

'The' Re-presented Core of New Zealand Professional Planning Education in 2009

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The New Zealand Planning Institute (NZPI) accredits a number of specific New Zealand planning programmes offered by some New Zealand universities as meeting the academic requirements for their graduates to enter the Institute as graduate members. The programmes are reviewed every five years to assess their appropriateness for continued accreditation. A set of core planning knowledge and skill is set out in the NZPI education policy against which part of the assessment is conducted. This approach could be expected to result in a standard core to the planning programmes offered by New Zealand universities and a close match between the NZPI core knowledge and skill set and that offered by universities. However, planning programmes also have to meet the requirements of academic disciplines at university level. There are inherent tensions between the academy and the profession. The NZPI has announced a review of its education policy. As part of the input to that review, this paper explores and discusses the current core of New Zealand's accredited planning programmes based on a comparison of the prescriptions of the accredited programmes.

Key words: planning core, New Zealand, university, NZPI, education, professional, accreditation.

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Introduction

Historians of planning theory are well aware of the tensions between the academic discipline of planning and the practice of planning. They are also aware of the range of approaches to planning theory and the changes that have occurred in the nature of planning practice and the diversity of approaches to planning. As awareness has grown of the complexity of interactions between humans and their biophysical and socio-cultural environments, so too has grown the demand for more sophisticated understandings of, and demands on, planning practice. Traditional approaches, such as top-down 'master planning' have been challenged by Marxism, structuralism, the 'communicative turn', post-modernism, post-colonialism and environmentalism. Whether planning practice has been driven more by developments within the academic discipline or the discipline has been driven by practice is arguable, but that the two have traditionally had a very close, possibly mutually dependent, relationship appears generally accepted.

As with any healthy academic discipline there are ongoing debates over the nature and content of planning. This is particularly so in the formative years of a discipline as it battles for recognition as a distinct discipline, as opposed to a field or subfield, within its academic context. Similar debates occur among planning practitioners as they seek to advance or defend their positions with respect to other potentially competing practitioners who align with other disciplines (e.g., engineers, surveyors). Those involved in the teaching of planning

within academia are tasked with preparing students for a broad range of careers as planners, from research and education to a variety of practice contexts (e.g., urban, transportation, rural, housing, development, health, resource, environmental, indigenous, coastal) and levels (e.g., policy, regulatory or development control). That there should be tensions between those who research, teach and practice planning is perhaps inevitable given the different priorities that determine in which category their activities primarily fall. This is further exacerbated by the dominance or otherwise of particular ideologies of planning and the academic and practice contexts at any particular time. Among practising planners, the development of institutional mechanisms to advance the interests of their particular associative interest group include the development of formal mechanisms such as guilds.

The NZPI

In the New Zealand context, the guild most frequently associated with the academic planning discipline is the New Zealand Planning Institute (NZPI). The hegemonic history of the NZPI, and its conflicts with other guilds, has been traced in Miller's (2007) interesting hagiography *Unsung Heroes*. Lacking the advantages of statutory recognition as a discipline, the NZPI has sought to advance its members' interests through establishing an aura of objective exclusivity based on adherence to a code of practice, capital, and distinctive expertise. Among the tools employed by the NZPI to maintain its status as a home for distinctive expertise are its requirements for (potential) members to demonstrate and maintain a particular knowledge and skill base. Thus, entry requirements include possession of a recognised academic qualification and three years relevant practical experience or, alternatively, seven years practical experience.

The recognition of an academic programme is entirely at the discretion of the NZPI Executive Council. To provide an appearance of objectivity in exercising its discretion, the Council has developed a process of conducting five yearly reviews of programmes that are already recognised and of requiring new programmes to face a similar examination. The review panel is usually headed by an overseas academic (usually Australian), and NZPI members considered experienced in or knowledgeable about local government (usually district/city councils), private sector, and Maori. The chimeric nature of this process has recently become apparent through NZPI Council's rejection of key recommendations of its review team. In its recently released redrafted Education Policy, the NZPI Council proposes to lessen the independence of the Panel by replacing one of the independent appointees with the CEO of the NZPI and having a preference for one of the others to have been a previous NZPI Councillor.

The NZ Academy

A history of the development of planning as an academic discipline, and the key role played by the NZPI in establishing it, has been outlined elsewhere (Miller 2007). To summarise, the first programme was established at Auckland University, followed by Massey, Otago, Lincoln and Waikato Universities. The first three were established in the days of the Town and Country Planning Act, a traditional master plan, city-oriented regime. The Otago programme, however, was distinct in that it was a postgraduate programme specialising in regional and resource planning. This reflected and announced the arrival in New Zealand and the academic discipline generally of a more strategic approach and scale to planning that provided more integrative, 'beyond the city' planning. This was supported by concurrent 1970s changes in the Town and Country Planning Act. It also reflected the renewed international awareness of

resource-based limits to growth and the emergence of environmentalism present in the mid-1970s.

The Lincoln and Waikato programmes were established in the 1980s and 1990s respectively, with Lincoln's being revamped at the start of the new millennium. Lincoln also emphasised resource planning and especially planning policy and its graduates played significant roles in the reforms to New Zealand planning legislation in the late 1980s and early 1990s that resulted in the introduction of the Resource Management Act 1991 and changes to fisheries management planning. The NZPI-recognised Waikato programme was at post-graduate level only, but built on an undergraduate Resource and Environmental Planning major. Aspects of this programme were introduced to Massey when Jenny Dixon switched universities.

From anecdotal evidence, it is probable that a detailed examination of the history of the establishment of the new academic programmes would show considerable resistance from the established programmes to each new planning programme. The source of such resistance would include the historical conflicts between universities, based as much on personalities and concerns over the potential competition for students as 'objective' arguments of lack of need for a new programme. The final decision on establishing new programmes, however, reflects the amount of central government funding and associated priorities for tertiary education. That each programme has been approved is indicative of acceptance that each provides appropriate disciplinary content, graduated learning and relevance to warrant their academic status. However, not all planning programmes are recognised by the NZPI. Otago's BSc major *Land Planning and Development*, Lincoln's *Bachelor of Environmental Management and Planning* and Waikato University's BSocSc major *Environmental Planning*. Each of these is a three year degree and the NZPI requires a minimum of 4 years for a degree to be accredited.

It is important to place the following discussion in the context of three recent academic governance directions that are exacerbating tensions between academia and the NZPI. These are the increased emphasis at universities on research, degree flexibility and benchmarking. The New Zealand government, like others, has adopted measures of performance of its universities and their staff. The guiding principle in the New Zealand system is that universities should provide research-led education. It places a requirement on universities to submit to assessments of their staff in terms of their research productivity with greater funding being made available to those universities that have higher level of research productivity. This is based on each academic staff member being required to submit research portfolios every six years to independent national rating boards. While the ratings of individual staff are not known, the aggregates within particular areas and between universities are published. Thus we know that in the subject area "Architecture, Design and Planning", Lincoln University is top-ranked for research productivity, but we do not know which staff contributed most to this. The system provides a real incentive for universities to only hire staff with PhDs and emphasise research engagement and publication. Few practising professional planners meet these criteria, which also work to limit time available for staff to engage with professional practise and reduce such engagement to unrewarding cost factors for universities and staff.

The second trend in academia has been in response to recognition that graduates may go through many different 'careers' during their life. Consequently there is a greater societal need for graduates to have more interdisciplinary skills to provide a sufficiently flexible workforce to cope with the greater levels of volatility in employment generally. The

Government's Tertiary Education Commission, which advises government on funding and other educational matters at universities, has indicated a desire to adopt Europe's Bologna Agreement. This would standardise degrees as comprising 3 years (Bachelors), plus one (for honours or post graduate diploma), plus one (for masters) or 3 years (Bachelors), plus two (masters). This has been the standard approach for most degree programmes for many years, but is clearly different from the four year (Bachelors) plus 1 year (masters) favoured by the NZPI accreditation process. In particular, the trend is toward enabling double majors, not simply a major and a minor. To achieve this, the majors have less prescriptive content in undergraduate degrees, thereby enabling greater flexibility for students to follow particular double majors or specialisations (minors) while retaining academic coherence in the student's programme. Consequently, academic programmes are being repackaged to enable greater depth in specialisation (through the minors), rather than breadth of intra-discipline coverage, or alternatively to increase the level of interdisciplinary knowledge (through the double majors). The choice is left to the student.

Benchmarking is primarily in terms of research productivity, but evidence of 'end-user' connectivity or professional body accreditation is also invoked by academic staff as justification for the importance of their programme. This provides an entrée for NZPI accreditation processes as a form of end-user benchmarking and potential as a marketing tool to attract students to the university. However, it requires the NZPI to continue to demonstrate its relevance and the appropriateness of its accreditation processes.

It is not surprising then, that academic programmes seek recognition from established guilds and most planning programmes look towards the NZPI for that recognition. However, it is notable that in the redrafting of its education policy the NZPI has provided no evidence of being aware of these directions in education. Indeed at least one member of the NZPI Council was unaware of the existence of the TEC or the Bologna Agreement until mid-2009. This is not surprising as university education is not a category that is included at NZPI annual conferences; there is no NZPI coordinated or funded meetings of planning programme heads; and there are few NZPI members on the staff of the NZPI accredited planning programmes. This disconnect with the academy may also mean that the NZPI is both falling behind in its understanding of planning theory and research. It may also become, perhaps unwittingly, subject to the agenda of particular interests who stand to gain commercially from reductions in the number of planning programmes the NZPI accredits (e.g., through increasing exclusivity of accredited programmes and reduced numbers of planning graduates competing for planning employment).

The review of the NZPI education policy is a mechanism by which such exclusivity can be strengthened. At the heart of the justification of changes in the policy is the issue of what should be accepted as the 'core' content of planning curricula to ensure the quality of planning education is maintained or improved. Therefore, it is pertinent to explore the content of current NZPI accredited programmes to see if there is some apparent planning core to one of the professional practice sides of the planning discipline (there are a number of professional or other bodies which planners might consider more or less appropriate to their professional practice than the NZPI, but the focus here is on the NZPI)..

Methodology

The methodology employed was to examine the prescriptions for the accredited planning programmes published in the university calendars in 2009. The focus is on the core (i.e.,

compulsory) courses. These courses and their prescriptions are taken as representing the respective academies view of core skills and because these are NZPI accredited programmes, must also represent past NZPI acceptance of the appropriateness of their content. It must be noted, however, that the NZPI bases its accreditation on a range of factors and on a deeper assessment of the content of the courses than simply reading their prescriptions. In this research we have deliberately opted for the prescriptions because this is the ‘face’ of the courses presented to the public and might be expected to distil the essence of the content. Promotional brochures and detailed course outlines change with changes in personnel and marketing trends and may become outdated, but the calendar prescriptions are in part a contract with the potential students and are updated at least annually. They therefore provide the most reliable standardised data to examine in a particular year.

There is considerable variation between universities in the number of courses (papers) that comprises a full time programme of study. The number of points or credits for courses/papers within a university programme also vary (some courses are worth double the credits of others), consequently there is potential for over- or under-weighting particular areas or fields of knowledge. The analysis is based on a careful reading of the course titles and prescriptions, bearing in mind the above matters.

A manual count of the repetition of key words in the title of core courses identified the most frequent words in each of the three University programmes. Some words with similar meanings were grouped based on the context of their use. This process was repeated for the core course prescriptions. Some prescriptions were wordier than others, some repeated words with considerable frequency whereas similar courses did not, and the number of core courses varied significantly. This meant that a simple count of frequency would distort comparison between programmes and the overall total frequency of repetition for all programmes combined. The frequency with which the words appeared in each programme was divided by the number of credits that core courses comprised for the respective programme. This standardisation addressed the difference between the number of courses but not the internal repetition or differences in the number of words in a prescription as it appeared unlikely that such an exercise would significantly affect the outcome. The number of times that the word ‘planning’ did not appear in the title of a paper was also recorded for reasons noted further below.

Results

Auckland, the oldest and largest of the planning programmes, is also the most prescriptive with all but two (30 credits) of its papers considered core. Massey and Lincoln consider the core to be much smaller (285 and 240 credits respectively) but, like Auckland, Massey only allows one non-planning-related elective paper (Table 1). Lincoln provides the most flexibility to students, enabling them to gain double majors more easily. However, because the fourth year of Lincoln’s programme is taken as a post-graduate year students must obtain a B average to enter it, whereas a C average is sufficient for students in each of the other programmes. Lincoln is also the only one of the three programmes that requires all planning students to take science papers to at least second year level.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

All programmes had papers that did not contain the word ‘planning’ in the title, but Massey had the fewest papers without planning and Auckland the most with it. Lincoln was least

likely to include 'planning' in the title, but of the six words/concepts appearing in the titles of all three programmes, 'planning' was the most common (Table 2). The standardised comparison indicates that Lincoln gave the most weight to the 'environment' and to 'urban' in naming its papers, although these words appear only three and two times respectively. The other words/concepts to be shared are (in order of standardised frequency): 'professional practice', 'law/legislation', and 'society/social'. Massey placed the most emphasis on 'professional practice', while Lincoln most emphasised the other two. Auckland placed the least weight on each of these words/concepts. 'Planning', 'studio' and 'special topic' were the only words/concepts to be repeated more than twice in the titles of Auckland core papers; 'planning', 'environment' and 'professional practice' for Massey; and, 'planning' and 'environment' for Lincoln. Both Lincoln and Auckland used 'resource management' and 'economic/economy' at least twice whereas these words do not appear in the titles of Massey's papers (Tables 3, 4 and 5). Auckland and Massey both used 'community' more than twice, but the word does not appear in Lincoln's titles.

[INSERT TABLES 2, 3, 4, 5 HERE]

Thirty words/concepts were shared by all three programmes in the prescriptions of their core courses (Table 3). 'Planning/planners' was the most common. The other top ten standardised concepts, respectively, recognised: diverse dimensions and perspectives, methods/techniques, environment, issues, practice, New Zealand, applications, theories, and law.

[INSERT TABLE 6 HERE]

Discussion

The way in which the academy presents planning programmes will in part be affected by the level of demand for its courses and the importance it places on planning research, planning practice, professional recognition, graduate employability and student recruitment. In reading the websites and course information, it was readily apparent that Massey, in particular, had placed considerable effort on promoting planning to potential students. Its course structure was relatively easy to follow and attractively presented, even if it did substitute a non-core GIS paper for a core Treaty of Waitangi paper.

It was also apparent that there are several core papers at each university that can hardly be considered *core* to the discipline of planning (e.g., Auckland's 'special topic' papers), but which may reflect more the specialisation of the university. For instance Auckland, based in the heart of the largest city in New Zealand has a course simply titled 'Housing'. Massey notes a close connection with the GIS programme and consequently has a required course on GIS and (as noted above) lists a non-core GIS paper on its website as if it was a core paper. Massey also clearly has a special interest in communicative planning and in hazard, risk and disaster which are not shared by the other universities. It is not clear why Massey alone feels that it needs three papers to teach the one concept "Professional Planning", especially in a university. By comparison, New Zealand Law Schools do not have a need to have three papers on professional practice.

Lincoln, is the smallest university and with fewer students doing its planning programme than the other two programmes. It generates economies of scale by attracting students from planning-related disciplines (e.g., environmental management). This may explain why it has such imaginative course names as "The Living City" instead of a name more accurately reflecting its content, such as 'Histories and planning of modern cities and urbanism'. From the perspective of promoting the brand name 'planning' this is ineffective, but in a rural

setting where 'planning' is often a dirty word, promoting a brand is perhaps less important than attracting students to the profession. Lincoln also places more emphasis on the regional scale than do the other universities.

It is important to treat these results carefully. Just because a topic is not mentioned in a course prescription does not mean that it is not present. Maori issues, for instance, are mainstreamed at Lincoln, where there are also minors in 'transportation', 'urbanism and design', and 'spatial planning' that students interested in planning careers might elect to take. Alternatively they can graduate with a double degree that matches their planning degree (e.g., a BCom(Transport and Logistics)). Its programme has the least number of core papers and it has recently been reviewed by the NZPI accreditation team which recommended it continue to be accredited for another five years.

The NZPI released a redraft of its new education policy and accreditation procedures in early August 2009 for comment prior to adoption by the Council, set tentatively for 21 August 2009. The policy (apparently drafted by Caroline Miller of Massey University) includes in its objectives for planning education, to:

- Produce planners who are critical and creative thinkers, adaptable, objective, flexible and who are able to work in a dynamic environment
- Ensure planners have an understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi and how its principles may be implemented through the planning system
- Produce planners sensitive to and committed to working in multi-cultural and multi-ethnic contexts
- Produce planners who can work in a multidisciplinary environment
- Support research and the pursuit of planning knowledge

Other objectives relate to attracting and supporting high quality students.

The substantive objectives seem to reflect an understanding of the academic task and match well the core identified in the existing planning programmes. However, the objective to: "Develop in students a commitment to the planning profession" smacks of doctrinaire and runs counter to encouraging critical thinking.

Somewhat presumptuously, the policy (p.3) states that the NZPI "primarily ensures quality in planning education" and proceeds to set out "the content of planning programmes" including the order in which the content shall be taught. The titles of the knowledge sections are: "Introduction to planning", "Planning context", "Planning methods", "Planning practice", "Planning Law and Policy", "Cultural and Social aspects of planning", and "Specialisations" (p.6). The content described generally matches the core identified in this research. There are some exceptions. The first is the emphasis in the redrafted policy on Maatauranga Maori. This phrase is missing from all three universities' programmes but, as noted above it is probably mainstreamed where it is not explicitly present. It is interesting to note that GIS is specifically considered an alternative to design, as opposed to being a necessary operational competence, but mediation and negotiation are operational competence requirements. This clearly represents the communicative turn that appears to be a Massey specialisation, although again such skills may be hidden within the detail of professional practice papers as at Lincoln and special topics at Auckland. The low rating of GIS may also reflect the reality that in most planning offices GIS specialists are employed and the average planner's desk comes equipped with ready access to an online, serviced, user-friendly GIS and on-the-job training that make a full university course unnecessary.

Most significant, however, is the failure to include the biophysical environment, and associated requirements for a greater level of understanding of science in the redrafted NZPI policy. 'Environment' is a common theme in the core of the planning programmes, more so than cultural and social aspects of planning which the redrafted policy favours. Perhaps academia, especially the newer programmes like Lincoln's (and Waikato's unaccredited Environmental Planning major) which require planning-related science papers in the first and second year, are better aware of the major issues facing planning into the future, whereas the profession remains dominated with concerns of the past and the planner's present day-to-day operating skills.

There are operational aspects of the redrafted policy that will be of concern to some universities, academics and members (e.g., the inclusion of 'planning' in the name of courses and the NZPI requiring lecturers to be full members of the NZPI (or equivalent) regardless of whether it is adequately serving their interests or they are the most competent for the task). The most significant concern, may be that despite stating that planning education provides "a *deep understanding of the complex forces that shape our urban, regional, and natural environments at all spatial scales*" (P.3, emphasis added), there is no requirement for planning programmes to provide a solid science component. Nor, in a long narrow nation of islands, is there any mention of coastal and marine planning despite the mandatory requirements to produce coastal plans extending out to twelve nautical miles. Instead, the emphasis is on the traditional strengths of the planning core.

Conclusion

The identification of the core of planning is fraught with difficulties, but is obviously of importance to both the discipline and the profession. Tensions exist between the desire of professional institutes to establish and reinforce their exclusivity to the benefit of their members, and the discipline's requirement to provide research-led education (with its concomitant academic freedom, critical content, and theoretical thrust). In New Zealand at least, our research suggests that either the age of establishment of an undergraduate planning programme or the context within which it was established has a significant effect on the extent to which it is prescriptive. The core educational content for the planning discipline appears to lie in the concepts of 'planning', 'environment', 'urban', 'professional practice', 'law' and 'society'. The substantive content appears dominated by 'theory', 'law', 'recognition of the diversity of perspectives', and an orientation toward 'professional practice' and real world 'issues'. Of these, only planning theory, professional (planning) practice, and planning law appear to be distinctively core to the discipline (as opposed to other disciplines). However, although the discipline represents itself as being relevant and concerned about the environment, relatively little weight is placed on biophysical science through which to understand that environment.

This raises questions as to whether the profession has been and is being adequately prepared for the biophysical challenges that face it. That the profession does not include the environment or biophysical science in its core content may reflect inadequacies in the science content of the planning programmes producing the majority of New Zealand's planners, an ideological belief that resource planning and the role of science in our society can be addressed adequately through communicative skills and professional planning practice, or that the majority of planners in the NZPI (and certainly those best placed to attend meetings and be active on its branch and national executives) are primarily employed in urban planning.

The profession has relatively few members in regional councils or national government agencies. With current moves to amalgamate city and regional councils this may result in planners becoming less employable in government bodies that have broader regional mandates. Such concerns are not reflected in the redrafted policy. It appears time for the NZPI to take its lead from academia and place greater emphasis on the environment. Unless biophysical science becomes as much a part of planning as is social science and Maori culture, then the discipline may be found sadly wanting in facing the real challenges of the present, let alone the future. If the discipline recognises the importance of the environment, but the profession does not then the tensions may reach breaking point and we may see an increase in planning programmes that no longer consider NZPI accreditation relevant to the discipline.

Table 1: Course credits and numbers of core courses in the three undergraduate four year accredited NZPI programmes

	Auckland	Massey	Lincoln
Full time load per semester credits	60	60	60
Credits per paper	10-30	15-30	15-20
Credits per semester for fulltime	60	60	60
Total Credits required to complete qualification	480	480	480
Total core credits	450	285	240
Total core papers	36	18	12
(credits per paper vary in each programme)			
Required choice from Planning-related credits	15	180	105
Required choice from Planning-related papers	1	12	7
Elective credits allowed	15	15	135
Elective papers allowed	1	1	10
Minimum average grade for admission to fourth year	C	C	B

Table 2: Frequency of words in core course titles that are shared by all three undergraduate programmes

Paper title key words	Auckland	Massey	Lincoln	Total	Standardised			
					total	Auckland	Massey	Lincoln
Planning not in paper title	16	7	9	32	0.097617	0.035556	0.024561	0.0375
Planning	20	11	3	34	0.095541	0.044444	0.038596	0.0125
Environment	2	3	3	8	0.027471	0.004444	0.010526	0.0125
Urban	1	2	2	5	0.017573	0.002222	0.007018	0.008333
Professional Practice	1	3	1	5	0.016915	0.002222	0.010526	0.004167
Legislation/Law	2	1	2	5	0.016287	0.004444	0.003509	0.008333
Social/Society	2	1	1	4	0.01212	0.004444	0.003509	0.004167

Table 3: Most common words/concepts in Auckland University core paper titles

Paper title key words	Auckland
Planning	20
Planning not in paper title	16
Studio	7
Special Topic	3
Environment	2
Legislation/Law	2
Economic	2
Resource Management	2
Social/Society	2
Community/ies	2
Development	2
Frameworks	2
Science	2

Table 4: Most common words/concepts in Massey University core paper titles

Paper title key words	Massey
Planning	11
Planning not in paper title	7
Environment	3
Professional Practice	3
Urban	2
Community/ies	2
Policy	2

Table 5: Most common words/concepts in Lincoln University core paper titles

Paper title key words	Lincoln
Planning not in paper title	9
Planning	3
Environment	3
Legislation/Law	2
Urban	2
Economic	2
Resource Management	2
Regional	2

Table 6: Ten most frequently occurring words in all three programmes' course prescriptions

Prescription key words	Auckland	Massey	Lincoln	Total frequency	Standardised total frequency	Standardised Auckland	Standardised Massey	Standardised Lincoln
Planning/planners	18	25	4	47	0.144386	0.04	0.087719	0.016667
Dimensions/Factors/Diverse/ Perspectives/Difference/attitudes/scales/disciplinary/ paradigm	8	10	3	21	0.065365	0.017778	0.035088	0.0125
Methodological/methods/ technique/tools	5	11	3	19	0.062208	0.011111	0.038596	0.0125
Environmental	7	7	5	19	0.06095	0.015556	0.024561	0.020833
Issues/topical/significance/ problem	6	9	3	18	0.057412	0.013333	0.031579	0.0125
Practice/practical/real	4	11	1	16	0.051652	0.008889	0.038596	0.004167
New Zealand	1	8	5	14	0.051126	0.002222	0.02807	0.020833
Applications	4	5	5	14	0.047266	0.008889	0.017544	0.020833
Theory/Conceptual	3	9	2	14	0.046579	0.006667	0.031579	0.008333
Law/legislation	4	7	3	14	0.04595	0.008889	0.024561	0.0125