



**IRISH PLANNING
INSTITUTE**

Institiúid Pleanála Na hÉireann

Irish Planning Institute Survey of the Planning Profession 2014/2015

April 2015

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IPI President's Foreword

With the Republic's modern planning system reaching its 50th anniversary in 2014 and embracing positive change, significant local government and planning reform in Northern Ireland and the Irish Planning Institute celebrating its 40th birthday this year (2015), it is fitting and timely that the Institute has published this *'Survey of the Planning Profession 2014/2015'*. As noted in the recently published National Planning Policy Statement 2015, a "...forward looking, visionary and dynamic planning process..." is a significant catalyst for improvements. Key to the creation of such a process is an effectively resourced and informed profession.

A great deal of time has passed since the Institute produced the landmark *'Census of the Planning Profession in Ireland'* in 2007 and, as such, this survey represents the opportunity to follow up on that work. The period since the publication of the census has been defined by the onset of a severe economic downturn. While economic recovery is becoming apparent in some respects, this time of transition is opportune in terms of providing insights into the manner in which the profession has endured the downturn and how it is positioning itself to tackle future challenges. A balanced and sustainable return to growth will be supported by a well resourced profession in the years ahead.

The *'Survey of the Planning Profession 2014/2015'* goes beyond merely totting up numbers. It also highlights the current challenges and opportunities which face practitioners in the public and private sector. I look forward to the continued development of the planning profession within Ireland, and the introduction of appropriate structures and processes to facilitate positive and sustainable growth.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mary Hughes'.

Mary Hughes

President, Irish Planning Institute

1.0 Introduction to the IPI Policy and Research Group

“ The planning process and its underpinning regulatory and policy framework has become more sophisticated because the wider public has justifiably high expectations of what planning should deliver for their own local areas
(DECLG Planning Policy Statement 2015) ”

The IPI Policy and Research Group, established in 2012, strives to enhance the capacity for research within the Institute and indeed throughout the profession. Advocating independent and joint research, the Group's outputs are supported by, and inform, policy submissions and CPD programmes. The Group ensures that the planning profession has a collective voice in policy and research development.

Key responsibilities of the IPI Policy and Research Group include the:

Organisation and research of **submissions** for approval by Council;

Coordination of **independent research projects**, where appropriate;

Sourcing and securing of funding to undertake **major joint research projects** with other relevant bodies and organisations;

Formulation and development of **new and existing IPI publications** (journals and publications); and,

Acting as a **dissemination conduit** between research outputs from the IPI-accredited Planning Schools and members of the planning profession in Ireland.

“...it's time that planners stopped being so focused on being regulators and start thinking like activators...”

Public Sector Planner - response to Survey of the Planning Profession in Ireland 2014/2015



2.0 Rationale for the IPI 'Survey of the Planning Profession in Ireland 2014/2015'

“**The efficient and effective resourcing of the planning system is essential to ensure that good planning decisions are made throughout Ireland**”
(DECLG Planning Policy Statement 2015)

Since the IPI was formed in 1975, it has undertaken regular audits of the planning profession on the island of Ireland. The 1996 document *'Quality and Equality'* provided a snapshot of the then planning system and the number of public planners in the country. The publication introduced the concept of different tiers of planning authorities: an “upper”, “intermediate” and “lower” tier.

Particularly in relation to the “lower tier”, the publication noted with concern that many counties only employed planners at the Assistant or Executive Planner grade/level. This prevented planners from considering careers in planning outside the areas traditionally covered by the larger planning authorities. It created a situation whereby many parts of Ireland did not have the benefit of a Senior Planner, and may have had limited ‘knowledge’ and ‘mentoring’ necessary to provide continuity and institutional memory. Hence the title, *'Quality and Equality'*: the need to provide equality in the planning system between different geographical areas.

The 2006 survey which resulted in the publication of the *'Census of the Planning Profession in Ireland'* (2007) showed that much was achieved in the ten years since 1996, and was a landmark publication.

Most planning authorities, by 2007, had a proper planning staff structure, allowing planners to pursue a career in planning in areas throughout the country and facilitating parity within the practice of planning around the State. Opportunities for further professional education had also expanded with the coming on stream of new planning schools. What also emerged from this publication in comparison to previous similar exercises by the IPI is that the private sector had expanded significantly. New challenges emerged also, and many local authorities had under resourced forward planning and enforcement sections. There were also the problems associated with a high turnover of staff and a lack of mentoring of young planning staff by more experienced personnel, due to pressures of work present during the *'Celtic Tiger'* years.

1996

2006

2014/15

As indicated in the President's Foreword, the planning processes within the island of Ireland are undergoing significant reform. With forthcoming legislation in the Republic vis-a-vis the recently published General Scheme of the Planning and Development (No.1 and No.2) Bills of 2014, a new Planning Policy Statement (which reaffirms key principles and priorities for the profession), and regional and local government restructuring (through the provisions of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014 and the Government's *'Putting People First Action Programme for Effective Local Government'*, the profession is in the midst of a period of adjustment.

In Northern Ireland, 01 April 2015 marked a historic date for planning and the most significant change to the planning system there in over 30 years. On this date, the Department of the Environment transferred planning powers to 11 new councils (reform of local government sees the reduction of 26 councils to 11), to include responsibility for local development plans, the majority of planning decisions, and shaping the growth and development of the communities they serve.

Planning has three key roles:



A social role - supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being;



An economic role - contributing to building a strong and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;



An environmental role - contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy.

Planning is about helping to make positive growth and sustainable development happen.

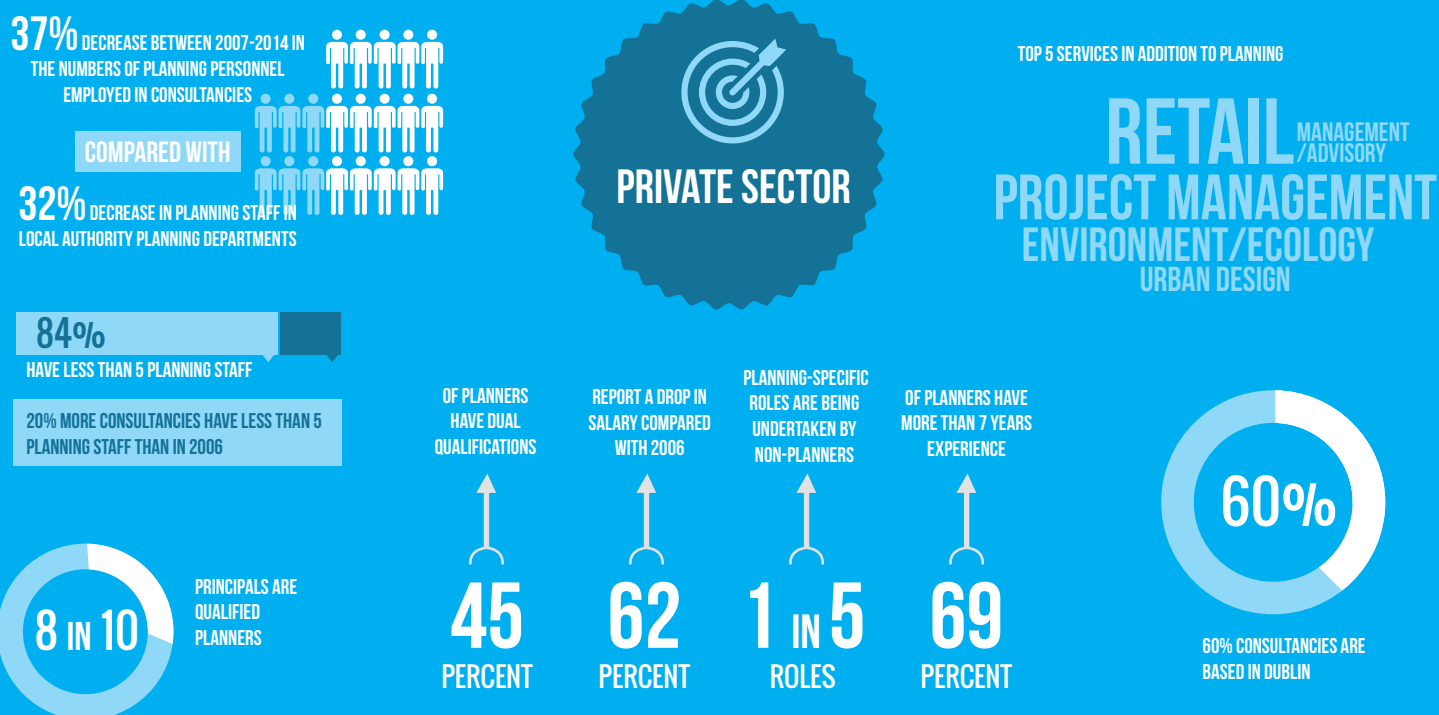
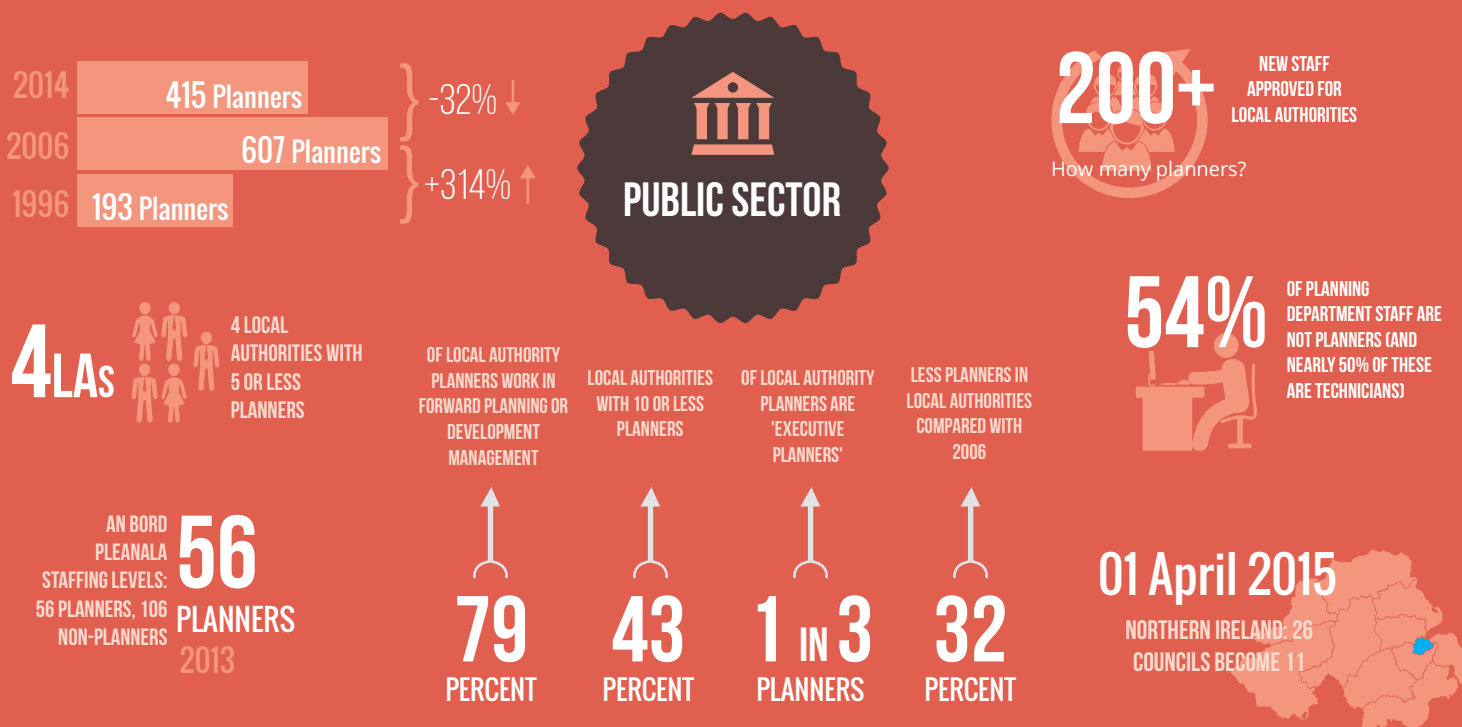


Coherent joined-up planning and development minimises costs and enables society to prosper. But such prosperity is impossible without appropriate resourcing. **The process of planning requires the skill set and knowledge of professional planners** tasked with applying the law and proper planning principles.

Having regard to the foregoing, the IPI recognised the need to explore the existing resourcing of the planning profession and its capacity to confront the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for public and private sector planners. The economic downturn has had a significant impact on Irish society, and has spanned most of the years since the '*Census of the Planning Profession in Ireland*' (2007). Accordingly, this publication traces the changes that have arisen in resourcing the profession in the intervening period.

3.0

Summary of Findings



4.0 Local Authority Survey Results

The local government sector is experiencing a period of significant change, and one of the founding objectives of this survey has been to ascertain an up-to-date picture of the number of professional planners engaged in guiding and informing the planning system here in Ireland. As the sector that has the most direct engagement with the public (which it serves), private sector planning consultants and other professions within the built environment, it obviously employs the largest proportion of Ireland's professional planners. Because local authority planners are at the forefront of the planning process - the 'public interface' - it typically attracts regular debate within the profession and among the public/media as to its quality and effectiveness.

CONTEXT

In recent years, notwithstanding the embargo on recruitment at local government level, the IPI has remained concerned by the impact a sub-standard quantum of planning staff within local authorities has often had on the efficient and effective operation of the planning system, including development management, enforcement and forward planning functions. The existing planning personnel within local authorities have often found themselves burdened with extensive commitments, owing to a variety of reasons, not least a mismatch between workload and available planning personnel. An example of this is evident at a practical, operational level, where concerns have been expressed that there have been delays in securing pre-planning meetings, leading to potential knock on delays for applicants and important development projects.

The IPI has previously expressed its concerns to a number of local authorities regarding the non-filling of planning posts in these authorities and consider that it is imperative that this is addressed urgently in light of the general improvement in the economy. It is encouraging to see the February 2015 announcement by the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government, that his department in conjunction with the Department for Public Expenditure and Reform have approved 200 staff for local authorities. The purpose of this enhancement is to support the implementation of the Social Housing Strategy. The IPI recommends that an appropriate proportion of these should include planners. The table to the right provides a breakdown of these general posts approved or approved in principle (other applications are currently being assessed), and is worthy of comparison alongside the numbers of planning staff recorded within this survey (among the local authorities).

Council	Number of New Posts
Dublin City Council	50
Fingal County Council	28
South Dublin County Council	17
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	16
Limerick City and County	17
Donegal	10
Cavan	8
Clare	2
Cork County	2
Galway City	1
Galway County	1
Kerry	1
Laois	2
Leitrim	1
Louth	4
Roscommon	3
Tipperary	1
Waterford	2
Wexford	2
Wicklow	2
Total	170*

*Note - Applications from Cork City and Kildare still being assessed. A further 80 applications are being assessed by the Department with approval expected for an additional 40 staff bringing the number to over 200 for 2015.

Planning legislation has become increasingly complex with emerging and highly technical areas such as appropriate assessment, strategic environmental assessment, and public participation obligations arising from the Aarhus Convention and proposed amendments to the EIA Directive. The need for a full complement of professional planners is imperative for the professionalism of planning departments as a whole (and contributions to other departments) and to safeguard consistency and accountability in the decision making process.

NUMBER OF PLANNERS EMPLOYED

As far back as 1996, the IPI has sought to periodically review the resourcing condition of the planning profession in Ireland. Back then, IPI research and records found that the total number of planners in local authorities stood at 193. Within ten years, 607 planning posts were present in the local authorities (including town and borough councils) throughout the State. As referenced in the IPI's Census 2007, the *"...1996 survey recorded 193 planners in the same local authorities and so the (2006) survey recorded an increase of over 200%"*.

While this was to be expected given the emerging economy, and was a positive finding, it is of some concern that a key finding from the IPI's Census 2007, namely highlighting that *"...all county and city councils now employ at least five professional planners including...(those)...who employed no professional planners in 1996"*, has been undermined in 2014. Indeed, this survey finds that a number of local authorities have less than 5 professional planners in their employment, and over one third of the City and County Councils (11 out of 30) have 10 or less professional planners working there.

Worryingly, the vast majority of local authorities have experienced a decline in the number of professional planners working for them.



Collectively, the State's local authorities have lost nearly 1 in 3 of its professional planner roles between 2006 and 2014.



32% LESS 'PLANNERS' IN LOCAL
AUTHORITIES SINCE 2006

Total No of Planners 2014:

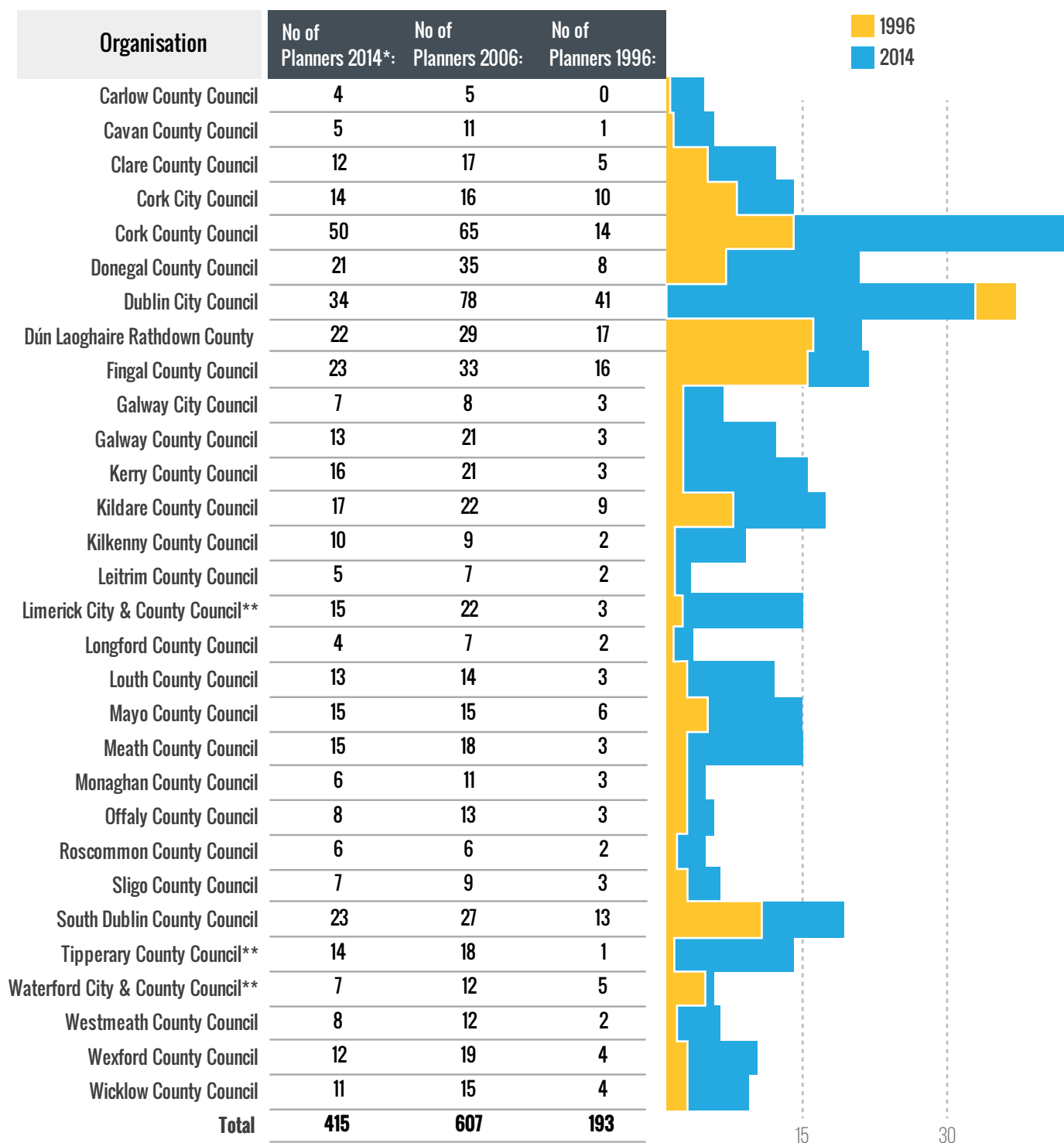
415

Total No of Planners 2006:

607

Total No of Planners 1996:

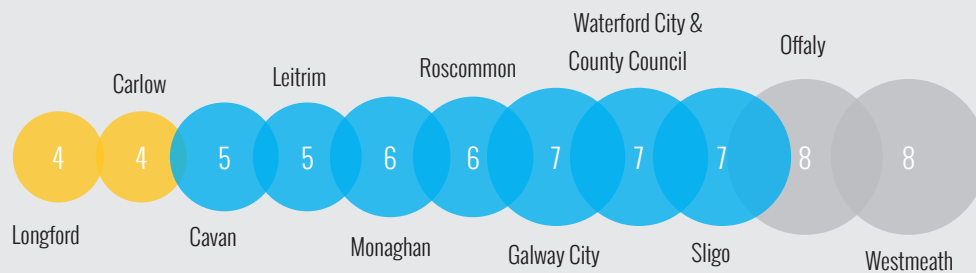
193



* Excluding those on long term sick leave/career break.

**Due to the amalgamation of these 3 local authorities on foot of the Local Government (Reform) Act, 2014 the numbers above are based on the combined returns of each authority's return to the Census of the Planning Profession 1996 and 2006.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES WITH LESS THAN 10 'PLANNER' STAFF



The table below records the number of professional planners now in each local authority, alongside the population of each county (2011).

Organisation	Planners '14:	Population 2011	Ratio*
Dublin City Council	34	525,383	15,452
Cork County Council	50	399,216	7,984
Fingal County Council	23	273,051	11,872
South Dublin County	23	265,174	11,529
Kildare County Council	17	209,955	12,350
Dún Laoghaire Rathdown	22	206,995	9,409
Limerick City and County	15	191,306	12,754
Meath County Council	15	184,034	12,269
Galway County Council	13	175,127	13,471
Donegal County Council	21	160,927	7,663
Tipperary County Council	14	158,652	11,332
Wexford County Council	12	145,273	12,106
Kerry County Council	16	145,048	9,066
Wicklow County Council	11	136,448	12,404
Mayo County Council	15	130,552	8,703
Louth County Council	13	122,808	9,447
Cork City Council	14	118,912	8,494
Clare County Council	12	116,885	9,740

*Ratio = 1 Planner per x Population

Waterford City & County	7	113,707	16,244
Kilkenny County Council	10	95,360	9,536
Westmeath County Council	8	85,961	10,745
Laois County Council	N/A	80,458	N/A
Offaly County Council	8	76,806	9,601
Galway City Council	7	75,414	10,773
Cavan County Council	5	72,874	14,575
Sligo County Council	7	65,270	9,324
Roscommon County Council	6	63,898	10,650
Monaghan County Council	6	60,495	10,083
Carlow County Council	4	54,532	13,633
Longford County Council	4	38,970	9,743
Leitrim County Council	5	31,778	6,356

Total No of Planners 2014:

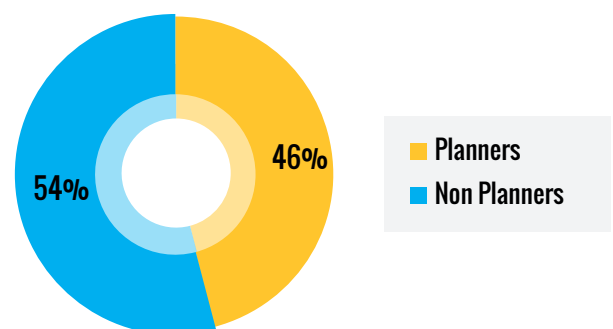
415

Average Ratio 2011

10,986

COMPOSITION OF PLANNING DEPARTMENTS

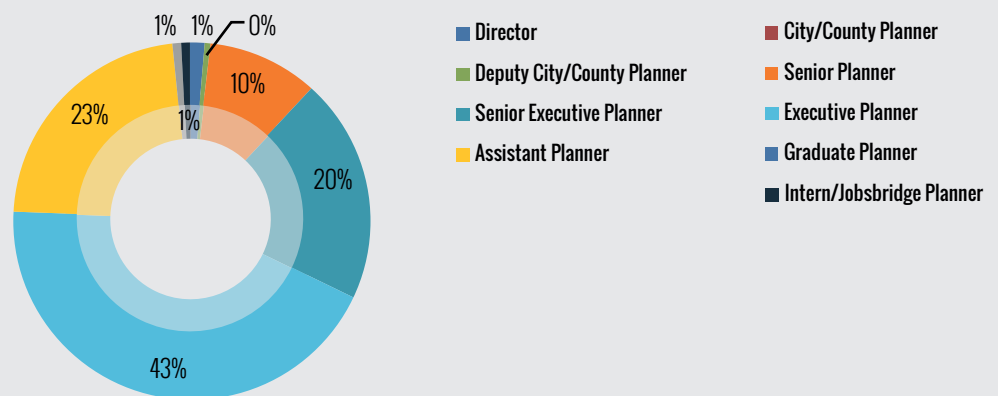
It is very interesting that this survey has found that the Planning Departments in the State's local authorities are staffed by more non-planners than planners. Over 900 personnel perform the Planning Department's functions, with 46% of these being qualified planners. While clerical/administrative support is to be expected in such departments, it is nonetheless surprising to see that non-planners occupy nearly 10% more of the roles within Planning Departments. The survey found that there are 489 posts of other professional/technical staff working in the Planning Departments in local authorities.



BREAKING IT DOWN: PLANNERS BY GRADE

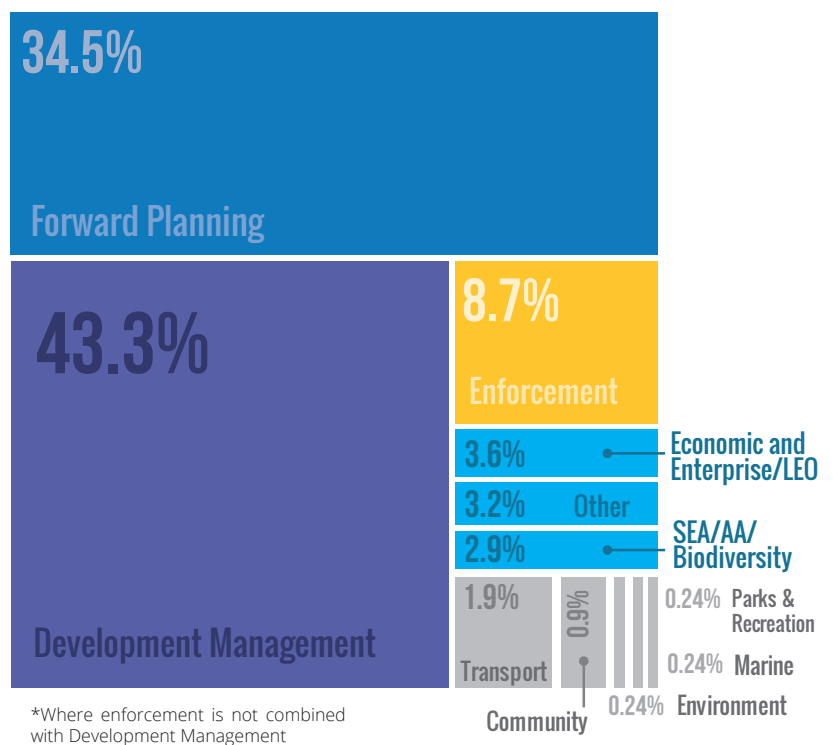
As the above chart demonstrates, the survey has found planners working across 8 of the 9 identified grades. The vast majority work across the four grades of Assistant Planner (22.80%), Executive Planner (43.37%), Senior Executive Planner (20.20%) and Senior Planner (10.10%). A negligible number record Graduate Planner or Intern/JobBridge Planner posts, while at the other end of the ladder, a small number of local authorities record planners filling Director (of Services) roles. It is understood that the post of City/County Planner and Deputy City/County Planner is not widely utilised, and so does not record a significant return.

PLANNERS BY GRADE



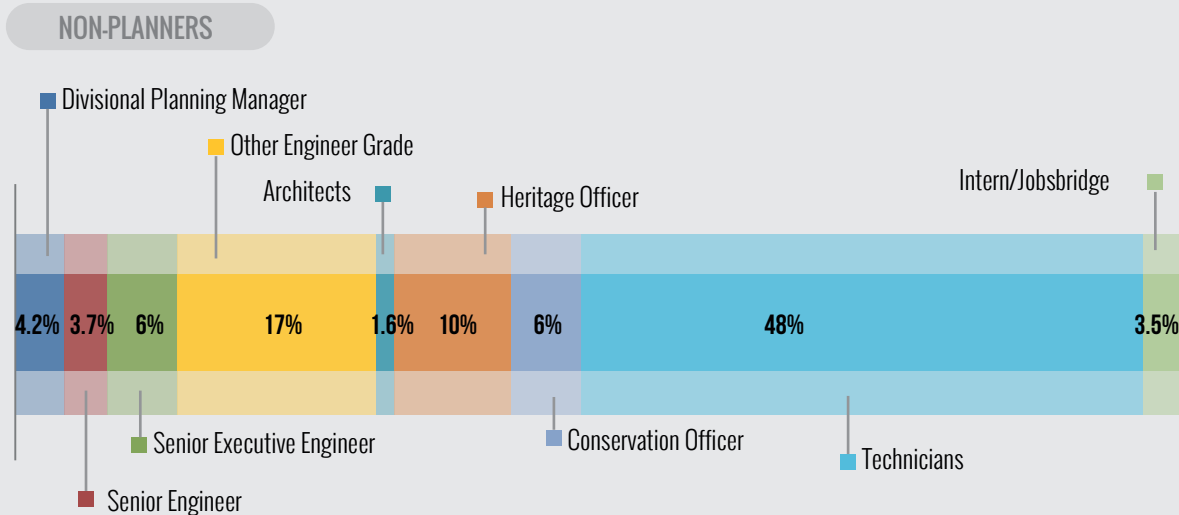
AREAS OF WORK

The survey has found that over 40% of planners are engaged full-time in assessing planning applications ("development management"). The second most dominant function of planners is within forward planning, with close to 35% fulfilling local, city and county development plan duties. Where the IPI Census 2007 found that 5% of planners were employed full-time in planning enforcement, this survey finds nearly 9% of planners are working in this role. In some of the less-resourced local authorities, it appears that enforcement responsibilities are subsumed into the wider development management processes.



BREAKDOWN OF NON-PLANNERS IN PLANNING DEPARTMENTS

The survey also explored the number of other non-planner technical and professional staff in the Planning Department. Nearly half of these (48.80%) are recorded as filling a technical (Technician) role, while a sizeable number stated 'Other Engineer Grade' (i.e. not a Senior Engineer/Senior Executive Engineer), at 17.30%. Behind this, Heritage Officers (10%), Senior Executive Engineers (6%) and Conservation Officers (6%) dominated the main categories, with a smaller scattering of other roles recorded (Divisional Planning Manager, 4%; Senior Engineer 4%, among others).



PUBLIC SECTOR TRENDS

REGIONAL AND LOCAL ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Following the enactment of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014 and the passing of a 'transition' period for regional structural reform, January 2015 saw three new regions - the Southern, the Midland/Eastern and the Connaught/Ulster Regional Assemblies - assume responsibility for regional matters. The survey generated insight into the optimistic sentiment for more sustainable economic growth patterns having regard to regional strengths:

"...promoted through the greater alignment of economic and spatial land use planning in the Regional and Economic Spatial strategies, which will in turn be based on a revised and updated national planning framework to reflect the post boom and bust economy and address its spatial realities and apply lessons learned".

At this regional level, many respondents highlighted the need for strategic approaches to the development of economic activity. That said, there is relative optimism that practical measures at a local level will contribute to this process, and that the regional alignment:

"...will be reflected and informed by a similar approach at a local level through the Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), should provide for tailored solutions to regional barriers with the potential to turn these into opportunities".

A number of opportunities were highlighted by a range of respondents, including:

Addressing the **oversupply** of certain property types by focussing on uses required;

Maximising the use of natural resources through promotion and support of local innovative technologies;

Building on **unique identities and strengths**;

Creating linked physical and communication networks to **connect peripheral areas** in the most appropriate and cost effective way;

Developing sustainable **live/work relationships** in both urban and rural areas;

Promoting the development of **properly-managed clusters** (i.e. not merely co-location);

Creating **economic growth** while addressing legacy issues of local imbalances.

Indeed, some of the survey responses referred to the risk of spatial imbalances continuing to grow as the economic recovery strengthens:

"Within the overall economy there are good prospects for growth. Unfortunately a lot of this is likely to be located in the larger metropolitan areas, particularly Dublin..."

"...Rural peripheral areas will not fare so well, notwithstanding the strengthening of agriculture"

"The Dublin metropolitan region appears to take the greatest proportion of activity and the prospects for growth at a regional level would be less than at national and Dublin region level"

On a positive note, planners from local authorities were largely positive about the economy's prospects, with some noting economic growth as being a 'principal corporate goal', and others interpreting an increase in pre-planning consultation requests as an indicator of increased economic activity, based on their experiences in the past (but which have often yet to generate planning applications):

"Corporate position is positive towards economic growth and the promotion of economic activity in the county is a principal corporate goal of the organisation."

"...there seems to be a growing confidence that is reflected in the nature, scale and number of pre-planning discussions"

"We have seen a significant rise in the number of requests for pre-app meetings - not yet translated into significant increase in applications"

"Pre-planning requests are up, as are the number of planning applications lodged. Increase in the number of job-creation planning applications. Gradual improvement foreseen with a steady growth across all sectors, except for housing developments."

RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY MARKET

Certainly, there was mixed-sentiment when it comes to the residential property market, with some (such as the above), singling it out as an area where barriers remain (that will prevent the supply of new housing), and others including it as one of the more active sectors. This mixed-reaction does not appear to have a geographical influence.

Across public and private sector responses, the issue of housing came to the fore. While some local authorities reported increases in the number of applications for residential development, others reported that the number of applications for this type of development had remained static.

"...interest in housing interest is at a low level, indeed completions in the county can be linked to the completion of unfinished estates..."

Other respondent's flag up that interest in housing is rebounding:

"Pre-planning requests are up, as are the number of planning applications lodged. This is most likely down to the introduction of REITs into the Irish market"

The differing narratives offered above reflect the disparity of experience between planners in planning authorities outside of the Greater Dublin Area (the latter) and those located in the rest of the country (the former), where the legacy of an oversupply of housing units, often in unsuitable locations, remains.

Some “non-traditional” sectors are being mooted as possible generators of growth (alongside housing development), such as the ‘blue economy’ and ‘marine-based development’, facing strong short and medium-term growth prospects.

More generally, some of the anticipated growth sectors in 2015 include:



OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The respondents outlined a number of opportunities and challenges which influence the manner in which planning is practiced in the public sector. The opportunities and challenges outlined by the respondents reflect the dynamics of the procedural and economic climate which face the profession and the State.

In terms of opportunities, some respondents felt that planners should seek to have a stronger voice and influence on the issues facing the urban and rural environment, perhaps by strengthening collaboration with other professions in order to bring interdisciplinary approaches to bear on key issues:

“Planners need to be at the table, as members of multi disciplinary teams, when the new Community and Economic plans for their county are being prepared by the new Local Community and Economic Committee”

“Planners need to leave the comfort of their existing development management/forward planning silo to engage meaningfully and in partnership with the Local Government reform-established bodies”

While it would appear that the private sector planning consultancies have succeeded in diversifying, be it through desire or commercial interest, many planners in local authorities feel that the profession can be ‘pigeon-holed’ into traditional work areas (development management, enforcement and standard forward planning activities). Some alluded to an opportunity for wider appraisal and innovation to reinforce the role of the planner:

“Recognition of the skill set that planners have which is far broader than development management. Willingness of employers to capitalise on this and the willingness of planners to move beyond traditional work areas is needed.”

Resourcing in terms of person-power was outlined as being a key issue in terms of managing existing obligations and any future workload over time should the nascent economic recovery continue. Indeed, the survey has found a very strong feeling among local authority planners that the under-resourcing of Planning Departments increases the risk to decision-making processes and statutory obligations, and represents a prevailing challenge:

"...the lag that will occur between demand for planning due to increased activity and the filling of necessary posts will see a pressure on the professional planners already in situ and may lead to poor decision-making..."

"...large volume of work and inadequate resources. Impossibility of fulfilling statutory responsibilities with inadequate resource..."

"...we are seriously under resourced and therefore not managing planning the way it should be - therefore planning will soon be market led again..."

Beyond the issues tied to resourcing, some respondents stated that the complexity of existing planning legislation and processes have posed an ongoing challenge to planners operating within local authorities. This is further compounded by new processes arising from local government reform and European level obligations in terms of the Aarhus Convention which Ireland ratified in 2012 (UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters) and other directives:

"...increased public demands etc on staff due to e.g. Aarhus, FOI [Freedom of Information], AEI [Access to Environmental Information] requests"

"Interface between LECP [Local Economic and Community Plan] and County Development Plan - lack of economic analytical capacity in many LAs..."

"Recognition that there is more to planning than planning application numbers - development plans have become more complex documents and I feel it is a challenge to get buy-in to invest"

Learning the lessons of the past also emerged as a theme within the responses submitted. Many respondents recognised and highlighted the challenge the profession faced in terms of the public mis-understanding of the perceived role professional planners played in the legacy issues emanating from the Celtic Tiger years:

"...the reputation of the profession - many still blame the planning profession for some of the legacy issues of the economic downturn such as unfinished estates and excess amounts of zoned land..."

"The view of the profession on matters such as plan led development and managing housing provision will be lost in the larger debate on meeting emerging needs - we may repeat the mistakes of the past and planning will be held as having failed."

This perception of planners is being addressed, particularly by the IPI's more significant engagement with the media and with Government in recent years, where it has underlined the messages of the common good, proper planning and sustainable development, and planning for the longer term (rather than short term) which is evidenced-based and plan-led.

The first ever Government planning policy statement has been launched recently as the "Planning Policy Statement, 2015". This has been strongly welcomed by the IPI, who had been invited by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG) to input into its development. The IPI met with the DECLG and made a comprehensive submission to the document and this is evident in the final policy statement as launched.

PRIVATE SECTOR SUPPORT TO THE PUBLIC SECTOR

The manner in which the public and private sector support each other was raised in a number of responses in terms of the private sector affording the resourcing-capacity and supplementary skills to local authorities in order to provide services and expertise which would not normally be available internally to the local authority. One local authority respondent stated:

“... since 2011, consultants have been procured for SEA, AA, FRA, Housing Strategy, Retail Strategy, economic strategy, small number of planning applications, study on rights of way, study on protected views...”

With others stating:

“All SEA is carried out by consultants with appropriate qualifications in ecology”

Other local authorities reported more extensive collaboration with the private sector in terms of ensuring the completion of workloads:

“...with limited staff resources, the development plan review has required consultants also for Retail Strategy, Housing Strategy, SEA, AA, SFRA, Landscape Character Assessment plus consultants in relation to all conservation work...”

The most common piece of work outsourced to the private sector is Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment. Retail Strategies and policies tied to economic research also figured prominently in the responses.





Name: Mr. John Martin

Position: (Former) Principal Planning Adviser

Organisation: Dept. of the Environment, Community and Local Government

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF POSITION

As Principal Planning Adviser in the DECLG from 2002 to 2011, I was responsible for managing a small team of professional planners dealing with planning policy guidelines, planning legislation, implementation of the NSS and regional planning guidelines, and reporting on draft development plans and draft local area plans.

It is just over 50 years since national planning legislation was introduced to Ireland. During your career, what have been the most notable changes to occur within the planning system?

- The introduction of a hierarchical plan-led system under the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (NSS/RPGs/development plans/local area plans)
- The concept of Strategic Infrastructure Development (2006)
- The concept of core strategies within development plans (2010)
- The transposition of various EU Directives requiring assessment of plans and/or projects (SEA/EIA/ Appropriate Assessment)

What is the most significant planning issue now facing the profession?

In Ireland, recent events such as the Planning Tribunal and “ghost estates” have eroded public confidence in the planning system, even though in many cases professional planners gave advice which was ignored. Planners can help rebuild public trust by constantly promoting the common good over sectional or short-term interests. This can be done in a myriad of ways - through impartial reporting on planning applications, in EISs, in planning policy statements such as development plans and planning guidelines, etc.

The IPI as a representative body should engage more pro-actively in public debate on key social, economic and environmental issues facing decision-makers, particularly in situations where individual public service planners may be required to maintain a lower profile. Another way of gaining public support is to facilitate the creation of attractive places, where people will want to live and work (Grand Canal Basin in Dublin is one such place).

The recent publication by the Department of the 'Planning Policy Statement 2015' highlights key principles that those within the planning process should observe, together with high level priorities to enhance the planning system. What opportunity does this represent for the profession?

The Policy Statement can play an important role in re-emphasising the centrality of the common good as the primary driver of the planning system (see response to Q2). Individual planners and the IPI need to find ways of demonstrating to the general public and elected representatives how the planning system does more than give lip-service to the principles set out in the Policy Statement, for example, how planning can become increasingly plan-led and evidence-based. This would help overcome ad-hoc and/or sectional policies.

I welcome especially Principle 10:

"Above all, planning will be conducted in a manner that affords a high level of confidence in the openness, fairness, professionalism and efficiency of the process, where people have the opportunity to participate at both the strategic plan making and individual planning application level with decisions always being taken in the interests of the common good and in a timely and informed fashion and where people can have confidence that appropriate enforcement action will be taken where legal requirements are not upheld"

Housing provision remains a major challenge facing the planning profession and related disciplines in Ireland. What can be done to ensure the increased supply of housing to meet requirements?

Core strategies in development plans provide an important evidence-based rationale for housing supply policies. There would appear to be a reasonable amount of residentially-zoned lands around urban centres such as Dublin and Cork, but a significant deficiency with regard to infrastructure. The key challenge therefore is to ensure timely public investment in servicing zoned land to enable the housing market to work efficiently during the life of a development plan and beyond. The current funding model needs to be re-examined, to ensure that development levies do not militate against the provision of affordable housing.

'Rural vs. Urban' has been a long-standing debate throughout Ireland. What measures will ensure the balanced development of our villages, towns and cities in the coming years?

There are no easy solutions. International evidence would suggest that high-end service employment is increasingly focused within cities, and that we need to compete with other countries to attract such employment. Insofar as larger urban centres will grow their relative share of the national population, this will inevitably be at the expense of some small rural villages, particularly given the trend towards greater productivity in agriculture. Having said that, indigenous enterprise is both smaller-scale and more foot-loose, and there are thus more opportunities to attract such firms to villages and small towns, particularly if local authorities engage in active land-management policies.

Climate change may prove to be one of the biggest challenges facing wider society in the coming decades. How do you feel that the planning profession may contribute to Irish society's adaptation to its consequences?

Planners need to engage more with civic society in identifying the issues which require medium to long term solutions and to show how those solutions begin with practical steps, such as flood protection and reducing carbon emissions. At the macro-level, the planning system must deliver sustainable settlement patterns which facilitate public transport, walking and cycling, which are energy-efficient, and which minimise run-off to drainage systems.

What advice can you offer to someone entering the profession?

I have found planning to be a rewarding career, involving team-work, engaging with a wide range of other professionals, mastering complex technical and legal issues, and being creative in shaping development proposals. I hope new entrants will be equally happy in the profession, but if they find it is not for them, my advice would be to move on and find some other avenue. Don't become a cynic - it isn't good for you, your colleagues or your work.

How would you define "planning" to a layperson in 100 words or less?

It is hard to better the Brundtland Commission's definition of sustainable development as "*development which meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*". The role of planning is to facilitate such development in the right place and at the right time, and to make it as attractive as possible.



Name: Mr. Gerry Sheeran

Position: Senior Planner

Organisation: Limerick City and County Council

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF POSITION

I am the Senior Planner in the Planning Section in Limerick City and County Council. I have been in this position for the last 25 years but I have previously worked as a planner in Cork Corporation and Waterford Corporation.

Limerick County Council and Limerick City Council amalgamated to the one unitary Authority in June 2014, and now has a total population of over 190,000. There is a total of 41 staff in the Planning Section of the Economic Development and Planning Directorate and I have specific responsibility for 13 Planners, a Heritage Officer, a Conservation Officer and 6 Technicians.

What is the most significant planning issue facing the profession?

Planning and planners have been negatively perceived in the public eye, particularly over the last 20 years, and they are associated with the issues relating to the Mahon Tribunal and the boom and bust of the Celtic Tiger. This needs to be addressed and this is currently happening through the higher media profile of the Irish Planning Institute in terms of getting information on planning policy on current issues into the public domain.

It further needs to be stressed that planners are preparing policy, plans and making decisions in the interest of the common good in order provide a better quality of life for the community as a whole. Planners need to be seen not just as a means of controlling development but as promoters of quality places in cities, towns, villages and rural areas, implementing public realm improvements and also protecting our built and natural environment to ensure a better quality of life and experience for those living, working, studying and visiting these places.

How have Planning Authorities had to evolve over the last decade to cope with significant change in the economy and how are they positioning themselves for the future?

Obviously there has been a very big change in the economy over the last period particularly since the demise of the Celtic Tiger. The number of planning applications has dropped significantly even though currently there is now an increase in the number of planning applications. Significantly the number of professional planners in local authorities has fallen dramatically by over 32% since the 2007 IPI census. There are two significant changes for Planning Authorities over this period:

1

The very substantial economic decline and the drop in planning applications; and,

2

The much increased complexity of the planning system as a result of new legislation which has a requirement for core strategies which are evidenced based and consistent with higher level strategies. In addition Appropriate Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment are now central elements of planning and this has widespread implications for planning applications, regional plans, development plans and local area plans.

Planning authorities themselves have changed in that there is a focus on economic development and this is in line with the title of the planning acts which is: Planning and Development Acts. The widespread requirement for Appropriate Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment means planners have to be trained in AA and SEA and in some cases planners have taken over the role as the officer responsible for AA and/or Heritage.

The review group examining the Cork city boundary as part of local government reform measures is ongoing. With Limerick, Waterford and Tipperary having gone through restructuring, how have the changes impacted on resourcing planning priorities within Limerick City and County Council?

With the amalgamation Limerick City and County Council has now a population of over 190,000 making it one of the bigger Councils in the State. Whereas there is a full Council of 40 members for Limerick City and County Council, these Council Members also sit separately on the Limerick Metropolitan District Council and three other Municipal District Councils (representing approximately the east, west and centre of the former county area). The formal amalgamation took place on 1st June 2014. However, the Planning Department had amalgamated well in advance of that and in March of 2014 the City and Council Planning Departments moved to a refurbished new location in the City Centre. The Planning Department became the Economic Development and Planning Department and now includes the functions of Planning, Economic Development, Marketing, Innovation and the Limerick Enterprise Office.

The Limerick Economic and Spatial Strategy 2030 was launched and incorporated into the Limerick City Development Plan. It focuses on seven major transformational projects for Limerick City Centre. The Limerick Regeneration Strategy dealing with four disadvantaged local authority areas within the city will be incorporated into the Limerick City Development Plan. The focus is on the development of Limerick City in terms of its economy, vibrancy and quality of life issues. The uplift of Limerick/Shannon Gateway city will also benefit the county and the region but there is also a focus on the rest of the county and Limerick has 16 Local Area Plans for towns in the county area.

There has been a lot of debate in recent years regarding the relationship between the west of Ireland and the “dominance” of Dublin and the east. From a planning perspective, what challenges does this bring for Limerick City and County Council’s Planning Department?

The National Spatial Strategy 2002 was the first Spatial Strategy for the state and it indicated balanced regional development with the major Gateway being Dublin and 7 other Gateways within the State. The Atlantic Corridor was the Gateways from Sligo through Galway, Limerick, Cork and Waterford. The Limerick Shannon Gateway is actually the central point on the Atlantic corridor and I would think that is of significance. The dominance of Dublin and the Dublin-Belfast Corridor is an issue which needs to be assessed. This eastern corridor cannot be developed to the detriment of other areas of the country. The update of the National Spatial Strategy, 2010, again promoted balanced regional development. It stated *“Delivering sustainable communities: through sustained investment in regeneration of existing disadvantaged urban areas catching up on infrastructural deficits in areas that have developed rapidly in recent years”*.

The National Spatial Strategy is to be replaced by the National Planning Framework and it is important that this emphasises balanced development. Sustainable development has three elements; certainly economic but also social and environmental. By focusing only on the fastest economic development for the State, which could be promoted through encouraging growth on the eastern corridor, would not promote sustainable communities and balanced regional development. The social and environmental elements have to be given adequate weight in looking at an overall national spatial framework. Similarly the EU supports *“Territorial Cohesion”* which addresses regional/territorial disparities. The purpose of Structural funds is to develop regions which are weak in order to have cohesion between these areas and the stronger regions. So applying this model to Ireland, we need to look at the Country as a whole and encourage development in a balanced way but focusing on the main drivers which are the major Gateway cities both in the east and other areas of the Country.

What advice can you offer to someone entering the profession?

Your career is going to be interesting with no day being the same as the last. You should remember that your training has given you a wide range of skills which you can further develop and use in the various fields in which a planner can be employed.

The planner’s role and skills are one of an analyst, a forecaster, consultant, negotiator, politician and assessor of competing views. In all of this the planner must hold as his/her core objective: *“to provide, in the interest of the common good for proper planning and sustainable development...”*

I would also advise a young planner, whether as a student or a graduate, to join the Irish Planning Institute. The Institute has c. 700 members throughout the island of Ireland. It represents the planning profession and has increasing impact on government and also on the public through the media. It now requires each member to maintain and upgrade their knowledge through continuing professional development. In addition, I would advise young planners not only to become a member of the Irish Planning Institute but to contribute to it through branches, committees and the submission of papers so that you are shaping the Institute and the way it interacts with government and society.

How would you define “planning” to a layperson in 100 words or less?

Planning is concerned with places - regions, cities, towns, neighbourhoods and rural areas - how to ensure that they change and develop over time for the better. The Planning Acts state that Planning is about providing for sustainable development in the interest of the common good. Sustainable development can be described as including economic, social and environmental elements and a requirement for equity and for consultation with and involvement of the community. It is important that planning stands as bulwark for the common good where there are often strong sectoral or individual interests that can result in bad planning.

Planning Policy Statement 2015

The Government has produced a Planning Policy Statement 2015 and this is the very first statement produced by any Irish Government on Planning and is to be welcomed. There are a number of key planning principles in this document and some of these are:



Planning must be plan led and **evidence based**;

Planning must proactively drive and support **sustainable development**;



Planning is about creating communities and further developing **existing communities** in a stable manner;

Planning will enhance a **sense of place** between cities, towns, villages and rural areas;



Planning will conserve and enhance the rich qualities of **natural and cultural heritage**; and,

Planning will be conducted in a manner that affords a high level of confidence in the **openness, fairness, professionalism** and efficiency of the process.



5.0 Private Sector Survey Results

This section outlines the results of the survey conducted with professional planning consultancies throughout Ireland. Owing to a very changed landscape since the IPI *'Census of the Planning Profession in Ireland'* (2007), the results do not allow for direct comparison, but the general themes remain consistent, and offer an interesting insight in to how the private sector component of the planning profession has evolved in recent years.

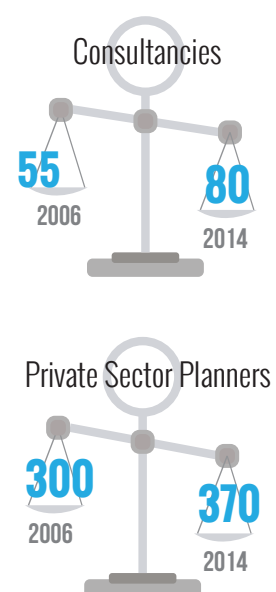
CONTEXT

Back in 2007, the IPI Census identified 55 planning consultancies (either firms or sole traders) operating. Conservative estimates indicated that there were 300 planners working within these consultancies. During the *'Celtic Tiger'* (and in the years prior as economic growth took hold), as with many professions associated with the construction and development industry, planning consultancies grew significantly in line with the pace of economic growth, the increasing complexity involved in planning projects and the statutory process itself, and the demands for a full project team and project manager service (roles in which a planner's skills were perfectly suited).

In late 2014, the *'Survey of the Planning Profession 2014/2015'* was conducted by the IPI Policy and Research Group, based on recognition of the growing scope and sophistication of planning and its requirements.

NUMBER OF PLANNERS EMPLOYED

The survey yielded a response from 60 planning consultancies (again, either firms or sole traders), from an identified total of 80 planning consultancies. By incorporating a guiding estimate for those consultancies for which a response was not received, some 370 planners are estimated to be actively engaged in the profession through private sector consultancy roles. **However, it is prudent to highlight at this juncture that the responding consultancies indicate that their personnel numbers have decreased by over 37%.** i.e. while the private sector has experienced natural growth since 2006, a very significant loss of employment has been witnessed within consultancies that have weathered the economic downturn. With c. 25 more consultancies now in operation, just 70 (approx.) planning roles have been created, indicating many freelance/micro firms.



GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

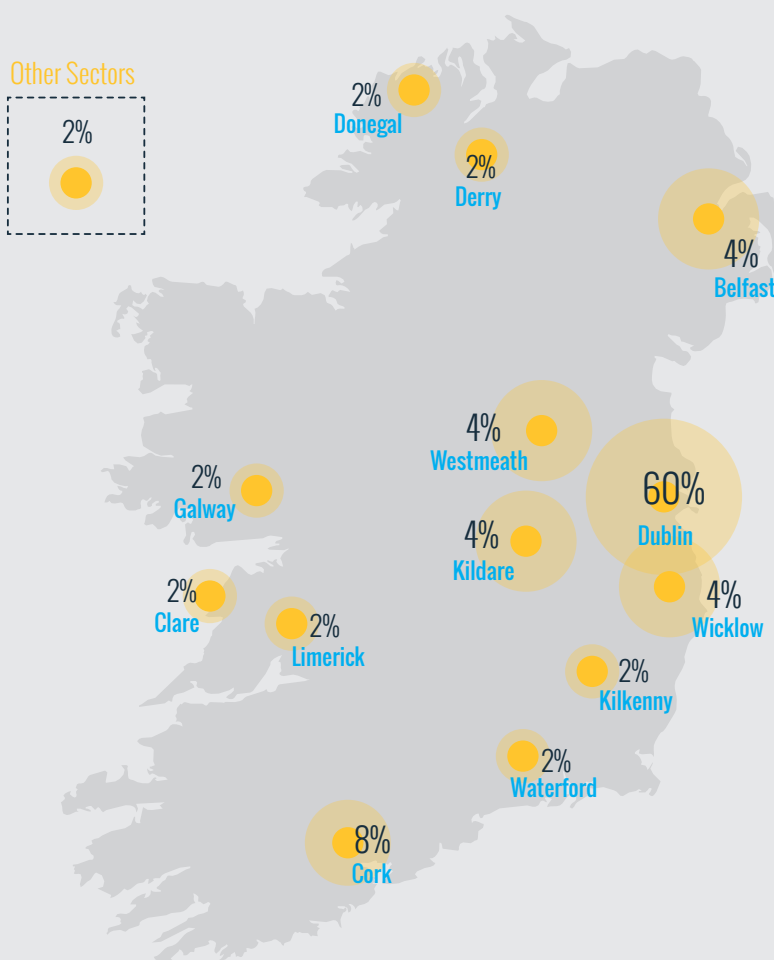
As might be expected, Dublin is home to by far the highest proportion of planning consultancies, at some 60%. Many of these consultancies offer a national service, while a smaller number of consultancies have their primary base in locations throughout the country, most notably within the Greater Dublin Area, Cork, Galway and Antrim (Belfast).

Just 17% of the Dublin-based consultancies indicated that they also operate from a satellite office in another county. Those responses from Northern Ireland indicated active involvement in projects with the Republic, and are therefore recorded. A small percentage of consultancies have diversified into other sectors, citing the economic downturn as the primary motivation/reasoning.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

"...working in a Dublin local authority may not be a reflection of the overall Irish economy but definitely there seems to be a growing confidence that is reflected in the nature, scale and number of pre-planning discussions..."

*Dublin's economic prominence as a reason for the pattern above?
(Local authority planner survey response)*



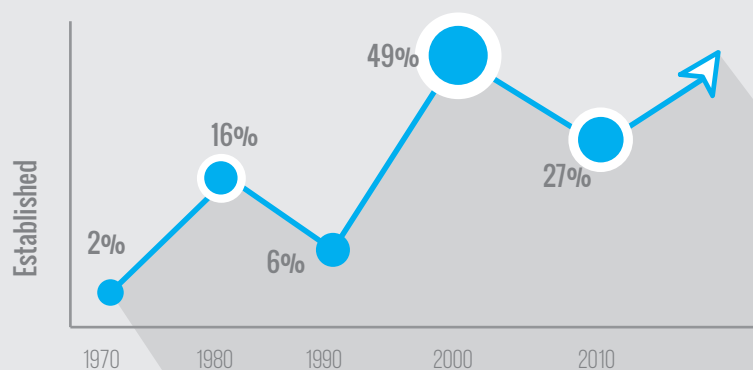
DATE OF ESTABLISHMENT OF FIRMS

It is interesting to consider the length of time in which planning consultancies have been established. Indeed, just 18% of consultancies were established during the 1970s and 1980s (at 2% and 16% respectively), while 6% were formed during the 1990s. This means that a significant proportion (76%), were formed since 2000, and thus demonstrative of the very significant growth experienced during this time. Drilling a little further, it is evident that 27% of consultancies were formed since 2010, while 49% formed during the 2000s.

Based on the estimated 370 planners employed and actively engaged in the private sector, this substantial growth patterns accords with the level of activity in the property and infrastructure development of the 2000s. The private sector landscape has changed considerably since the IPI Census in 2007, with many larger firms severely impacted by the economic downturn. Indeed, a number of high-profile consultancies closed their doors, others consolidated and focussed on core service offerings, while others diversified to build their profiles in niche areas.

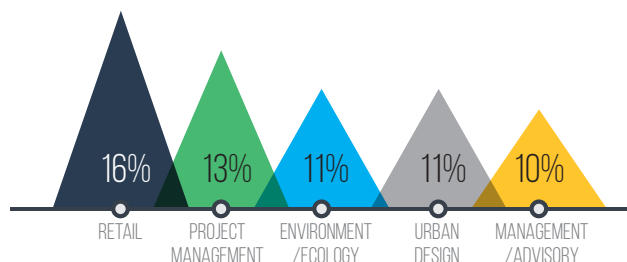
It is encouraging to see that 27% of consultancies were formed since 2010. While reasonable to expect that the majority of these are sole traders or firms with a small core team, there are notable exceptions. Anecdotally, there is evidence of senior personnel from established firms that ceased trading during the late 2000s showing resilience and forging new business opportunities and new firm formation in recent years. It is a positive finding that these planners, with consultancies formed since 2010, have shown resolve and continue to operate, building profile and capacity and contributing to employment creation and a return to sustainable economic growth.

DATE OF ESTABLISHMENT OF FIRMS



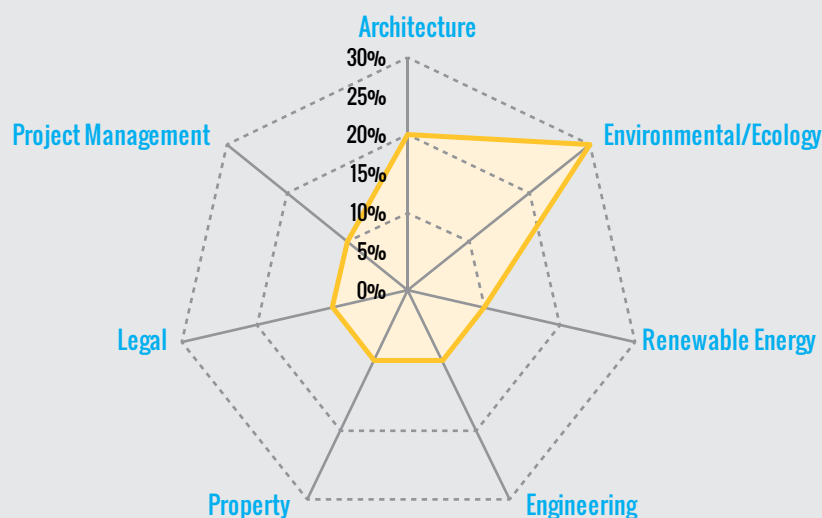
ACTIVITIES OF PLANNING CONSULTANCIES

While the vast majority of consultancies confirmed that 'Planning' is the principal function and service offering of their company (86%), it is important to consider the supplementary services offered within many consultancies. The top five most popular services offered supplementary to 'Planning' (as the main function) were:



Alongside the above finding, 14% of respondents specified that 'Planning' was not their core function. If we look at this group in more detail, half of these consultancies confirmed that 'Environmental/Ecology' services (30%) or 'Architecture' services (20%) was their main function, with 'Planning' representing part of their offer or indeed a 'multi-disciplinary' offer. The remainder indicated that their core business was 'Engineering', 'Renewable Energy', 'Project Management', 'Property/Real Estate', or 'Legal' services.

MAIN FUNCTION



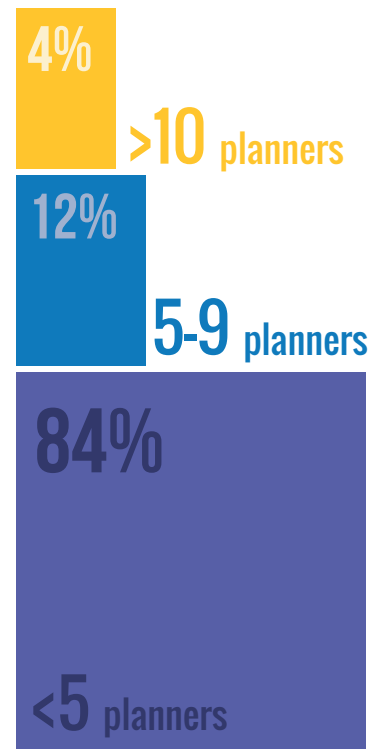
It is interesting to note, at this juncture, that when asked "Is the Principal (of the consultancy) a qualified planner?", some 84% confirmed positively

With 16% clarifying that the Principal was qualified in another profession, it would appear that there is a direct correlation between the Principal/figurehead within the consultancy and the strategic service offering that the consultancy makes. While this would appear logical, it is equally important as a profession that those offering professional planning services have the professional planning personnel to carry out these functions.

SIZE OF FIRMS (BY NO. OF PLANNERS)

As an indication of professional staffing levels, over 80% of consultancies have less than 5 qualified planners in employment. 12% have between 5 and 9 qualified planners working in the consultancy. Just 4% of consultancies currently have in excess of 10 qualified planners. While this is not to say that these consultancies do not have other professional personnel in employment, it is nonetheless an important finding having regard to the increased level of activity in the following: residential property market and indeed the commercial property market, FDI interest in establishing facilities in Ireland, a number of infrastructure projects which require private sector support and the emerging general upturn in property and development activity (not to mention the increased complexity of bringing a project through from inception to completion in the planning system).

In the IPI Census 2007, 64% of consultancies were either sole traders or firms with less than 5 planning personnel. With that figure now standing at 84%, it is apparent that the economic downturn has had a very damaging effect on the private sector planning professional. Many of the larger firms have had to shed the number of staff (planners and non-planners alike), and those that may have lost their jobs have often established themselves as sole traders or commenced work in newly-established smaller firms. Of course, as a profession this brings with it many challenges, not least the capacity of smaller consultancies to compete for and deliver larger scale projects (in competition with large, 'multidisciplinary' firms that may actually have a small number of planning staff).



REPORTED CHANGE IN PERSONNEL NUMBERS

Based on the survey responses, between 2007 and 2014 a significant 37% decrease has been witnessed between the numbers of planning personnel employed in consultancies. A combination of factors relating to the downturn in the national economy can of course be inferred as the underlying cause in this respect. It would appear that some of these have subsequently remained within the profession, perhaps establishing as sole traders or finding positions with other consultancies.

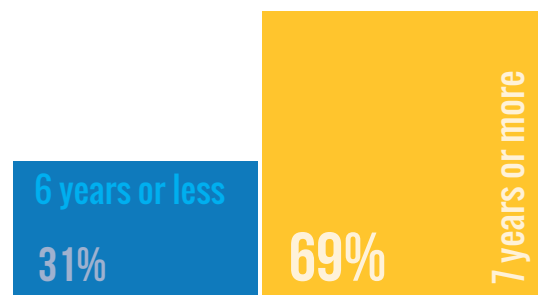
CHANGE IN PERSONNEL NUMBERS

37% decrease between 2007-2014
in the numbers of planning personnel
employed in consultancies, compared with a **32%**
decrease in planning staff in Local Authority Planning Departments



LEVELS OF EXPERIENCE

The survey also sought to determine the level of experience among planners working in consultancies. Some 69% of planning staff in planning consultancies have in excess of 7 years of professional experience, while 48% have 11+ years of experience. This indicates that the private sector benefits from a high calibre of personnel in terms of experience, which bodes well for the 31% with 6 years or less of experience, in terms of mentoring and career development support.



When asked about the number of planning roles occupied by non-qualified 'planners', the consultancies reported that 20% of planning-specific roles are being performed by personnel with no planning qualification, although where consultancies offer a multi-disciplinary service, planning-related roles might be 'blurred' with other professions. That said, it is encouraging that just 22% of consultancies indicated that 'non-planners' form part of their personnel.

1 in 5 planning-specific roles are being conducted by non-planners, but just **1 in 5** consultancies have 'non-planners' working for them.



PLANNING ROLES



Only has qualified planners working for them



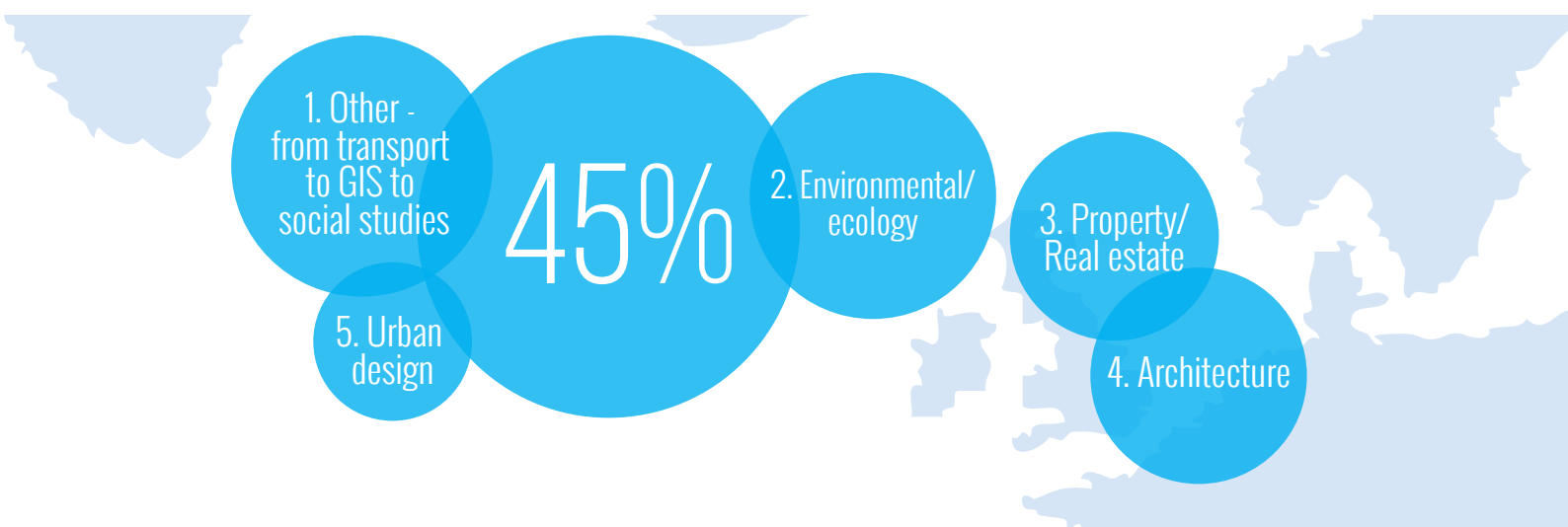
Has a number of un-qualified 'planners' working for them



This pattern is of interest considering the over **54%** of Local Authority Planning Department staff are non-planners

EXTENT OF DUAL QUALIFICATIONS AMONG PLANNERS

It is useful to consider the professional qualifications benefitting planning consultancies. **Over 45% of qualified planning staff has an additional qualification**, with the top five being:



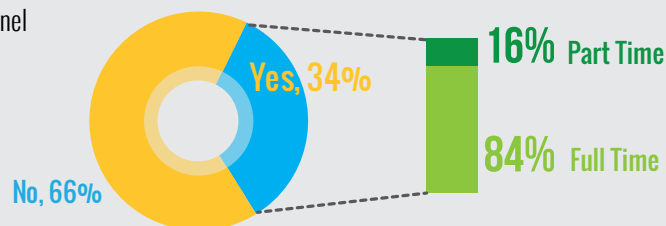
During the 2000s, there was a trend for firms in related areas, such as property development, construction, retail and utilities (among others) to establish a dedicated in-house professional planning advisor/team, rather than procuring the services of a planning consultant. It will be interesting to observe in the coming years if this trend will continue, and while it is a difficult task to quantify how many planners fill such roles, opportunities for employment may arise in either form.

RECRUITMENT TRENDS IN 2013/2014

When asked if they had hired personnel in 2013/2014, 66% of planning consultancies responded 'No'. With just over a third responding positively, 84% were for full-time positions, and 16% in a part-time capacity.

RECRUITMENT TRENDS 2014

Did you hire personnel in 2013/2014?

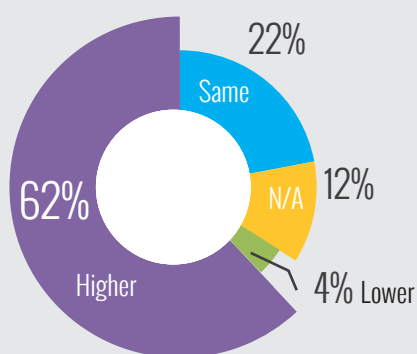


ECONOMIC OUTLOOK (PERCEPTION)

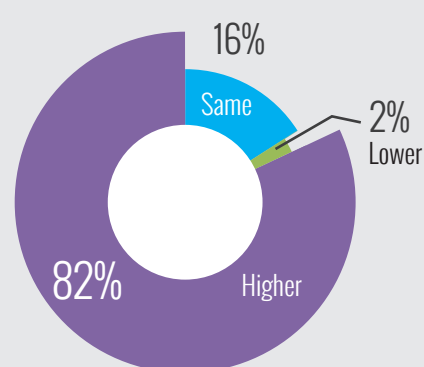
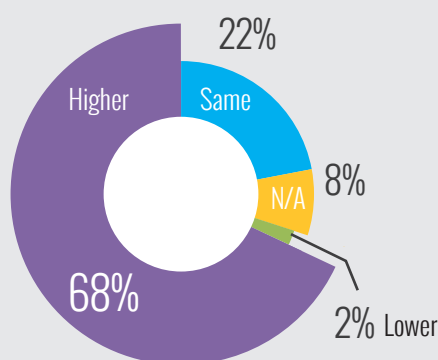
Planning consultancies were surveyed on their economic outlook for the coming period, and to report on their experiences of the last six months. As can be seen from the breakdown of responses, there has been a positive upswing in the sentiment towards the rate of business being experienced and the level of confidence in the Irish economy.

RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY MARKET

"In the past 6 months, your company's rate of business has been ..."



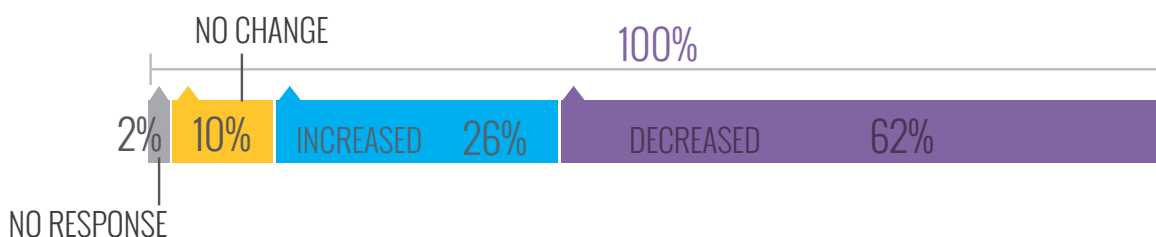
"Your confidence in the Irish economy compared to 6 months ago is ..."



"In the next 6 months, you expect your company's rate of business to be ..."

This is certainly positive news within the profession, as the respondents also confirmed, as expected, that the majority had experienced a decrease in their basic salary since the IPI Census 2007. Just over a quarter reported an increase in salary between 2007 and 2014 (with 12% recording no change/no response).

Salaries since 2007 census



PRIVATE SECTOR TRENDS

The survey also invited respondents to consider future trends in planning and the wider economy and how these might impact upon their practice and the wider profession.

Responses highlighted the continued role of the Institute in developing collegiality between planners across all sectors. While this is an ongoing process, this survey exercise is supporting this goal by giving practitioners an opportunity to share their experiences of the planning system.

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK AND PLANNING

Respondents were generally positive about the future of the economy, with a typical response arguing:

“the prospects for growth are good - economic output and employment will continue to grow (albeit from depressed levels). In the property sector there is pent up demand for commercial and residential property, the supply of which effectively stopped in 2010 which will need to be met otherwise it will become a significant impediment to future economic growth”

There was a view that any recovery was Dublin-based and only beginning to spread to the other cities with rural areas further behind.

Many highlighted the role of planning in securing sustainable growth going forward. The challenge posed by this need was captured by a respondent who stated:

“A main challenge will come for the new NSS which must plan for such growth. With main centres gaining priority as before, will realistic targets and designations be set for those areas which remain outside the prime drivers?”

Another respondent offered that:

“A lack of cohesion/sequencing in revisions to statutory policies could lead to uncertainty over the next 1-2 years - the hierarchy of plans may struggle with consistency”

A number of respondents voiced concerns in relation to uncertainty, particularly around finance. One respondent stated that

“specific measures such as limits on mortgage borrowing, [the] upcoming planning bill, new building control regulations, and budgetary changes may negatively impact on the delivery of product to the construction sector in particular”

The intersection of sustainable growth with energy and land use planning was considered by some:

“Looking ahead a decade or two, the real impacts of climate change will begin to be felt, and Ireland is already exposed to the international price of oil, gas and other fuels”

This perspective was reinforced by another contribution:

“One such challenge is dealing with the unrealistic expectations of clients who continue to behave as if the Celtic Tiger will return, and there is no need to design and locate buildings to take account of solar energy, either passive or active. A second challenge is to educate planning authorities to these issues”

Through the Institute’s participation in the Spatial Planning for Communities in All Landscapes (SPECIAL) project, training will be developed and delivered to address some of these challenges in 2015.

PLANNING AND HOUSING

There were a significant number of responses which referenced housing. Steady growth was envisaged but some concerns were expressed regarding the role of planning standards and density requirements in suppressing supply. This topic figured prominently during Mary Hughes’ participation in a debate on Primetime with economist Ronan Lyons.

Some saw planning as overregulated with one believing:

“I think it is being overwhelmed with regulation. There should be a comprehensive review of planning policy guidance to consider whether they are fit for purpose. There should be more reliance on planners’ professional judgement rather than box ticking”

The Institute is participating in the Planning sub-group of the High Level Group on Business Organisation convened by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

The High level group is tasked with identifying ways of reducing the burden of red tape on business. The Group acts as a clearing house for specific business suggestions for red-tape reduction by identifying administrative solutions and simplifications across Government.

A belief that Government support for social housing is below the level required was also stated (It is noted that the social housing strategy has subsequently been released).

PLANNING PRACTICE

Regarding the realities of planning practice, downward pressure on fees featured prominently, with one respondent offering:

“Fee levels have dropped considerably during the recession and planning appraisals have been carried out on shoestring budgets. If the economy improves and more in-depth planning work is called for, it may be difficult to persuade clients of the value of well researched and properly time resourced site appraisals and submissions”

Another stated that it is difficult:

“to earn reasonable fees as a private practitioner. Fees largely driven down by competitive tendering, expect this to continue”

Many respondents expressed concern about how recent graduates will be allowed to return to planning or if those working overseas will return.

OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

Opportunities for planning and the profession in areas such as Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), renewable energy and agriculture and planning were noted. Challenges include:

“Continued political lack of understanding of 'proper' planning and development standards”

“Stakeholder perception that planners in the private sector are simply a mouth piece for rapacious development - need to do more to illustrate that this is not the case”

“Develop the ability to be seen to fairly critique issues”

“Poor recognition for the profession”

“Education of public and professionals on the importance of planning and the role of planners in the planning process”

“The continued lack of recognition by Government Departments of the role of a professional planner in state projects”

“Ensuring the market place is aware of the role of planning and in particular planning consultants”

“The need to ensure that the planning system is not seen as an impediment to economic development but to position the system in a way that can channel and focus economic development while also being a vehicle for social inclusion and change”



Name: Dr. William Hynes

Position: Managing Director

Organisation: Future Analytics Consulting Ltd.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF POSITION

I am Managing Director of a small but progressive planning, research and economic consultancy based in Dublin. We specifically specialise in providing the 'evidence-base' (data identification, collation, analysis and visualisation) to supplement our project management, strategy, feasibility and applied-research services. Our projects span regional and national socio-economic development studies, through to pan-European research in Secure Societies, Resilience, ICT and Smart Cities, etc.

How has the 'planning consultant' had to evolve over the last decade in Ireland?

Over the last decade, planning consultancies have had to consolidate and up-skill to continue to offer a quality service that aligns with market demand. Project management and the coordination of multidisciplinary teams draws on the transferable skills professional planners inherently possess. For consultancies, diversification and the application of analytical and 'strategic oversight' capabilities have been a necessary departure to battle the economic downturn, and many consultancies have managed to adapt by drawing on other expertise and experience to remain competitive and current. At an individual level, some planning consultants have utilised a previous area of expertise (e.g. I apply my background in construction economics in viability studies) and many have up skilled through CPD via their professional institutes or postgraduate studies, etc.

What difficulties does a private sector consultancy face, and are there practical solutions to tackle these challenges?

There are many challenges faced by all planning consultancies, from cut-price tendering requirements and tedious insurance premiums, through to the challenges of remaining fully versed in evolving planning legislation and guidance. Given the uncertain economic outlook of recent years, it has been difficult to 'horizon scan' in terms of forecasting continued workstreams to sustain a growing office. Thankfully, positive growth has been sustained recently and the level of project activity has returned with good prospects going forward. It is very important to have a diverse and experienced team that can deliver quality, comprehensive and defensible project outputs (i.e. evidence-based). Networking, CPD event attendance, observation of good practice and imparting good standards to junior colleagues can all contribute to a productive consultancy. As a profession, we must continue to strengthen our collective voice and clearly justify our place in decision-making at all levels.

What direction do you consider the planning system in Ireland to be taking, and what opportunities exist to strengthen the profession in this context?

There is no denying that the profession and the planning system in which we operate has faced a difficult number of years recently. That said, constructive steps have been, and are being, proactively taken at all levels now to correct structural weaknesses and enhance the manner in which the planning system operates. With forthcoming planning legislation, recent regional and local government reform, a new planning policy statement and other initiatives such as the Construction 2020 Strategy and new Local and Economic Community Plans, the profession has a huge opportunity to greatly enhance and solidify the role it must play in assessing and guiding how our urban and rural areas should develop over the coming years. Irish society has been beset with a dogged few years during the economic downturn, and we are now at a point where the period of reflection and lessons learned should be applied to make Ireland place of opportunity for future generations.

In addition to development management and forward planning services, FAC is actively engaged in international research projects. What are some of the emerging trends that will influence the profession in the coming years?

Without a doubt, there has been a heightened interest in urbanisation in recent years, and many research agendas are focussed on investigating the implications of growing populations within our cities and towns, and the demands this places on critical infrastructure. I believe that a stronger understanding of demographic change will be needed within the profession, as this will influence many of the key policy decisions and interventions that professional planners will make in the future. As more and more pressure is placed on key infrastructure, and with often competing priorities at local government level (and sometimes unrealistic expectations of the public), the challenge will be to find a way to develop our urban centres sustainably, without abdicating responsibility for delivery - the public and private sectors will most likely need to identify stronger partnership solutions.

Similar to Ireland, the dynamic nature of housing markets and the realities around 'supply and demand' remain a hot topic throughout Europe. The housing market needs to be better understood by professional planners and related built environment professionals. It represents a core example of how the dichotomy between the understanding of population change and the complexities of housing delivery are intertwined, and the planning profession should be at the heart of the solution, like so many 'societal challenges' which we will face in the coming years.

The acquisition, collation, assessment, visualisation and analysis of data will continue to influence plan and decision-making within the profession. Much like the "evidence-based" approach required through the delivery of Core Strategies within City/County Development Plans, we have found that many research projects are investigating new ways to ensure that reliable data analysis informs policy development. It is all too often that different agencies are collecting valuable data which can guide decision making, but which is collected, stored and approached in very different formats, meaning that the opportunity for integration is lost, and the utilisation of the data is undermined. A closer collaboration and standard is needed, as reliable data represents a powerful ingredient in addressing future challenges.

Smart Cities, ICT and data-utilisation have a growing relationship with how we plan and manage our environment. Are there risks inherent in such innovations?

We have found a huge interest in the 'Smart Cities' movement and the exploration of how ICT solutions can contribute to the management and development of urban environments. The adoption of sensor technology to monitor trends (traffic movements, air quality, energy consumption, etc.) has given policy makers access to hugely valuable information and enabled a much better understanding of the condition being investigated. Of course, innovation and creativity brings with it risks and responsibilities. Data protection, the safeguarding of fundamental human rights, and ethical compliance are important pillars that have been firmly incorporated in applied research projects, and thus influence the practical solutions applied "on the ground".

Of course, if you take the example of unmanned airborne vehicles, or drones, many would see the huge opportunity that this technology brings, such as through a contribution to security and wide-area surveillance, emergency response (when ground access is impeded), surveying and mapping, asset management, agricultural insurance, etc. Equally, many others would have strong concerns around a lack of regulation, undermining civilian privacy and civil liberties and the general perceived invasive nature of this technology. It is important that we communicate the facts about the opportunities, and indeed shortcomings, that technological solutions can bring to proper planning and sustainable development. The data that can be collected through innovative solutions represents a significant step forward and can contribute greatly to a more informed forward planning.

In terms of resourcing the profession, what advice can you offer graduates and those seeking new opportunities?

At a practical level, graduates have in recent years faced the difficult task of finding employment opportunities at a time when many organisations were exploiting internship/placement programmes (it is a positive initiative only in specific circumstances). As this trend begins to dissipate with the emerging economic recovery, new opportunities will arise. I would recommend that graduates and those seeking new opportunities observe the trends as to what direction planning is taking. For example, the continued growth of data as a decision-support input highlights the importance of technical and analytical skills. Equally, meaningful participative planning requires skills in communication and facilitation. CVs need to highlight your "unique selling point" - point yourself in the shoes of a prospective employer: what are they expecting to jump off the page and set you apart from the competition? Think outside the box, and carve out opportunities.

I would strongly recommend active involvement in the Irish Planning Institute and other community or voluntary networks. Not only is this beneficial for your CV, it provides you with access to a huge network, direct experience in sector-related activities, and of course CPD and training opportunities.

How would you define "planning" to a layperson in 100 words or less?

For me planning is a profession where we are tasked with "thinking". This is not to undermine any other profession, but planners benefit from a particular range of skills that enable them to think strategically and look at the "big picture", consider cause-effect relationships, cascading impacts, multi-criteria analyses and other techniques to give us a clearer perspective than others. Planning is a diverse and exciting profession, and one in which the world is our oyster. With responsibility for how our cities evolve, how the very fabric of society is supported, planning is central to quality decision-making and the opportunities are endless.

6.0

Conclusion

The findings of this survey will continue to guide and inform the work of the IPI on behalf of its members. It will frame future discussions with key stakeholders and bodies particularly relating to staffing levels and the distribution of staff within planning departments and addressing different elements of the planning system. A case in point is where the IPI has written to several local authorities in 2014 to emphasise the role of the planning consultant in delivering good planning outcomes. One of the practical achievements in this respect have been changes in Local Authority website descriptors around the role and qualifications of planning agents.

Importantly the findings of the survey will inform IPI submissions on key pieces of legislation including forthcoming planning legislation in the context of existing and future resourcing and capacities, and in strategy and guidance documentation.

Planning in Ireland is a highly collaborative field, and planners work closely with the public and many other stakeholders in all activities they undertake. As the profession pervades many facets of society, the demand and requirement for those with planning skills will continue to take central stage given the challenges faced within urban, rural and regional contexts. Population growth, employment creation, access to (and provision of) housing, transport infrastructure planning and delivery, environmental protection and energy efficiency, the protection of our cultural heritage - there are so, so many areas where professional planners are crucial to meeting societal challenges. Our profession is at the forefront of creating sustainable communities and ensuring quality of life for future generations. Resourcing the profession is a key priority, not least as we enter a period of economic growth and face the pressure from speculative interests for short-term gains. Resisting short-term 'wins' and promoting sustainable and evidence-led decisions require access to appropriate staffing levels and personnel with professional knowledge and experience.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

From snapshot to comprehensive national picture

Public sector

While the focus of this survey has been on gaining a snapshot understanding of the Local Authority and Private Sector planning sectors, the IPI recognise that it is important to augment this survey with data on the resourcing of the wider public sector/semi-state authorities and agencies. Knowing where professional planners are contributing to the activities and initiatives within Ireland's regional government structures, national utilities providers and major infrastructure operators, among others, will supplement the insights garnered through this survey.

Equally, the IPI would like to engage with other important contributors to the planning process in Ireland, such as An Bord Pleanála, as part of a fuller profile of the profession and its resourcing capacities. In its 2013 Annual Report, An Bord Pleanála recorded a complement of 56 planning personnel and 106 non planning personnel. It would be useful to get an updated release of how An Bord Pleanála is currently resourced, and its capacity with regard to existing and forecast levels of activity in planning referral matters.

Indeed, the IPI feels it is important to continue to develop a closer and more definitive register of the planning profession in Ireland, to inform the distribution and focus of professional planners throughout the country (also see 'Registration of the Profession', below). Knowing the total number of professional planners, the distribution across private consultancy, local authority and other agencies/organisations, the roles and responsibilities and the needs of these planners would serve as hugely beneficial insight for the IPI with regard to priority activities for the years ahead.

Accredited Planning Schools

The IPI works closely with the accredited Planning Schools in third level institutions in Ireland, and will continue to foster this relationship. Arising from the findings of this survey of the planning profession in 2014/2015, and having regard to emerging and forecast levels of growth in the Irish economy, it is essential that the quality of planning graduates entering the workforce is maintained, and indeed that opportunities for employment are created and sustained within Ireland.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

As mentioned earlier in this report, the reform of local government in Northern Ireland took effect on 01 April 2015. This reform saw the reduction of 26 councils to 11, and will result in improved service provision and performance management (new responsibilities and a broader range of powers) and long-term cost savings (economies of scale). During 2014, the Irish Planning Institute sought to include local government in Northern Ireland in this survey of the planning profession. However, owing to the then impending reforms, it was advised that it may be appropriate to postpone the Northern Ireland portion of the survey work until after the reform measures took effect. Accordingly, it is intended to explore the possibility of a survey of Local Government Planners in Northern Ireland during 2015.



REGISTRATION OF THE PROFESSION

The survey gives some insight into the number of planners in the country. While there is no definitive figure on the number of planners that are not a member of any professional institute and so are not bound by a professional code of ethics or by mandatory Continuous Professional Development (CPD), it is apparent that there is a need for a more formalised structure in this respect. Membership of a professional institute is necessary to ensure that the profession remains credible and transparent ensuring that professionals working in the system are operating in an accountable manner, maintaining quality and excellence and adhering to the highest international professional and ethical standards. We need to ensure that all professional planners working in Ireland are members of a professional institute. The IPI is thus working with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and is seeking the establishment of a National Register of Planners whereby every planner working in Ireland must be a member of a professional institute and must be registered on a National Database of Professional Planners in Ireland. We fundamentally believe that this approach is required to strengthen and unify the profession for the overall betterment of the planning system.



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Breakdown of Survey Questions

Summary of Local Authority survey

- 1 No. of Professional Planners in the Planning Department
- 2 Breakdown of Grades
- 3 No. of Other Non Planner Technical & Professional Staff in the Planning Department
- 4 Breakdown of Grades
- 5 Total staff in the Planning Department:
- 6 Total ALL professional Planners in the Local Authority
- 7 Total ALL staff in the Local Authority
- 8 Breakdown of number of professional Planners in:

Development Management	Parks and recreation
Forward Planning	Transport
Enforcement	Environment
Economic and Enterprise/LEO	Marine
SEA/AA/Biodiversity	Other (Please Specify)
Community	
- 9 Total professional Planners on secondments/career breaks
- 10 Total professional Planners on maternity/long term leave
- 11 Does your Local Authority procure private sector consultants for certain undertakings
- 12 What prospects for Irish economic growth do you foresee in 2015 and beyond?
- 13 What do you feel is/are the biggest challenges facing the planning profession in the coming years?



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Breakdown of Survey Questions

Summary of private sector survey

- 1 Location of head office?
- 2 Year established?
- 3 Is the principal a qualified planner?
- 4 Is planning the main function?
- 5 Additional areas of expertise?
- 6 How many qualified planners per consultancy?
- 7 How many non-planners are working in planning role?
- 8 No. of qualified planners employed during 2007 vs. 2014?
- 9 Experience of qualified planning staff?
- 10 No. of qualified Planners with dual qualification?
- 11 Rate of business?
- 12 Confidence in Irish economy?
- 13 Did you hire in 2013/2014?
- 14 Full or part-time hires?
- 15 Since 2007, has your salary increased, decreased or remained the same?

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