

Jobs and Skills Australia
Workforce Analysis Team
Via email: jobsandskills.gov.au

PIA supports inclusion of Urban and Regional Planners in Core Skills Occupation List

Introduction

Thank you for consulting with the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) on the Draft Core Skills Occupations List (CSOL)([link](#)). PIA offers evidence supporting the inclusion of Urban and Regional Planners on the CSOL and ultimately the expansion of migration pathways for individuals with this core skill.

PIA evidence shows a sustained national shortage of urban and regional planners (ANZSCO 232611) and alongside evidence of networks and pathways demonstrating that migrant planners are able to enter the workforce in productive roles. In addition, migrant planners enrich the culture of the profession, add international insight and connect well with diverse of community engaged in planning.

The Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) CSOL includes Urban and Regional Planners (ANZSCO 232611) in the category 'to be targeted for stakeholder feedback'. JSA is interested in any corroborating labour market surveys, independent research, business recruitment experiences, and the views of Australian and migrant workers and jobseekers on the inclusion of Urban and Regional Planners in the list.

The Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) is the national body representing planning and the planning profession. Through education, communication and standards of professional development, PIA is the pivotal organisation serving more than 5000 members and guiding many thousands more planning professionals in their role of creating better communities.

Evidence of Planner Shortages

The [PIA State of Profession Report 2023](#) documents planner shortages and is supported by the experience of local employers and international planners engaged through PIA. Our submission interrogates this report and includes evidence from further industry consultation. PIA notes Urban and Regional Planners meet the criteria of being 'in shortage' and are 'paid a salary at or above the Core Skills Threshold (TSMIT).'

The extract below charts JSA data on the shortage of planners in every jurisdiction. In 2023 there is a shortage reported in every state with NSW and SA suffering planner shortages across the board and other States mostly in regional settings.

Although this is an increase over 2022, the 2022 data is anomalous in relation to the years either side and feedback from PIA industry engagement (see page 100 of PIA State of Profession Report).

The screenshot shows the ANZSCO Skills Shortage Drivers tool interface. At the top, there are filters for 'Shortage' (S, R, NS) and 'Future demand' (Above, At, Below economy-wide average). A search box contains '232611'. Below the search, the selected occupation is 'Urban and Regional Planner'. A table displays shortage data for 2021, 2022, and 2023 across National and various states (NSW, VIC, QLD, SA, WA, TAS, NT, ACT). The 2023 data shows a 'Future Demand' filter applied, with 'R' (Regional Shortage) for National, NSW, VIC, QLD, SA, WA, TAS, and NT, and 'NS' (No Shortage) for ACT. The 2022 data shows 'NS' for National and ACT, and 'S' (Shortage) for NSW, VIC, QLD, SA, WA, TAS, and NT. The 2021 data shows 'R' for National, NSW, VIC, QLD, SA, WA, TAS, and NT, and 'NS' for ACT.

PIA’s submission responds to the four JSA ‘Skills Shortage Drivers’ based on the likeliest cause of shortage (link) based on the JSA skills shortage typology.

Classification Definition	
Long training gap	<p>Analogous to Richardson’s level 1 shortage. Longer training gap shortages are defined by few qualified applicants per vacancy and a long training pathway – corresponding to a certificate III or above.</p> <p>This suggests a need to increase the number of available skilled workers but with significant time lags involved in the training process.</p>
Short training gap	<p>Analogous to Richardson’s level 2 shortage. Shorter training gap shortages arise when there are few applicants per vacancy and qualifications less than a Certificate III are required.</p> <p>This suggests a need to increase the number of available skilled workers, with shorter time lags involved in the training process.</p>
Suitability gap	<p>Analogous to Richardson’s quality gap. The suitability gap category is those occupations where there are enough qualified applicants, but they are not regarded as suitable. Reasons cited include a lack of employability skills and work experience. Another factor which may be in play is unconscious bias of employers.</p> <p>This is a category where simply increasing the throughput of qualified people is a questionable strategy. The solution is to enhance the attributes of qualified applicants through investing in their employability skills and work experience.</p>
Retention gap	<p>Analogous to Richardson’s skills mismatch. Retention gap shortages are where there are below average rates of retention, potentially reinforced by low numbers of new applicants per vacancy.</p> <p>This is a category where increasing the throughput of qualified applicants is unlikely to solve the problem because of the low likelihood of retaining them. Ways to enhance the attractiveness of the occupation through improved remuneration and/or working conditions, professional development and clearer career pathways would be potential solutions to alleviate this kind of shortage.</p>

The metrics used to classify occupations in 2023 are listed by JSA below.

Classification Definition	
Long training gap	Average or below-average job mobility of 12.17% in 2023 Fewer than average qualified applicants per vacancy 5.57 in 2023 Above average in requiring a Cert III or above (multiplied by needing a qualification at all), the average being 62.5% in 2023
Short training	Average or below-average job mobility of 12.17% in 2023 Fewer than average qualified applicants per vacancy 5.57 in 2023 Below average in requiring a Cert III or above (multiplied by needing a qualification at all), the average being 62.5% in 2023
Retention gap	Above average job mobility of 12.17% in 2023 Below average qualified applicants per vacancy 5.57 in 2023
Suitability gap	Average or below-average job mobility of 12.17% in 2023 Above average qualified applicants per vacancy 5.57 in 2023
Yet to be determined	Not enough data to be of sufficient quality or did not satisfy any of the above requirements.

The consistent pattern in both the JSA internet vacancies data and PIA's Employment Directory job advertisements indicate a likely increase in the number of urban and regional planning roles (Figs 114-5 below p97 PIA State of Profession report). It is assumed that this reflects a genuine increase in the number of roles, but it is possible that this could also indicate that Planners may be more inclined to leave their existing job; there are simply insufficient planners joining the profession; or a combination of all three. Overall there is strong anecdotal evidence from public and private sector employers that there is currently a significant shortage of planners to fill the available roles.

Figure 114. Number of job advertisements in PIA's Employment Directory, by Division, 2019 to 2022

	TOTAL	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	INT
2019	656	23	179	2	81	25	18	282	31	15
2020	480	8	197	2	40	26	22	153	28	4
2021	910	12	316	8	134	37	39	294	47	23
2022	1054	18	386	10	146	53	36	349	44	12

Source: PIA National Office – Employment Directory

Figure 115. Jobs & Skills Australia internet vacancies for Planners, 2006 to 2023



Source: Jobs & Skills Australia Internet Vacancies for Urban and Regional Planners, 2023

Please note PIA's earlier response to the JSA Stakeholder Survey (20/2/2024) in **Attachment A**.

PIA is working to address planner shortages through local initiatives – but not enough

PIA is currently developing a campaign focussed on marketing planning as a career choice, but that given the lag times in study this is not expected to impact labour supply in the short term.

PIA continues to work with Australian universities in every state on the content and practicality of their planning degrees. We have also establishing a para-planner pathway into the profession via non-university training. PIA is active at open days, industry events and outreach programs to explain and support interest in planning as a career.

PIA's International Planner Network strengthens pathways to employment in planning for migrant planners

PIA has collaborated in the development of a sophisticated **International Planner Network (IPN)** to introduce and upskill migrant planners and address barriers to employment by:

- Connecting, supporting, and informing international planners about various opportunities to secure employment in planning practice including placements (orientation)
- Encouraging international planners to participate in professional development to familiarize with local Australian planning legislation, laws, and professional requirement (workshops)

October 23: Presentation about the International Planners Network at “Empowering transformation” workshop of the PIA- Vic State symposium on 12-13 October.



The IPN has helped mobilise the collective energy of the planning profession to facilitate better representation for international planners to participate in the workforce. The Network empowers international planners by:

- Celebrating contributions of international planners in evolving planning practice for multicultural communities
- Offering opportunities to attend and present at seminars, forums and discussions organised by PIA on critical planning issues or topical planning projects.
- Contributing to the development of urban and regional planning internationally

The IPN offers advocacy and advise and stakeholder engagement opportunities by:

- Providing reviews and advice to PIA about its programmes and activities through a cultural diversity lens
- Sensitizing employers (government, private sector, NGOs) about the potential benefits of employing international planners.
- Providing guidance for employers and PIA to create a more culturally diverse workforce including advocating for diversity and inclusion, as well as skilled migration and the retention of international planners (see Greater Bendigo Inclusion Plan)
- Contributing a cultural diversity voice to broader planning policy discussions and debate within PIA, governments and society at large.



Rural and regional planning employment pathways exist

A significant proportion of migrant planners enter the planning workforce via regional placements in local government and infrastructure agencies / utilities. This pathway exploits cross-over skills in engineering, design and planning which are important where a small organisation has to apply its resources across many issues.

Planning graduates from outside Western Europe frequently have cross disciplinary training and experience. These capabilities place many migrant graduates at a relative advantage in regional offices - especially where the interpretation of English language planning vernacular is less important to the role.

International planners' insights and communication will enrich the profession

Migrant planners do not only address a labour supply shortage, but their insights also add to the productivity of the profession - and improve communication among more diverse community stakeholders. This submission argues that Australia can harness diversity better by greater inclusion of skilled migrant planners.

The PIA State of the Profession Report shows 76% of planners working in Australia were born in Australia – compared to 63% in all professional occupations. The limited exposure of the profession to planners from non-English speaking backgrounds is shown in the table below.

Language groups spoken at home (2 digit)	No of Planners	% of all Planners speaking a language other than English
Chinese	401	19%
Indo-Aryan (primarily concentrated in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Maldives)	311	15%
Iberian Romance (primarily Spanish and Portuguese)	150	7%
South Slavic (Bosnian, Bulgarian, Croatian, Macedonian, Serbian, Slovene)	108	5%
Greek	106	5%
Southeast Asian Austronesian Languages (primarily concentrated in the Philippines and Indonesia)	98	5%
Dravidian (primarily concentrated in southern India, north-east Sri Lanka, and south-west Pakistan)	94	5%
Italian	89	4%
Dutch and Related Languages (Dutch, Frisian and Afrikaans)	88	4%
Middle Eastern Semitic Languages (primarily Arabic and Hebrew)	87	4%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics – Census of Population and Housing, 2021, TableBuilder

Kiran Shinde (coordinator IPN) highlights the potential of international planners to enrich planning practice in **Attachment D**.

Conclusion

PIA’s State of the Profession 2023 Report acknowledges there is a widespread and sustained planner shortage which is only partially addressed through local education and training pathways.

International planners can address important elements of this shortage – and contribute distinct and valuable skills due to cross disciplinary expertise in regional areas. They offer cultural and communication skills relevant to the diverse consumers of planning services. They also bring diverse insights to a relatively less culturally diverse planning workforce.

Migrant planners can find and sustain productive planning work in Australia. PIA’s International Planner Network is smoothing the transition and curating meeting and training opportunities to improve migrant planner access to the labour market.

PIA recommend inclusion of Urban and Regional Planners in the Core Skills Occupation List - so that a wider range of migrant planners can access visas for secure longer term involvement in the Australian planning labour force. Please contact PIA via [REDACTED] for further information on our submission.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

ATTACHMENT A: PIA RESPONSE TO JSA RE STAKEHOLDER SURVEY (20 FEBRUARY 2024)

PIA write in response to the request to contribute to the Jobs and Skills Australia 2024 Skills Priority List. It is noted that the stakeholder survey is primarily interested in capturing vacancies filled both State and Australia-wide. This is not information that PIA captures and we are unable to respond to these specific set of questions.

However, as the primary representative organisation for the planners in Australia, we are well-placed to contribute to this conversation and hope that the information contained in this letter will assist JSA in their analysis.

Since 2019 PIA's Employment Directory has held a consistent market share of ~90% of all relevant planning roles advertised. From 2019 – 2022 job advertisements increased 61% and from the low point of 2020 (COVID affected), increased by 120% to 2022. This information can be found in PIA's recent State of the Profession report, published in July 2023 (p.96).

Recent analysis of the 2023 statistics shows that jobs advertised have remained at very similar levels at 1039 positions Australia-wide. Growth between 2022 and 2023 was experienced in ACT, QLD, TAS and WA with parity in Victoria and a slight dip in NSW, NT and SA. We continue to hear anecdotally that employers are unable to fill vacancies and have simply given up advertising.

Planner shortages are having very clear impacts in regional communities. Our State of the Profession report highlighted that there are 232 local government areas in Australia (43%) where there are no planners working within them (p.25).

The Australian Government's Temporary Work (Skilled) Visa program data for 'Urban and Regional Planners' show that we are not attracting planners via this pathway with less than 25 planners per year arriving (see Fig.116, p.99 State of the Profession report).

Another report of interest is a survey of Australian local governments undertaken in 2022 by SGS Economics & Planning for the Australian Local Government Association shows that:

- the top three most cited skill shortages that local governments experienced were engineers (as noted by 46% of 2022 survey respondents), urban and town planners (40% or 83 of responding local governments in Australia), building surveyors (36%), environmental health inspectors (30%) and human resources professionals (29%).
- as a result of these skills shortages, 51 responding local governments (24%) said that they resorted to recruiting less skilled applicants for urban and town planning roles.
- 102 local governments in Australia (49%) reported that the skill shortages for urban and town planners are becoming critical for the future.
- the proportion of local governments expecting shortages in critical occupational areas increased from a range of 20-35% in 2018 to 37-53% in 2022.

Section 9.4 of the State of Profession report (p.102 onwards) has some analysis on forecast supply of planners looking at current study enrolments, graduates, retirement and switching careers and initiatives to boost planners joining the profession. PIA has concluded that a continued growth in demand seems likely and there will continue to be an undersupply of Planners into the profession to meet that demand in Australia. We encourage Jobs & Skills Australia to interrogate PIA's State of Profession report which relies largely on data collected from the ABS 2021 Census, along with PIA conducted survey of planners, Jobs and Skills Australia data and PIA accredited urban planning programs at universities across Australia.

Beyond this, our deep networks across the planning profession means we have significant anecdotal reports of the challenges in filling employment vacancies. We hear consistent messages from employers in both the public and private sector about the difficulty in finding suitably qualified candidates to fill employment vacancies. This is apparent in both city and regional areas across Australia.

ATTACHMENT B: INTERNATIONAL PLANNERS NETWORK OUTLINE AND EVENTS

Activities of International Planners Network- supported by Planning institute of Australia (VIC)

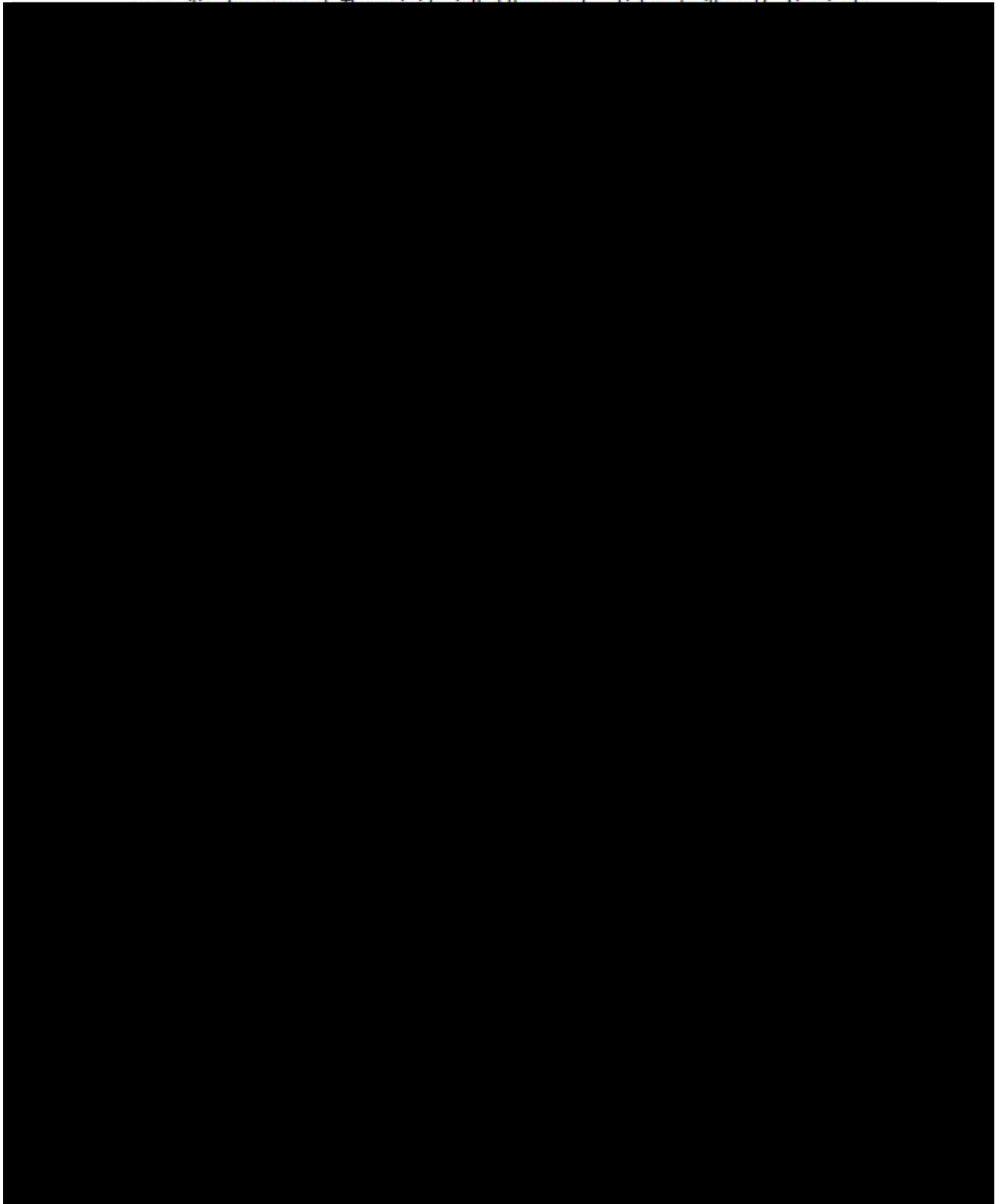
16 Apr 2024: Meet the Employers; Know the Job Market

This event titled was designed as an opportunity for international planners and planning students to connect with industry and employers/hiring managers like yourself. The main objective of the event was to allow international planners and students to have an informal conversation surrounding jobs, application processes, and general employment related questions directly with the people making hiring decisions. Representatives from different kinds of employers including private sector planning firms, Councils, State departments, recruitment agencies, and others providing employment to international planners were invited. The event format was 'Speed Networking' followed by a panel discussion.



29 February 2024: Welcome and Wins: bringing international planners closer

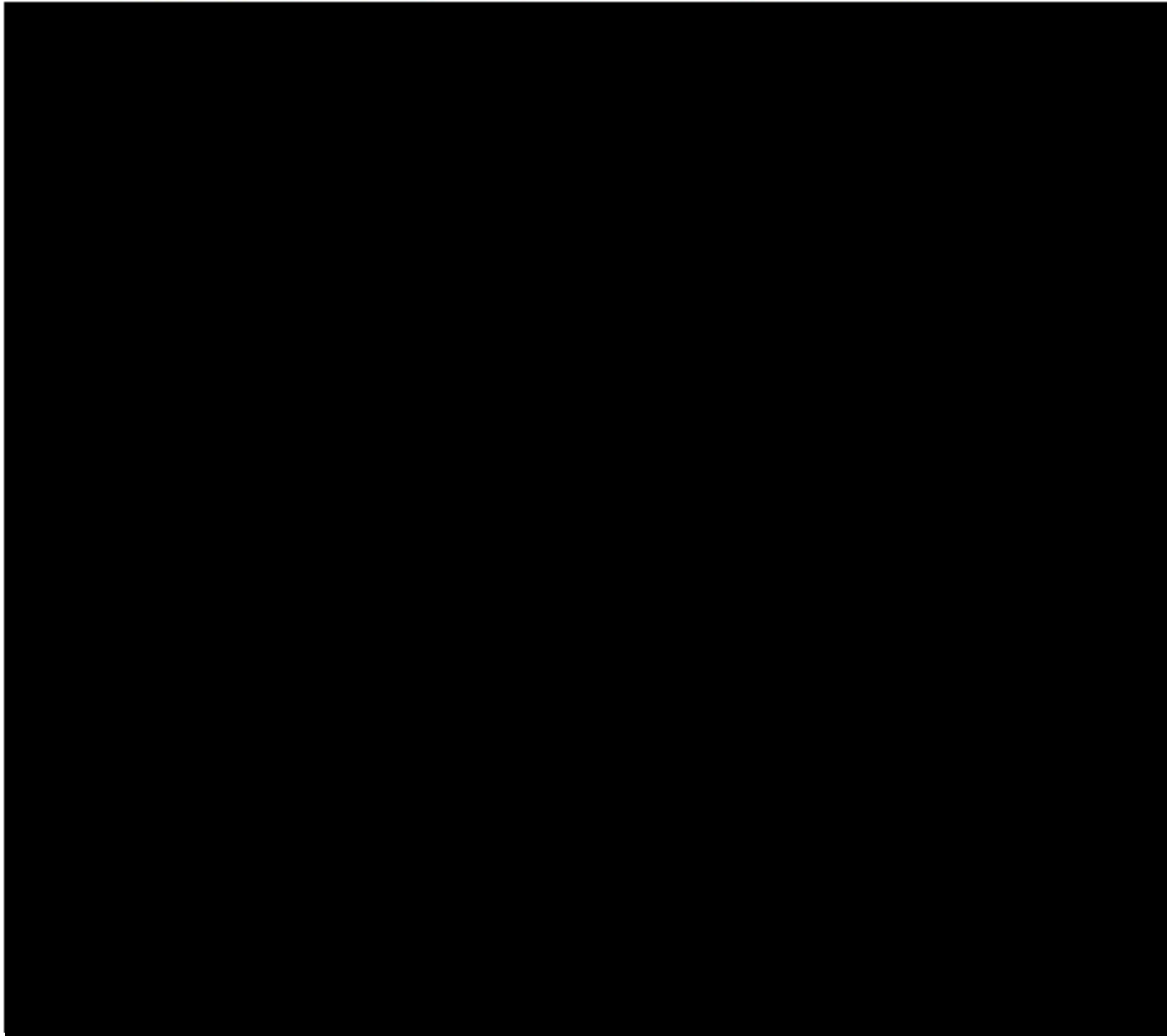
The event was designed as an opportunity to welcome planning students who are pursuing studies in planning or have just completed and interact with international planners like you who have been successful in developing a career in planning practice and winning a PIA award in



16 November 2023: Formal launch of IPN with "Finding a foothold: Career guidance panel".

International Planners Network (IPN) was formally launched with a career guidance panel discussion as its inaugural event. The event, hosted at the Tract office in Melbourne was oversubscribed, and opened to a packed house. It was designed as an opportunity for attendees to meet and interact with planners from four types of employers - council, state agency, private consulting, and advocacy and hear about their professional journey from the specific perspective as an international/migrant professional. The aim was that by listening to their stories, others can feel inspired...

The selection of panelists showcased the diversity of what it means to be international: [REDACTED] a Senior Urban Designer with the City of Greater Geelong came as an international student from India almost a decade ago; [REDACTED] Urban Planner working at the private consulting firm of Ethos Urban came from Argentina about five years ago; [REDACTED] a native of Bangladesh started his journey as a permanent resident and is now a Traffic Engineer at the Department of Transport and Planning; and [REDACTED] who came from the U.K., after a few different planning roles and moving back and forth is now a Strategic Planning Manager with Victorian Planning Authority. Hearing from these international planners like you who have been successful in developing a career in planning practice was a delight for most people - if they can do it, so can others.



Dilemmas in Planning Education

Our diverse international graduate cohort – a missed opportunity

Australian universities have experienced over two decades of growth in international students. Despite the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, international student numbers have once again increased to play an important (but often debated) role in Australian tertiary education. While there are fewer international urban planning students than in many other areas of study, they do make up a significant cohort particularly in postgraduate programmes, pursuing masters level degrees across Australia. This has created a significant shift in both urban planning graduate experiences and the potential for their integration in the changing nature of planning practice in Australia.

While many international students seek to study in Australia and return to their home countries to work in the planning sector, others seek further higher degree studies, particularly research degrees, while a significant number seek to stay and work in Australia, aiming to make a career in planning practice. However this can be challenging, with lower employment reported amongst international students. Across all areas of study “as of 2022, only 57% of undergraduate Indian students and less than 53% of postgraduates had full-time employment after they graduated”.¹

Such findings fit well with the anecdotal information from students we have met over various years which suggests that international students graduating from urban planning programs, although qualified in planning skills, often struggle to find employment in the planning sector. From our perspective we consider this to be a challenge that should be addressed by universities and industry alike. We believe there’s also a role for PIA as the professional body representing planners and the planning profession in this process. We consider that the challenge is twofold.

On one hand, the international students have become planners after studying accredited planning education at Australian universities so, surely, they have the necessary skill sets and qualifications to perform planning roles. However, they may not be considered as ready as local employers want them to be, because of a lack of local experience and a clear understanding of local workplace norms and context.

On the other hand, the current high demand for planning professionals across government, non-government, and private sectors is all too well-known; every week PIA’s job bulletin has at least 60-70 roles advertised.

This shortage of planning professionals is not new. PIA’s Findings and Recommendations of the National Inquiry into Planning Education and Employment (2004) noted similar shortages of local government planners, especially in rural and regional areas. A National Skills Shortage Strategy (Local Government Managers Australia, 2007) focusing on addressing shortages in local government has also been in place². Thirteen years later, local governments still need as much help as ever to ensure that they have the expertise they need to serve their constituents. So, there seems to be

clearly a mismatch in producing planners and their ability to contribute to the profession.

First, we see a role for industry and universities ensuring graduates, particularly those from diverse cultural backgrounds, are job ready so that they can contribute to the much-needed skilled workforce required across various sectors of planning. The international students who graduate as planners are trained and competent in the discipline of planning and also have language and cultural traditions that can assist planning within diverse and multicultural communities and bring different ways of thinking about planning problems and their solutions. Their competence would be of immense importance to the ever-expanding nature of planning practice that now includes planning for multiculturalism in an increasingly diverse Australian society.

Second, we should address the loss of potential from the cohort of international students. We need graduates in urban planning to fit in with an Australian urban planning agenda, but this occurs in an increasingly diverse society. So, we should explore what steps could be taken to validate the experiences and learnings of international graduate planners while making them aware of the contours and multifaceted aspects of planning practice in Australia. There is a role for planning education in this, to truly reflect on the value of international experience in the classroom and recognise the benefits of such diversity. This includes constructing settings for genuine sharing of ideas and a suitably internationalised curriculum. There is also a role of industry mentors and employers of these graduates.

Many urban planning programmes in Australia have introduced international learning opportunities to try and utilise cross cultural practise as an educational tool, but arguably our international student cohort, and the cohort of international graduates, provides many of those benefits within their own careers. Workplaces also need to do more by creating safe inclusive spaces where planners from different backgrounds, abilities, class and experiences can work together to achieve better planning outcomes for all. In general, culturally and linguistically diverse staff face pressures to ‘code-switch’ – adjusting speech, appearance, and expression to suit an ‘Australian’ workplace³.

Urban planning has a rich international or universal tradition of practice, and most of us also understand the need to recognise local conditions and local context. Australian trained international students provide opportunities for both of these benefits. While organisations such as VicWISE are focussed on this challenge in a broad sense, we consider that there is an opportunity for the urban planning industry, including PIA, to develop a focussed role for our profession in ensuring we recognise and gain from a rich and diverse graduate cohort. This is especially crucial in responding to the demands placed on planning to respond to nationwide challenges around housing, our renewable energy future and creating liveable cities for all. ●

1 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-06/iwd-racially-marginalised-women-hide-their-identity-code-switch/102032030>

2 <https://www.planning.org.au/documents/item/321>

3 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-06/iwd-racially-marginalised-women-hide-their-identity-code-switch/102032030>