

**Tim Edmundson
Planning Research**

An investigation of potential measures to address
London Local Planning Authorities' recruitment and
retention problems

Report for the
Association of London Government, the
RTPI London Branch, and the
Association of London Borough Planning Officers

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Executive summary

E1 The project

- E1.1 This research was commissioned in December 2003 by the Association of London Government, the Association of London Borough Planning Officers and the London Branch of the Royal Town Planning Institute in order to investigate recruitment and retention problems affecting local planning authorities in London.
- E1.2 The research included a literature review, a small email survey of all London Boroughs, interviews with officers in a small number of London Borough Planning Departments, and discussions at seminars and meetings. Research and analysis was completed by the beginning of April 2004.

E2 The extent of recruitment and retention problems

- E2.1 Planning, in common with many local public services,¹ is suffering severe staff shortages nationally, and particularly in London.² In a survey last year³ 87% of local planning authorities nationally, and 94% in London, reported experiencing recruitment and retention problems that were affecting their ability to deliver an effective planning service. In London, turnover of local authority staff is higher than elsewhere⁴, and some London Boroughs have problems retaining planning staff.⁵
- E2.2 These problems have been getting worse, and an ageing workforce, “(d)ifficulties in attracting young people into public sector careers,” and changing demographics mean that recruitment and retention problems are likely to intensify.

Chart 1: Recruitment difficulties in London LPAs (ALG)

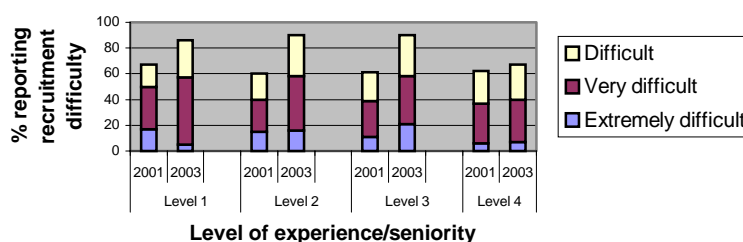
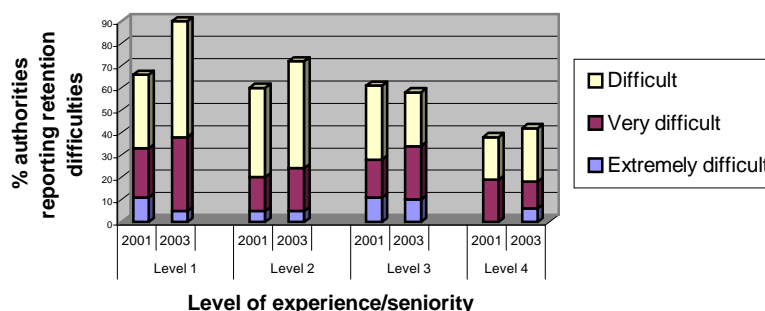


Chart 2: Retention difficulties in London LPAs (ALG)



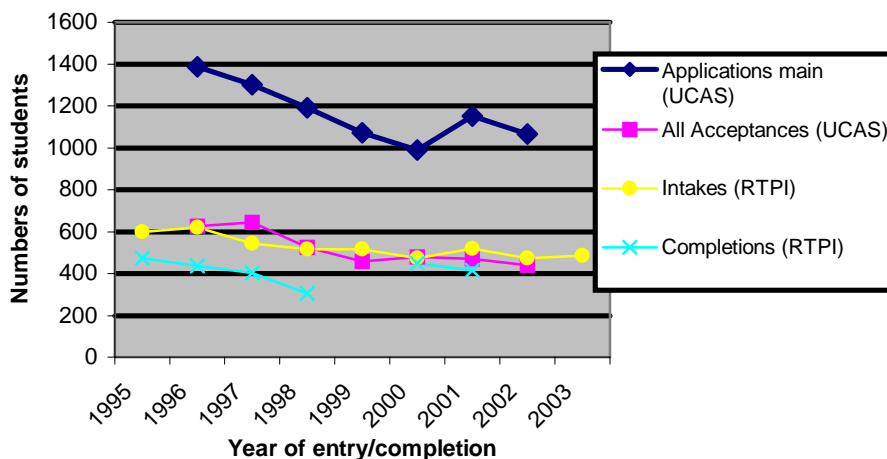
- E2.3 Two-thirds of the twenty-one boroughs responding to this study reported difficulties in recruiting experienced planners, and half had problems recruiting junior planners. One-third reported difficulties in recruiting planners at management level. The survey found that over 13% of planning posts were vacant.
- E2.4 Authorities are receiving few applications and are having difficulties compiling short-lists. Re-advertisements are common, and in several cases authorities had been unable to fill senior or even management posts. DC posts are harder to fill than policy posts, and posts in enforcement and urban design are the hardest to fill. The lack of suitably qualified applicants to permanent posts has forced authorities to fill 17% of their posts with temporary agency staff.
- E2.5 The research suggests that retention is a problem affecting the London market as a whole. Staff leaving London posts are often moving to jobs outside London or in the private sector. There appears to be little movement of staff in the other direction. This appears to be causing a decline in the availability of experienced staff in London. Retention of temporary staff is seen as a problem by some authorities, with staff moving on very quickly often as a result of head-hunting by agencies.

E3 The causes of the problems

Junior levels – student numbers

- E3.1 At a junior level the problems stem from a shortage of applicants with accredited planning qualifications. At best the number of full-time planning students completing courses nationally has remained stable whilst demand has grown considerably. Trends in applications and entrants are downwards, and completions seem likely to decline over the next few years.

**Chart 3: Applicants, acceptances, entrants and completions
RTPI full-time undergraduate courses**



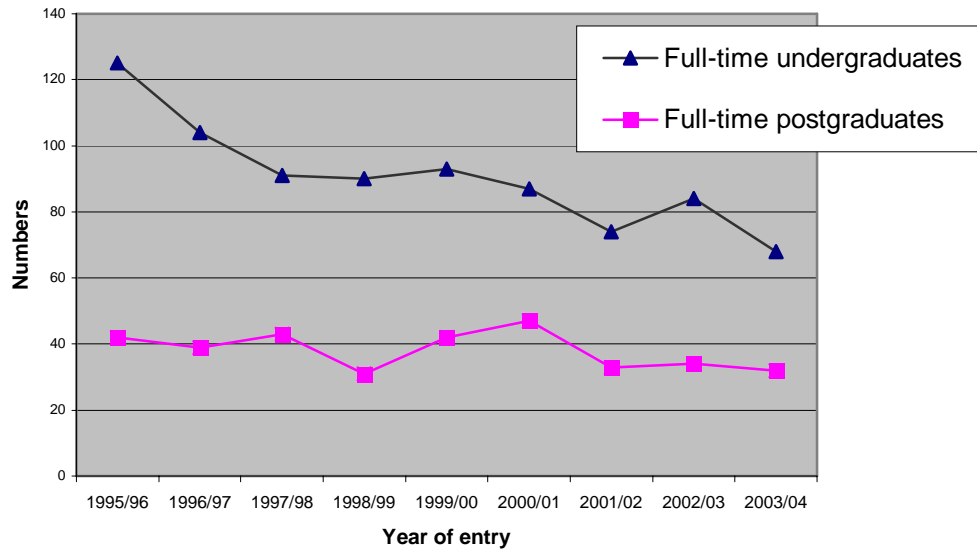
- E3.2 The situation in London and the south-east is considerably worse than that nationally.¹ There has been a substantial decline in the number of full-time

¹ The following five Universities offer RTPI accredited planning courses in London and the south-east: Oxford Brookes University; Reading University; London South Bank University; University College London; University of Westminster.

undergraduate students studying at Planning Schools in London and the south-east,² and less than 30 full-time postgraduate students entered Universities in London and the south-east in 2003/04. This adversely affects London employers as students are increasingly living at home and many are seeking employment near where they have studied.

Student entry to RTPI accredited courses in London & SE

Source: RTPI Planning Schools Annual Returns



E3.3 There are several reasons for the decline in applications to undergraduate courses and the low level of applications to postgraduate courses nationally.

- a lack of awareness of the subject, (rather than its “poor image,”) ^{6,7}
- a declining interest in vocational subjects
- a desire to keep career options open
- a general decline in interest in the built environment professions
- an association with, and attitudes towards, the public sector
- salaries and job prospects in planning (more relevant to potential postgraduates)
- Length of courses

E3.4 In London the cost of accommodation - a third more than elsewhere⁸ - is an additional deterrent “Being a full-time student in London may be becoming impossible for some.”⁹

Junior levels – shortage of applicants

E3.5 Student numbers provide only a partial indication of the supply of applicants to entry level jobs. Not all students completing accredited courses will seek jobs in local planning authorities. A third of the students accepting places on RTPI accredited planning courses in 2002/03 were taking jointly accredited programmes.¹⁰ Although some of the students completing such courses may seek local authority planning jobs upon completion of their degrees, most do not.¹¹

² The following five Universities offer RTPI accredited planning courses in London and the south-east: Oxford Brookes University; Reading University; London South Bank University; University College London; University of Westminster.

- E3.6 Low starting salaries and poor prospects¹² in local planning authorities, combined with the growth and greater attraction of jobs in private sector and a buoyant general jobs market will also influence students' job application decisions. Thus the figures for entrants to and completions of accredited planning courses may over-represent the likely supply of applicants to local planning authority jobs.
- E3.6 High living costs and low starting salaries are additional factors deterring students from seeking work in London. In 2002 the cost of rented accommodation was two-fifths higher in London than elsewhere, while average mortgages were 50 per cent higher.¹³ The salaries for junior posts in planning are amongst the lowest offered to local government professionals in London.¹⁴

Junior levels – growth in demand

- E3.7 The decline in supply is accompanied by a growth in demand for planning graduates and general graduates. Nationally “the number of vacancies for graduates is forecast to rise by nearly 12% in 2004 (8% in London), compared with a drop of 6.5% in 2002 and 3.5% last year.”¹⁵
- E3.8 Since 1997, the demand for junior planners has also increased substantially,¹⁶ and half of the London Boroughs in a recent survey considered that they would need more junior planners over the next five years, whilst only two thought that they would need less.¹⁷ There has also been an increase in the demand for junior planners from the private sector. A quarter of planning graduates now go into the private sector.¹⁸

Experienced staff

- E3.9 The national shortage of experienced planners has been attributed in part¹⁹ to the period of economic downturn in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A reduction in planning opportunities led to planning students and some experienced planners taking jobs outside planning, causing a “missing generation” of planners. This problem is compounded by an apparent net loss of experienced staff from local authorities in the capital to jobs outside London and in the private sector. Turnover may not have increased in individual authorities, but the net loss from London as a whole is causing recruitment problems to individual authorities. The age profile of planning suggests that the loss from retirement will also increase over the next few years.
- E3.10 Arup's study²⁰ found that planning staff are leaving the profession due to growing workloads, which contribute to poor staff morale and a poor image of the profession. This research found limited evidence of staff leaving the profession, although the buoyant jobs market and the growth of jobs in regeneration and other planning-related fields suggests that staff may be leaving the profession for other jobs.
- E3.11 Some experienced staff are leaving London due to their inability to get on the housing ladder, to purchase a larger property or, sometimes, because of a desire for a change of lifestyle. There were few examples of experienced staff moving in the other direction.
- E3.12 There appears to be a net loss, also, to the private sector. The proportion of RTPI Members working in the private sector rose from 18% to 24% between 1997 and 2001.²¹ One housebuilder employed five planning staff in 1998 and now employs seventeen; it is likely that many of these staff were recruited from local authorities and that this picture is repeated in other organisations. Higher pay, the perception that private sector jobs are more exciting, as well (possibly) as a decline in the public service ethos amongst staff, may all have attracted planners to the private sector.

Many of the major consultancies and developers are located in the capital, making competition for staff greater than elsewhere.

- E3.13 There are increasing concerns also about the “poaching” of staff between authorities.²² Arup found that the higher than desirable level of turnover, was often the result of movements between nearby authorities.²³

Implications of shortages

- E3.14 There are several implications of the shortage of planners. Most obvious are the difficulties and costs of maintaining the quality of service and the effect on the workload and morale of existing staff. These problems are likely to cause additional retention and, subsequently, recruitment problems.
- E3.15 The shortage of students will cause a continued shortage of planners, and this and the use of temporary staff will further reduce the numbers of experienced planners. In addition, the decline in student numbers could threaten the viability of Planning Schools and further reduce the supply of planners.

E4 Responses to the shortages

- E4.1 Individual authorities have adopted a variety of measures to deal with the problems. Short-term measures to deal with the staffing shortages at all levels of experience include the use of temporary agency staff and consultants. Longer-term measures to improve staffing levels, include the recruitment of non-planning graduates, training existing staff with planning qualifications, and creating trainee posts. To improve recruitment and retention of staff, some authorities have introduced pay packages or improved conditions. Enhancing the roles of support staff, process re-engineering and making more use of IT are amongst the measures adopted in an effort to reduce the effects of the shortages. All have strengths and weaknesses.

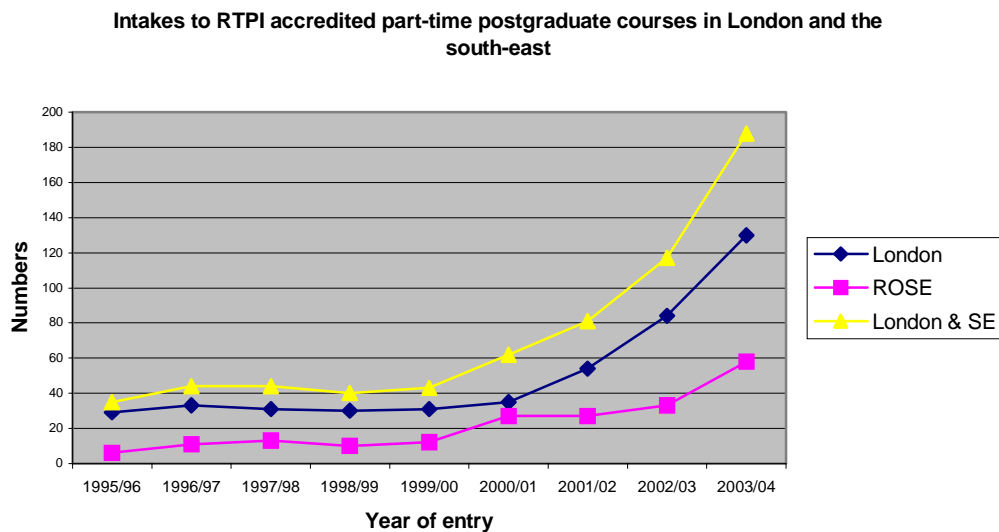
Temporary agency staff and consultants

- E4.2 The main response to shortages of junior and experienced staff has been to employ temporary agency staff. 17% of posts in the London authorities responding to this research are occupied by such staff. The majority of these staff come from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, however there appears to be an increase in the number of UK staff choosing to work through agencies.
- E4.3 Many of these staff are of a high quality and have planning qualifications and experience from their own countries. They also offer employers flexibility to cope with peaks and troughs in workloads. However, they are very expensive to employ - costing 20% or more than permanent staff, even after on-costs and recruitment costs are taken into account. In addition, many require considerable initial training and supervision, and often don't stay at one authority long enough to develop local knowledge of the social, economic, political and environmental context within which they are working.²⁴ This causes problems for the continuity of the service.
- E4.5 In the short-term there is often little alternative to employing such staff. However, costs could be reduced, and recruitment processes and training improved by the creation of a not-for-profit employment agency.
- E4.6 Many authorities employ consultants for specialist work or ad hoc projects for which they don't have the in-house expertise. A few authorities are also outsourcing some of the more routine and continuous work to sole traders or small firms. Some of these staff are former officers recently retired from the authority. Estimates suggest that consultants increase overall costs by between 30 and 40%²⁵, but provide

expertise and experience not otherwise available. Costs could be reduced by creating a public sector consultancy, unit or pool of experts.

Employing non-planning graduates

- E4.6 Many local authorities nationally, and in London and the south-east, are not requiring new junior recruits to hold an RTPI accredited planning qualification. In London this is primarily a response to the shortage of applicants with such qualifications.
- E4.7 The growth in the number of such recruits has led to a massive growth in the number of students taking part-time postgraduate planning courses, particularly in London and the south-east. As many as 75 employees of London Boroughs may be taking such courses at present (over 6%).



- E4.8 Most authorities have been able to recruit such staff more easily than planning graduates, largely from geography courses, and many are of a high calibre. The Tomorrow's Planners Initiative has enabled several authorities to recruit Black and Minority Ethnic graduates and address the under-representation of such staff in their authorities.
- E4.9 Recruiting non-planning graduates does have disadvantages. Such staff are studying away from the workplace for at least forty days annually and may require more initial in-house training and support than graduates of planning courses, as initially they lack knowledge of the statutory planning system. Balancing work and study imposes pressures on the staff, which can create retention problems. Mentoring and monitoring can help staff to cope with such pressures.
- E4.10 Recruitment practices could be improved to increase the numbers of applicants to junior posts, with greater use made of the local press, the internet and direct contact with HEIs.
- E4.11 A potential problem with the growth of this practice is the capacity of courses to accommodate the students. There is an urgent need to discuss with HEIs, at a pan London or wider level, the provision of places on courses and to reduce peaks and troughs in demand that cannot be accommodated by the training providers.

Trainees without degrees

- E4.12 Some authorities nationally are enhancing the roles of internal staff without planning qualifications, and offering them training on sub-degree or degree level courses, providing them with a pathway to a planning qualification. Few authorities, however, appear to be recruiting school-leavers or others without degrees, to trainee posts that combine planning work with part-time undergraduate study. There are few students on part-time undergraduate degrees nationally or in London.
- E4.13 This practice was more common in the 1980s, and several respondents expressed an interest in resurrecting this practice. The growth in students living at home and having to work part-time and future changes in student funding suggests that there may be potential demand for such trainee posts. However, the shortage of available courses presents a major barrier. Discussions with a range of stakeholders would be necessary to investigate the expansion and creation of sub-degree and degree level courses.

Recruitment from other sources

- E4.14 Respondents to the research suggested a number of other sources of recruits. These were not examined in detail and require further investigation of their feasibility. One suggestion was the recruitment of staff back into the profession following career breaks, the undertaking of child-rearing or other caring responsibilities, or retirement. Although there are many examples of returners working for local authorities, there may be many who have been discouraged by perceptions that their skills and knowledge are out of date or by their inability to work full-time. Returners' courses and flexible working arrangements could attract staff back, although it is unclear what methods could be used to reach such potential recruits.
- E4.14 Overseas planners from the enlarged EU may provide another potential source of recruits. Such staff have been recruited to the health service and teaching. Discussions with EURES and professional bodies overseas would be worth pursuing.
- E4.15 There may be some potential for more sharing of staff between Boroughs, particularly for specialist functions. Although there are successful examples of such practices outside London in environmental health, and in London in transport planning, and some legal and enforcement work, most respondents felt that there was limited potential for this in relation to mainstream planning work. Few authorities have spare capacity and sharing staff does not overcome the fundamental problems of a shortage of staff.

Enhancing the roles of internal staff without planning qualifications

- E4.16 Research for this and another project²⁶ indicates that many authorities have enhanced the roles of staff without accredited planning qualifications. The enhancement of roles has freed up planners from some of the less complex tasks they were undertaking. In addition, it has provided greater opportunities for progression and staff development and a fuller utilisation of the skills, abilities and ambitions of those members of the workforce who are not professional planners. Although promotion of such staff leaves a gap, it is generally easier to fill posts at this level than at the professional levels.²⁷
- E4.17 A barrier to the extension of such practices is the availability of training courses, particularly at sub-degree level, and the rigid pay structures of some authorities. Discussions with a range of stakeholders would be necessary to investigate the

expansion and creation of sub-degree and degree level courses, and authorities may need to consider introducing broader career bands to encourage staff to take enhanced roles.

Changing structures and processes

- E4.18 Many authorities across the country have changed their structures and processes in an attempt to minimise the effects of staff shortages. This has often been accompanied by the enhancement of the roles of staff without accredited planning qualifications, and the introduction of improved IT.²⁸ Many larger authorities have introduced minor applications or fast-track teams, set up customer liaison teams or roles and set up other teams undertaking a limited range of functions.
- E4.19 The creation of customer service teams and roles appears to have been successful in freeing up experienced planners' time. Minor applications teams, often including staff without accredited planning qualifications, appear to have been widely successful in improving performance, but staff in such teams have expressed concerns about the initiative unless it has been accompanied by staff development opportunities, such as staff rotation. In smaller departments such specialisation has often been considered unfeasible.

Improving pay and conditions

- E4.20 The introduction of broader career grades has been seen as successful by some authorities in improving the retention and recruitment of staff. Performance related pay has been introduced by some authorities, and other have introduced local supplements. These latter measures may prove successful to individual authorities, but have been criticised as creating a bidding war and increasing staff turnover, whilst doing little to address the underlying London-wide shortage of staff.
- E4.21 The introduction of work-life balance measures has proved very successful in several authorities. One of the case study authorities was a pilot for the national initiative, and has introduced a range of flexible working arrangements. In this authority, these measures have improved morale, performance and recruitment and retention. Few negative effects were reported by respondents. This mirrors the findings of a large volume of other research.²⁹
- E4.22 Planners in London have been included as key workers on a trialed pilot basis in a new scheme designed to provide accommodation to key front line public service workers in London and the south-east.³⁰ The scheme may well help to attract junior planners to London, particularly as planners are eligible only in London. However, as staff only become eligible once they have a job, the availability of accommodation would have to be given prominence in recruitment literature.
- E4.23 It might also help to retain planners with some experience who are at an early stage of their careers, who would otherwise have moved out of London due to their inability to purchase a first home. It is less likely that it will attract more experienced staff to London, or help to retain staff who are already in the housing ladder. Authorities will obviously need to publicise the scheme for it to be effective in improving the recruitment and retention of staff.

Increase the number of applicants with accredited planning qualifications

- E4.24 Students with accredited planning qualifications remain the main source of recruits to entry level jobs nationally, but the supply is not matching demand. In London the supply has declined dramatically to the concern of employers. To increase the supply of applicants there is a need not only to increase student numbers but also to attract those completing to jobs in London local planning authorities.

- E4.25 To increase student numbers action is necessary to increase the awareness of planning amongst potential students and their advisers, and improve its image and the image of local government generally. There is also a need to reduce the financial barriers to studying planning in London and the south-east.
- E4.26 There have been a number of national and local initiatives – by the RTPI, its Branches, Planning Schools and employers - designed to raise potential students' awareness of planning. These range from web pages, brochures and resource packs to attendance at careers events, competitions, work experience and school visits. Evidence suggests that the national careers literature, web site information and course brochures will have limited effect, given the volume of such material sent to schools. Planning is rarely prominent on careers web sites, and is unlikely to be found unless specifically sought. Other initiatives may be more effective in raising the awareness of participants, but resources have dictated that they are intermittent, cover small numbers of students and are not co-ordinated or systematic. There is an urgent need for new initiatives and for greater coordination of efforts in London.
- E4.27 The reduction of full-time postgraduate courses from two to one year full-time and the introduction of bursaries is likely to have a positive impact of postgraduate student numbers nationally and in London. However, London courses will be less attractive than others as the bursaries will not be weighted for London. Welcome though this initiative is, postgraduates make up only 20% of full-time planning students, and the likely increase will not dramatically change the numbers of full-time students studying in London and the south-east. There is no financial assistance for planning undergraduates, and the cost of four years' study is likely to remain a deterrent. The introduction of bursaries for other undergraduate students will compound the relative disadvantage. Some financial assistance to undergraduates would reduce this current barrier; top-up bursaries for postgraduates could increase applicants to London courses.

Lessons from elsewhere

- E4.28 Measures to address the problems facing the public sector have been introduced by the Government and relevant organisations. In addition, actions have been taken to address the problems facing particular professions. Considerable efforts have been made nationally to attract people to training courses and jobs in teaching, social work, health and the police. These are much larger occupational areas than planning, but there have been initiatives, also, in smaller professions such as environmental health and transport. They provide some useful lessons for planning.
- E4.29 The recruitment and retention crisis in teaching led the Government to introduce a range of primarily financial initiatives. These included bursaries for students, a repayment of loans scheme, golden hellos, a fast-track programme, a returners' scheme and the starter homes initiative. These measures have proved successful in increasing student numbers and improving recruitment. Retention remains a problem, although the aforementioned measures and others such as the workload initiative are intended to address this.
- E4.30 In London, the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Unit has been created to tackle issues that could best be addressed at a pan London level, including supply agency issues, housing and transport costs, and to recruit overseas staff.

- E4.31 The Transport Planning Skills Initiative was established in 2001 to address the shortage of transport planners. The Initiative had a final budget of £350,000 – half from sponsors, including Government Departments, and half in pro bono contributions – to implement an Action Plan. The Plan aimed to raise awareness of the profession, improve careers guidance, provide work experience opportunities, identify gaps in sub-degree, undergraduate, postgraduate and CPD training provision, secure financial support for students, and the provision of a coordinated framework of qualifications describing entry and progression routes for both technicians and professionals.
- E4.32 The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health has also undertaken a considerable amount of work to raise awareness of the profession, improve careers guidance, and encourage the provision of work experience opportunities following the development of a marketing plan by consultants. Discussion with employers and Government Departments has now led to the establishment of a partnership of employers' organisations and professional bodies who have produced the Regulatory Services Partnership Action Plan. This is intended to raise the profile of environmental health, trading standards and health and safety work in order to improve recruitment to these services. Bursaries are available for students, and employers are funding students through full-time undergraduate courses.

E5 Conclusions and recommendations

- E5.1 Many of the responses of authorities to the shortages of planners at different levels of experience create their own problems. Whilst the employment of temporary agency staff presents some advantages, in terms of flexibility, the current proportion of posts occupied by such staff is unacceptably high. Temporary agency staff are expensive and cause problems of continuity for the service. In addition, they will rarely remain in London to progress to more senior posts.
- E5.2 Many of the other possible responses to the shortages of planners will make little immediate impact on the shortages of planners, and particularly experienced planners. Authorities will therefore have to employ such staff in the short-term. The cost of employing such staff could be reduced, however, and some of the recruitment and training problems reduced by **the establishment of a not-for-profit employment and recruitment agency.**
- E5.3 A range of other measures could be adopted to address the shortage of applicants with accredited planning qualifications. Many authorities are already recruiting non-planning graduates and some are offering opportunities to administrative or technical staff to undertake enhanced work and/or train to become qualified planners. Both measures can help to address the shortages, but potential barriers are presented by the availability and capacity of part-time and distance learning training courses at sub-degree, undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
- E5.4 If local authorities were to offer **trainee posts for school leavers or others without degrees linked to places on part-time undergraduate planning courses** this may prove attractive to many potential students faced with the alternative of studying full-time whilst undertaking menial and low-paid work. Not only would this assist LPAs in their efforts to address longer-term recruitment and retention problems, an increase in the numbers of part-time undergraduates on planning courses would also help to retain the viability of full-time undergraduate courses and secure the future of London Planning Schools.

- E5.4 In relation to both the above measures, there is a need for **urgent discussions between employers, employers' organisations, the RTPI and training providers to address issues relating to training provision (See E5.12).**
- E5.5 There is a need to investigate several other potential sources of recruits and explore means of attracting such staff. Recruitment of returners and retired staff could help to address the shortages of experienced staff; **the provision of training for returners and flexible employment opportunities** might help to attract such recruits.
- E5.6 Measures relating to pay and conditions may improve recruitment and retention, and indirectly attract more students to planning courses. The majority of respondents to this research considered that performance related pay had more disbenefits than benefits, and research reveals mixed results.³¹ In contrast respondents reported that the **introduction of broader career bands and improved progression opportunities** had had positive effects on recruitment and retention of staff. Very positive results were reported concerning the **introduction of work-life balance measures**, and respondents were hopeful that **publicising the inclusion of planners as key workers** would help to attract new recruits and retain staff with some experience.
- E5.7 Changing structures and processes, increasing the use and effectiveness of IT, and enhancing the roles of staff without accredited planning qualifications** can also reduce the effects of staff shortages.
- E5.8 Many of the above measures will help to address the shortages of planners. It is unlikely, however, that recruiting trainees and internal staff, returners and retired staff will provide the number of staff necessary to overcome the problem. Although it would be possible to recruit non-planning graduates to entry level posts and allow full-time undergraduate courses in London to disappear, this would be a dangerous strategy as the training providers may not be able to provide the part-time undergraduate or even postgraduate courses necessary to train non-planning graduates.
- E5.9 A better solution would be to continue to recruit from a variety of sources, and attempt to support the provision of undergraduate courses by **providing a steady supply of entrants to part-time courses**, whilst supporting measures to increase numbers on full-time courses such as **raising awareness of planning** and the **provision of bursaries for full-time undergraduates, and supplementary bursaries for full-time postgraduates.**
- E5.10 The Employers Organisation³² considered that many of the recruitment problems faced by authorities are shaped by local circumstances and are best answered by local solutions. Some local solutions, such as enhancing the roles of support staff or training internal support staff, will have no implications for other boroughs and may help to reduce the shortages of planners across London. However, other measures adopted by individual boroughs may not have such a benign effect on other authorities. The shortages of planners at all levels of seniority across London, suggests that while some measures adopted by individual authorities may address their local problems they will not solve the London wide problem of staff shortages, and some may merely increase the problems of neighbouring boroughs and increase staff turnover.
- E5.11 In addition, the cumulative effects of some of the measures adopted by individual boroughs – such as the implications for Planning Schools of the increased

recruitment of non-planning graduates - will need to be addressed at a level wider than individual boroughs.

E5.12 Many of the measures highlighted above could be introduced by local authorities immediately, but it is recommended that ALG convene urgent meetings involving LGA, Employers Organisation, GOL, ODPM, RTPI, London First, LDA, LSCs, and other relevant bodies to discuss the establishment, funding and composition of the following three (or two) partnerships or units to co-ordinate or lead the introduction of the above measures:

- **A not-for-profit employment and recruitment agency**
 - To provide temporary staff at lower costs than existing agencies
 - To provide initial induction training for overseas recruits
 - To provide technical interviews for all staff

- **A pan London environmental/planning education unit**
 - To liaise with schools, universities, FE colleges, education departments, careers advisers, LSCs, RGS, RTPI and other relevant bodies to identify the most appropriate form and content of materials and initiatives to raise awareness of planning across London schools, college and universities
 - To develop new/enhance existing careers literature, teaching packs, and other material and initiatives in consultation with existing providers and the RTPI in the light of the above findings
 - To lead and coordinate the efforts of local authority planners, university staff, and other bodies undertaking planning education in schools colleges and universities
 - To coordinate the provision of work experience opportunities as part of vocational qualifications and independent of these

- **A national planning recruitment and retention unit**
 - To investigate and ensure the provision of adequate training opportunities at sub-degree, undergraduate and postgraduate levels in consultation with providers and the RTPI
 - To investigate, secure funding for, and coordinate the delivery of bursaries for undergraduate students
 - To investigate the potential for introducing a repayment of students loans system for planning students entering the public sector

E5.13 It is possible that some of these issues could be addressed by the National Centre for Sustainable Communities Skills proposed by the Egan Review. However, some actions – such as the not-for-profit employment agency and the coordination of efforts to raise awareness of planning in schools - would be more effectively undertaken or coordinated at a pan London level.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Section 18

Conclusions and recommendations

18.1 Introduction

- 18.1.1 The survey revealed high vacancy levels and continuing reports of difficulties in recruiting staff in order to maintain an adequate level of service. What seems clear from the survey of authorities is that many of the responses of authorities to the shortages of planners at different levels of experience have their own problems, and this and the scale of the problem suggests that it will require a wide variety of measures to begin to tackle the current shortages of planners in London.
- 18.1.1 The problem is one that affects the London market as a whole, and whilst the current responses by individual Boroughs address their own problems, they do little to address the pan London problems; some may even increase the problems of other Boroughs. This suggests that there is a need for a more co-ordinated approach to the problems backed by improved targeting of funding.

18.2 Employing temporary agency staff

- 18.2.1 Whilst the employment of temporary agency staff presents some advantages, in terms of flexibility, the current proportion of posts occupied by such staff is unacceptably high. Temporary agency staff are expensive and cause problems of continuity for the service and will not remain in London to progress to more senior posts.
- 18.2.2 Many of the other possible responses to the shortages of planners will make little immediate impact on the shortages of planners, and particularly experienced planners. Authorities will therefore have to employ such staff in the short-term. The cost of employing such staff could be reduced, however, and some of the recruitment and training problems reduced by **the establishment of a not-for-profit employment and recruitment agency.**

18.3 Recruiting non-planning graduates, internal staff and trainees

- 18.3.1 Many authorities are already **recruiting non-planning graduates** and some are **offering opportunities to administrative or technical staff to undertake enhanced work and/or train to become qualified planners.** Both measures can help to address the shortages, but potential barriers are presented by the availability and capacity of part-time and distance learning training courses at sub-degree, undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
- 18.3.2 If local authorities were to offer **trainee posts for school leavers or others without degrees linked to places on part-time undergraduate planning courses** this may prove attractive to many potential students faced with the alternative of studying full-time whilst undertaking menial and low-paid work. Not only would this assist LPAs in their efforts to address longer-term recruitment and retention problems, an increase in the numbers of part-time undergraduates on planning courses would also help to retain the viability of full-time undergraduate courses and secure the future of London Planning Schools.

18.3.3 In relation to both the above measures, there is a need for **urgent discussions between employers, employers' organisations, the RTPI and training providers to address issues relating to training provision (See 4.4.**

18.4 Other potential sources of recruits

18.4.1 There is a need to investigate several other potential sources of recruits and explore means of attracting such staff. Recruitment of returners and retired staff could help to address the shortages of experienced staff; **the provision of training for returners and flexible employment opportunities** might help to attract such recruits.

18.5 Improving pay and conditions

18.5.1 Measures relating to pay and conditions may improve recruitment and retention, and indirectly attract more students to planning courses. The majority of respondents to this research considered that performance related pay had more disbenefits than benefits, and research reveals mixed results. In contrast respondents reported that the **introduction of broader career bands and improved progression opportunities** had had positive effects on recruitment and retention of staff. Very positive results were reported concerning the **introduction of work-life balance measures**, and respondents were hopeful that **publicising the inclusion of planners as key workers** would help to attract new recruits and retain staff with some experience.

18.6 Changing structures and processes

18.7 **Changing structures and processes, increasing the use and effectiveness of IT, and enhancing the roles of staff without accredited planning qualifications** can also reduce the effects of staff shortages.

18.8 Increasing the supply of applicants with accredited planning qualifications

18.8.1 Many of the above measures will help to address the shortages of planners. It is unlikely that recruiting trainees and internal staff, returners and retired staff will provide the number of staff necessary to overcome the problem. Although it would be possible to recruit non-planning graduates to entry level posts and allow full-time undergraduate courses in London to disappear, this would be a dangerous strategy as the training providers may not be able to provide the part-time undergraduate or even postgraduate courses necessary to train non-planning graduates.

18.8.2 A better solution would be to continue to recruit from a variety of sources, and attempt to support the provision of undergraduate courses by **providing a steady supply of entrants to part-time courses**, whilst supporting measures to increase numbers on full-time courses such as **raising awareness of planning** (see E5.) and the **provision of bursaries for full-time undergraduates, and supplementary bursaries for full-time postgraduates.**

18.9 Delivery mechanisms

18.9.1 The EO³³ considered that many of the recruitment problems faced by authorities are shaped by local circumstances and are best answered by local solutions. Some local solutions, such as enhancing the roles of support staff or training internal support staff, will have no implications for other boroughs and may help to reduce the shortages of planners across London. However, other measures adopted by individual boroughs may not have such a benign effect on other authorities. The

shortages of planners at all levels of seniority across London, suggests that while some measures adopted by individual authorities may address their local problems they will not solve the London wide problem of staff shortages, and some may merely increase the problems of neighbouring boroughs and increase staff turnover.

18.9.2 In addition, the cumulative effects of some of the measures adopted by individual boroughs – such as the implications for Planning Schools of the increased recruitment of non-planning graduates - will need to be addressed at a level wider than individual boroughs.

18.9.3 Many of the measures highlighted above could be introduced by local authorities immediately, but it is recommended that ALG convene urgent meetings involving LGA, Employers Organisation, GOL, ODPM, RTPI, London First, LDA, LSCs, and other relevant bodies to discuss the establishment, funding and composition of the following three (or two) partnerships or units to co-ordinate or lead the introduction of the above measures:

- **A not-for-profit employment and recruitment agency**
 - To provide temporary staff at lower costs than existing agencies
 - To provide initial induction training for overseas recruits
 - To provide technical interviews for all staff

- **A pan London environmental/planning education unit**
 - To liaise with schools, universities, FE colleges, education departments, careers advisers, LSCs, RGS, RTPI and other relevant bodies to identify the most appropriate form and content of materials and initiatives to raise awareness of planning across London schools, college and universities
 - To develop new/enhance existing careers literature, teaching packs, and other material and initiatives in consultation with existing providers and the RTPI in the light of the above findings
 - To lead and coordinate the efforts of local authority planners, university staff, and other bodies undertaking planning education in schools colleges and universities
 - To coordinate the provision of work experience opportunities as part of vocational qualifications and independent of these

- **A national planning recruitment and retention unit**
 - To investigate and ensure the provision of adequate training opportunities at sub-degree, undergraduate and postgraduate levels in consultation with providers and the RTPI
 - To investigate, secure funding for, and coordinate the delivery of bursaries for undergraduate students
 - To investigate the potential for introducing a repayment of students loans system for planning students entering the public sector

18.10 Implementation

18.10.1 Funding would be required for research to investigate the feasibility of these initiatives, the form such partnerships or bodies would take, where they would be located, and the way in which they would operate. If such research were to provide positive results, funding would be required to develop the bodies. Funding could be sought from a range of national and local public sector organisations, for example: the ODPM, GOL, ALG, LGA, LDA.

18.10.2 One potential danger of the creation of such a body is that, if it proves effective in recruiting temporary staff, it may lead to an initial period of considerable instability and mobility amongst existing temporary staff. This could be very disruptive for many authorities, and particularly those most reliant on temporary staff. It would therefore be advisable for the agency to develop slowly at first. This potential short-term problem would, however, be considerably outweighed by the longer-term benefits in terms of reduced costs.

Section 19

Action Plan

Recommendation	Reasons	Action	Possible funding sources
To set up a pan-London not-for-profit recruitment, employment and training agency	<p>To reduce the cost of employing temporary employment agency staff</p> <p>To improve the quality of recruitment processes and training provision for temporary staff</p>	<p>ALG to seek funding to undertake or commission research into the feasibility of setting up an agency and to develop a model</p> <p>ALG to seek start-up funding if research results positive</p>	<p>ODPM, GOL, LDA, GLA, LBs, ALG</p> <p>ODPM, GOL, LDA, GLA, LBs, ALG</p>
To set up a planning/environmental education unit to raise awareness of planning in schools and universities	To increase the future supply of planning graduates and the future supply of staff	<p>ALG to develop a unit in discussion with GOL/ODPM, LBs, LGA, EO, RTPi, RGS, DfES, HEIs and other stakeholders</p> <p>The unit would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare or adapt existing training packs for schools • Co-ordinate and prepare material for school and university visits, environmental education projects, competitions etc • Undertake promotional visits and attend career fairs to schools and universities • Liase with graduate recruitment agencies and careers services, Planning Schools etc 	ALG, ODPM, GOL, LDA, GLA, LBs, RTPi
To set up a national Planning Recruitment and Retention		ALG to initiate discussions with ODPM, LBs, LGA, EO, RTPi, RGS, DfES, HEIs and other	ODPM

Agency		stakeholders The RRU to: Seek funding for, and coordinate the delivery of bursaries for undergraduates Ensure availability adequate level and distribution of education and training courses To produce or procure good practice guides for local authorities to assist their efforts to improve recruitment and retention	
To secure the continued provision of adequate capacity on part-time postgraduate planning courses to meet demand	To improve recruitment and retention, and ensure adequate training for unqualified staff	ALG to discuss with HEIs the provision of places on part-time postgraduate planning courses ALG to discuss with HEIs the possibility of entering partnerships to enable a regular supply of students to HEIs and a regular supply of places	ALG, HEIs ALG, HEIs
To encourage LBs to introduce more work-life balance practices	To improve staff retention and improve recruitment	ALG to synthesise existing research into the benefits of work life balance practices and undertake new research across London Boroughs if necessary ALG to disseminate the results of the research and produce a best practice guide or toolkit	ALG, ODPM, GOL, LDA, GLA, LBs, ALG, ODPM, GOL, LDA, GLA, LBs
To encourage LBs to increase basic levels of pay for junior staff and introduce career grades	To improve staff recruitment and retention	ALG to investigate and provide guidance on different models	ALG
To encourage LBs to introduce	To improve retention of junior	ALG to investigate staff development	ALG, ODPM, GOL, LDA, GLA,

structured staff development programmes involving training and rotation of duties	staff	models in LBs	LBs
To encourage LBs to include planners in their key worker living programmes	To improve the retention of junior planners and planners with experience within the London jobs market To improve the recruitment of junior planners to London authorities from elsewhere	ALG to promote the scheme to LBs	(ODPM)
To encourage LBs to introduce trainee posts at sub-degree level, linked to part-time study	To increase the supply of qualified planners in the future	ALG to encourage LBs to create trainee posts at sub-degree level ALG to discuss the creation and/or expansion of broad based planning-related part-time Foundation or Undergraduate courses in planning urban management with HEIs ALG to discuss setting up partnerships with HEIs to develop the courses and ensure a regular supply of students and places. ALG and HEIs to discuss with professional bodies the accreditation of such courses and/or progression to accredited courses	ALG ALG, HEIs ALG, HEIs ALG, GOL, HEIs, RTPI, IHT and related professional bodies
To encourage LBs to provide training and career development opportunities to enable those members of the planning workforce without planning qualifications (administrative	To develop fully the potential of all staff and increase the supply of qualified planners	ALG to investigate and develop career development models for administrative and other support staff ALG to disseminate details of these models and publicise the availability of distance	ALG ALG, LBs

and support staff) to undertake courses leading to technical or corporate membership of the RTPI.		<p>learning courses, NVQs and day release courses</p> <p>ALG to lobby ODPM to provide funding to investigate the need for additional provision and to fund an increase in the capacity of existing courses and/or develop new courses if necessary</p>	ALG, ODPM, existing training providers
To set up a database of qualified planners not currently working in planning but seeking part-time or full-time employment in London	To increase the pool of experienced planners from which London Boroughs can recruit	<p>ALG to discuss with the RTPI the possibility of using its database of members to invite non-working members to register on the database</p> <p>To encourage LBs to offer flexible employment opportunities to such staff</p>	ALG
To investigate the potential for recruiting planners from Europe	To identify other potential sources of recruits to London LPAs	ALG to commission or undertake research into the availability of planners in the EU	ALG
To improve recruitment methods currently employed by LBs	To increase the level of applications to jobs at all levels	<p>ALG to undertake or commission research, and synthesise existing research, into the effectiveness of current recruitment methods used in London and elsewhere</p> <p>The research would require questionnaire surveys of employees, managers and HR Departments in LPAs to discover information sources, and views on different types of jobs, advertisements, pay and conditions and material supplied by the Boroughs to candidates.</p>	ALG, GOL, LDA

Endnotes

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- ²¹ RTPI (2001) *Members Survey 2001: “How can the RTPI deliver its vision for planning?” commentary on the findings of research undertaken by Priority Research Ltd.*
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- ²⁴ Watson,J. (2001) op cit
- ²⁵ Arup (2002) op cit
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