

# 14 Culture and capability

## Key points

- Successful reform of the institutional, statutory, governance and regulatory framework for urban planning in New Zealand requires corresponding changes in planning culture and capability. Lack of alignment of culture and capabilities with the direction of reform impeded the successful introduction of the RMA, and is an ongoing constraint.
- From the start of planning in New Zealand, traditions, beliefs, legislation and planning personnel from overseas have heavily influenced planning culture and capability. Professional bodies and associations also had a substantial influence as a conduit for planning values, beliefs and assumptions.
- The role and scope of an emboldened planning culture expanded as planners attempted to solve a wide range of social and policy problems. Yet such issues were largely outside the control of local government and beyond the ambit of land-use regulation. Moreover planners lacked the necessary knowledge, capability and skills to solve them.
- The planning profession in New Zealand has struggled to carve out a distinctive professional identity, and lacks some of the key elements of a “professionalised” regulatory workforce. In the absence of a strong professional identity founded on disciplinary knowledge, planners tend to fall back on legislation to define their role in the planning system. Tensions between subgroups within the planning profession also hinder the development of a clear professional identity.
- A future planning system requires more focus on rigorous analysis of policy options and planning proposals. This would require councils to build their technical skills in areas such as environmental science, economic analysis, policy analysis and evaluation. It will also require a stronger understanding of Māori worldviews and more effective engagement with Māori.
- Councils will require “access” to a wide range of skills and knowledge, covering multiple disciplines and processes. This will require strong capabilities in evaluation and policy analysis, mediation skills, a capacity to listen to and understand the knowledge, analysis and opinions of experts, and to articulate trade-offs among issues raised. A greater emphasis on critical thinking is needed among those involved in planning, requiring a deeper understanding of notions of substantiality, subsidiarity and negotiability.
- In a future planning system, central government should substantially improve its understanding and knowledge of, and engagement with, the local government sector who are important implementers of much legislation. A greater capability to engage on urban planning issues will help promote more productive interactions between central and local government and achievement of mutual goals. It will also allow central government to better fulfil its regulatory stewardship obligations.
- The question of who will lead the reforms proposed in this report is vexed. The academic and planning organisations are likely to be resistant, largely wedded to the status quo and incremental change. Fundamental reform of the current urban planning system will be hampered unless entrenched views, natural conservatism and resistance to change are understood and addressed.
- Yet the statutory, institutional and governance settings proposed in this report will provide strong incentives for councils to, over time, develop and employ the necessary capability and skills. Those carrying out the planning task and councils operating in the proposed new environment will more likely be successful if their cultural attributes, capability and skills are aligned with the new settings.

The Terms of Reference ask the Commission to investigate the behaviour and actions of councils, planners and central government. This chapter will explore behaviour through a lens of organisational and

professional culture (referred to generally as “planning culture”). In this context, “culture” covers a wide range of factors that influence behaviour, including the competencies passed to new staff without being formally articulated; mental models that guide how planning tasks are to be approached; and ideological principles that differentiate acceptable and unacceptable outcomes and behaviours (Schein, 2010).

Because of their influence on the planning system, this chapter will focus on the culture and capability of the planning profession, local authorities, central government, and others involved in planning. It will identify the key influences on planning culture and attributes that are necessary to support good planning outcomes and a future planning system.

It will investigate the planning skills and the workforce capabilities necessary to support the planning framework proposed in this report. This chapter uses the terms “skills” to describe the abilities, knowledge, and expertise required of planning staff in effectively carrying out their roles. As discussed in Chapter 3, the role of urban planning is threefold:

- regulating negative spillovers arising from different uses of land;
- providing a fair and efficient level of local public goods; and
- coordinating investment in relevant infrastructure.

## 14.1 What is culture?

The “culture” of an organisation or profession describes the norms, values and beliefs shared by staff working in the organisation or within the profession. These include norms of behaviour and accepted wisdom around the factors that are important for organisational/professional success and how success is best achieved.

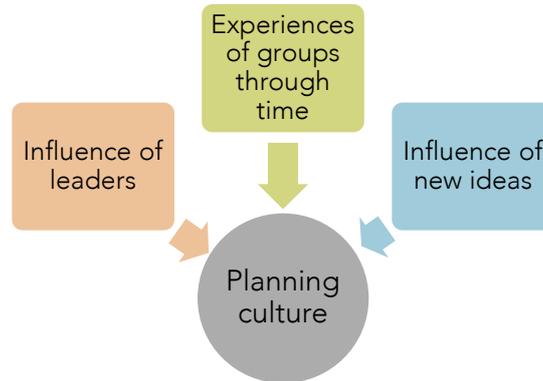
Culture can be conceptualised as the shared, tacit assumptions that a group has come to take for granted and that determine the daily behaviour of group members (Schein, 2013). In this way, culture can be likened to a “psychological contract” that lays out the unwritten rules that govern how people within an organisation or profession are expected to act, think and feel (Brewis & Willmott, 2012; NZPC, 2014b).

Organisational and professional culture emerges from three primary sources.

- *The actions of leaders.* Professional and organisational leaders have a profound impact on the beliefs, values, assumptions and behaviours that evolve within the planning profession. They do this by drawing on their own experiences, convictions and assumptions to propose answers to the questions about the scope and goal of planning and how best to undertake the planning task. In this way, leaders provide a source of ideas and cognitive frameworks for those involved in planning. Importantly, cultural messages are sent through the actions of leaders, and what leaders *don’t* acknowledge as being important is as significant as what they *do* acknowledge (Victorian Public Sector Commission, 2013).
- *Shared experiences of planners as their understanding of what it takes to be “successful” evolves.* Planning cultures evolve through time in response to the experience of organisations and individuals. As planners and planning organisations become more experienced, the approaches of leaders are applied and tested, and with them the values and assumptions that underpin these approaches. If the approaches are repeatedly successful, they become embedded in the beliefs and values of the organisation and the profession. Unsuccessful approaches are (through time) re-examined and new assumptions emerge to take their place (or existing assumptions are modified). In this way, the collective experiences of planners and planning organisations combine to shape planning culture. Importantly, what constitutes “success” may change through time (eg, in response to changes in the legislative environment, social attitudes and technology).
- *Different beliefs, values and assumptions brought in by new planners and leaders.* When new staff arrive at an organisation they bring with them their own experiences, beliefs and traditions. Staff who come to planning from other disciplines also bring the culture of their previous discipline. The injection of new ideas, values and ways of doing things can influence planning culture, particularly when changes are

made to key personnel such as the chief executive, chief planning officer, university professors or leaders of professional institutes.

**Figure 14.1 Sources of professional and organisational culture**

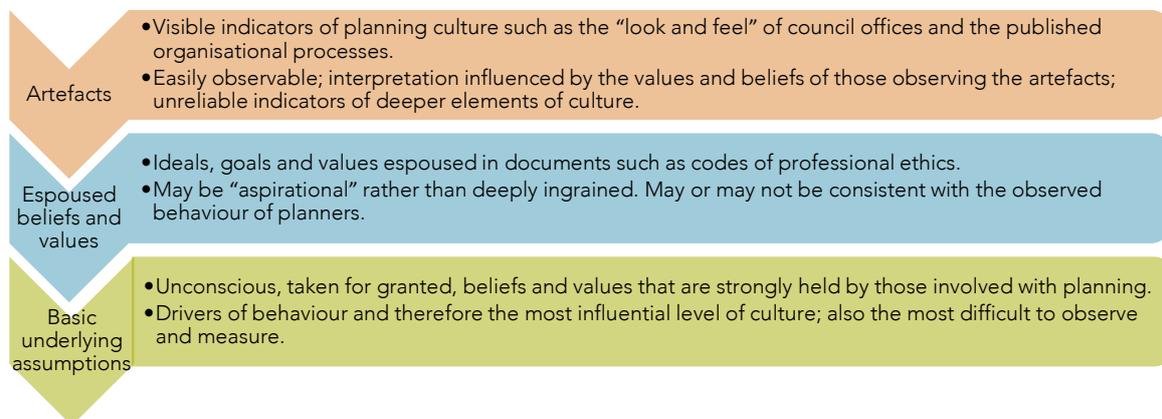


Assessing planning culture is a difficult task. At the most basic level, culture can be examined by looking at visible attributes or “artefacts” of culture (Figure 14.2). These visible artefacts include, for example, the design and style of planning publications, the language used by planners, and observations of how planners interact with other professions. While such artefacts can be readily observed, they can be difficult to decipher.

At a deeper level, culture can be examined by looking at the espoused values and beliefs of planners and planning organisations. Documents such as professional codes of ethics, vision statements and declarations of organisational values are common sources of adopted values. For some planning organisations, espoused values and beliefs may have emerged through time as a set of “tried and tested rules”. However, for others they may be “aspirational” rather than deeply ingrained and may therefore have little influence on the behaviour of planners, or at least on their skillsets.

The deepest level of cultural analysis involves examining the basic underlying assumptions that guide the behaviour of planners and planning organisations. These are “unconscious and taken for granted ways of seeing the world and are the source of the values and artefacts” (Brewis & Willmott, 2012, p. 378). It is the underlying values and assumptions of planners that ultimately steer behaviour, but these are the hardest elements of culture to observe and examine. Ultimately, they may best be revealed by prevailing behaviours among “members of a culture”, especially as they manifest across organisations and/or in the codes of professional associations.

**Figure 14.2 Levels of planning culture**



Source: Schein, 2010.

## 14.2 Culture and the reach of the planning role

This section examines the role and scope of planning.

### Urban planning is founded on a belief of “doing good”

Urban planning in New Zealand has its genesis in the English “town planning” paradigms that emerged in response to the Industrial Revolution. During this period, rapid urbanisation increased population density in English cities, and water and sewerage infrastructure struggled to keep pace with the influx of people. This – along with a rapid decline in air quality – resulted in widespread disease and illness. Concerns about the exploitation of labour and the squalid living conditions of the urban poor led to the emergence of social reformers seeking a healthier, more equitable society (Scobie & Jardine, 1987).

Against this backdrop, town planning emerged as a logical solution to urban problems. Separation of conflicting land uses – particularly industry and housing – became the key instrument for achieving higher living standards and better health conditions (particularly for the urban poor). Planning facilitated the all-important supply of sanitation and water services to housing areas and reduced the negative impacts of congestion and pollution associated with living close to workshops and factories. Separation of conflicting land uses also facilitated planning for urban expansion and the provision of transport and energy infrastructure to households and businesses.

In this way, the planning profession can be said to be founded on a moral precept of “doing good” for society. Early English reformers and founders of the new planning profession saw town planning as bringing “order” and “certainty” in a period of chaotic growth and widespread disease. They also saw the opportunity to plan for a better future in which cities were more liveable and residents were happier and healthier. All that was required to realise this vision, they believed, were small constraints on individual property rights in the interest of the community as a whole. In this way, town planning operated as a mediator ensuring that the greater good was achieved and that the surrender of private property rights was enforced. This basic trade-off between private property rights and the wider community good is a founding principle of the planning profession.

For decades this trade-off worked because town planning, it was quickly realised, also delivered the property owner a basic certainty and a bundle of exploitable rights. The certainty that town planning provided ensured each landowner was clear about what they could use their land for and, most importantly, what their neighbour could use their land for. Town planning could also offer new or enhanced property rights and development opportunities that increased the value of land.

During the early 1900s New Zealand experienced widespread public debate about town planning. Various planning schemes were mooted and proposed, drawing to varying degrees on the US, UK and Australian planning systems. The increased public and political momentum to manage the built environment was motivated by the desire to raise amenity, remove unsightly areas and control social problems such as “larrikinism” (Perkins et al., 1993, p. 18). Conditions in some inner-city residential districts were reported as “slum-like”. A 1903 survey of 300 inner-city Wellington houses found more than half were in an unsatisfactory state – “damp, dilapidated ... [and] infested with vermin” and one-fifth were overcrowded (Schrader, 2012).

The English “Garden City” movement had a deep influence on planning philosophies in New Zealand. The movement arose in Britain in the 1890s in response to the squalid conditions in industrial cities, and promoted “environmentalism” – the idea that the physical environment shaped human behaviour. As Schrader (2012) explains:

The [Garden City] movement feared [...] cities were creating a degenerate working population and would cause national decline. The solution was to remove people from metropolitan areas and resettle them in suburban-like garden cities. In such settlements land uses would be zoned and populations restricted to 30,000. The nuclear family would be the main social unit and local community centres would facilitate public life. Not only would former inner-city dwellers’ health improve in garden cities, they might also adopt middle-class values. (p. 2)

The wellbeing of people and the desire to avoid the social ills experienced in England became an early tenet of town planning in New Zealand. Scobie and Jardine (1987) provide an apt illustration.

In a speech to the First New Zealand Town and Country Planning Conference in 1919, the Minister of Customs, the Hon. Myers, stresses the “effects of systematic town and country planning increasing national prosperity and the evolution of a healthier and efficient race”. He cited figures for the gross death rates in planned English communities, and compared these to the (higher) rates in New Zealand without town and country planning. Similar “evidence” was also presented for the heights and weights of children in planned industrial estates compared with those in the unplanned cities. While hardly constituting a rigorous test of the hypothesis, his statement is symptomatic of an early conviction that town and country planning was ‘good’, and that society would be less healthy and have lower real incomes in its absence. (p. 5)

The British House and Town Planning Act and formation of the British Town Planning Institute early in the 20th century institutionalised these founding views of planning. In New Zealand these ideas influenced the Town Planning Act 1926 (TPA), which introduced a modest planning system for urban areas with more than 2 000 residents. The production of town plans was slow due to a lack of town planning practitioners and the unwillingness of local authorities to take on a potentially expensive responsibility (for which there was little local demand).

The TPA was followed by more comprehensive legislation in 1954 – the Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA). The TCPA codified and institutionalised Garden City planning philosophies. That Act required councils to prepare land use plans based on zoning regulations. The introduction of the TCPA coincided with large-scale infrastructure projects in New Zealand. Responsibility for town planning transferred from the Department of Internal Affairs to the (then very powerful) Ministry of Works. This led to the creation of the Town and Country Planning Directorate within the Ministry of Works.

During this time, planning became a major arm of government and asserted greater control over the urban fabric. A steady stream of British planners also came to New Zealand. These planners brought more authoritarian planning backgrounds and professional cultures.

The 1977 revision of the TCPA recognised an increasing diversity in circumstances among regions and amplified the focus on economic development. The revisions recognised that a standardised prescription of zones ignored local circumstance. As such, the revisions gave local councils responsibilities for preparing plans. One result was an extension of planning into many facets of urban life, prescribing the activities that could be undertaken in increasing detail.

The shift to greater prescription was influenced by the emergence of the Rational Comprehensive Model of planning (Taylor, 1998). Under this model, planning was conceptualised as a simple process of defining a problem, establishing planning criteria, creating alternatives, implementing alternatives, and monitoring progress of the alternatives. The Rational Comprehensive Model provided an important operational framework for planners during the early years of the planning profession.

McLoughlin (1969) conceptualised cities as complex systems that planners could model and steer through plans. McLoughlin saw planners as technical experts, whose job was to help set social goals (including modelling the evolution of cities) and monitor progress towards those goals by taking corrective action when the city deviated from them. While conceptually powerful, the interpretation of cities as complex systems was information intensive and appears to have played little part in urban planning in New Zealand.

The 1960s and 1970s saw growing concern over urban sprawl due to the apparent destruction of productive agricultural land. These concerns reflected the importance of farming to New Zealand’s economy, and more significantly, to the country’s national identity and consciousness. The 1953 and 1977 TCPAs institutionalised this unique “kiwi” twist on planning by including the preservation of land with “high actual and potential value for the production of food” as one of the Matters of National Importance (MNI) to be “recognised and provided for” in plans. Other MNI were avoiding urban sprawl, preserving amenities and heritage sites, recognising the relationship of Māori with land and preserving the natural character of and access to the coast, lakes and rivers (Chapter 11).

New Urbanism is a relatively recent planning paradigm that emerged from the United States in the early 1980s. This approach is based on the belief that the design of urban areas is central to achieving “more sustainable neighbourhoods, buildings and regions” (Robbins, 2013, p. 313). This approach to planning has gained wide appeal in New Zealand – largely due to its promise to prevent sprawl, protect agricultural land and create more harmonious neighbourhoods. Miller (2016) notes:

New Zealand seems to have adopted these ideas quite uncritically and begun to include them in district plan residential zones in particular. Given the RMA largely ignored the urban world there was a void in New Zealand planning waiting to be filled. (p. 35)

Robbins notes that “the CNU [Charter of New Urbanism] has a fundamental and almost evangelical belief in the role of design not only in informing a better city but also in shaping a better society” (p. 316) (see Box 14.1).

#### Box 14.1 **The Charter of the Congress for the New Urbanism**

“The Congress for the New Urbanism views disinvestment in central cities, the spread of placeless sprawl, increasing separation by race and income, environmental deterioration, loss of agricultural lands and wilderness, and the erosion of society’s built heritage as one interrelated community-building challenge.

**We stand** for the restoration of existing urban centers and towns within coherent metropolitan regions, the reconfiguration of sprawling suburbs into communities of real neighborhoods and diverse districts, the conservation of natural environments, and the preservation of our built legacy.

**We advocate** the restructuring of public policy and development practices to support the following principles: neighborhoods should be diverse in use and population; communities should be designed for the pedestrian and transit as well as the car; cities and towns should be shaped by physically defined and universally accessible public spaces and community institutions; urban places should be framed by architecture and landscape design that celebrate local history, climate, ecology, and building practice.

**We recognize** that physical solutions by themselves will not solve social and economic problems, but neither can economic vitality, community stability, and environmental health be sustained without a coherent and supportive physical framework.

**We represent** a broad-based citizenry, composed of public and private sector leaders, community activists, and multidisciplinary professionals. We are committed to reestablishing the relationship between the art of building and the making of community, through citizen-based participatory planning and design.

**We dedicate** ourselves to reclaiming our homes, blocks, streets, parks, neighborhoods, districts, towns, cities, regions, and environment.”

Source: Congress for the New Urbanism: [www.cnu.org/who-we-are/charter-new-urbanism](http://www.cnu.org/who-we-are/charter-new-urbanism)

The Ministry for the Environment (MfE) has facilitated and supported the socialisation of New Urbanism in New Zealand – principally through the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol (Gunder, 2011).

Yet while New Urbanism has gained wide appeal, support for the paradigm is far from universal – indeed numerous planners are critical of its core values and assumptions (Gunder, 2011). Some planners argue that urban design is best suited to the public realm and that putting urban design controls into District Plans takes the concept of urban design too far (Miller, 2016). Larice and Macdonald (2007) note:

New Urbanism is criticized, especially in academic circles, on numerous grounds; that its traditionally inspired forms are antimodern and nostalgic; that its recommendations are too prescriptive and formulaic; that its emphasis on form smacks of physical determinism; that its projects are elitist because

they are not particularly affordable; and that it is contributing to urban sprawl because many projects built on greenfield sites are of relatively low density. (p. 308)

Several planning academics have questioned the evidence base of New Urbanism (Talen, 1999; Cuthbert, 2007; Gunder, 2011). For example, Sternberg (2000) notes that New Urbanism tends “to operate in a theoretical vacuum . . . and to invite dogmatic adherence” (p. 265). Similarly, Cuthbert (2007) describes New Urbanism as “a methodologically based practice with some rather dubious assumptions about the growth of cities and the generation of urban form” (p. 209).<sup>105</sup>

Also criticised are the New Urbanism planning prescriptions and advocacy for curbing urban sprawl and the wellbeing and sustainability benefits of compact city forms. Troy (2013), for example, notes:

There was a romantic notion that increasing urban density would lead to greater participation in urban life in the whole range of social and cultural pursuits in a city. The evidence is, however, that there is a higher level of disputation between occupants of strata title developments. Easthope (2012) suggests that the argument that increasing density increases community engagement is flawed. (p. 8)

Troy goes on to say: “The notion that . . . cities would be made more efficient, lively places if they were massively increased in their density has become one of those dominant paradigms untested by research or rigorous discussion with the public” (p. 10). Neuman (2005) reviews the empirical data on whether compact cities are sustainable and concludes: “The planning profession and academy take as axiomatic that the compact city is more sustainable than sprawl . . . the evidence is equivocal and does not necessarily support that claim.” (p. 12)

#### F14.1

A number of historical influences have shaped the planning culture in New Zealand:

- the moral precept of doing good for society by bringing “order” and “certainty” (dating from the Industrial Revolution which caused chaotic growth and widespread disease);
- the traditions of the English Garden City movement and a belief that planning, and the shape of the physical environment, is vital for the health and wellbeing of the community;
- the legislative frameworks, planning models and traditions imported from Britain, along with a workforce of influential British planners;
- a belief that urban areas need to be contained to protect agricultural soils, and that this was important for New Zealand’s national identity; and
- the New Urbanism model of planning, that emerged from the United States in the early 1980s, and its belief in the role of design in achieving better cities and also shaping a better society.

## Professional bodies reinforce a process-driven approach to planning

Higher-order goals and expectations expressed by bodies representing professional planners provide a useful insight into the role that planners see themselves playing in the system. How planners see their role is important because it illustrates the “space” in which planners see themselves working. This in turn helps to inform the worldview of the profession and the norms that underpin planning practice.

The Commission has looked at how planning professional bodies in six countries, including New Zealand, view the role of planning and planners. The views from Australia, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada are set out in Table 14.1.

<sup>105</sup> Gunder (2011) provides a good summary of the literature on New Urbanism.

**Table 14.1 The role of planning – views of the planning profession**

Professional body	Role of planning
Planning Institute of Australia	Planning is specifically concerned with shaping cities, towns and regions by managing development, infrastructure and services. Planners are described as specialists “in developing strategies and designing the communities in which we live, work and play. Balancing the built and natural environment, community needs, cultural significance, and economic sustainability, planners aim to improve our quality of life and create vibrant communities”.
The South African Planning Association	Planning is concerned with enhancing the “art and science of sustainable local, regional and national human and physical development planning, and the theory and practise relating thereto”.
The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)	Planning is a place-focused set of practices that seek to enhance the places where people live and work in, through spatial planning, through mobilising the relevant interests, and resolving differences in expectations of land-use activities among them. Planning involves twin activities – the management of the competing uses for space, and the making of places that are valued and have identity. Spatial planning is concerned with the location and quality of social, economic and environmental change
The American Planning Association (APA)	Planning is presented as a benign, professional, community-focused discipline based on advising decision makers how to make decisions that contribute collectively to a wide range of socially beneficial outcomes.
The Canadian Institute of Planning	Planning is focused on physical resource and land-use planning but also covers other aspects of development activity generally, managing them to the benefit of urban and rural communities.

As for New Zealand, the New Zealand Planning Institute (NZPI) website notes that “planning is a complex profession requiring the input of a variety of different disciplines” and that planners “work in cities, suburbs, and towns, and can specialise in, for example, transportation, urban design, or rural environments”. As NZPI (2011) highlights:

Planning is a diverse discipline which deals with the processes and mechanisms through which natural and built environments are managed and transformed in the interests of the economic, social, cultural and environmental aspirations of communities. As a discipline, planning is shaped by and responds to environmental and cultural values, economic circumstances, technological, political and social imperatives, institutional arrangements, and society’s ongoing evaluation of resources and the environment. (p. 5)

NZPI’s submission to this inquiry notes:

Planning is about process as well as outcomes. For example: Land use planning creates the prerequisites required to achieve a type of land use, which is sustainable, socially and environmentally compatible, socially desirable and economically sound. It sets in motion social processes of decision-making and consensus building concerning the use and protection of private, communal and public areas. This approach is reflected in the ... RTPI quote about the work of planners as: “mediation of space – making of place” (sub. 27, p. 4).

These (and other) NZPI documents suggest an interpretation of planning as a process in which planners manage and transform built environments, protect property rights, provide for externalities, and act in the interests of communities. Planning institutes in other countries have similar interpretations, albeit with different emphases and nuances.

Yet, material from the various planning institutes confirms that a concrete description of the role of planners is elusive (Table 14.1). Descriptions tends to focus either on *process* (ie, the activities that planners undertake) or *outcomes* (what planners are trying to achieve). At the core of the plethora of definitions of planning is the relatively simple concept that planners are trying to make places easier and more fulfilling to

live in – summarised today as making places more “liveable”. This is consistent with the early philosophies of planning as being vital for the wellbeing of society.

Hall (2014) argues that planning theory has two distinct streams – *theory in planning* and *theory of planning*. *Theory in planning* examines the practical techniques and methodologies that planners require to perform planning-related tasks and duties. *Theory of planning* involves academics and practising planners trying to understand the nature of planning, including the reasons to use planning rather than other policy levers.

The Commission’s review suggests that a “procedural” view of planning dominates the professional identity of the planning profession – in New Zealand and overseas (ie, a substantial focus is on “theory in planning”). This perspective of planning emphasises how planners can make planning processes work more effectively – rather than a critical assessment of whether planning is the best tool for achieving a desired social outcome. This contrasts to the early days of planning when land use regulation was an obvious solution to public health problems.

While submissions by academics (DR79 and DR117) point to the teaching of planning thematics as well as process, the definitions offered by the professional bodies and the focus of reforms to the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) tend to deal with the processes required to achieve wide-ranging objectives rather than the validity of those objectives and the method through which they aim to achieve them.

#### F14.2

A “procedural” view of planning dominates the professional identity of the planning profession in New Zealand and overseas. This planning perspective emphasises how planners can make planning processes work more effectively, rather than examining whether planning is the best tool for achieving desired social outcomes.

## Planning has struggled to establish a unique professional identity

Professional groups typically have a distinctive body of knowledge that they can lay claim to. This creates intellectual legitimacy - a key element of a profession’s identity. Yet the planning profession (in New Zealand and overseas) has struggled to identify a unique body of knowledge, or a specific professional space that it exclusively occupies (Miller, 2016). Indeed, planning was not viewed as a distinct profession until after the Second World War, with most practitioners being architects, surveyors or engineers. Consequently, planning emerged in New Zealand as an additional role practised within the culture of a person’s primary profession.

Even today some planners hold no undergraduate qualifications in planning. For instance, a survey of NZPI members conducted in 2014 found that 23% of respondents held no planning qualification. Similarly, a survey of councils undertaken for this inquiry found that only 30% of councils require their planning staff to be a member of a professional planning association. Figure 14.3 provides answers from those councils as to why they did not require planners to hold professional membership.

**Figure 14.3 Reasons for professional membership not being required****Notes:**

1. Respondents were permitted to select all more than one reason.
2. Other reasons centre around two main themes: a) membership is voluntary and encouraged but not required, and b) becoming a member of NZPI is too narrow, not relevant for all staff, or too difficult to obtain.

It is also notable that while five universities in New Zealand offer NZPI accredited planning degrees, only a small proportion of university teaching staff trained as planners, and even fewer have practical planning experience. Miller (2016) notes that most university programmes only just meet NZPI's requirement that a proportion of teaching staff must be eligible for NZPI membership (or members of an equivalent overseas institute). Other staff will generally have advanced degrees in geography, social policy, environmental management or ecology.

The difficulty that the planning profession has had in demonstrating a unique knowledge base has seen it fall back on legislation to define (and justify) its role in the planning system (and actions as planners). The submission from Planz Consultants elaborates: "Planning and the profession of planning is only legitimised through the real or implied powers under the RMA – this is not the case with many other professions such as medicine, engineering or architecture for instance. This is a unique and significant point of difference with other professions" (sub. DR60, p.4). Likewise, Miller (2016) puts it this way: "The lack of a strong professional profile founded on disciplinary knowledge and historical achievements leads planners to constantly fall back on legislation to define who they are as planners and what they do" (p. 8)

### Professional subgroups and cultures

Tension between subgroups within the planning profession also hinders the development of a clear professional identity. Distinctive groups include:

- *policy planners* (who write council plans and policies) and *consent planners* (who implement and enforce council plans and policies); and
- *urban designers* and "traditional" *urban planners*.

The separation of consent and policy planners emerged from the management reforms of the 1990s as a means of improving transparency and accountability within local government. But the Commission has heard that this separation has been problematic and has created an element of professional conflict between these planning specialities. The two groups are commonly separated into different departments, with little interaction between them. Miller notes that the separation has been

a disaster for planning as it cut off the good feedback loops that are at the heart of good planning processes. Now 25 years later the planners who write plans have often had no experience of implementing the plans they write and resource consent planners seem to be regarded as second class planners. (sub. 50, p. 8)

This suggests some divergence within the planning culture, potentially an intergenerational one that can be attributed initially to the career path. Therefore, new graduates are often assigned to implementing plans and administering consents, with only a few graduates shifting to the policy path. One result is consent planners complaining that policy planners write provisions that are difficult to administer or that are open to interpretation.

As the “public face” of council planning, consent planners often bear the brunt of public criticism. Constant criticism, combined with high workloads and a lack of professional “status”, has resulted in many councils experiencing a high turnover in consent staff. As Miller (2016) notes:

Graduate planners often start with a consents’ job as that is the only work available. It is available because that is where the greatest churn of staff occurs. Despite the best efforts of planning educators who stress the importance of consents work, they often consider it to be a temporary position. Usually they develop career aspirations to become a policy planner. This often creates an ever-changing group of consents’ staff. (p. 13)

One result is that the competence of consents planning is compromised either because many practitioners are relatively inexperienced or because many practitioners have failed to progress their careers.

The distinction between urban planners and urban designers is more subtle and perhaps more contentious. Reid Ewing (a professor of city and metropolitan planning at the University of Utah) describes the difference:

Urban design differs from planning in scale, orientation, and treatment of space. Its scale is primarily that of the street, park, or transit stop, as opposed to the larger region, community, or activity center, which are foremost in planning. Its orientation is both aesthetic and functional, putting it somewhere between art, whose object is beauty, and planning, whose object is utility. The treatment of space in urban design is three-dimensional, with vertical elements as important as horizontal ones. Urban planning, on the other hand, is customarily a two-dimensional activity, with most plans visually represented in plan view, not model, section, or elevation. (Ewing, 2012)

In New Zealand urban design has strong links to the architectural profession and to the American New Urbanist movement. Miller (2016) notes the “very real friction” between urban planners and urban designers. Similarly, McDermott (2016) observes that the relationship between urban planners and urban designers is, at times, strained and competitive:

Often the relationship goes beyond a complementary one to elements of competition. Hence urban designers promulgate urban form which may or may not be in accord with the prognostications of planners. One result has been an increasing overlap between the urban design and planning although the core knowledge between them differs significantly. In some respects, it might be argued, this shift removes planning further from the economic and fiscal disciplines that should underlie urban planning. (p. 49)

Innes and Booher (2015) note the impact that division within the planning profession is having on planning students:

Today planning theory seems to have become a set of dividing discourses. People talk past one another. Blame, criticism, and incivility often crowd out scholarly dialogue and inquiry (e.g. Bengs, 2005). Theorists belong to discourse communities which employ different languages and methods toward different ends. Students are often confused and frustrated, craving a way to make sense of the differences. While the brouhaha may have started as a war over turf and over which views will be dominant, the result today is that we, as theorists, have little ability to learn from our differences. The situation is conducive neither to constructive conversation nor to building richer and more robust theory. (p. 196)

### **Professionalisation of planning**

The Commission’s previous investigation into New Zealand’s regulatory workforce found that improving capability requires an increasingly professionalised regulatory workforce, especially where regulatory regimes and the regulatory environment are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Box 14.2 sets out what is meant by a professionalised regulatory workforce. Critical features of a professionalised workforce are that the professional group possess a core set of theoretical, practical and contextual knowledge. Also that the professional group share a worldview about the role and purpose of their profession. As has been discussed above, the planning profession is weak on these two features.

**Box 14.2 Key features of a professionalised regulatory workforce**

Professionalisation involves creating a workforce where members:

- possess a core set of theoretical, practical and contextual knowledge;
- are recognised and respected by others in the profession and by the broader community for the knowledge they hold;
- have opportunities to meet, network with and learn from others undertaking similar tasks;
- are continually challenged to stay up to date with the latest developments in their field;
- share a worldview about the role and purpose of their profession and are guided by a common code of professional conduct; and
- share a “professional language” and culture that instils a sense of “belonging to the regulatory profession”

Source: NZPC, 2014.

**F14.3**

The planning profession in New Zealand has struggled to carve out a unique professional identity, and lacks some key elements of a professionalised regulatory workforce. In the absence of a strong professional identity founded on disciplinary knowledge, planners tend to fall back on legislation to define their role in the planning system. Friction and tension between subgroups within the planning profession also hinders the development of a clear professional identity.

**Has the role of planning overreached?**

While planning academics undertake “periodic soul-searching for disciplinary identity” (Davoudi & Pendlebury, 2010, p. 613), many planners seem reluctant to be involved in such discussions. They believe instead that the need for, and value of, planning is self-evident. Miller (2016) notes:

It is this critical theory that planners still find the most difficult to engage with. As a planning professional and educator I have spent many frustrating hours trying to provoke students and fellow practitioners, often by playing devil’s advocate role, to engage in critiquing the role of plans and planners. Some are uncomfortable or unwilling to engage in this type of discussion. Some retreat to presenting planning as a product of statute and a process (ie, they undertake planning because the RMA and its predecessors provided for it). In essence, they are like the original town planners in that they appear to believe that the need for, and value of, planning is self-evident. (p. 6)

The various planning professional bodies assert that planning has a positive role to play in society. Yet “shaping places”, “managing growth”, and “enhancing economies and communities” are ambiguous concepts – particularly when applied to urban areas where defining concrete outcomes (and measuring progress towards them) is difficult.

The history of planning has emboldened a professional culture that is confident that planning can solve a range of social problems and improve society’s health and wellbeing. As a result, the profession has developed a “cultural licence” to assert specialist knowledge in a wide range of policy and social issues. Yet, in practice, planners have struggled to convince others that they possess unique knowledge to achieve such outcomes. McDermott puts it this way, “planning risks being an introverted and even defensive discipline, authoritarian in practice even if benign in intent” (2016, p. 8).

As concluded in chapter 3, the three legitimate roles for the planning system are to manage externalities, coordinate the provision of relevant infrastructure and providing local public goods to support the needs of

urban areas. Managing externalities was clearly an objective of the RMA's founders. In his Third Reading speech on the Resource Management Bill in 1991, the then Minister for the Environment, the Hon Simon Upton said that the goal of the new legislation was to concentrate on spillovers and limit unnecessary constraints on land use (New Zealand Parliament, 1991, pp. 3019–20).

However, the practice of planning has diverged markedly from the fundamental role that was envisaged for it. A review of District Plans undertaken as part of the Commission's *Using land for housing inquiry* (2015) reveals that they contain land-use rules and regulations on a wide range of issues. Some of these rules and regulations do not provide a net benefit and increase the cost of housing unnecessarily, and some serve to protect the wealth of incumbents at the cost of non-homeowners. Others apply controls that appear to have little to do with managing negative impacts on others, such as 'design guidelines' which seek to regulate the placement or design of buildings so as to:

- maintain "the rhythm of buildings along the street edge in areas of consistent character" (Wellington City Council, 2015, Volume 2, Residential Design Guide, p. 7); or
- ensure that "development on corner sites enhances the structure and legibility of the City and incorporates distinctive design treatments" (Christchurch City Council, 2015, Vol. 2, Section 11, Policy 11.5.2 (b)).

Other significant planning documents, such as the Auckland Plan, have a range of objectives that sit well outside the traditional frame of managing land-use externalities and coordinating infrastructure and arguably outside the control of local government, such as raising vaccination rates, reducing life expectancy disparities, lifting participation in "culturally appropriate early childhood learning services" and increasing foreign language fluency (Auckland Council, 2012a).

This expansion in rules and objectives reflects the expansion in the perceived role, scope and impact of planning, and the inability of the system to assess the full costs and benefits of its actions. This scope-creep is consistent with planning evolving an emboldened professional culture, confident that it can solve a range of social problems and improve society's health and wellbeing.

#### F14.4

An emboldened planning culture has seen its perceived role and scope expanded in an attempt to solve a range of social and policy problems, despite:

- such issues being outside the control of local government, and beyond the scope of urban-planning and land-use regulation; and
- a lack of the necessary knowledge, capability and skills.

### 14.3 Influences on culture and capability

This section explores some of the influences on planning culture and capability in New Zealand

#### The influence of universities

Those involved in planning first encounter the ideas and cognitive frameworks needed to succeed at university. NZPI has a significant influence on planning education through its accreditation of university planning courses. Together, NZPI and universities play a crucial role in setting the body of knowledge, values, goals and assumptions for planning students.

NZPI's (2011) Education Policy and Accreditation Procedures state that universities offering planning programmes must be able to demonstrate that their course content addresses a range of issues related to (for example) the context of planning, the methods of planning, planning practice and planning law. Importantly, NZPI also requires that planning programmes address "Planning Thematics" (which largely relate to the theory of planning noted above). Planning thematics covers issues such as the nature and purpose of planning and contemporary debates in planning theory (Box 14.3).

### Box 14.3 Content of university planning programmes in New Zealand

The content of NZPI-accredited planning programmes cover the following.

- a) **Planning Thematics:** Study in thematics includes philosophy, policy, history, ethics, theory, and critical reflection on planning to provide an overview of the nature and purpose of planning; planning history; contemporary debates and trends; planning theory; and planning at different spatial scales.
- b) **Planning Context:** Study about context includes knowledge of natural, physical, policy, economic and social processes affecting the natural and built environments. Understanding of the social, cultural, environmental and economic consequences of management and change in the natural and built environments. Understanding the complexities of interactions between people and their environments and the economic drivers of development processes.
- c) **Planning Methods:** Study of methods including learning how to manage the natural and built environment through techniques and tools for environmental evaluation and impact assessment; policy development and analysis; planning and monitoring systems; managing space, amenities and heritage; principles of sustainability; and social, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and equity planning.
- d) **Planning Practice:** Practical experience that covers processes and practice, including application of the principles of plan making; policy development and implementation, review and evaluation; goal setting; strategic planning; and planning tools and instruments.
- e) **Planning Law:** Study of legislation, including an understanding of government organisational and institutional structures; planning; resource and environmental legislation; related legislation and case law and associated areas.
- f) **Cultural and Social Aspects of Planning:** Study of aspects that recognise New Zealand's bicultural mandate and multi-cultural context for planning and planning practice; resource and environmental law and treaties; plan development; and management of resources.
- g) **Specialisations:** Opportunities for planning graduates to develop a specialist field of expertise.

Source: NZPI, 2011.

While “planning thematics” is one of seven broad areas of planning mentioned in the Education Policy and Accreditation Procedures, knowledge in this area is not listed as a “core competency” for graduate planners. This reinforces the procedural focus of the profession.<sup>106</sup>

Most New Zealand planning programmes have their origins in the social science departments, particularly geography. This reflects planning's traditional grounding in spatial analysis. Today, planning programmes cover a much wider range of topics and disciplines, including law, ecology, sociology, economics, statistics and geography. The breadth of disciplines covered in planning courses reflects a movement away from spatial analysis and land use regulation to a more general approach.

In some cases, the non-planning content of degrees offers little more than an introduction to other disciplines (McDermott, 2016). For example, while economics and urban economics are part of most university programmes, core papers generally only cover basic concepts. This is surprising given the important role that planning plays in allocating scarce resources and correcting market failures (chapter 3).

<sup>106</sup> Until the mid-1990s applicants for full membership of NZPI had to produce an essay on the origins and role of planning. Applicants discussed their essay at an interview with NZPI leaders as part of the application processes. The NZPI abandoned the essay requirement because the essay was unpopular with applicants and it feared that component would act as a barrier to planners taking up full membership (Miller, 2016).

The risk with this “broad” rather than “deep” approach to planning education is that planners leave university with only a cursory understanding of the disciplines on which they draw. This can lead to policy prescriptions that lack a strong theoretical or empirical evidence base, or which may be strongly contested among experts. Two possible exceptions are the bachelor’s programmes offered by Massey University and University of Waikato where, in addition to compulsory planning papers, students are required to complete a “minor” in a non-planning discipline (such as ecology, economics, geography, management or Māori studies). This approach provides an opportunity for students to develop a deeper understanding of a related discipline. In addition, it might be expected that entrants to a planning programme at master’s level (which is the only level offered at the University of Otago) will bring some wider or expert knowledge with them.

Universities structure and manage their programmes differently according to the academic colleges or departments in which they are located giving rise to a tendency towards planning specialisation based on where a student attends. In New Zealand, geography remains the host discipline for planning degrees at Massey, Waikato, and Otago universities, implying a social sciences orientation (although Massey and Waikato students may elect a major within the natural sciences). At the University of Auckland, the School of Architecture and the Department of Planning merged in 2006 to become the School of Architecture and Planning (within the Creative Arts and Industries faculty). This alignment of the planning programme with architecture emphasises the urban design elements of the programme.

Generally speaking, a planning degree from Lincoln University places more emphasis on the natural environment and tends towards the physical sciences in its complementary papers.

**Table 14.2 Planning schools in New Zealand**

University	Faculty	Bachelor’s Degree in:	Master’s Degree in:
University of Auckland	National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries	Urban Planning	Planning Urban Planning
Lincoln University	Faculty of Environment, Society and Design	Environmental Policy and Planning Environmental Management and Planning	Planning
Massey University	School of Humanities, Department of Geography	Resource and Environmental Planning	Resource and Environmental Planning
University of Otago	Division of Humanities, Department of Geography		Planning
Waikato University	Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Department of Geography, Tourism and Environmental Planning	Environmental Planning	

Source: New Zealand Planning Institute website: <https://www.planning.org.nz/>

It is notable that, in the 1990s, planning courses were modified to reflect the sustainable management objective of the RMA. New papers in physical sciences were added to the planning curriculum - typically at an introductory level and often by way of electives outside the core compulsory planning papers. At the same time, core planning papers introducing physical sciences were re-framed in terms of environmental management and sustainability. Some universities also changed the name of their degrees to reflect the reorientation of the RMA legislation.

## The influence of professional bodies

Professional bodies or associations are arguably the strongest driver of planning culture as they act as a powerful conduit for values, beliefs and assumptions. NZPI is the gatekeeper of foundation knowledge for New Zealand planning, which it articulates, codifies, reinforces, and promulgates through its programme prescriptions for the universities, and its professional development programmes. In these ways, professional

bodies institutionalises the values and beliefs of their planning profession and also play a role in validating the role of the profession to the wider community.

In addition to monitoring and accreditation of university courses, NZPI reinforces professional culture through rewarding planners that demonstrate behaviour consistent with the adopted values and standards of the profession. Awards help embed professional culture in two key ways.

- Awards are an important source of feedback – both to the planner receiving the awards and to the broader planning community. Awards provide public examples of the type of behaviour, values and frameworks needed to be successful within the profession. For example, awards for integrated planning help to reinforce integration as a key element of planning.
- Awards are often used to reinforce the values exhibited by founding leaders of the profession. Commonly, reinforcement is achieved by naming an award after a founding member of the profession or someone who, over a long time, has consistently demonstrated behaviours that others should aspire to. One example is the John Mawson Award of Merit (John Mawson was the creator of the first town planning institute in New Zealand). The naming of awards after prominent members of the profession contributes also to a sense of professional identity. This will be strongest when current planners see a link between the behaviours expected of them and those exhibited by founding leaders.

The behaviour that organisational and profession leaders tolerate also sends important cultural messages. Responsibility for correcting poor workplace practice generally lies with councils. However, professional bodies can also play a role through formulating and enforcing a professional code of ethics. For example, over the past five years, NZPI's Professional Standards Committee has considered 10 potential breaches that either others have brought to NZPI's attention through informal channels or have been the subject of an official complaint (NZPI, 2015). In practice, NZPI has little control of professional standards in the workplace as NZPI membership is voluntary.

Other avenues through which professional bodies transmit cultural messages to its members include participation in national policy debates, submissions to government, hosting conferences, organising professional development periodic workshops and coordinating mentoring programmes for new planners.

#### F14.5

Professional bodies provide an important source of cultural leadership for the planning profession. Cultural messages are transmitted through the accreditation of university courses, the direct provision of professional development opportunities, and by rewarding good practice.

## The culture of councils also influences planning practices

The organisational culture within which planners work can influence planning practices. In New Zealand, many planners work in local authorities. The culture of councils is therefore important to how planning is undertaken. For example, the Commission has heard that the culture of a council plays a large role in determining the quality of the relationship between planners and local iwi/Māori (Chapter 7). A recent positive initiative is the Memorandum of Understanding signed between Local Government New Zealand and the Freshwater Iwi Leaders Group that is intended to 'make local and central government more accountable to Māori', exemplifying the changing attitudes in local government towards collaborating with Māori communities (Ngā Aho & Papa Pounamu, 2016, p.47).

The organisational culture of councils can also influence:

- the extent to which decision makers listen to, and act on, the advice of planners as opposed to the advice from those in other professions;
- the openness of decision-makers to new and innovative approaches to planning tasks;
- the extent to which planners feel comfortable challenging other planners about poor planning practices;

- the extent to which planners feel comfortable offering “free and frank” advice to councillors; and
- the relative importance that decision-makers (implicitly or explicitly) place on different aspects of the planning task (ie, regulation, the provision of local public goods, and the provision of infrastructure).

Councils tolerance for risk can also influence planning culture and practices. Planning occurs in a highly contested and political environment in which decisions are often made under the public microscope. While external scrutiny is an important component of democratic institutions, councils that are particularly sensitive to external criticism can result in conservative planning practices. This can contribute to:

- more complex and prescriptive plans and policies as councils reduce the prospect of legal challenge;
- consultation processes that are disproportionate to the value of the information obtained (and are beyond statutory requirements); and
- resistance to new or innovative planning approaches.

Importantly, organisational cultures are not static. They evolve through time in response to the demands and expectations of the system. As McDermott (2016) notes:

Over their history, local councils, for example, have moved from a predominantly developmental role through engineering, through financial, to managerial, and more recently to broadly-based planning cultures as demands and expectations on them have changed (often by way of statutory innovation and amendment). (p. 40)

#### F14.6

Planning practice is influenced by the organisational culture of councils, particularly in areas such as the relationship between planners and Māori, the level of organisational risk adopted, the influence of planners in council decision-making, and the general openness of councils to new and innovative approaches to planning tasks.

## The RMA challenged the existing planning culture

Effective regulatory regimes require cultures that value operational flexibility and the ability to adapt to changes in the environment, and strong capability across all levels of the regulator (NZPC, 2014b). Cultural and capability issues impeded the successful introduction of the RMA, and are ongoing constraints.

When the RMA emerged in 1991 it represented revolutionary rather than evolutionary change. Previous reforms to planning statutes had built on land use planning theory developed over the previous 100 years. The RMA was intended to be a statute that would support land use management practices that are enabling and innovative. The failure of the Act to deliver on these goals has been attributed to councils and other planning institutions holding to traditional methods, beliefs and attitudes. Day et al. (2003) investigated the roll-out of RMA Plans in six territorial authorities, and found that low capacity inhibited the “use of policies and techniques that promote innovation”:

In general, policies in plans provided for a far greater range of techniques than were applied in everyday practice, for although plans scored very well for implementing each of their policies at least once, only a small range of the policies and techniques are implemented in the majority of consents. Conventional techniques predominate in consents, even when new approaches, such as low impact stormwater management methods, are identified in plans. This adherence to tradition appears to leave little room for innovative practices, especially when factors related to cost, time pressure, and administration constraints reduce the ability of consent planners to adopt new practices. (p. 45)

Others have highlighted the carrying over of practices and traditions from the previous Town and Country Planning Act. Palmer (1995, 2015a) highlighted the hostility of the Planning Tribunal to the RMA as a key contributor to problems bedding in the new regime. In Palmer’s view, the Tribunal took an overly narrow view of the law, and was a “hangover from the old prescriptive town and country planning approach” (1995, p. 170). Gow (2014) pointed to the decision to roll over plans from the previous Town and Country Planning Act into the new regime as contributing to over-complicated, burdensome, incoherent and poorly justified

RMA plans. Spiller (2003) noted that “planners and the planning process in New Zealand have more or less carried on as they would have had the old Town and Country Planning Act remained in force”. Spiller concluded that “a case can be made that the RMA was too far ahead of its time, too far ahead of New Zealand’s institutional capabilities and too far ahead of the skill sets of practising planners” (pp. 100–101). Likewise, Frieder (1997) notes that

the programmes, politics and personalities that existed before the RMA did not go away when the law came into effect. It is no surprise that some local government personnel see little new in the RMA. They have made it their job to salvage whatever could be saved from the former system. (p. 87)

#### F14.7

The Resource Management Act (RMA) challenged existing planning culture and practice which led to resistance by planning practitioners and the carrying over of traditions, values and beliefs of the previous regime. The failure of the RMA to deliver on its goals highlights the importance of aligning and building culture and capability for successful reform.

## The legislative setting and culture

Planning culture and practice in New Zealand is strongly influenced by the legislative setting. The legal profession, the courts and case law are a dominant features of the New Zealand system under the framework provided by the RMA. This has led to a planning environment that is more litigious than in the past and consequently a planning culture and practice that is described as cautious and risk averse (Miller, 2016; Planz Consultants, sub. DR60).

The practice of planning has also become more litigious. Former Chief Planning Judge Arnold Turner told me in an interview (Miller, 2011) that few lawyers during the 1950s and 1960s were doing planning work. Most combined that specific work with general local authority work. While the number of planning lawyers increased in the 1970s and 1980s, they did not exist in the numbers that they do today when every major law firm has a resource management law department. We also have the Resource Management Law Association, which mainly represents and advocates for legal interpretations of the RMA. (Miller, 2016, p. 21)

The Environment Court appeal process, which was ultimately controlled by lawyers, is a major contributor to the risk averse culture that many planners demonstrate... Procedural matters under the RMA exercise such a strong influence over planning practice, that there is a real fear of ‘getting it wrong’ on matters such as notification – with subsequent consequences in the form of criticism by members of the public, senior managers, and the Environment Court. [...]

In-house legal advice is regularly sought by planners in larger councils, and is always very cautious and conservative. Once sought and offered, this legal advice becomes a redoubt where planners take sanctuary.” (Planz Consultants, sub. DR60, p. 6)

The legislative setting can therefore have a profound effect on planning culture and practice, and this can change over time in response to statutory reform, as shown with the RMA. The Commission has previously investigated the allocation of risk under the Building Act 2004 and found strong incentives for Building Consent Authorities to be risk averse, and that this can add to building costs (NZPC, 2012; NZPC, 2013). One view of the impact of the RMA is of a planning culture founded on avoiding culpability rather than promoting good outcomes.

## 14.4 Desirable cultural attributes for planning

In its regulatory institutions and practices report (NZPC, 2014b), the Commission identified organisation cultures that lead to good regulatory outcomes. Good planning outcomes are most likely when planning cultures follow the following practices.

- *Are based on robust, evidence-based, decision making* – The success of any planning regime depends on the quality of decisions. Robust analysis and reliable evidence not only improves the quality of decision-making but also promotes public trust in councils and the wider planning system. Embedding this attribute begins at university and is reinforced through the organisational culture of councils.

- *Place a high value on continuous learning and feedback (ie, learning cultures)* – Learning cultures embrace experimentation and seek to gain insights from failure (rather than punish those who fail). Learning cultures will typically encourage “systems thinking” that goes beyond immediate role of planning and emphasise the sharing of insights and experiences throughout the organisation.
- *Empower those involved in planning to “speak-up” and challenge existing practice* – Related to above point is those involved in planning should continuously challenge their own methods and ways of operating. This requires a working environment in which employees involved in planning feel safe to “speak-up”.
- *Place importance on being open, transparent and accountable* – Trust in the planning system will be strongest when the community is confident that rigorous and fair decision-making processes are followed. This means a planning culture that has a high regard on transparency, openness and accountability.
- *Value operational flexibility and adaptation to changing socio-economic or environmental conditions* – Planning does not operate in a static setting. New technologies, changes in business practices, movements in market conditions and changing social preferences mean the context in which planning operate is constantly changing.
- *Respects the significance of the civic responsibility that comes with using the coercive powers of the state* – Councils are vested with legal powers over citizens and businesses to promote the wellbeing of the community. This authority must be used judiciously and in a manner that respects the rights of citizens.
- *Favour collaboration and communication* – Collectively, the submissions highlighted the central ground that local councils hold between the communities for which they are responsible and the government with its role in setting a broadly based agenda for the environment and urban development. This saw calls to increasingly engage and partner with central government in urban planning matters while protecting local democracy. This in turn points to a planning culture of collaboration and less authoritative approaches to planning on the part of central and local government.

**F14.8**

Good planning outcomes are more likely to be achieved when planning cultures:

- insist on robust, evidence-based, outcome-focused decisionmaking;
- value continuous learning and feedback (ie, learning cultures);
- empower staff to “speak up” and challenge existing practice;
- stress the importance of being open, transparent and accountable;
- value operational flexibility and adaptation to changing socio-economic or environmental conditions;
- recognise the significance of the civic responsibility that comes with using the coercive powers of the state; and
- favour collaboration and communication

Culture change is necessary to upgrade the skills brought to planning and its practice generally. Ultimately this is a matter of leadership, both in those organisations where planners practise and in those that influence and instil the necessary skills and behaviours. Submissions to this inquiry suggest that there will be considerable resistance to, or indifference about, the types of cultural and institutional change that will be needed to make the urban planning reforms (proposed in this report) a success. It will take strong leadership to achieve the changes necessary and to ensure that planning is relevant to and influential in urban development.

## 14.5 Planning skills and capabilities

So why does capability and skill matter to the planning role and achieving planning goals? It is easiest to explain this by considering what happens when a council lacks the appropriate mix of skills or level of skill (box 14.4).

### Box 14.4 The consequences of capability and skill deficits

- Deficiencies in regulatory capability and skill can:
  - create integrity and reputation risks for regulators, both individually and collectively;
  - mean activities are not always performed to an acceptable standard, resulting in poor compliance outcomes / regulatory failure;
  - create inefficiencies through poor use of resources, as work is not performed neither efficiently nor effectively;
  - add to the cost of compliance, because of the high cost of system failures compared with effective performance;
  - contribute to harm, including serious harm to people, the environment and the economy;
  - indicate missed opportunities to share innovative ideas and best practice solutions; and
  - lead to inconsistent approaches to carrying out regulatory compliance functions that create public confusion about the purpose of regulatory compliance and the role of regulation.

Source: NZPC, 2014

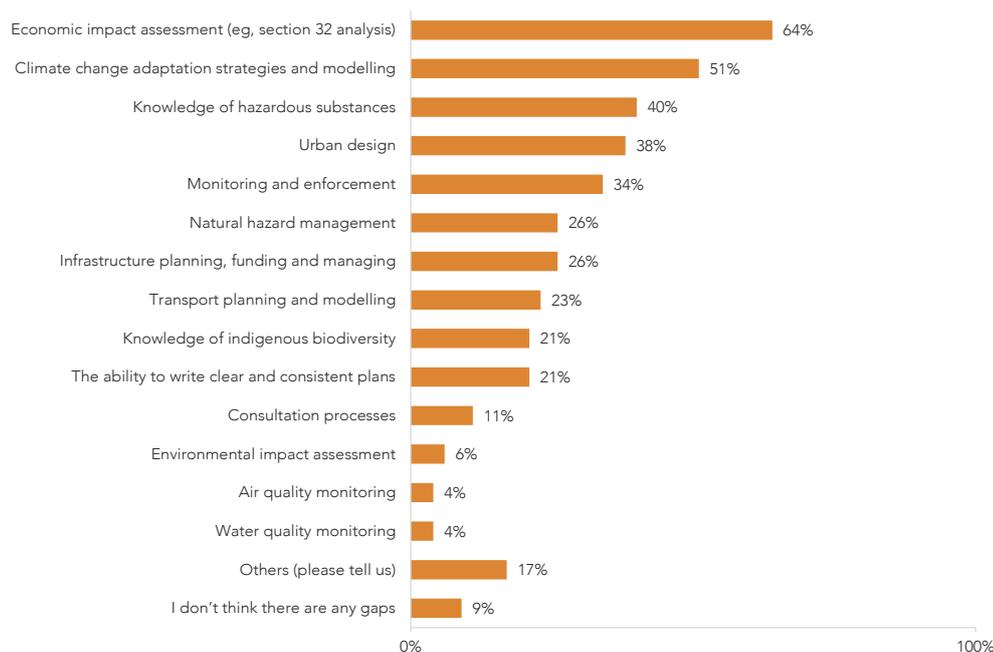
### Capability gaps – Local government

The Commission's 2016 council survey asked for respondents' views on significant capability gaps within the planning system. The results show that the main areas of perceived capability gaps are in economic impact assessment (64% of respondents identified this as a significant capability gap), climate change adaptation strategies and modelling (51%), and urban design (38%) (Figure 14.4). Notably, 76% of councils that identified "economic impact assessment" as a capability gap had urban planning responsibilities. Likewise, 48% of councils that identified "urban design" as a capability gap had urban planning responsibilities.

The submissions to the inquiry showed general acceptance that an upgrade in skills was needed in economic analysis and environmental matters (eg, Auckland Council, sub.DR47; Christchurch City Council, sub. DR90; NZPI, sub. 27). Submitters also identified the capability to engage with the community as needing enhancement. There was also a general acceptance of the need for more rigorous policy analysis, suggesting evaluation skills are currently insufficient.

The survey also found that only 38% of councils agree they receive the training and information required to implement new releases of National Policy Statements and National Environmental Standards – the lowest rating of all statements. Although, more broadly, 87% of councils indicated that "staff involved in planning receive ongoing training which enable them to do their job better", and "have real opportunities to improve their skills through education and training programmes" (85%). Further, 72% of participants indicated they do not believe that elected councillors have sufficient planning knowledge.

These results are consistent with the Commission's previous findings around the low standard of section 32 analysis (Chapter 5) and the difficulty that councils have in planning for the effects of climate change (Chapter 9). Both of these areas require a deep technical knowledge.

**Figure 14.4 Areas of significant capability gaps**

Inquiry participants noted that some councils lack the capability to engage with Māori groups (eg, IMSB pers. comm., 20 April 2016; Ngā Aho & Papa Pounamu, 2016). The Commission's 2016 council survey found that more than a third of councils identified a lack of staff with a knowledge and understanding of Māori perspectives as a barrier to engagement. An overwhelming 83% of council survey participants identified limited resources available to iwi/Māori groups to participate in the planning process as a barrier to engagement. Chapter 7 sets out the importance of effective engagement between councils and Māori for recognising and actively protecting Māori Treaty interests in urban planning.

**F14.9**

Inquiry participants widely accept the need for increased technical capabilities in planning, particularly in environmental sciences, economic analysis, and policy analysis more generally. Capability gaps in these areas hinder the ability of councils to undertake rigorous policy analysis and evaluation when carrying out their planning functions and, importantly, exercising their coercive planning powers. Participants also identified Council engagement with the community as needing enhancement, particularly through more effective engagement with Māori.

**R14.1**

A future planning system should place greater emphasis on rigorous analysis of policy options and planning proposals. This will require councils to build their technical capability and skill in areas such as environmental science, economic analysis, policy analysis and evaluation. It would also require strengthening their understanding of Māori worldviews and more effective community engagement including with Māori.

## Capability gaps - Central government

The capability of central government officials is crucial to the efficient operation of the planning system. Not only does central government (through Parliament) establish the legislative framework in which planning occurs, it also:

- sets national policies and standards;
- plans, provides and funds key elements of New Zealand's transport infrastructure;

- monitors system outcomes; and
- provides information, advice and guidance to support the implementation of legislation.

Shortcomings in central government's capability in urban planning can have a rippling effect throughout the system with impacts manifesting in different ways at the local level. For instances, the Commission has previously noted that the ability of central government to achieve its policy objectives is strongly linked to the ability of local government to implement the functions devolved to it in legislation. In this sense, both spheres of government have a mutual dependency on the success of the legislation. Yet, central government has a poor understanding and knowledge of the local government sector (Cabinet Policy Committee, 2004; DIA, 2006; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2009; NZPC, 2013). Further, engagement with local government during the design of new regulations is generally poor (NZPC, 2013; SSC et al., 2012; SOLGM, sub. DR107).

Submissions to this inquiry and engagement meetings with inquiry participants identified substantial deficiencies in the capability and knowledge within central government of urban planning and local government (eg, Environment Canterbury, sub. DR72; Christchurch City Council, sub. DR90; Planz Consultants, sub. DR62; SOLGM, sub. DR107; Auckland Council, sub. 47). There was also criticism of central government for poor engagement with the local government sector in relation to urban planning matters: "In our experience those departments that have stewardship of planning legislation tend not to engage with us" (SOLGM, sub. DR107, p. 14). That said, some central government agencies that participated in urban planning were credited with carrying out engagement with local government particularly well: "In recent years, the quality of engagement undertaken by the Ministry of Transport has also been cited as consistently high standard" (SOLGM, sub. DR107, p. 15)

While general training on what constitutes good policy analysis is readily available to government agencies, there seems to be little appetite to develop the specific knowledge needed to analyse issues involving the local government sector, let alone urban planning (NZPC, 2013). This is at odds with regulatory stewardship expectations on central government departments discussed in Chapter 13. The Commission envisages a strengthened regulatory management and oversight role for central government departments responsible for urban planning. This will demand greater knowledge of, and skill and capability in, urban planning matters. Regulatory stewards responsible for the urban planning system would be expected to monitor the condition and performance of the urban planning system and identify problems and opportunities to improve its design and operation. There would also be expectations on central agencies stewards to ensure that the urban planning system has sufficient capability to achieve stated goals.

Central government could improve their capability in urban planning through:

- additional training aimed at raising awareness and understanding of urban planning and the local government sector more generally;
- seconding staff from local government with specific expertise in urban planning; and
- promoting the joint working groups and advisory groups (these groups would consist of central government officials and staff from relevant local authorities).

#### F14.10

How capable and skilled central government officials are in urban planning is crucial to a well-functioning planning system and achieving urban planning goals. However, evidence shows that capability and knowledge of local government and urban planning is poor within central government. Likewise, engagement with local government on policy design and implementation generally, and urban planning specifically, is also poor. This impedes the ability of central government to successfully carry out its regulatory stewardship role in regard to the urban planning system.

**R14.2**

In a future planning system, central government should substantially improve its understanding and knowledge of, and engagement with, the local government sector, who are important implementers of much legislation. A greater capability to engage on urban planning issues will help promote more productive interactions between central and local government and achievement of mutual goals.

## 14.6 Skills and capability required for a future planning system

Chapter 3 describes three core functions of planning – regulation of spillovers, the provision of local public goods, and infrastructure supply and coordination. In effectively undertaking these functions, councils and central government agencies require access to a wide range of skills and knowledge. Table 14.3 summarises some of the skills required when undertaking core planning tasks. The table is not intended to be comprehensive; rather, it aims to highlight the spectrum of knowledge needed. The skills outlined are extensive and cover a wide range of disciplines and processes.

**Table 14.3 Knowledge and skills needed for core planning functions**

Core role	Examples of knowledge and skills needed
Regulating negative spillovers arising from different uses of land.	<p><b>Consent approval:</b> Understanding of legislative processes and timelines. Skills in applying legislative requirements to the potential impacts of land uses. Skills in dispute resolution, including listening, mediating, and negotiating compliance. Education and communication skills to facilitate public understanding of legal requirements and options for achieving compliance. Strong administrative and project-management skills.</p> <p><b>Monitoring and enforcement:</b> Sound knowledge of the relevant legislation and the ability to apply legal requirements to real-world situations. Ability to inquire into alleged regulatory breaches, gather information to make a case, conduct interviews, produce reports, and present evidence in court. Skills in identifying and assessing the risk posed by individual land-use activities and to prioritise monitoring according to the risks posed. Strong conflict management and resolution skills.</p> <p><b>Policy/rule-making:</b> Knowledge of the range of policy tools available for achieving social goals (eg, regulation, market-based mechanisms, and persuasive measures). Ability to critically evaluate policy options through techniques such as cost–benefit analysis, adaptive management and real-options analysis. Understanding of policy implementation processes. Skills in designing and implementing effective public consultation processes. Knowledge of tools for assessing public preferences (eg, surveys and statistical analysis).</p> <p><b>Specific scientific knowledge</b> will be needed when regulating natural systems. This includes a technical understanding of the interactions and relationships between the different components of natural ecosystems and how land-use activities affect these components. Knowledge of technical options for reducing damage to the natural environment (eg, investment in green infrastructure, and changing land uses). Skills in modelling natural ecosystems. Understanding of the resilience of natural systems to different types of spillovers and of ecosystem dynamics.</p>
Providing a fair and efficient level of local public goods.	<p><b>Design skills:</b> Ability to design public spaces that provide the public with a functional and aesthetic space. Ability to design local public goods that reflect the preferences of local communities. The ability to demonstrate the connection between public preferences and design.</p> <p><b>Engineering skills:</b> Skills in areas such as the design, construction, operation and management of different types of local public goods. Knowledge of geography and spatial issues affecting the provision of local public goods.</p> <p><b>Financial/economic skill:</b> Ability to analyse the costs and benefits of alternative configurations of public spaces. Ability to understand future demand for local public goods and alternative mechanisms for funding the future supply of goods.</p> <p><b>Communication and facilitation:</b> Ability to design and implement effective public consultation processes. Ability to assess public preferences for different types of local public goods.</p>

Core role	Examples of knowledge and skills needed
Coordinating investment in relevant infrastructure.	<p><b>Engineering skills and knowledge:</b> Skills and knowledge in areas such as the design, operation, construction and management of different types of infrastructure. Knowledge of geography and spatial issues affecting the infrastructure provision.</p> <p><b>Scientific knowledge of the natural environment:</b> Understanding the potential impacts of infrastructure construction and operation on ecosystems. Ability to develop management strategies to avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse impacts on the natural environment (eg, habitat disturbance, loss of biodiversity, and increased water run-off).</p> <p><b>Financial/economic skills:</b> Capacity to undertake rigorous and transparent evaluations of alternative infrastructure proposals. Understanding of key tools such as cost–benefit analysis, financial modelling, demand forecasting, access pricing and real-options analysis.</p> <p><b>Legal skills:</b> Skills such as knowledge of relevant legislation, the formulation of contracts, design of partnership models (such as Public Private Partnerships), mediation of legal disputes, and ability to interpret legislative requirements on government bodies.</p> <p><b>Communication and facilitation:</b> Skills such as those noted above (including dispute resolution).</p> <p><b>Project management skills:</b> Skills such as procurement skills, and the ability to manage multiple interdependent workstreams, manage budgets, and marshal and synthesise input from technical specialists.</p>
General skills and knowledge	
<p>Understanding of how civil society works, how it operates, and the respective roles of central and local government.</p> <p>A strong understanding of Māori worldview and its application to urban planning and tikanga Māori.</p> <p>An understanding of the institutional structures within which planning operates, particularly the implications of operating within a politically driven system.</p>	

To carry out effectively the core function of planning, planners require “access” to a wide range of skills and knowledge, covering numerous professional disciplines and processes. This requires evaluation and mediation skills, a capacity to listen to and understand the knowledge, analysis and opinions of experts, and to articulate trade-offs among issues raised. Councils should therefore put a premium on well-developed policy analysis skills.

It may also mean mediating between the preferences of diverse interests with conflicting views about resource use, urban development and environmental management. This is consistent with the idea that a key role of planning is to reconcile competing claims, information, and advice to reach a decision by “weighing and balancing” (PLANZ Consultants, sub. 62).

Importantly, a future planning system should put greater emphasis on critical thinking by those carrying out the planning task. This requires a sound understanding of the following.

- *Substantiality* - Does the issue require attention. Does it even require some sort of regulatory resolution at all?;
- *Subsidiarity* – Where is the issue best addressed, and by whom. Should planners even be involved?; and
- *Negotiability* – Does the science or the relevant national policy statement enable choices to be made and, if so, how constrained are the choices?

**F14.11**

In a future urban planning system, those carrying out the planning task will require access to a wide range of skills and knowledge, covering multiple disciplines and processes. This requires strong capabilities in critical thinking, evaluation and policy analysis skills, mediation skills, a capacity to listen to and understand the knowledge, analysis and opinions of experts, and to articulate trade-offs among issues raised.

**R14.3**

In a future urban planning system, councils should have access to a wide range of skills and knowledge, covering multiple disciplines and processes. This will require councils to build strong capabilities in critical thinking; evaluation and policy analysis; mediation; and articulating trade-offs among issues.

So where will the pressure come for the change in culture and the mix of skills needed by councils in a future planning system? It is expected that the statutory, institutional and governance settings proposed in this report will provide strong incentives for councils to develop and employ the necessary capability and skills. For example:

- The systematic review of Plans through the Independent Hearing Panel process, guided by the right statutory principles, will help shape the mix of skills that councils employ;
- The legal system, law profession and courts will also likely have less prominence in a future planning system as planning and decision-making becomes less of a legal process;
- The prominent role of the Regional Spatial Strategy in a future planning architecture is likely to put a premium on collaboration and mediation skills in order to be successful; and
- The regulatory stewardship expectations on central agencies will require central agency stewards to better understand and engage with local government on urban planning matters.

## 14.7 Conclusion

Changes in the statutory, institutional and governance framework for urban planning in New Zealand, along the lines proposed in this report, provide a basis for assessing the changes in planning culture and capability that might be called for. Culture and capability issues hampered the successful introduction of the RMA, and are an ongoing constraint. This underlines the importance of aligning and building culture and capability for successful reform.

A future planning system would place greater emphasis on rigorous analysis of policy options and planning proposals. This will require councils to build their technical capability in areas such as environmental science, economic analysis, policy analysis and evaluation. It would also require strengthened understanding of the world views of mana whenua and other Māori communities and more effective engagement with these communities. A greater emphasis on critical thinking is needed among those involved in planning, requiring a deeper understanding of notions of substantiality, subsidiarity and negotiability.

To carry out effectively the core function of planning, practitioners require “access” to a wide range of skills and knowledge, covering numerous professional disciplines and processes. This requires evaluation and mediation skills, a capacity to listen to and understand the knowledge, analysis and opinions of experts, and to articulate trade-offs among issues raised. This will put a premium on well-developed policy analysis skills. A key role of planning is to reconcile competing claims, information, and advice in order to reach a decision by “weighing and balancing”.

Central government will also need to substantially improve its understanding of urban planning and knowledge of, and engagement with, the local government sector. There will be a strong obligation to exercise effective regulatory stewardship of the planning system.

The question of who will lead the reforms proposed in this report is vexed. The academic and planning organisations are likely to be resistant, largely wedded to the status quo and incremental change. Fundamental reform of the current urban planning system will be hampered unless entrenched views, natural conservatism and resistance to change are understood and addressed.

Yet the statutory, institutional and governance setting proposed in this report will provide strong incentives for councils to, over time, develop and employ the necessary capability and skills. Those carrying out the planning task and councils operating in the proposed new environment will more likely be successful if their cultural attributes, capability and skills are aligned with the new settings.