Planners of the future: expectations, motivations, and experiences

A snapshot from 2019-2020

"*… in my point of view, planners are society's humanisers*" (Postgraduate Student)

"*I want to have a positive impact, that may go unnoticed, and promotes values such as inclusivity, accessibility*" (Undergraduate Student)

A report for the Royal Town Planning Institute, from the UWE Planning School, published in March 2021

UWE Bristol | University of the West of England

Headlines

*This report provides the findings from three surveys of planning students and recent graduates in the UK and Ireland, to explore their **motivations**, their **ideas** about planning, and their **expectations** for a career in planning. In total, 279 planning students or graduate licentiate members of the RTPI participated in one of the three surveys, providing a significant body of knowledge to further our understanding of how planning is viewed both by students new to planning and those early in their planning careers. With planning reform high on the political agenda[1], it is particularly important that we **understand** and **nurture** the **views and aspirations of planners of the future** whose responsibility it will be to implement and challenge the system to ensure the benefits of good planning are realised. The findings are a significant contribution to furthering our understanding of young planners and are of relevance, therefore, not just to educators (both in schools and universities) but to the RTPI, employers and politicians alike.*

1. The students and graduates who completed these three surveys clearly **care about the environment, cities, the future, and are motivated to make places better for people**. They perceive planning as a profession offering the 'ability to make a difference'.

2. Although the specific motivations of individuals vary, the most frequently cited motivation for studying planning was '**opportunities for career progression'**.

3. Many respondents also chose to study planning because of an **evident enthusiasm for the subject, particularly its inter-disciplinary nature, and for its role in improving places**, most notably cities and urban areas.

4. Students were asked about their desires for change, and whilst numerous topics were identified, the overwhelming focus on **achieving positive environmental change was striking**.

5. They have **strong ideas about planning values** ranging from values associated with professional practice such as integrity and honesty, to ideas around the public interest and the promotion of balanced and sustainable development.

6. Some students raised the possibility – right from the outset of their studies - that **the reality of planning might be distant from their ideal**, using words like 'rule-based', 'rigid', 'technocratic' and 'bureaucratic'.

7. The majority of respondents described their levels of 'optimism' about the ability of planning to make a difference as 'somewhat optimistic', suggesting a degree of circumspection about **the contribution that planning can and will make**.

8. Whilst the majority of **graduates reported that their early career experiences had matched up to their original expectations**, some chose to qualify this by also expressing some uncertainty about planning's ability to affect change in reality, questioning, in particular, the political nature of planning decision making. 21% of graduates reported that their early career experiences had not matched up to their original expectations.

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[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-build-build-build

9. Both current students and recent graduates, reported enjoying a wide range of elements of their planning courses. Striking, however, was the number of participants **who wanted far greater course content focused on practice**. This exposes the important (and long standing) conversation about what planning education is for: is it professional training to deliver 'practice-ready' students, or a more abstract education in critical thinking about spaces and places?

10. Most of the students new to planning were understandably undecided as to their intended career destinations, with the **majority of students expressing openness to both public and private sector career routes**. Nevertheless, of the total choices expressed, a private sector route was the marginal preference.

11. The potential for a **tension between the perceived public interest values of planning and private sector employment routes** was alluded to but with little in-depth comment. More understanding is needed as to how ideas around the value of planning (particularly, although not exclusively, public interest values) influence intended employment choices.

Contents

1. Introduction

Why do students elect to study town planning at university? What has motivated that decision, and, importantly, what do students aspire to achieve as a result of their choice? These are three questions that we, as the authors of this report, posed in an article published in 2019 in the journal of the Town and Country Planning Association[2], on 'planners of the future, planning for the future?'. Our motivation for writing this piece was twofold:

Firstly, we were interested in some recent international accounts reporting an increasing mismatch between what initially motivates students to study planning – an 'ideal of planning' with ambitions to make places better – and the reality of day-to-day practices of planning. Early practice experiences are, it is reported, failing to live up to this notional ideal. 'Disillusion in many young practitioners' is being noted, inducing them to abandon the 'planning ethos they were taught – often very early in their careers', leading to 'despair, disappointment'[3]. There is, however, a surprising lack of empirical research in this area and much of it is anecdotal meaning that we know little about whether this narrative is a widespread reality. In addition, this narrative is largely international[4], with little work focused on UK practice. This is a significant gap given the particular characteristics of planning in the UK and Ireland, with its high percentage of private sector practitioners and its discretionary nature creating a distinctive approach to development management not seen within other planning systems. The legislative and policy frameworks are also not typical of those that would be found in the majority of nations internationally.

Secondly, we argued that there is a void in our knowledge about planning students, with the voices of student planners and early professionals both rarely heard, and even more rarely, thoroughly researched. In addressing this, a critical part in furthering our understanding of early practitioners' experiences is to understand future planners from the beginning of their journey: do undergraduate and graduate students enter the planning profession with hopes of pursuing the public interest and making the world a better place? Are more commercial motivations present? Are aspirations dashed within the early years of practice or do careers fulfill expectation? And are we, as researchers and educators, either projecting our own feelings, or underestimating the knowledge of the world held by students? Where disconnects do exist, what could / should be done?

These considerations raise issues of note for both practitioners and educators - reflecting their roles in nurturing new planners and informing the nature of planning now and into the future.

This report represents the first stage in some longitudinal research that seeks to help fill 'this empty'[5] vessel of knowledge about planning students and young planners studying and practising in the UK. It presents the findings from three surveys:

1. **The first** is a survey, endorsed by the RTPI, carried out by the University of the West of England (UWE) of undergraduate and postgraduate students across all accredited planning schools in the UK and Ireland at the *beginning of their planning studies* in September 2019[6];

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[2] Hickman, H., McClymont, K., & Sheppard, A. (2019). Planners of the future, planning for the future?. Available from https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/852615

[3] Taşan-Kok, T. & Oranje, M. (2018) 'Young practitioners' reflections on contemporary ethical challenges'. In T Taşan-Kok and M Oranje: From Student to Urban Planner: Young Practitioners' Reflections on Contemporary Ethical Challenges. Routledge.

[4] See also, Tasan-Kok, T. (2016) "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee": Giving voice to planning practitioners, Planning Theory & Practice, 17(4), pp: 621-651.

[5] Taşan-Kok, T. & Oranje, M. (2018) 'Young practitioners' reflections on contemporary ethical challenges'. In T Taşan-Kok and M Oranje: From Student to Urban Planner: Young Practitioners' Reflections on Contemporary Ethical Challenges. Routledge.

[6] This second year of this survey, for students beginning their planning studies between September 2020 and January 2021 has recently closed and will be reported on later in 2021.

2. **The second** is a survey carried out by the Royal Town Planning Institute of undergraduate and postgraduate RTPI student members *in any year of study* during the spring of 2020; and
3. **The third** is a survey carried out by the Royal Town Planning Institute of licentiate members of the RTPI, graduates who have completed a fully RTPI accredited qualification and are on the journey towards becoming a Chartered Town Planner via the Licentiate Assessment of Professional Competence (L-APC), also completed during the spring of 2020.

Whilst the UWE and RTPI surveys were initially conceived of separately, our common areas of interest led us to collaborate in the joint presentation of findings. A total of 279 licentiates and students completed one of the above surveys, providing a substantial body of information about young planners as follows:

Survey	Number of Completions
1	208
2	42
3	29
Total	**279**

The results of each of the individual surveys are presented separately in the following sections (2-3). We conclude by drawing some comparisons across the three surveys and considering the implications of this research now and moving forwards. This is important because this report is just a snapshot from 2019-2020. What is critical is to understand the journey of these students: how do their experiences of planning match up to their original expectations and ideas of planning once they reach practice? And then, what are the implications of this for both planning education and practice in the future?

Research team

This research has been led for UWE Bristol by:

➢ Hannah Hickman, Senior Research Fellow;
➢ Dr Katie McClymont, Senior Lecturer, and programme leader for the MSc in Urban Planning at UWE; and
➢ Adam Sheppard, Lecturer, and Associate Head of Department - Geography and Environmental Management.

This research has been led for the RTPI by:

➢ Andrew Close, Director of Education and Profession; and
➢ Judith Taylor, Higher Education Manager

Acknowledgements

We are extremely grateful to:

➢ all the undergraduates, postgraduates and graduate and licentiate members of the RTPI for taking time to complete one of the above surveys;
➢ to the support of the Planning Schools Forum, and its members, for its assistance in the dissemination of the UWE survey;
➢ to the University of Liverpool (John Sturzaker and Sebastian Dembski) for providing feedback on the draft UWE survey prior to launch; and
➢ Nick Smith (UWE Bristol), for acting as reviewer and critical friend.

2. Survey 1: UWE Bristol – Student Expectations and Motivations Survey Results

2.1 Introduction

In September 2019 all RTPI accredited Planning Schools in the UK and Ireland were invited to share an online survey with their first year undergraduate and first year postgraduate students, at the start of their course. This survey is the first step in a longitudinal study of these students; we wanted to understand students' motivations and ideas about planning at the beginning of their studies to create data on current perspectives, in order to be able to explore how these change as their studies progress and they move on into practice (either in planning or elsewhere).

The survey was developed and peer reviewed by staff within the RTPI accredited Planning School located in the Faculty of Environment and Technology at UWE Bristol, with feedback from both the RTPI and planning staff at the University of Liverpool. It comprised both open and closed questions ranging from what motivated students to study planning and their ideas about planning values, to their aspirations for practice and intended career routes. Analysis has been undertaken, co-funded by the Institute, using both MS Excel and NVIVO qualitative data software: MS Excel for the quantitative data, and NVIVO to code and analyse open ended responses in order to draw out themes. A copy of the survey is appended to this report.

The results presented below are data from a specific moment in time for the respondents, not an in-depth exploration of these issues. The data presented therefore represents a baseline, which the UWE project aims to build upon over the next few years. The longitudinal nature of this work will allow for more in-depth study, including qualitative research with individuals, in subsequent years, focused on early practice experiences.

2.2 The nature of respondents

A total of 208 responses were received from first year undergraduate and first year postgraduate students across 18 universities, with representation from Planning Schools across England, Ireland (including the Irish Republic), Scotland and Wales[7].

There was a near even split between **postgraduates and undergraduates**, with 96 completions from undergraduates and 111 from postgraduates (one unstated). The postgraduate group of students came from a range of prior undergraduate study backgrounds, but by far the most common two were Geography and Architecture, followed by design-related courses and environmental studies[8].

There was a similarly even split between **'home' students and those studying in the UK from overseas**, with:

- 100 responses from UK students;
- 27 response from students from overseas, but within the EU[9]; and
- 75 responses from overseas and outside of the EU.

Figure 1 shows the split of respondents by origin: the most notable points being the high % of postgraduate respondents from overseas, outside of the EU, and the predominance of undergraduate completions from UK students.

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[7] Students completing these surveys were from the following universities: Birmingham City, Brighton, Cardiff, Dundee, Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Oxford Brookes, Plymouth, Reading, Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam, Ulster, University College Dublin, University College London, and University of the West of England.

[8] Other disciplines taken by two or more students included psychology, management studies, journalism, international development, European studies, languages, and English.

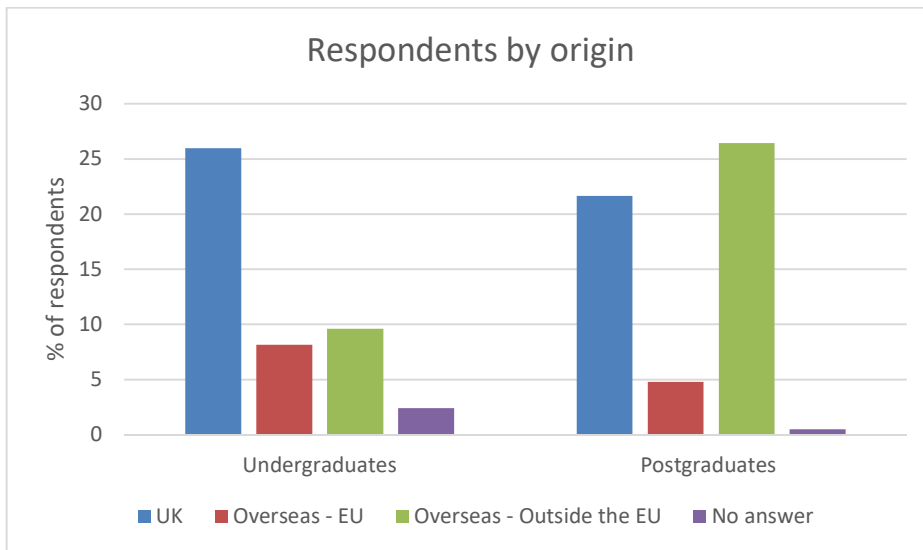[9] Students from the EU were concentrated within two institutions.

Figure 1: Survey respondents by origin

Respondents were also asked whether they **currently work or had prior experience of working in planning practice**. Of the 29% of respondents who had some current or prior experience, the majority (56.1 %) had experience of 6 months or more. The data suggested a higher number of postgraduate students with practice experience (particularly practice experience of 6 months or more), reflecting the characteristics of this student group which typically includes more part-time and in work students than would normally be present on an undergraduate route. The data also suggested that very few overseas students had prior practice experience. However, with a large number of students failing to fill in the question on length of practice experience, these are more tentative findings.

All the data have been coded to allow us to analyse any patterns or variations according to the nature of respondents so we could explore, for example:

- did postgraduates appear to have a different perspective to undergraduates?;
- did existing experience of planning practice shape students' reported levels of optimism about the power of planning?'; and
- did a non-UK background influence ideas around planning values?

We found surprisingly little variation that aligned with types of respondent, but where trends did appear, we report them in the substantive findings.

2.3 Why study planning?

"That's my dream." (origin not given)

"I wish to improve my city by turning it into a more liveable place." (Undergraduate, from overseas – outside of the EU)

"It seems like a good way to make a difference about issues important to me like climate change and the housing crisis." (Undergraduate, from the UK)

"I have always been interested in design, and always had a love of geography. I wanted to find out more about planning, to develop a career." (Postgraduate, from the UK)

"It was a mixture between three of my favourite subjects: Human geography, sociology and economics." (Undergraduate, from the UK)

Students were asked the open-ended question, '*why did you decide to study planning?'.* Responses have been coded, allowing for responses to be coded across multiple areas if students provided extended or expansive responses. In descending order of frequency, the top 6 themes that emerged were:

Career plans and prospects: 61 students specifically mentioned career plans and prospects as a particular motivation for studying planning. Observations varied from the brief, '*I'm interested in planning jobs*', to the more extensive, '*I would like to further my career in a discipline I find very interesting. I have worked in a planning department for the last 5 years in a peripheral role and would like to get a deeper understanding of the subject with the view to becoming a Planning Officer'.* Notable was the number of respondents who referred to the requirements of either current or future employers as their study motivation, such as '*I require a masters for job progression in my organisation*', or '*I need an RTPI accredited degree in order to progress*'. There was, therefore, a strong sense of the need for a fully accredited degree to achieve necessary professional qualification/standing, whether at undergraduate or postgraduate, which in turn would enable career progression: '*I studied planning modules during my undergraduate degree and really enjoyed it, and decided I wanted to go into planning professionally. For this I would be at a significant disadvantage by not having studied it at postgraduate or undergraduate level and being without an RTPI/RICS accredited degree'.*

General interest in the subject: 50 students referred to a general interest in the subject, often although not exclusively prompted by an introduction to planning whilst studying geography as an undergraduate. These students tended not to provide extensive responses, instead providing brief statements such as: '*planning is interesting and affecting our daily lives*', and '*because it seemed like an interesting and versatile course to study'.* Some students referred to work experience as having prompted their interest.

Interest in cities and urban areas: 31 students made specific reference to their interest in cities and urban areas as a specific motivation for studying planning. There were three themes within this: the first was simple expression of a love for cities or fascination with urban change; the second was a desire to understand cities better in order to affect change; and the third was a specific desire to '*build better cities'* in response to their contemporary challenges and urbanization.

Inter-disciplinary nature of planning: 22 students referred to the inter-disciplinary nature of planning as their study motivation- often also linking this to how it is applicable and useful in solving 'real world' problems. These responses tended to be succinct: '*I think it covers a lot of areas I'm interested in- human geography, sociology, environmental issues. I first became interested through following the housing crisis in Dublin'*, and, '*Planning encompasses a wide array of things and allows me to understand the breadth of what happens around us, but also the depth to make a difference'.*

The ability to make a positive contribution: 22 students referred to the ability of planning to make a difference. Some students expressed this in emphatic but succinct terms, '*my future aspirations have been shaped by wanting a role that makes a difference',* and '*I want to be able to bring change to my country by being part of the planning system*'. Others referred to specific areas in which they wished to make a difference, with a positive impact on people predominating: '*I felt that planning was the subject that would allow me to have the greatest positive impact on the livelihood of people', 'I want to help people live a better life through my hard work and this course helps me make it come true',* and '*It seems like a good way to make a difference about issues important to me like climate change and the housing crisis'.*
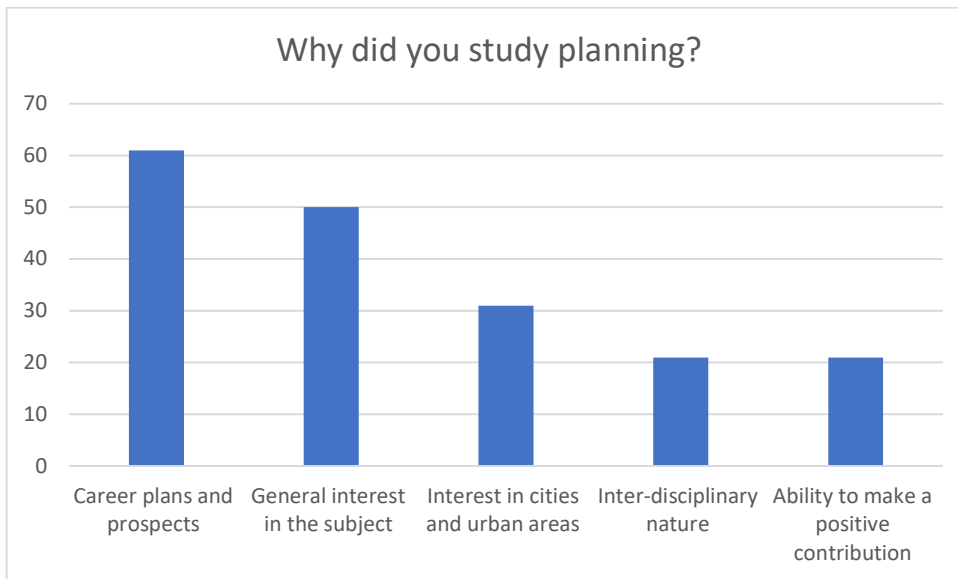
Figure 2: Reasons for studying planning

In addition to these five themes, many students also raised **topic specific interests**, with design being the most prominent theme ("*I saw planning as an extension of architecture*"), followed by environmental and social issues. Notable here were the students that had a specific interest in studying planning in order to address issues in the global south.

There were few patterns between 'types' of student, with three exceptions:

➢ Students from overseas (outside of the EU) more frequently expressed a desire to study planning in order to improve the quality of life (expressed in variety of ways) in their home country – "*I want to help people live a better life through my hard work and this course help me make it come true*";
➢ Postgraduates were more likely to reference existing practice experience and associated enjoyment; and
➢ UK undergraduate students were more likely to mention career prospects as their study motivation.

In addition to being asked why they wanted to study planning, students were asked if they knew, prior to commencing their course, what a planner does for a job and or whether they had previously spoken to a planner. The majority of students said they were aware of what a planner does for a job (87.6%), whereas fewer had previously spoken to a professional planner (53.6%).

2.4 Alternative course options

54% of respondents had considered other course options, with undergraduates making up a slightly higher proportion of this group. The types of other courses considered are shown in descending order of frequency in the diagram below:

Humanities and social sciences (geography, history, sociology, law, international relations, regional studies, social policy, philosophy, economics, languages)

Design (architecture, urban design, landscape architecture)

Real estate (surveying, management, marketing, commerce, business, construction management)

Environmental (environmental science, sustainable development/cities, environmental studies, EIA, water/air quality)

Other (transport, GIS, teaching)

One-off others

"*I considered International Relations but found it was too theoretical. I wanted something vocational, a planning degree would give me the right skill set and knowledge*" (Undergraduate, UK)

"*Initially I thought I would study veterinary medicine ... then I changed my mind and was set on committing to a career based around research and science surrounding the environment and climate crisis. I had chosen environmental science as my top three choices however felt city planning would also contribute somewhat to the general improvement of the world at this current moment ... I couldn't imagine studying something else*" (Undergraduate, overseas – EU)
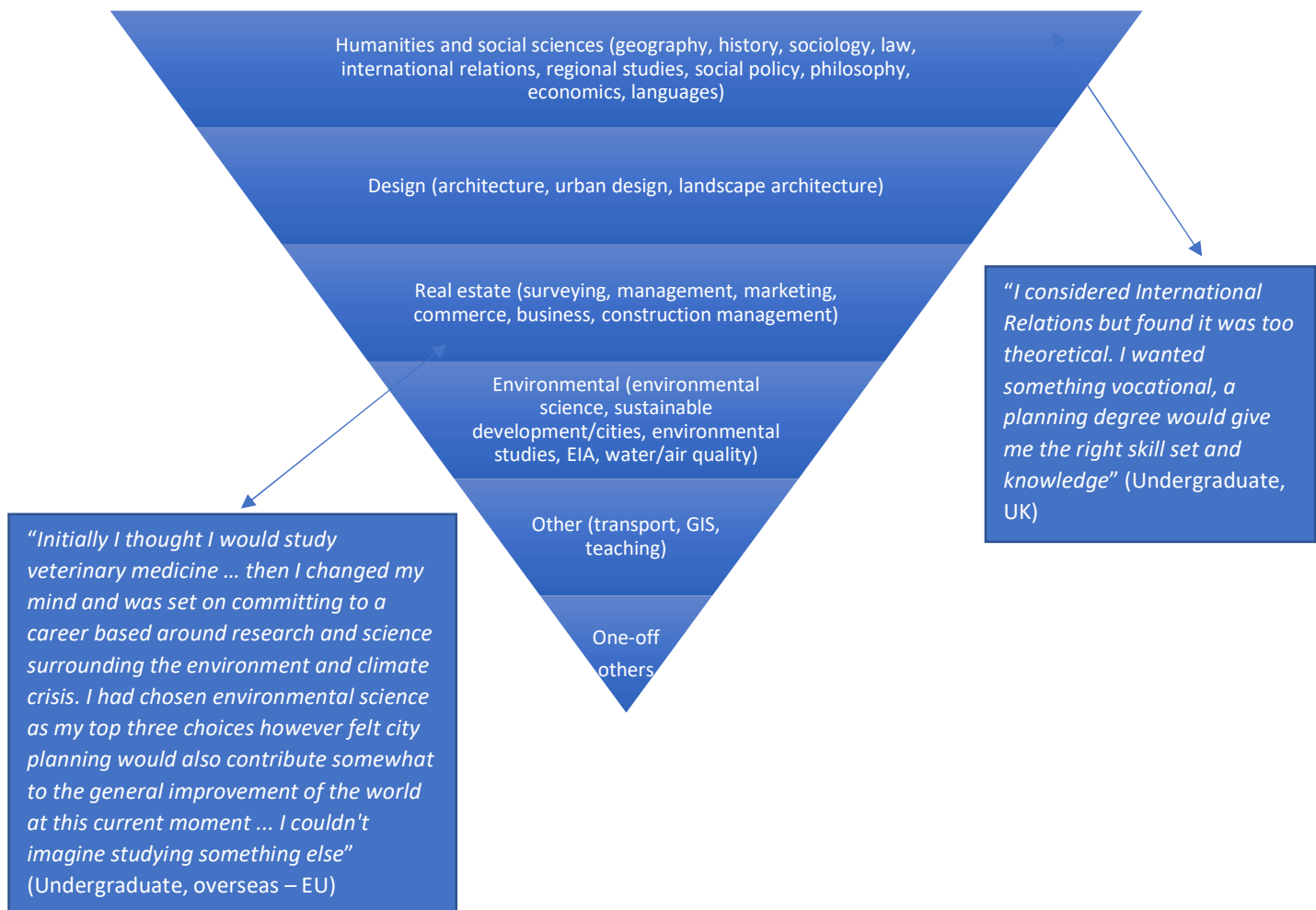
Figure 3: Alternative course choices

It is notable that most of the 'other options' considered by students who enter planning courses are in cognate disciplines, demonstrating that planning relates to a wide range of subjects, and does not have a discrete student body who consider this and nothing else in the first instance. Reflecting upon the question of motivations to study it is likely to be the distinct attributes of planning programmes, and specifically their relationship to a defined profession and career, that is influential in the final choice. Planning courses can also create an opportunity for academic learning **and** the associated application of knowledge into context. This would further reinforce the view that students chose both undergraduate and postgraduate planning courses as part of a relatively formed post-study career/life plan, which their chosen programme of study enables them potentially to achieve.

The more unrelated other options probably reflect more about personal choice of individuals and a lack of formed direction of travel in life/career decision making. There is perhaps an opportunity here to make sure planning is promoted as a relevant alternative alongside other choices - and create scenarios where planning has a presence in appropriate undergraduate courses so that more students may see its potential as a postgraduate option.

2.5 Optimism, and desires for change

Students were asked about their levels of optimism; specifically, '*are you optimistic about the ability of planning (and planning practitioners) to effect positive change*?'
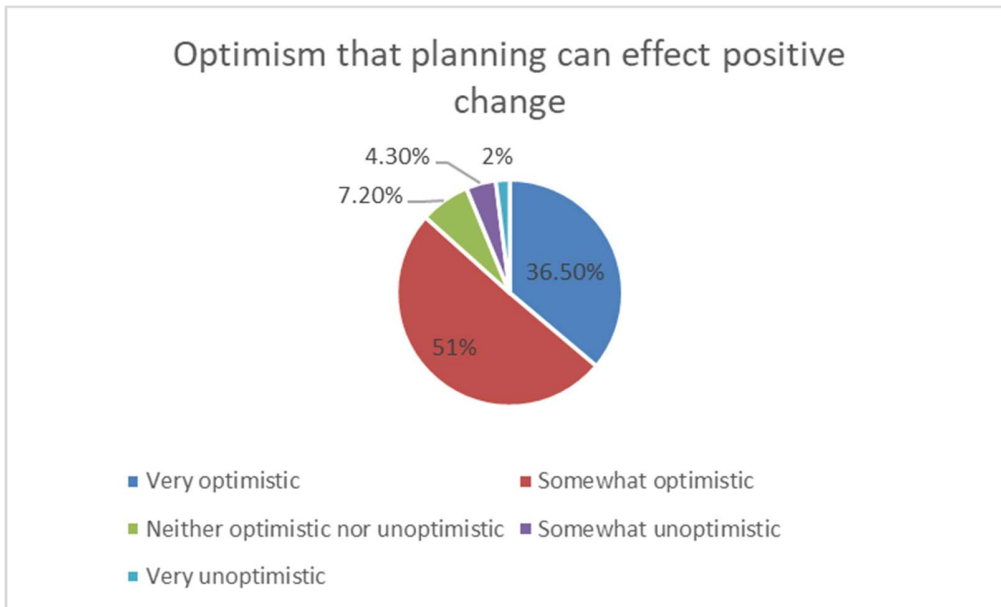

Figure 4: Optimism about planning's ability to effect positive change

Although it may be assumed that students choosing to study planning would be optimistic about its ability to effect positive change – otherwise why would people study it if they felt it could not bring about the changes to the world they hoped for? - this might not be axiomatic. As figure 3 above demonstrates, there are high levels of optimism, but more cautious optimism than strong optimism: 36% of students were 'optimistic', but by far the majority of students (51%) were 'somewhat optimistic'. This suggested a reasonable level of positivity, but tempered with some circumspection.

Students were not asked to explain their level of optimism. Nevertheless, we were particularly interested in the profile of those students who were somewhat optimistic and even unoptimistic mindful of the data received: had existing practice experience impacted levels of optimism, for example?:

➢ Out of the 11 students who were somewhat or very unoptimistic, only 4 of those had had some practice experience;
➢ Marginally more postgraduates were unoptimistic than undergraduates; and
➢ Of the 15 students who selected 'neither optimistic, nor unoptimistic', 11 of these students were from the overseas – outside of the EU. This might say as much (if not more) about the nature and extent of the challenges faced in their home countries and the ability of planning to address them, as it does about planning itself. Alternatively, it might represent that this question was hard to answer as they were thinking about multiple geographic contexts which may have varied abilities to bring about change.

This further breakdown is interesting, but does not really reveal any clear patterns or explicitly deepen our understanding of *why* these answers were given. Follow-up, specifically qualitative and in-depth, research would be needed to further understand this.

Students were also asked '***what sort of change* would you like to see, e.g. environmental, societal, economic?'** This was an open question which elicited a wide-ranging response. 81 students simply selected one, two, or three of the prompt words in the question. In descending order of frequency these were:
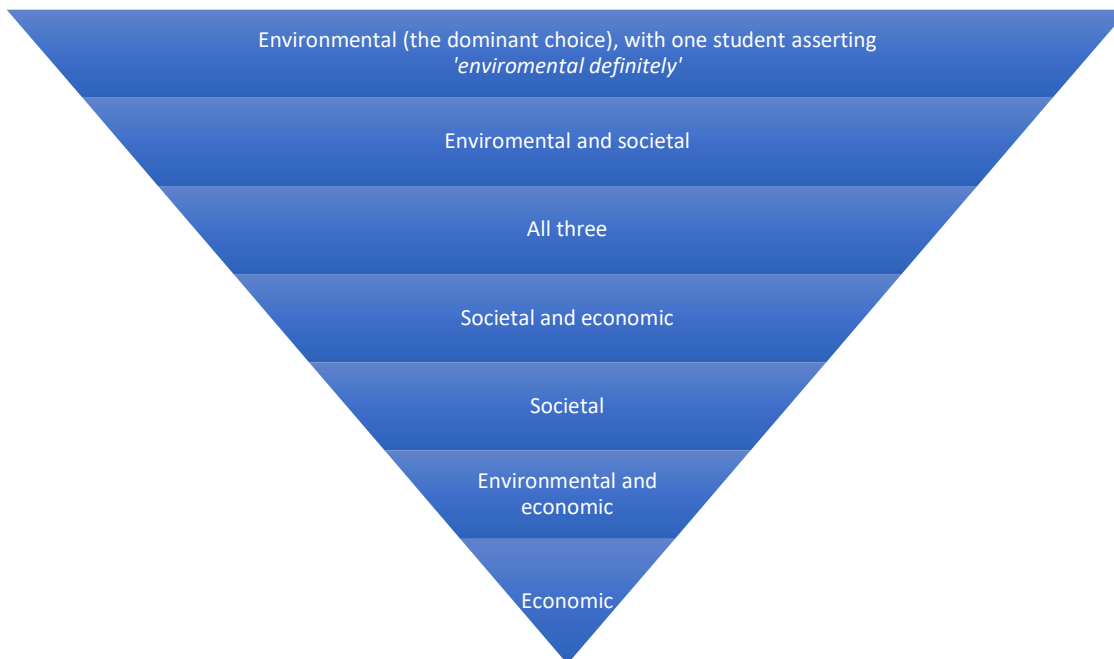
Figure 5: Desires for change

The remaining students provided a more discursive response, or chose different words to describe the change they would like to see. In descending order of frequency, the themes below emerged following coding. They largely reflect the order of priorities in figure 5 above, but also bring out some additional themes, as well as presenting what these terms mean to participants in greater depth.

Environmental change: There was an overwhelming focus on environmental change, ranging from climate change to local environmental quality, with the latter having a distinct urban focus.
Some students raised the concept of 'environmental justice':

> *"In particular, I would love to see planners making positive environmental changes in the future".*
> *(Undergraduate, from the UK)*

> *"I would firstly like to see an environmental change in the city. I think a greener and slower city is healthier and has a huge positive impact on human well-being. Then it would help the societal change to a more egalitarian city". (Postgraduate, from overseas – EU)*

Social change: Ideas of social justice, public interest before profit, addressing inequality, deprivation and poverty, were most prominent after environmental concerns.

> *"Wider awareness and championing for 'doing the right thing' being a greater benefit other than simply profit i.e. providing housing for a diverse range of groups, backgrounds and household incomes." (Postgraduate, from the UK)*

> *"I would like to work on social justice issues. Be a voice for communities that need the help and need conversations to be started." (Postgraduate, from overseas – outside of the UK)*

Striving for balance: Many students focused on the idea of achieving balance between social, economic and environmental outcomes, and whilst the language of sustainable development was present, more common was the suggestion that a focus on the environmental outcomes would / could also deliver social and economic benefits:

Mobility and housing: the most commonly identified specific themes for change outside of the prompts related to transport and housing. Students' transport focus was predominantly on urban mobility, and solving congestion in cities, rather than on strategic connectivity.

There was no one common theme in relation to housing, with comments covering: tackling homelessness, affordable housing, reduced rents, housing for asylum seekers, checking urban sprawl, reducing greenfield development for housing, improved housing conditions, and energy efficient housing. Some students connected these comments to notions of a 'housing crisis', but these connections were by no means predominant.

Other desired changes: Albeit less frequently, a number of other changes were raised, including: the quality of design, regeneration of derelict buildings, building on brownfield land, the provision of green space and the desire for planning to tackle crime and obesity. A small handful of students focused on the resourcing and perception of planning, best encapsulated below:

Whilst there were very few discernible patterns according to student type and desired change, all students expressing a desire for a change in the perception of planning came from the UK.

2.6 Planning values

Planning values, or values in planning, remain an important part of both academic literature and the contestation of planning issues. Understanding what role this has in students' thinking is both interesting and very important for understanding the motivations of emerging practitioners. It is also important to see in relation to the other aspects of the survey - how does the way they express the values of planning/planners relate to their own aims and aspirations? Further, what does this say about the sorts of debates we need to have as a profession and as educators?

"Planners … are generally conscientious, enthusiastic and critical about the world around them."
(Undergraduate, from the UK)

"Impartiality and integrity, and a strict application of the law. Planners are not supposed to do politics, although the planning practice is linked to it (just like every practice). Needless to say, being incorruptible." (Postgraduate, from overseas – outside of the EU)

"No - I think there are a diverse range of values dependent on individuals' interests and motivations." (Postgraduate, from the UK)

"I think planners sign up to the willing to make people's life better thanks to their broad vision of the influence of urban form on well-being." (Postgraduate, from overseas – EU)

"I think, given the broad variety of jobs that planners fill, it is impossible for all planners to sign up to the same set of values but I do believe that all planners should do everything they do believing that there is a benefit (be it social, economic or environmental) to the region they work in." (Postgraduate, from the UK)

Answers to this open-ended question were extremely varied, complex and fascinating. Some answers were tentative and uncertain, with students suggesting variously they were 'unsure', 'that they would wait and see as their studies progressed', or that 'values might be …'. Others were more confident and assertive in response: 'planners are …'.

A significant high number of students (25) selected 'no', they did *not* associate planners with signing up to a particular set of values, suggesting that these values would be dependent on 'individual motivations and values' or even that 'it is impossible for all planners to sign up to the same set of values' a view that was justified by the range of roles planners potentially occupy.

All 'yes' answers accompanied by a description of planners' values, have been coded. Where students raised multiple values, these were coded across more than one category. The five most predominant codes, in descending order of frequency were:

1. *Professional practice values*

   "*Impartiality, balance, integrity.*" (Postgraduate, from the UK).

   Many students (39) ascribed planning values as being less (if at all) about planning outcomes, but more about the characteristics which planners should exude in their work using terms to describe their values such as: expertise, impartiality, integrity, working for clients, being incorruptible, logical, honesty, competence, diligence, respect, team-work, critical thinking, open-minded, problem-solving, clear communicator, reasonable, conscientious, optimistic, flexible, creative, loyal, efficient. Those students identifying professional practice values were also more likely to mention the importance of '*sticking to procedure*' and '*the strict application of the law*'. Notable, were the number of students that used words such as 'empathy', 'compassion', 'care', 'consideration', and the need to be 'self-less'. These values can arguably be separated into those concerning approaches to work, and those which consider the nature of a planning professional, but in combination form a powerful attitudinal and character reflection of planners.

2. *Community / public interest / public service focused values* (36 references)

   '*Yes, I think planners should by right, put the public as a priority. That's the power we have as planners*'. *(Undergraduate, from overseas – outside of the EU)*

36 students strongly associated planning values with ideas around the public interest. This was expressed in three ways: the first was a simple statement such as *'to be public spirited'*, *'to act in the best interests of the citizens'*, *'a sense of social responsibility'*, or *'people oriented'*; the second was to focus on public service delivery, *'to deliver a service that will directly impact the community'*, and the third was to focus more overtly on the idea of 'people before profit': *'Improving places for people keeping in mind environmental issues'*.

3. **Substantive, topic-based, values**

"*I would like to think that most planners would view themselves as environmentalists as well as someone who has the greater good of the population of their country in mind.*" (Undergraduate, from overseas – EU)

17 students identified topic-specific issues that they believed planners should seek to influence, and ascribed these as planning values. These included a wide variety of topics from waste management, conservation, addressing climate change, improving housing conditions, and achieving good urban design. Striking, however, was the predominant focus on environmental issues. The notion of 'keeping in mind environmental issues' was frequently expressed.

4. *Moral / ethical / justice-based values*

"*The core principles of being a decent human being.*" (Postgraduate, from the UK)

Students (16) who chose to express planning values in terms of morals, ethics or justice tended not to provide added description or explanation of how these ideas might inform practice, instead simply stating the above terms, or expressing the need for *'ethical based decision making'*. The use of the terms 'ethics' and 'justice' were more prominent, but the idea that planners are 'moral people' was mentioned four times.

5. *Ideas of balance / sustainable development*

"*I think most planners understand a need for balance between environment, social and economic and their values are based on trying to achieve this.*" (Undergraduate, from the UK)

15 students expressed planning values in terms of the need to balance environmental, social and economic needs, sometimes – but not always – referred to by students as sustainable development. The process of 'weighing' and 'balancing' competing interests in order to make 'good decisions', was part of this value set. Some students asserted that planners should prioritise the environmental aspects of sustainable development, with only one student suggesting the 'exciting' opportunity for designing urban planning policies to influence economic development.

Whilst the above five themes were the most prominent, several other observations are worth making:

➤ A few students suggested that the values of public and private sector planners might differ, but none sought to articulate in what ways;
➤ Several students expressed a broad 'commitment to place' and values associated with making a difference in particular countries, regions and communities: "*wanting to impact a place for the better*";

➢ Some students expressed planning values in terms of thinking about the long term with notions of 'the bigger picture' or 'wider view' being expressed several times; and

➢ There was an even split between students asserting that planners should be 'apolitical', and those that confidently asserted planners to be 'politically liberal' or 'left-wing': "*I believe planning is inherently left-wing and more socialist than other policy making pathways and conscientious of doing good".*

2.7 Skills for practice

Students were asked for their views on what they considered the most importance skills for planning practice. Skills were ranked (1 being the least important, and 5 being the most important).
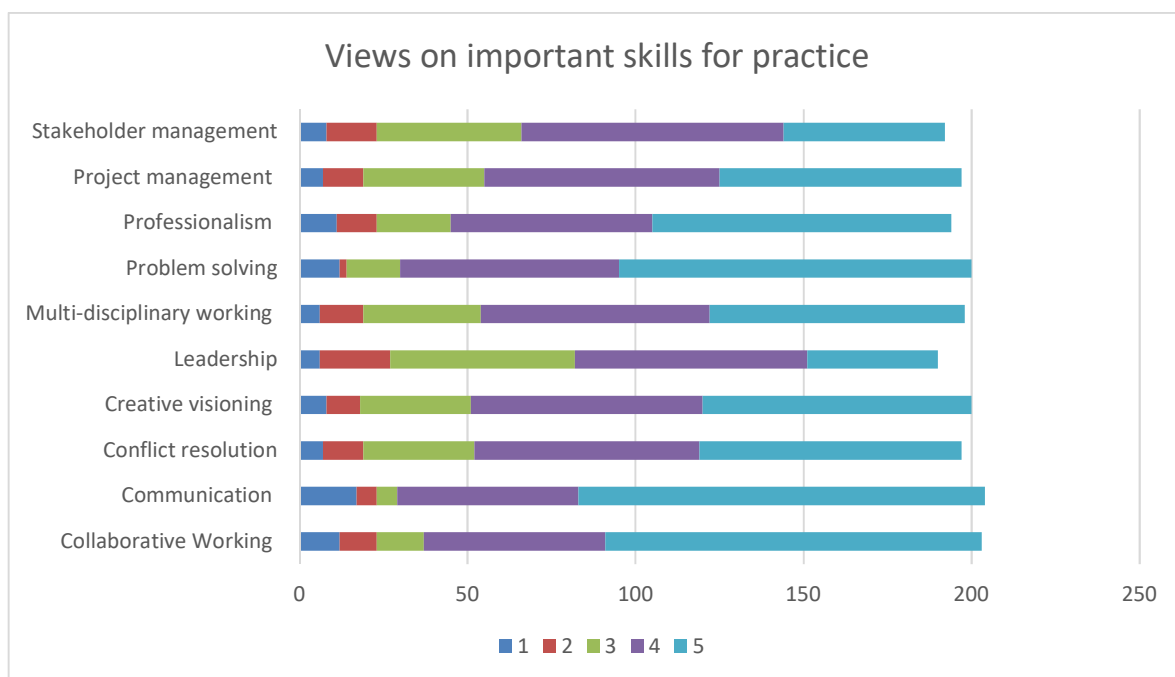

Figure 6: Views on skills for practice

Students were not 'forced' to rank skills against one another, and equally, they could score all skills as '5' very important, should they wish to. This explains the high number of skills ranked as important. Nevertheless, some interesting trends emerge when the numbers are aggregated.

The skills that students identified as the most important based on an aggregated 4 and 5 score were: **communication, collaborative working, and problem solving, with professionalism and creative visioning** in equal place.

Based on an aggregate score of 1, 2 & 3, the skills perceived as least important were **leadership, project management and stakeholder management;** however, these findings would need fuller exploration or examination over a longer time period.

2.8 Desires for learning

Students were asked 'what are you most interested in learning about?'. They were given a list of subject areas and were asked to score each, with '5' being 'most interested' and 1, being 'least interested'. Again, students were not 'forced' to rank subject areas against one another, and could score all skills as '5' if they wished.
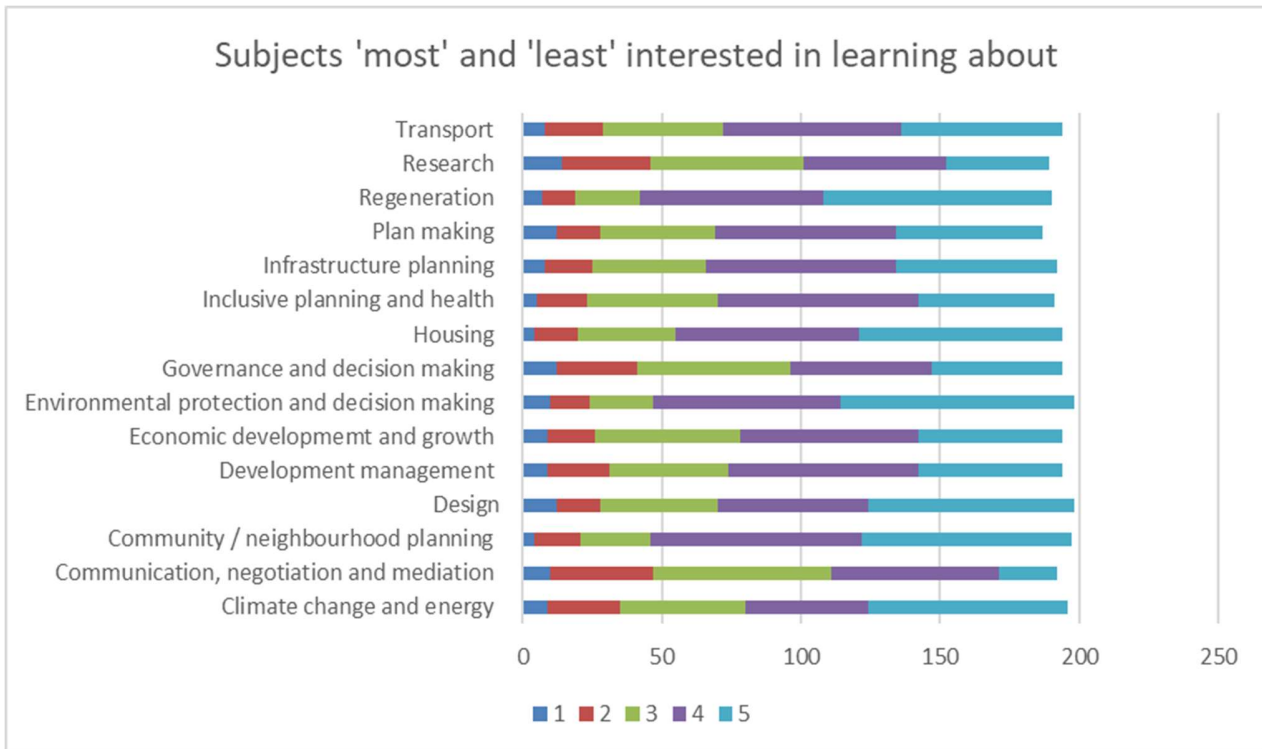
Figure 7: Desires for learning

Four subject areas stood out as being the areas students are most interested in: **environmental protection and decision making, community / neighbourhood planning, regeneration and housing**. It is notable – although not unsurprising - that there is some strong consistency here with students' motivations for studying planning.

Students appear less interested in learning about: **communication, negotiation and mediation, governance and decision making, and research**. It is particularly notable that communication skills and problem skills came out top in terms of 'skills for practice' but did not score highly in 'desires for learning', raising important questions (considered later) about the role of education in preparedness for practice and 'learning by doing'.

There were very few significant variations by student type, but the following observations can be made:

➢ As a cohort percentage, more overseas students (those outside of the EU) were interested in learning about economic development and transport, than those from the UK or within the EU;
➢ Again, as a cohort percentage, UK students were more interested in learning about environmental protection and decision making, and housing; and
➢ Postgraduate students were more interested in learning about governance and decision making, research, and environmental protection and decision making, than undergraduates.

2.9 Possible early career destinations

Students were asked whether they already had views on where they would like to practice in the future. Respondents were allowed to select up to two answers. Of the 321 total answers given (show in figure 8 below), 50% of these answers were for the private sector, compared with 33% for the public sector.
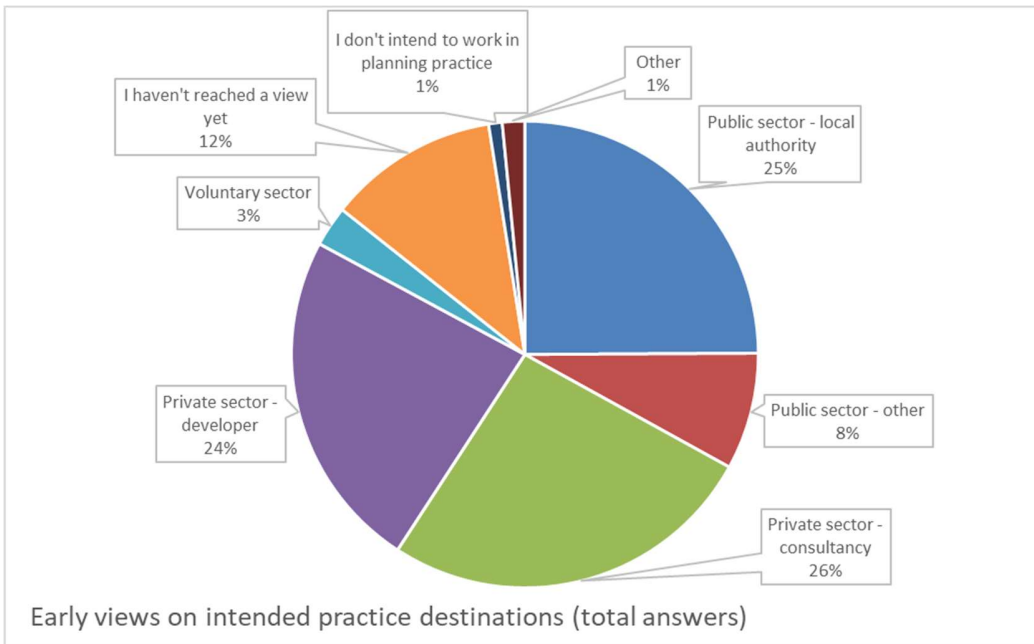
Figure 8: Intended career destinations (total answers)

Some students chose to select only one answer: this may imply a greater conviction over intended career destination. Discounting for those students that selected 'I haven't reached a view yet' (a perfectly understandable choice for students at the start of their studies, and view perhaps also reflected in those students selecting both a public and private sector route), 'public sector – local authority' was the highest preference 'single choice' as illustrated in figure 9 below.

Figure 9: Intended career destinations (single answers)

Of those students selecting two choices, the most common combination selected was both public sector and private sector (58 students) – so these students were still open to both public and private sectors at the start of their studies.

Notable, however, was the contrast between the number of students that selected the combination of 'private sector – consultancy, and 'private sector – developer' (32 students), as compared with 'public sector – local authority' and 'public sector – other' (6 students). With the exception of those students having not yet reached

a view, there were, therefore, more students emphatic at this early stage in their studies about a private sector route than a public sector route.

This is a particular area of study where a longitudinal perspective could bring further data. Additional depth of information can also allow for interrogation of the determinants of the preferences too. This part of the research has the potential to generate interesting insights into perspectives on influence as well as personal career choice; given the public interest narrative present within student motivations, the ability of the public and private sectors to have impact upon the built environment and society is pertinent. This links into questions around organisational roles and motivations, influence, implementation and delivery, power dynamics, and relationships. The reasoning behind the stated student preference here has the potential to be enlightening upon perspectives of actors and stakeholders within planning, alongside insights into personal career expectations and preferences.

There was very little significant variation between types of students, the only exceptions being:

➢ Of the total 'public sector' answers, 64% of these answers were from post-graduate students;
➢ A slightly higher proportion of UK students selected 'private sector – consultancy', and a slightly higher proportion of EU students selected 'private sector – developer'. This might reflect varying terminology as well as varying background contexts.

2.10 Hopes for practice

"I'd like to work on interesting projects, achieve some measure of recognition, and maybe even make the world a slightly better place -- or at least arrest its decline(!)" (Undergraduate, from the UK)

Penultimately, students, were asked '*what do you hope to achieve in practice*?'. This was an open-ended question which again elicited a wide-ranging response. A few students (20) stated that they were 'unsure', 'didn't know yet', or left this answer blank (42). Answers were coded, with some answers coded across multiples codes if students raised multiple aspirations for practice. The principle themes that emerged, in descending order of frequency, were as follows:

Outcome-based achievements *(75 references)*: Almost half of all responses expressed a desire to achieve particular planning outcomes. These largely reflected answers to the earlier question '*what sort of change do you want to see*', although students did not necessarily provide a consistent response here. These responses can be sub-divided into three: those students, most notably students from outside of the UK and EU, who were specific about wanting to achieve change in particular cities, places or 'home towns'; those students who expressed generic planning outcomes, such as 'more balanced development', 'more sustainable environments'; and the very small number of students who expressed a desire to achieve more specific outcomes, such as 'a focus on smart city development', or 'an increase in economic growth'. Included here were also those students who referred to generic ideas about 'better places', 'better spaces', and 'better projects', but without any detail on what 'better' but constitute.

Job based achievements *(31 references)*: Various specific planning roles were identified by students as a specific aspiration: thus, these students defined their achievement as the procurement of one of these roles, for example:

"I would like to be able to work as a senior planner eventually and work within conservation or environmental protection at some point." (Postgraduate, from the UK)

"Gather a good experience and knowledge base from the public sector within DM … further in the future I feel I could have more impact in the private sector - possibly setting up own consultancy with a view to green developments". (Postgraduate, from the UK)

A derivate of this was the number of students (16) expressing a hope to be engaged in project work, often defined by size as indicated by the desire '*to work on large scale infrastructure projects'*, '*big projects'*, '*new cities'* and '*large scale masterplans'.*

Impact-based achievements *(27 references)*: Striking was the number of students who – without expressing the kind of impact they would like to see (perhaps assumed to have been articulated in the previous question on desires for change) – expressed a strong desire to achieve positive change, reflected in language such as 'positive impact', 'genuine change', and 'real and lasting improvements':

"That my work is making a change to more than the privileged society." (Postgraduate, from overseas – outside of the EU)

"The opportunity to contribute positively to the places people live in, both aesthetically and environmentally." (Postgraduate, from the EU)

"I hope to be a part of big projects that can make genuine positive change." (Undergraduate, from the UK)

"I want to have a positive impact, that may go unnoticed, and promotes values such as inclusivity, accessibility." (Undergraduate, from the UK)

Skills and knowledge-based achievements *(26 references)*: These students expressed a strong desire to learn new skills or acquire specialist knowledge in order to become an effective practitioner. Rarely was this expressed as something specific, more commonly students expressed a more generic desire:

"to continuously strive to learn and apply skills that will better the lives of the population." (Undergraduate, from overseas – EU).

"I hope to gain valuable knowledge in order to contribute efficiently to the purpose of planning." (Postgraduate, from overseas – EU)

"Getting to know the tools that planners use on a daily basis." (Undergraduate, from overseas – EU)

Personal fulfillment *(12 references)***:** Some students expressed achievement more directly in terms of job satisfaction or recognition, articulated in terms of "*hoping to be fulfilled by day to day tasks*", "*happy in my work*", and the desire to have "*an exciting and engaging job*".

Notable was that students who expressed the desire for fulfillment or job satisfaction often combined these comments with wanting to make a positive difference to particular communities or people rather than outcomes that were expressed in more environmental terms.

Professional based achievements *(7 references)*: The final most prominent theme was around ideas of 'professionalism' and 'being an effective practitioner' with one student asserting that they: "*hoped to be a competent Town Planner of International reputation!*"

This aspect of the study bears consideration in the context of the previous section and personal career choice intentions. The inter-relationship between hopes for practice, and their preferred destination in practice, offer the potential for further insight into the perceived characteristics of different aspects of the planning profession and practice. Again, a longitudinal exploration of this can bring further insight into the changes, or lack thereof, in opinion positioning on these matters.

2.11 The Royal Town Planning Institute

Students were asked three questions related to planning's professional body in the UK, the Royal Town Planning Institute.

Firstly, they were asked if they had prior knowledge of the RTPI before they started their course. 75% of students had heard of the RTPI, with the number of 'no' respondents slightly higher amongst those from overseas – outside of the EU.

Secondly, students were asked if they were aware of either the RTPI's student bursaries, or the RTPI's ambassadors scheme. Only 20% of students had heard of the bursaries, with even fewer, 10%, having heard of RTPI ambassadors. Again, 'no' respondents were highest amongst students outside of the EU.

Finally, students were asked if they intended to become a chartered member of RTPI in the future. The results are presented below.
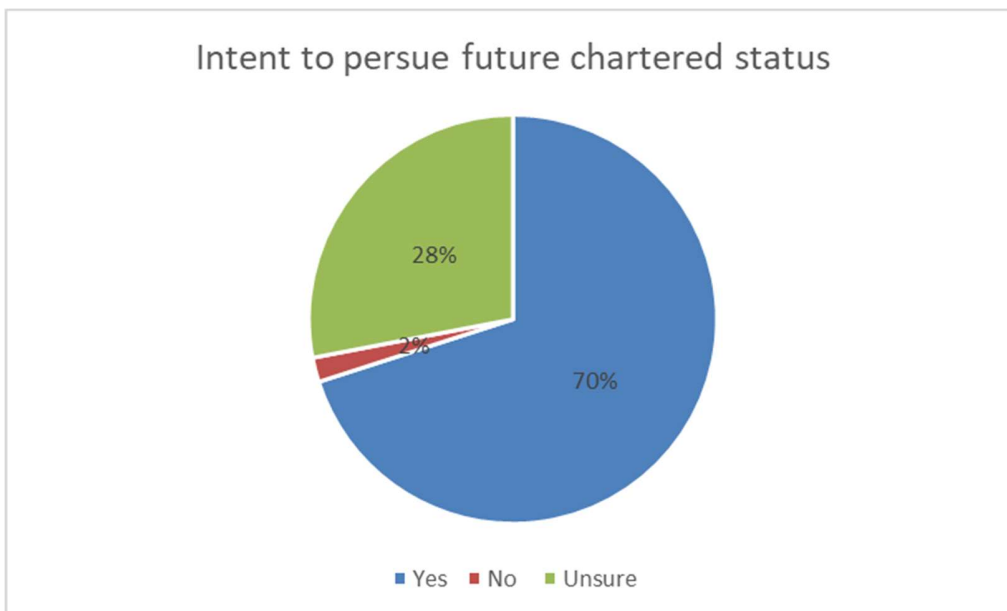

Figure 10: Chartered status aspirations

3. Surveys 2 and 3: RTPI Student and Licentiate Surveys

A core component of the RTPI's new research agenda, as set out in its Research Programme for 2019-2021[10], is the 'Value of Planners', including 'Planning Education and the Planning Profession'. Specific areas of research are identified including work on:

➢ Planning careers – understanding why people enter or exit pathways into planning at various stages (e.g. school, undergraduate, Master's, after graduation, later career). What attracts and alienates potential planners?

➢ The future of the planning profession – changing ways and patterns of working, the influence of technology, new specialisms etc.

A key component to this agenda, delivering on the planning careers strand, is the Institute's *Understanding the Future Planner Pipeline* research programme. The two surveys presented here – of student members and Licentiates of the RTPI - were conducted as part of the *Pipeline* research, to give an understanding of student perceptions of and motivations for pursuing a career in planning, what they have learnt (or feel they have learnt) on their accredited course, and what they perceive their course to be, or have been, missing. The results augment survey 1 in conjunction with UWE.

The findings from the surveys will be used in conjunction with data from a survey of employers, school focus groups, and input from accredited Planning Schools, to build a picture of planning education in the UK and skills needs and recruitment and retention issues in planning, with a view ultimately to understand and address issues around the potential loss of future talent, and, simultaneously, to improve diversity and inclusion, a key focus for the RTPI and its professional education and membership strategies. The findings from the research programme will inform a forthcoming education review that the RTPI will conduct in 2021 and future education engagement initiatives.

The survey used here was developed by RTPI Education officers, and has been used over the past few years as a means of gathering feedback about how planning students view their education as part of the Institute's annual review of partnerships with its accredited Planning Schools, and it is intended that the survey continue to be used each year. The survey was composed using the survey development software Survey Monkey and distributed to all student and Licentiate members of the Institute in its quarterly email newsletters to the two groups. It is comprised of both open and closed questions ranging from why the students and Licentiates had chosen to study planning to the aspects of their planning courses they had enjoyed the most. Analysis has been undertaken using both Excel and NVIVO qualitative data software: Excel for the quantitative data, and NVIVO to code and analyse open-ended responses in order to draw out themes.

The same survey was given to both students and licentiates with the exception of an additional question to licentiates to ask them to reflect on their practice experience to date. There is much commonality in the findings of both the RTPI surveys. Nevertheless, the results are presented separately to enable some of the subtle differences to be identified. Furthermore, the strong consistency between these findings, and those of the UWE survey presented in section 2, serve to reinforce the emerging headline messages, even if the exact methods of data gathering and questioning varied.

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[10] https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/1508/researchprogramme_2019_2021.pdf

3.1 RTPI Student Member Survey

3.1.1 Nature of respondents

42 students completed the RTPI survey from across 20 institutions[11]. The majority of these students (30) were postgraduates. Of these, 50% were studying part time and 50% were studying full time. All undergraduates were studying full time.

26 of the 42 students answered that they were doing some work in planning, including some students studying full time, but no further information was sought on the type of planning work they were currently engaged in.

3.1.2. Why did you choose to study planning?

Students were asked '*why did you choose to study planning?*'. The themes that emerged following coding closely mirror those of the UWE student survey. The five most prominent responses from the students were (in descending order of frequency):

Options for career progression: A number of students (13, 31%) specifically stated that they had chosen to study planning for the career options it would yield. Whilst some simply stated, '*to support my professional development*', or '*because I want to pursue a career in the profession*'. Several students highlighted links to existing work or the requirements of current employers:

> *"I enjoy my job as a planning assistant, carry a full caseload, and if our planning officer or senior planner are off then I take on some of their caseload. However, I am ineligible to apply for any such post without RTPI recognised qualification"*
>
> *"I studied planning as an undergraduate, I then started working in local authority planning & they advised me to study the masters"*

Links to geography: 8 (19%) students stated that they had chosen planning either as a natural progression from geography or because they had discovered planning as a discipline whilst studying geography.

> *"Enjoyed geography and thought planning would be an ideal course to apply geography knowledge practically"*
>
> *"It was the next step on from studying Geography at Undergraduate level and I enjoyed the planning and development modules I had completed previously".*
>
> *"I was always interested in the human side of geography, however planning not only allows you to work directly on the practical implications of human geography, it also provides a great deal of job satisfaction seeing your work physically being built or changed in the places you live and care about."*

Ability to make a positive contribution: 8 (19%) students suggested that they had chosen planning because they perceived it as offering a career route with the potential ability to make a difference:

> *"I have recently moved into planning after teaching geography for the last 20 years. Planning offered me a very attractive career path and I felt, an opportunity to make a difference".*
>
> *"A desire to make people's day-to-day lives better led me to planning".*

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[11] One respondent was from the University of Hong Kong and therefore an outlier in the context of the rest of respondents currently studying in the UK.

A general interest in the subject: 6 (14%) students highlighted a general interest in the subject. One simply said 'it's interesting', another that 'they were drawn to news articles on planning', and one student referred to their interest having been prompted by a careers talk at school:

> *"Found it interesting when a talk was held at my secondary school whilst I was in sixth form. Researched the career and decided it was for me."*

Interest in development: Four students stated emphatically that they were 'passionate about development' or 'interested in the process of development', but with little further detail.

3.1.3 Course content – positives, and areas for improvement

Students were asked about the best aspects of their course, and what might have been improved. Both of these questions were open-ended. The results have been coded and summarised in the two tables below. It should be noted that not all students answered this question.

Table 1: positive aspects of planning courses

Positive aspect raised	Number of students	Selected student observations
Variety of material	8	'Range of subjects including economics, design and more social subjects' 'The variety of skills and aspects of planning being taught on the course'.
Engagement with other students	7	'I think that the interaction with both public sector, private sector and uni students adds a good dynamic to the thought processes, debates and knowledge sharing in lectures and discussions. Meeting other like-minded people and discussing the future of planning'.
Knowledge and skills gained	6	'Gaining knowledge to help me progress' 'Learning skills transferable for career'
Specific modules [Planning law, and urban design both featured three times each.]	6	
Lecturers	6	
Practical content	5	'Real world examples and getting the knowledge about upcoming policy changes as we study' 'Vocational projects where we worked on planning proposals and delegated reports'.
Field and site visits / trips	3	
Placements	3	
Enjoyment	2	'In all honesty I enjoy every aspect of the course. I love everything about the course!'
Other [Global perspective, flexibility, creativity, ability to specialise]	5	

Table 2: areas for improvement on planning courses

Areas for improvement	Number of students	Selected student observations
More practical application	8	'I think what is lacking is the practical aspect of working in the planning industry, course provides the knowledge of planning but when it comes to

		making decisions on planning applications I think this is somewhat lacking'. *'Too academic, lack of reality'* *'Join the dots of study with DM - but not too much that it becomes a bland training course without any real appreciation as to the profession'.*
Opportunities for placements and career advice	5	*'I wish the programme to provide students more opportunities to participate in an internship and real practice'.* *'Employment: job fair for planners, internships, training positions and graduates'*
Balance of timing and content for part time students	4	*'A lot of the course is geared towards students with no planning experience. For those of us who also work full time, there are aspects of the course that are quite irrelevant'.*
More up to date material	3	*'Some of the lecture material so far seems a little out of date'.*
Timing and handling of assessments	3	*'In terms of assessments, there could be longer deadlines. Lecturers expect us to have genius level ideas and arguments in 1-2 months when we actually lack broad enough views and perceptions of any kind of knowledge related to planning, this causes great stress. Therefore we rush out straightforward ideas so we can just pass the given module, I am not entirely sure that's what learning should be'.*
More interactive teaching	2	*'I am on a 100% distance learning course which can prove to be quite isolating. My course has no lectures, maybe access to live interactive or even recorded lectures, would be a positive thing'*
Other		A whole range of issues were identified once including a desire for: smaller class sizes, access to software, more feedback, better organization, a more global perspective, less on ethics, more contact time and for consideration of the timing and structure of the apprenticeship programme.

3.1.4 Course content – areas of learning

Students were asked which skills / topics were covered on their course, and what topics they would like to have seen covered.

The chart below summarises the students' responses. The five topics that students most reported as having learnt about were: design, community/neighbourhood planning, development management, economic development and climate change and energy. The five topics that students most reported as wanting to have covered (and by implication therefore having not yet learnt about) were: plan making, governance and decision making, development management, communication, negotiation and mediation, and climate change and energy.

In terms of topics not listed as a choice in the survey, students reported also learning about: rural planning, infrastructure planning, urban renewal, data analysis and statistics, international planning systems, GIS, and

history. They listed wanting to also learn about: planning law, heritage, the development approval process, and policy. One student stated emphatically, '*some things were covered by the course, but I wish we'd gone into them in more depth*'.

It should be noted, however, that the results should not be over-interpreted. Some students' answers were not consistent: they selected having learnt about a subject and wanting to learn about the same subject. In addition, some students may have chosen certain specialist modules meaning they had chosen to either cover or not cover certain elements. Moreover, some of the comments may only reflect one student's experience of one institution rather than something which can be used to reflect on the nature of planning education more widely. Further, students may not yet have covered some of the topics, especially those students in the first or second year of undergraduate study. One student noted, '*I'm sure as we go along and get into the next year more will be covered*'.
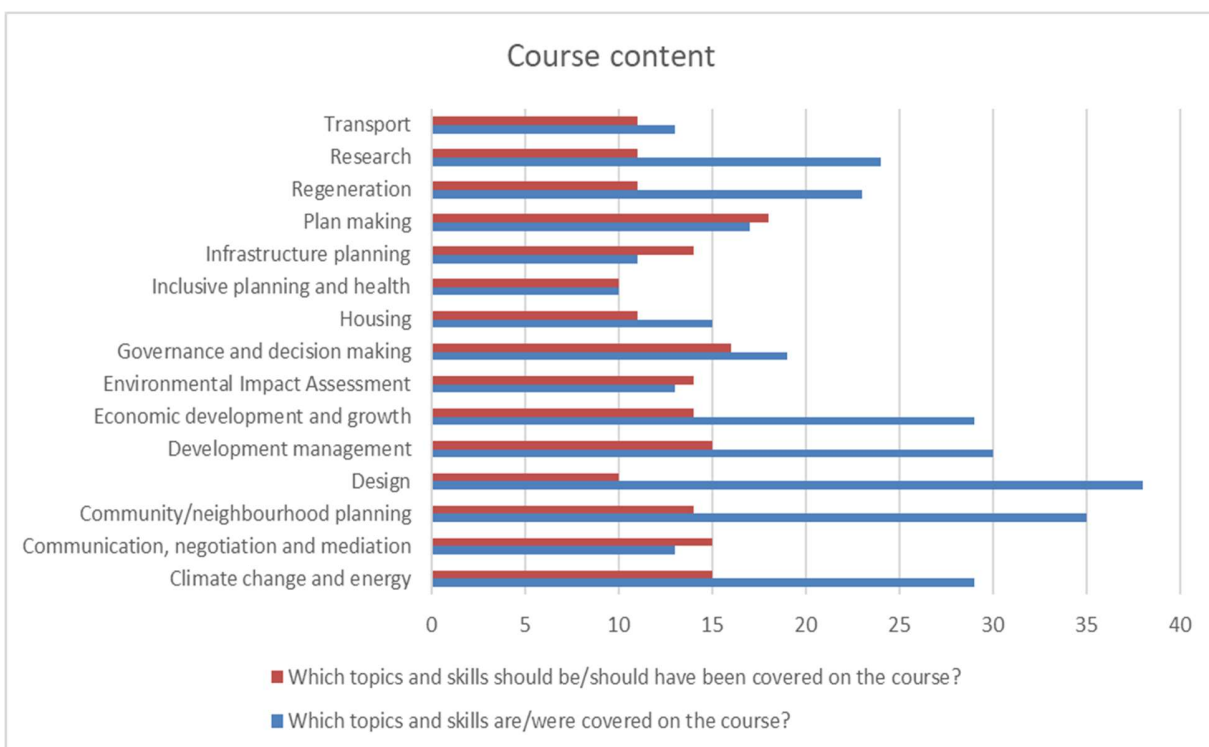

Figure 11: Course content

3.1.5 Other points for the RTPI
Students were also given the opportunity to use the survey to raise any other issues they wished to with the RTPI. The points raised were in relation to:

➢ The desire for the RTPI to run more events for students not just young planners generally;
➢ The desire for more tutor support with longer assessment deadlines;
➢ Concerns about the degree apprenticeship being restricted to people working 30 hours a week minimum; and
➢ The module a student found particularly helpful in relation to preparing for a future APC submission.

3.2 RTPI Licentiate Member Survey

3.2.1 Nature of respondents

29 licentiate members of the RTPI completed the survey. These came from across 15 institutions[12]. Licentiate membership is for graduates who have completed a fully RTPI accredited qualification. It is the first step towards becoming a Chartered Town Planner.

Licentiates had therefore recently completed a range of different Master's programmes, the titles of which varied (albeit subtly) from institution to institution.

8 licentiates had studied part time, with the rest having studied full time.

26 licentiates were now in full time work, 1 was working part time and 2 were not currently working. All, bar 1 licentiate currently working, were working in planning jobs, with the other member working in economic development.
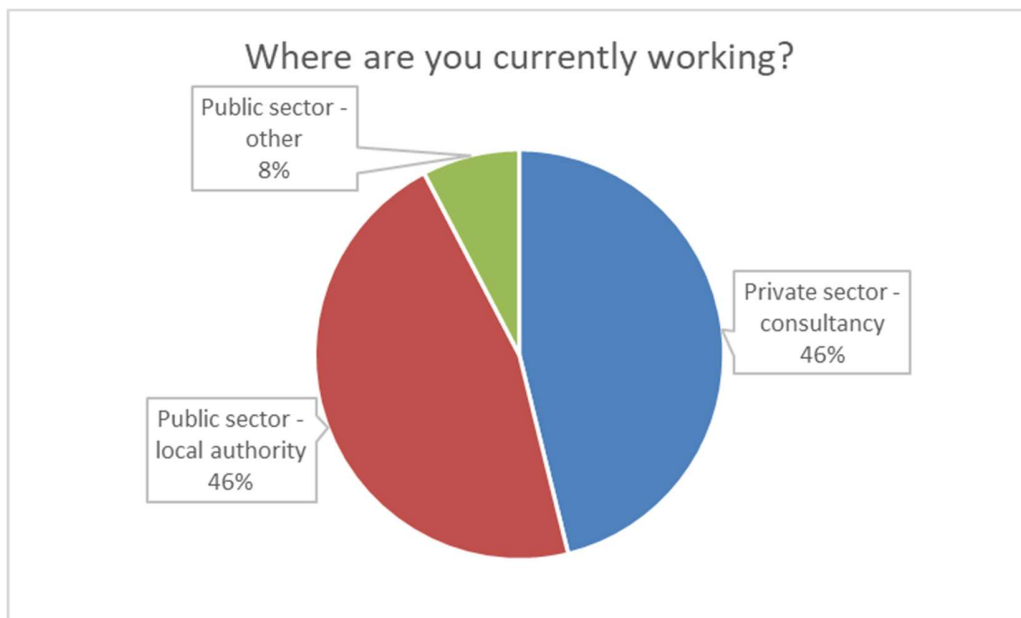
Licentiates were working in the following sectors:

Figure 12: Licentiates current employment

3.2.2 Why did you choose to study planning?

Licentiates were asked '*why did you choose to study planning*'. These responses closely mirror those of the UWE student survey, and of the RTPI student member survey, but with slightly less emphasis on options for career progression.

The four most prominent responses from across the 29 licentiates were (in descending order of frequency):

General interest / interest in cities: 9 students identified either a general interest in the subject, or a more specific interest in cities.

"I enjoy the complexity of planning and how it affects all walks of life in very different ways".

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[12] One respondent was a graduate from the University of Cape Town and therefore an outlier in the context of the rest of respondents having studied in the UK.

"It interested me, and I was inspired by living in Milton Keynes, a new town specifically designed for London's overspill over 50 years ago".

"I am interested in how towns and cities function especially in regard to infrastructure".

Links to geography: 9 licentiate responses majored on planning as a '*natural progression*' from geography (notably human geography) and/or that they had discovered planning as a discipline whilst studying geography as an undergraduate:

"I accidentally came across planning by undertaking a planning module in my undergraduate, on Environmental Sustainability. It taught me how I could use my interest in geography to shape places, understand how the built environment operates well and not so well. I chose planning as the endless possibilities excited me, from development management to policy, regeneration".

"I came from a human geographical background and the urban environment and placemaking was fascinating to me".

Ability to make a positive contribution: 6 licentiates specifically mentioned either the desire to make a '*positive contribution to the built and natural environment*', '*to create better places to live in*', or that the work of a planner had '*real-world application*':

"I wanted a way to practically apply my interest in Geography and Urban Design. Planning is the perfect way to do this and really make positive changes to areas and people's lives".

Career options: 5 licentiates specifically stated that their choice related to future ability to secure employment. These were not expansive responses and included statements such as, "*I thought there would be jobs available*".

Other response included reference to planning '*as a respected career*', prior work experience in planning, influence of family members, and an interest in project management.

3.2.3 Course content – positives, and areas for improvement

Licentiates were asked about the best aspects of their course, and what might have been improved. These were both open ended questions the results of which have been coded and summarised in the two tables below. Not all licentiates answered this question.

Table 3: positive aspects of planning courses

Positive aspect raised	Number of licentiates identifying	Licentiate quotes
Reference to specific modules enjoyed	8	*'My interests lay in sustainability so the focused module on this was the best aspect of the course. The policy thread was also very well done'.*
Practical /real-life assignments now relevant in work	6	*'The practical exercises such as the mock planning inquiry and the Local Plan monitoring exercise'*
Quality and variety of material	5	*'I particularly enjoyed the wide range of topics covered (even those not strictly related to planning) that helped me gain knowledge of the disciplines of planning stakeholders and actors'.*
Field trips	3	*'Field trips to learn about other planning systems'*
Ability to carry out course part time	2	

Reference to specific lecturers	2	*'Learning about housing policy and social sustainability was particularly fascinating, in part due to the quality of the lecturers'.*
Other: Library	1	
Dual accreditation	1	
Involvement of practitioners	1	*'Best aspects were learning about the Scottish Planning System from practitioners and ex-politicians'*

Table 4: areas for improvement

Areas for improvement	Number of licentiates identifying	Licentiate Quotes
More practical application	10	*'The course didn't help me in my current job. I felt like I almost walked in blind. The course should cover more things like Use Classes, Permitted Development, Class Q, Local Plan Processes / Reviews etc...'* *'The practical side of planning was severely lacking in the course material - including Development Management skills such as, interpreting plans, decision making, application processes and governance. There was a general over emphasis on strategic planning and private sector planning than on development management'.*
More on development management	3	*'I felt there was real lacking of exposure to the development management side of planning. I briefly went into a DM role after graduating and felt very out of my depth and quickly realised that was not what I wanted to do'.*
Topic specific additions including GIS, visualization software, climate change, infrastructure, governance	3	
A more global / international perspective	2	*'How planning is done differently in different countries. This would have provided some international context'.*
Other	5	Academics with experience of working in planning More on communication More feedback Longer courses Opportunities for networking Improvements in material

3.2.4 Course content – areas of learning

Licentiates were asked which skills / topics were covered on their course, and what topics they would like to have seen covered.

The chart below summarises the licentiates' responses. The five topics that students most reported as having learnt about were: design, community and neighbourhood planning, research, plan making, and governance and decision making.

The five topics that students most reported as wanting to have covered (and by implication therefore having not learnt about) were: development management, governance and decision making, communication, negotiation and mediation, community and neighbourhood planning, and climate change and energy. There was some helpful consistency here with the student survey findings (above).

In terms of topics not listed as a choice in the survey, students reported also having learnt about: planning history, sustainability, planning theory, marine planning, place making, research methods and spatial planning in context. They also listed wanting to have learnt about: GIS, Planning Law, Enforcement, Planning Obligations, Role of statutory consultees, Appeals system, organisations that work with/alongside planning and, '*more practical linkage with on-the-job training*'.
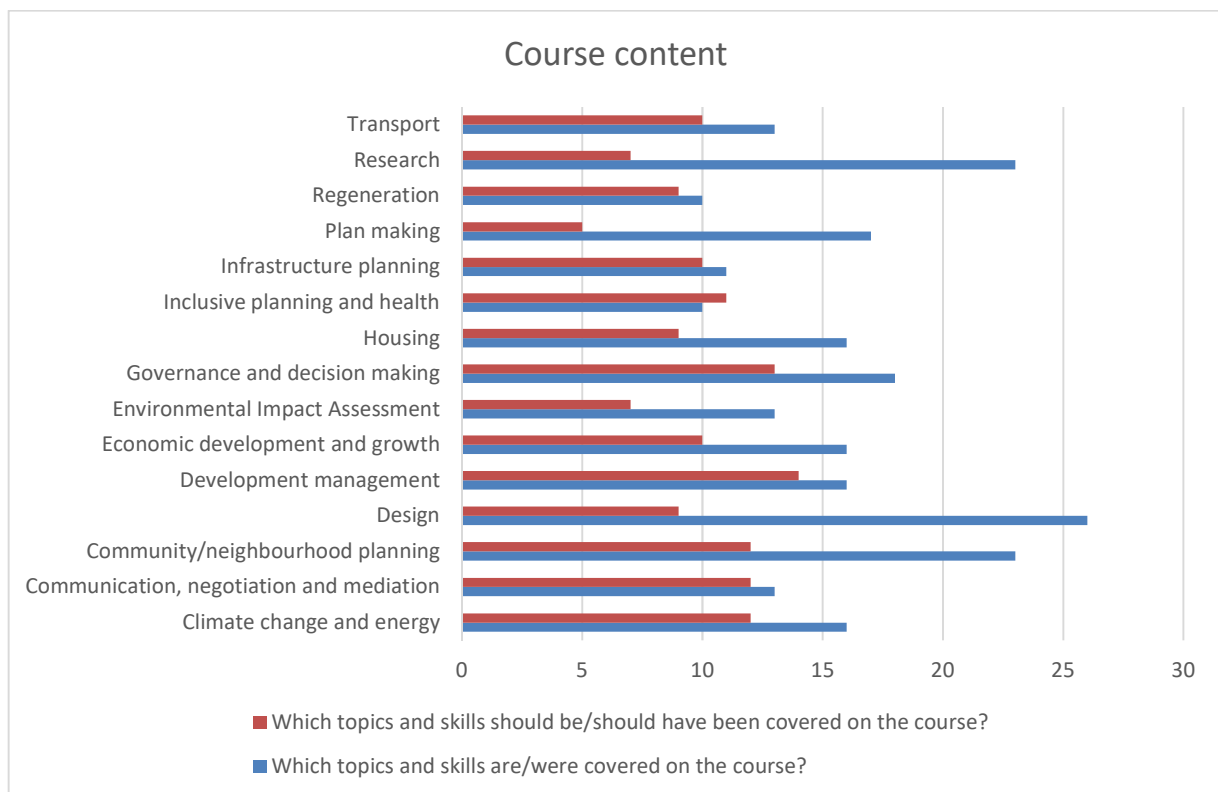

Figure 13: Course content

3.2.5 Levels of optimism?

As with the UWE survey, licentiates were asked '*Are you optimistic about the ability of planning (and planning practitioners) to effect positive change*?'. The results are indicated in the chart below.
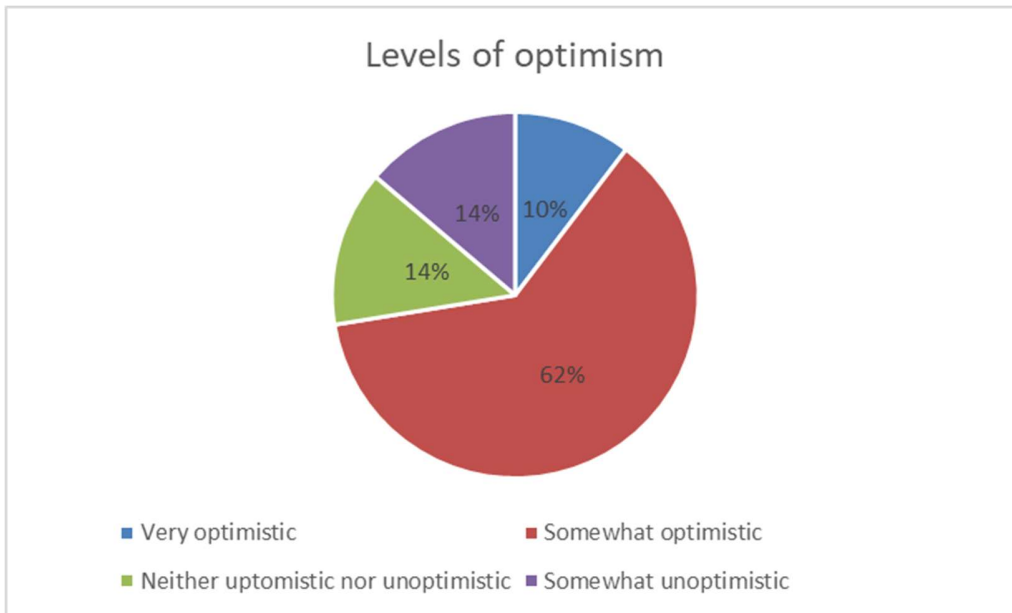
Figure 14: Licentiate optimism

Fewer licentiates were 'very optimistic' than in the UWE survey of students, and it is notable that the majority of responses were for the 'somewhat optimistic' choice. This, as with the UWE survey, suggests optimism with a little circumspection. Striking however, is the 10% of licentiates who were 'somewhat unoptimistic'. These correlated closely with those students who had expressed that their early experience of practice had not matched up to their expectations.

There was no discernible correlation between views expressed on levels of optimism and role in either the public or private sector.

3.2.6 Expectations and realities

Licentiates were asked: '*If you are working in planning, reflecting on your original motivations for studying planning/becoming a planner, have your early experiences matched up to your expectations?*'

20 licentiates said 'yes'. A small handful of licentiates elucidated on their response. One respondent was emphatically positive:

> "*Yes, there is plenty of variety in my work and I can see tangible changes to place as a result of my input in planning*".

Others wanted to qualify their 'yes' response, with the following observations:

> "*This is a 'partial yes'. My motivations for studying planning were to, essentially, make the world a better place. While I do feel I am at least somewhat achieving this in my current role, it is hard to see how my original motivations can be achieved, particularly within the current planning system and in a role as a planning consultant*" (Private sector - consultancy).

> "*Yes and No - my role in Policy is more varied than I thought but also more technical than I anticipated. In that sense it can be process driven like Development Management - something which isn't often associated with strategic planning*" (Public sector – local authority).

6 licentiates said 'no, their original motivations had not met up to their expectations', with an even split across those in public and private sector roles. One respondent working in a local authority, simply stated, '*Rigid*'. Others offered the following observations:

"Do planners actually have any influence? Or do politics get in the way of good planning in England?" (Local Authority Respondent).

"Less focus on place and helping to solve challenges facing cities, more focus on technical detail and monitoring" (Private Sector – Consultancy Respondent).

"My current role has not involved the level of decision making I had hoped for, but it is an enjoyable role nonetheless" (Public sector – other).

These observations, albeit limited, suggest that the narrative of practice disappointment reflected in some of the international accounts noted in the introduction to this report, is emergent and reflected, at least to some degree, in UK experience.

3.2.7 Other points for the RTPI

Three students chose to use the opportunity provided within the survey to provide other comments to the RTPI. These were:

➢ *"Planning academic positions are extremely difficult to obtain for people without a PhD. This encourages teaching from people solely from an academic background with too much focus on theoretical social sciences and not enough on the actual planning system"*;
➢ *"Having completed my MSc and now working in the field of planning, rather than reflecting on what I may have missed out and my planning peers, scope to provide CPD aimed at Licentiates/ graduates on these affairs"*; and
➢ *"I was awarded a bursary from the RTPI. I am very pleased that at the age of 58 I had the opportunity to re-train and that I have been successful in obtaining a full-time job. However the pay is very low in relation to the knowledge and skills required by the job"*.

4. Conclusions and an agenda for further research

Despite the difference in the framing of some of the survey questions across the three, the level of commonality in the findings of the three surveys was striking. There were no major points of difference. Here, we reflect some of the nuances in the key findings across the three surveys.

Finding 1: The students and licentiates who completed these surveys clearly care about the environment, cities, the future, and have a desire to make places better for people. All three surveys revealed, without exception, a cohort of young planners eager to achieve change, perceiving planning as a profession offering the 'ability to make a difference'.

Finding 2: Although the specific motivations of individuals vary, the most frequently cited motivation for studying planning in both the UWE student survey and the RTPI student survey was 'opportunities for career progression'. The fact that planning as an academic discipline can lead directly to employment, and, importantly, employment with the potential for onward progression, was clearly an attraction for the students surveyed. Licentiate members mentioned this less frequently, which perhaps reflects the fact this cohort was already in work.

Finding 3: Most respondents also chose to study planning because of an evident enthusiasm for the subject, particularly its inter-disciplinary nature, and for its role in improving places, most notably cities and urban areas. The diversity and breadth planning as a discipline was clearly a major attraction for many students. It was notable, however, that rural planning, and broader interests in rural development, were not evident as interests for the respondents in these surveys.

Finding 4: Students in the UWE survey were asked about their desires for change, and whilst numerous topics were identified, the overwhelming focus on achieving positive environmental change was striking. This question was not included in the RTPI's surveys, so we cannot comment on any commonality here, although it is worth noting that a predominant desire for environmental change was not strongly evident in other related responses in the RTPI's surveys, particularly reasons for studying planning, or desires for learning.

Finding 5: Students participating in the UWE survey had strong ideas about planning values ranging from values associated with professional practice such as integrity and honesty, to ideas around the public interest and the promotion of balanced and sustainable development. However, it was clear that these students did not start their studies with one unifying idea of planning's value*.*

Finding 6: Some students raised the possibility – right from the outset of their studies - that the reality of planning might be distant from their ideal, using words like 'rule-based', 'rigid', 'technocratic' and 'bureaucratic'. This 'possibility' was reflected in the 'reality' of those handful of Licentiates in the RTPI's survey (21%), who, in reflecting on whether their early practice experiences matched up to their expectations, used the phrases 'rigid', 'process driven', and 'too much focus on technical detail', to express a degree of disappointment.

Finding 7: Linked to the previous finding, there was a little unease about the contribution that planning will and can actually make, with the majority of participants describing their levels of 'optimism' about the ability of planning to make a difference as 'somewhat optimistic' suggesting more circumspection than might be anticipated amongst young planners choosing to study planning and apparently eager to make change. One might have expected levels of optimism between students and those in practice to differ, but there was strong consistency between the UWE survey data and the RTPI Licentiate survey[13].·

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[13] The question on 'levels of optimism' was not posed in the RTPI student survey.

Finding 8: Only the Licentiate respondents could comment on whether their early career experiences were matching up to their original expectations. **Whilst** the majority reported their experiences to have matched their expectations **some chose to qualify this by expressing some uncertainty about planning's ability to affect change in reality,** questioning, in particular the political nature of planning decision making.

Finding 9: Students in the UWE survey were asked about what they *want* to learn about, whereas students and Licentiates in the RTPI surveys were asked what they *had* learnt about, and therefore the results are not directly comparable. It is perhaps unsurprising that environmental protection and decision making was top of the list for 'desires for learning' in the UWE student survey, given the strong environmental motivations expressed by this sample. What is interesting, however, is an apparent subtle difference between the desires learning expressed by students in the UWE survey (focused on topics rather than skills), and the strong response in the RTPI's two surveys for **far greater course content focused on practical application. This exposes the important (and long standing) conversation about what planning education is for: is it a professional training to deliver 'practice-ready' students, 'learning by doing', or a more abstract education in critical thinking about spaces and places?**

Finding 10: The majority of students new to planning in the UWE survey were understandably undecided as to their intended career destinations, with the majority of students expressing openness to both public and private sector career routes. Nevertheless, of the total choices expressed, a private sector route, was the marginal inclination.

Finding 11: The potential for a tension between the perceived public interest values of planning and private sector employment routes was alluded to but with little in-depth comment. More understanding is needed as to how ideas around the value of planning (particularly, although not exclusively, public interest values) influence intended employment choices. In the UWE survey, this finding manifested itself in the comments about whether the public interest could be served in the private sector, and in the Licentiate survey, by comments such as, "*it is hard to see how my original motivations can be achieved, particularly within the current planning system and in a role as a planning consultant*".

What next?

This report has aimed to give some greater depth of analysis and discussion to the headline findings of recent research into the aspirations, expectations and motivations of those starting on their journey into professional planning. The findings are rich, insightful - and possibly most importantly at this stage – partial, requiring follow up investigation and research over time.

We now know much more about the opinions of planning students and licentiate RTPI members at one specific moment in time, and this gives us ground for insightful engagement into questions of values and education – as well as the ability to bring about change. For us as planning educators, it is very much a first step in exploring how education and early years of practice shape both individuals' motivations, and the emerging profession: *planning students of today are planning leaders of tomorrow*.

For the profession more broadly, it clearly should be of concern that student and graduate levels of optimism about planning's ability to affect change appear not to match their ideas about planning and their motivations for becoming planners, quite so early on in their planning journey. Similarly, the narrative of disappointment reflected in a small number of the Licentiate's observations about their early practice experiences, is also worrying.

This report should, therefore, act as a stimulus about the nature of planning itself; as a profession, industry, practice, system, science, art, and interface. The reflections and perspectives of the respondents on the state of planning today are pertinent. They allow us to begin to consider the nature of planning education today; its appropriateness, effectiveness, impact, and approach, and in doing so allow educators to consider the need to

reflect on their own practice. But in addition to this, perhaps in response to this research, we can all explore if there is opportunity for positive change such that the planning professional environment which graduates move into is adapted and evolved positively to reflect their desired reality, rather than their education as students being changed to reflect currently suggested actual realities.

The report should be motivation to deepen the discussion on the role of planning education, and the link between what is taught and what then practitioners feel they can do by way of achieving the changes they want to see in the world. The role of both Planning Schools, and the RTPI, in shaping this is critical.

More immediately, the report suggests that there is more to be done to ensure that awareness, visibility, presence and prominence of planning is enhanced. Important to this is getting planners into schools to speak to students and show what their job involves - planners from both public and private sectors. This can enhance the traction of undergraduate programmes, and provide appropriate foundations to support students making choices later in their own personal journey. Further to this therefore, ensuring that undergraduates from a wider range of academic backgrounds are targeted with information about postgraduate planning is important.

Most of all the findings suggest the need for future research.

An ongoing research agenda:

The above findings and conclusions are based on a snapshot of students in 2019-2020. Inevitably, given the nature of the survey, and the relatively limited number of open questions, we are left wanting to undertake more in-depth exploration of the issues that have been exposed. Below, we set out our agenda for ongoing research:

> *From student to practitioner*: The majority of students who completed the UWE survey gave their permission for on-going participation and contact. This gives us the potential to add value to the findings presented here by following students as they progress through their studies and on into practice. This will enable us to explore how their experiences match up to their original motivations, to understand if their ideas about the purpose of planning are borne out in reality, and see if their desires for change are things they feel they can carry effect in practice.

> *Professional comparability*: to be able situate this study in a wider understanding of professions, we would like to understand whether some of the issues emerging – particularly around levels of optimism, and concerns about ability to effect change – are unique to young planning students and practitioners, or are they a more general characteristic of students new to study and / or early practice?

> *Practice destinations/intentions*: we would like to interrogate how students' ideas around planning and its role and value, and their stated reasons for studying planning, influence intended career destinations. Is there a tipping point between one set of values and another, and how do different aspirations converge and/or contradict, e.g. potential future income, nature of work, values?

> *Understanding practice*: we want to undertake more qualitative research about the nature of different practice experiences in order to understand how these experiences influence practitioner's ideas about planning and its lived experience in work: this is particularly important in understanding where young practitioners' experiences are not matching up to their original expectations - where is the emergent disappointment narrative most evident and why?

> *An employers' view on education versus an educators' view of education:* it seems a timely point to have a contemporary debate of the age-old question around what university planning education is for: skills for practice, or the nurturing of critical thinkers, and can / should both be achieved?

➢ ***Planning values***: given the variety of views presented about what planning values might encapsulate, a more in-depth review of whether there has been a shift in planning values would be interesting. Are previous characterisations of planning values around ideas of the public interest as predominant in the lived experience of planners in contemporary planning practice in the UK as previously? Does the private sector planner have the same ideas of planning's value as a planner in the public sector, if indeed these can be defined? If there has been a demonstrable shift, what does this tell us about contemporary planning practice and how its purpose is perceived by different practitioners? Further work here should reflect and build upon recent ESRC funded work, 'Working in the Public Interest: Exploring the role of the private sector in planning'[14].

➢ ***Understanding the international planning student***: An increasing number of both undergraduate and postgraduate planning students are from outside of the UK. To what extent does planning education reflect the needs / desires of the international student (and the history of planning in their home countries) and inter-alia what is the potential benefit of more international content to planning courses? We should seek to further understand the perspectives of international students, particularly their apparent lower levels of optimism in the potential ability of planning to effect change.

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[14] https://witpi.group.shef.ac.uk/

Student survey on motivations and expectations for practice. September 2019

Page 1: Student survey on motivations and expectations for practice

To undergraduate and postgraduate planning students enrolling at universities in September 2019.

We would be grateful if you could complete this short survey on your motivations for, and expectations about, becoming a planner. This is the start of a long-term study being undertaken by the University of West of England in collaboration with the Royal Town Planning Institute, to explore students' expectations and experiences as they move through planning study and into practice. We hope to keep in touch with you during your early years of practice to explore how your experiences relate to your initial expectations.

Your individual views will not be attributed to you directly in any analysis or presentation of findings.

CONSENT

Your participation in this research study is voluntary and involves filling out this online survey. It will take approximately 10 minutes.

Material gathered during this research will be treated as confidential and securely stored. The researchers may use selected information and quotes in their evaluation reports, and in academic publications or presentations, but you will not be named personally. By default it will be removed from the UWE server and anonymised on completion of the evaluation.

This research has received ethics approval from the University of the West of England and is being conducted in accordance with UWE's research governance framework.

If you have any queries about the survey, please contact Hannah Hickman, Senior Research Fellow at UWE, via hannah.hickman@uwe.ac.uk

Clicking on the "yes" button under question 1 below indicates that:

• you have read the above information
• you voluntarily agree to participate

Page 2: Page 1

1. I have read the background information for this study (above), and consent to participate in the study under the conditions set out in the information.

☐ Yes

2. Are you a postgraduate or undergraduate student?

○ Undergraduate
○ Postgraduate

2.a. If you are an undergraduate student, please indicate your current year of study.

○ 1st year
○ 2nd year
○ 3rd year

2.b. If you are a postgraduate student, what was your undergraduate degree?

[   ]

3. Are you a UK or overseas student?

○ UK
○ Overseas - EU
○ Overseas - Outside of the EU

4. In which university are you studying?

- ○ Anglia Ruskin University
- ○ Birmingham City University
- ○ Cardiff University
- ○ Heriot Watt University
- ○ Leeds Beckett University
- ○ London South Bank University
- ○ Newcastle University
- ○ Oxford Brookes University
- ○ Plymouth University
- ○ Queen's University, Belfast
- ○ Sheffield Hallam University
- ○ Technological University Dublin
- ○ Ulster University
- ○ University College Cork
- ○ University College Dublin
- ○ University College London
- ○ University of Birmingham
- ○ University of Brighton
- ○ University of Dundee
- ○ University of Glasgow
- ○ University of Hertfordshire
- ○ University of Liverpool
- ○ University of Manchester
- ○ University of Reading
- ○ University of Sheffield
- ○ University of Strathclyde
- ○ University of the West of England
- ○ University of Westminster

5. Do you currently work / have you recently worked in planning practice?

○ Yes

○ No

5.a. If yes, please select your length of experience to date:

○ One month or less

○ Up to 6 months

○ 6 months or more

6. Why did you decide to study planning?

7. Did you consider other course options?

○ Yes

○ No

7.a. If yes, what other options did you consider?

8. Before you started this course, were you aware of:

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Yes	No
The Royal Town Planning Institute?	☐	☐
What a planner does as a job?	☐	☐
RTPI Ambassadors?	☐	☐
RTPI Bursaries?	☐	☐
or had spoken to a professional planner?	☐	☐

9. Are you optimistic about the ability of planning (and planning practitioners) to effect positive change?

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Very optimistic	Somewhat optimistic	Neither optimistic nor unoptimistic	Somewhat unoptimistic	Very unoptimistic
1	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

10. What sort of change would you like to see, e.g. environmental, societal, economic?

11. Do you associate planners as signing up to a particular set of values, and if so, what do you think they are?

12. What do you think are the most important skills for planning practice? (Please rank the following skills, 1 being the least important, 5 being the most important)

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	1	2	3	4	5
Collaborative working	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Communication	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Conflict resolution	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Creative visioning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Leadership	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Multi-disciplinary working	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Problem solving	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Professionalism	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Project management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Stakeholder management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

13. Would you add any skills to the list included in question 12?

[   ]

14. What are you most interested in learning about? (Please rank the following, 1 being least interested, 5 being most interested)

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	1	2	3	4	5
Climate change and energy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Communication, negotiation and mediation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Community / neighbourhood planning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Design	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Development management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Economic development and growth	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Environmental protection and decision making	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Governance and decision making	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Housing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Inclusive planning and health	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Infrastructure planning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Plan making	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Regeneration	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Research	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Transport	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

15. What do you hope to achieve in planning practice?

16. Do you already have views on the type of organisation in which you would like to practice in the future?

Please select between 1 and 2 answers.
- ☐ Public sector - local authority
- ☐ Public sector - other
- ☐ Private sector - consultancy
- ☐ Private sector - developer
- ☐ Voluntary sector
- ☐ I haven't reached a view yet
- ☐ I don't intend to work in planning practice
- ☐ Other

16.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

[   ]

17. Do you intend to become a chartered member of the Royal Town Planning Institute?

Please select no more than 1 answer(s).
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure at this stage

18. If there is anything else you would like to add to supplement any of the above answers, then please do so here.

[   ]

19. We would like to do some follow up interviews with people in each year cohort once they enter practice. If you are a happy to be contacted about an interview in the future, please leave a personal (non univeristy) email address that would enable us to contact you. There is no requirement to do so. Email addresses supplied will be held in a password protected database and only used for the purposes of making contact on a future interview.

[ ]

20. Please now confirm that you are happy for the above survey answers to be used subject to confidentiality and anonymity as indicated in the information above.

◯ Yes
◯ No

APPENDIX 2: RTPI SURVEY

Planning Course Survey 2019-20 – student and licentiate members

1. **At which university do/did you study?**
2. **Which course are/were you on?**
3. **Please indicate whether you are/were studying full- or part-time.**
4. **Are you currently working?**
5. **If you are working, is this...**

In planning?

In another field?

6. **If you are currently a student, are you graduating this summer?**
7. **If you are graduating this summer from an undergraduate programme, are you undertaking further study? If 'yes', which course will you be doing?**
8. **If you have graduated, are you a Licentiate member of the RTPI? If you are not, it would be helpful if you provided some details regarding your reasons.**
9. **Why did you choose to study planning?**
10. **What are/were the best aspects of the course?**
11. **What could be improved?**
12. **Which topics and skills are/were covered on the course?**
    - Climate change and energy
    - Communication, negotiation and mediation
    - Community/neighbourhood planning
    - Design
    - Development management
    - Economic development and growth
    - Environmental Impact Assessment
    - Governance and decision making
    - Housing
    - Inclusive planning and health
    - Infrastructure planning
    - Plan making
    - Regeneration
    - Research
    - Transport

13. **Which topics and skills should be/should have been covered on the course?**
    - Climate change and energy
    - Communication, negotiation and mediation
    - Community/neighbourhood planning

- Design
- Development management
- Economic development and growth
- Environmental Impact Assessment
- Governance and decision making
- Housing
- Inclusive planning and health
- Infrastructure planning
- Plan making
- Regeneration
- Research
- Transport

14. Any further comments you would like to make to the RTPI: