme would need to be accompanied by a developmental programme which offered guidance (and possibly practical help and resources) to planning schools seeking accreditation. Without this, the divide between better-off planning schools able to secure accreditation and those unable to do so, would simply increase.

The way forward

The full support of the existing country-based accreditation bodies (and particularly the RTPi and PAB), which have a wealth of experience in accreditation matters, is crucial to this initiative. Also crucial is support from planning schools and their associations – both from those countries with accreditation systems and those without. But first thorough consultation needs to take place around the form of an international capacity and the various models of consultation.

It is suggested here that GPEAN could play a role in initiating discussion on this issue, first within planning school associations, and then in conjunction with existing accrediting bodies. Both the RTPi and the Commonwealth Association of Planners have given some thought to the question of accreditation of schools outside of the UK, and this will provide a useful input to the debate. *As a practical first step it is suggested that future planning school congresses arrange panel discussions on the issue of international evaluation and consultation, and invite speakers from existing professional and accrediting bodies to contribute to these.* GPEAN representatives would be asked to feed back on these debates to the GPEAN co-ordinating committee, which could act as a point of co-ordination and dissemination for these debates. The next World Planning Schools Congress in 2006 would provide a good opportunity to assess the extent to which consensus has emerged on this issue.

This document is therefore being sent to planning school association representatives on GPEAN, with a request to raise the issue where appropriate in your association, and to put forward proposals for panel discussions in upcoming congresses.

Angus Witherby
(GPEAN chair)
August, 2003

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