

NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION OF COMPETENCE IN AUSTRALIAN PLANNING

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Introduction

Social, economic, environmental and administrative influences are forging significant changes in the professions. It is believed that these influences and changes are also combining to impact on both the content and delivery of professional education. Associated with these impacts is a growing academic, professional, and community awareness of and concern with the need to confirm just what is a competent professional.

The increasing complexity of theory and practice makes the challenge of identifying relationships between theory and practice even more difficult (Melotte 1994a). Identifying these relationships for the professions requires new areas of knowledge, skills, and new levels of awareness and understanding in professional education and professional practice. Integration of these new areas and levels of knowledge, skills and values is urgently required for the enhancement of competence in the professions.

In the context of regulatory reform, the Australian government's initial requirement for National Competency Standards for entry level qualifications, and the more recent State's legislative provisions for Professional Certification, will influence the role of the planning profession and its Institute. The formal requirements for assessment of professional

competence for Institute Membership will come under scrutiny and may even be questioned (RAPI nd). My experience in the private sector, the public sector, and as an academic has confirmed a belief in the need for better linkages between theory, principles, competence, practice and professional development. Recent Australian, State and Local government and private sector initiatives in regulatory reform of education and the professions have made these linkages an urgent priority.

National Competency Standards for The Professions

The National Competency Standards for the professions describe skills, knowledge and attitudes with respect to professional performance. Competency standards are intended to provide a basic measure of competence in the performance of an occupation. The benefits of competency standards for a profession include: better articulation of the profession; improved dialogue with the educational institutions on curriculum improvements (Bowden and Masters 1993); and improved communication of the profession at a community level (Heywood et al. 1992).

The Scope of Competency Standards

The scope of competency standards identifies attributes of competent professionals to be demonstrated, including self-employed professionals (IEAust. 1993). Thus the identification of competency standards for a profession requires the profession to consult its members, relevant higher education academics, clients and consumers as stakeholders, to confirm the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for performance in their profession. Consistent development and recognition of national competency standards (NTB 1992) requires articulation of:

- *Units of competency* - the simplest, comprehensive statement of competency in broad functions of professional performance;

- *Elements of competency* -to identify in more detail what is done within this broad area of competency;
- *Performance Criteria* - to describe how well a competent professional should perform quantitatively and qualitatively outcomes that can be measured and observed;
- *Range Indicators* are optional qualifying statements which identify the conditions and contexts for the profession which require separate performance criteria (NOOSR 1992a; Heywood et al. 1992)
- *Cues and Evidence Guides* demonstrate: prior achievements; performance evidence from observation, examples and, supplementary evidence (NTB undated; Melotte 1994b).

The contribution of “cues” and an “evidence guide” is to support differentiation within the levels of the Australian Standards Framework for the professions. The level of competence of the profession can be defined by, what the professionals do and the standard to which it is to be done (NOOSR 1992b).

Competency standards and the professions

The Australian Standards Framework (ASF) categorises the levels of competence for trades, office clerical and supervisory staff, vocational, para-professionals and professionals. These categories are based on particular attributes, performance and standards and are derived from the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be demonstrated at an achieved level of competence for the appropriate qualification. The ASF as shown in Figure 1 recognises achieved competencies in order to provide:

- comparisons between standards in various industries and sectors,
- provide the basis for credit transfer and recognition, and
- provide an impartial bench-mark for the alignment of credentials and other forms of recognition (NTB 1991, pp.6-7).

Use of the Competency Standards

Competency standards for the professions will enable consistent National recognition and accreditation by all States and Territories (AACA 1993). In addition, competency standards will enable equitable accreditation assessment of overseas qualifications and experience, as well as articulation of training and career progression in related occupations. The confirmation of professional practice competence should demonstrate the unique professional role of that profession. Therefore all the stakeholders; the individuals, the professions, educational institutions, industry and the community, are expected to benefit from the identification and appropriate use of professional competence (NTB 1994).

Confirmation of Professional Planning Competence

A Delphi Survey of the Members of the Institute and those stakeholders, who use planning services or are affected by the activities of planners, was undertaken to identify a competency framework for the planning profession. This framework was presented for discussion and comment by Members. A Draft Planning Competence Framework was presented as a Draft Planning Competence Policy and confirmed at the 1998 Annual General meeting of the Institute.

Delphi Survey of the Planning Profession's Stakeholders

A Delphi Survey is a way of involving the stakeholders in identification and sharing opinions on issues of common interest. The preparation for this Delphi Survey of the planning profession, had three important issues:

- i) identification and ranking of 'Units' and 'Elements' of Professional Competence for Planning ,and,
- ii) identification of 'Core' Competencies in the areas of knowledge, skills, values, practice and continuing professional development.

- iii) identification of the stakeholders as; internal spokespersons- the members of the planning profession; and external spokespersons, those who use the services of planners.

Internal Stakeholders

Thus the draft planning competencies were developed, discussed and confirmed by members of the planning profession. The key spokespersons involved in the initial Delphi Survey for the Royal Australian Planning Institute were the National Councilors of the Institute; and spokespersons from State planning agencies; Local government planners; private consultants; and planning academics. All these key spokespersons gave a sample from all the Australian States and Territories. Then the Members of the Institute needed to assess these Draft Units and Elements as Core Competencies resulting from the Survey, to confirm what they would accept as professional planning competence.

External Stakeholders

The next step will be to engage the key spokespersons for the external stakeholders in a Delphi Survey to determine their appreciation of the desirable Units, Elements and Core (key) Competencies for planning, as well as their ranking of these criteria. The external stakeholders of professional competence for planning are those who use the services of the planning profession. The professional planning competence they desire from planners can also be confirmed by a Delphi survey of key spokespersons. These external spokespersons would be the representatives of: other professions and business; the property development industry; elected and employed representatives of Commonwealth, State and Local government; the voluntary sector; and the community organizations. The outcome of this external survey will be consolidated and reported to all the key spokespersons and Members of the profession for review and confirmation.

Conclusions

The confirmation of the requirements for Competence by Members of the Institute has provided the profession with the basis of competent performance. The benefits of this confirmation of competence for a profession include the following. First, the articulation of entry levels for the profession. Secondly, assistance with the focus for professional education, curricula delivery and the professional curriculum. And finally, a focus for the continuing enhancement of the profession through professional development.

The expected influences of structural reform on education, employment and the professions, particularly with respect to the Australian Standards Framework and the identification and certification of competence, has been outlined. The explicit and implicit influences on the development, expected use, and the potential use of the National Competency Standards for the Professions have been discussed.

The analysis of the profession and assessment of competency is outlined. The Band One / Unit 1 and the supporting Elements of a pilot Delphi Survey of key spokespersons from the Membership are reported. The details of Performance Indicators, Range Indicators, Cues and Evidence are not discussed here. However, they are recognised as completing the Competency Framework.

Finally, confirmation of Professional Planning Competence is advocated as a necessity for appropriate recognition of the positive role that the planning profession can play in structural reform. Recognition of National Professional Planning Competence must be urgently developed further in consultation with all the stakeholders in the community, if the planning profession is to continue as a serious participant in structural reform.

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Appendix

Figure 1. Levels of the Australian Standards Framework

Australian Standards Qualifications Framework	Previous Qualifications	New
Level 8 Degree / Ph. D.	No change	Masters
Level 7 / Grad. Dip.	No change	Bach.Degree
Level 6 Grad. Cert.	Diploma	Adv. Dip. /
Level 5	Associate Diploma	Diploma
Level 4	Advanced Certificate	Certificate 4
Level 3	Certificate of Trade Studies	Certificate 3
Level 2	{Senior Secondary Certificate	Certificate 2
Level 1	{Lower Vocational Certificate	Certificate 1

The Australian Standards Framework has eight competency levels for the development and recognition of competency standards for occupations. This

framework categorises the relationship of employment with education and training; vocational training; and certification. The ASF Level Descriptions in Figure 2 outline the competencies, the education and training and the typical occupations for Level 7 and Level 8 of the framework which are of particular interest to the planning profession. Level 5 and Level 6, which are not listed here, could be of interest for para-professional and supervisory para-professionals, should the Institute initiate articulation for this particular level of membership.

Figure 2

Australian Standards Framework ASF 7

Competencies :

- * involve self-directed development and mastery of broad and / or specialised areas of knowledge with a range of skills in highly varied and / or highly specialised contexts.
- * are normally used independently and are non-routine; significant high level judgement is required
- * are likely to be applied with a broad plan, budget or strategy; responsibility and broad ranging accountability for the structure, management and output of the work of others

Education and training qualification: Higher Education Degree

Example : general manager, professional position

Australian Standards Framework ASF 8

Competencies :

- * involve self-directed development and mastery of a range of knowledge and skills; specialised within highly varied and/or specialised contexts.
- * are normally used with full independence and in contexts and combinations of great variability; and the highest level of complex judgement
- * involve full responsibility and accountability for all aspects of the work and the work of others

Education and training qualification: Masters / Ph. D. Degree

Example: chief executive officer, senior executive service, or specialist professional position.

(Adapted from DBIRD 1995)

Figure 3

DELPHI SURVEY OF REPRESENTATIVE MEMBER STAKEHOLDERS -

Consolidation of Delphi Survey Responses- Round 1

BAND ONE UNIT

UNIT 1

PRACTISE PROFESSIONAL PLANNING IN PLAN PREPARATION

Element 1.1

Interpret the planning process (including problem definition, goal formulation, policy formulation, analysis of constraints and opportunities, plan generation, evaluation, implementation, monitoring and review)

Element 1.2

Prepare plans as instruments to guide, control, foster and manage development and change, to identify and classify elements for retention, protection, conservation and enhancement and to provide a statutory basis for decision making

Element 1.3

Interpret the physical, social, economic, environmental and political aspects of planning.

Element 1.4

Devise plans to be used in a variety of circumstances and scales varying from local, district, sub-region, region to state

Element 1.5

Use expertise in a range of communication media such as the preparation of written reports, [plans] research, oral and visual presentation methodologies and processes

Element 1.6

Involve key spokespersons and public in participation in, and conduct of meetings

Element 1.7

Develop community confidence in ability to cope with uncertainty and multiple goals---