

RTPI Survey of the Independent Consultants Network 2011

About you:

1. Employed status

- **self-employed consultant 73%**
- managing a small planning practice 17%
- managing a small multi-disciplinary practice 3%
- employed consultant within a planning practice 0%
- employed consultant within a multi-disciplinary practice 5%
- other 2%

answered question: 41 skipped question: 0

2. Your age group

- up to 30 years 5%
- **41-50 years 39%**
- 60-65 years 17%
- 31-40 years 5%
- 51-60 years 32%
- 66 years onwards 2%

answered question: 41 skipped question: 0

3. Are you:

- **Male 76%**
- Female 24%

answered question: 41 skipped question: 0

4. Your location (as defined by RTPI Regions and Nations)

- RTPI in Scotland 0%
- Irish Branch North 0%
- East of England 20%
- London 10%
- North West 2%
- South West 15%
- West Midlands 12%
- RTPI Wales 2%
- Irish Branch South 0%
- East Midlands 7%
- North East 2%
- **South East 22%**
- Yorkshire 5%
- International 3%

answered question: 41 skipped question: 0

5. If you run your own practice then how long have you been in business?

- **0-5 years 56%**
- 11-15 years 17%
- 21+ years 5%
- 6-10 years 17%
- 16-20 years 5%

answered question: 41 skipped question: 0

6. What was your type of employer before you set up your own practice?

- **Local Government 51%**
- Consultancy 47%
- Developer/Housebuilder 6%
- Other (please specify) - Central Government Agency 3%
- Central Government 0%
- Charitable/Not for profit 3%
- Government Agency/Body 3%

answered question: 41 skipped question: 0

7. What circumstances led you to becoming an independent planning consultant?

- Desire to set up my own practice 41%
- Improve work/life balance 25%
- Retirement/early retirement 12%
- Improve career prospects 10%
- **Redundancy 51%**
- Other 10%

Comments received:

To secure fair rewards / challenge / caring responsibilities / independence / dissatisfied with previous work environment

answered question: 41 skipped question: 0

About your business:

8. How would you describe your practice?

- **full time 66%**
- home based 39%
- sole trader 24%
- partnership 10%
- private limited company 42%
- part time 20%
- office based 20%

answered question: 41 skipped question: 0

9. Do you/your practice offer the following services?

- **Development management 73%**
- Rural planning 63%
- **LDF advice 73%**
- Regeneration 51%
- Sustainable development 37%
- Environmental planning 24%
- Training 24%
- Urban design 24%
- Community planning 44%
- Retail planning 24%
- Town centre management 15%
- Enforcement 49%
- Housing 63%
- Listed buildings 44%
- Lesiure & tourism 37%
- Conservation/natural environment 42%
- Economic development 42%
- Renewable energy 20%
- Waste 18%
- Minerals 7%
- Transport 10%

Other comments received:

'Interim management consultancy / 'landscape planning' / 'third sector development' / 'Research' / 'General Aviation' / 'Pre purchase advice on strategic land'.

answered question: 41 skipped question: 0

10. In addition to yourself, how many professional planners do you employ?

- **None 81%**
- Two 2%
- One 15%
- 3 or more 2%

Other comments received:

1 RTPI Technical member / Sub contract 1-2 a week to another MRTPI

answered question: 41 skipped question: 0

11. In addition to professional planners, who else do you employ or contract work to on a frequent basis?

	<i>Employed</i>	<i>Contracted</i>	<i>Response Count</i>
• RTPI Licentiate member	50% (1)	50%(1)	2
• RTPI Student member	0%	0%	0
• Surveyor	0%	100% (1)	1
• Architect	22% (2)	78% (7)	9
• Archeologist	25% (1)	75% (3)	4
• Landscape architect	38% (3)	63% (5)	8
• Graphic designer	33% (1)	67% (2)	3
• Financial assistant	25% (2)	75% (6)	8
• Administrator	54% (6)	46 (5)	11
• No additional employee/contractor	67% (14)	33% (7)	21

Other comments received:

GIS / Technician / specialists – transport, flood risk, ecologist / 3 Licentiate members / graphic designer

answered question: 41 skipped question: 0

12. What services do you employ externally to support your business operation?

- **Accountancy 81%**
 - General IT support 52%
 - Graphic Design/Printing 30%
 - Other comments received:
- Legal 22%
Website design/management 42%
None 15%

Architect / Book keeping / Survey firms

answered question: 41 skipped question: 0

Professional Indemnity Insurance

13. What level of PII cover do you hold?

- | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------|---------------------|-----|
| • £250,000 or less | 32% | £250,001 - £300,000 | 15% |
| • £300,001 - £400,000 | 2% | £400,001 - £500,000 | 15% |
| • £500,001 - £600,000 | 7% | £600,001 - £700,000 | 0% |
| • £700,001 - £800,000 | 2% | £800,001 - £900,000 | 0% |
| • £900,001 - £1million | 5% | £1million + | 22% |

answered question: 41 skipped question: 0

14. How much did the premium cost?

<u>Level of cover</u>	<u>Range of premiums paid</u>
• £900,001 - £1million	£850.00 / £300.00
• £700,001 - £800,000	£800.00
• £400,001 - £500,000	£850.00 / £735.00
• £500,001 - £600,000	£530.00
• £400,001 - £500,000	£300.00
• £250,001 - £300,000	£577.70 / £405.00 / £318.00 / £135.00

- £250,000 or less £301.88 / £230.00 / £220.00 / £209.00 / £200.00
£190.00 / £125.00

**This information represents the premium paid for the level of cover held, and is for guidance only. When researching PII premiums it is important that you compare like for like. Some of the above premiums will include exclusions (i.e type of work not covered by policy) and therefore the premium will be less than a policy without the exclusion.*

answered question: 18 skipped question: 23

15. Any claims history?

Have you ever made a claim against a third party during your professional career?

Yes 0% **No 100%**

Have you ever had a claim made against you in your professional career?

Yes 5% **No 95%**

If yes then please give details

- Action commenced for failing to keep a planning permission live but action withdrawn by complainant before any formal claim was initiated
- Counter claim made against practice when we went to small claims court for outstanding fees; subsequently found to be no case against us; client had judgement made against him and went bust.

answered question: 41 skipped question: 0

16. Which of the following insurance brokers do you use? Please rate the quality of service they provide.

	Excellent	Good	Average	Below Average	Response count
HLI	0%	0%	100% (1)	0%	1
Perkins Slade	50% (8)	38% (6)	13% (2)	0%	16
BlueFin	20% (1)	80% (4)	0%	0%	5
Norwich Union	0%	100% (1)	0%	0%	1
Hiscox	30% (3)	50% (5)	10% (1)	10% (1)	10

Other insurers:

- Venture Insurance / Simply Business / Caitlin Insurance / Lockton Affinity / Howdens / Professional Insurance Agents

answered question: 33 skipped question: 8

Your income:

17. If you charge an hourly rate then please indicate which one you usually charge (or the average if you have a variable rate)

	Responses
Less than £40	3% (1)
£41-£50	8% (3)
£51-£60	13% (5)
£61-£70	3% (1)

£71-£80	16%	(6)
£81-£90	13%	(5)
£91-£100	18%	(7)
£101-£110	8%	(3)
£111-£120	8%	(3)
£121-£130	0%	
£131-£140	5%	(2)
£140+	3%	(1)
I only charge a fixed fee	3%	(1)

answered question: 38 skipped question: 3

18. Is this hourly rate the same, an increase or decrease from the period April 2010 to March 2011?

Same	72%
Increase	22%
Decrease	6%

answered question: 32 skipped question: 9

Increase of 5% / increase of 20% / increase of 25% / decrease of 10% / decrease of 20%

19. Do you charge a fixed fee for a complete job? If so what is the minimum fee you would charge?

• up to £100	0%	£101-£200	13%
• £201-£300	18%	£301-£400	5%
• £401-£500	5%	£501-£600	16%
• £601-£700	3%	£701-£800	3%
• £801-£900	0%	£901-£1000	3%
• £1001-£1500	8%	£1501-£2000	0%
• I do not charge a fixed fee	26%		

answered question: 38 skipped question: 3

20. Is this minimum fixed fee the same, an increase or decrease from the period April 2009 to March 2010

• Same	89%	Increase	0%
• Decrease	11%		

answered question: 27 skipped question: 14

21. If you include a success-related element to your fees, is it;

• A lump sum that tops up an otherwise discounted fee to the normal level	3%
• A lump sum that provides a % uplift of the assumed normal estimated time of fixed fee charge	11%
• A lump sum unrelated to the normal fee	11%
• * Another formula or amount? e.g. 10% of land value if permission is secured, number of units, etc)	8%
• I do not use success-related fees	71%

*Another formula or amount

15-33% of the uplift in land value after allocation secured or pp granted / 50% / half usual fee if proposal unsuccessful or double usual fee is proposal successful

answered question: 38 skipped question: 3

22. With what types of work would you normally negotiate success-related fees?

Comments received:

LDF strategic land promotion / Where I am more confident than the client / Appeals that have a greater chance of success / Housing schemes based on the number of units / Where I am fairly confident of a successful outcome / On request or a particularly interesting job that would lift my portfolio / Appeals and awards of costs / Success related fees are normally only used where the client has little money available to speculate, but a large amount to gain (i.e. new housing development).

answered question: 14 skipped question: 27

23. Please indicate your net fee income year end 31 March 2010

£5,000 - £10,000	29%	£10,000 - £20,000	13%
£20,000 - £30,000	10%	£30,000 - £40,000	3%
£50,000 - £60,000	10%	£60,000 - £70,000	3%
£70,000 - £80,000	5%	£80,000 - £90,000	0%
£90,000 - £100,000	3%	£100,000 - £110,000	5%
£110,000 - £120,000	0%	£120,000 - £130,000	5%
£130,000 - £140,000	0%	£140,000 - £150,000	3%
£150,000 +	10%		

answered question: 38 skipped question: 3

24. How did this compare with last year's net fee income?

• No change	32%	Up to 10% more	8%
• Up to 20% more	3%	Up to 30% more	5%
• Up to 10% less	8%	Up to 20% less	3%
• Up to 30% less	11%	Other (please specify)	30%

Other (please specify):

New business so no previous income to compare / increase of 50%

answered question: 38 skipped question: 3

25. What are the principle reasons for this change?

• No change	26%	Reduced client activity	26%
• Increased client activity	21%	Increase in competition	5%
• Reduced fee levels for same type of work	3%	Increased fee levels for same type of work	0%

Other (please specify)

Increased client base / bad debts + reduced house builder activity / Reduced client activity

answered question: 38 skipped question: 3

26. In the recovery of unpaid fees, which of the following has your practice found most useful?

	Useful	Average	Not useful	Responses
• Negotiating a watertight contract	63% (12)	11% (2)	26% (5)	19
• Reminder letter	76% (22)	14% (4)	10% (3)	29
• Solicitor letter	33% (4)	25% (3)	42% (5)	12
• Threat of debt collection agency	33% (4)	25% (3)	42% (5)	12
• Threat of court proceedings	64% (9)	14% (2)	22% (3)	14
• Negotiating a partial settlement	63% (10)	25% (4)	13% (2)	16
• Withdrawal of services	46% (6)	15% (2)	39% (5)	13

Other (please specify)

Regular chasing of client personally by phone / Just take the hit / Winding up order / Upfront payment on appeals and for first time clients / Actual court proceedings / My bookkeeper chases all outstanding payments.

answered question: 38 skipped question: 3

27. At what level do you consider it not worthwhile pursuing a debt (for example with debt collection agencies or through the small claims court).

• £1000 or less	34%	£1001 - £2,500	11%
• £2,501 - £5,000	11%	£5,001 - £10,000	0%
• Other	44%		

Always worth pursuing to a degree / less than £500 / the circumstances of the debtor / I pursue every debt as a matter of principle

answered question: 38 skipped question: 3

28. What impact is the economic climate having on your business? What would you suggest are your main concerns?

(comments received)

Local authorities not initiating consultancy work anywhere to the same degree / Reduced work and reduced fees for work undertaken / Lack of certainty over next commission / Having to put in tighter, more competitive bids Undercut more often by firms that are short of work / Much more onerous public tendering processes that are especially difficult and costly for sole traders / Expected to do a lot more 'for free' once appointed / Having to take on less enjoyable types of work / My own practice went through a difficult patch in 2010-11, but picked up in the summer. The new company, which is the subject of this survey, has been going for 5 months with 3 co-directors and we have around £100,000 of work commissioned. The business plan was written for the current economic and political climate and this appears to have been very successful / Significant reduction in activity and income for the past 30 months and little prospect of a rise for another 24 - 36 months / Lack of new clients; more competition; people prepared to pay less or want more for same fee; clients slower to pay; no sign of improvement; stress and worry so concern about health and life work balance as if the work comes in one dare not refuse it or say too busy, it's either little to do or very busy / Slower LPA processing of applications (resourcing issues / Clients are still willing to talk about potential schemes but are unwilling to commit / Concerns over volume of work/contracts that can be won and rate/fees that can be charged / Long term business planning impossible as clients are uncertain about whether to proceed with projects. Downward pressure on fees and clients requiring more work upfront before agreeing to instructing / Client's reluctant to challenge LPA decisions because of cost, time scale and often

uncertain outcome / We started in October 2007 at the start of the downturn. We have not known anything different but have steadily grown our client base and have perhaps been lucky in finding a gap in the local market. This year has been the best yet and we see no direct sign of the economy slowdown. It may be that as we are in city which is an attractive location and has a large student population there are always development opportunities. Whether things will change in 6 months, who knows but the constant news coverage of the poor economic outlook discourages us from taking on a graduate planner / Major downturn in business from larger house builders / Negotiating PP far more complex, frequently protracted negotiations and chasing takes an enormous amount of time but cannot be fairly represented in fees charged, and prevents time being spent on new casework / Lack of confidence in planning system / huge costs dissuade clients after initial feasibility-pre-app stage / Delays in LDF progress and prospective policy changes creates huge uncertainty Rising S106 charges dissuade developers from moving forward Proving reasonable AH viability takes enormous amount of time and cost, and creates despondency / New enquires remain buoyant, but clients are not committing. Fees are possibly going to become more of an issue and may have to be reduced in order to maintain a steady work stream / Use of professional services - applicants at smaller end of the scale are not understanding the value / Difficult to plan workload / Reduced staff by two thirds but I am frantically busy / Much more enforcement / A lack of development activity and a concerted and ill informed government scapegoating of planning is just about ending my business.

answered question: 38 skipped question: 3

29. Do you have a view as to how long a recovery will take in your sector? How long do you think it will take to return to the levels of previous activity?

- 1-2 years 32%
- 3-4 years 47%
- 5 or more years 21%

(comments received)

We work in different sectors and they vary. But the prospects for construction are not good - we target other sectors / I am fortunate not to have suffered as client base tends to own assets that they wish to enhance / Been here three times before, but this is going to be a longer haul than previous experience / It depends on how you define recovery! My business is just over 2 years old and still growing despite the economic uncertainty / I think the construction/development sector will be relatively flat for the next 3-4 years unless the recent public sector funding and initiatives prove to be successful. / As always the British media talk us into a recession. It is the air of uncertainty that is preventing people from committing to a project – although the recession has created a lot of work for me, as some see development as a way out of their financial problems.

answered question: 38 skipped question: 3

30. How can the RTPI better support independent consultants during the recession?

(comments received)

Raise awareness that there are good quality RTPI consultants with capacity for additional work. More short Network seminars on various topics, especially with the many changes to the planning system currently going through / Fight to retain simple tendering procedures and access to public sector work for sole traders / Support with strategic/business planning - we could advise on this / Lobbying for more regeneration funding in under performing areas. / Reduce subscription rates and reduced professional indemnity insurance rates as our rates are ridiculous relative to the actual risk / Better insurance rates, more deals with providers, advertise our services, promote chartered planners and have an accredited practice scheme / Reducing membership fees for consultants earning less than, say, £10,000 or £20,000 pa / Increase public awareness of and reasons for using a qualified consultant / Promote the need to use planning consultants / Lower

subs and subsidised CPD events. Lobbying Sweet & Maxwell and others to lower the cost of reference material to independent consultants./ Helping people who have been made redundant / By lobbying government to not stop regeneration activity, and to improve the perceived status of Chartered Town Planners that carry out regeneration and development work, as compared to Chartered Surveyors for example. Keep providing the level of support on-line that is available at the moment / Put on low cost training and update seminars on legislative and planning related changes / We're not all in development management - some of us specialise in interim management and planning support to LPAs / Scrutinise expenditure particularly on recruitment of senior staff (do we need a managing director and a chief executive) and so keep subscriptions as low as possible / Provide CPD that is free / Get public sector planners to appreciate how difficult it is outside their cosseted lives / Advice / Guidance notes on general business matters /By seeking to promote and advocate to LPAs a more reasonable and proportionate approach towards, and a better understanding of, the challenges faced by small practices and sole practitioners /More low cost sub regional networking opportunities / A difficult question to answer although the forum is a good way of getting quick advice from experienced professionals and I guess providing advice on business issues./ Accessible training on new topics as soon as they come to light / Provide hard statistics on the implications of NOT employing a planning consultant /Fight some of the more ridiculous claims, policies and ideas promoted by the Government who is making the job almost impossible to do at the coalface. I want to retire much sooner than I had intended a few years ago because it has all got so burdensome and hard to justify to clients. Who will pay £50 to 60K for an outline application when not that long ago it might have cost about £3,000? I don't feel I need any RTPI support as I have been through it all before. However workshops and mentoring of new independent consultants may be useful / Undertake national research into public sector use of small firms using / Many small firm panels have not been renewed so you are shut out of work. / Reduce RTPI fees by at least 30%. Myth busting a good idea but a coalition of militant action may be required. / More CPD at reasonable prices.

answered question: 38 skipped question: 3

31. What future work opportunities do you feel are open to consultants? Where do you think the demand will come from?

(comments received)

Neighbourhood planning - from parish/town councils, neighbourhood forums / Localism & neighbourhood planning work - if there is funding / LPA work if up-turn results in workload imbalance after staff cut backs / Change management with LPA's / Infrastructure projects? - these at least still seem to be ongoing / Diversification is essential -new skills / Specialisation is the key to getting work in a saturated market / Also different business models - CICs, third sector partnerships, etc / Work from local authorities will increase / New legislation always brings with it new opportunities In understanding and adding value to the wider development process. / Via agencies as a contractor - now advantageous to be Ltd company / New rules on employing agency staff is further affecting my ability to find new contracts. Fewer short term contracts are on offer, so with very little regeneration sector to speak of, and an apparent bias towards taking on permanent staff instead of consultants even for "short term" project work, I find it hard to see where demand for my services will come from / Community groups / The development of Neighbourhood Plans might increase opportunities for planners so long as resources are sourced to development them. Renewable energy schemes potentially if further subsidies are provided also advising developers on community consultation requirements from Localism Act / There is need (if not demand) for experienced support to LPAs in dealing with neighbourhood planning issues / Housing is a good long-term bet - rising population coupled with a shortage of supply Larger consultancies will get more work from the public sector. Smaller sole practitioners will get work mainly on personality of owner / Greater appeal work as planning system changes occur such as NPPF / Demand for more specialist work relating to Sustainability and Renewable Energy and large Infrastructure Projects / Community engagement and capacity studies / Enforcement / Renewable Energy Continuing my specialist minerals & waste work.

answered question: 38 skipped question: 3

32. The RTPI is developing the range of management guidance available to members. Please select the following areas that you feel would be of most use to you either now or in the future.

- **Professional indemnity and contractual guidance 63%**
- **Key issues in running your business 58%**
- Marketing and PR 58%
- Planning your exit from your business 26%
- Conflicts of interest 45%
- Business Finance 24%
- Succession planning 16%
- Responsibilities as an employer 21%
- Employee pay and conditions 11%

(Management guidance is currently available from the RTPI website <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/cgi-bin/item.cgi?ap=1&id=536>)

answered question: 38 skipped question: 3

Independent Consultants Network

33. Please let us know what you think of the Independent Consultants Network's (ICN) services:

	Very useful	Useful	Sometimes useful	Not useful	Response count
• Weekly email bulletin	37% (14)	40% (15)	21% (8)	3% (1)	38
• Small business news (section of bulletin)	11% (4)	46% (16)	31% (11)	11% (4)	35
• Website	5% (2)	43% (16)	43% (16)	8% (3)	37
• Discussion forum	32% (12)	16% (6)	40% (15)	13% (5)	38
• Annual meeting with PINS, PINS Wales or DPEA	29% (10)	20% (7)	29% (10)	23% (8)	35
• Database	3% (1)	31% (11)	37% (13)	29% (10)	35

answered question: 38 skipped question: 3

34. How often do you use the ICN website?

- Weekly 11%
- **Monthly 29%**
- Once or twice a year 24%
- Fortnightly 8%
- Quarterly 24%
- Never 8%

answered question: 38 skipped question: 3

35. Do you access 'Information and Support for Consultants' through the RTPI's Member Services?(www.rtpi.org.uk/member_services/piwp/)

- Yes 34%
- **No 37%**
- Unaware of this service 29%

answered question: 38 skipped question: 3

36. How often do you read your email bulletin?

