Generating Academic Standards in Planning Practice Education

Final Report to the Australian Learning and Teaching Council

Martyn Jones
John Jackson
Eddo Coiacetto
Trevor Budge
Matthew Coote
Wendy Steele
Sarah Gall
Melissa Kennedy

RMIT University
Griffith University
La Trobe University

March 2009
Generating Academic Standards in Planning Practice Education
---------------------------------------------
Final Report to the Australian Learning and Teaching Council

Project Team
- Martyn Jones, RMIT University
- John Jackson, RMIT University
- Eddo Coiacetto, Griffith University
- Trevor Budge, La Trobe University

Project Officer
- Matthew Coote, RMIT University

Project Assistants
- Wendy Steele, Griffith University
- Sarah Gall, Griffith University
- Melissa Kennedy, La Trobe University

Project Website
- www.plannereducation.org.au

Collaborating Universities
- RMIT University
- Griffith University
- La Trobe University

March 2009
Support for this project has been provided by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd, an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

This work is published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 Australia Licence. Under this Licence you are free to copy, distribute, display and perform the work and to make derivative works.

**Attribution**: You must attribute the work to the original authors and include the following statement: Support for the original work was provided by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd, an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

**Noncommercial**: You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

**Share Alike**: If you alter, transform, or build on this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under a licence identical to this one.

For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the licence terms of this work.

Any of these conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder.

To view a copy of this licence, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/au/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, 543 Howard Street, 5th Floor, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

Requests and inquiries concerning these rights should be addressed to the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, PO Box 2375, Strawberry Hills NSW 2012 or through the website: http://www.altc.edu.au

2009

**ISBN** 978-0-646-51151-1

**Citation Details**: Jones, M., Jackson, J.T., Coiacetto, E., Budge, T., Coote, M., Steele, W., Gall, S. & Kennedy, M. (2009) Generating Academic Standards in Planning Practice Education: Final report to the Australian Learning and Teaching Council
# Generating Academic Standards in Planning Practice Education: Final Report to the Australian Learning and Teaching Council

## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Abbreviations</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1 Overview of Project</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Project Aims</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Significance of Project</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Limitations of Project</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Key Terms and Definitions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2 Project Approach</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Introduction</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Rationale of Approach</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Project Design</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Project Methods</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Summary</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3 Literature Review</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Introduction</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Overview of Planning Profession</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Planning Education in Australia</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Professional Practice Capability, Pedagogy and Situated Learning</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Practice Education, Standards and Assessment</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Implications for Project Understandings</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4 Planning Practice Education in Australia</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Introduction</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Planning Education in Australia</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 PIA Accredited Planning Programs</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Planning Programs with Structured Work Practice</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Summary</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Generating Academic Standards in Planning Practice Education

## Chapter 5 Hearing from the Stakeholders
- 5.1 Introduction .......................... 49
- 5.2 Academic Educator Interviews .................................................. 49
- 5.3 Planning Practitioner Interviews .................................................. 62
- 5.4 Student Focus Groups ................................................................. 75
- 5.5 Summary of Empirical Inquiry ..................................................... 83

## Chapter 6 Enhancing Assessment Practices and Academic Standards
- 6.1 Introduction .......................................................... 87
- 6.2 Academic Standards and Practice Education .................................. 88
- 6.3 Assessment Practices, Student Workplace Learning and Complexity .......... 90
- 6.4 Assessment at Work in Planning Practice Education ................................ 93
- 6.5 Developing Assessment for Academic Standards for Planning Practice Education .................................................. 95
- 6.6 Potential Assessment Frameworks for Structured Work Placement ......... 96
- 6.7 Summary ................................................................. 101

## Chapter 7 Overall Findings and Recommendations
- 7.1 Introduction .......................................................... 103
- 7.2 Overall Findings ................................................................ 103
- 7.3 Enhancing Assessment Practices and Academic Standards in Planning .......... 108
  - Planning Practice Education
- 7.4 Factors Affecting Project Success .................................................. 110
- 7.5 Recommendations ................................................................. 111
- 7.6 Dissemination ........................................................................ 113
- 7.7 Deliverables and Outcomes ........................................................ 114
- 7.8 Areas for Further Study and Development ...................................... 115
- 7.9 Concluding Comments ............................................................. 115

## References ................................................................. 117

## Appendices ............................................................. 125
- Appendix 1 Making Sense of Academic Standards Discussion Paper .......... 125
- Appendix 2 Communication & Dissemination Strategy ................................ 130
- Appendix 3 Summary of Pilot Survey Results .......................................... 146
- Appendix 4 Academic Interviews: Schedule .......................................... 151
- Appendix 5 Academic interviews: Participating Planning Schools ................ 152
- Appendix 6 Practitioner Interviews: Schedule .......................................... 153
- Appendix 7 Student Focus Groups: Schedule .......................................... 156
List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Impacting Agendas on Planning Practice Education ................................. 13
Figure 5.1 Continuum of Practice-based Education Opportunities ............................. 53
Figure 6.1 Default Position on Assessment Practices: Workplace and University ... 94
Figure 6.2 The ‘Task Performance’ Assessment Framework ....................................... 98
Figure 6.3 The ‘Negotiated Learning Plan’ Assessment Framework ......................... 99

List of Tables

Table 2.1 Four Phases of the Project ........................................................................... 11
Table 2.2 Target Groups ......................................................................................... 20
Table 3.1 What Do Planners Need to Know? ............................................................ 32
Table 4.1 Planning Education in Australia, 2007 ....................................................... 42
Table 4.2 Accredited Undergraduate Planning Programs in Australia, 2007 .......... 43
Table 4.3 Accredited Postgraduate Planning Programs in Australia, 2007 .......... 44
Table 4.4 Planning Programs with a Structured Work Practice Component .......... 46
Table 5.1 Number of Practitioner Interviews ........................................................... 63
Table 5.2 Number of Students in Focus Groups ....................................................... 76
## List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACEN</td>
<td>Australian Collaborative Education Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALTC</td>
<td>Australian Learning and Teaching Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANZAPS</td>
<td>Australian and New Zealand Association of Planning Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATN</td>
<td>Australian Technology Network (of Universities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>Development Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Doctor of Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIA</td>
<td>Planning Institute of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMIT University</td>
<td>Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education (institutions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WACE</td>
<td>World Association of Cooperative Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIL</td>
<td>Work Integrated Learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Executive Summary

This project investigates understanding of academic standards within the discipline of urban and regional planning (hereafter known as planning). It focuses on academic standards, assessment practices and student outcomes in planning practice education. The learning and assessment of practice is central to quality professional education. It requires a discipline to address its engagement with contingent professional and industry bodies. Investigating and instituting change processes in practice education in planning is integral to developing academic standards within the discipline as a whole.

The project team comprised four staff from three collaborating universities, RMIT University (lead institution), Griffith University and La Trobe University. A project Reference Group was appointed, with three senior planning academics including one from overseas. The project work was supported by a project officer and three project assistants.

The project approach was participative and collaborative, engaging key stakeholders of planning practice education and seeking to allow opportunity for inclusion of their respective understandings and perspectives. The project design involved a national scoping and review of planning practice education; and an empirical inquiry into the views and experiences of planning educators, planning practitioners and planning students. The design also included development and dissemination of models and materials for the enhancement of assessment practices and academic standards, and strategies for achieving change.

The project affirms the value afforded by planning programs to preparing students for professional practice. Those involved in structured work placements – educators, practitioners and students – strongly endorse this form of practice education in undergraduate programs. Yet, there are many challenges in delivering a high quality student learning experience through structured work placements. These include the issues of assessment and academic standards.

The project shows how practice is rendered a legitimate part of academic endeavour. Achieving practice capability is seen to encompass complex learning outcomes of thinking, doing and being that are fostered in learning situated in “real world” tasks. Generating academic standards and associated assessment practices suited to such learning outcomes commonly requires a re-appraisal of familiar understandings and practices that are embedded in more conventional, class-based educational activities. The quality of the student practice
learning experience is very much affected by the ways in which their planning programs bridge the worlds of work and academia.

The project develops a set of guiding principles for enhancing assessment practices and academic standards for structured work placement. These principles are indicative of a more conjoint and coherent approach between the university and planning industry. The project also recognises the diverse contexts within which planning practice and planning education occur. It develops a set of factors to reflect this diversity that need to be taken into account when considering the viability and sustainability of any given approach. The professional accrediting body is seen to have a role in generating a sense of shared purpose between the university and planning industry in the development of student practice capability.
Acknowledgments

The project team would like to acknowledge the contributions of staff, students and employers who participated in this project. It would also like to acknowledge the contribution of the Reference Group.

Robert Freestone
Professor, University of New South Wales

Steve Hamnett
Professor, University of South Australia

Bruce Stiftel
Professor, Georgia Institute of Technology
Chapter 1 Overview of Project

1.1 Introduction

This project investigates understanding of academic standards within the discipline of urban and regional planning (hereafter known as planning). It focuses on standards, assessment practices and student outcomes in planning practice education. The learning and assessment of practice is central to quality professional education. It requires a discipline to address its engagement with contingent professional and industry bodies. Investigating and instituting change processes in practice education in planning is integral to developing academic standards within the discipline as a whole.

Practice education brings relevance to the student learning experience. It offers an authentic, contextualised learning environment. Universities are increasingly requiring academic programs to integrate work-relevant learning into their curriculum (Symes & McIntyre, 2000; McLennan & Keating, 2008). Student evaluation consistently cites work integrated learning as a desirable and positive component of study, and work-relevant learning supports ‘work-readiness’ (Atchison et al., 2002; Crebert et al., 2004; Krause et al., 2005). The development, implementation and dissemination of academic standards pertaining to work integrated learning are crucial to improving the student learning experience and to student outcomes. There has yet to be a systematic approach to this in Australian planning education. The project addresses this gap and, whilst the focus of this investigation is planning practice education, the project considers issues of relevance to other disciplines.

The project has been conducted by a team formed across three universities: RMIT University, Melbourne (the lead institution), Griffith University in south east Queensland and La Trobe University in Bendigo. Reaching across two States and rural, regional and urban settings helped reflect the diversity of planning practice. The project team comprised four academic staff, a project officer and three project assistants. The work was supported by a Reference Group of two Australian planning professors and one planning professor from the United States.
1.2 Project Aims

The aims of the project are to:

1. Generate knowledge about the current status in Australia of planning practice education and assessment;
2. Identify the factors which impede or facilitate the development of a shared understanding of academic standards in planning practice education;
3. Present key models and theoretical perspectives for understanding and applying academic standards and related assessment in planning practice education; and
4. Institute processes of change for the improvement of academic standards and assessment in planning practice education.

1.3 Significance of Project

All three collaborating universities are committed to providing educational programs that equip graduates to be future leaders in their profession. The provision of high quality work-relevant learning is seen to be pivotal to these objectives. A strategic goal of RMIT University (2007: 7) is to be the ‘first choice provider of work-relevant learning’ in Australia by 2010. The RMIT University WIL policy requires all its higher education programs to include work integrated learning by 2010 (RMIT, 2008). The strategic goal of Griffith University (2006: 6) is that ‘70 per cent of programs to have identifiable work-integrated learning component by 2010’. All planning programs in Australian universities are under pressure to demonstrate relevance and academic standards in a profession which has grown rapidly in both numbers and the agenda with which it deals. The project aligns with these institutional priorities and contributes to their achievement. It leads to discussion about the generation of standards in planning practice education using methods and processes that will be transferable to other disciplines and institutions.

The professional body responsible for accrediting planning programs, the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA), states that it ‘encourages the combination of planning education with professional work experience, acknowledging that their interaction can enhance the quality of each’ (PIA, 2002, paragraph 15). Through its collaboration with PIA, the project will play a role in a national consideration of academic standards for practice education and the identification of resources and infrastructures to support enhanced assessment practices. In the present national shortage of planning graduates, employers have generally been ready to support student work placements. Current and prospective employers have welcomed the attention the project affords both to work practice and to the future employment of planners.
The project offers new directions for the discipline based on in-depth study that will generate knowledge and approaches to the learning and assessment of planning practice.

The project addresses the objectives of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council by focusing on one of its priority areas, assessment practices and academic standards, and pursuing this with regard to practice education. It raises the profile of this form of education within universities and with related professional and employer groups. The project also develops effective models for future work including an inclusive and participative approach to developing, disseminating and embedding good practice in higher education through its focus on collaboration and dialogue for the enhancement of assessment and standards in practice education.

### 1.4 Limitations of Project

There are limitations to this study. The first limitation is that, in the main, the project focused on planning programs accredited by PIA. This decision followed on a review of planning programs where a preliminary search identified at least 90 possible planning programs available in Australian universities. It was felt that a thorough review of all these programs would be too time consuming, so a further search focusing on PIA accredited planning programs narrowed these down to 43. The project reviewed these 43 programs. Within the 43, 11 were undergraduate programs containing a form of work practice, which the project investigated in further depth. The most intensive investigation focussed on 3 of the 11, the planning programs of the collaborating universities and their structured work placement courses. (See Chapter 4 for more details.)

The second limitation is that the project generally focused on undergraduate programs. Postgraduate programs comprise a large proportion of planning education and only a minority of these include a formal work practice component.

### 1.5 Key Terms and Definitions

1) **Academic standards**
   Areas and levels of student achievement in university award programs

2) **Assessment**
   Process of gathering and using information on student performance
Generating Academic Standards in Planning Practice Education

3) **Field Education Coordinator / Placement Coordinator**
The person designated by the University to co-ordinate the student’s placement with the host organisation or placement provider

4) **Field of Practice / Profession / Industry**
The student’s chosen professional practice area, e.g. urban and regional planning

5) **Fieldwork / Placement / Work placement**
The period spent by the student in the workplace-learning environment

6) **Host Organisation / Placement Provider**
The organisation, industry or company that is providing the placement for the student

7) **Practice-based courses / Practice-integrated Courses**
Courses within academic programs where practice capability is central to learning outcomes and their associated learning activities and assessment

8) **Planning Educators**
University academics working in planning programs

9) **Planning Practice Education**
Education focussed on the professional practice of planning

10) **Planning Practitioners**
People working in the field as qualified and/or experienced planners.

11) **Planning Students**
Student enrolled in planning programs

12) **Structured Work Placement**
A period of assessed student workplace learning

13) **Work-integrated Learning**
Educational activities that integrate theoretical learning with its application in the workplace

14) **Workplace Supervisor**
The supervisor provided by the host organisation or placement provider to oversee the student’s work during their placement

15) **Urban and Regional Planners**
Urban and regional planners develop and implement plans and policies for the controlled use of urban and rural land, and advise on economic, environmental and social needs of land areas (ABS, 2008)
Chapter 2  Project Approach

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the project design and methods, structured around the four key phases of the project. A rationale is also given for the particular methods and methodological approach undertaken.

2.2 Rationale of Approach

The project approach is defined by several features:

- It embraces collaboration and participation as necessary conditions for developing shared understandings of academic standards;
- It places importance on learning and assessment of practice as integral to the development of standards in professional disciplines;
- It seeks an inclusive approach to the diverse perspectives and backgrounds of all major stakeholders in practice education;
- It forges strategic change initiatives based on knowledge systematically generated through the involvement of all major stakeholders in practice education; and
- It uses both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods: Quantitative data were sought to describe and profile current issues and trends in planning practice education, and qualitative data were generated to investigate perspectives and meanings attributed to assessment and standards.

The project design is based on the premise that a diverse range of stakeholders and perspectives contribute to planning practice education within the Australian (and international) context and thus it is imperative that any attempt to generate shared understandings of academic standards must be inclusive and focused on the views and perspectives of a multitude of stakeholders. The stakeholders include academic staff in planning education (‘planning educators’); students enrolled in planning programs; host organisations providing work placements; employers of student planning graduates; and PIA as the professional association for planning. The project’s methods were designed to allow for significant involvement of stakeholders in the inquiry process by:

- Drawing findings primarily from the knowledge and experiences of key stakeholders (across both Academic and Professional Practice realms of the planning discipline);
Devising an iterative process for data analysis and identification of key themes and issues (involving the views and feedback of key stakeholders and participants); involving key stakeholders in dissemination of models and materials and in devising strategies for structural or institutional change; and involving key stakeholders in evaluation of the project’s success.

Such an approach values the knowledge put forth by participants as well as ensuring accountable and grounded interpretations of the “raw” research materials. It also enables participants to emphasise those issues and points they feel most strongly about, allowing communication of problems, assets, roots of the situation, or strategies for improving the situation (further to Wang, 1999:190). In this sense, the political or personal biases of the project team were afforded a back seat while the participant views were given hearing.

2.3 Project Design

The project was undertaken in four key phases designed to address the project’s core objectives while maintaining a stakeholder-centric approach. These phases were:

1. Setting the National context: A review of relevant literatures and consultations with stakeholder groups;
2. A review of practice education in planning programs at three selected Australian universities: An empirical investigation of structured work placement courses;
3. Development of models and materials: The design, piloting and revision of research instruments and processes to generate further knowledge about academic standards and assessment practice in planning practice education; and
4. Strategising for change: The wider dissemination of the models and materials generated by this project as well as strategising with key stakeholder groups to initiate change in planning practice education. Further details of these four phases of the project are outlined in Table 2.1 below.
### Table 2.1: Four Phases of the Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Methods/Steps</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase One: Setting the National Context / Scoping</td>
<td>- Generate knowledge about the current status in Australia of planning practice education and assessment; - Explore key models and theoretical perspectives for understanding and applying academic standards and related assessment in planning practice education.</td>
<td>- Sense of context and issues in planning education (particularly practice-based education); - Inventory of planning programs and work-based learning (National); - Inventory of specific assessment schemas, structures and pedagogies (National); - Refined research design, targeted interview and focus group materials; - Inventory of potential participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Two: Review of Practice Education in Planning Programs (Three Australian Universities) / Inquiry</td>
<td>- Explore perspectives (academic, student, practitioner) surrounding academic standards and related assessment in planning practice education; - Identify factors which impede or facilitate the development of a shared understanding of academic standards in planning practice education.</td>
<td>- Interview and focus-group transcripts; - Preliminary identification of key emerging themes; - Emerging models and materials; - Preliminary outputs of ideas, models and other materials to participants, general planning education community, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Three: Development of Models and Materials / Analysis</td>
<td>- Develop models and materials to enhance the understanding and application of academic standards (and related assessment) in planning practice education.</td>
<td>- Identification of key themes and issues in practice-based education; - Development of models and materials to enhance the understanding and application of academic standards (and related assessment) in planning practice education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Four: Strategising for Change / Dissemination</td>
<td>- Institute processes of change for the improvement of academic standards and assessment in planning practice education.</td>
<td>- Communication and Dissemination Strategy; - Papers, articles, reports for target groups; - Evaluation of factors influencing change strategies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* N.B. Evaluation and dissemination are ongoing strategies of this research approach.

### 2.4 Project Methods

This section expands on the choice of particular methods and tools for each phase of the project.

#### 2.4.1 Phase One: Scoping

**Literature Review**

The literature review formed a major step in scoping and contextualising key issues and themes surrounding academic standards in planning practice education. The literature review has directed the project in four main ways:

- Literature review;
- Identification of planning programs and practice education initiatives;
- Discussions with key stakeholders;
- Participant recruitment;
- Scoping of issues (conferences, preliminary discussions, etc.).
Establishing the theoretical and practical contexts for planning education in Australia and internationally;

Developing and refining key research questions, aims and objectives and research design. Literature on academic standards and assessment practice relevant to planning practice education has highlighted many of the questions to be addressed by the project. These have been surveyed in the *Making Sense of Academic Standards Discussion Paper* (Jones, 2007) for the project (refer to Appendix 1);

Determining themes to guide qualitative data analysis (further discussed in the sections that follow); and

Refining the academic and general audiences to whom the project is addressed.

In order to achieve these goals, four main aspects of literature were reviewed during the initial project phase:

- Overview of the planning profession;
- Planning education in Australia;
- Professional practice capability, pedagogy and situated learning; and
- Practice education, academic standards and assessment.

The literature review has shown how the project is located in a broader series of debates regarding student employability and higher education; the evolving shape of planning education generally and planning practice education in particular; the engagement of planning employer and professional bodies in student learning and assessment; and various education philosophies and pedagogies. The impacting agendas, coming from these broader debates, are shown in figure 2.1 below.

**Identification of planning programs and practice education initiatives**

In order to understand the delivery and practice of planning practice education in Australia, the project embarked on a review of planning programs. This involved two related sets of activities: a search of publicly available materials; and interviews with academic staff involved in planning practice education. This information formed an inventory of assessment and standards in existing Australian planning practice education courses, starting with those in place at the collaborating universities and expanding to the other ten universities with PIA accredited programs. Information was derived from written course materials, followed by telephone interviews with course coordinators to determine:

- How the program fits into the overarching context of planning education at its university;
How student achievement in the workplace is assessed and what standards are involved; and

How responsibilities are defined and distributed between the university and the workplace.

This information has been collated and tabulated (refer to Chapter 4).

Survey of key stakeholders

A survey was designed for use with the planning industry. The survey was to collate data on the following questions:

- What is wanted in a planning graduate?
- How effective is planning education in helping develop and assess required capabilities?
- What does work placement achieve? and
- What academic standards and assessment practices apply to work placement? Who should be involved in defining and implementing them?

A pilot of the survey was conducted in Perth at the PIA National Congress 2007 and subsequently with a sample of students from a partner institution. A total of 43 people participated in the pilot. The pilot survey indicated that the areas of investigation were of considerable interest to the stakeholders. On review, however, it became apparent that the survey was not necessarily going to add sufficient new knowledge to existing studies of graduate planning capabilities and that the resources of the project team would be more productively expended on other areas (refer to Appendix 3).
Participation and dissemination
The project team attended two major conferences during Phase One in order to consult with relevant stakeholder groups about the purpose, focus and design of the project. These were the PIA 2007 National Congress in Perth and the Australia and New Zealand Association of Planning Schools (ANZAPS) Conference 2007 in Dunedin, New Zealand.

Summary of Project Team Outputs – Phase One
At the end of Phase One, the project team had produced:
- A literature review;
- Overview of planning programs and planning practice education programs in Australia; and
- A clear line of questioning for Phase Two of the project (including interview schedules and focus group outlines).

2.4.2 Phase Two: Inquiry
The Inquiry Phase of this project sought to explore the perspectives of planning academics, students and practitioners regarding academic standards and related assessment in planning practice education. Two main techniques were used to explore the perspectives of each of these stakeholder groups, namely semi-structured in-depth interviews (planning academics and planning practitioners) and focus groups (planning students). A third technique – that of survey questionnaire – was initially proposed to engage with the planning profession more generally but as indicated above was later taken out of the project design. Energies were instead focussed on engaging with those in the planning profession with specific experience and involvement in structured workplace learning as this was seen to better accord with the project aims and objectives.

The following sections outline both the rationale for selection of these methods and the general procedure followed during the course of the research enquiry.

In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews
Taylor and Bogdan (1998:90-91) suggest in-depth interviewing as an appropriate technique when:
- Research interests are well-defined, and ‘researchers have a relatively clear sense of … the kind of questions they want to pursue’ (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998:91);
- Settings or people are not otherwise accessible (e.g. there is a need to discuss events that occurred in the past so that direct observation would be inappropriate);
The research is interested in understanding a broad range of settings and people, valuing breadth alongside depth; and
- There is a need to generalise from the research results.

Given that a clear line of questioning had emerged from the initial research enquiry and the methods of Phase One, and that the project was interested in perspectives of key stakeholders that may have been formed over a period of time ranging from weeks to years, in-depth interviews were seen as the most appropriate research method for exploring the perspectives of both planning academics and planning practitioners. Thus a clear semi-structured interview schedule was devised which both ensured a consistent and focused line of questioning, as well as the flexibility for interviewees to pursue their own line of reasoning (building on the idea from Fontana & Frey (2000) of interview as negotiated text).

The project’s design also attempted to recognize and minimize identified limitations of in-depth interview techniques, particularly differences between what people say and what people do (as highlighted by LaPiere in Taylor & Bogdan, 1998:91). This was mainly achieved by triangulating research findings with the views of other participants and the project reference group. This approach clearly positioned the interview process as an exercise in communication and the building of shared meaning (rather than a pure or objective “observer/observed” relationship) and used the interview and follow-up communications with participants as testing spaces for ideas and theories – that is, participants were themselves involved in processes of analysis and theme-building, and in jointly exploring ideas raised by other participants. The project was also mindful of potential power disparities between interviewer and interviewee, and in particular for these reasons used focus groups rather than one-on-one interviews to engage with planning students (further to the views of Janesick, 1998:35).

**Process for Academic Interviews**

Further to the initial exploration of planning programs undertaken in Phase One of this project, an interview schedule was designed for use with academic staff involved in planning practice education. These interviews were designed to complement the material gathered on planning programs and together these elements constitute the project’s review of planning practice education.

The interviews were intended to elicit information and views on the nature of practice education in planning programs accredited by PIA, collating data on the following questions:
- What are the varieties/dimensions of practice-based education?
- What is the nature of assessment for practice-based education?
What is the history of practice-based education within the overall degree/program? and
What are the strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats to practice-based education?

These questions were piloted with three members of the project team who were themselves planning educators. The pilot showed the interview schedule to be effective in terms of structuring the interviews and generating relevant information, though feedback and discussion amongst the project team regarding the findings from the pilot pointed to some important revisions, namely:

- Alignment of assessment and holistic assessment practice;
- Approaches to achieve ‘fair’ assessment in workplace learning; and
- Processes for managing students whose level of achievement is not satisfactory.

The final interview schedule for these interviews is outlined in Appendix 4. A table of participating planning schools is also included in Appendix 5.

**Process for Practitioner Interviews**

The project recruited 40 planning practitioners from three Australian regions as participants. These practitioners, who had all participated as supervisors to planning students involved in practice education, were interviewed using the semi-structured schedule outlined in Appendix 6. The interviews sought to elicit practitioner perspectives and experiences of assessment and academic standards in practice education courses. In particular the interviews sought to focus upon examples of specific practices and approaches further to the critical incident technique of Fook (1996) where concrete examples are used to probe the interviewee’s actual ways of thinking and acting in any given situation.

The interviews sought to identify:

- How practitioners perceive their roles in learning and assessment of student planning practice, and how this understanding corresponds or not with the expectations of university practice educators;
- What informs practitioners’ understandings of academic standards for practice education;
- What practitioners understand to be required to achieve academic standards and authentic assessment practices in practice education; and
- Whether practitioners have noticed any differences in the practice capabilities of early career planners in terms of the practice education they have undertaken.
Interviews were conducted primarily face-to-face, with a small number conducted via telephone. Interviews were transcribed for later analysis.

Practitioners were recruited for interviews based on their involvement in practice education, and were drawn from the databases of the three partner universities. A purposive sampling process ensured interviewees were drawn from all sectors of the planning profession including private firms, local government, State government, self-employed, salaried, urban and rural-regional.

**Process for student focus-groups**

The project also identified the importance of student views in this review of academic standards and assessment in planning practice education. Focus groups were employed as the key strategy for engaging with student perspectives, harnessing the power of group interaction to produce data that would not be as easily accessible without the group interaction (Janesick, 1998; Cameron, 2000:84). Cameron (2000) describes focus group discussions as having a ‘synergistic’ effect on participants, which often results in ‘far more information being generated than in other research methods’ (2008:84). The use of a group setting for conversation was seen to be less intimidating for students, who might feel “singled out” or closely-scrutinized during one-on-one interactions with interviewees in more conventional interview settings. Focus groups were also seen as providing an opportunity to student participants to ‘explore different points of view, and formulate and reconsider their own ideas and understandings’ (Cameron, 2000:86). Focus groups also enabled the research team to combine participant observation with interview techniques.

Four focus groups were convened with a total of 34 students from two institutions. Recruitment for these groups was generally problematic, affected very much by the timing of the sessions and availability of students. Nonetheless the groups provided valuable insights into:

- What students believe have worked well, and what could have been improved, in their planning education and assessment;
- How students view practice education courses and their experiences in comparison to university-based courses they have taken; and
- How students believe their practice capabilities are assessed, or not, within their planning education and the kinds of standards they understand to be involved.

Records were made ‘in situ’ and finalised through participant editing following the workshop facilitation approaches advocated by Sarkissian (2000). Material was analysed by the project team. Adequate steps were taken to ensure that student participation was free from inducement or coercion and that project inquiries remained separate to students’ ongoing
learning and assessment. This was generally achieved by using members of the project team who were not teaching or tutoring the students as the interview mediators and using pseudonyms when identifying students.

Project Team Outputs

At the end of the second phase of the project, the team had gathered the following information:

- Interview transcripts of 12 planning academics from across 11 universities;
- Interview transcripts of 40 planning practitioners from across three geographical regions and two states;
- Transcripts of four focus groups with a total of 34 students from across two universities;
- Project team reflections on the effectiveness or otherwise of research methods;
- A sense of emerging themes from the raw data; and
- Feedback from the project reference group and other participants regarding these emerging key themes.

2.4.3 Phase Three: Analysis

Thematic analysis (or “coding”) of research information is a widely-practiced method of relating qualitative data to ideas about that data: recognising what is (both theoretically and empirically) important; giving it meaning; and conceptualising research observations (see for example Boyatzis, 1998:8; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Janesick, 1998). Boyatzis (1998:8) makes a key distinction between themes and patterns directly observable in the research material (the ‘manifest level’), or more causal, underlying or theoretical themes used to “read” empirical material (Boyatzis, 1998:vii). In other words, themes can be derived ‘inductively’ from raw information, or ‘deductively’ from prior research and theorising.

It is important to recognise that the themes used to analyse and organise “raw” research data can significantly affect a project’s findings, and thus this project used a three-pronged strategy for analysing and thematically organising interview and focus group material. This built on the work of Boyatzis (1998) to bring an attention to both deductive and inductive material and themes, and also included a participative phase (building on the work of Wang, 1999) to involve key stakeholders in the analytical process, in keeping with the stakeholder-centric approach outlined at the beginning of this section.

This three-pronged approach positioned the identification of themes as an important and considered process within the overall research design, achieved:
1. **Deductively**: Key themes were derived from the literature as well as preliminary conversations with stakeholders and used as a basis for interview and focus-group schedules;

2. **Inductively**: Enough flexibility was included in interview and focus-group schedules (semi-structured) to allow participants to raise points that were not to the fore in the original line of questioning. The “raw” interview transcripts and summaries made by interviewers were brought to project team meetings and re-interrogated for “inductive” themes; and

3. **Participatively**: Emerging themes were brainstormed (and sometimes, for later interviews, discussed) with participants, both during and after the interview/focus-group events. During initial communications, participants were asked to identify events or issues they found most significant, the context of events, and emergent themes or theories of issues. In later stages, themes used for analysis were disseminated to research participants for further comment.

The three levels of analysis (inductive, deductive and participative) were designed to work in ways that enhanced the strength of the project findings.

**2.4.4 Phase Four: Dissemination**

The fourth phase of this project is clearly articulated in the latest version of the project’s *Communication and Dissemination Strategy* (refer to Appendix 2). This has been formed and re-fined during the course of the initial project phases, in particular following information gained from the Carrick Institute Assessment Forum 2007 (Hounsell, 2007).

The *Communication and Dissemination Strategy* is based on a clear set of communication objectives for the project, which are:

- To provide a communication mechanism and discussion forums for stakeholders connected with the project;
- To provide opportunities to involve stakeholders in the development of the project’s outcomes;
- To provide communication mechanisms for the dissemination of the project’s outcomes;
- To communicate with associated projects and researchers in associated fields; and
- To provide opportunities for change initiatives with stakeholders.

The following section details these aspects of the dissemination strategy, outlining target stakeholders, methods and evaluation techniques.
Target Groups

This includes the main target groups (audiences/users/clients) for the project. For this project, this includes those with an interest in planning education (the primary target group), and education in general (the secondary target group), including students, professionals, employers, educators, and professional bodies.

Two distinct target groups were identified and categorised following Hounsell (2007). These are detailed in Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2 – Target Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Target Group</th>
<th>Secondary Target Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key beneficiaries</td>
<td>Others who could also benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Members of the Project Team</td>
<td>• Educators and Academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Project Reference Group</td>
<td>• Non-planning Supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Funding Body (ALTC)</td>
<td>• Non-planning Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Planning Educators and Academics</td>
<td>• Non-planning Employers or Industry Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Planning Practitioners</td>
<td>Note: these stakeholders are engaged mainly through indirect consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Planning Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional Body (PIA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Planning Employers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A series of communication activities were designed and used to provide information to these target groups about the project, gain feedback on our project findings and tentative models and materials, and disseminate the project findings and models and materials. These are:

- Establishment and maintenance of project website (both target groups);
- Regular reference group meetings (Primary Target Group);
- Briefing sessions to stakeholders and their networks (including in particular, local councils, private firms, stage government, academic institutions, and PIA) (Primary Target Group);
- Presentations to local, regional and national forums of relevant professional and industry groups (Secondary Target Group);
- Preparation of a major report containing project findings (Primary Target Group with possible flow on to Secondary Target Group); and
- Publications in peer reviewed journals as well as other journals and professional magazines (both target groups).
Chapter 2 Project Approach

2.5 Summary

This chapter has described the rationale and significance of the project. It shows how the project has an important contribution to make to the advancement of practice education within and beyond the discipline of planning. The four phases of the project design describe the logic with which the project was undertaken, from initial scoping, review and inquiry into analysis and development and then dissemination. The methods pursued in each of these phases describe how the collaborative and participative approach of the project was translated into the project activities. The methods are also illustrative of the depth of study that the project has been able to achieve. The next three chapters present the findings of the study in the areas of literature, planning practice education review, and empirical inquiry.
Chapter 3 Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the project. The review is presented in four sections. The first section is an overview of the planning profession. The second section reviews existing literature on planning education in Australia. The third section focuses on the development of professional practice capability and the pedagogies employed to advance this, including situated learning. The fourth section addresses assessment practices and the achievement of academic standards. The chapter concludes by discussing the implications for understandings in this project.

3.2 Overview of Planning Profession

The planning profession is one traditionally associated with the designation and control of land uses, a project that has its roots in the various social and policy movements that emerged in Britain during the 19th Century (Dredge et al., 2005; PIA, 2005a; Thompson, 2007; Campbell & Fairnstein, 1996). Early planning ideas were ‘chiefly influenced by modernist thought in relation to industrial urbanization, as technologies that enabled the regulation of building form and location became available’ (Healey, 1997:17-18, in Thompson, 2007:13).

Influenced by the disciplines of engineering, architecture, geography, sociology and politics (Dredge et al., 2005), since its inception planning has been considered a multi-disciplinary field and as such, many see it a ‘generalist’ profession (Dredge et al., 2005). Due to its focus on the spatial dimensions of people’s everyday lives, the profession has often defied traditional disciplinary boundaries and some (e.g. Marshall, 2007) question its status as a ‘profession’ altogether.

While the intricacies of the debates surrounding the definition of a planning profession are beyond the scope of this project, it is important to note significant developments in the planning profession’s direction and scope. In particular, since the 1960s a critique has emerged of planning’s ‘Utopian’ origins and focus, with authors such as Jacobs (1961) and Fried (1963, in Thompson, 2007) spearheading critiques of physical determinism and the positioning of planners and planners as infallible ‘experts’ in community design. The environmental movement that grew from debates in the late 1960s and 1970s also added an enhanced
awareness and consideration of environmental issues and the more-than-human within the day-to-day scope of planning practice (Dredge et al., 2005).

The changing organizational, governmental and socio-political contexts of recent time have also seen a growing reflexivity within the profession. Debates surrounding democracy, feminism, ethics and post-colonialism have added dimension and scope to the direction of the profession, particularly as the work of planners has broken out of traditional ‘British Regional and Town Planning’ to other geographical, cultural, political and even workplace contexts.

One thing that remains certain is that planning is a multi- and inter-disciplinary activity, where ‘it is the task of the planner to bring together...a broad range of technical and scientific information’ (Dredge et al., 2005:1). A growing awareness that this task also requires presenting this information to the community in a format that is easy to understand (Dredge et al., 2005) means that social planning and community consultation work are a burgeoning field within the planning profession. Nevertheless, the PIA inquiry into planning and education in Australia shows that statutory planning remains the main planning activity and development assessment the leading specialist planning area undertaken by planners (PIA, 2004). These are associated with the ‘traditional’ realm of planning and include activities such as zoning, development assessment and compliance, and planning scheme development. In a study of planners in New South Wales conducted by Zehner (2002), traditional planning skills such as planning law, development control/statutory planning, administration (general) and negotiation/conflict resolution were identified by 80 per cent of planners.

Thus while the scope and purpose of the planning profession continues to diversify, many graduates find themselves working in fields more commonly associated with ‘bread and butter’ planning. These issues will be further expanded and addressed during the course of this report.

### 3.3 Planning Education in Australia

In January 2008, PIA released the Planning Education Discussion Paper, prepared by Gurran, Norman and Glesson. This Discussion Paper was commissioned by PIA to inform the review of PIA’s Education Policy. The Discussion Paper highlights a number of planning education issues including:

- The introduction of a formal, ongoing program of professional certification for Australian planners (the ‘Certified Practising Planner’ program); the development of specialist Chapters within PIA, whose members hold diverse educational qualifications or experiences; and the revision of PIA’s requirements for continuing education (‘professional development’);
- National and international changes to tertiary education delivery models, including the need to impart generic skills and a rounded theoretical and practical education, distinctions between undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, and the introduction of a TAFE level IV certificate program in planning;
- The pressure on traditional planning programs to expand their curricula to include new subject areas as the discipline and practice of planning broadens, and to meet the needs and expectations of increasingly diverse employers;
- Resourcing of university planning programs in the context of broader shifts in the higher education and research sectors; and
- The accreditation of planning courses, the increasing number of universities seeking accreditation for new courses, and the need to ensure that the content of accredited courses is relevant to the profession, the needs of employers, and the practice of planning (Gurran, Norman & Glesson, 2008: 4).

The Discussion Paper sets out questions and makes recommendations for PIA policy and activity. As of late 2008, PIA was inviting input on the following issues:
- What are the skills and capabilities required of planners? What knowledge and experience are relevant to effective professional planning practice?
- How best can planning education (each provider and as a whole) develop the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and experience of those who require it?
- What is the role of accreditation in planning education? and
- What responsibilities do various stakeholders have in planning education, and what role should PIA play?

The Discussion Paper builds on previous work by the professional body. In 2004, PIA undertook a major national inquiry into planning employment and education resulting in the *Findings and Recommendations of the National Inquiry into Planning Education and Employment* (PIA, 2004). The PIA Inquiry found, among other things:
- In 2001, there were 5,400 urban and regional planners in Australia;
- Local government employed 47 per cent of all planners, the private sector 30 per cent, state/territory governments 21.9 per cent, and the Commonwealth 1.8 per cent;
- There is a need for better links between the planning profession and planning educators;
- A need to review the PIA education policy and make recommendations for changes to training and education of planners;
A need to review the PIA Code of Recognition of Planning Courses and Education Policy in light of the PIA Inquiry recommendations (including the Royal Town Planning Institute United Kingdom report on Education); and

A need to review how development assessment, urban design skills and generic skills such as negotiation and project management are being taught at university (PIA, 2004).

The PIA Inquiry found that education and training is increasingly important for planners as legislation is changing and becoming more complex, the role of the planner is changing requiring new skills and planners are moving into related professions.

One aspect of the PIA Inquiry included a national survey of planning employers on the issues of planner skills, recruitment and supply. Employers felt that planners need increased skills from both university courses and on the job training, particularly skills required for development assessment such as negotiation, project management and economics of development. These views were also supported by a submission to the Inquiry by the Young Planners Network. Based on their survey of young planners, the Young Planners Network felt that, in a planning degree greater emphasis should to be placed on the skills of negotiation, conflict resolution, project management, practical 'how to' knowledge and planning law. The Young Planners Network and others also recognized the value of compulsory work experience as part of a planning degree (PIA, 2004).

The main recommendations for education and training coming from the PIA Inquiry was increased co-ordination between training providers and the profession and closer monitoring by the professional body (PIA, 2004).

PIA accredits undergraduate and postgraduate planning programs at Australian universities to provide professional recognition and for membership of the professional body. The PIA Educational Policy for Recognition of Australian Planning Qualifications, which sets the requirements and process for accreditation of tertiary qualifications in planning, was last reviewed in 2002. Recognition establishes national standards for the educational attainments of entrants into the planning profession.

In setting the criteria for the educational content of recognised qualifications, PIA does not specify a precise planning curriculum but instead outlines ‘the knowledge and skills base, and understanding of professional ethics, which are the national standard for educational attainment of those who enter the profession’ (PIA, 2002: paragraph 13).
The educational policy includes the vocational objective ‘to encourage students to develop the skills and professional ethics required by professional planners and to have a well-rounded understanding of the role of planners in society’ (PIA, 2002: paragraph 10). The educational policy also states the academic objective ‘to encourage students to think creatively, analytically and critically, and to be able to communicate effectively. Students should understand the benefits of sound land use planning in a complex decision-making environment. They should know about the effects people have on the natural environment and the use and management of natural resources and about conservation and change in the cultural and built environment. They should acquire a holistic view of the interrelationships between human society, natural resources and the built environment’ (PIA, 2002: paragraph 11).

Another relevant part of the educational policy states that PIA ‘encourages the combination of planning education with professional work experience, acknowledging that their interaction can enhance the quality of each. Where professional work experience is a formal requirement of a qualification, PIA in determining whether to recognise the qualification, will evaluate the quality and supervision of the work experience. It will seek to ensure that it assists in the acquisition of core knowledge and skills’ (PIA, 2002: paragraph 15).

Along with the work undertaken by the professional body, there has been scholarly examination of planning education in Australia. Some time ago, Rodriquez-Bachiller (1988) undertook a review of educational theory relating to professions in general to support his comprehensive survey of planning education around the developed world. Most coverage is given to planning education in Europe and North America but there is a minor focus on planning education in Australian and New Zealand.

Hamnett (1999) briefly examined the first planning courses in Australia to mark the 50th anniversary of formal planning programs in Australia at the South Australian School of Mines and Industries, The University of Sydney and The University of Melbourne in 1949. Moving forward 50 years, he notes that planning education is more complicated. The idea of collective values in planning is being criticised by postmodernists, while at same time, public planning is being supplanted by the political and ideological preference for smaller government. Hamnett also notes the changes in planning education where some planning schools have recently closed while others have expanded to include environmental issues, ethics, and a refocus on urban design. Most planning programs are presented as vocational or professional but the diversity of the curriculum raises questions about the ‘core’ skills required by planners.
The future of planning education in Australia was also considered in a series of other articles in the journal *Australian Planner* in 1999. Planning education has been criticised by some academics for contributing to a skills-based professional education rather than a critical education based within the social sciences. Huxley (1999), for example, argues that a generalist undergraduate degree in geography and environmental studies, rather than the vocational planning agenda, is a better option for the education of future planners. According to Huxley, the way that geography approaches issues of space and place, through both content and critical theoretical debates, encourages students to explore ideas and take diverse and multiple actions rather than any particular form of practice.

The divide between planning theory and actual planning practice is highlighted in the Sorensen and Auster (1999a; 1999b) critique and subsequent debate with Sandercock (1999). For Sorensen and Auster (1999a; 1999b), there is considerable intellectual and practical distance between the activities of planning professionals and some academics.

The examination of the role of urban design within planning sits within the wider debate about planning education. Writing from a design perspective, Kerkin (2000) uses the example of the design studio to show the possibility of integrating both policy analysis and a focus on spatial political economy into planning education. For Kerkin, the base materials and design exercises used in the studio, along with examples of student work, show the ability of a design studio to critically reflect upon the social questions and policy occurring at a site and on the impact of urban design on these.

Heywood (2006) suggests that planning education should be seen broadly to include providers beyond university institutions and accredited degree programs. Heywood identifies four categories of educational provider. These are educational institutions (including schools, technical and vocational colleges and universities), community organizations, professional institutions and commercial organizations. The role of universities in delivering traditional forms of planning education is likely to remain predominant but may need to expand and diversify to include more students and provide more flexible forms.

Hedgcock (2003) looks at the exercise of influence within the local planning system in Western Australia and the implications for education. He surveys planners to examine their appreciation of power relations. Planners were asked about how they exerted their influence and the qualities that supported the extent of that influence. The most significant and for surprising finding was that local planners saw themselves as powerful and influential players in the local planning process. In reflecting on the basis of the power of their position, planners highlighted the significance of a generalised and broad knowledge base and their ability to effectively
communicate this material within the context of local planning debates. Planners felt this influenced by their own personal attributes such as self-confidence and assertiveness. According to Hedgcock (2003:39), these findings support the view of planning as ‘a communicative, collaborative and argumentative activity that is rapidly moving away from having any particular or sectoral knowledge and skill base’.

In understanding the application of influence, Hedgcock (2003) sought to identify the range of personal abilities and resources that planners use as well the qualities that planners felt underpinned their influence. In response to his survey, four abilities stand out. These are effective communication, understanding of planning and development issues, knowledge of planning processes, and knowledge of planning principles. In response to questions about the qualities that planners felt underpinned their influence in the planning system, personal qualities, professional knowledge and skill base, and the ability to analyse contested arguments stand out.

These findings, therefore, have implications for the way educators train planners and Hedgcock (2003: 39) identifies six of these. These are:

1. The need for generalised and broad course content to encompass the vocabulary and arguments required to debate and discuss planning and development issues occurring at a local government level;

2. The fact that planning principles and processes (as the exclusive domain of the planner) appear to be losing their influence in local planning debates. Planning courses in Western Australia have traditionally been built around this content. The survey findings reinforce the significant movement away from this position in recent years;

3. The development of generic skills (communication, literacy, problem solving etc.) is widely seen as the basis for exercising influence in the local planning system. While these have long been recognised and articulated by employers, the opportunity to better integrate them into course content should be addressed;

4. The generic skills and range of generalised knowledge required by planners demand innovative approaches to course delivery and content. The ability to integrate diverse knowledge, apply this knowledge to particular cases and to skillfully present such material in a contested forum should be an educational outcome of planning courses. How to teach (or inculcate) such knowledge and skills is a challenge that needs to be handled with tact;
5. Given the fragmentation of power and the shifting terrain of power relations in local government student planners need to be knowledgeable of this central context of their operating environment. While planning theory courses have the opportunity to ‘background’ such issues there is a need to relate such theory to operational practices and strategies for engagement in the power debate; and, finally,

6. The education process, in its broadest sense, does provide opportunities to build personal qualities such as self-confidence, assertiveness and sensitivity. Such qualities are clearly regarded as being central to the effective performance of local planners and the formative experience of tertiary education environment is potentially an excellent medium to reinforce and consolidate these ‘life skills’.

Minnery (2000) suggests that teaching students how to do as practitioners do is only one of many models of teaching planning practice. For Minnery, the key question is the most appropriate ways to incorporate planning practice into planning education, especially given the debate and concern about the relationship between planning education and planning practice. He argues the answer lies in linking planning practice and education by expanding the concept of practice to serve a wide variety of purposes. These should improve both student learning and academic staff development while also serving the main purpose of practice which is to produce planners who can fulfil the expectations of employers, the community and the profession.

Kwitko and Thompson (2002) survey the ways that planning academics in Australia and New Zealand teach students about difference and multiculturalism. Despite a low response rate to their survey, they find that academics are using innovative techniques to improve the understanding of diversity in both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Low cost teaching methods such are seen by academics as the least effective in communicating diversity to students.

Some recent Australian studies (e.g. Phibbs, et al., 2002\(^1\); Zehner, 2002; Gurran et al., 2008\(^2\)) have turned to practising planners to gain a sense of their perspectives on planning education vis-à-vis the oft-cited views of planning educators and researchers. These studies have invariably focussed on the types of skills and competencies expected of practising planners by employers (and the profession more generally). As previously noted, Zehner’s study (2002) into what planners in New South Wales actually do found that, although some new skills are

---

1 Phibbs et al. (2002) surveyed planning graduates and employers in New South Wales as part of a curriculum review undertaken by The University of Sydney.

2 The PIA discussion paper prepared by Gurran, Norman and Gleeson has, as one of its primary aims, a profiling of ‘the Australian planning education ‘landscape’;’ (2008:2) and identifies universities as the key source of professional knowledge and research about planning.
required, some traditional planning skills have remained the same and some skills have become more prominent in particular, participation techniques/community liaison and communication techniques.

Phibbs et al. (2002) have pointed out that there can be conflicting views of planning education between practitioners and educators. In some studies, the university's role in educating planners for practice is held to be fundamentally different to, and sometimes antagonistic to, the role of workplace experience. Phibbs et al. draw attention to the challenges of balancing the conflicting demands and expectations of professional associations; employers; educator/researchers; and students and ex-students within planning practice education more generally.

Both Phibbs et al. (2002) and Zehner (2002) were able to draw out key themes, skills and competencies relevant to the design and implementation of university planning courses into the future (these observations are summarised in Table 3.1 below). While a similar survey was initially proposed for this project, it was found that adequate coverage of the expectations of various stakeholder groups is present within recent research work in the Australian context (see Zehner, 2002; Phibbs et al., 2002), and this work follows from many similar studies in the United States and United Kingdom (e.g. Poxon, 2001; Ozawa & Seltzer, 1999).

Of interest is the correlation between the top ten skills planners found themselves to be using in practice and the ‘gaps’ recent graduates found in their own knowledge after graduation from a planning program. The PIA discussion paper on planning education by Gurran et al. (2008:7) further explores this issue by asserting that practitioners need to be much more strongly engaged in the provision of planning education to alleviate disparities between the planning schools and issues in practice.

The themes, skills and competencies identified by Phibbs et al. (2002) and outlined above are of interest to this project not least because of its focus on learning and assessment standards, but because the skills and competencies also appear to clearly delineate educative roles for both workplace and university. Gurran et al. (2008:4), in particular, emphasise and recommend a ‘central role for university planning programs in delivering organised and accredited planning education, and in furthering knowledge about the theory and practice of planning within its social and political contexts’.
Table 3.1  What Do Planners Need To Know? Key Competencies and Skills as Identified by Phibbs et al. (2002) and Zehner (2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top ten skills planners use in practice (Zehner, 2002)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Planning law;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Development controls and statutory planning;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Participation techniques/community liaison;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Administration (general);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Strategic Planning;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Negotiation/conflict resolution;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Communication techniques;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Environmental management;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Briefing/debriefing consultants; and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key gaps in education as identified by ex-students (Phibbs et al., 2002)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. DA skills and knowledge of DA processes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Community consultation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Conflict resolution/political skills;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Project management; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Communication skills (written and oral).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This highlights the ongoing importance and timeliness of debates surrounding the role of universities in implementing practice-relevant, politically-reflexive and yet theoretically and intellectually-challenging, education programs. Many of the recommendations of the 2008 PIA enquiry into planning education resonate with these challenges.

3.4 Professional Practice Capability, Pedagogy and Situated Learning

The skills seen to be required by planners have implications for planning education. Stubbs and Keeping (2002) have undertaken research into course content and employability skills in vocational planning degrees at Oxford Brookes University. This builds on research undertaken in the 1980s and 1990s that concluded that in the decision to employ graduates many employers gave preference to personal attributes and low priority to matters of subject knowledge. Undergraduates, on the other hand, have shown dissatisfaction with the lack of skills training in their degrees, some being vocationally based.

Guzzetta and Bollens (2003), from the University of California, have also investigated the skills and competencies of planners with ‘planning-related’ and ‘non-planning’ professionals. They investigate these three groups to see whether planners’ perceptions of skills are different from
other professions. They also review whether the context within which planners operate makes a difference and whether the perceived importance of skills evolves with career experience. Guzzetta and Bollens find that communication skills are valued more than technical and quantitative skills across all three groups. Planners, however, put greater value on certain types of communication (such as report writing and writing for the public) when compared to ‘planning-related’ and ‘non-planning’ professionals. They also find that the professional context matters where, for example, planners in the public-sector value written communication more than planners in the private-sector. Also, the assessment of skills changes with the length of planning experience, suggesting an ‘evolutionary model’.

Negotiation has also been identified as a necessary part of professional planning. Claydon and Chick (2005) look at the teaching of negotiation skills. They have taught negotiation skills to undergraduate, post-graduate and practising planners in the United Kingdom and overseas. They believe that planners can benefit from more effective performance in negotiating, particularly when operating in a discretionary planning system such as found in Britain. Despite this, the teaching of negotiation skills is not common in the ‘initial education of planners’.

Practice capability is conceived as more than the acquisition of skills. Much debate centres on the place of knowledge in practice. Bridging the practice-theory divide is of central concern in planning education, and in the respective contribution of universities and the profession and industry to that education (Baum, 1996; Innes, 1995; Minnery, 2000; Myers & Banerjee, 2005; Sandercock, 1997; Sorensen & Auster, 1997). For some time now, there has been widespread questioning of the rationalist approach to planning practice and education. The spotlight has shone on the complexity of each and every ‘real world’ planning situation, arguably rendering redundant theoretical templates developed outside those situations (Bolan, 1980). In this scenario, teaching students generalised procedural or normative models that they are then expected to apply in the workplace becomes problematic, and contrary to the intrinsic features of everyday planning practice.

A consequence has been the emergence of a ‘practice-based’ theory movement (Watson, 2002). Greater credence is given here to inductive approaches, in which the activity of planning is to the fore. Empirical accounts of planning practice and experiential processing of practice take on a strong pedagogical role. Furthermore, the planning environment is seen by many to be a highly political one. If planning practice is infused with politics, a grounded appreciation of practice requires the acquisition of ‘political savvy’ (wisdom) that the classroom alone cannot provide (Brooks, 2002).
Planning education has responded in various ways to the ideas of practice capability, pedagogy and situated learning (Frank, 2006). Reflective and narrative approaches have been introduced as a means of focusing on the intricacies of practice (Schon, 1987; Watson, 2002). Project work has been a traditional and well regarded mode of teaching that encourages problem solving, decision making, communication skills, and course integration (Brown & Moore, 1989). In more recent times, information technologies are increasingly being used for communication and course inclusion. Lawhorn (2003) examines the implications of using distance learning in planning education. The use of distance learning technology has the potential to connect with a wider planning education audience. At the same time, the distance learner and future clients may be denied the opportunity of the traditional classroom experience particularly face-to-face communication and collaboration.

In a review of the purposes and forms of practice in planning education, Minnery (2000) takes a broad approach when examining ‘planning practice’. He identifies 25 main forms of practice in planning education including, among others, student internships, paid employment, work experience, field trips, role playing, group projects, studio-based teaching, and projects for ‘real’ clients.

The situated learning that comes from work placements has retained a special place in planning education. Work placements are seen to provide an invaluable and distinctive form of learning, offering not only training for competence but a grounded approach to the development of meaningful theory and professional identity (Coiacetto, 2004).

Freestone et al. (2006) use the broad term ‘work-based learning’ to describe practice education but, given its variability in type and character, they identify a typology of some 11 models and characteristics of work-based learning in tertiary education. Their focus is on a model they call ‘sandwich course’, which is characterised by ‘(p)eriods of work experience between years of course’ (Freestone et al., 2006:239).

Freestone et al. (2006) track the student expectations of work experience. They examine these through a survey of a cohort of students from The University of New South Wales involved in a yearlong paid placement as part of an undergraduate planning degree. Their results show that students generally supported the value of work experience in planning education. These undergraduate students lack the maturity of postgraduate students but demonstrate the ability to reflect on their experiences. However, despite preparation, monitoring, and review, work-based learning ‘remains a rite of passage’ (Freestone, 2006 et al.:248) into practice and is a personal journey that can only be negotiated individually.
PIA, as the professional body responsible for accrediting planning programs, states that it ‘encourages the combination of planning education with professional work experience, acknowledging that their interaction can enhance the quality of each’ (PIA, 2002, paragraph 15). According to one commentator, however, such courses ‘pose some of the greatest teaching and learning challenges in the entire curriculum’ (Kotval, 2003:297).

Whilst work placement is consistent with many contemporary assumptions about appropriate education for planners, it is not self-evidently a good thing. The quality of the learning environment and the benefits of the experience are notoriously difficult to assure. Conditions for achieving quality in work integrated learning may be well rehearsed but are not easily achieved (Reeders et al., 1999) and can be institutionally compromised (Orrell et al., 1999).

Practice education in the form of work placement is no less subject to key debates in higher education than other areas of the curriculum. Following Ramsden (1992) and the critique of the content-driven curriculum, some practice educators will be more inclined to ask themselves what changes in understanding they expect their students to undergo, and what the students will be able to do as a result of these changes that they couldn't do before. Attention to this kind of deep learning and higher order thinking is sometimes contrasted with prescribing a list of skills and knowledge to be mastered (Bowden & Marton, 1998). Meanwhile, employers and the professional bodies are subject to their own set of imperatives for student learning (Alexander, 2005; Phibbs et al., 2002); and students bring their own motivations, histories, learning styles and interests to the work placement (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Manns (2003) examines the idea of developing the reflective practitioner through workplace experience in a professional postgraduate planning course for full-time students at the University of Central England in Birmingham, now known as Birmingham City University. The range of work-based experience for students was extended following a review of the postgraduate town planning course. A new module aimed at stimulating the ‘reflective practitioner’ was introduced to complement existing modules which emphasised the development of ‘process knowledge’ or ‘technical expertise’. Manns (2003:77) uses educational theory, along with employer’s attitudes and the student experience, to investigate the reflective practitioner module and finds that it is ‘a valuable and enriching addition to the professional development of full-time students’.

The dynamic nature of the field within which the project resides is illustrated further by two papers produced at national level in Australia in recent times. A report on ‘Graduate Employability Skills’ has been prepared by the Business, Industry and Higher Education
Collaboration Council (2007) for consideration by the Ministry for Education, Science and Training. Universities Australia has launched a position paper on a National Internships Scheme that is designed to ‘enable more Australian university students to undertake structured work-based learning in industry’ (Universities Australia, 2008:1). These papers pick up at a wider level a number of the issues highlighted by the literature, including both pedagogical aspects of embedding employability capability within curriculum and the political economy of student workplace learning.

### 3.5 Practice Education, Standards and Assessment

A review of models of good assessment practice in work integrated learning has suggested:

> If we accept that the two key components of learning outcomes are the performance of the student (that incorporates both process/means and output/ends) and what the student has actually learned from the placement, then a combination of the performance-based and portfolio approaches can meet both these needs.

[Hodges et al., 2004:52]

As Hodges elaborates, a performance-based assessment will generally adopt a criterion-referenced approach to identify workplace performance outcomes and how these will be assessed. Zegwaard, Coll and Hughes (2003) indicate how such a matrix can be adapted for use as either a competency-based approach (competent/not competent) or an achievement-based approach (level of competency achieved). Commonly, an evidential process is employed for the demonstration of competence, and concepts of ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’ are explored in considering the strengths, or otherwise, of the assessment. Used part way through a placement and again at the end, the matrix can be both a formative and summative instrument. Employers and professional bodies may well be included in defining what constitutes desired workplace performance and the levels of competence expected of newly qualifying professionals.

Two limitations of performance-based assessment are often noted. Firstly, student learning on placement is seen to involve more than the acquisition of workplace competencies. Students learn about workplace culture and the communities of practice to which they aspire (Hodges, 2004). They also learn much about themselves (Dawson, 1989). There is a risk that pre-specifying performance outcomes can constrain some of the most important learning. Secondly, some argue that performance-based assessment risks not being authentic – either to the practice being learned, or the learning processes involved. Where the work and professional context is characterised as one of uncertainty, change and contingency, practice cannot be captured within a series of boxes. Reflexivity, sense-making and creativity are some of the features to be nurtured and allowed expression in the ‘learning journey’. Portfolio assessment has become a prominent tool to encourage learning of this kind (Mabry, 1999).
Portfolios can include a wide range of evidence from multiple sources, with students being involved in determining the criteria for selection and judging the merit (Hodges, 2004).

The use of portfolios for assessment is problematic. It may be difficult to generalise from materials selectively included in the portfolio by the student. Interviews or presentations, for example, may be required to strengthen inferences drawn. The intrinsic uniqueness of each portfolio represents a challenge for assessors in achieving acceptable consistency between themselves and across the student cohort. The sheer volume of material can become unwieldy and overly demanding of staffing resource (Hodges, 2004). Nevertheless, advocates of portfolio assessment are convinced that it is this approach that is most fitting for the twenty-first century:

Young (1999) describes a curriculum of the future as one that has a transformative concept of knowledge that emphasises empowerment of learners to act on the world .... This reconceptualisation of curriculum has important implications for the assessment of learning ... The notion of a portfolio of work, developed over time, incorporating critical reflection and self-evaluation of what has been achieved makes for a more compatible assessment system (Klenowski, 2002:135).

The ways in which different recording systems can produce different processes of reflection has been studied by Roberts (2008) in relation to the workplace experience of students of built environment. Roberts asserts that assessment strategies that encourage reflection are especially effective in work-based learning, and proposes a spectrum of possible techniques including dossier portfolios, training portfolios, a reflective portfolio, and a personal development portfolio. An aim is to accommodate students' varying learning styles with overall goals and objectives when designing assessment for personal reflection. Similarly Wright and Jones (2008) suggest the importance of providing a choice of different templates for assessment of reflective activities. With a particular focus on the use of Personal Development Plans in build environment education, they also identified that peer assessment formed a vital part of fostering reflective practice.

The increasing interest being shown in e-portfolios suggests that some would see these as the way ahead in addressing many of the logistical issues associated with portfolios. There is nevertheless a strong line of argument mounted against aligning the achievements recorded in portfolio manner with formal assessment and grading (Knight & Yorke, 2004). This relates to the nature of the capabilities associated with work integrated learning. Where these concern skilful practices, self-efficacy, metacognition, and other 'complex learning outcomes', Knight and Yorke question how well they can be properly captured in formal assessment procedures.
Assessment isn’t limited to ‘extrinsic’ forms, those that result in the award of a pass, fail, or grade. Arguably, an appreciation of intrinsic assessment is vital to work integrated learning. Intrinsic assessment is understood as integral to the learning process, occurring as a consequence of the feedback that comes through interaction. It goes beyond its predecessor ‘formative’ assessment (Hounsell, 2003). It does so in ways that prepare the learner for ongoing learning and so is associated with ‘sustainable assessment’ (Boud & Falchikov, 2005). Work integrated learning is at the heart of these re-conceptions of assessment, affording students a multitude of sources and kinds of feedback. Furthermore, it forces the question of ‘authentic assessment’, linking assessment with professional tasks to secure alignment between student work and the ‘real world’ (Newmann & Archbald, 1992).

Academic standards indicate what should be taught and how it should be assessed. They accord value to students’ work and differentiate levels of quality in that work. They concern comparability within and across institutions. A major thread of the preceding discussion relates to the ways in which standards are set and implemented. At one end of the spectrum, standards are pre-formed and transmitted for application. At the other, standards emerge from, and are created amongst, communities of interested parties. Generating academic standards for planning practice education requires negotiating the complex issues and contexts that give shape to practice, learning and assessment.

### 3.6 Implications for Project Understandings

There has been considerable discussion within Australian planning education around the skills required of planning graduates and the relation of knowledge to practice. There is also a considerable literature available relating to broad principles of assessment and the relevance of these for work placement generally. However, there is a dearth of existing literature and prior study that is specific to assessment practices and standards in planning practice education. This project on assessment and academic standards will be cognisant of changing ways of thinking about practice and the associated educational approaches. The project will be breaking new ground in addressing these gaps. Whilst the project will progress related aspects of teaching and learning in planning education specifically, many of the issues and initiatives developed by the project will be relevant to other fields of professional education.

The literature review has informed the focus and direction of the project. Key issues have emerged:
• The nature of professional practice and the theory-practice nexus in planning education;
• The place or otherwise of workplace learning within planning education;
• The capabilities sought in planning graduates and identified gaps;
• The range of learning outcomes associated with practice education and workplace learning;
• Varieties of workplace learning and alternative forms of practice education;
• The supply of work placements and factors impacting upon this;
• Considerations in the design of structured work placement courses;
• The uncertain and uncontrollable aspects of workplace learning;
• Different approaches to assessment of workplace learning;
• The role of the workplace supervisor; and
• Relationships between host organisations and universities

Literature on academic standards and assessment practice relevant to planning practice education has highlighted many of the questions addressed by the project. The relationship between academic standards and practice education in higher education is not straightforward. Practice learning can be rendered subject to academic standards in different ways but they generally require an examination of what is meant both by ‘practice’ and by ‘academic’. Meanwhile, ongoing feedback from multiple sources is integral to the student experience in practice education. This questions the separation of assessment and learning. It also provides a foundation for capabilities in lifelong learning. The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic assessment, and their relationship to authentic assessment, becomes highly relevant to the project. Evidently, there is an empirical job of work to be done in finding out how academic standards and assessment practices are realised in practice education. The generation of academic standards for practice education undoubtedly poses issues about stakeholder relationships and territory.

The project investigates the full range of possibilities regarding academic standards in planning practice education. This aligns in a timely way with the inquiries by PIA into planning employment and education. The project, however, has not been designed to pursue centrally controlled standardisation in planning education. This would have been too narrow and restrictive an approach. Rather, the question of academic standards goes to the heart of crucial matters about planning – how it understands the nature of its practice, the conditions that secure a vibrant and forward looking profession, and how its practitioners acquire ongoing learning capabilities. The project makes a significant contribution to these agendas.
Generating Academic Standards in Planning Practice Education

whilst impacting on the student experience through advancing understandings and practices in producing and sustaining standards.
Chapter 4 Planning Practice Education in Australia

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines planning practice education in Australia. In order to understand the delivery and practice of planning practice education in Australia, the project team embarked on a review of planning programs. This entailed an initial search of publicly available materials. This information has been collated and tabulated and then verified by subsequent interviews with academic staff involved in planning practice education.

The goals of this review are to:
- Determine the range of assessment standards that are currently used in planning practice education including current best practice that enhances learning; ineffective practices and ideas for improvement; lessons learned, and issues and opportunities for developing academic standards for students undertaking planning practice; and
- Engage the interest of participating universities and planning academics and to elicit their involvement in the latter stages of the project.

This information is to determine:
- How the program fits into the overarching context of planning education at its university;
- How student achievement in the workplace is assessed and what standards are involved; and
- How responsibilities are defined and distributed between the university and the workplace.

4.2 Planning Education in Australia

A preliminary search of planning programs available in Australian universities in 2007 identified at least 90 possible programs. This was an online search of the Good University Guide 2007 (Hobsons Australia, 2007) using the search term ‘urban and regional planner’. It was felt that a thorough review of all these programs would be overwhelming and too time consuming. Therefore this project decided to focus on reviewing the planning courses accredited by PIA as the professional body. A search focusing on accredited planning programs narrowed these down to 43. This information is summarised in Table 4.1 below:
Table 4.1: Planning Education in Australia, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Undergraduate and Postgraduate Planning Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban and regional planning is an umbrella term that covers a wide range of sectors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are 43 academic programs in Australia accredited by PIA that include planning education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accredited programs occur at both undergraduate and postgraduate level including:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o 19 programs offering Bachelor Degrees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o 6 programs offering a Postgraduate Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o 18 programs offering Masters Degrees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are 19 undergraduate programs accredited by PIA, across 11 tertiary institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 of these 19 accredited undergraduate programs contain a form of work practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are 24 accredited postgraduate programs, across 14 tertiary institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work practice is a formal component in 4 (2 of these as electives) of the 24 postgraduate programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work practice is a formal component in planning programs at 9 tertiary institutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hobsons Australia, 2007; PIA (2005b) for list of accredited courses; each tertiary institution website including, among others, Griffith University (2007); La Trobe University (2007); The University of New England (2007); University of South Australia (2007); University of Tasmania (2007); some information later adjusted following interviews with planning academics

4.3 PIA Accredited Planning Programs

Table 4.2 shows PIA accredited undergraduate planning programs that were available to students in 2007. There are 19 PIA accredited undergraduate planning programs across 11 tertiary institutions in Australia. Table 4.2 also shows whether the respective program has any form of work practice built into the structure. 11 of the 19 undergraduate planning programs contain a form of work practice. The exceptions to this are the undergraduate planning programs at The University of Melbourne, Queensland University of Technology, The University of Queensland, and Curtin University of Technology.

Table 4.3 shows PIA accredited graduate diploma and masters planning programs available to students in 2007. In total there are 24 PIA accredited graduate diploma and masters planning programs across 14 tertiary institutions in Australia. The University of Sydney, University of Technology, Sydney, Macquarie University, and University of Tasmania offer accredited postgraduate programs but do not offer accredited undergraduate courses. La Trobe University (Bendigo) offers an accredited undergraduate program but not an accredited postgraduate program.

Table 4.3 also shows whether the respective program has any form of work practice built into the program structure. Most PIA accredited postgraduate programs do not contain a form of work practice. At the University of Tasmania, however, work practice is a formal component of the graduate diploma and masters planning program. Work practice is also offered as an
elective at Macquarie University and at Griffith University for postgraduate students wishing to take on some practical training.

**Table 4.2: Accredited Undergraduate Planning Programs in Australia, 2007**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TERTIARY INSTITUTION</th>
<th>COURSE TITLE</th>
<th>WORK PRACTICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CURTIN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY</td>
<td>• Bachelor of Arts in Urban &amp; Regional Planning</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bachelor of Arts in Urban &amp; Regional Planning (Hons)</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>• Bachelor of Environmental Planning</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bachelor of Environmental Planning / Bachelor of Science</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bachelor of Laws / Bachelor of Environmental Planning</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>• Bachelor of Applied Science (Environmental &amp; Urban Planning)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA TROBE UNIVERSITY (Bendigo Campus)</td>
<td>• Bachelor of Urban, Rural and Environmental Planning</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY</td>
<td>• Bachelor of Urban Development</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bachelor of Built Environment (Urban &amp; Regional Planning)</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROYAL MELBOURNE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>• Bachelor of Applied Science (Planning)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bachelor of Applied Science (Planning) (Hons)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bachelor of Social Science (Planning) (Hons)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE</td>
<td>• Bachelor of Urban Planning &amp; Development</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bachelor of Urban Planning &amp; Development/ Bachelor of Planning &amp; Design</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bachelor of Arts (Planning &amp; Design)</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND</td>
<td>• Bachelor of Urban &amp; Regional Planning</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES</td>
<td>• Bachelor of Planning</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND</td>
<td>• Bachelor of Regional &amp; Town Planning</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA</td>
<td>• Bachelor of Urban &amp; Regional Planning</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PIA (2005b) for list of accredited courses; each tertiary institution website including, among others, Griffith University (2007); La Trobe University (2007); The University of New England (2007); University of South Australia (2007); some information later adjusted following interviews with planning academics
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TERTIARY INSTITUTION</th>
<th>COURSE TITLE</th>
<th>WORK PRAC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CURTIN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY</td>
<td>• Master of Urban &amp; Regional Planning</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>• Graduate Diploma in Environmental Planning</td>
<td>Elective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Master of Environmental Planning</td>
<td>Elective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>• Graduate Diploma of Science (Tropical Urban &amp; Regional Planning)</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Master of Applied Science (Tropical Urban &amp; Regional Planning)</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>• Master of Environmental Planning</td>
<td>Elective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY</td>
<td>• Graduate Diploma in Urban &amp; Regional Planning</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Master of Urban &amp; Regional Planning</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROYAL MELBOURNE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY</td>
<td>• Master of Social Science (Environment &amp; Planning)</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Master of Social Science (International Urban &amp; Environmental Management)</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE</td>
<td>• Master of Urban Planning</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND</td>
<td>• Graduate Diploma of Urban &amp; Regional Planning</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Master of Urban &amp; Regional Planning (Hons)</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES</td>
<td>• Master of Planning</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Master of Urban Development &amp; Design</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND</td>
<td>• Master of Urban &amp; Regional Planning</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY</td>
<td>• Master of Urban and Regional Planning</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Master of Urban Design (Urban and Regional Planning)</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Master of Transport Management/Urban and Regional Planning</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA</td>
<td>• Graduate Diploma in Regional &amp; Urban Planning</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Master of Regional &amp; Urban Planning</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA</td>
<td>• Graduate Diploma of Environmental Planning</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Master of Environmental Planning</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY</td>
<td>• Master of Planning</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PIA (2005b) for list of accredited courses; each tertiary institution website for example University of Tasmania (2007); some information later adjusted following interviews with planning academics
The finding that most PIA accredited undergraduate planning courses contain a form of work practice shows that work practice is a valued part of planning education at an undergraduate level. Consequently, the main focus of this project is planning practice education within an undergraduate setting.

This project is conscious of the need to recognise the diversity of work practice on offer. To assist in the interpretation it is worthwhile to use information from the literature review, particularly the typology of models and characteristics of work-based learning in tertiary education. Of the planning practice programs in tables 4.2 and 4.3, all except the course on offer at The University of New South Wales, can be classified as a placement or practicum. The types of work placements can also vary in assessment components, the level of grading, the duration of time spent in the workplace, where the placement is situated in the entire program, and whether it is a compulsory or elective course.

### 4.4 Planning Programs with Structured Work Practice

Table 4.4 shows details of planning programs with structured work practice being a formal component at nine tertiary institutions. Work practice is a compulsory component at most of these institutions except for Macquarie University (postgraduate) and Griffith University (postgraduate) where it is an elective.

The duration that students are required to spend in the workplace varies. At The University of New England, for example, students are required to complete 12 weeks practical experience prior to graduation. At RMIT University, students are required to spend 60 days in the workplace whereas at Griffith University it is 30 days for undergraduate students (not doing honours) and 20 days for honours and postgraduate students. Conversely, students spend 40 hours in the workplace for postgraduate elective at Macquarie University postgraduate elective.

The assessment components of these work placements also vary. Work practice is graded at five institutions. The type of assessment varies within each course with some using work plans, personal diaries, presentations, seminars and reports. Supervisor reports are a feature in some programs but generally not graded. For the example, at both RMIT University and the University of South Australia, the supervisors report is not graded, whereas at Griffith University the supervisor assessment is worth 10 per cent of the total marks for the course.
Assessment tends to focus on personal reflection through the use of journals or peer presentations. At the University of South Australia, for example, the journal is worth 70 per cent of total marks. Presentation (along with poster) is worth 35 percent at Griffith University, 18 per cent at RMIT University and 30 per cent at the University of South Australia.

### Table 4.4: Details of Planning Programs with a Structured Work Practice Component

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Program Names</th>
<th>Course/Subject/Unit Codes</th>
<th>Compulsory Work Placement</th>
<th>Graded</th>
<th>Graded Assessment</th>
<th>Duration in the Work Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Griffith University</td>
<td>Bachelor of Environmental Planning/Honours; 2) Bachelor of Environmental</td>
<td>4016EVP; 4107EVP</td>
<td>Yes for Undergraduates;</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Planning Practicum Poster and short oral presentation at the Practicum Forum (workshop) 35%; 2 Practicum placement supervisors’ assessment 10%;</td>
<td>20 working days as part of a structured practicum for honours/postgraduate students. 30 working days as part of a structured practicum for undergraduate students (not doing honours)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning/Bachelor of Science; 3) Bachelor of Laws/Bachelor of Environmental Planning; 4) Master of Urban and Environmental Planning/Honours</td>
<td></td>
<td>ELECTIVE for Postgraduates</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 Planning practicum issues paper 35%; 4 Professionalism and participation 20%. Poster and Oral Presentation at the Practicum Forum (full day workshop) 25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>; Journal Article 25%; Planning practicum placement supervisors’ assessment 10%; Exam 20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Professionalism and participation 20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Cook University</td>
<td>Bachelor of Applied Science (Environmental &amp; Urban Planning)</td>
<td>EV5605</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No Grade</td>
<td>6 weeks of professional planning work experience. Final year, work placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Trobe University</td>
<td>Bachelor of Urban, Rural and Environmental Planning</td>
<td>PLA3PPB; PLA4PP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Group Presentation; 2,500-word practical assignment; 1,000-word individual presentation; 2,000-word assignment (40%); 3,000-word assignment (60%)</td>
<td>Professional work experience in semester 1 of third year and semester 2 of 4th year starting in 2008. Students undertake 30 days of work experience prior to the start of semester 1. Weeks 1 to 3 of semester: one 1-hour lecture and one 2-hour workshop per week, Weeks 4 to 12 of semester: 2 hours of classes and two days of work experience per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macquarie University</td>
<td>Master of Environmental Planning</td>
<td>GSE821</td>
<td>No but an elective</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>This is an individualised unit. There are no set lectures but each student must arrange a program of workplace attendance and meetings with both academic and workplace supervisors. It is essential that the program and assessment components be negotiated in advance via a contract proposal.</td>
<td>40 hours spent in the workplace. Students who are currently employed (full-time or part-time) may not use their current employer for this unit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5 Summary

The review of planning programs provides support for focusing on undergraduate planning courses in the project’s inquiries into work-based practice learning. Based on this review, the scope of this part of the project has been narrowed. An in-depth investigation of approaches within postgraduate planning programs to practice education would be a valuable subject for future study.
The information presented in this chapter provides a good basis for the more detailed and comprehensive task of inviting planning academic staff to be interviewed about planning practice across the range of planning schools within Australia. Along with the differences in work practice on offer, the finding that some accredited undergraduate planning programs do not require work practice is important. It is likely that other alternatives such as studio work, role play or fieldwork are used in place of work practice. These would also merit further, in-depth study.
Chapter 5  Hearing from the Stakeholders

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the results of interviews and focus groups with the main stakeholders – planning academics, planning practitioners and planning students. Firstly, it describes the methods used to interview planning academics located in Australian planning schools and then summarises the key strands to emerge from these interviews. Secondly, it describes the methods used to interview planning practitioners working in metropolitan Melbourne, rural Victoria and south east Queensland who have participated in supervising planning students and presents their perspectives. Thirdly, it describes the methods used in the focus groups with planning students who have participated in practice education courses at two of the collaborating universities and summarises the key strands to emerge.

5.2 Planning Academic Interviews

5.2.1  Description of Planning Academic Interviews

The interviews with planning academics located in Australian planning schools were undertaken to determine the range of assessment standards that are currently used in planning practice education in Australia. The goal of these interviews was to identify current best practice that enhances learning; ineffective practices and ideas for improvement; lessons learned; and issues and opportunities for developing academic standards for students undertaking planning practice. A secondary goal is to engage the interest of participating universities and planning academics and to elicit their involvement in latter stages of the project.

Between January and March 2008, 12 interviews were undertaken with academics involved in planning education across 11 tertiary institutions in Australia (see Appendix 5 for further background information).

The interviews were undertaken using a semi-structured interview process (see Appendix 4 for a copy of the questions asked). Most of the interviews lasted between 40 – 60 minutes in length. The interview process built on the experiences gained during a pilot study of three planning academics from the institutions represented by the project team.
5.2.2 Key Strands

A number of key strands have emerged from these interviews. Broadly these include:

- The contemporary context of practice-based education;
  - The demand for planners – two sides of the supply coin
  - University resources and restructuring – doing more with less
- The centrality of practice in Australian planning education;
  - Pracademics’ – addressing professional accreditation demands and expectations
  - The benefits of practice-based education
- The diversity of practice-based education;
- Assessing practice-based education;
  - Assessment pedagogy
  - Types of assessment
  - Assessment challenges
- Staffing resources and practice-based education;
  - Role of champions
  - Workload models
  - Sessional staff
- Student experiences with practice-based education;
  - ‘Sitting with Nelly’
  - Paying to go to work
  - International students
- Building a professional collegial culture; and
- Building future knowledge.

5.2.2.1 The contemporary context of practice-based education

Two significant issues emerged during the interviews in relation to Australian planning education that is generating both opportunities and challenges for practice-based approaches. These are: the demand for planners; occurring alongside growing strains on university resources. Such issues are echoed in the PIA (2004) inquiry into employment and education.

The demand for planners – two sides of the supply coin: A twin phenomenon exists in 21st century Australian planning: a ‘boom in planning’ resulting in more jobs, coupled with a ‘chronic shortage of planners’. There is heightened demand for graduates with practical planning skills and academic qualifications to fill an increasingly diverse range of roles. This has resulted in:

- More planning courses being offered (and proposed) at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels;
- More planning students enrolling in planning courses (including an increase in post-graduates with no previous planning experience and international students);
- High levels of student employability with some students employed in their 1st year; and
- An abundance of practicum placements opportunities currently available within the planning shortage climate.

**University resources and restructuring – doing more with less:** Accompanying the rise in demand for planners within the Australian context has been a restructuring of Universities that has resulted in widespread reductions in resources and staff for planning schools. This typically translates to:
- Larger class sizes per staff member;
- Fewer resources to conduct field trips; and
- Less administrative support.

In many cases planning schools are housed within larger discipline-based departments that do not have the same professional accreditation requirements, and place far less emphasis (and therefore support and resources) towards practice-based education requirements.

### 5.2.2.2 The centrality of practice in Australian planning education

A clear emphasis in the interviews undertaken was the belief that planning is professionally and practically based (as opposed to a more traditional discipline-based education), and that understanding and applying practical skills and competencies is ‘vital’ and ‘lies at the heart’ of planning education. Participants reinforced this idea by pointing out that most subjects they teach have a strong practical element to assist in developing professionals who can operate effectively and be reflective practitioners within the contemporary planning context.

**‘Pracademics’ – addressing professional accreditation demands and expectations:** PIA actively promotes a practical focus on professional skills and competencies and the central role of practice-based education through its accreditation process. This has influenced the development of planning curricula and choice of subjects.

Many of the planning academics interviewed have either come into academia from the planning profession or have previously worked in planning schools that have emphasized practice-based approaches to education. This has influenced their involvement and commitment to this approach. One participant described their role as a ‘pracademic’ – a facilitator who helps forge the links between theory and practice.
The benefits of practice-based education: There was a strong conviction expressed by participants in the ‘huge benefits’ of practice-based education and its popularity with students, parents and employers as expressed through both formal and informal feedback and evaluation processes. These benefits can be grouped under the following headings.

- **Insights into planning practice** – Through structured exposure to work-based practices students can see what actually happens in the real world of planning. They familiarize themselves with the contemporary planning terrain and gain insights into real life problems. This is seen to be educationally valuable – not just to learn about specific procedures (although this may be useful as well in some instances) so much as to extend their wider learning and understanding of what planning entails within particular contexts.

- **Employability** – Provides a springboard to employment. It is seen as a ‘string to their bow’ and enhances their employability and marketability. The majority of students who undertake work placement are offered jobs by the employer. It is seen as a head start in a planning career leading to permanent jobs.

- **Commitment to a career** – Informs students of the type of work they might want. Once students engage in practical projects they have a very different idea of what planners might do and appreciation of the different planning roles available. Many begin to ‘get excited’ and think this is what they want to do – ‘they get a buzz out of it and at that point they become committed to the career’.

- **Realize the professional dimension** – Highlights what planners are doing and why they are doing it which tends to encourage in students a sense of responsibility, maturity and enthusiasm in relation to their studies. It also allows students to see planners make a mark and can expose them to both innovative and creative practices, as well as less laudable ones. This in turn builds a working understanding of the diversity of practice and the importance of ethically-informed behaviour to enable ‘a new generation of planners with a mindset that has the potential to improve planning practice’.

5.2.2.3 The diversity of practice-based education

Practice-based education in Australian planning schools as outlined by the participants in the study falls into four broadly defined categories (brief encounters, project-based work,
structured practicums, work experience\(^3\) underpinned by an ethos of experiential learning and reflexive practice. These four categories represent a continuum of practice-based education opportunities that extend from predominantly University-based to predominantly workplace-based. This is illustrated below in Figure 5.1 and the categories expanded upon below.

**Figure 5.1: Continuum of practice-based education opportunities for planning education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predominantly University-based</th>
<th>Predominantly Workplace-based</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brief encounters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studio/Project-based learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured practicum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---------------------experiential learning and critically reflexive practice------------------

- **Brief encounters** – Short interactions with practice as part of a subject/unit
  
  Example 1: Guest speakers from the profession come to speak to students  
  Example 2: Professional planners come in and assist with studio work  
  Example 3: A day with a planning department  
  Example 4: Visits to the state planning tribunal

- **Studio/Project-based work** – Undertake a real-life or simulated planning project based at the University (projects may last over one or more semesters)
  
  Example 1: Students simulate the development of a plan/planning for a real world site  
  Example 2: Students work in conjunction with planners/developers on site specific investigations – a panel of professionals may judge the outcomes  
  Example 3: Students track a development application in conjunction with a particular Council  
  Example 4: Students work on live, real projects where they undertake a minor professional role and report to the client who provides feedback on their work

- **Structured work practicum** – Students are required to undertake a certain number of days in a planning setting under the supervision of a planning professional, as well as attend face-to-face classes/seminars and/or engage in ongoing interaction with peers and university staff as part of a structured practicum.

  Example 1: Students undertake a practicum placement for 1 day a week for the duration of the semester while still attending subjects
  Example 2: Students undertake a placement in the holidays and return to classes based solely on the practicum process during the semester

- **Work experience** – Students are required to work a certain number of days in a planning setting under the supervision of a planning professional.

  Example 1: A compulsory sandwich year of work experience in between years of a course
  Example 2: The equivalent of one semester of work experience with a seminar
  Example 3: A set number of days to complete e.g. 60 days

The participants in this study indicated that all of their institutions undertake some type of practice-based education in the form of brief encounters and studio/project-based learning as part of the planning education curricula at both the undergraduate and post-graduate level. On top of this about half of the programs currently offer either the structured practicum or work experience as a core compulsory part of the undergraduate degree.

One participant whose institution does not currently offer a structured practicum experience was keen to see this undertaken – ‘There is great scope to formalise a placement project and to do something positive in light of the multiple opportunities for students to work’. Whilst another participant noted that their structured practicum subject has been withdrawn recently as a response to the ‘very high levels of students already engaged in part-time planning work’.

At the post-graduate level a structured practicum or work experience has traditionally not been offered as part of the curriculum as most students have tended to enter the course with previous planning experience. This is changing, however, as more students undertake postgraduate studies in planning without prior experience and an increase in International student enrolments. A number of institutions now offer practicum or work experience opportunities at the post-graduate level.
5.2.2.4 Assessing practice-based education

The assessment of practice-based education was quite consistent amongst the participants interviewed. Key themes emerged around assessment pedagogy, types of assessment, and assessment challenges.

**Assessment pedagogy:** There was a broad consensus that assessment for practice-based education within a planning program is grounded within a commitment to experiential (learning by doing) processes and reflexive practice. This is reflected in the type of theoretical texts included in the reference lists for most practice-based courses in Australian planning schools such as Schon’s *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) and Forester’s *The Deliberative Practitioner* (1999).

The teaching philosophy of many of the academics interviewed is for a preference for direct practically-oriented assessment, but utilizing a less didactic, more facilitator-oriented style of teaching and learning. The emphasis here is on encouraging reflective rather than mechanistic practice. This is broadly an approach that seeks to move beyond understanding and applying workplace skills and competencies, towards a critical exploration of what has been learnt and what might be improved or done differently.

A number of participants did point out that this is an aspect not necessarily well developed in terms of a rationale, and that there are no guarantees that the convenor/staff of the practice-based subjects will be experienced in designing and/or delivering placement courses.

**Types of assessment:** The range of assessment for practice-based education in Australian planning schools reflects the diversity of teaching and learning shifts within the tertiary education setting generally as well as the broad pedagogical position outlined above. These were reported to include (but are not limited to):

- Group work (i.e. projects, reports, plans, presentations);
- Seminar presentations;
- Journals (record of professional activities undertaken, observations, learnings in light of set readings);
- Diary (more personalised account of thoughts and feelings in relation to activities undertaken);
- Employer reports/questionnaire;
- Planning capabilities portfolio; and
- Reflective report/issues paper.
Assessment may be ungraded, pass/fail only or graded depending on the particular subject requirements. The participants stressed that for those subjects that are graded, the aims and objectives for practice-based education set out the expectations and assessment criteria in the same way that more conventional face-to-face or theoretically driven courses do.

Assessment is usually carried out by full-time university staff, sessional staff (including PhD students and practising planners) and, where appropriate to the course/unit, planning employers/supervisors in the workplace. A number of participants noted the benefits of having a rotation of professional planning practitioners as sessional staff members as a means of staying abreast of contemporary practices. Potentially it also opens up opportunities for student to gain access to resources such as council maps and plans. Examples cited included employing professionals to teach into subjects such as planning law and design, or seconding a council planner for a semester to work with students on projects related to the jurisdiction of that council.

As a rule of thumb the less university-based the practice-based education, the less likely there is to be graded assessment. Reasons for this were typically the difficulties in:

- Ensuring control over the quality of student experiences;
- Working with the different levels of experience on the part of employers; and
- Moderating assessment appropriately.

There exists a range of different models around this. For example an institution may offer a sandwich year of paid work which is an ungraded but compulsory component of the undergraduate planning degree. This does not carry any university fees. This differs from an elective unit of planning-based work experience that is pass/fail and carries a university fee. Different again is a structured planning practicum unit over one semester that is both formally graded and carries a university fee.

**Assessment challenges:** A number of challenges related to the assessment of practice-based education emerged from the interviews.

- **Group work** – Students working in groups of 4-6 underpin most practice-based assessment undertaken within a University-based setting. The rationale for this is that group work is what occurs in ‘real life’ – that planning is fundamentally a team-based activity that requires an ability to work well with other people on a common task or project. Typically all members of the group receive the same mark. It is assumed that
exemplary students will shine because they become leaders and bring along weaker members.

Yet the reality is that in many cases group work is challenging both for students and staff. It is difficult for staff to select groups. Many students do not like group work and prefer to work alone. There are frequent complaints about free loaders and difficulties navigating group development processes. Often students are expected to develop group skills (e.g. communication and dispute resolution skills) themselves through the group assessment experience with little formal training or staff input. The difficulties of group-work were a recurring theme in the interviews and become further exacerbated when class sizes become very large.

In response to these challenges a variety of strategies has emerged, for example: the use of Belbin team role theory to select groups, peer assessment whereby students confidentially grade each others contribution, or a management file kept by students to monitor their performance. This management file is a record of team meetings which are in turn a record of group member responsibilities. Students undertake different roles at each meeting such as chairing or taking minutes, which are then rotated.

- **Balancing the workload** – Students have the perception that practice-based subjects are often more time and energy intensive than other types of subjects. The size and scale of the project must be carefully considered in light of the number and experience of the students, particularly if it is a real-life project with the expectation of an outcome or ‘product’ at the end of the semester. In this way students are not committed to something they are not capable of whilst retaining an appropriate level of challenge. The importance of ‘staircasing’ practice-based education and avoiding overlap within the broader planning curricula was noted by participants.

- **The reflective diary/journal** – Particularly for structured practicums this was cited as a very common piece of assessment. In most cases students are expected to go beyond simply listing activities to include reflective and critical insights gained from their own experience, from their classes and from their wider reading.

A number of participants noted that reflective writing is not an easy skill and that many students ask ‘Is my diary entry ok?’ and find it difficult to reflect on their work in any depth. There was the sense that there is little role-modelling of reflective writing. Many students do not get exposed to critical thinking and reflective practice theory until later
in their degree and do not see much evidence of reflective practice in the workplace. Providing appropriate criteria to assess this style of writing can also be challenging and time-consuming.

Often workplace supervisors or employers sign off for the diary/journal on a weekly basis. This raises issues of confidentiality and the availability of a ‘safe space’ for reflection. One participant observed however that it can provide a fruitful avenue for communication between students and those reading the journal/diary.

- **Supervisors as assessors** – In some structured practicums and work experience contexts, supervisors in the workplace take a role in the assessment of students. For example they may have to fill out an employer report or complete a questionnaire. Some times supervisors are given criteria to mark against. One participant suggested that at times this can be very labour intensive for the supervisor and it is easier to recommend that students get a job in the holidays to achieve similar outcomes, but without the paperwork requirements for either the employer or the university.

### 5.2.2.5 Staffing resources and practice-based education

Practice-based education requires particular skills and a level of commitment from the staff that co-ordinate these subjects. Key themes to emerge were the importance of the role of champions, the problem of workload models that adequately reflect the time and input of staff and the contribution of sessional staff.

**Role of champions:** Practice-based education in Australian planning schools tends to be championed by staff that have a particular belief in the merits of this approach. They are often prepared to invest more time and energy than may be required by other courses into making the experience a positive one for students. This includes the time required to organise projects and placements appropriate for the cohort of students they have at any particular time. They bring with them (or build up over time) a mixture of background, skills, education, commitment, embedded knowledge and professional networks, and develop important relationships with employers in the industry. Without these champions practice-based education would not be as effective. Often these people are difficult to replace and when they leave the networks and knowledge they have built up are not easily replicated.

One of the participants outlined a possible solution to individual champions that is currently running in their institution and involves the establishment of semi independent "Community Practice Centres". In line with overseas models (e.g. Cornell University, University of Oregon)
it was suggested that the community practice centre idea might provide ‘a continuing, inclusive and generative institutional auspice sitting inside the university, but including outside members on their Steering Committee or Governing Body’. Such systemic developments are indicative of broader, institutional support for practice education, built in partnership with external stakeholders.

**Workload models:** The workload for academics who are responsible for practice-based education can be much higher especially in the light of apparent administrative and resource cutbacks. Work is often far more time-consuming and this is often not reflected in workload models. As a result people are reluctant to put their hands up for coordinating positions.

For example a practicum placement may entail liaising with employers and students by email, phone and face-to-face, running meetings as well as organising legal/administrative aspects related to risk management and insurance. The staff member becomes a facilitator for not only student learning experiences but for industry and the university as well. The onus of finding positions or suitable projects for students can be very stressful even within the current job climate because of the sheer number of students to place. As one participant observes, ‘one way to reduce workload is to get rid of work experience but it is too valuable to the students and to the reputation of the program – the profession values it highly’.

**Sessional staff:** The use of sessional staff for key practice-based education subjects emerged within a number of the interviews. Some programs employ a sessional staff member such as a recent or current postgraduate student to co-ordinate placement and oversee that process to do with advice and day-to-day administration with key decisions being made by the course co-ordinator.

Another perspective put forward was one that saw the continuity of experienced staff as an important component particularly in relation to building relationships and networks with the broader profession, as well as providing experienced support for students – this led to minimum use of sessional staff in these roles.

**5.2.2.6 Student experiences with practice-based education**

According to the participants in this study the feedback they get from students is that experience with practice-based education is ‘overwhelmingly positive’. For the majority of students it provides a means of bridging the theory-practice divide in a way that allows for teaching and learning synergies between ‘what could be’ and ‘what is’. However within this
positive framing a number of emerging concerns were raised repeatedly, particularly in relation to structured practicums and work experience.

**‘Sitting with Nelly’**: The potential for students to be given passive roles such as excessive tea-making and photocopying was raised as an ongoing source of concern. Learning through habituation and without academic rigour was seen to create the potential for students to mistake ‘paltry, morally dubious and second rate work’ for what constitutes ‘good’ planning practice. Some students have also experienced the replacement of an intended workplace supervisor with someone less able to undertake such a position, or have turned up for practicum to find they were working in makeshift and inappropriate locations.

**Paying to go to work**: The current shortage of planners in Australia has led to a high number of planning students attaining part-time work as early as the first year of their studies. By the third or fourth year of an undergraduate degree many students are working 3 or even 4 days a week and are enrolled in their studies part-time. Within this climate there are a number of students who resent having to attend a compulsory practicum (often located in the third or fourth year) as part of their degree – for which they have to pay fees.

Yet some of the participants observe that paying fees provides students with: 1) the structured reflection that is often missing in the workplace; 2) the opportunity to hear about other students experiences; and 3) enhanced opportunities for gaining experience and networks which builds a competitive edge when students seeking jobs or further employment opportunities.

**International students**: The increase of overseas students enrolling in Australian planning schools with poor English skills was a recurring topic. These students often find practice-based education that involves workplace interaction to be extremely difficult. These students find workplaces threatening and run the risk of being out of their depth. As one participant noted ‘it can be overwhelming if you are not familiar with the system’.

In some cases this means that international students do not get paid like their peers and so take volunteer work. However for many supervisors it is a lot of extra work to manage a student who does not have good grasp of the language and is reluctant to do so. One participant confessed that it is also problematic for the university as weak students reflect poorly on the planning program and damage their professional reputation and this needs to be minimised as much as possible. This means that it will become more staff-labour intensive to carefully manage both the educational experience and those relationships. Yet if the
placement is part of a compulsory subject then there is an obligation to find all students a placement experience – even if perhaps they are not really up to it.

5.2.2.7 Building a professional collegial culture
Practice-based education provides the basis for building relationships between the universities, the profession and the wider community. Through this approach the university can build an ongoing relationship with practising planners who may then take an active role in assisting the university through participation on the advisory board, by undertaking guest lecturers and by mentoring and ultimately employing the students. This in turn creates a great deal of support from the planning profession for what universities are doing and helps establish new initiatives that respond to contemporary challenges. Universities are actively seeking ways to strengthen these links.

For example one university holds a feedback session with employers involved in their work experience program. Employers are invited to the university each year to discuss issues, share experiences and to come up with ideas and suggestions. Another is seeking to develop a database of willing practitioners who are happy to invest time and give-back to the university either through offering placement, guest speakers or other resources. Many participants noted that past students now serve on their advisory board and offer placements to the current cohort.

Finally the research culture has the potential to be enriched by the links to practice-based educational experiences. Many participants observed that students come back from project or practicum experiences with ideas for research that they wish to examine in more detail. These then become the foundation for honours and even postgraduate level projects.

5.2.2.8 Building future knowledge
A recurring theme within the interviews was a desire to know ‘how what we do here fits in with what other planning programs are doing’ and to have increased exposure to practice-based planning resources and networking amongst those involved. Practice-based education in particular institutions tends to have emerged within particular historical and cultural contexts. The degree of time and resources they require provide little opportunity to gain a bigger picture understanding of broader practices. As one participant said:

We need to keep a handle on what we are doing with the students and how we are doing it. We need to challenge and transform some of the processes we are using and things we are doing in light of contemporary changes and shifts.
Yet a groundswell of activity appears to be building around planning resources and recognition for practice-based education. A number of the participants interviewed pointed to publications they have been involved in related to the experiences of their institution with practice-based education, as well as in-house teaching and learning grants to look further into planning practice that are currently underway. Others commented on how encouraging it was to see an educational foundation fund research into planning education, and saw a need to maximise the momentum. According to another participant:

If practice-based education is important then we better resource it sufficiently – if it’s a course then the University has to resource it appropriately.

5.2.3 Overview of Planning Academic Interviews

The planning academics interviewed for the project showed great interest in the question of practice education. They placed much value on learning for practice and were keenly aware of its benefits and also the challenges it represents. A range of practice-based education opportunities were evident, some more university-based and some more workplace-based. The planning academics associated practice education with experiential and reflexive learning and they used a variety of assessment tools. Generally, they were cautious about having too many expectations of workplace supervisors as regards their participation in student assessment. The staff resource issues for both university and organisations hosting work placements were a serious consideration in realising high quality student experiences. Practice education was commonly seen to serve a broader purpose in building stronger links between the universities and their external communities.

5.3 Planning Practitioner Interviews

5.3.1 Description of Planning Practitioner Interviews

Interviews with planning practitioners working in metropolitan Melbourne, rural Victoria and south east Queensland were undertaken to discover their perspectives and experiences of assessment and academic standards in practice education courses. These practitioners have participated in supervising planning students. The interviews sought to identify:

- How practitioners perceive their roles in learning and assessment of student planning practice, and how this understanding corresponds or not with the expectations of university practice academics;
- What informs practitioners’ understandings of academic standards for practice education;
- What practitioners understand to be required to achieve academic standards and authentic assessment practices in practice education; and
• Whether practitioners have noticed any differences in the practice capabilities of early career planners in terms of the practice education they have undertaken.

In total, 40 interviews were undertaken with planning practitioners with various levels of experience in supervising planning students. Table 5.1 shows the number of practitioners who participated in the interviews from the three geographical settings.

**Table 5.1: Number of Planning Practitioner Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning Setting</th>
<th>Metropolitan Melbourne</th>
<th>South east Queensland</th>
<th>Rural Victoria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private Practice</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Government</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviews were undertaken using a semi-structured interview process (see Appendix 6 for a copy of the questions asked). Most of the interviews lasted between 40 – 70 minutes in length. The interview process was trialled informally by conducting a role play between two members of the project team.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, resulting in hundreds of pages of transcripts. In order to identify salient themes and patterns, a three stage process of analysis was used as described in Chapter Two. Expressed below are supervisors’ views as revealed in the transcripts. Common aspects as perceived by the interviewers were derived from the practitioner interviews with some variations between the three geographical settings of metropolitan Melbourne, rural Victoria or south east Queensland.

**5.3.2 Practitioners Talk about Work Placements, Assessment and Standards**

Through the interviews, planning practitioners approached the subject of assessment and academic standards by placing it in a much broader context. In many respects, assessment and academic standards were not at the forefront of their minds when they started to speak about what they did. This, it seemed, was something for the university. Yet, their observations about the contextual factors pertaining to work placements prove to be highly relevant and insightful to understandings of assessment and academic standards. And compellingly, the more they spoke and deliberated during the interviews, the closer to home became the questions of assessment and standards in their day to day dealings with students – and the more they realised they did indeed have an invaluable contribution to make to generating new knowledge and practices in this area.
So, what do the interviews with planning practitioners have to tell us about assessment and academic standards in planning practice education? Presented below is a crystallisation of the ‘voices’ of planning practitioners as they emerged from the analysis. The material is organised in a broadly chronological fashion, around the components that the practitioners construed as making up work placement.

5.3.2.1 Building the discipline: Foundation work in the university
Planning practitioners interviewed for the project had supervised students on work placement. They saw the university as playing an important role in ‘building the discipline’ of planning. By this, they were referring to the teaching content developed and provided to students. But they were also referring to a sense of collegiality that can emerge amongst those who belong to a program of study, and the building of career direction and identity during formative years at university.

A significant aspect of this, for the planning practitioners, concerned some very fundamental understandings they would expect the university to evoke in students regarding the character and contexts of the planning discipline. These included: an understanding of the history and philosophy of the planning discipline and its interdisciplinary nature; an understanding that planning decisions do not occur in a vacuum but are subject to a multitude of influences; an emphasis on versatility; and a desire to belong to a professional organisation.

Given processes of identity formation and socialisation into the discipline, planning practitioners thought of the university as a place where students would begin to situate themselves in the planning discipline – to develop a sense of where they ‘fitted’. Ideally, they hoped that this developing view of self within the discipline would be underway before the students embarked on work placement; and that students would arrive with an idea of their career goals and interests, and of course with their passions.

5.3.2.2 Value of Work Placements
The planning practitioners had committed time and energy to supervising students on work placement. They all endorsed the value of such learning – though some in terms of being desirable but not essential to a planning degree. Those who had not done a placement themselves generally regretted its absence from their education. Many spoke of the formative nature of their own placement.
The value of a work placement was commonly seen in exposing the student to the ‘real life’ complexities of planning. Together with this, the practitioners spoke of the opportunities provided in linking theory with practice. Organisational culture, relationships with fellow staff and clients, and the ‘physical format’ of the work place, were all aspects of professional development that the placement afforded and could not be taught as such. Building student confidence was a common goal.

Some spoke of work placements as helping to define a student’s career choice. Many students, they said, were uncertain whether they want to become planners: their placement experience helped them to decide. A few saw their role as career guiders, exposing the students to the varied roles of planners and opportunities, for example, in general government positions outside of planning itself. The work placement also subjected students to the negative aspects of the profession, such as bad habits, stressful environments, and so on, but they recognised it was important to give a realistic experience to the student.

There was a perception that work placement represented an investment in an individual’s career. It would give students opportunity to identify and confirm their basic skills and competencies; opportunity to recognise areas of practice for future development in the remainder of the degree or beyond; and give confidence to students about their skills and abilities to perform well. The investment might also be in favour of the host organisation: students might be kept on for continuing work beyond the placement, or encouraged to apply for future positions. Placements could be an effective recruitment strategy.

5.3.2.3 Students’ Backgrounds

The planning practitioners placed varying degrees of emphasis on the different kinds of backgrounds with which they thought it desirable the students should come to placement. Many spoke of the value of students having previous work experience, specifically in jobs either dealing with people (retail, restaurants) or in office environments (office decorum, filing systems, telephone skills). Such experience allowed the students to move directly towards practising and acquiring planning skills. In this case, pre-placement planning skills, while valued, were not seen as a pre-requisite to a successful work placement. Above all else, these supervisors were looking for keenness and enthusiasm – students who wanted to be there and learn. Limited previous work experience and limited knowledge of planning practices could be overcome.

Other supervisors thought that, at a university level, students should be expected to ‘know the questions to ask ... not necessarily have to know the answers’. Essential practical matters
ranged from a general understanding of the planning scheme and the application of legislation; to specifics such as interpreting land titles, a familiarity with the area – and possession of a driver’s licence. When selecting students, many gave consideration as to how they would fit in with the team. Communication skills came up frequently, as did students having the ability to relay information confidently with customers. Report and letter-writing competence was raised a number of times, with it being desirable for students to convey information in a concise and clear manner. A couple mentioned that over-confidence was a bad thing.

Expectations of students differed according to the timing of the work placement within the planning program. One group of practitioner responses focussed on skills and competencies that they felt could reasonably be expected of final year planning students commencing a work placement. These included:

1. **Basic project management skills:** The ability to organise tasks effectively (plan and complete tasks to schedules based on time, resources and budgets), to be able to delegate and ask questions as necessary, to be able to come up with and stick to realistic timeframes for work, to be able to think strategically about what needs to happen to complete a project or task;

2. **Presentation and professionalism:** Punctuality, interpersonal skills, ability to dress appropriately, and so on;

3. **Development assessment skills:** Most interviewees agreed that while planners think they can “change the world” (and have had some exposure to strategic planning issues), not many understand the “pointy” end of planning: language, procedures, legislation, etc.;

4. **Data analysis and numeracy skills:** Many practitioners had found the students to be lacking in quantitative data interpretation skills;

5. **Moving from description to analysis and inference:** Students generally could describe things, but analysis and inference was seen to be disappointing at times;

6. **Ability to ask critical questions:** Interviewees raised aspects such as being able to understand how different types of enquiry yield different types of data, relationships between data, information and knowledge, policy implications of particular practices, and so on;

7. **Exposure to working in interdisciplinary teams:** Ability to look beyond boundaries of time, space, jurisdiction, discipline, and the like, and understand flow-on effects; some exposure to working in teams and group dynamics; and

8. **Work-relevant written and spoken communication skills:** Some interviewees felt there was an over-emphasis on building these skills in an academic context that did not always easily translate to the workplace setting.
5.3.2.4 Selection into Placement through Interviews and/or Matching

Whilst not a prominent point of discussion, a few who mentioned it believed that pre-placement competitive interviews allowed a better matching of student to supervisor and, thus, the potential for a more productive personal and professional relationship. Others of this view spoke of the comparison with treating students like regular employees, and in measuring desired attributes such as general competence and enthusiasm as might be done in regular performance appraisal. However, the point was made that, in the case of smaller or less well resourced councils, for example, competitive interviewing was not really a possibility.

At a more general level, many interviewees felt that the placement program was an investment in a student's career development. Many were frustrated when the “match” between student and workplace was not helpful to the student’s career (i.e. poor skills or interests match, or abilities did not match the calibre of work). Consequently, the suggestion arose that if the students had been encouraged from the outset of their degree to develop a clear sense of “where they fitted” in the discipline, they would be in a better position to select an appropriate work placement. Suggestions made to assist this included more guest lectures (with personal stories of career development); an ongoing, staff-led “check-in” with students regarding their professional and personal development; a portfolio of skills regularly updated; or self-assessment of skill-building goals by students.

5.3.2.5 University Guidance

When speaking of the placements, many of the planning practitioners did so without reference to the wider degree program. Many were only vaguely aware of what the declared purposes of placements were. They had not had time to read what university-provided material was available. The students themselves, they said, were not always forthcoming. This was not necessarily a major hindrance to desirable learning in a work placement setting as many supervisors over the years had developed their own notions of what was needed to successfully supervise a work placement student. In some instances, they had received no advice from the universities to the contrary. Indeed a few resented a lack of university feedback on the success or otherwise of their supervisory efforts. One or two interpreted this as indicative of an apparent lack of interest in planning practice by universities.

The practitioners worked intuitively on the path they perceived the placement should take. A lot were guided by their own personal experiences as student. Some had developed in-house pre-planning processes that were put in action before the student arrived. Most indicated that they would welcome more guidance from the university. Particular issues concerned a desire
to know where the student was at in their curriculum, what skills the work placement should be looking at to work on with the student, what should be the outcome of the placement. A few practitioners, however, stated that an informal flexible approach suited their organisation better.

For the planning practitioners, it was often unclear what each student really wanted to achieve – and they sometimes wondered if the students themselves were any the wiser. This in turn made it harder to structure a work placement experience. The majority of these workplace supervisors advocated joint cooperation between the university, the work placement and the student in determining learning objectives. They wanted clear and straightforward advice and direction from the university.

5.3.2.6 Planning Practitioners Providing Student Supervision

The practitioners were highly conscious that their time to supervise students was always short given the pressure of work, the turnover of staff, and the general labour shortage in the profession. Many senior planners were instrumental in offering the placement but were especially aware of their lack of time to supervise. They spoke of how they delegated their responsibilities to others who were willing to assist. Some spoke of buddy systems or team efforts. One specifically spoke about how in an open plan office everyone was always half-conscious of the planning student in their midst and because of the group's honed interaction, knew when and who was to respond to the student's queries. The majority interviewed seemed to enjoy supervising and were keen to supervise in future years. They did often find it challenging to draw up work plans for the student without guidance from the university and were sensitive to how this impinged upon their time. In the smaller councils in particular, when staff numbers were low, supervision put considerable stress on the everyday workload.

Given the time and resource constraints involved, this desire to supervise was investigated. The general answer was: student supervision is not a cost but, rather, an investment, benefiting both the planning agency and the profession. Several expressed their pleasure in having a young questioning person in the office and how this encouraged mutual learning. Beyond the personal satisfaction in having an inquisitive student in the office, many spoke of their professional responsibilities to renew their ranks and all spoke of their hope to recruit new staff, the tight labour market being sometimes the unspoken motivation. A few spoke explicitly of a dearth of planners with two to five years experience in the city area, and in-house training through work placement being a practical and successful response to this.
In the same city area, many planning agencies were now budgeting to take a work placement student on an annual basis. Most consultancies work using time sheets: every minute of work being tied to specific clients. In the case of those consultants interviewed, the student’s time was not allotted to a particular client but absorbed in overhead costs. The previous reluctance of many consultants to take on work placement students because of the perceived costs involved had now been overcome.

One group of interviewees saw themselves as born supervisors, or if not naturals, had refined their skills. They tended to view the ability to supervise as an innate quality. Others believed that supervision could be learnt, or perhaps was more a combination of training coupled with life experiences. Many spoke of the formative nature of their own work placement experience. Those who had a bad placement experience were determined that any student they supervised did not repeat theirs. For the managers who delegated mentoring/supervision tasks to other colleagues, one in particular spoke of also having to mentor the supervisor. This was a positive tribute to the general consensus that students brought “freshness” to the organisation, and acted as a “mirror” to reflect their work practices.

A common approach to supervision was to coach students along in a positive manner, and also to get them thinking and acting on initiative in finding answers to questions and achieving “planning outcomes”. Supervisors spoke of their responsibility to encourage and nurture students and to build their self-confidence. Critical feedback had to be carefully considered and couched in as positive a manner as possible. Related to this was the matter of a student’s sense of personal and professional direction, and so motivation. Some students were uncertain and some lacked a sense of self-knowledge. Some did not know how to interact with other work colleagues and did not know what questions to ask. For many supervisors, this kind of uncertainty and diffidence on the part of students had considerable implications for the way they thought about assessment.

Amongst one cohort of interviewees, there was general support for half day supervisory training – not that they didn’t already have adequate supervisory skills; but more to put a focus on the student. It was suggested that this might even be done in some form of concise document of “hints and tips”.

5.3.2.7 Students Working on Real Tasks
Generally during the first days of a placement, a supervisor set a student tasks to gauge their capabilities and then adjusted the work given. Expected roles, responsibilities and desired
outcomes were normally relayed at the beginning. Students were given real planning tasks to do rather than support administration duties. This happened in particular in local government, reflecting the acute the labour shortage – and clearly, the more stretched the workplace, the more likely it was students would be expected to get on with tasks and perform as a “worker” as much as a “learner”. Nevertheless, most supervisors were not overly concerned with how “advanced” their student was, rather they were concerned at providing work suitable to the student’s stage of development and working up from there, depending on the student’s progress. Several spoke of setting firm boundaries. Giving students “real work” could in some instances mean over-enthusiastic students inadvertently caused ructions and both they and the organisation needed protecting. Contrariwise, one supervisor lamented the ‘barriers to learning’ that can exist in work placements by underestimating the ability of the student.

This careful attention to sensible and appropriate work allocation meant time commitments on the part of the supervisor to check a student’s work. Such a commitment was underpinned by supervisors’ personal, professional and commercial motivations. Some supervisors did speak about being at times over-stretched and unable to give sufficient attention to a student’s work, but the majority conveyed that they built this commitment into their work day and provided support, either directly or indirectly, through a more junior planner, when needed.

Real tasks exposed students to the messiness of planning. Thus some supervisors consciously encouraged students to experience “fire fighting” as a normal part of planning. Practitioners commented on how the emotion that planning can generate is something that cannot be experienced in a classroom. For a significant number of supervisors, people skills, rather than planning skills per se, were seen to be at the heart of the work placement learning experience. Telephone and counter skills were used as examples of core people skills and ones supervisors encouraged students to master while in a supportive work placement setting. Again, it seemed such learning opportunities were not available in the classroom. From a practical point of view, supervisors acknowledged that whilst there is a desire to allow students to experience the many dimensions of planning, at an organisational level this can prove difficult. For instance, when students were there mostly part-time, a whole file could not be handed over as students were often not present to keep up the correspondence with clients on a regular basis.

Work placements also gave students a new perspective on property developers. It provided an opportunity to meet them and make their own judgement on their motivations and competencies. Likewise, supervisors stated work placements enabled students to see how planners do not work independently but more in partnership with related professions. Implied
here was the wealth of experience about how planning actually operates that students can take back to the classroom for further discussion.

The work placement, for the planning practitioners, was very much about exposing students to the “realities” of practice. It provided a special opportunity in this respect. Ideally, it also included guided reflection on the student’s own practice, as they confronted ethical dilemmas, technical dilemmas, self-assessment, and so on. Amongst the interviewees, there were those who had a clear view about the importance of students learning to become reflexive practitioners. The work placement afforded special opportunities for students to develop in their reflexivity as they processed ‘real world’ experiences. This would need to include an appreciation that the contemporary workplace was not always the most conducive place for reflexive practice.

At the same time, such exposure to “real practice”, for many practitioners, was best complemented by bringing “real planning” into the university. This might be done through guest lectures, for example, where students needed to hear personal stories and career trajectories of planning professionals and needed to be exposed to other disciplines they would be working with. They also saw classrooms as a place for the use of role-playing and linking “real-life” projects to current issues; for actively building core competencies identified earlier; and for encouraging active reflection on practice.

5.3.2.8 Standards and Assessment
The interpretation of supervisors’ responses to questions related to standards and assessment rests at the heart of this project. At one level, there is evidence that there was limited understanding of what these terms meant and avoidance of a direct answer to the questions asked, despite definitions being given in writing and repeated in the introduction to the interview. Planning practitioners, after all, are not “educators” and not employed by a university that has responsibilities for academic standards and student assessment. Indeed, one interviewee, with an education background, raised the point that planning supervisors are not in tune with educationally based assessment. Yet, in their own way, the practitioners were aware of the salience of these questions and were quite capable of engaging with them.

There is clear evidence from several interviews that many supervisors thought formal or structured assessment should be downplayed. ‘Less assessment and more monitoring’, ‘more flexible assessment’, and ‘we should talk through what had been accomplished before writing a review’, were common responses. Many things learnt in a planning office cannot be measured or ticked off. Supervisors were concerned more about the student, their motivations
and what might be their best ways of learning. These learning styles varied, and supervisors needed to adapt, rather than impose either their own, the university’s or the profession’s standards. Learning, some supervisors explicitly said, others implicitly, should be an enjoyable process allowing the student the time and space to clarify their own motives, so they can grow in purpose and in self-confidence. These were pre-requisites to achieving high standards. Interestingly, the fact the students were being paid to do a job of work did not appear to cloud supervisors’ view that this was the central purpose of work experience. Put another way, the tight labour market and the high turnover of young planners, indicates this supportive approach to training young planners is pragmatic, not romantic.

For many, assessment was understood primarily as “feedback”. Almost all supervisors agreed that the idea of reflection on practice was important, but there was disagreement as to best means of achieving this. Student input into self-assessment was also a popular concept. Assessment was deemed to be generally a blend between what they referred to as formal and informal. Thinking this through, some supervisors posed a dilemma that if assessment is all informal there is no real challenge, and if it is overtly formal, it will be too driven by structure and missing the point of what the placement should be about – gaining confidence. Informal assessment and standards played an important role in assessing the student’s motivation, communication, skills, and willingness to accept feedback. If informal standards were to be fed into the formal process of assessment, this would have to be clear at the start for the student.

There were varying opinions on the matter of issuing standards. Some saw it to be too arbitrary, especially as students were all different and supervisors all had differing standards. Assessment and standards, it was felt, would have to be broad enough to encompass many personality types. A few supervisors, however, saw standard setting, if done the right way with the input of all involved and subject to review, to be very useful to the organisation. Many saw standards to be compatible with already established organisational codes and performance review practices. In this sense, they were almost taken for granted. Here, a few assumed that everybody in their office was at an acceptable standard as a given, since they were performing in accordance with the values, rules and expectations of the organisation and it was the manager or supervisor’s role to ensure everybody complied with this.

Generally, greater guidance from the university about assessment practice was desired, and also from the student in seeking which skills and tasks they thought needed monitoring and evaluation. The majority of supervisors worked from an assumption that there should be flexible goals and objectives for each student placement. This logically led them to a highly personalised approach to assessment and standards. Building on something like a skills
portfolio, or a clearly-articulated vision of a career trajectory, a student might then sit down with academic staff and/or their workplace supervisor and develop some personal goals and aspirations which their performance could be assessed against. One model put forward was that used by a particular city council, where there were five or six set competencies each worker needed to achieve, but other, personal goals could also be added. Generally, the aim was to encourage student ownership over the goals, have clearer expectations for the supervisor, and more open communication between the university, the workplace and the student.

Many supervisors thought a balance could be struck between flexibility and structure by having a work plan originating at the university and reworked between the student and supervisor in the workplace. The notion of a work plan of desired learning outcomes, assessment criteria and levels of standards appealed to many supervisors. They saw it as providing the basis of a matrix in which certain planning skills to be acquired or further developed could be set against levels of competency reached, with written comments – agreed to after discussion between student and supervisor – put into appropriate boxes in the matrix. Such comments would be suggestive of how further improvements could be made, rather than being the basis of a mark.

Again, for many supervisors, these considerations pointed to the need for the work placement to be better situated with the whole degree program. From this perspective, students needed to have an ongoing, building sense of practice and where they might fit in it through the duration of their degree – linking their developing capabilities and work interests with different kinds of practice-based learning throughout their studies.

The supervisors shared a common view in which they were seeking an approach that ensured students wanted to “be there”; that the capabilities being developed on work placement were personally, professionally and work-relevant; and an approach that reduced the amount of formal assessment that occurred at the discretion of only academic staff. In that sense, they wanted more active engagement of workplace supervisors in the student’s assessment and performance.

5.3.2.9 Other challenges
Some interviewees emphasised the hitherto overlooked role of other professional bodies in building links between universities, student bodies and the workplace. Further investigation into the role of PIA and other social, political, environmental, professional forums in exposing students to practice was flagged, particularly given the time and resource constraints acting
upon academic staff. Supervisors of this view sometimes suggested these links could become more formalised.

The student experience on work placements, according to many supervisors, was going to be greatly affected by the state of the job market. Some thought the workplace was accepting lower standards of work from its employees, and by implication students – as a consequence of skills shortages and the pace of work. The investment made by organisations and individual practitioners in student placements was also likely to vary according to their necessity as a recruitment strategy. Meanwhile, the shortage of planning staff could result in a lack of mentors for early career planners, arguably placing more responsibility on the university and structured work placements.

Some practitioners commented on what they termed ‘generational shifts’ in students. They were referring to a need to recognise the changing learning styles of students on placement, and their general orientation to work. If students did indeed approach learning differently, there was a challenge for workplace supervisors in adapting to this – and for universities to be responsive in their relationships with workplaces.

For many supervisors, the relationship of the university to the workplace was a crucial feature in almost every aspect of the student experience. In their view, neither party was sufficiently proactive in building these highly valued relationships. Though for some, it would always be the less formal and more personal relationships that would remain the most fruitful.

5.3.3 Reflections on Planning Practitioner Interviews
As part of the process of making sense of the practitioner interviews, three of the key interviewers and analysts each took time to step back from the pages of transcripts and the findings presented above, and further review what struck them as the most potent messages to emerge. The review, reflecting on the perspectives of the practitioner interviewees, has drawn particular attention to the following.

Planning practitioners acting as workplace student supervisors generally saw as a pressing priority the need to support sometimes unsure young people to gain confidence and a basic command of planning tasks and office routines, encouraging them to work at their own pace slowly or quickly as the case might be. They did not want to be burdened by overly formal or quantitative standards and criteria. They would appreciate, however, some guidance from the universities on how to make better and more comparable assessments. A negotiated
placement work plan promises to be a useful vehicle for achieving greater clarity of purpose whilst retaining flexibility.

The universities need to develop have a clear sense as to what sort(s) of graduates they wish to produce, necessarily a collaborative process with the workplace and other organisations such as PIA. The work placement program and related assessment should be relevant to these goals. Students, viewing career as a whole-of-life issue, need to be able to articulate by the time they embark on a work placement, where they see themselves going and take due ownership for their learning. To do this, they will require ongoing exposure to practice throughout the degree program and an ongoing development plan from the first year. Their potential for independent learning and critical reflectivity would need to be nurtured from the outset. University-based learning following the work placement would need to build on that experience and deepen reflexive capabilities. Effective communication and strong working relationships between universities, employers, students and PIA would underpin such developments.

5.4 Student Focus Groups

5.4.1 Description of Student Focus Groups
Focus groups with students who have participated in practice education courses at two of the collaborating universities were undertaken to establish:

- What students believe have worked well, and what could have been improved, in their planning education and assessment;
- For students who have participated in practice education courses, how they view these courses and their experiences in comparison to university-based courses they have taken; and
- How students believe their practice capabilities are assessed, or not, within their planning education and the kinds of standards they understand to be involved.

Four focus groups with a total of 34 third-year planning students were undertaken. Table 5.2 shows the number of students who participated in the focus groups at the two collaborating universities. The first student focus group was also a trial to ensure that future focus groups would run effectively.
**Table 5.2: Number of Students in Focus Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Uni A</th>
<th>Uni B</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>7 participants</td>
<td></td>
<td>October 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>3 participants</td>
<td></td>
<td>November 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>14 participants</td>
<td></td>
<td>June 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>10 participants</td>
<td></td>
<td>July 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21 participants</td>
<td>13 participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviews were undertaken using a semi-structured interview process. There was some difference in the questions asked in each focus group (see Appendix 7 for a sample list of questions asked). The length of focus groups ranged from just over 40 minutes up to 90 minutes.

The role of the moderator of each focus group was to ask questions, keep track of time, and make sure that relevant and interesting issues were discussed. The idea was that the moderator repeated a question if need be, but apart from that, contribute as little as possible. The focus groups were audio recorded and later transcribed to capture the richness and diversity of the responses.

5.4.2 Key Strands

A number of strands emerged from the student focus groups. Broadly these include:

- There is general appreciation from students about the value of experiencing practical learning. Specifically, student views on the benefits of planning practice education are that it:
  - Offers a chance to experience the realities of planning;
  - Gives awareness of workplace culture and expectations;
  - Assists in helping put theory into practice;
  - Gives a greater understanding of the expectations of employers;
  - Helps clarify or confirm career options and aspirations;
  - Provides networking opportunities;
  - Assists in identifying skills that need further development; and
  - Builds confidence.

- Students want educational assessment to reflect what they do in the workplace.

- As a result of the work practice, many of the students are continuing to work at the same workplace while balancing studies with planning work.

- There are important differences between the roles of ‘work supervisor’ and ‘mentor’ that need to be recognised.

- What employers do, and how they do it, in the work placement needs more rigour.
Students need to develop higher order thinking, and some are questioning the extent to which planning education delivers that for them.

There is a risk that work experience can result in a narrow, utilitarian approach to planning.

Students appreciate the value of reflection with classroom colleagues.

5.4.2.1 There is general appreciation from students about the value of experiencing practical learning

There is an understanding from the students about the value and benefits of planning practice education. Most students in the focus groups were positive about their experiences with work placement. The students believed that they gained better knowledge of how planning is implemented and felt they experienced the realities of planning by getting practical experience.

Some students thought that work placement resulted in greater awareness of workplace culture and expectations, in particular workplace protocols. For a few students, work placement was a grounding experience as they felt unprepared for a desk-bound job where most of their time was spent sitting in front of a computer rather than in the field or in meetings.

Some students commented that work placement resulted in a greater understanding of the expectations of employers, in particular when it came to report writing and standards. The demands and levels of responsibility placed on the students varied depending on workplace pressures and workloads. For a small number of students, there appeared to be some cases of insufficient support, particularly around high workplace pressures. In contrast, the lack of challenge was a concern for a few students when monotonous duties were assigned.

Students were generally enthusiastic about the networking opportunities available in the workplace and enjoyed meeting new people and making valuable contacts. They appreciated the support of experienced workplace colleagues. Some said they valued the opportunity to talk through issues with planners with greater workplace experience but in a similar age bracket. Networking with peers seemed to be influential, for example, one student said:

[It] seemed like everyone there and even the people that had been there [in the workplace] for a year or two and had been previously in placement, all knew that as soon as you get there your university knowledge does not relate to working in a planning workplace …

Many students believed that the work placement was confidence building. For some an increase in confidence came from dealing with various stakeholders in planning process such as work colleagues, decision makers, lawyers and developers. Others felt that confidence grew with the confirmation that they were able to apply concepts and do ‘real life’ planning tasks in contrast to the simulation or mock activities in the classroom. When students were
asked to elaborate on the idea of increasing self-confidence as a result of the work placement, some students felt this was because they were forced to become more confident. For example, one student said:

At uni because you do a lot of group work you can tend to just, you can hide in the shadows a bit more … just to stand back in the shadows and let everyone push and pull you along … Whereas when you do your practicum you have to be up there and stand alone and it forces you to become confident. It sort of makes or breaks you really …

Another student said:

It was initially (nerve wracking) for me but after a while you start becoming more confident. There were a few mornings I’d be sitting in the car park and wondering what am I doing this for? But after a while it did become a lot easier.

A small number of students spoke about the fluctuations in their levels of confidence over the duration of the work placement. For example, one student commented:

You question yourself about some things but you’re learning. Of course you’re going to feel like confident one day, ‘Yep, I’ve got the hang of this’ and then the next day you’re like ‘Maybe I don’t have the hang of this’. But it’s a big part of the learning process.

Some students believed that work placement assisted them in identifying skills that need development. Skills highlighted by the students in the focus groups included project management, report writing and verbal communication. Students felt this recognition came about due to dealings with various stakeholders in the planning process and an understanding of the expectations and required standards.

Students generally felt that work practice helped clarify or confirm their career options and aspirations. For many, work practice validated their choice of career path but others were unsure. A few were disappointed because they expected to learn more about planning than they actually did. A small number of other students felt disillusioned with the realities of planning; in particular, their experiences with the machinations of the political process and government administration.

Work placement clearly helped most students to develop their own opinions and understandings of planning. For some, but not all, it also assisted in helping to put theory into practice. For example one student said:

Everything was an eye opener to show the large gaps that there are between the planning education and planning practice because there’s quite a number of them. Obviously education is more based around theory, whereas the theory that you’re taught at uni is quite different to what you’re actually practicing in the workplace so it was good to try and work out what the similarities are but also gain an understanding of the differences.

For others, the link between theory and practice was not as clear and they did not see the relevance of their formal academic grounding. Some students were openly antagonistic about
the structure and content of their university education and felt that university knowledge does not relate to working in a planning office.

5.4.2.2 Students want educational assessment to reflect what they do in the workplace
The students in the focus groups demonstrated strong opinions about assessment and showed that they give assessment a lot of thought. Students want assessment to reflect what they do in the work placement. For some students the weighting of assessment given for tasks on the work placement was too low when compared to work done in the rest of the course/unit. For example one student said:

You know if it [the work placement] is only 10% then it kind of doesn’t matter what you do at work, it matters how well you do the readings and the writings for those assessments.

Another student said:

I was quite angry … I understand that there are problems that you can’t get marked on your work placement. But there must be some common middle ground though. Like we’re out there working three days a week but we’re getting marked on assignments. … It is an interesting exercise but it is just that we’re getting marked on that when considering what you might be doing now during your work placement.

For others, their concerns about assessment related to how rigorous the process was with some feeling their supervisors didn’t give it much thought. Others were uncertain about which workplace colleagues (supervisor, mentor, manager or a combination) graded their performance. A few also felt that working part time meant that they missed opportunities to follow through on projects and this resulted in lower grades.

When the moderator of one focus group explained that it can difficult to assess students out in the workplace, some students were unconvinced. For instance, one student responded with:

[But] a lot of other people in different courses like teachers have to be assessed out in the classroom. You can’t just send someone out, ‘Alright, here, start teaching’ and that’s it and not have anyone comment on how you’re actually teaching. It is the same with this.

5.4.2.3 As a result of the work practice, many of the students are continuing to work at the same workplace while balancing studies with planning work
Many of the students in the focus groups revealed that, despite finishing work placement, they were continuing to work at the same workplace. In one focus group, for example, this was the case for six of the seven students. For students it can be difficult to balance the demands of university studies with paid work in a planning office. Some students felt that they were working too much. One reason given was that

I think is only natural [working too much] given that what you get out of work placement far exceeds what you actually get out of classes. That could be a reflection on the quality of teaching, the content, all of the above.
While there might be an issue in balancing studies with planning work, not all students saw this as an institutional problem. The small number of students that were vocal about this issue felt that it is “up to the individual” to decide whether they wanted to earn money and worry about graduating later.

5.4.2.4 There are important differences between the roles of ‘co-ordinator’, ‘work supervisor’ and ‘mentor’ that need to be recognised

Students in the focus groups mentioned the different levels of supervision that occurred during the work placement. Some supervisors were more ‘hands on’ than others. Sometimes the students were supervised by a senior leader or department manager. In most cases, however, it seems the manager played the role of co-ordinator and delegated the task of supervision to a team leader or less experienced planner. Sometimes the role of supervision was done by multiple people. In other cases, students were allocated a supervisor and also a mentor. In a few cases the supervisor had less than two years experience as a working planner.

Given the diversity of work places these variations can be expected. At times, however, some of the students were unsure about who they could go to when seeking assistance. Some students were also worried about their formal assessment and who would be doing the assessment. Some felt there was an issue with reliable assessment because in some cases the co-ordinator or manager wrote the student report despite delegating the task of supervision.

5.4.2.5 What employers do, and how they do it, in the work placement needs more rigour

What employers do in the work placement needs more rigour, particularly with the issues of assessment, quality control, appropriate dispute resolution mechanisms, and the tasks students undertake in the workplace. As mentioned previously, some students in the focus groups were concerned about how rigorous the assessment process was and felt their supervisors didn’t give it much thought.

A few students also made mention of disputes that occurred on work placement and a lack of communication with work management. A small number of students saw the work placement in a negative light due to mundane and unchallenging work. As a result, students generally felt that university administrators and course coordinators should have been involved in resolving any disputes or ensuring quality control.

When the moderator of one focus group suggested that increasing quality control could result in extra paperwork for the university and workplace supervisor, some students were
unconvinced. The general response from the students was that by agreeing to take on a student, host work places need to be accountable.

5.4.2.6 Students need to develop higher order thinking and some are questioning the extent to which planning practice education delivers that for them

Students need to develop higher order thinking and some are questioning the extent to which planning practice education delivers that for them. While most students in the focus groups were positive about work placement, a small number of students were concerned that working in a planning office prior to graduation could restrict the development of critical thinking skills. They felt this could occur if the students where doing mundane and unchallenging work or in an attempt to fit in, applying an uncritical view of the planning system. In general, it was mature age students in the focus groups who were more questioning about the extent to which work practice delivers higher order thinking for them. For example, when asked whether work placement should be kept on the curriculum one student said:

I’m in two minds. Like we can go to university and learn statutory processes and that would be great or I would probably prefer to have the course content revolve more around critical thinking, academic, strategic stuff like that. They’ve kind of tried to do both and to me it’s just not working and when you end up in work and you go well I haven’t learned a thing that’s going to help me at work.

5.4.2.7 There is a risk that work experience can result in a narrow, utilitarian approach to planning

A small number of students questioned work practice and worried about the potential for work experience to result in a utilitarian approach to planning. When asked, most students felt that work placement should be kept on the curriculum but some qualified this with concerns that it has the potential to narrow student focus. In general, it was mature age students in the focus groups who were more questioning about the value of work practice.

This concern about work practice, while only raised by a small number of students, seems valid. With most students overwhelmingly supporting work practice there is a danger that students believe that what occurred on the placement is the be all and end all of planning. For example one student said:

[You realise that after two years of uni, you’ve really learnt bugger all to do with the actual job.

Another student response was:

[You learn] just the whole experience of planning, understanding what really gets done now because at uni you’re just going through the theory. There’s only so much you can learn and actually getting into the job you pick up what you do, how you do it. Just the whole experience of planning…

5.4.2.8 Students appreciate the value of reflection with colleagues in the university classroom

Most students appreciate being able to return to the university classroom and reflect about their work practice experiences with colleagues. Some students in the focus groups spoke
about their feelings of anxiety when reflecting on the different demands placed on their capabilities and the professional and personal issues that they experienced while on placement. When they returned to the classroom, some of these students were surprised (but relieved) to learn that their classmates had experienced similar issues in the workplace. Through this, they were able to gauge their own experiences. A few students felt that this reflection with classroom colleagues was crucial because, at times, they were unable to rebound ideas off employees in the office. For some students this occurred when deadlines were looming and other employees were under stress and unable to help.

5.4.3 Discussion of Student Focus Groups

The four focus groups stimulated informative conversation and the student reflections provide a valuable insight into their expectations, perceptions and understandings of work practice.

Practice education can be a way for students to evaluate practically the theoretical foundations of their early years of study. Some of the student responses showed high level thinking and questioning about planning education and, in particular, practice education. For many others, however, there was not a strong feeling that theoretical concepts translate into practice. It could be that the students were in fact drawing on theoretical concepts in a subconscious, rather than conscious, manner. How the students perceive the relevance of their academic grounding could also reflect the level of maturity and experience of the focus group participants. The focus groups did consist of undergraduate students so it is likely that they are at a different developmental stage relative to postgraduate students or more experienced planners.

Another issue is that many of the students continued to work at the same workplace following work practice. This is understandable because, in doing this, students are learning about planning, gaining practical experience and working in their chosen career path/profession. For some students, however, it can be difficult to balance studies with planning work. If students neglect their students the opportunities for classroom based post-work reflection are reduced.

In considering assessment, students had important things to say. Some voiced strong opinions while others showed concern and worry about assessment in the work place. For some, the specifics of assessment are a mystery. Students are rational actors and some want educational assessment to reflect what they do in the workplace. Related to this, the differences between the roles of co-ordinator, work supervisor and mentor need to be recognised along with the potential affect that this can have on the students. Also, what employers do in the work placement needs more rigour.
5.5 Summary of Empirical Inquiry

These findings from the focus groups show the important role that students play in this project. At the same time, the views of students need to be weighed up with the opinions, observations and experiences of the other stakeholders involved in work placement; in particular, practitioners, academics and members of the professional association. Whilst enhancing the quality of the student experience is a common and over-riding goal, workplace learning relies on the collaboration of all parties. Host organisations are not educational institutions and the insights of practitioners are vital in developing arrangements that effectively embed learning processes into organisational settings shaped by other missions, strategic objectives and ethical traditions. Furthermore, work practice is not synonymous with professional practice. Professional activity within organisations is a complex blend of professionally and organisationally derived languages, behaviours and values. The professional accrediting body plays a significant role in defining professional identity for both host organisations and educational institutions. It is not surprising, then, that the agendas and interests of the stakeholders in work placement can be expected to both align and conflict.

Hearing from the stakeholders underlines the value that they all give to work placement. There appears to be a strong consensus that it provides a rich and special form of learning of relevance to the personal and professional development of students. However, getting it right and making it work is a different story. For some planning academics, the changing profile of students, of the local contexts of planning practice and the lack of resources for educational programs is prompting serious consideration of other ways of achieving the desired outcomes of workplace learning. Yet, there remains a broad impetus towards the provision of work integrated learning in situated, “real world” contexts. Many planning practitioners are willing to invest time into supporting work placement. Their readiness to do so, and the organisational permission they have to do so, is very reliant on individual motivations but arguably even more reliant on external factors such as the status of the local and national labour markets in planning.

There seems to be a shared view amongst the stakeholders about the kinds of learning they consider important for a successful work placement experience. Somewhat unlike classroom based activity, the work placement is built very much around the individual student. It is that person’s opportunity to make use of the tasks, settings and people they encounter, to progress
their understandings and capabilities. And each person starts from their own unique place. Through the work placement, the student can “grow” – and, most tellingly for the stakeholders, they can grow in confidence. This is a very suggestive idea since the confidence speaks to both personal and professional dimensions and capabilities. It is evocative of the “nurturing” character that stakeholders bestow on work placement. There is also an unpredictable element to it. The most salient learning moments can come from the most surprising and unplanned of experiences – and produce memorable turning points in that person’s “journey”.

Infusing this sense of work placement with assessment and standards can seem incongruous. Assessment might be taken to stifle growth. Standards might seem to undermine the individuality of the placement experience and achievements. Planning academics tended to abstract assessment and standards from the immediacy of the work placement – constructing assignments that sit alongside or “draw upon” the experience but remain apart from it. Workplace supervisors interpreted the substantive assessment they did in terms of the day to day “feedback” provided to students. They looked for the ways students developed over the duration of the placement, and how effectively they turned experiences into learning. Planning students were not unaware of the discontinuities. Many spoke of the gap between the way they were assessed on work placement and the manner of their learning on work placement. Many were simply unclear of the expectations. Others were somewhat confused, or at times angry, that the achievements they valued – and thought were the point of the placement – were often not captured in the assessment practices. The students were also quick to realise discrepancies in the standards being applied. For some, there was a sense of not knowing what they should be achieving, as far as the university and profession were concerned – perhaps unease that they should be attaining a standard of practice that was either ill-defined or obscured. At the end of the day, what were they on placement to learn?

If producing a work placement requires bringing together a varying set of agendas and interests across stakeholders, then it becomes a challenge to create a clear sense of purpose for all those involved. Yet, this is what was lacking for many students and planning practitioners. They did the work placement; they valued it; they got a lot out of it. But where did the work placement fit in the overall planning program? Was there a common focus for the work placement for all students in the program – what was the university hoping their students would gain and be able to demonstrate? What would happen following the work placement, at the university and for the student’s ongoing professional development? And if the goal was that students would learn to become reflexive, ethical and capable practitioners, what were the different contributions to be made by the university and workplace towards this? These are
questions that come to the fore when hearing what the stakeholders had to say. They will be pursued in the next chapter.
Chapter 6  Enhancing Assessment Practices and Academic Standards

6.1 Introduction

The project focuses on generating academic standards for practice education in programs of urban and regional planning. It has investigated the literature on this subject, reviewed professionally accredited planning programs, and undertaken an in-depth inquiry with stakeholders of three planning programs that provide structured work placement courses to students.

This chapter integrates the information produced by the project and shows how it can guide understandings of assessment practices and academic standards in practice education. It shows that the issues faced by planning programs are reflective of broader considerations for programs that seek to integrate a strong practice orientation into the student experience. The chapter shows how those understandings have implications for enhancing student workplace learning.

Running throughout the report, there is an understanding of academic standards in practice education as at once elusive and evocative. They are hard to pin down and yet they are a vital ingredient for the enhancement of quality learning. The project encourages a sophisticated appreciation of academic standards in the learning and teaching process. A simplistic and overly certain imposition of standards into the fluid and diverse contexts of planning practice education would, on the basis of this project’s insights, quickly flounder.

The project has adopted a generative approach to engaging with the question of assessment and standards in practice education. A generative approach emphasises the processes whereby assessment and standards are produced by a range of social actors who are party to the student learning activity. The project has sought through its empirical inquiries to appreciate the assumptions, meanings and experiences that those actors bring to the activity – and what they “do” to create assessment and standards in their dealings one with another.

A generative approach opens up opportunities also to engage with those involved to consider alternatives ways to “do” assessment and standards. It nudges their assumptions and meanings, canvassing other possibilities. It is, arguably, a reflexive process. And as such, it
aims to mirror the reflexive capability that is commonly valued as an outcome in graduates of planning practice education.

**6.2 Academic Standards and Practice Education**

In bringing together academic standards and practice education, the project team was immediately concerned with a series of conceptual questions that are the subject of contemporary debate in higher education. These are reviewed briefly now as a way of conveying the orientation within the project towards framing and understanding the issues.

Student workplace learning is a major form of practice education. But it has become apparent that distinctions drawn between *workplace learning* and *work experience* are crucial, and are used to considerable effect. Workplace learning is generally held to go beyond workplace experience. Gaining experience of the workplace might well be seen as valuable – and workplace learning is clearly an experiential way of learning. But it makes a big difference to the place and relevance of academic standards whether workplace activity undertaken by a student is seen within the study program to constitute simply a valuable experience to be had or whether the expectation is that the experience be translated into valuable learning. Interestingly, current federal administrative regulations reinforce this distinction by requiring that time spent in industry as part of a study program has to receive educational direction by the university if a student is to be charged fees for it (Commonwealth of Australia, 2004). Ultimately, a period of work experience that sits outside the educational logic of the study program renders the matter of academic standards somewhat irrelevant.

Yet the relation between workplace learning and work experience is further complicated. Increasingly, the problem gets to be the recognition that is given to students who may well have considerable work experience related to the study program. Planning academics have commented on the increasing number of students for whom this is the case. For some students, the work experience occurs as a result of job offers following their work placement. Others have taken up relevant work opportunities prior to placement. If this experience is to be credited, then the issue again turns on the extent to which that experience is judged to translate into learning that satisfies educational requirements. Practice education quickly bumps into the issue of recognition of experiential learning gained outside the formal program of study. And once that happens, academic standards come back into consideration.

Within the focus of the project, there are some fundamental assumptions at stake. The project has deliberately sought to address the relation between *academic* standards and *practice*
education. On the one hand, we might ask what understanding we need to have of “practice” if we are to align it with a notion of “academic” standards. The project’s inquiries substantiate the literature on this subject to the extent that the answer commonly lies in drawing out dimensions of practice that relate to knowledge and theory. This leads academics to visit epistemologies of practice, particularly those that construe practice as the enactment of knowledge. Making practice “academic” is achieved through legitimating different ways of knowing. “Know how”, for example, or “theory-in-action” are presented as academically valid forms of knowledge. Much emphasis is given to the exercise variously of reflection, reflexivity and critical reflection in realising these alternative forms of knowledge that reside within practice and that situate experience as a source of practice learning.

On the other hand, we can interrogate our understanding of “academic” and ask what that has to do with “practice”. In some respects, this is more troublesome. Guardians of the liberal academic terrain may well see a threat in attempts to forge too close a connection between “knowing” and “doing” – especially if that “doing” is driven by agendas of those outside the university, employers for example. Yet it would be a very narrow view of academia, attuned wholly to cultivation of the mind, which gave no place to preparing students for moral and productive life beyond the hallowed walls. The stakeholders to practice education – academics, practitioners, students – were all conscious of this issue. They had views on the respective contributions of the university and the workplace to student learning, to the professions, and to the more general “public good”. They understood the potentially conflicted nature of the matter, and the possibilities for privileging one domain over another. Students were very much aware of the debated oppositions between training and education, conformity and criticality, real world and ivory tower.

Explorations of practice beg the question: “practising” what? Through the project, planning practice education can be seen to be invested with at least three inter-related kinds of practice: work practice; professional practice; and what might be termed citizenship practice. These are inter-related but not identical kinds of practice. Work practice is associated with workplace literacy – those abilities which enable people to perform in a workplace, including employability skills. Professional practice concerns the principles, processes and customs of an occupational grouping. The relation between work practice and professional practice is not straightforward. From the literature and the project’s inquiries, it is clear that much learning takes place around this and the dilemmas of identity and action in being both an “employee” and a “professional”. Some of those dilemmas are ethical ones – and the moral dimensions of practice point us to the third kind of practice which exists within and beyond the workplace and professional grouping. This has to do “citizenship”. Educating for planning practice includes
drawing upon frames of reference through which students learn to exercise accountabilities that transcend organisations and occupations and speak to broader social values and ethical practices. The boundaries between practice education and “work integrated learning” become somewhat fuzzy at this point – educating for practice and educating for work clearly overlap but have significantly different connotations.

Accepting for the time being that there is a way of understanding “academic standards” that embraces practice achievements – achievements in doing and being as well as thinking – another issue looms out of the project’s investigations. This rests more on the matter of standards. Put simply, the issue surfaced by the project is the extent to which these are standards of how well students can practice and/or standards of how well they learn to practice. All the stakeholder groups reflected this dual focus. It is more than a semantic nicety: it has to do with perceived purposes. It includes, for example, the role or otherwise of occupational or professional standards in setting performance benchmarks and of the academic award in “licensing” for practice; contrasted with a focus on the quality of a student’s engagement in the practice learning process. For the stakeholders of this project, academic standards are a vehicle for addressing both of these purposes – establishing some level of acceptable practice, but also very much representing a standard of engagement to be demonstrated by a student in applying themselves to the distinctive opportunities associated with workplace learning. Colloquially, accomplishment has related as much to the way the learning journey has been undertaken as the destinations reached.

Practice education, then, speaks to a rich combination of capabilities. Using the topical concept of “employability” to describe these could be misleading – certainly in the utilitarian sense in which it can be understood. Aligning practice with academic standards situates practice as a complex achievement embracing intellectual, moral and practical domains. Will academic standards be compromised or enriched by embracing practice achievements? Whilst this remains an important debate, the current trend appears to be very much one of finding accommodations between the two. The challenge addressed by the project, and of concern to the stakeholders, is to ensure that these accommodations are as enriching as possible.

6.3 Assessment Practices, Student Workplace Learning and Complexity

An important vehicle for enriching the accommodation between academic standards and practice education comes in the design of suitable assessment practices. The project looks in particular at student workplace learning, which highlights many important considerations. This
section outlines what have emerged as useful ideas in appreciating the complexities involved in designing suitable assessment.

In some respects, reconciling academic standards with workplace learning may seem fairly straightforward. Academics might set assignments that can be assessed in much the same way as any other piece of academic work: a case study; an organisational analysis; a practice evaluation; or a reflective essay. At one level, of course this resolves the dilemmas. One can assess from the comfort of the marking room the student’s display of analytic, critical and reflective capability. The application of pre-determined assessment criteria may help ensure consistency (at least according to the recently received wisdoms of good assessment practice), and grades can be moderated as others view the textual evidence. All this may seem unproblematic, but that depends on what it is one is aiming to assess – what it is that academic standards are standards of. Whilst the idea of situated learning is well accepted by many academics, can this be extended to an idea of situated assessment and standards?

These kinds of written assignments bring academic standards back into the purview of the university. They are extrinsic, existing apart from the workplace experience; and they can be transported readily into the university. They exist outside of the student who produces them – a “piece of work” that can be handed in (by the due date). They are evidence that the student has learned how to do the academic task. But if we are talking about authentic assessment, in the sense of assessment fitting to the learning environment, then maybe this solution is not altogether hitting the mark (Wiggins, 1998). It’s a solution that reinforces an established understanding of academic standards derived from university-based learning activities. It preserves a sense of the academic that is removed from the student experience in the workplace. Perhaps that is inevitable, and not altogether undesirable. If the learning objective is for students to stand aside from the workplace experience and show they can analyse, critique and reflect from the university vantage point upon what they found in the world of work, then perhaps this is a valid way to do it. Let professional standards take care of the capabilities students display in the workplace, and preserve academic standards in the university domain.

But, we can ask, is it possible to have a sense of academic standards not quite so removed from the immediacy of workplace learning? Are there approaches to academic standards and assessment practices that do not reinforce the separation between what is inside and outside the university domain? There are other assessment literatures that help address this issue.
The achievement of complex (or divergent or emergent) learning outcomes has become a topic of interest in higher education that seeks to foster “deep learning” – the kind of significant learning that students often report experiencing on work placement. The assessment of complex learning is, as one might expect, complex (Knight & Banks, 2003). Some educationalists are questioning the wisdom of using pre-set assessment criteria as the preferred way to do it. They argue that something important can be lost when a complex achievement is reduced to the aggregate of its parts in the assessment process. Assessors, sensing at some level that this is the case, are actually likely to make global judgements and operate with a degree of indeterminacy not captured in the mechanistic application of assessment criteria (Sadler, 2008). The assessment of complex learning outcomes, such as those that occur on placement, shines the spotlight once again on the exercise of judgement by assessors; the place of tacit knowledge in the expertise that goes into judgements by experienced assessors; and, the value of engaging students in learning how to develop judgement-making (expertise in assessment) through the assessment process itself (Boud, 2007). Assessment as judgement-making is seen to stand in stark contrast to an emphasis on objectifying assessment through the use of measurement and formulae – and ever more finely grained assessment criteria – as the means to securing reliability and validity in assessment. Understanding assessment as judgement-making may help build bridges between the university and industry around assessment practice and academic standards. After all, judgement-making is very familiar to professional practitioners.

This line of thinking also suggests a rather different emphasis in our approach to formative (low stakes) and summative (high stakes) assessment. Formative assessment focuses on assessing the learning that is occurring on the way to achieving the end capabilities for the period in question, which are the focus of the summative assessment. Traditionally, success or otherwise in summative assessment determines the overall “mark” or grading within the given component of the study program, and as such carries “high stakes” for students. In the context of work relevant learning (employability agendas in particular), Knight and Yorke (2003) argue strongly for using learning oriented assessment that is predominantly low stakes and formative in nature. They question the extent to which the complex learning associated with workplace environments can be captured in a trustworthy way in summative assessment beyond a pass/fail judgement, something which may be required especially where professional accreditation looks for warrants of fitness to practice (Knight & Yorke, 2006). Limits to trustworthiness have to do with: contingencies impacting on the learning environment; the unpredictability of learning outcomes; and, variability in the quality of learning resources and processes (involving, amongst other things, the contribution of workplace supervisors).
The following section illustrates the relevance of these understandings of assessment for making sense of the ways planning academics and workplace supervisors went about “doing” assessment in their engagement with the work placement courses.

6.4 Assessment at Work in Planning Practice Education

The project’s empirical inquiry into planning practice education, in particular the structured work placement courses of three accredited planning programs, has shown how planning educators, workplace supervisors and students construe and achieve academic standards and assessment practices.

For workplace supervisors, assessment was approached as a relatively informal process that occurs in the day-to-day interaction between themselves and the student. It was intrinsic to the student being there to learn through their workplace experience. Largely, they wanted the experience to be an encouraging and nurturing one for their students, seeing learning as something that should be enjoyable, positive and open-ended. With limited understanding of university assessment and standards, their aims concerned building personal and professional confidence and providing an opportunity to confirm basic capabilities. Time spent by students with them in the workplace was viewed as being just one component in the students’ overall program, only one episode in the ongoing development of professional practice. Many were averse to the prospect of overly structured and formalised assessment – preferring instead to think of attending to personalised student goals set within a longer career trajectory.

Planning educators tended to share this view that assessment in practice education needs to encourage reflective rather than mechanistic practice, underpinned by models of experiential and reflective learning. They emphasised assessment as being a critical exploration of what has been learned from the experiences rather than focussing on skills that have or have not been acquired. With an eye to academic standards and course grading, however, assessment tasks for practice education courses generally adopted a not dissimilar form to those for any other course. Students would produce textual assignments (written or pictorial) in the way of reports, studies, posters, accounts derived from an accumulation of their experiences that would be presented and/or submitted for marking. The less university-based the assignment, the more likely it would not be graded beyond pass/fail. Such extrinsic forms of assignment provided planning educators with the assurance to make high stakes judgements in awarding defensible grades.

Commenting on their perceptions of assessment and standards in structured work placement courses students were not unaware of the potential dissonance between workplace and
university perspectives. Their energies might be focussed on learning and achieving what they could on placement but what formal recognition was given to this as regards successful course completion? Did it really matter what you did? This was taken by some to a more sophisticated level. Realising that the value of their placement rested very much on knowing personally what they wanted to get out of it, some students might well act seriously on the message to develop their own learning goals and assume responsibility for directing their learning on placement. Yet, in the words of one student, ‘you don’t really know what you should be getting out of it’.

What has emerged is a broad “default” position on assessment practices – an accommodation reached by the stakeholders as they work together from their particular roles and contexts on student learning activities (see Figure 6.1). The default position is a typification and reflects a path of least resistance for stakeholders attending to their respective capacities and responsibilities.

**Figure 6.1 A Default Position on Assessment Practices: Workplace and University**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workplace</th>
<th>University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low stakes</td>
<td>High Stakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here and now</td>
<td>Cumulative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic</td>
<td>Extrinsic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The default position for assessment practices represents a workable but uneasy accommodation between the host organisations for placements and the university. It places minimal demands upon workplace supervisors and it enables universities to approach practice assessment in much the same way as in any other course. However, the default position is a somewhat segregated one and the project inquiries suggest that it is problematic in several ways. Workplace supervisors feel unclear about their role in guiding the students’ learning. Planning educators place great value on the experiential and reflective learning of work placement to progress student capabilities but find aligning assessment with this difficult. Students find ways of mediating across the two settings whilst carrying the disjuncture. Shifting assessment practices away from the default position involves building a more conjoint approach. In some professions, the accrediting body plays a significant role creating an overarching framework for achieving this.

In summary, the project inquiries suggest that future possibilities for enhancing academic standards and assessment practices in planning practice education consider the following principles:

- Assessment in planning practice education needs to be reviewed for its alignment and authenticity;
“Situated learning” needs to be complemented with “situated assessment”;
Assessing the complex learning outcomes associated with practice education needs to allow for the exercise of judgement by assessors;
Practice education needs to connect with the students’ professional development and career trajectories across the entirety of their study program;
Pre-, during, and post-placement learning activities need to work at creating a greater sense of shared purpose across the major stakeholders (planning educators, students and workplace supervisors);
The shared purpose needs be reflected in learning outcomes and assessment framework(s) that embody a high degree of flexibility;
An assessment framework needs to be responsive to local conditions and staff capacities to be viable and sustainable;
Contingent learning (unintended learning outcomes) is a significant and valued feature of structured work placements and any assessment framework needs to acknowledge and encourage this; and
An assessment framework needs to consider both rewarding the quality with which the student undertakes their “learning journey” and celebrating their arrival at key personal and professional “milestones”.

6.5 Developing Assessment and Academic Standards Frameworks for Planning Practice Education

In working towards future possibilities, several factors can be identified from the project inquiries and literature that are especially influential in clarifying and constructing alternative and stronger assessment frameworks. To some degree, the presence or absence of these factors determines what potential there is for achieving more conjoint and coherent approaches between universities and the planning industry. They indicate how the contexts of planning practice education vary, and what kinds of contexts are conducive to realising different kinds of assessment practices and academic standards. It is important to pay attention to these factors as they relate to the likely success or otherwise of introducing alternative frameworks. They also underline the need to create a spectrum of alternatives appropriate for the diversity of contexts of application.

6.5.1 Quality of Communication between University and Industry

High quality communication between the university and industry will be required where the aim is for the workplace supervisor to become more active in assessment practices that support purposeful student learning. The university will need to find effective ways of disseminating
information but also generating shared understandings of the assessment framework. This is likely to rest on organisational commitment to student workplace learning as well as motivated individual staff members.

6.5.2 Coherence for Practice Education within Overall Planning Program
Assessment frameworks that aim to situate structured workplace learning within the students’ longer career and professional development trajectory will require supportive program architecture. Students will need an opportunity to acquire an appreciation of the capabilities viewed as important for planning graduates; to learn how to guide their trajectory and to use feedback and self-evaluation in reviewing their progress. Program coherence will be necessary to enable students to pursue developmental goals following the period of workplace learning.

6.5.3 Assessment Literacy within Planning Education
For planning education academics, strengthening assessment frameworks in planning practice education assumes a certain level of capacity in learning and teaching generally, and assessment in particular. Forging greater alignment in course planning, and achieving greater authenticity in assessment design, rests on familiarity with more generic concepts of student assessment. In developing assessment frameworks for practice education, staff would need to be able to extend their assessment literacy to contexts of experiential and reflective learning.

6.5.4 Organisational Recognition of Distinctive Features of Practice Education
To be viable and sustainable, assessment frameworks need to be responsive to their local conditions. This applies to the settings for “real world” learning, the industry sector and host organisations. Such settings will be affected by labour market conditions, for example, and organisational values and strategic goals. This also applies to the higher education institution. Creating “real world” learning environments for students; managing and administering them; communicating adequately with employer and professional stakeholders; orienting students to different pedagogies; directing and monitoring learning across discrete learning sites; and maintaining relationships with collaborating organisations are just some of the distinctive features of practice education provision. The attention and energies to be expended on strengthening assessment frameworks for practice education will depend on the extent to which these distinctive features gain formal recognition within the institution. Formal recognition would occur in a number of ways, for example: the framing of academic policy; management and administrative infrastructure support; career rewards and promotion criteria.
6.5.5 Place of Professional Accreditation

The requirements of the professional accreditation body are a crucial factor in shaping assessment frameworks for practice education generally and structured work placement learning in particular. Planning is constituted by a diversity of practices and occurs in a diversity of local conditions and contexts. The planning profession in Australia has not evolved a set of practice standards for planning graduates. Nevertheless, the professional body is acutely concerned with the question of the capabilities required for the profession into the future and how these might be best achieved. Further endorsement of practice education and greater accountability of planning programs for graduate capabilities would undoubtedly shift the form of assessment frameworks developed in structured work placement courses.

6.6 Potential Assessment Frameworks for Structured Work Placement

There are two important dimensions to the enhancement of assessment practices and academic standards in planning practice education:

- Firstly, a set of principles has been outlined that can guide the future design for improved student experience; and
- Secondly, a set of factors has been outlined that influence the possibilities for the implementation of any new design.

The project inquiries suggest that greater adherence to the principles would be reflected in a more conjoint and coherent approach between the university and planning industry. However, the possibilities for achieving this depend upon a number of factors as described above. A high presence of those factors would be conducive to such a design. Their absence would question the viability of the approach.

Planning practice education faces two challenges. The first is to develop strategies that help shift the university and industry away from their “default” position on assessment practices and academic standards, in which they remain somewhat segregated, towards a more conjoint and coherent approach – whilst at the same time being responsive to the presence or absence of factors that will influence the possibilities for achieving this. The second is to question the absence of factors where they are seen to threaten the quality of the student experience, and consider how this might be addressed. The first challenge concerns working with what is; and the second concerns working for what should be.

This section pursues one particular strategy – the development of assessment frameworks – to illustrate how alternative approaches might be introduced that are sensitive to the diversity of
contexts within which planning practice education occurs. Other strategies might be invoked; for example, the promotion of judgement-making in assessment practices.

The idea of utilising assessment frameworks to progress assessment and academic standards in structured work placements has arisen out of the project’s engagement with the key stakeholders – planning educators, students and practitioners. Developing a viable assessment framework requires attention to the principles for assessment and standards outlined previously, and to the factors impacting upon its application to any given context. The intention of an assessment framework is that, to a greater or lesser extent, it fosters a more conjoint and coherent approach that creates some shift away from a “default position” in which there is an element of segregation between the university and industry that detracts from the quality of the student experience.

### 6.6.1 A Spectrum of Assessment Frameworks

Given the great variation to be found in planning education in the local contexts of application, it is important that any strategy to enhance student experience does contain sufficient flexibility. Developing a spectrum of potential assessment frameworks is a way of maintaining sensitivity to the diversity of contexts in which it is applied. In this strategy, the design of the assessment framework varies along the spectrum. At one end, the design would be viable for a context showing a high presence of the factors described previously. At the other end, the design would be rather simpler and requiring less of the respective stakeholders.

By way of illustration, towards the simpler end of the spectrum could lay the ‘Task Performance’ assessment framework (see Figure 6.2). This is less demanding on participants, very open, and relatively tolerant of variable levels of commitment, capacity and resourcing. Towards the more complex end of the spectrum could lay the ‘Negotiated Learning Plan’ assessment framework (see Figure 6.3). This is more bounded and requires high levels of communication, shared understanding and engagement.

#### Figure 6.2  The ‘Task Performance’ Assessment Framework

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>What were the student’s assigned tasks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Given the student’s level of experience, how well did the student perform the assigned tasks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>To what extent did the student exercise good judgement in the execution of these tasks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>To what extent did the student show an ability to practise reflexively?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the Task Performance Assessment Framework, the tasks undertaken by the student are primarily assigned by the workplace. The university operates some, but relatively minor, influence over the tasks. The student is involved in discussions about work allocation with the host organisation but the allocation comes as much from tasks that are available as from learning goals the student may have defined for themselves. The workplace supervisor takes into account their understanding of the student’s level of experience in judging, with the student, how well the student performed the assigned tasks. A small number of additional questions are included to prompt particular feedback and comment. These are generic questions, designed to be applicable whatever tasks a student has been doing. In this instance, the questions concern good judgement and reflexive practice.

Figure 6.3  The ‘Negotiated Learning Plan’ Assessment Framework

Relative to the Task Performance Assessment Framework, the Negotiated Learning Plan is a more complex model. The Negotiated Learning Plan begins with a list of broad areas for assessment that apply to all students whatever their workplace site. These broad areas of assessment are understood by the workplace supervisor, who will be assessing the student’s performance against them. The areas may be defined by the local university and industry, or they may derive from a statement by the accrediting professional association, or other umbrella body. As an example, a list of broad areas for planning practice education might include:

- Understanding of Planning Context/Organisational Culture;
- Understanding of Planning Roles and Responsibilities;
- Communication Skills (written, verbal, interpersonal);
- Technical Skills;
- Project Management;
- Practice of Community Engagement/Professional Advocacy;
- Exercising Good Judgement;
- Practising Reflexively; and
- Other.
The next column involves the student determining their learning goals for the placement against the areas for assessment. Here, the standard areas become personalised. There is also an ‘other’ box to extend the individualising of the framework. Work tasks and projects are negotiated between the student and workplace supervisor, and allocated on the basis of the opportunity they provide for the student to work towards their learning goals. There are periodic and scheduled reviews of progress, and revisions to learning goals and allocated work. The latter columns contain the assessment areas and levels of achievement. Rubrics are provided to guide assessment of levels. The Plan includes an assessment of ongoing development for the student.

The Negotiated Learning Plan is a design suggested to inject more explicit educational purpose into the work placement, compared with the Task Performance design. The latter is a somewhat minimal requirement for a work placement. The Negotiated Learning Plan requires a more conjoint approach between university and industry, and promises greater coherence. But, what are the implications and is it viable?

**6.6.3 Implications of Assessment Frameworks for Structured Work Placement Courses in Planning Practice Education**

The two contrasting frameworks illustrated above represent alternative approaches to the issues highlighted by the project’s inquiries. The openness of the Task Performance framework permits a good deal of discretion over the allocation of work tasks and consequently the capabilities required in their performance. Control over the framing of the placement is devolved very much to the local level and to individual learning sites. There is little constraint as regards ‘in situ’ responsiveness to contingent learning.

The more bounded nature of the Negotiated Learning Plan assumes a common set of areas for assessment. In that sense, more control is assumed beyond the individual learning sites. Discretion is exercised as the broad areas for assessment are translated into personalised learning goals. Allocation of tasks is determined by their appropriateness in providing opportunities to work towards learning goals. Explicit time points are agreed for the review of progress against learning goals, and subjects for feedback more circumscribed by the assessment areas. Levels of achievement are also written into the assessment framework. Scope for unexpected or additional learning activities enters through a catch-all ‘other’ category.

Broadly speaking, the Negotiated Learning Plan framework is more aligned to the development of common academic standards within and across planning programs. It is closer to
professional development models in which professional accrediting bodies exercise greater regulation, whilst it maintains a heavy emphasis on negotiated and personalised learning. Such a framework creates a shared sense of purpose across the stakeholders. But this is on the presumption that the stakeholders have a shared understanding of what it means and how it should be used. An implication here is that the quality of communication across the stakeholders is very high. The university and planning industry would need to be actively engaged in, and committed to, conjoint activity to achieve this, and students appropriately prepared and equipped. This implies dedicating staff resource to the activity. The degree of common ground prompted by the framework is dependent largely on how wide the subscription is to the areas for assessment. Clearly, the professional accrediting body and/or planning schools would be crucial to generating a widely shared pursuit of common assessment areas.

The Negotiated Learning Plan framework also implies a supportive program architecture. It suggests that students have become oriented to the areas for assessment that apply on placement and have been assisted to develop the capacities required to identify their personal learning goals and negotiate appropriate work tasks or projects. Using the Learning Plan effectively suggests that they will have been exposed to professional development processes within the program, and that post-placement learning will enable them to follow through on achievements or aspects for improvement. In this scenario, the work placement is an integral part of overall student capability building within the program.

6.7 Summary

The project has developed a set of principles to guide the enhancement of assessment practices and academic standard. The principles emerge from a review of the literature and from material elicited from key stakeholders in structured work placement courses. They reflect an understanding derived from the analytic work of the project, namely: that a more conjoint and coherent approach to assessment and standards between the university and planning industry would increase the quality of the student experience of this form of practice education. Concurrently, the project has identified a number of factors that need to be taken into account that influence the viability and sustainability of any new approach. These factors speak to the diversity of contexts within which planning practice education occurs. The project has investigated one particular strategy for negotiating the path that these principles and factors lay out. The strategy concerns the development of a spectrum of assessment frameworks that attend to the principles whilst affording the flexibility required for the diverse contexts in which the principles are to be applied. The formative role of a professional
accrediting body has been recognised in this process. There is also a challenge for planning practice education to address, where possible, the contextual factors that inhibit the move towards a more conjoint and coherent approach for the enhancement of assessment practices and academic standards.
Chapter 7    Overall Findings and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This project set out to investigate understandings of academic standards within the discipline of urban and regional planning. It has focused on standards, assessment practices and student outcomes in planning practice education. The aims of the project have been to:

- Generate knowledge about the current status in Australia of planning practice education and assessment;
- Identify the factors which impede or facilitate the development of a shared understanding of academic standards in planning practice education;
- Present key models and theoretical perspectives for understanding and applying academic standards and related assessment in planning practice education; and
- Institute processes of change for the improvement of academic standards and assessment in planning practice education.

The first two aims have been wholly met and the other two aims have been partially met. The project has undertaken an inquiry into planning practice education and, in particular, structured work placement that is of a depth not previously seen in Australia – and rarely seen internationally. The inquiry has led to findings, models and theoretical perspectives that will benefit student learning and lead to improved understandings and educational approaches within the discipline of urban and regional planning.

This chapter provides an overview of the main findings of the project inquiry, the issues and potential strategies, and makes some recommendations for planning practice education. It also examines the factors that have contributed to the areas of success of the project and factors that have impeded the project’s progress and outcomes.

7.2 Overall Findings

Information collected for the project comprised: a literature review; a review of practice education within urban and regional planning programs; and an empirical inquiry of the key stakeholders in three structured work placement courses of undergraduate planning programs. Set out below are the main findings reached from the project.
7.2.1 Literature Review

An extensive review has been undertaken of literature relevant to the project. The literature came under four broad categories:

- Overview of the planning profession;
- Planning education in Australia;
- Professional practice capability, pedagogy and situated learning; and
- Practice education, standards and assessment.

The literature review has informed the ongoing focus and direction of the project inquiry. The most significant areas to emerge from the literature review were:

- The nature of professional practice and the theory-practice nexus in planning education;
- The place or otherwise of workplace learning within planning education;
- The capabilities sought in planning graduates and identified gaps;
- The range of learning outcomes associated with practice education and workplace learning;
- Varieties of workplace learning and alternative forms of practice education;
- The supply of work placements and factors impacting upon this;
- Considerations in the design of structured work placement courses;
- The uncertain and uncontrollable aspects of workplace learning;
- Different approaches to assessment of workplace learning;
- The role of the workplace supervisor; and
- Relationships between host organisations and universities.

Literature on academic standards and assessment practice relevant to planning practice education has highlighted many of the questions addressed by the project. In an early Discussion Paper for the project, a number of the issues were canvassed.

- The relationship between academic standards and practice education in higher education is not straightforward.
- Practice learning can be rendered subject to academic standards in different ways but they generally require an examination of what is meant both by “practice” and by “academic”.
- Ongoing feedback from multiple sources is integral to the student experience in practice education. This questions the separation of assessment and learning. It also provides a foundation for capabilities in lifelong learning.
The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic assessment, and their relationship to authentic assessment, is highly pertinent to student workplace learning.

There is an empirical job of work to be done in finding out how academic standards and assessment practices are realised in practice education.

The generation of academic standards for practice education raises issues about stakeholder relationships and core concerns.

### 7.2.2 Planning practice education in Australia

A desk top review was undertaken of university programs in urban and regional planning. The key findings from this review were:

- Urban and regional planning is an umbrella term that covers a wide range of sectors;
- There are 43 academic programs in Australia accredited by PIA that include planning education;
- Accredited programs occur at both undergraduate and postgraduate level including:
  - 19 programs offering Bachelors Degrees;
  - 6 programs offering a Postgraduate Diploma; and
  - 18 programs offering Masters Degrees;
- There are 19 undergraduate programs accredited by PIA, across 11 tertiary institutions;
- 11 of these 19 accredited undergraduate programs contain a form of work practice;
- There are 24 accredited postgraduate programs, across 14 tertiary institutions;
- Work practice is a formal component in four (two of these as electives) of the 24 postgraduate programs;
- Work practice is a formal component in planning programs at nine tertiary institutions
- There are many different forms of work practice on offer; and
- Planning programs with a structured work placement course have evolved a range of approaches to learning and assessment.

### 7.2.3 Empirical inquiry: Talking with the stakeholders

The major part of the project inquiry involved talking with the key stakeholders to practice education and, in particular, to structured work placement courses from three accredited planning programs. The questions concerned their understandings and views of practice education, work placements and related assessment practices and academic standards.

#### 7.2.3.1 Planning educators on practice education

Interviews were held with academic educators from 11 universities with accredited planning programs. The interviews explored practice education in a broad sense and also with special regard to work placement. The key strands to emerge were:
A heightened demand for planners coupled with universities doing more with less;
- Centrality of practice in Australian planning education;
- Diversity of practice-based education;
- Assessment of practice reflecting experiential and reflective learning;
- The less university-based, the less likely it was to be graded beyond pass/fail;
- Assessment challenges: group work; workload; reflective tasks; role of workplace supervisors;
- Staffing practice education: significance of champions; demanding and often unrecognised workloads; use of sessional personnel;
- Continued positive student feedback about practice education generally and work placement especially – but amidst emerging staff concerns about viability;
- Importance of strengthening university-employer links; and
- Practice education as a platform for building future knowledge and collaborative resources.

7.2.3.2 Planning Practitioners on work placement

A total of 40 interviews were undertaken with planning practitioners who had varying levels of experience in supervising planning students on work placement. The work placements covered metropolitan, regional and rural planning agencies; local and state government agencies; and private planning consultants. Key strands to emerge were:
- The role of the university in building the discipline of planning;
- The value of work placements;
- The importance of the backgrounds and skills students bring to work placement;
- Appropriate selection of students for work placement sites;
- Guidance provided or not by the university about work placements and their purposes and expectations;
- The nature and quality of the supervision provided to students; and
- The benefits to students of working on “real tasks”, and the challenges for supervisors.

On the subject of assessment and standards, the planning practitioners talked of:
- Being encouraging, nurturing and positive – making learning enjoyable and open-ended;
- Building personal and professional confidence;
- Providing opportunity to confirm basic capabilities;
- Their limited understanding of university assessment and standards;
- Being sometimes unclear what students wanted to achieve;
Many being averse to overly structured, formal assessment; and to measures and tick boxes;

Some being attracted to more informal, reflective assessment;

Importance of ongoing, building sense of professional practice for students throughout degree; and

Personalised goals for each student placement, within a career trajectory.

7.2.3.4 Planning Students on work placement

Student viewpoints on planning education and planning practice education were explored through four focus groups held across two universities, involving a total of 34 students who had undertaken structured work placement courses. The key strands to emerge are detailed below.

A general appreciation from students about the value of experiencing practical learning.

Expressed benefits identified are that it:
- Offers a chance to experience the realities of planning;
- Gives awareness of workplace culture and expectations;
- Assists in helping put theory into practice;
- Gives a greater understanding of the expectations of employers;
- Helps clarify or confirm career options and aspirations;
- Provides networking opportunities;
- Assists in identifying skills that need further development; and
- Builds confidence.

Students want educational assessment to be clearer and to reflect what they do in the workplace. Some comments relating to this were:
- ‘[Assessment is] a bit of a mystery’;
- ‘Didn’t have goals or agreements or anything like that’;
- ‘If it [supervisor’s report] is only 10% then it kind of doesn’t matter what you do at work…’;
- ‘You know personally what you want to get out of it but you don’t really know what you should be getting out of it…’; and
- ‘You can’t just send someone out, alright start [doing it] … and not have anyone comment on how you’re actually [doing it]…’.

As a result of the work practice, many of the respondents are continuing to work at the same workplace while balancing studies with planning work.

There are important differences between the roles of work supervisor and mentor that need to be recognised.
What employers do, and how they do it, in the work placement needs more rigour.

Students need to develop higher order thinking, and some are questioning the extent to which planning education delivers that for them.

There is a risk that work experience can result in a narrow, utilitarian approach to planning.

Students appreciate the value of reflection with classroom colleagues.

7.3 Enhancing Assessment Practices and Academic Standards in Planning Practice Education

The information collected in the project inquiry has shown:

- The range of issues pertinent to a consideration of assessment and standards in practice education;
- The trends and current debates in planning education;
- The importance placed on developing student practice capability;
- The diversity of contexts and local conditions within which planning practice education occurs;
- The value placed on structured work placement by stakeholders;
- The challenges in providing a high quality practice learning experience for students; and
- The different perspectives and assumptions brought to assessment and standards by stakeholders to structured work placement courses.

The project has identified a set of principles for guiding the enhancement of assessment practices and academic standards in planning practice education that are especially pertinent to structured workplace learning in undergraduate planning programs. The project has also encountered the diversity of contexts within which planning practice is undertaken and planning education is provided, and has identified a set of factors defining the variations in these contexts. The project analysis suggests that the viability and sustainability of new approaches to assessment and standards will be influenced by the relative presence or absence of these factors.

The principles for enhancement are broadly indicative of a more conjoint and coherent approach to assessment and standards between the university and planning industry. The professional accrediting body is seen to have a role to play in this. However, the project analysis suggests that the possibilities for moving towards such an approach need to take the
contextual factors into account. One particular strategy is used to illustrate a flexible approach to enhancement. The strategy utilises a spectrum of assessment frameworks.

7.3.1 Principles to guide the enhancement of assessment practices and academic standards in planning practice education

The project has identified the following set of principles:

- Assessment in planning practice education needs to be reviewed for its alignment and authenticity;
- “Situated learning” needs to be complemented with “situated assessment”;
- Assessing the complex learning outcomes associated with practice education needs to allow for the exercise of judgement by assessors;
- Practice education needs to connect with the students’ professional development and career trajectories across the entirety of their study program;
- Pre-, during, and post-placement learning activities need to work at creating a greater sense of shared purpose across the major stakeholders (planning educators, students and workplace supervisors);
- The shared purpose needs be reflected in learning outcomes and assessment framework(s) that embody a high degree of flexibility;
- An assessment framework needs to be responsive to local conditions and staff capacities to be viable and sustainable;
- Contingent learning (unintended learning outcomes) is a significant and valued feature of structured work placements and any assessment framework needs to acknowledge and encourage this; and
- An assessment framework needs to consider both rewarding the quality with which the student undertakes their “learning journey” and celebrating their arrival at key personal and professional “milestones”.

7.3.2 Contextual factors affecting the application of the enhancement principles

The project has identified the following set of factors as influential in the ways the set of principles can be applied in any given planning practice education context:

- Quality of communication between the university and planning industry;
- Coherence for practice education within overall planning program;
- Assessment literacy within planning education;
- Organisational recognition of distinctive features of practice education; and
- Place of professional accreditation.
7.3.3 Strategies for achieving a more conjoint and coherent approach to assessment practices and academic standards

The project analysis has suggested that strategies need to be developed to achieve a more conjoint and coherent approach between the university and planning industry as indicated by the guiding principles. The strategies need to be mindful of the diversity of contexts within which any new approach is to be applied. One illustrative strategy utilises a spectrum of assessment frameworks. At one end of the spectrum is the Task Performance framework; at the other, the Negotiated Learning Plan.

The spectrum allows for flexibility in the strategy. Whilst the Negotiated Learning Plan represents a much more conjoint and coherent approach, local contexts of application may render it unviable. A challenge is to work at enhanced assessment and standards within contexts as they currently exist whilst recognizing how they compromise the student experience and working towards creating more conducive contexts.

7.3.3.1 A Spectrum of Assessment Frameworks

The Task Performance framework is a simple framework that makes minimal demands on the planning practitioner who is supervising the student. It takes as its starting point the assigned work tasks, and comprises a small series of questions pertinent for student assessment. It brings a degree of clarity whilst remaining a very open and loosely structured framework.

The Negotiated Learning Plan framework takes as its starting point a number of broad areas for student assessment. Learning goals and work tasks are negotiated around these. There are reviews and revisions of student progress. The student is assessed against the broad areas with reference to their personal learning goals. Levels of attainment are noted, together with areas for ongoing development. Successful use of the Negotiated Learning Plan involves a more conjoint and coherent approach between the university and planning industry. Working with this more elaborate framework creates a stronger sense of shared purpose whilst allowing for significant individualization for each student.

7.4 Factors Affecting Project Success

The project has made substantial progress towards its aims over the two year funding period. Its success can be attributed to a number of factors.

- The project members evolved into an effective and committed team. Team meetings were held on average every eight weeks. On two occasions, the team held two day
intensive workshops. Respective areas of expertise were recognised. One project member brought strong connections with the professional association.

- The project was supported and guided by a well informed and insightful Reference Group of senior planning academics. Terms of Reference were developed. Four meetings were held, two part teleconference and two part face-to-face.
- The project officer skilfully combined the roles of project manager and project worker. The project leader and project officer held weekly planning and tracking meetings. The project officer maintained regular communication with all team members across the collaborating universities.
- The project assistants were of extremely high calibre and very well organised.
- The project approach was one of ongoing evaluation and responsiveness to discoveries as they emerged. The project focus and priorities were adjusted accordingly.
- The project design incorporated a combination of inquiry methods, producing an in-depth understanding of the subject matter.
- The areas addressed by the project were topical within planning education specifically and higher education generally.

The project did not achieve all of its original aims or progress as far as initially envisaged. Factors that have impeded the project have included:

- Delays in recruiting a project officer and obtaining necessary ethics approval;
- The limited pool of people suitable to recruit as project assistants;
- Time expended on setting up the financial arrangements across the collaborating universities;
- Competing work pressures on project members during peak times of the academic calendar;
- An unforeseen change of organisational role for the project leader half-way through the project;
- Nationwide reviews of the status, nature and future of planning education indicative of some fundamental re-evaluations in the field; and
- The unanticipated extent of the inquiry necessary to establish platform for change-oriented strategies.

### 7.5 Recommendations

The project makes a number of recommendations based on the information it has collected and analysed, and the communication it has had with stakeholders involved in planning practice education.
There are many academics within planning education with considerable experience of and commitment to practice education. Valuable work has, and is, being undertaken. There is scope for greater mutual learning across the planning programs about practice education. An informal network should be considered, perhaps under the auspices of the Australian and New Zealand Association of Planning Schools. The ALTC Exchange should be investigated for its potential to inform and support planning practice educators.

A “one-size-fits-all” approach to generating and enhancing academic standards and assessment in planning practice education is not appropriate. The diversity of local contexts and conditions has to be taken into account in any improvement initiative.

Structured student work placement requires a clearer focus and clearer articulation of what assessment is seeking to achieve. There is a need to be more transparent with planning practitioners and planning students.

Enhancement of assessment practices and academic standards for structured work placement should attend to student learning outcomes that are contingent and complex and involve the exercise of judgement by assessors.

Structured student work placement needs to be situated within the students’ overall career and personal development trajectory. Program architecture needs to be supportive of this.

Assessment practices and academic standards in structured work placement should be evaluated against the set of principles proposed by the project.

An aspirational goal for enhancing assessment practices and academic standards in student work placement is a conjoint and coherent approach between the university and the planning industry. Improving the quality of communication across the stakeholders is a key factor.

The professional accrediting body plays an important role in achieving a more conjoint and coherent approach between the university and the planning industry. Accreditation requirements should endorse the value of practice education and encourage greater shared purpose across the stakeholders whilst recognising the diversity of local contexts and conditions.

Planning practitioners providing supervision or mentoring to students on structured work placement should be offered appropriate professional development opportunities by the respective university.

Planning educators involved in practice education generally and structured work placement specifically should be offered professional development opportunities on matters of pedagogy, assessment, standards and course management.
Planning students should be adequately prepared for structured work placement learning and assessment. They should be offered learning opportunities post-placement to consolidate and build on their learning.

Organisations involved in structured work placement, in both higher education and the planning industry, need to recognise the distinctive demands placed on their employees to achieve high quality student experience.

7.6 Dissemination

An important part of this project has been to maintain a consultation process with key stakeholders. This has been achieved through:

- Initial interviews with planning practitioners and planning academics;
- Follow up contact with planning practitioners and planning academics;
- Focus group meetings with planning students;
- Establishment of the project web site (www.plannereducation.org.au), which was used to post an outline of the project, updates on the project, resources, publications and findings;
- Attendance at the Carrick Project Managers Workshop 2007 and Carrick National Assessment Project Forum 2007; and
- Attendance and poster presentation at the ALTC Assessment Forum 2008.

Over the next six months we will continue our dissemination activities by following the post-project plan in the updated Communication & Dissemination Strategy Version 3. This includes:

- Preparation of refereed articles to be published in peer reviewed academic journals;
- Preparation of non-refereed articles to be published in non-peer reviewed journals, including professional journals;
- Presentation to the PIA National Education Committee (February, 2009);
- Circulation of Project Briefing paper to members of ANZAPS; and
- Loading of materials into ALTC Exchange.
7.7 Deliverables and Outcomes

The project has delivered the following:

- A comprehensive literature review on planning practice education, assessment and academic standards;
- A subject bibliography derived from the sources that comprised the literature review;
- A project website housing key information and material;
- A survey of planning programs and their practice education components;
- An in-depth empirical inquiry into the perspectives and understandings of planning educators, planning practitioners and planning students regarding structured work placement and assessment and standards;
- An analysis and critique of the ways in which the stakeholders to structured work placement construct assessment practices and academic standards in their everyday work;
- A set of principles to guide the enhancement of assessment practices and academic standards in planning practice education with particular reference to structured work placement in undergraduate programs;
- A set of factors that influence the possibilities for achieving the enhancement principles;
- An illustrative strategy for achieving a more conjoint and coherent approach to assessment practices and academic standards in structured work placement. This spectrum of assessment frameworks includes a ‘Task Performance’ framework and a ‘Negotiated Learning Plan’ framework;
- One peer reviewed and one non-peer reviewed conference paper; and
- A successful model for a grounded inquiry into the construction of assessment practices and academic standards across multiple stakeholders.

The main outcomes of the project are:

- Greater awareness amongst planning educators of the content and diversity of planning practice education in accredited Australian planning programs;
- Greater understanding within planning education of the perceived value of structured work placement and the challenges it poses for quality student experience;
- An enhanced conceptual understanding of the place of academic standards in practice education and issues related to assessment;
- A well founded appreciation of the significance of a conjoint and coherent approach to structured work placement for improving the student experience;
- A formulation of issues and challenges related to assessment and academic standards in practice education for review by the professional accrediting body; and
Chapter 7 Overall Findings and Recommendations

- Forthcoming changes to assessment practices within the structured work placement courses of the collaborating universities.

### 7.8 Areas for Further Study and Development

Arising from this project there are numerous areas that the project team believes require further study and development:

- The respective contributions of forms of planning practice education other than structured work placement to the achievement of desired student capabilities;
- The particular challenges for assessment practices and academic standards in forms of planning practice education other than structured work placement;
- The impact of relevant work experience gained by students outside their academic program on the provision and nature of practice education;
- The roles of the university and planning industry in practice education at postgraduate level;
- Broad areas for assessment perceived to be suited to structured work placement in planning programs;
- Program architecture supportive of student career and professional trajectory across the entire program;
- The process of implementing assessment frameworks for enhancing assessment practices and academic standards in structured work placement in planning programs;
- The levels of assessment literacy for practice education within and beyond planning programs; and
- Differing models of professional accreditation requirements for student practice capability across disciplines / professions and the implications for assessment practices and academic standards.

### 7.9 Concluding Comments

The project team would like to extend their thanks to the Australian Learning and Teaching Council for the opportunity to engage in the project and for their support throughout. Thanks are due to the members of the Reference Group for the commitment, encouragement and wisdom they brought to the project. Lastly, thanks to the planning educators, planning practitioners and planning students who participated in the project inquiry and who generously gave of their time and thoughts.
References


Griffith University (2006) *Strategic Plan 2006-2010*, Griffith University


Hamnett, S. (1999) ‘50 Years of Planning Education in Australia: The first planning courses’, *Australian Planner*, 36(1), 5-6


RMIT University (2007) RMIT 2010 Designing the Future, RMIT Strategic Plan, Melbourne: RMIT University


University of South Australia (2008a) ‘Bachelor of Urban and Regional Planning’

University of South Australia (2008b) ‘Course Information: ARCH 3044 and 3045 (2008) –
Planning field placement’

University of South Australia (2007) ‘Bachelor of Urban and Regional Planning’

University of Tasmania (2008a) ‘2008 Graduate Diploma of Environmental Planning (S6L)’

University of Tasmania (2008b) ‘2008 KGA513 Professional Placement’

University of Tasmania (2007) ‘2008 Graduate Diploma of Environmental Planning (S6L)’

on planning in an island state’, Australian Planner, 40(2), 97-99

movement to planning theory’, Journal of Planning Education and Research, 22(2), 178-187

Students in Built Environment Subjects in Higher Education, Liverpool: John Moores University

(4), 463-477

8(2), 185-192

student performance, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

39(1), 25-29

Appendices

Appendix 1: Making Sense of Academic Standards Discussion Paper

Martyn Jones

What do we mean by academic standards when it comes to practice education?

Practice education is about learning to practice. Its pedagogy is primarily one of learning by doing. For academic standards to have any relevance to practice education, practice has not to be understood as something other than theory. If we aren’t to reduce standards in practice education to ‘practice standards’ or narrow skill-based competencies, then our conceptions of practice have to be ones that lend themselves to an education judged to be fitting for higher education.

Framing academic standards for practice education pushes our understandings of practice and its place within graduate (and postgraduate) education. All the material on education or training, practice or theory, skills or knowledge, mind or body, ivory tower or coal face, functional or critical curricula, etc, is important for our project to the extent that it will dictate the purposes and goals of practice education. Academic standards become relatively meaningless for a practice education that embodies nothing recognisably ‘academic’.

Framing academic standards for practice education therefore also pushes our understandings of ‘academic’. If academic is construed through the lens of lectures, books and exams, then we will be hard placed to connect it with practice education. We would also be hard placed to meld academic standards that flow from classroom based learning to what goes on in practice education.

But of course, what goes on in the ‘classroom’ increasingly is not limited to lectures and books. Problem and project based learning are obvious examples. They relate to a pedagogy that seeks to inject something new into ‘academia’. They question the effectiveness of traditional, content based, delivery of knowledge. They place more emphasis on inductive (constructive) learning processes, on working out from experiences and on engaging with meanings students give to those experiences. In the creative and design areas, studios have also represented an alternative learning approach. What renders this academic? Students are expected to be able to defend their designs, to articulate a case for what they have produced and why, to ‘show their workings’. The designs may be evaluated by a panel of experts, drawn from within and without the university, but the criteria by which they are (supposedly) judged ultimately rest with the academics running the course.

The introduction of new learning technologies has also unsettled the classroom metaphor. Yet, the web does not of itself change the pedagogy. Putting lecture notes on line is just another form of delivery. Interactive uses of ICT, on the other hand, open up sources of knowledge and ways of thinking about that knowledge that do engage students differently.

Practice education shares with these other learning forms a ‘modernising’ of the notion of ‘academic’. What arguably distinguishes practice education further is: the relative lack of control over the learning environment associated with workplace learning; and, the much more
active role played by people other than academic staff in the ‘feedback’ (in its broad sense) that underpins ongoing learning (and informal assessment). How does this additionally push our understandings of academic standards?

**How have academic standards been transferred to practice education?**

The main ways that practice education has been rendered academic have been:

- to emphasise the theorising of practice (use of case studies or practice accounts that are intended to demonstrate the application of theoretical frameworks to the analysis and actions of practice)
- to emphasise the reflections on practice (use of reflective accounts to capture the personal insights and meanings drawn from experiences in professional practice, and translate them into developmental achievements)
- to create a practicum that codifies learning goals and tasks and uses a series of assignments to demonstrate capabilities against prescribed requirements
- to use portfolios for students to collate and produce materials that evidence their ability to direct, process and demonstrate their learning

Each of these approaches are based on certain assumptions that render ‘practice’ in one way or another ‘academic’, and also render it an appropriate part of a university award.

They are also based on assumptions as to what actually happens to realise them as assessment practices. For example, what makes a successful case study – does it capture what ‘really’ happened, how integral was the ‘theory’ at the point of practice? Or, what makes for a successful reflective piece? Portfolios are notoriously difficult (and time consuming) to evaluate and to moderate.

How do assessors allow for the content and quality of the practice experiences and the support, mentoring or supervision offered the student? What role do workplace personnel play in student assessment? What weight is given to this? How do they enact the role? What of student peer assessment?

Is there any consistency as to whether these different modes of assessment lead to ‘pass/fail’ or ‘graded’ courses? What does the rate and nature of ‘fails’ tell us about the way the assessment practices are implemented?

However, beyond these considerations, there is a layer of debate about ‘authentic assessment’. Crudely, this relates to an alignment of assessment with learning outcomes, and outcomes with the learning environment and activities. It speaks of something other than the validity of assessment (ie do the assessment practices actually assess what they set out to). Authenticity requires that the learning experience, outcomes and assessment all sit neatly, holistically, hand in hand. But it is an important concept for practice education because it begs the question, ‘an authentic assessment of what?’ A tick of authenticity depends on the assessment capturing the heart of practice.

What, then, is the nature of the learning outcomes sought in practice education? Where the ‘academic’ nature of practice education is legitimated through a claim that it fosters deep learning or higher order cognitive abilities, then those learning outcomes become complex ones to describe, nurture and assess. Such learning outcomes would set the bar of academic
standards and assessment practices very high – it’s just that this kind of learning is rarely articulated within more traditional learning modes, let alone practice education.

Where the ‘academic’ nature of practice education is legitimated through a claim that skills, acquired in the workplace, sits alongside knowledge, acquired at university, then those learning outcomes become performance activities that can be observed and assessed and measured against standards of practice. The tricky thing here is to specify the skills, somewhat independent of the context of their performance, and then to generate indicators to guide the collation of evidence of their presence.

Thinking about Assessment Practices and Practice Education

Assessment and learning are commonly thought of as two related but separate processes that together build the architecture of an academic program. The notions of ‘formative’ and ‘summative’ assessment call this separation into question somewhat, and encourage an approach to assessment that would have it occurring throughout the learning experience and not simply at the end. More recently, a similar distinction has been made in terms of ‘low stakes’ and ‘high stakes’ assessment. This terminology recognises the importance attached to assessment by students, for whom there is much at stake in their assessment – to the extent that it may drive their whole approach to the learning activities in which they are being invited to engage. ‘High stakes’ assessment is what produces the formal grading of their course, whilst low stakes assessment guides their learning on the way.

Arguably, practice education forces us to consider an even greater integration of assessment and learning. This comes, in part at least, from a view that the potential richness of workplace learning is due to the way in which it requires students to cohabit multiple worlds; academia; the host organisation and its networks; the professional culture; the worlds of clients and their communities; and the students’ own personal life and work situations. Experiences within and across these worlds have to be negotiated and processed, and transformed into meaningful learning. The worlds harbour multiple values and knowledges that students mediate in ways that confirm or revise their own sense of self, and their changing identification with personal, organisational or professional aspirations.

In other words, workplace learning opens up multiple sources of feedback to students as they interact and perform within these co-existing worlds. Learning by doing creates an array of feedback processes through which the student can continually assess their practice. This ‘intrinsic assessment’ is qualitatively different to ‘extrinsic assessment’, which resides outside of everyday practice and represents the formal and structured feedback and grading process. Intrinsic assessment can capture an indeterminate range of learning outcomes, from behavioural skills to self-awareness. It implies the ability to utilise informal and diverse sources of feedback that come from interaction. It is, almost by virtue of what it is, authentic assessment.

Intrinsic assessment and learning are inseparable. Moreover, the recognition and proactive use of intrinsic assessment relates to the student’s capacity continually to review and redesign their practice. It is fundamental to ‘lifelong learning’. So in that sense too, practice education invites us to see assessment as integral to and not separate from learning. Workplace learning knows about intrinsic assessment. Reflective and social models of learning draw upon it to foster practice development. Portfolios can be seen as a way of trying to bridge intrinsic and extrinsic assessment. But it isn’t an easy thing to align complex learning outcomes and extrinsic assessment.
So we need to be clear, when we are talking about enhancing assessment practices, what we are talking about here. Are we talking solely about extrinsic assessment and the delivery of a grade consistent with an academic standard? Or are we talking also about improving those more informal feedback learning processes that go hand in hand with the doing of practice. Perhaps we are seeking to harmonise the two, in pursuit of authentic assessment - or perhaps that is fanciful thinking.

*How are academic standards and assessment practices made in practice education?*

Our project is informed by educational philosophies that grapple with definitions and conceptions of what constitutes ‘practice’ and ‘learning’ and the ‘academic’. But the project is also adopting an empirical approach to these questions. In doing so, it doesn’t necessarily assume that we start with abstracted categories (for example, ‘standards’ and ‘assessment’) and then set out to investigate the extent to which they are to be found in any given set of academic program activities. An alternative view is that these categories exist to the extent that they are constituted by the language and actions of people going about their lives and work. This leads to an interrogation of the way the categories are created in the everyday and institutional contexts of those who use them.

Let’s assume (we have to start somewhere) that there are people who are employed as academics, employed as planning professionals, and enrolled as students. Let’s take what we as a project team are defining as our core of practice education, the work placement. [Let’s suspend for a moment that others would not define the core of practice education in that way at all. But let’s remember we will want to find out what they do view practice education as being, if it enters their worldview at all.]

How do academics, planning professionals and students achieve academic standards and assessment practices in coming together around what they call a work placement?

If we just concentrate on the planning professional for now. How did they come to be in the role of a workplace student supervisor? Did they know what the role involved? Is there anything written about academic requirements? Who writes it? Who reads it? Who understands it? (Honestly) Does the workplace supervisor view the student as there to work or learn? (How does paying a student affect that?) What do they see them as being on placement to do or to achieve? How do they see themselves helping the student do that? How much time do they spend with the student? Do they provide mentoring or supervision? What actually happens when they are doing this? Does the university ask how the student is going? How do they know how well the student is doing? Are they asked to provide a written or oral evaluation of the student? How do they go about their evaluation? What happens to that evaluation? Have they encountered a student who was not up to the mark? What did they do? What happened?

We can ask a parallel set of questions of the academic and student. The point is to elicit their understandings and their social practices. Achieving academic standards is a cultural accomplishment, constituting and constituted by a set of political and economic contexts. Doing extrinsic assessment is likewise a matter of working with certain artefacts (case studies, reflective accounts, evaluation reports) and enacting certain social practices (observation, mentoring, marking, moderating) that create a grade.

The complexity of practice education becomes apparent if we consider that it involves these questions coming together across professional, workplace, university and student environments. Elucidating the economics of the situation might include, for example, the immediate working environment and its material and administrative infrastructures as well as broader labour market relations and workforce profiles. The politics of the situation might be
concerned with, for example, who participates in the generation of assessment criteria and instruments, and the subsequent implementation. The ‘products’ created reflect the manner of the dialogue amongst stakeholders and the legitimacy afforded their knowledge and experience. It is consequently infused by the ethics of inclusion and values that shape engagement, including respect and entitlement. In the politics of learning and assessment, academic standards can become a way of shoring up existing boundaries and territories, or breaking into them, or re-generating them.

*Martyn Jones, 2007*
ALTC Project: Generating Academic Standards in Planning Practice Education

Communication & Dissemination Strategy for Stage 2 of the ALTC Project

February 2008

Project Team: Martyn Jones (Project Leader) (RMIT University)
              John T Jackson           (RMIT University)
              Trevor Budge            (La Trobe University)
              Eddo Coiacetto          (Griffith University)

Project Officer: Matthew Coote (RMIT University)

Research Assistants: Wendy Steele (Griffith University)
                     Sarah Gall  (Griffith University)
DISCLAIMER 1

Support for this document has been provided by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd, an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

DISCLAIMER 2

This document has been written by members of the Project Team. The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the Project Reference Group.
# Contents

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Project Background Information</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.1 Aims of the Project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2 Proposed Project Outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3 Project Approach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Communication Objectives</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Target Groups</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Key Messages</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.1 Project Team Messages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.2 ALTC Requirements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Communication Activity and Products</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Communication Methods</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Introduction

This document outlines the Communication and Dissemination Strategy for Stage 2 of the ALTC Project for the project titled: ‘Generating Academic Standards in Planning Practice Education’.

The Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) is funding a study into practice education in urban planning, particularly the education that occurs when students take on professional work as part of their studies. This study is being carried out by a Project Team including researchers from RMIT University (the lead institution) in Melbourne, Griffith University in Brisbane and La Trobe University in Bendigo.

The Project Team includes Project Leader Martyn Jones (RMIT University), supported by John Jackson (RMIT University), Trevor Budge (La Trobe University Bendigo), Eddo Coiacetto (Griffith University), Project Officer Matthew Coote, Research Assistants Wendy Steele and Sarah Gall (both Griffith University).

The Project Team report to a Project Reference Group made up of Robert Freestone (University of New South Wales), Steve Hamnet (University of South Australia) and Bruce Stiftel (University of Florida).
2. Project Background Information

2.1 Aims of the Project

The aims of the project are to:

1. Generate knowledge about the current status in Australia of planning practice education and assessment;
2. Identify the factors which impede or facilitate the development of a shared understanding of academic standards in planning practice education;
3. Present key models and theoretical perspectives for understanding and applying academic standards and related assessment in planning practice education;
4. Institute processes of change for the improvement of academic standards and assessment in planning practice education.

The researchers will conduct inquiry to examine:

1. What is desired in a planning graduate?
2. What assessment practices and academic standards are used in current planning practice education?
3. What are the experiences and understanding of both assessment practices and academic standards in planning education?

2.2 Proposed Project Outcomes

The proposed project outcomes include:

1. A review of existing knowledge regarding academic standards and assessment in planning practice education, the production of new knowledge and an evaluation of processes used to build knowledge;
2. A framework for generating shared understandings of academic standards, and enhancing associated assessment practices, in planning practice education;
3. An evaluation of a participative and inclusive approach to generating shared understandings of academic standards and assessment in practice education;
4. Strategies for instituting change at multiple levels for the improvement of academic standards, assessment practices and student learning, and an analysis of critical success factors and barriers;
5. A range of models and resource materials to support and institute change in the understanding and use of academic standards and assessment practices in planning practice education;
6. A progress report and final report on the project, with an evaluation of its approach and processes and recommendations concerning transferability to other disciplines and institutions; and

2.3 Project Approach

The project comprises two stages. The first stage was completed in late November 2007. The work in stage one will provide a sound basis for change initiatives in stage two. The second stage of is scheduled for completion in November 2008. Table 1 below sets out the link between the project aims and stages. Figure 1 below sets out our project timelines and stages.
Table 1: Project Aims and Stages

| Aim 1: Generate knowledge about the current status in Australia of planning practice education and assessment |
| Aim 2: Identify the factors which impede or facilitate the development of a shared understanding of academic standards in planning practice education |
| Aim 3: Present key models and theoretical perspectives for understanding and applying academic standards and related assessment in planning practice education |
| Aim 4: Institute processes of change for the improvement of academic standards and assessment in planning practice education |
| Stage One Processes: |
| (a) Setting up the project |
| (b) Project inquiry |
| (c) Analysis and Recommendations |
| Stage Two Processes: |
| (a) Developing models and materials |
| (b) Instituting change |
| (c) Evaluation and completion |

Figure 1- Project Timelines: Stages
3. **Communication Objectives**

The communication objectives of the project are:

(i) To provide a communication mechanism and discussion forums for stakeholders connected with the project;

(ii) To provide opportunities to involve stakeholders in the development of the project’s outcomes;

(iii) To provide communication mechanisms for the dissemination of the project’s outcomes;

(iv) To communicate with associated projects and researchers in associated fields; and

(v) To provide opportunities for change initiatives with stakeholders.

4. **Target Groups**

This project will involve those with an interest in planning education, and education in general, including students, professionals, employers, educators, and professional bodies.

This list of ‘Target Groups’ has been re-fined during the course of the initial project phases, in particular following information gained from the Carrick Institute Assessment Forum 2007 (Hounsell 2007).

This includes the main target groups (audiences/users/clients) for the project. For this project, this includes those with an interest in planning education (the primary target group), and education in general (the secondary target group), including students, professionals, employers, educators, and professional bodies.

Two distinct target groups were identified and categorised following Hounsell (2007). These are detailed in Table 2.2 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Target Group</th>
<th>Secondary Target Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key beneficiaries</td>
<td>Others who could also benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Members of the Project Team</td>
<td>• Educators and Academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Project Reference Group</td>
<td>• Non-planning Supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Funding Body (ALTC)</td>
<td>• Non-planning Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Planning Educators and Academics</td>
<td>• Non-planning Employers or Industry Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Planning Practitioners</td>
<td>Note: these stakeholders are engaged mainly through indirect consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Planning Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional Body (PIA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Planning Employers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A series of communication activities will be used to provide information to these target groups about the project, gain feedback on our project findings and tentative models and materials, and disseminate the project findings and models and materials. These are:

- Establishment and maintenance of project website (both target groups);
- Regular reference group meetings (Primary Target Group);
Appendices

- Briefing sessions to stakeholders and their networks (including in particular, local councils, private firms, stage government, academic institutions, and PIA) (Primary Target Group);
- Presentations to local, regional and national forums of relevant professional and industry groups (Secondary Target Group);
- Preparation of a major report containing project findings (Primary Target Group with possible flow on to Secondary Target Group); and
- Publications in peer reviewed journals as well as other journals and professional magazines (both target groups).

5. Key Messages

5.1 Project Team Messages

Communication between different stakeholders is important for three main reasons, each associated with different phases of the project. The first task is to provide information about the project. The second task is to gain feedback on our project findings and tentative models and materials. The third is to disseminate the project findings and models and materials.

The following messages must be used to achieve consistency in communication products and activities:

- The project is a cooperative project between RMIT University (the lead institution), Griffith University, and La Trobe University Bendigo; and
- The product is funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council;
- More information about the project is available on the website at www.plannereducation.org.au.

The use of the following messages should be considered where relevant to achieve consistency in communication products and activities:

- The project is of interest those involved in planning education, and education in general, students, professionals, employers, educators, and The Planning Institute of Australia;
- The project has the support of The Planning Institute of Australia;
- This important study aims to build on previous research into planning practice education;
- Academic standards and assessment practices are crucial to improving the quality of practice education, student work readiness and professional capability;
- The outcomes from this project will be of interest and use to planning students, professionals, employers, educators, and The Planning Institute of Australia, especially those involved in planning practice education;
This project has opened areas for research that should be explored in the future.

5.2 ALTC Requirements

As part of the funding agreement with the Australian Learning and Teaching Council there is a requirement to acknowledge the ALTC’s grant on all project material that is published, journal articles, presentations, websites, and advertising materials associated with the project.

Written Material
The following statement should appear in all written material developed in association with the project:

- Support for this (report/publication/activity) has been provided by Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd, an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The views expressed in this (report/publication/activity) do not necessarily reflect the views of Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

The ALTC logo shown should appear on all materials prepared for public distribution and presentations of project results. This includes the final report. There are ALTC guidelines on logo usage, which outline how the ALTC logo should appear. For more information see Project Officer Matthew Coote.

Text Resources
The ALTC also has instructions for the preparation of text resources that are part of the project.

Inside the cover page of any text resources the following statements must be included:

This work is published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution- Noncommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 Australia Licence. Under this Licence you are free to copy, distribute, display and perform the work and to make derivative works.

Attribution: You must attribute the work to the original authors and include the following statement: Support for the original work was provided by Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd, an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Noncommercial: You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

Share Alike. If you alter, transform, or build on this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under a license identical to this one.

For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work.

Any of these conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder.

To view a copy of this license, visit
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/au/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, 543 Howard Street, 5th Floor, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

Request and inquiries concerning these rights should be addressed to Australian Learning and Teaching Council, PO Box 2375, Strawberry Hills NSW 2012 or through the website: www.altc.edu.au

**Project Websites**
The following statement should appear on the home page of the website along with the ALTC logo:

Support for this project website has been provided by Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd, an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The views expressed in the project do not necessarily reflect the views of Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

The home page should also contain the Creative Commons logo associated with the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 Australia Licence and the statement “Unless otherwise noted, content on this site is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 Australia Licence.

**Media relationships**
The ALTC also has instructions on media relationships. A copy of any media release arising from a project should be provided to the ALTC’s Communications Manager and copied to the Program Administrator prior to release to the media. In the case of a collaborative project, the media release should mention all partners in the project. In all communications about a project, only the Project Leader at the lead institution (Martyn Jones RMIT University) should liaise with the media. For advice on how to handle media enquiries contact the Communications Manager at the ALTC. Recommendations that might result from a project report must not be released to the media prior to release of the report by the ALTC.

6. **Communication Activities and Products**

A series of communication activities will be designed and used to provide information about the project, gain feedback on our project findings and tentative models and materials, and disseminate the project findings and models and materials. These are:

- Establishment and maintenance of project website;
- Regular reference group meetings;
- Briefing sessions to stakeholders and their networks (including in particular, local councils, private firms, stage government, academic institutions, and The Planning Institute of Australia);
- Presentations to local, regional and national forums of relevant professional and industry groups;
- Preparation of a major report containing project findings; and
- Publications in peer reviewed journals as well as other journals and professional magazines.
The products **required** for preparation in printed and in digital forms includes:
- Half Yearly Progress Report for Stage 1 to be sent to ALTC;
- Stage 1 Project (Interim) Report to be sent to ALTC;
- Half Yearly Progress Report for Stage 2 to be sent to ALTC; and
- Final Report to be sent to ALTC.

The range of products **being used** in printed and in digital forms includes:
- Project website (including PowerPoint & Pdfs)

The range of products **being considered** for preparation in printed and in digital forms includes:
- Final project reports of research findings & recommendations (to stakeholders and others upon requests) in various digital, CD-ROM and hardcopy formats;
- Feedback from workshop;
- Project website (with potential web based tools);
- Project briefs;
- Summary newsletters, brochures and flyers; and
- Professional/ technical journal articles.

### 7. Communications Methods

The communication methods in use include:
- Targeted emails;
- Meetings and workshops with members of the Project Team;
- Meetings with the Project Reference Group;
- A project website; and
- Presentation to selected conferences, workshops or symposia.

The communication methods being considered include:
- Targeted printed materials;
- Direct postal correspondence;
- Invitations to meetings or direct briefings for the ALTC;
- Workshops or direct briefings with key stakeholder groups;
- Information sheets;
- CD-ROMs;
- News and information articles published or posted in bulletins, newspapers or newsletters; and
- Professional and technical journals and other formal publications.

Table 3 below sets the communications activity achievements for the project.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establish stakeholder network lists</td>
<td>RMIT, Griffith &amp; La Trobe</td>
<td>• Stakeholders contact details identified and organised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish project web site</td>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>• hits and usage of the website and online material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• request for project outputs and quantity of project products distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• feedback and advice from Project Team &amp; Project Reference Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct reference group meetings</td>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>• feedback and advice from reference group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaise with ALTC</td>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>• On-going support for project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct two sessions at the PIA National Conference 2007 with planning students, practitioners, employers and educators</td>
<td>RMIT, Griffith &amp; La Trobe</td>
<td>• successful conduct of the workshops &amp; sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• engagement of, and numbers of, workshop participants and successful stakeholder engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct workshop at the ANZAPS 2007 Conference in New Zealand with planning educators</td>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>• successful conduct of the workshops &amp; sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• engagement of, and numbers of, workshop participants and successful stakeholder engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Inquiry-Pilot Survey of Planning Professions</td>
<td>RMIT, Griffith &amp; La Trobe</td>
<td>• Response rate &amp; feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Inquiry-Pilot Student Focus Groups</td>
<td>RMIT &amp; Griffith</td>
<td>• Focus Group Numbers &amp; feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Inquiry-Pilot Academic Interviews</td>
<td>RMIT &amp; Griffith</td>
<td>• Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Inquiry-Pilot Practitioner Interviews</td>
<td>RMIT &amp; Griffith</td>
<td>• Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Inquiry- Academic Interviews</td>
<td>Griffith</td>
<td>• Number of Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Inquiry- Practitioner Interviews</td>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>• Number of Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATN Conference/workshop presentations and briefings</td>
<td>Griffith</td>
<td>• Responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrick Assessment Forum Conference/workshop presentations and briefings</td>
<td>Griffith</td>
<td>• Responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission of Interim Report</td>
<td>RMIT, Griffith &amp; La Trobe</td>
<td>• feedback and advice from reference group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 below sets the communications activity schedule for stage 2 of the project.

**Table 4: Communications Activity Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain &amp; Expand stakeholder network lists</td>
<td>RMIT, Griffith &amp; La Trobe</td>
<td>Stakeholders contact details identified and organised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain project web site</td>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>hits and usage of the website and online material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>request for project outputs and quantity of project products distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>feedback and advice from Project Team &amp; Project Reference Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct reference group meetings</td>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>feedback and advice from reference group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaise with ALTC</td>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>On-going support for project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct two sessions workshop at the ANZAPS 2008 Conference in Sydney</td>
<td>Griffith &amp; RMIT</td>
<td>successful conduct of the sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>engagement of, and numbers of, workshop participants and successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>stakeholder engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present two peer-reviewed papers at the ANZAPS 2008 Conference in</td>
<td>Griffith, RMIT &amp; La Trobe</td>
<td>successful conduct and publication of papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney with planning educators</td>
<td></td>
<td>engagement of, and numbers of, workshop participants and successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>stakeholder engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Inquiry-Student Focus Groups??????????</td>
<td>RMIT &amp; Griffith??????</td>
<td>Focus Group Numbers &amp; feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Inquiry- Academic Interviews</td>
<td>Griffith</td>
<td>Number of Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Inquiry-Practitioner Interviews</td>
<td>RMIT, Griffith &amp; La Trobe</td>
<td>Number of Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATN Conference/workshop presentations and briefings</td>
<td>Griffith</td>
<td>Responses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

142
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALTC Assessment Forum Conference/workshop presentations and briefings</th>
<th>???????</th>
<th>▪ Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Submission of Final Report</td>
<td>RMIT, Griffith &amp; La Trobe</td>
<td>▪ feedback and advice from reference group ▪ feedback from ALTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation and circulation of newsletter to stakeholders and networks</td>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>▪ response from stakeholders and other interested groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation of journal papers and submission to professional, industry and peer reviewed journals, journals and magazines</td>
<td>RMIT, Griffith &amp; La Trobe</td>
<td>▪ Publication in journals and number and type of responses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 presents a list of possible publications and publications outlets.

**Table 5: Possible publications and publications outlets**

1. **ALTC Project: Generating Academic Standards in Planning Practice Education Subject Bibliography**  
   A list of all the relevant literature, key words & subject headings  
   In a book form and available on the website in the resource section

2. **2 X Peer-reviewed Conference Papers at ANZAPs Conference 2008**

3. **Peer-reviewed Journal Articles**  
   **Obvious Candidates:**
   - Journal of Planning Education & Research  
   - Planning Practice & Research  
   - Australian Planner  
   - Journal of Geography in Higher Education  
   - Arts & Humanities in Higher Education  
   - The Journal for Education in the Built Environment

   **Other Education Journals**
   - Active Learning in Higher Education  
   - Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education  
   - Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education  
   - Australian Journal of Higher Education  
   - Educational Assessment  
   - Educational Research  
   - Higher Education  
   - International Journal for Educational Research  
   AND ON IT GOES…
4. Relevant Magazines (not peer-reviewed)

   Councillor Magazine (goes to 6,000 serving councillors)
   Council Manager Magazine

8. Evaluation

   The effectiveness of communication and dissemination will be monitored and evaluated during stage two of the project. This will enable ongoing adaptation in response to feedback and unforeseeable external influences. Performance monitoring will also assist the delivery of the project and the subsequent implementation of the project recommendations.

   The evaluation criteria will include the following:
   • Request for project outputs and quantity of project products distributed;
   • Engagement of, and numbers of, workshop participants and successful stakeholder engagement;
   • Successful conduct of the workshops;
   • Feedback and advice from the Reference Group;
   • Feedback from stakeholders and other interested groups;
   • Hits and usage of the website and online material; and
   • Peer review of reports.

9. Conclusion

   This document identifies details of the project’s communications objectives that respond to the identified target stakeholders. This document also addresses implementation aspects including the communication methods and their timing associated with the phases leading to project completion.
Effective communications can make a significant contribution towards to the success of stage two of the project. Consistent communications will ensure that all relevant stakeholders are engaged and provided with opportunities to become involved and contribute to the study. It will also ensure that the project's outcomes are disseminated efficiently and in a timely manner.

Reference

Appendix 3: Summary of Pilot Survey Results

PILOT OF SURVEY OF PLANNING INDUSTRY

Overview

In general terms, the survey was to establish:
- industry-specific conceptions of what capabilities are desired in a planning graduate, and of how planning graduates possess these;
- student perceptions of planning capabilities, based on their university education and prior work experience;
- early practitioner perceptions of capabilities required by the profession, and of how well their education prepared them for the realities of planning practice;
- senior practitioner perceptions of capabilities required by the profession, and of the relative significance of components of their professional education and related studies.

The survey was aimed primarily at planning professionals and students who would be registered with the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA). PIA maintains a comprehensive database of its membership of professional planners, planning educators and planning students, comprising some 4,600 members. This database enables inquiry into the views of a broad selection of planners chosen by length of membership, location, professional specialisation, and other variables. The database was to undergo re-development to enhance its functionality, although timelines for this had been put back by several months. PIA had agreed to make the database available to the project, compliant with privacy provisions.

Pilot Survey of Planning Professionals and Students

Preliminary information from the pilot survey was to be used to refine the ‘survey proper’ before general distribution. The PIA 2007 National Congress in Perth in May 2007 provided opportunity to run the pilot survey with planning professionals and students. To supplement the pilot work conducted at the PIA Congress, the pilot survey was also administered to students at Griffith University in late May 2007.

The primary objectives of the Pilot Survey were to:
- Test the survey format and wording;
- Generate a preliminary understanding of the range and type of response.

Pilot Survey Instrument

The survey was to collate data on the following areas:
- What is wanted in a planning graduate?
- How effective is planning education in helping develop and assess required capabilities?
- What does work placement achieve?
- What academic standards and assessment practices apply to work placement? Who should be involved in defining and implementing them?

The pilot survey instrument comprised four main sections:
- You and Your Organisation
Appendices

- Your Views on Planning Capabilities
- Planning Capabilities and Your Planning Education
  [Including general and planning specific capabilities, and ways of thinking and acting]
- Standards and Assessment in Planning Practice Education

The survey utilised a range of tick-box questions, attitude scales and open-ended questions. General capabilities were informed by the ‘employability skills for the future’ published by the Department of Education, Science and Training in 2002. Planning specific capabilities were based on those identified by the Planning Institute of Australia in its accreditation documentation.

Administering the Pilot Survey

The survey was administered to 35 delegates at the PIA National Congress and 8 students at Griffith University, a total of 43 respondents. Respondents were provided with a quiet place in which to complete the survey. They were encouraged to provide comments on the instrument itself as they filled out the survey. The survey was anonymous and respondents were advised not to include any personally identifiable information on any part of the survey.

The majority (26) of the 43 respondents were qualified planning professionals, two-thirds of whom had been qualified for five years or more. There were 13 planning students in total and 4 people who fell into other categories. 32 of the 43 respondents were from Metropolitan areas.

Main Findings from the Pilot

Planning Capabilities
All general capabilities were highly ranked, as were general abilities in thinking and acting. Both critical and ethical practice were ranked particularly high.

A range of planning specific capabilities were also viewed as important by both qualified planners and planning students. Planning students tended to place more importance than qualified planners on sustainability, cultural diversity and integration of values into practice.

None of the listed capabilities were viewed as unimportant for planning graduates. A number of additions were suggested, including: flexibility and adaptability; negotiation and conflict resolution; managing stress.

Respondents were asked how important it was that planning graduates were prepared: for general employment in a professional role; to practice to an acceptable standard in a planning role; as future leaders in the planning profession; and to be active and responsible citizens. There was little difference in the importance attached to these purposes, though the qualified planning professionals saw the latter two as slightly less important.

Planning Capabilities and Your Planning Education
Overall, the respondents viewed planning education as moderately effective in helping students develop capabilities sought in planning graduates. Qualified planning professionals tended to rate the effectiveness of planning education slightly lower than planning students.

Comments offered suggested that some respondents expected their education to improve their broad knowledge and understanding of the planning role but not necessarily to equip them with practice capabilities; some valued the opportunities they had had to integrate their theoretical
understandings with practice; and others were somewhat resentful that their education had not offered them more direct experience of the planning role.

Respondents also viewed planning education as moderately effective in assessing the capabilities sought in planning graduates. There was general concurrence about this. Some individuals believed the assessment to have been very limited and unsystematic.

Amongst the qualified planning professionals, only 6 had completed a work placement as part of their planning education. All 8 of the Griffith students had experience of work placement. Those who had undertaken work placement rated it highly in terms of helping to develop general and specific planning capabilities and ways of thinking and acting. Comments suggested that those who placed less importance on work placement had had prior experience of the planning role.

The majority of respondents expressed the view that work experience was an invaluable part of planning education. Comments include:

“I think work placement/work experience is essential. You learn a lot more on the job in things that just aren’t covered at uni.”

“I note that in a post grad course, there is no reason to have a work placement—however in my example as a new face to planning I found that the course gave me no practical experience and that all it gave me was an appreciation of theory and a good lead in to actually get a job in planning.”

“In my course it was not prescribed to undergo a work placement which I feel was detrimental especially as I was not working in planning so did not have direct hands on experience such as some of my fellow student peers. As an experienced learner, ‘a work placement’ would have helped my learnings on subject matter often more so than pure theory academic driven.”

“My degree was highly practical, so was of equal benefit as my work placement. However, I see work placement as a crucial part of my education.”

“Studying at uni was nothing like real work practice.”

“A lengthy work placement that gives you the opportunity to really try the actual job is much more beneficial. You learn practical application of skills and theory that cannot be learnt easily in the classroom. Need the ability for those already working to get credit for that though rather than having to do a placement elsewhere.”

“Theory and education do not and cannot replace actual experience…range of issues and concerns are raised in practice. How do you …human interaction and communication without doing it.”

“Work experiences teach you a lot more than theory.”

“I believe that nothing can compare to experiencing employment in a professional environment. University provides the framework of knowledge needed to succeed in the professional environment.”

Standards and Assessment in Planning Practice Education

Generally, the respondents did not express great confidence in the standards by which planning students are assessed for their capabilities. Similarly, the respondents showed only moderate confidence in the way planning students are assessed for their capabilities. Qualified planning professionals tended to be less confident, particularly in relation to general professional capabilities and planning specific capabilities. Comments include:

“What are those standards?”

“It is not clear at all how students on work placements are assessed. It varies so much from workplace to workplace and supervisor to supervisor.”
“This all depends on the standard objectives that the standard is set—especially if it is not informed throughout the different universities throughout Australia. Need to set criteria for all universities with training for educators to assess for across the board standard.”

“I believe that a degree can teach you how to think and act as a planner; specific planning capabilities are too workplace specific to teach at uni.”

“Depends on whether person marking is currently working in the sector as to how accurately marks reflect practical skills vs theoretical knowledge.”

“Assessment needs to establish that the graduate has developed methods and skills in planning and closely related disciplines. Skills can be developed further within workplace/projects. Personal skills, particularly self awareness, communication and others need to be at s… (more difficult in the workplace)”

Whilst there was relatively strong support for the idea that workplace professionals should be involved in the development of planning graduates and setting of standards expected of them, most respondents weren’t quite so sure that workplace professionals should be involved in student assessment.

On the question of who should be involved in work to enhance academic standards and assessment practices in planning practice education, there was general consensus that this should include: students, professionals, employers, educators and the professional body. One comment offered was:

“All - lets get all involved so as to get better social cohesion and gather data from holistic approach, not just from the educators!!”

The Survey Method and Instrument
Respondents were invited to comment on the survey itself. A number of problems were identified:

- Some of the questions were not clear;
- Some found the structure difficult to navigate;
- Questions relating to ‘standards’ were not readily understood;
- The survey was too long and concentration hard to maintain
- Aspects of the survey appeared repetitious
- In latter sections, fatigue led to ratings becoming unreliable

Aspects of this feedback suggested feasible refinements to the survey instrument, for example in the use of terminology and phrasing of questions. However, the feedback raised other more fundamental issues. Following considerable discussion, the project team came to the view that the survey was attempting to collate information on too wide a set of issues. In particular, the investigation of capabilities was recognised to be a substantive subject of inquiry in its own right. Other studies have been undertaken in recent years on capabilities for planning students. It was questionable whether this survey would be able to build on those without deflecting from its primary focus on standards and assessment.

Of the 26 qualified planning professionals, only 4 had undertaken a work placement as part of their own planning education. Others had experience as workplace supervisors. The respondents had a range of experience of work placement, and the nature of work placements they had experienced differed widely amongst them. This raised a further set of questions for the project team. It suggested that a survey would need to differentiate respondents according to experience and nature of work placement. The team felt this could result in a complicated and possibly cumbersome survey, difficulty to administer and with potential impact on response rate. They were also mindful of some previous surveys of the planning industry that had had few returns. On reflection, it appeared that the subject matter and likely structure of this survey could make it hard to achieve a statistically significant response rate.
Overall, the pilot led to the conclusion that a survey method was not going to be the most effective way of eliciting useful material from the planning industry on academic standards and assessment practices. It was agreed that energies would be better directed to more in-depth conversations with planning professionals who had had experience of student work placement.
### Appendix 4: Academic Interviews: Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key question</th>
<th>Sub questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. What are the varieties/dimensions of practice-based education? | - Type of experience (i.e. description of placement or practicum offered)  
- Type of student participation (i.e. is there assessment? reflection? etc)  
- Level (i.e. Undergrad/Post-grad)  
- Duration  
- Credit-point value  
- pre-placement and concurrent learning activities (e.g. briefing sessions, call back days, etc)  
- Compulsory/core or elective  
- Learning objectives  
- Timing within a program (i.e. to other subjects? to other practice experiences such as field trips?)  
- Relationship to other courses  
- Characteristics of student body (i.e. Are they already working, distance-education etc) |
| 2. What is the nature of assessment for the practice-based education? | - What type of assessment?  
- Graded or Pass/Fail only  
- If graded, on what basis, if Pass/Fail, on what basis  
- What academic standards are the assessment based on?  
- What informs these standards/assessment?  
- Who is involved in the assessment and to what degree?  
- What workload implications does this have for staff? |
| 3. What is the history of practice-based education within the degree/overall program? | - When did practice-based education originate?  
- How has it evolved/changed over time?  
- What pedagogy informs its current shape and form?  
- What is likely to occur with practice-based education in the near future? |
| 4. What are the strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats to practice-based education? | - What are the perceived strengths of practice-based education?  
- What challenges does practice-based education offer?  
- What pressures exist in relation to practice-based education (i.e. funding, resources, support? etc.)  
- What opportunities are emerging for practice-based education in the future? (i.e. funding, resources, support? etc.) |
Appendix 5: Academic Interviews: Participating Planning Schools

1. CURTIN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
2. JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY
3. MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY
4. QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
5. THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES
6. THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND
7. THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY
8. THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
9. UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA
10. UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA
11. UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY

Pilot Academic Interviews: Participating Schools

1. GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY
2. LA TROBE UNIVERSITY
3. RMIT UNIVERSITY
Appendix 6: Practitioner Interviews: Schedule

**Experience and involvement in planning**
- Would you start by telling me about your planning history – your studies and professional experience?
- How long? How much experience?
- Did you have work experience or work-placement in your planning studies? Tell me about that? Do you wish you had?

**Experience in supervision of work-placement students**
- Can you tell me about your experience in supervising work-placement students from RMIT University and from other universities?

**Philosophy/approach to supervision**
- Can you tell me a bit about your philosophy/approach to supervising work placement students?
- Has this been affected over time by your experience with our planning placement program?
- Similarly, has this been affected over time by your experience with students from other universities?

**Workplace arrangements (with our work-placement students)**
Would you explain from your perspective, with examples, what happens in a work-placement?
- How do you and the student work out your respective roles and responsibilities?
- What happens on a day-to-day basis?
- How do you assess/give feedback on the quality of students’ work? What kind of feedback is given? [emphasise again our distinction between formal and informal assessment here]
- How do the student’s other colleagues fit into the students’ learning?

**Learning to supervise**
- Is supervising something one learns to do? How do you learn to supervise?
- Are our university’s requirements clear to you? Are they satisfactory? [provide examples or guides if relevant]
- Have you had any training in being a supervisor? Should there be any?

**Supervisor’s knowledge of the relevant University’s Work Placement**
I’d like to investigate issues surrounding learning at university and in the workplace. But first, can you tell me what you know about our work placement program? [may need to explain important things they don’t know and come back to this from time to time]
- How it is organized?
- The formal role of a supervisor to a student [as described in the Course Guide - may have to bring guide]
• The objectives and desired learning outcomes
• The formal assessment
  [show the assessment sheets for assessment. Will need some matrix or guide from our respective universities and may have to come back to this from time to time in interview. Perhaps explain the difference between formal and informal assessment again here]
• How standards are set – assessment sheets and other requirements?

What students actually learn/What students should learn?
Being mindful of the fact that every workplace is very different and the kinds of work planners do vary a lot, I’d like to get your opinions on what students learn in the workplace?
[Suggestions – generic skills; to reflect on practice; how to practice; how to get on with people in the workplace; how to integrate theory and practice; office skills like using the phone, writing letters, answering inquiries]

What do students actually learn in the workplace

What should students learn in the workplace?
• Are these different? Why? What do you think about this?

I’d like you to look at the learning objectives for our work-placement course: what do you thing about them? [show the documents]

Learning at university and at the workplace
I’d like to hear your perspectives on the relative roles of the workplace and the university in the education of planners.

• What, in your opinion, should be the purpose of a university education generally? [eg the preference for, or appropriate balance between, a broad liberal education and a narrow vocational training]
• What, in your opinion, should be the purpose of a university education for planners specifically?
• What, in your opinion, for planners, is best learnt in the workplace and what is best learnt at the university?
• What skills and abilities do you think it reasonable for a student to have before starting a work placement?

How should learning be assessed and what standards should be used?
Being mindful of the fact that every workplace is very different and the kinds of work planners do vary, I’d like to have a discussion with you about how to assess what students learn in practice education. Some of the matters we will cover include:
• How learning should be assessed?
• What is the role of formal assessment and informal assessment?
• By whom should assessment be done? Should students assess their own work?
• What standards should be used? (Standards mean the set levels of achievement for different learning outcomes) [refer to our approach – eg assessment criteria sheets to illustrate].
• What are the resource implications for workplace assessment?
• What about setting standards for informal assessment: is this an issue and if so, how can it be done? [show any guidance from our program and ask for comment]

[Go through and ask - discuss each question]

Impact of formal work-placement
• Do you find there are subsequent differences between students who undertake a formal work placement such as ours, and those who don’t? [If there are differences, ask next question]

• If there are any differences, are they important in educational and training terms?

Revisit and review
Our interview is almost at an end. In the light of our discussion, do you have any further comments on any of the matters discussed:
• What students learn in practice education?
• How their learning should be assessed?
• What standards should be used?
• What is best done by the workplace?
• What is best done by the university?

Other issues
Are there any further points you wish to make or issues you would like to raise?
# Appendix 7: Student Focus Groups Schedule: Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Focus</th>
<th>Sample Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Introductory Closed Questions</strong>&lt;br&gt;(These are some introductory questions)</td>
<td>Just to confirm, have you undertaken planning work practice as part of your planning education? (Around the Table: Yes or No)&lt;br&gt;How long (in days) did you spend on work practice placement? (Around the Table: In Days)&lt;br&gt;Did you have a designated work workplace supervisor or mentor whilst on work practice placement? (Around the Table: Yes or No)&lt;br&gt;Was your work practice placement assessed? (Around the Table: Yes or No)&lt;br&gt;Had you worked in a planning office prior to your work practice placement? (Around the Table: Yes or No)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Planning Work Practice</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Two questions about your work practice placement)</td>
<td>What did you like best about your experiences in planning work practice?&lt;br&gt;What did you like least about your experiences in planning work practice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Planning Work Practice and Assessment and Academic Standards</strong>&lt;br&gt;(These questions consider your own experience of planning work practice and the assessment and academic standards)</td>
<td>Whilst on work practice placement, to what extent did you understand the standards that you were expected to meet?&lt;br&gt;Whilst on work practice placement, to what extent was your work assessed in an appropriate way?&lt;br&gt;Who do you believe should be involved in any effort to enhance standards and assessment in planning practice education? Planning students? Planners? Employers of planners? Planning Educators? PIA? Or any others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D. General Planning Education</strong>&lt;br&gt;(These questions consider issues to do with your broader planning education)</td>
<td>Can you describe some of the other methods used to link your planning practice and education in your planning degree so far? These could include the use of guest speakers, the studio, role plays, IT such as blogs. How do you participate in these activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E. Planning Education and Recommendations for Change</strong></td>
<td>In what ways, if any, can planning education assessment be improved?&lt;br&gt;What suggestions, if any, do you have for improving the teaching/learning process for students in planning education?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### F. Conclusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Do you have any other issues about your planning education or planning work placement that you’d like to raise here?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
