

Results from the SAPER survey with South African planning professionals

This briefing note provides an overview of the method and quantitative results of the SAPER survey that was undertaken with planning professionals in South Africa. This survey relates to Objective 2 of this project, which focuses on deconstructing how the development and delivery of the urban planning undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum addresses issues raised by a changing post-colonial context in SA.

The next section in the briefing noting sets out the methodology used, which is followed by an overview of the quantitative results of the survey.

2. Method

The survey was hosted on an online platform (SurveyMonkey), and circulated via the two main planning organizations in South Africa, the South African Council of Planners (SACPLAN) and the South African Planning Institute (SAPI). This meant that the survey was distributed to every accredited planner in South Africa, and all non-accredited planners who belonged to SAPI. In addition, the survey was also circulated to all past students who had studied planning at the University of the Free State.

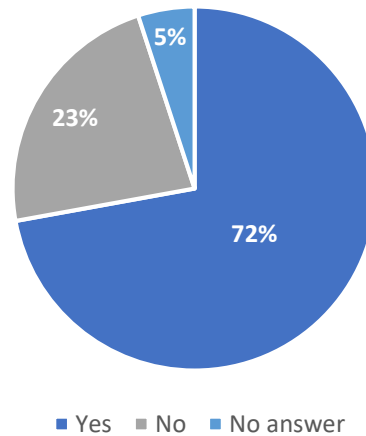
The survey contained both open and closed ended questions to planning practitioners in South Africa, with the open questions consisting of a mix of long and short answers.

With 219 responses, representing 5.6% of all candidate and professional planners in South Africa, this makes this survey one of the largest ever undertaken with planners in South Africa. It must be noted that a number of respondents only partially completed the survey, with the lowest number of respondents in any of the questions discussed in this paper being 167 (and the highest being 219).

The first limitation of the survey was a low response rate from technical planners, and thus this survey should not be deemed representative of their views. The second limitation of this survey was that the individuals who responded tended to be planners that are more 'mobile.' For example, 68% of the respondents had worked in the private sector during their career, and 75% had worked for government. This means that the respondents tended to be individuals that moved between sectors, and not individuals who stuck to working in one sector. The consequence of these limitations is that this survey should be viewed as showing the views of a significant portion of planners in South Africa, but not necessarily representative of all planners in South Africa.

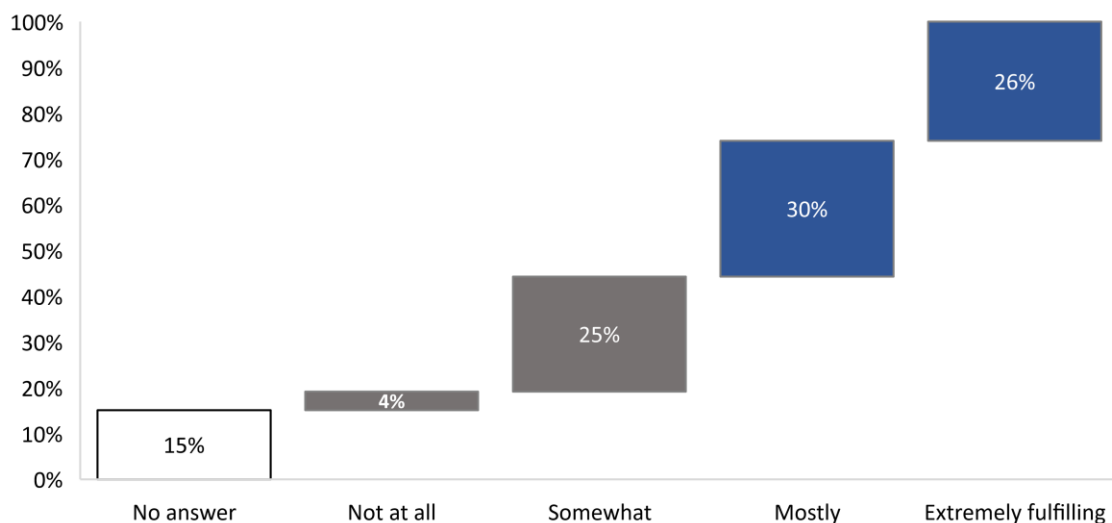
3. Findings

Figure 1: Overall, do you feel your formal education and training prepared you for work as a planner?



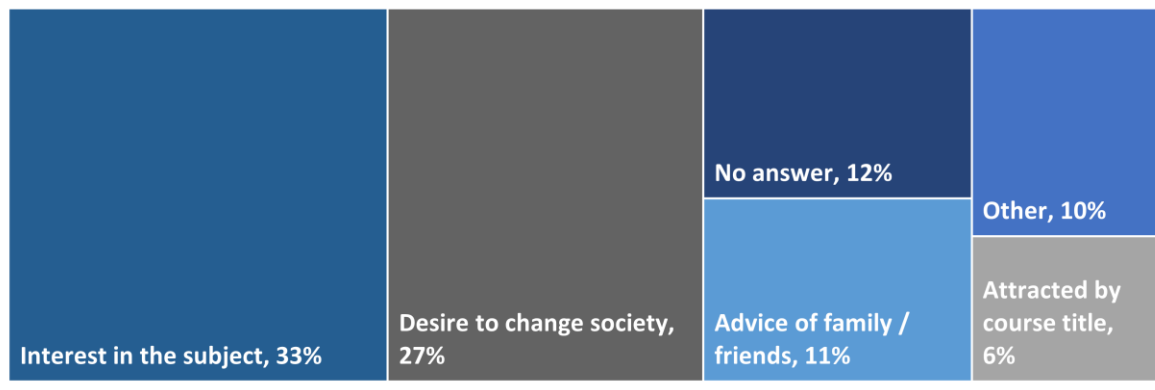
One of the most positive results we found in this survey was the perception that planning education is sufficiently preparing planners to work as planners in South Africa (Figure 1). There were a number of issues raised, and caveats made with regard to this statement, but largely respondents felt that planning education was adequately preparing them to work in planning practise in South Africa.

Figure 2: Do you find your work as a planner fulfilling?



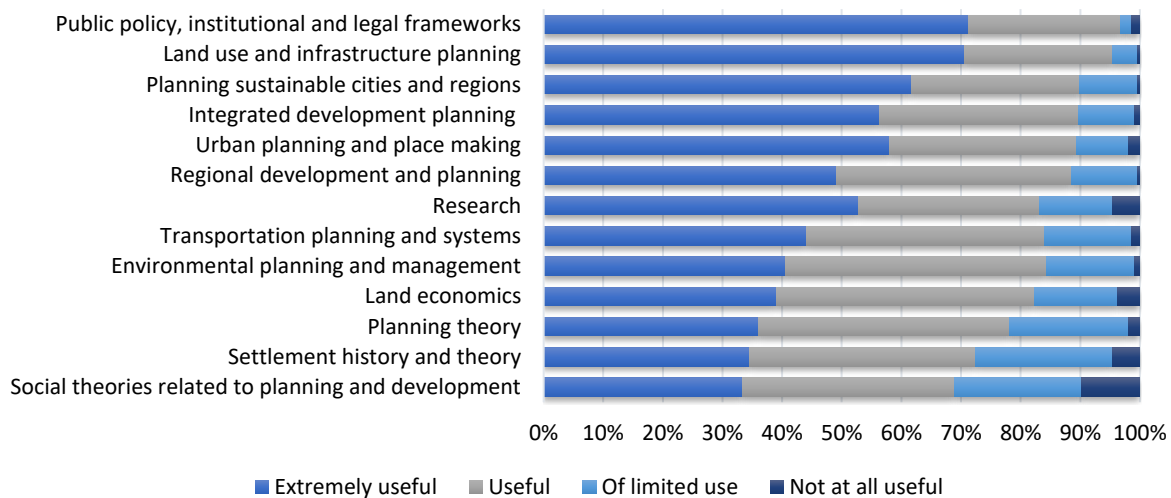
When asked whether the respondents found their work as planners fulfilling, an impressive 56% answered that they found their work either mostly fulfilling or extremely fulfilling (Figure 2). This is a heartening result, showing that many planners are finding meaning in the work that they are doing.

Figure 3: What was your main motivation behind choosing a career in planning?



When asked about motivations behind studying planning, the two largest answers were interest in the subject and desire to change society (Figure 3). This provides evidence for the widely held belief that many planners enter into the planning profession with the intent to improve the world in which they live.

Figure 4: Ranking of usefulness of core planning competencies in planning practise

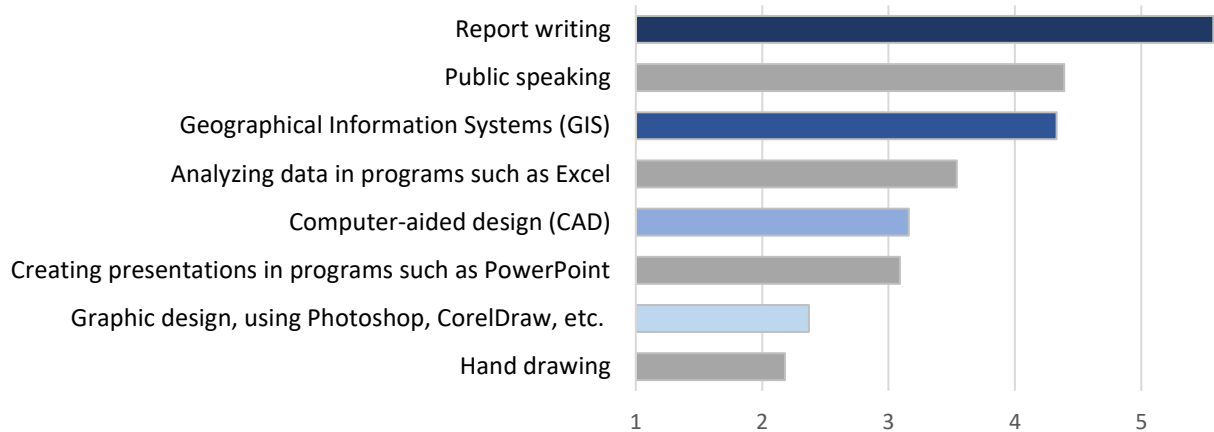


With regard to Figure 4, in this question we asked respondents to indicate the usefulness of various skills and competencies taught in South African planning schools. The skills and competencies were taken directly from the ‘core competencies’ listed in SACPLAN (2014: 12, 19-31)ⁱ. These are the officially recognised “set of specific knowledge, skills, abilities, or experience that a planner must possess in order to successfully perform the work and activities that are central to professional planning practice” in South Africa.

Figure 4 shows the results of this question, sorted from most to least useful skills as ranked by respondents. The main observation that we garnered from this question was the emphasis on practical aspects of planning, and the limited regard given to theoretical skills. Specifically, of the three competencies with the word theory in their title (Social theories related to planning and development, Settlement history and theory and Planning theory), these were ranked as being the three least valuable skills. Conversely, the two highest ranked competencies were ‘Land use and infrastructure planning’ and ‘Public policy, institutional and legal frameworks,’ two skills that are decidedly practical in nature. Note that this is not necessarily a rejection of theory, but possibly a challenge to how theory is being taught in planning schools in South Africa. (For more on this, see the forthcoming paper from the SAPER project.)

Note that this question dealt with the perceived usefulness of skills taught at planning schools. This can imply either that the topic was useful, but had limited or poor teaching or that it was taught well but had limited value in practice.

Figure 5: Ranking of technical skills by respondents (8 is highest, 1 is lowest)



Building on this broader notion of theory and practise, the next step was to identify what kind of technical skills were the most valued by respondents (Figure 5). Unsurprisingly, public speaking and report writing were ranked as the two most important skills. What was interesting was that GIS and data analyse in programs such as Excel was ranked higher than CAD skills, and that GIS skills had almost the same ranking as public speaking, emphasizing just how important respondents perceived GIS skills to be.

It should be noted that many of the respondents classified land use management as a technical skill, which is not reflected in this chart, but was frequently expressed in many of the open questions.

Respondents further supported the above arguments when we asked them what they felt was missing from their tertiary education and training in planning, which they feel should be included in current training of planning students. Ten of most common answers were the following:

- Practical / technical training and skills,
- Land use management,
- Financial management,
- GIS,
- CAD,
- Project management,
- Layout planning,
- Research skills,
- Property development,
- Transport planning.

This provides further evidence for the importance of teaching land use management, and practical skills such as GIS and CAD, but also points to a few key common business skills, such as financial management and project management. These points to the necessity of ensuring that planners are not just equipped with planning specific skills, but also the general skills required by professionals.

4. Next steps

While this specific briefing note has focused on the quantitative data, a significant portion of the survey involved long open-ended questions. Using this qualitative data, alongside the quantitative data discussed in this briefing note, we are developing two academic papers, one focusing on understanding the adequacy of planning education in South Africa, the other focused on race and planning in South Africa.

We are also interviewing around 80-100 planners throughout South Africa with the intent being to build on these initial findings. This will lead to a further set of papers.

¹ SACPLAN (South African Council of Planners). 2014. *Guidelines for competencies and standards for curricula development*. Available at: <http://www.sacplan.org.za/documents/Competencies%20Guidelines.pdf>