EXECUTIVE SUMMARY* of the Planning Education Discussion Paper

Prepared for the Planning Institute of Australia
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* This Executive Summary is a précis of, and extract from, a more extensive discussion of planning education. The full version is available from Planning Institute of Australia at www.planning.org.au or telephone (02) 6262 5933.
Foreword

The Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) is the national body representing planning professionals. The Institute is the voice of the planning profession and an advocate for improved planning performance and better planning systems; actively promoting economically, socially and environmentally sustainable communities. A key role of PIA is to support and promote education and training in planning, in order to set and maintain professional standards.

PIA accredits undergraduate and postgraduate planning programs at Australian universities to provide professional recognition and to provide for Membership of the Institute. The National Education Committee, which oversees program accreditation, commissioned the preparation of this Discussion Paper to inform the future direction of the Institute’s involvement in planning education. The Paper is intended to provide a catalyst and framework for debate about the future education agenda of the Planning Institute.

The Discussion Paper unpacks and explores Australian planning education. Its genesis is in issues of specialisation and professional accreditation and the continuing shortage of planners; however it also acknowledges the growth of new planning programs, emergence of new education models, and ongoing changes in the education sector. The Paper:

- Provides an overview of pressures and trends in planning, in education, and specific to planning education, and the implications for the profession and practice;
- Profiles the Australian planning education ‘landscape’, identifying universities as the key source of professional knowledge and research as well as of practitioners; and
- Describes ‘creative tension’ between expectations of industry, the community and the academy; and the reality of education rationalisation, competition and resources.

The Paper describes issues to promote discussion, identify possible future directions and elicit comment. It does not – and should not – resolve questions, but rather sets out their dimensions and implications, and suggests possible courses of action. Review of the PIA Education Policy will follow this research, and the discussion it generates.

The National Education Committee commends this Discussion Paper, and acknowledges and notes its appreciation for the significant dedication, rigour and responsiveness of the authors. The Paper has been extensively peer-reviewed by senior academics on the Committee and details a range of pertinent themes and questions both in its general discussion and through its formal recommendations. It will hopefully attract submission and commentary, and elicit engagement, from a wide range of stakeholders. This discussion will shape PIA’s ongoing engagement with Australian planning education, in accreditation or beyond, to be relevant to both the profession and the education sector.

Comments and responses to this Paper are invited. In particular, feedback is sought on the following issues:

1. What are the key skills and capabilities required of planners? What knowledge and experience are relevant to effective professional planning practice?
2. How best can planning education (each provider and as a whole) develop the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and experience of those who require it?
3. What is the role of accreditation in planning education?
4. What responsibilities do various stakeholders have in planning education, and what role should PIA play?

I invite you to consider this paper and provide your perspective on these questions.

Trevor Budge  
Chair, PIA National Education Committee  
March 2008
Executive Summary

Planners are increasingly at the forefront of societal issues and debates. From climate change to rapid urbanisation, from housing choice, and affordability to public transport, from regional disadvantage to urban renewal, the planning profession is expected to play a major role in facilitating and managing profound transformations during a time of global uncertainty.

How well does planning education equip practitioners to meet these complex and shifting challenges? This discussion paper, prepared for the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA), considers this question in relation to Australian planning education. It follows a National Inquiry into Planning Education and Employment, completed in 2004. A number of issues relevant to planning education in Australia have emerged or intensified since this time. These include:

• The introduction of a formal, ongoing program of professional certification for Australian planners (the ‘Certified Practising Planner’ program); the development of specialist Chapters within PIA, whose members hold diverse educational qualifications or experiences; and the revision of PIA’s requirements for continuing education (‘professional development’);
• National and international changes to tertiary education delivery models, including the need to impart generic skills and a rounded theoretical and practical education, distinctions between undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, and the introduction of a TAFE level IV certificate program in planning;
• The pressure on traditional planning programs to expand their curricula to include new subject areas as the discipline and practice of planning broadens, and to meet the needs and expectations of increasingly diverse employers;
• Resourcing of university planning programs in the context of broader shifts in the higher education and research sectors; and
• The accreditation of planning courses, the increasing number of universities seeking accreditation for new courses, and the need to ensure that the content of accredited courses is relevant to the profession, the needs of employers, and the practice of planning.

The paper recognises a broad continuum of planning education – from secondary education through vocational and para-professional training, undergraduate postgraduate and research degrees to continuing professional development. At the same time, the paper proposes that PIA affirm a central role for university planning programs in delivering organised and accredited planning education, and in furthering knowledge about the theory and practice of planning within its social and political contexts.

We seek to explore and generate discussion in response to the following questions:

1. What are the major pressures and trends affecting planning education internationally and within Australia today?
2. What is the current profile of planning education in Australia and how does this compare internationally?
3. What does planning education in Australia need to deliver, in relation to industry, community, graduate, professional body, and disciplinary expectations?
4. What key interventions may need to be implemented for planning education to meet these expectations?
Available information regarding each of these questions is presented in this paper in order to inform and encourage further deliberation.

**Key Recommendations and Questions for Discussion**

Following the introductory chapter, a series of further recommendations, discussion points, and questions are raised in each chapter of the paper.

**The Changing Context of Planning Education (Chapter 2)**

This chapter highlights the creative tensions between the needs and expectations of industry and the broader role of planning education in driving policy agendas and research. These tensions are particularly pertinent in the current climate of rapid societal shifts and significant environmental uncertainty, whereby new skills, new knowledge and new processes or systems are likely to be required. There are also major changes within the educational sector, such as the introduction of the “Bologna model”, of generalist undergraduate education followed by postgraduate specialisation.

The chapter identifies the following issues for further discussion:

1. What are the implications of a shift towards the Bologna model for the delivery of planning education in Australia? Is it important to distinguish between broader undergraduate education and more specialist postgraduate education?
2. How can the core research or knowledge generation functions of university planning schools be better integrated with their core teaching programs? Or should a division between research and teaching functions be accepted and even embraced?
3. How can planning education in Australia, particularly tertiary planning degree programs, better inculcate the ‘theory / practice’ nexus? What are the most effective pedagogical models for this?
4. How effective are university planning schools in leading constructive analysis and review of current directions in planning policy and practice and how should this role be supported? Is there a role for other educational providers, particularly PIA through its continuing professional development activities, in supporting members to participate directly in broader policy debates?
5. Does planning education in Australia, particularly tertiary and continuing professional development programs, need to equip planners for international practice in the context of globalisation? How should this be done?

**The Delivery Needs of Australian Planning Education (Chapter 3)**

Chapter three explores a range of perspectives from industry, students and graduates, planning academics, universities, and the community sector. It highlights many points of convergence about the knowledge areas and skill sets that planning education needs to deliver. However, there are also perceived tensions between the expectations of industry and planning students for their university education to equip them directly for the workplace and the broader aspirations of planning academics, universities, and the community for planning graduates to develop a deeper understanding of societal issues and the higher order skills in critical analysis, research or communication, to work effectively within different professional or community settings.

The chapter proposes the following key questions for further discussion:
1. To what extent should PIA’s educational policy dictate clear expectations and roles for the different sectors now involved in planning education and what should these be?

2. How should PIA’s educational policy extend to recognise the different PIA chapters and their foundational educational disciplines? Is it necessary or feasible to scrutinise or audit these wider qualifications and if so how should this be done?

3. To what extent do planning programs currently complement each other and what is the potential to enhance collaboration? Should PIA continue to encourage programs to complement one another or is this contrary to the reality of universities competing for students and resources?

4. How should indigenous interests in land and environmental management be incorporated and addressed through planning education in Australia?

5. What are the broader community expectations of planning education and how are these currently addressed? To what extent are Australian planning programs currently involved in community engagement and outreach activities and to what extent should such engagement be enhanced?

The State of Australian Planning Education (Chapter 4)

This chapter outlines the range of PIA accredited graduate and undergraduate planning programs in Australia. These are offered at universities in all States but mainly in the capital cities. There are similarities and differences in the length of planning degrees as well as the core and optional content they cover. Increasingly, continuing professional education and the TAFE sector may have important roles in providing initial professional training or in updating skills and knowledge in response to industry needs. Connections between PIA, university planning schools, and secondary education could also be strengthened in the future. There is potential to enhance access to planning education and increase choice through greater use of distance education and online learning.

Key questions for discussion highlighted in this chapter are:

1. What should be the core foundations of undergraduate planning education in Australia? Is there a need for more, or less, standardisation in the content and length of undergraduate planning degrees?

2. Should PIA encourage the current proliferation of postgraduate planning programs at the Master and Graduate Diploma level? To what extent should basic requirements about degree length and status be standardised?

3. What is the real level of industry and local government demand for a TAFE certificate IV, and to what extent should PIA foster and embrace such a qualification?

4. How should rural and regional access to planning education be better facilitated?

5. What connections between university education and continuing professional development programs are needed?

6. What are the potential and emerging roles of internet-based learning in Australian planning education and how might these be best fostered? Is there potential to promote greater collaboration across the planning programs and different educational providers?

Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Planning Education (Chapter 5)

This chapter considers the ways in which university planning programs are reviewed for educational quality and adherence to professional standards. The opportunity is to use higher education quality assurance processes and PIA accreditation requirements as strategic planning and performance monitoring tools for individual programs. However, in practice there is a need for far greater streamlining and convergence if university quality
assurance requirements are to align with, and complement, overall program planning and accreditation processes.

Key questions for discussion include:

1. Should PIA seek to support Australian planning programs in external quality assurance and research performance assessment exercises? If so, how?
2. What are the discipline specific markers of quality and high performance in planning education and research, as a basis for external assessment and review?
3. What are the likely implications of the Commonwealth’s new research assessment exercise for planning schools and educators?
4. What are the indicators of planning program quality in Australia, as a basis for PIA accreditation?
5. Are the current PIA accreditation requirements for programs appropriate and adequate?
6. Should the current PIA accreditation process be reviewed? Would more frequent monitoring and evaluation be preferable? How might this be done?
7. Is it possible or desirable to maximise convergence between university quality assurance processes and PIA accreditation reporting requirements?

Resourcing Needs and Issues in Planning Education (Chapter 6)

This chapter identifies the range of resource issues affecting planning education, particularly within the tertiary sector where formal, accredited planning accreditation is provided. In the context of growing resource scarcity and relentless managerial concern with costs, planning schools find it increasingly difficult to maintain the core capacities and activities needed to meet accreditation and broader pedagogical expectations. The chapter outlines issues associated with access and equity in planning education, the role of industry funded placements, forms of scholarships and student support, and the need to attract and support new planning scholars and educators as senior academics in planning schools retire. The chapter concludes by identifying opportunities for “closing the loop” between research, teaching and professional practice through much stronger practitioner engagement in the provision of planning education, particularly through courses delivered by university planning schools.

Key questions for discussion include:

1. How can PIA best identify, monitor and support the resource needs of tertiary institutions in Australia, through the accreditation process and or other advocacy activities?
2. How can PIA, universities, and the profession, improve access to planning education for those of lower socio-economic backgrounds, people with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and those from regional and rural areas?
3. How can PIA better encourage and support planning educator engagement in key PIA events and forums?
4. How can PIA and the profession more broadly, support the needs of planning students, for instance through industry placements, scholarships, and cadetships?
5. How can planning schools attract and retain educators with the appropriate academic qualifications and professional knowledge as senior academics retire?
6. What strategies can best encourage new planning academics to establish a research and teaching career while maintaining connection to professional practice? How can PIA best support the research activities and profiles of Australian planning academics?
7. How should PIA and the planning schools support industry engagement in the delivery of planning programs?

The Future Agenda (Chapter 7)

The concluding chapter summarises the discussion themes and proposes the following vision for planning education in Australia as a basis for further discussion.

Australian planning education supports the profession in facilitating, promoting, and responding to processes of urban and regional change. A spectrum of distinct learning opportunities, ranging through secondary, vocational, tertiary, and continuing professional development engages students, practitioners, researchers, and members of the community in sharing and generating knowledge about spatial processes and governance. Dynamic learning environments emphasise the nexus between theory and practice, fostering capacity for Australian planners to lead public policy and discourse for sustainability and social equity, in a climate of rapid societal change.

The chapter also outlines seven recommendations to progress the proposals contained in this paper and future discussions arising from it.

Review of PIA Education Policy and accreditation requirements
1. It is time to review the PIA educational policy to recognise the specific roles of different educational sectors and providers, and reiterate the core role of University planning schools in providing initial planning education through to the production of future planning educators.

2. It is also timely to review the PIA accreditation requirements and processes in the light of existing quality assurance reporting requirements, as well as clear indicators of planning school quality. These indicators should align with international markers of high planning program performance, as well as Australian accreditation requirements and expectations.

Increasing access to planning education
3. Increased access to planning education in rural and regional areas is a priority. There is also a need to maximise choice in course offerings for planning students, beyond the range able to be offered within any single planning school. PIA and the Education Committee should encourage course providers to collaborate with TAFEs in the provision of distance education, including internet-based learning opportunities. Resources should be sought to establish a common pool of online post graduate (and potentially undergraduate) course materials, perhaps hosted by the Australia and New Zealand Association of Planning Schools (ANZAPS).

Enhancing industry engagement
4. More consistent and structured industry engagement in the provision of university planning programs (teaching, assessment, research supervision, tutoring, and mentoring, as well as industry support for work placements, scholarships, cadets, and relevant research commissions) would benefit planning programs and participating professionals. The planning schools and the PIA should foster stronger models for industry engagement.

Supporting planning research and scholarship
5. A dedicated planning research agenda and research body is needed to generate independent, high quality research delivered through a competitive process by
Australian academics. One stream of this Planning Research Institute could invite universities to tender for specific research consultancies, or provide a clearinghouse for industry-based work including an innovative or research element. PIA should take the lead in establishing such an Institute.

6. PIA and the planning schools should continue to support and reinforce the key role of planning research and pedagogy, through its own and related congresses, through the dissemination of research through its own and affiliated publications, and by recognising significant contributions to planning scholarship and education.

Advocacy

7. We have argued that the PIA needs to develop a more explicit and ongoing awareness of the resource issues facing planning education and to commit itself to identifying ways of assisting planning schools to maintain capacity and quality. One broad means for doing this would be for the PIA to identify, codify and promote awareness of the resource and capacity needs of planning education within the university sector, through its accreditation requirements. Advocacy might also target the university hierarchies that manage teaching functions, typically a Deputy Vice Chancellor with designated responsibilities for ‘Education’, ‘Learning’, ‘Students’ or ‘Academic Affairs’.

The next step in this process will be a period of discussion, through circulation of this paper and meetings with key stakeholders from PIA members and education providers.

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SUBMISSIONS

Comments on this document are welcome. Submissions should be made to:

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