



# Planning at the Coalface: The Planner's Perspective Survey **Preliminary Results**

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March 2007

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# Planning at the Coalface: The Planner's Perspective Survey

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### 0.0 Overview and Key Findings

Planners are on the frontline of delivering across a range of government initiatives, and planning reform to help deliver some of these is an ongoing process across Great Britain. As local authority employees, planners are also subject to a range of other changes in the delivery of public services. It is thus of great interest to investigate how planners as a professional group are responding to the reform processes. In order to investigate this, a questionnaire was sent out by post to 1,987 members of the Royal Town Planning Institute who work in the public sector across Britain. The planners surveyed were chosen on the basis of a random sample. A healthy response rate yielded 612 completed surveys and this report overviews the data from those.

Although attitudes and opinions are heterogeneous, quite a nuanced picture emerges. Typical of similar professions, planning is dominated by highly qualified white males (although the percentage of females is much higher in younger age groups). Respondents report that their prime motivator for being planners is a genuine desire to make a difference to people and places but there are concerns their profession is becoming bogged down in bureaucracy. Overall the majority (63.1%) of planners are not convinced the reform agenda helps speed-up and simplify the planning system. There is concern that reforms increase red tape and have not been properly resourced but there is also support for the reform agenda in principle.

Attitudes towards central government are quite clear-cut with most respondents (54.5%) feeling there is too much central control of planning and complaining central government is not sufficiently joined-up. In terms of planning guidance, responses indicate that front-line planners find it hard to keep track of all the guidance issued and feel they do not have sufficient say in writing it but there is also a feeling guidance helps maintain national standards and improves planning. Furthermore, many planners felt better guidance would help deal with 'big issues' such as climate change and urban regeneration. Linked to concerns about central control, there is a feeling that targets and audit are too obsessed with speed (89.8% agree or strongly agree) and cause stress without properly assessing actual planning outcomes. Nevertheless, planners also report targets have improved the performance of the service and many reject the idea of abolishing targets altogether.

Finally problems or severe problems with recruitment are reported by planners working in 75.1% of authorities across Britain and problems or severe problems with retention of planners are reported by 53.6%. Better pay, better training and career development, and more respect for the profession are suggested as factors that could help tackle these problems. Further research involving in-depth interviews will help expand the preliminary analysis presented here.



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### 1.0 Introduction

The planning system is undergoing close examination across Great Britain with planning reform agendas being pushed by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), the Scottish Executive Development Department (SEDD) and the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). There is also interest from HM Treasury, as evidenced in the Barker Reviews (Barker, 2004; Barker, 2006). Increasingly, there seems to be a desire for the planning system to deliver across a range of policy fronts from urban regeneration to environmental protection to delivering economic development. Yet there have been concerns about the skills of those staffing the profession – the planners – which led to the Egan Review (Egan, 2004). The focus on planners is interesting since it is planners who are the focus of this research. This report outlines preliminary results from a questionnaire survey sent out to planners nationwide examining their attitudes and reactions to planning and wider public sector reform.

The questionnaire which this report is concerned with was sent out as a key component of my PhD project, which is entitled “Planning at the Coalface: Local Authority Planners, Planning Reform and the New Public Management”. The research project is joint-funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the DCLG and aims to understand how ongoing reforms of the planning system and of local government and the public sector more generally are affecting the quality and performance of planning in Britain.

The background to the project is the recent reforms which are transforming the planning system as well as the local government and public sector contexts in which planning is practised in Britain. A wealth of largely theoretical scholarship explores the tensions in planning policy between the emphasis, on the one hand, on local/regional devolution and social inclusion (through requirements for increased public participation) and, on the other, national uniformity and efficiency (through the imposition of central policy guidance and performance targets). However, few studies have empirically explored how these changes are manifesting themselves in planning practice.

This led to a first set of research questions, the first of which was concerned with *how these tensions are being played out and experienced at what, after Lipsky (1980), we might term the ‘street-level’*. In a national survey Demeritt and Langdon (2004) found that local authority officers felt overwhelmed by performance targets and yet, in the absence of even stronger central guidance, also lacking the clout needed to meet them. Similarly, cartoons in the RTPI’s newsletter (Cowan, 2004) identifying the toilet as ‘the ideal location’ to digest Government documents suggest frontline resistance that may influence how policies are actually put into practice.

Secondly, although its discretionary nature has long been a hallmark of British planning, the proliferation of central policy guidance, the increasing emphasis given to public participation, and the rise of formal audit procedures, such as Best Value, are reducing the scope for local authority planners to exercise the expert discretion traditionally seen as the foundation of their professional status. This raised a second set of research questions about *what implications recent reforms have both for planning as a profession and for the status, morale, and retention of planners in the public sector*.

Thirdly, while planning scholars have studied the implications of the emerging regional agenda and devolution for planning, they have tended to ignore its place in the wider reform of the public sector. Under the banner of so-called ‘New Public Management’ (NPM) (e.g. Ferlie et al, 1996), reformers are seeking to make public services more business-like, efficient, and customer-oriented. It is not, however, entirely clear who the ‘customers’ for planning should be. In measuring time to a decision, Best Value targets for local authority planning imply that the developer is the customer, whereas the emphasis on public consultation implies wider public interests than the narrow citizen-as-consumer orientation of NPM. This led to a third set of questions *about whether, how, and with what effects NPM techniques are being applied to public sector planning*.



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The PhD aims to answer these linked research questions by using a 'grounded theory' (Dey, 1999) approach to combine findings from several iterative research stages, including interviews and a large-scale questionnaire survey. The final result will be a PhD thesis of approximately 100,000 words which will consist of themed chapters addressing: mapping the planning profession; planning's image, morale and status; governance and discretion; trust and audit; public participation; and culture and customer rhetoric. The project will make contributions both to policy and to academic debates about planning and public sector management and the research will provide evidence about how planning and public sector reforms are being implemented and how they are impacting both the practice of planning and such key policy problems as professional recruitment and retention. To this end, as well as the thesis, working papers, seminar presentations, journal articles and other appropriate forms of dissemination will be produced. Already there have been presentations at the Royal Geographical Society – Institute of British Geographers, Association of American Geographers and Planning Research Network Annual Conferences, and an article on the media representation of planning in Britain (Clifford, 2006). This report is the latest in this series of outputs and provides preliminary results from a large-scale postal questionnaire survey carried out over the summer of 2006.

### 1.1 A Geographical Note

The survey was sent to planners across Great Britain, i.e. in England, Scotland and Wales. Although planning is now a devolved matter, this research focuses on how planners are responding to change rather than specifically assessing the reforms themselves. Thus, it can easily be extended across Britain despite slight differences between planning in England, Scotland and Wales. That said, the reforms being pursued are broadly similar between the nations although England and Wales are at a different stage (having had the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act in 2004) to Scotland (where a Planning (Scotland) Act has only just received Royal Assent).

Given the focus of the research being on the profession, I do not break down the majority of questions by nation when reporting results. Indeed in many areas, such as attitudes to public participation, a quick check revealed no significant differences between planners in England, Scotland or Wales in their attitudes. I have, however, broken the results down when considering direct attitudes to planning reform and central Government since there are clearly differences between the three regimes here that might be of interest, whereas when looking at issues such as what issues are of importance to people's sense of being a 'professional' planner I am looking at a single profession represented throughout Great Britain by the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI). In the questionnaire, it was made clear that 'central Government' referred to the DCLG, SEDD and WAG as appropriate (and distinct from the local Government focus of this research).



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## 2.0 Mechanics of the Survey

The PhD project is using a mixed-methods approach combining questionnaire and interview techniques and qualitative and quantitative approaches, with the aim of producing rigorous results and conclusions. Triangulation between data will help ensure this. The key to the research design is the use of several iterative steps of data collection so as to build-up and refine data as the project progresses.

The first stage of the data collection involved 'exploratory interviews' with Directors / Heads of Planning representing a cross-section of British local planning authorities (LPAs). A total of 25 senior planning officers were contacted via e-mail, of whom 17 agreed to be interviewed (a healthy 68% response rate and slightly above the desired figure of 15 exploratory interviews). In practice, on five occasions, the senior planning officer I had arranged to meet also called in one or two of their deputies to participate in the discussion, so contact was actually made with 23 local authority planners during this initial stage. The breakdown of those 23 planners is: 5 in district authorities in S.E. England, 3 in unitary authorities in S.E. England, 1 in a county authority in S.E. England, 3 in London boroughs, 4 in metropolitan boroughs in N.W. England, 1 in a metropolitan borough in N.E. England, 1 in a district authority in N.E. England, 4 in Scottish unitary authorities and 1 in a Welsh unitary authority. The interviews aimed to identify how practising planners respond to the major themes of the research. These interviews were semi-structured to allow the planners to direct the conversation to the topics of most interest to them, while still ensuring comparability between interviews.

The purpose of the survey was to establish a rigorous, large-scale picture of the planning profession as it stands in Britain today and opinions on key changes occurring in the profession. The large-scale questionnaire survey format is useful in establishing 'social facts', in gaining a bigger picture although this picture requires qualitative approaches to fully understand what is behind those 'facts'.

Design of the questionnaire survey began with the analysis of the exploratory interviews, which identified a number of themes that could be developed through the questionnaire survey. Furthermore, there were some interesting quotations which could be put to a wider audience of planners to see how much they agreed or disagreed with the statements. Using this information, a first draft of the survey instrument was put together. This was then redrafted following advice from my supervisors in the Geography Department at King's College London. The next draft of the survey was sent out to an 'advisory panel' of staff in the RTPI, the DCLG, the SEDD, the WAG and UNISON. After further refinement, a draft was sent out to 5 of the exploratory interviewees. Following the incorporation of useful feedback, the final draft of the survey was ready.

The design includes both qualitative and quantitative elements, with a mixture of closed and open questions. The vast majority of questions are closed allowing for ease of analysis and some useful numerical data to be produced. However, Likert agreements (May, 2003) were widely used to allow people to express how much they agreed or disagreed with certain positions. The final design on the questionnaire is included at the rear of this report in the appendices.

The method for the questionnaire was a postal survey, to allow a random sample to be selected, to allow ease of administering a nation-wide survey and to allow a fairly long questionnaire which respondents could answer in their own time. The survey was sent out to a random sample of 1,987 planners who were identified as working in the public sector in the RTPI membership list (in 2003 there were 11,500 public sector planners in total (RTPI, 2003) so this sample represents approximately 17% of all British public sector planners). The RTPI did this selection at random and supplied address labels to myself so that I did not have direct access to their membership list (given Data Protection considerations). I am very grateful to the RTPI for this assistance. The questionnaires were then sent out with a covering letter from the RTPI explaining the purpose of the survey (reproduced in the appendices) in two waves in July and August 2006. A pre-paid return envelope was also included.



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Respondents were given until 9<sup>th</sup> October 2006 to return the questionnaires, to allow time for people being away on holiday. Two articles were placed in the RTPI journal and newsletter *Planning*, one on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2006 to highlight the survey (Planning, 2006a) and another on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2006 (Planning, 2006b) to remind recipients of the survey to respond. In the end, some 612 questionnaires were received back, representing a response rate of 30.80%, which is healthy for a postal survey. More importantly, almost all of these questionnaire were answered in full, yielding a great deal of useful data.

The questionnaire data was entered into computer program SPSS between October and December 2006. This is specialist Social Science statistical software and has allowed ease of data analysis. Initial data analysis has been conducted in December 2006 and January 2007 using this software and includes a range of descriptive statistics, frequency tables and graphs. These are reproduced thematically in the results selection below. More detailed data analysis involving further cross-tabulations and comparison of variables using techniques such as chi-squared tests to highlight significant relationships will be conducted later in the project and duly reported.

The next key stage of the research project as a whole will be a series of detailed interviews. As well as yielding useful, representative data in itself, the survey proved a useful vehicle for recruiting planners for these detailed interviews in a rigorous way. Some 171 planners volunteered to be interviewed and 85 volunteered to take part in a focus group. The selection and conduct of the interviews will occur in the next few months.

It is important to note that results reported here are preliminary. Although the effort was taken with regards to obtaining a 'representative' sample of planners and the survey responses yielded a vast amount of data, there are some areas where a deeper understanding of the issues will also require more in-depth interviewing. In the final PhD thesis, results from this survey and from the interviews will be combined to produce rigorous results. Nevertheless, the survey results contain a wealth of information which I am sharing through this report as I feel this will be of interest to a number of people.

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### 3.0 Results

The preliminary results are presented here by way of results tables and graphs. A large number of issues were covered in the questionnaire by 'Likert agreements' (May, 2003) which asked people how much they agree or disagree with each statement (see Appendix 7.1 for a copy of the survey instrument). For these Likerts, results tables show how many people fell into each category while mean and median scores show the balance of opinion and allow comparison between different factors related by topic. The mean and median scores are calculated as a 'Strongly disagree' answer is awarded a score of 1 whereas 'Strongly agree' is awarded a score of 5. An initial analysis of the results, highlighting those I find most interesting and important, is presented in section 4.0. Further statistical testing will give more results and analysis in the final PhD thesis.

### 3.1 Mapping the Profession: Who are the planners?

Results concerning who the respondents were, where they worked, how they became planners and how long they had been planners allows us to paint a sketch map of the planning profession in Great Britain. Responses were received back from planners working in all parts of Great Britain and Table 1, below, shows which part of Great Britain (region / nation) the planners worked in and compares responses received back to the questionnaires sent out to show response rates by region / nation. Please note that the questionnaires sent out were not stratified by region, the selection was entirely random from planners working throughout Great Britain, but the region / nation each one was sent to was recorded. The locational distribution of the responding planners is illustrated by figure 1 (overleaf), which clearly shows most planners as being located in the South-East of England.

**Table 1 – Part of Great Britain in which responding planners worked and response rates**

		Sent Out		Received Back				Response Rate (%)	% of British ++ Population	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %			
Valid	E Midlands	127	6.39	36	5.9	5.9	5.9	44.09	7.25	
	E of England	185	9.31	56	9.2	9.2	15.1	19.46	9.36	
	Grtr London	159	8.00	58	9.5	9.5	24.6	36.48	13.06	
	NE England	104	5.23	34	5.6	5.6	30.2	32.69	4.37	
	NW England	224	11.27	66	10.8	10.8	41.0	29.46	11.69	
	SE England	365	18.37	122	19.9	20.0	61.0	33.42	13.90	
	SW England	214	10.77	69	11.3	11.3	72.3	32.24	8.56	
	W Midlands	180	9.06	62	10.1	10.2	82.5	34.44	9.15	
	Yorkshire	109	5.49	28	4.6	4.6	87.0	25.69	8.80	
	All England*	0	0	3	.5	.5	100.0			
	Scotland	207	10.42	48	7.8	7.9	94.9	23.19	8.80	
	Wales	113	5.69	28	4.6	4.6	99.5	24.78	5.04	
	Total		1987	100.00	610	99.7	100.0			100.00
		England +	1667	83.9	534	87.3	87.3		32.03	86.16
Missing	99 **			2	.3					
Total				612	100.0			30.80	100.00	

\* - NB – this category relates to people who answered that they worked throughout England on planning matters. It is not a sum of English results. To avoid confusion, these 3 results have all been recoded as 'Greater London' and are included in Greater London results from now on (since all 3 respondents were based in that region)

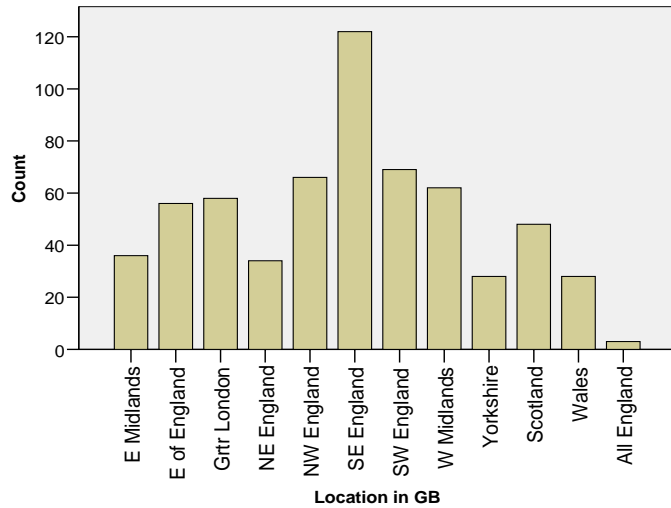
+ - Calculated by summing those for each region detailed above

\*\* - 'Missing' means that that respondent did not complete that particular question, which is represented by the code '99'. This was relatively rare, with the vast majority completing all sections of the questionnaire

++ - This column shows the population of each part of Great Britain as a total of the population of Great Britain according to the 2001 census (Wikipedia, 2006)

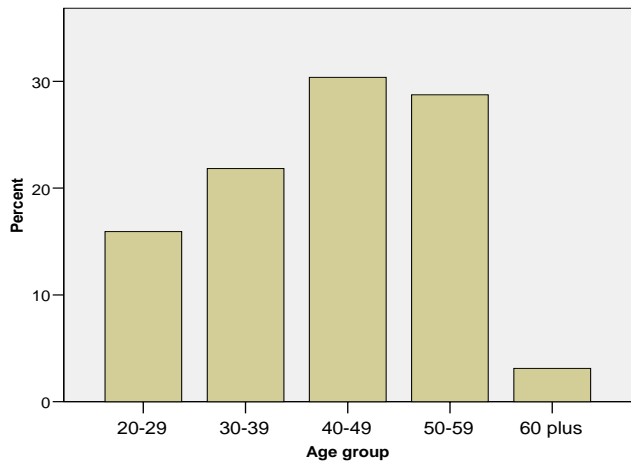
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**Figure 1 – Number of respondents located in each part of Great Britain**

The survey included questions on the age, gender and ethnicity of the planners. The results revealed that some 62% of the responding planners are aged 40 years or above (figure 2 and table 2), approximately 95% are ethnically White British (table 3) and almost 70% are male (figure 3 illustrates that 69.8% of the respondents specified male as their gender and 30.2% specified female). The survey also asked how long people had worked as a planner: the mean average of length of service was 18.1 years as a practising planner.



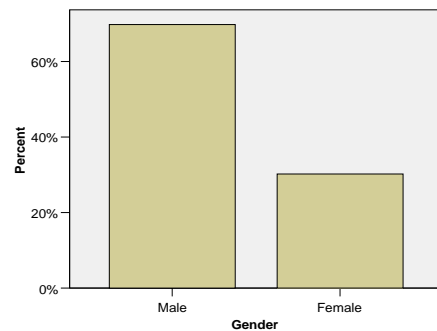
**Figure 2 – Percentage of respondents in each age group**

**Table 2 – Age of respondents**

	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid				
20-29	97	15.8	15.9	15.9
30-39	133	21.7	21.8	37.8
40-49	185	30.2	30.4	68.1
50-59	175	28.6	28.7	96.9
60 plus	19	3.1	3.1	100.0
Total	609	99.5	100.0	
Missing	3	.5		
Total	612	100.0		

**Table 3 – Ethnicity of respondents**

	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid				
White British	579	94.6	95.1	95.1
White Irish	11	1.8	1.8	96.9
White Other	4	.7	.7	97.5
Black Caribbean	1	.2	.2	97.7
Asian - Indian	3	.5	.5	98.2
Asian - Pakistani	1	.2	.2	98.4
Asian - Other	1	.2	.2	98.5
Mixed - White / Asian	2	.3	.3	98.9
Mixed - White / Chinese	1	.2	.2	99.0
Chinese	6	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	609	99.5	100.0	
Missing	3	.5		
Total	612	100.0		



**Figure 3 – Percentage of respondents in each gender**

# Planning at the Coalface: The Planner's Perspective Survey

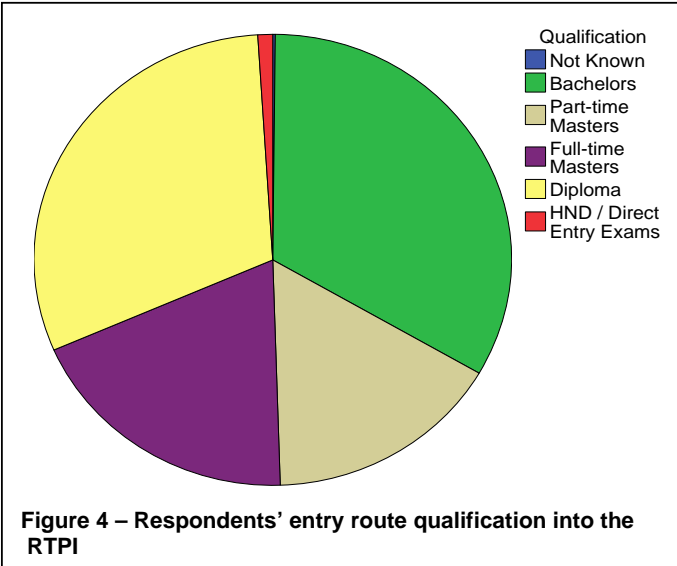
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Interestingly, a comparison of age against gender – illustrated by table 4 (below) – shows that younger planners were much more likely to be female than older planners. A chi-squared test can be used to see if there is a statistically significant relationship between the two variables and in this case it confirms that there is ( $p \leq 0.000$ ,  $df = 4$ ): the younger a planner, the more likely they are to be female. This suggests that the make-up of the profession is changing.

**Table 4 – Cross-tabulation examining the relationship between age and gender of the respondents**

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Age group	20-29	45	52	97
	30-39	78	55	133
	40-49	131	54	185
	50-59	155	20	175
	60 plus	16	3	19
Total		425	184	609

In terms of their professional qualifications, planners were asked what their entry route in the RTPI was. The largest group was through a Bachelor's degree in Town Planning (or equivalent), but almost as many had done a Diploma in Town Planning (or equivalent) and either a full- or part-time Master's course in Town Planning (or equivalent), as illustrated by figure 4 and table 5 (below)



**Table 5 – Qualification on entry into the RTPI for respondents**

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Not Known	1	.2	.2	.2
	Bachelors	198	32.4	33.2	33.4
	Part-time Masters	96	15.7	16.1	49.5
	Full-time Masters	113	18.5	19.0	68.5
	Diploma	182	29.7	30.5	99.0
	HND / Direct Entry Exams	6	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	596	97.4	100.0	
	Missing	99	16	2.6	
Total		612	100.0		

Planners were also asked about their current and past employment, as illustrated and discussed below.

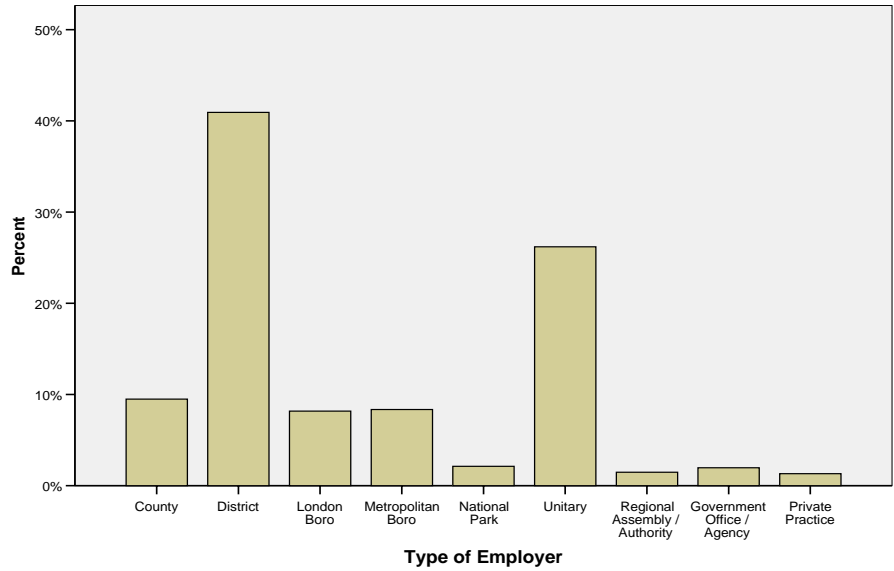
**Table 6 – Type of employer respondents worked for**

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	County	58	9.5	9.5	9.5
	District	250	40.8	40.9	50.4
	London Borough	50	8.2	8.2	58.6
	Metropolitan Borough	51	8.3	8.3	66.9
	National Park	13	2.1	2.1	69.1
	Unitary	160	26.1	26.2	95.3
	Regional Assembly / Authority	9	1.5	1.5	96.7
	Government Office / Agency	12	2.0	2.0	98.7
	Private Practice	8	1.3	1.3	100.0
	Total	611	99.8	100.0	
	Missing	99	1	.2	
Total		612	100.0		

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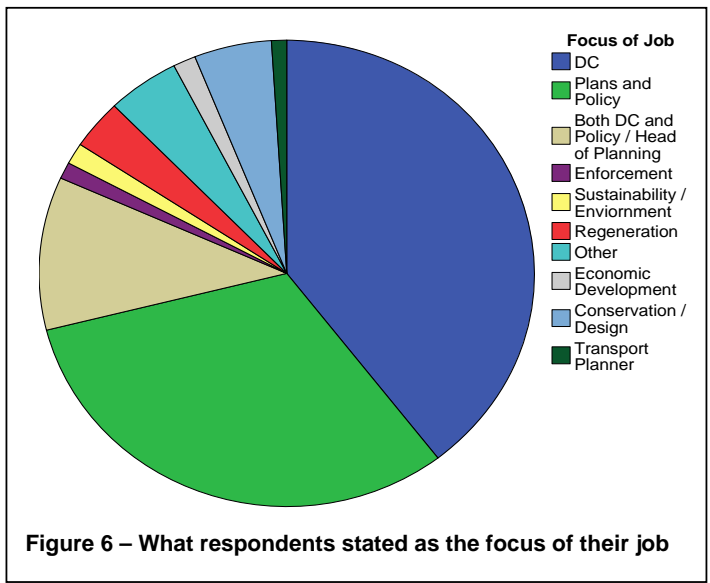
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In terms of their current employment, table 6 (above) and figure 5 (below) indicate a majority working in either district councils or unitary authorities (which include all those in Scotland or Wales as well as a large number in England). Although the survey was sent to planners who told the RTPI they worked in the public sector in LPAs, a few working for regional or central government responded as well as a number in private practice who had recently moved on but not yet updated the RTPI about this. Their results were included in the analysis.



**Figure 5 – Percentage of respondents employed in each type of authority**

In terms of their current employment, planners were asked what the focus of their job was, with the options of DC, Plans and Policy or ‘Other – Specify’. Given this a majority suggested they worked in DC (39.5%) or Plans and Policy (31.5%), but a significant number specified a range of other job focuses, which were then coded and are illustrated by figure 6 and table 7 (below).



**Figure 6 – What respondents stated as the focus of their job**

**Table 7 – What respondents stated as the focus of their job**

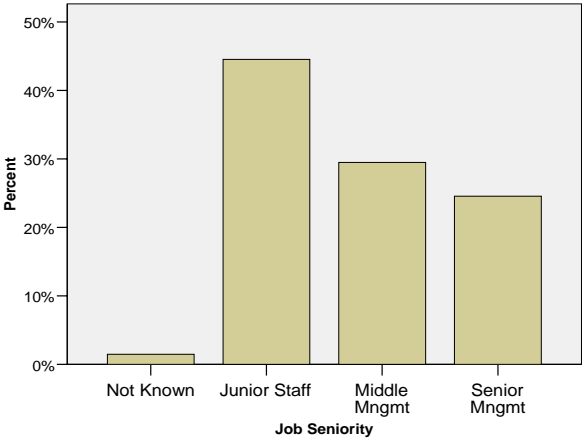
	Freq- uency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
DC	242	39.5	39.5	39.5
Plans and Policy	193	31.5	31.5	71.1
Both DC and Policy / Head of Planning	65	10.6	10.6	81.7
Enforcement	7	1.1	1.1	82.8
Sustainability / Environment	9	1.5	1.5	84.3
Regeneration	21	3.4	3.4	87.7
Other	29	4.7	4.7	92.5
Economic Development	9	1.5	1.5	94.0
Conservation / Design	31	5.1	5.1	99.0
Transport Planning	6	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	612	100.0	100.0	

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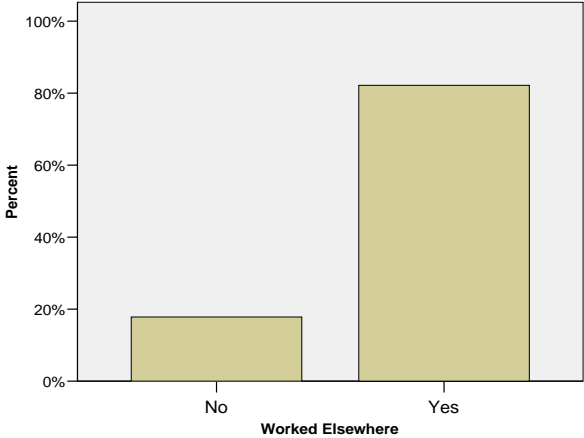
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Respondents were asked to give their job title and based on this, they were classified as 'junior staff' (this approximate category including Planning Officer and Senior Planning Officer), 'middle management' (this approximate category including Principal Planning Officer and Team Leader) or 'senior management' (this approximate category including Heads of Planning / DC / Policy and similar). The responses show a good spread of respondents with both junior and senior staff represented in the survey: 44.4% were junior staff, 29.4% middle management and 24.5% senior management. In 1.5% of cases seniority could not easily be discerned from job title. Figure 8 (below) illustrates this range.

Figure 9 (below) illustrates whether respondents had ever worked as planners for another employer other than their current employer. Some 82.2% had compared to 17.8% who had not, indicating a profession where this is a good deal of movement between employers. Of those 82.2% who had worked elsewhere, some 69.9% had worked for another local authority, 3.9% had worked for central government or an agency of central government, 14.1% had worked in the private sector and 2.3% had worked in the voluntary sector as planners, indicating much less movement between sectors than between employers.



**Figure 8 – Seniority of respondents at work**

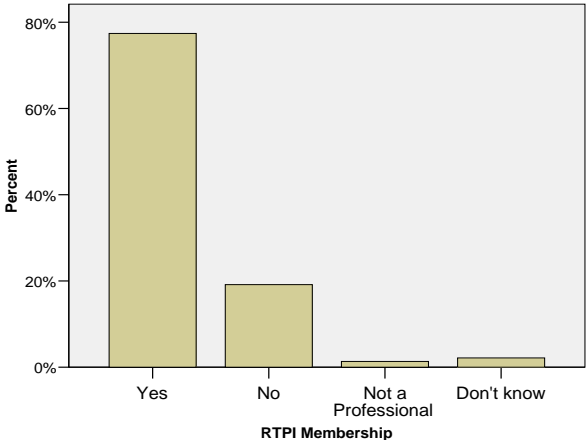


**Figure 9 – Had respondents worked as planners other than with their present employer?**

### 3.2 Views on the Profession: Motivated but not respected

In terms of examining the idea of planning as a profession, planners were asked whether their membership of the RTPI was important to their sense of being a 'professional'. Here, 77.4% answered that yes, membership was important to that sense, 19.1% disagreed and said it was not important whilst 1.3% said they did not consider themselves 'a professional' at all and 2.1% of respondents did not know how they felt (figure 10).

Similarly, with regards to trade union status, planners were asked what their membership status was with regards to UNISON, the local government union. 59.4% were currently members of UNISON and a further 2.3% planned to become members whilst 22.6% were former

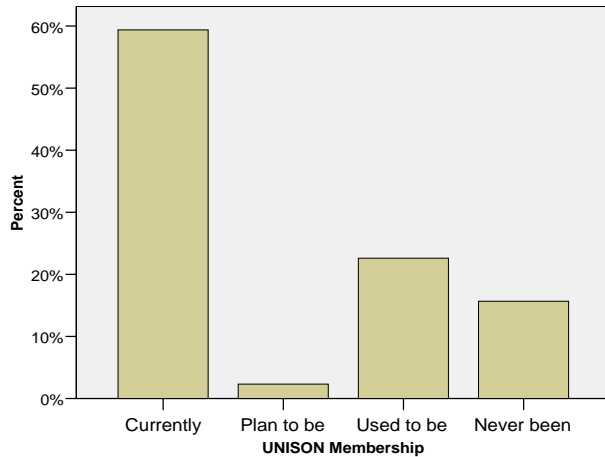


**Figure 10 – Did respondents feel that membership of the RTPI was important to their sense of being a 'professional'?**

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members who had left and 15.7% had never been members (figure 11, below).



**Figure 11 – Were respondents members of the UNISON trade union?**

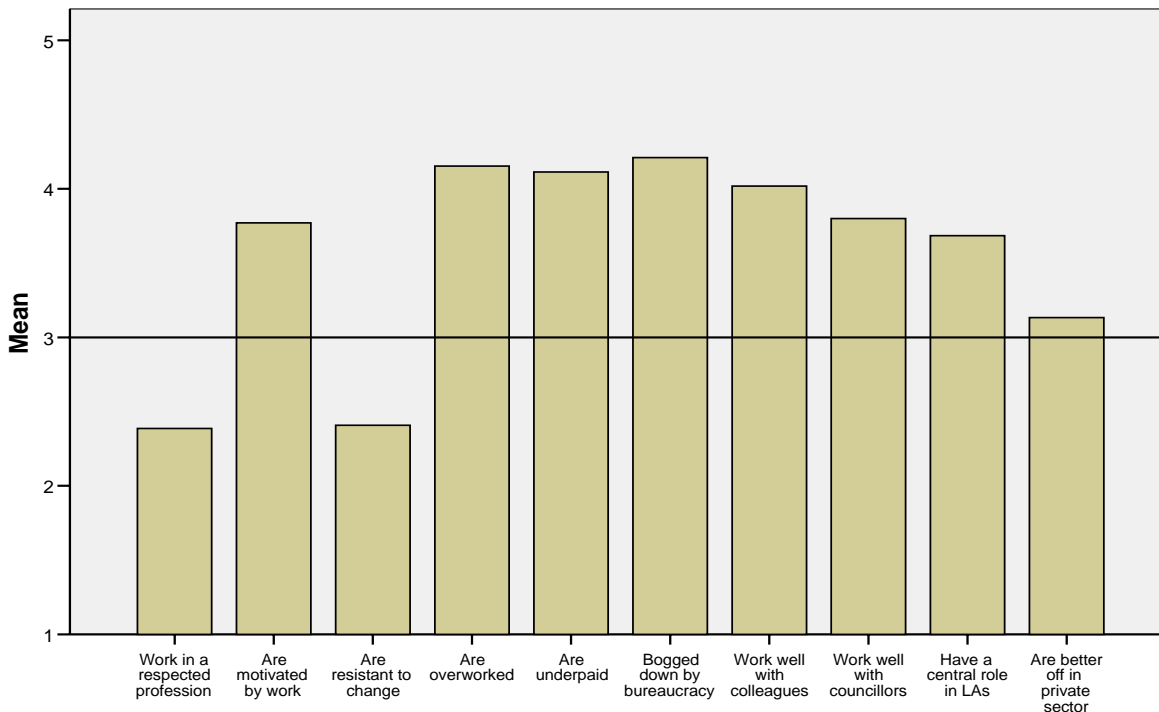
A ‘Professional Group’ Likert agreement asked planners to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements regarding local authority planners as a professional group. Respondents could answer on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The percentage of planners answering in each category is shown by table 8 below. The table also shows how many respondents answered each statement (N), a mean score, a standard deviation and a median score. The mean is the average of all scores; if the mean is above 3.00 the strength of opinion agreeing with the statement is stronger than that disagreeing with it. However, because answers could only be from 1 to 5, even small deviations from the mean may be significant. The standard deviation is a measure of the spread of the results – a larger standard deviation indicates answers that are more widely spread, i.e. opinion is more divided. The median, meanwhile, indicates what the central response were when all responses are put in order (using the 1-5 scores). Thus, if the median is 2.00, this indicates that the clear majority of planners disagree with the statement, a median of 3.00 indicates opinion is more-or-less balanced while a median of 4.00 would indicate a clear majority agreeing with the statement.

Figure 12 (opposite) illustrates a comparison of the mean scores for each of the statements shown in table 8, quickly showing which statements had a balance of opinion in agreement with them (bar above 3.00) compared to those with a balance disagreeing (bar below 3.00) and those with mixed opinion (bar about 3.00). This is the model which will be used for reporting results from each Likert agreement, although for some detailed graphs illustrating the distribution of results for an individual statement from within the Likert will also be included.

**Table 8 – Summary of responses for Likert agreement measuring how much respondents agreed or disagreed with various statements relating to local authority planners as a group**

Likert Statement:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	% Strongly Disagree	% Disagree	% Undecided	% Agree	% Strongly Agree
Planning is a well respected profession	606	2.39	.923	2.00	11.2	57.6	13.4	17.0	0.8
Planners are motivated by their work	607	3.77	.929	4.00	1.8	12.5	9.1	60.5	16.1
Planners are resistant to change	605	2.40	.948	2.00	10.7	58.5	12.9	15.7	2.1
Planners are overworked	605	4.16	.863	4.00	0.7	5.8	9.3	45.8	38.5
Planners are underpaid	606	4.12	.864	4.00	0.7	6.4	8.9	48.7	35.3
Planners are bogged down by bureaucracy	608	4.21	1.414	4.00	5.8	7.6	51.6	34.9	0.2
Planners work well with other council staff	606	4.02	.807	4.00	1.0	6.3	6.6	61.7	24.2
Planners work well with elected councillors	605	3.80	.848	4.00	1.0	8.9	15.0	59.0	16.0
Planners have a central role in local authorities	606	3.68	1.114	4.00	2.6	19.6	8.1	46.0	23.6
Planners are better off in the private sector	604	3.13	1.022	3.00	4.3	23.0	38.1	24.2	10.4

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**Figure 12 – Comparison of the mean averages scores of responses to the Likert agreement measuring how much responding planners agreed or disagreed with various statements relating to local authority planners as a group (with a score of 1 representing ‘Strongly disagree’ and 5 representing ‘strongly agree’)**

Looking at table 8 and figure 12, two statements in particular stand out. One is “planners are resistant to change”, a statement that nearly 70% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with, perhaps unsurprisingly given that planners are in a time of change at the moment and are unlikely to look in themselves in such a negative light. Yet the other statement that nearly 70% disagreed or strongly disagreed with is the statement “planning is a well respected profession”. It is interesting that the vast majority of planners do not associate with this statement and possibly reflective of their own experiences. With one exception, all other statements here had a majority of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with them (and means well above a neutral 3.0 and medians of 4.00), these include ideas that planners are motivated by their work, that they are overworked, underpaid, bogged down by bureaucracy and work well with various colleagues. The one exception is the statement that “planners are better off in the private sector”. This statement seemed to divide opinion (the median is 3.00), with a strong number undecided and significant numbers in the disagreement and in the agreement sides.

Sticking with ideas of professionalism, a ‘Professional Motivations’ Likert agreement asked respondents how important they thought various factors were to their sense of being a “professional planner”. In this case the scale ran from 1 being “not at all important” to 5 being “very important”. The results for each factor are detailed in table 9 (overleaf), while figure 13 illustrates a comparison of the mean scores for each factor within that professional sense Likert.

Interestingly, all factors here were considered either important or very important by a majority of planners. We can, however, look at the figures and means and see that some factors are considered important or very important by more planners than others. The factor with the highest mean score and by far the greatest number of planners considering it very important in “a sense of making a positive difference to people / places” (98.3% rated this factor important or very important and the median was an exceptional 5.00). This is followed by “freedom to make professional judgements”, “a sense of providing a good service to customers” and “a sense of serving the public at large”. The factors with the lowest

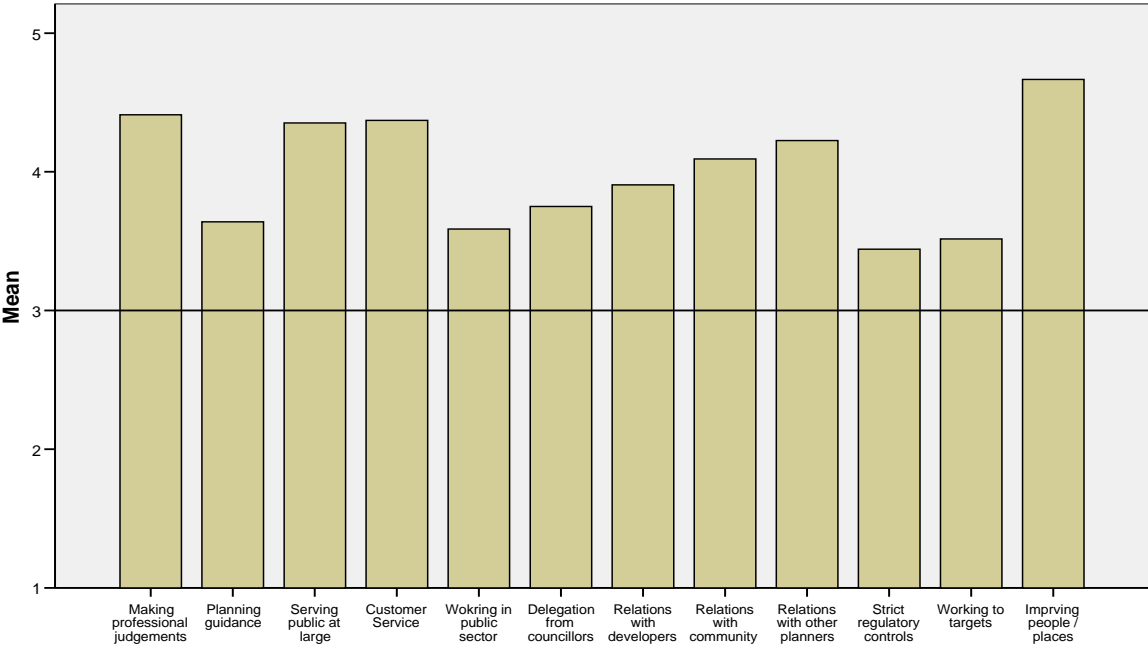
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means are “ability to work to targets” (rated very important by just 10.9% compared to 68.9% considering a sense of making a positive difference very important), followed by “working in the public sector” and then “planning guidance from central government”. That said, all factors had more people considering them important or very important than considering them not at all or not very important (including the three just mentioned).

**Table 9 – Summary of responses for Likert agreement measuring how important respondents thought various factors were to their sense of being a professional planner**

Likert Statement:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	% Not at all important	% Not that important	% Undecided	% Important	% Very important
Freedom to make professional judgements	609	4.42	.582	4.00	0.2	1.1	0.3	53.5	44.8
Planning guidance from central government	605	3.63	.916	4.00	2.1	13.6	13.6	60.5	10.2
A sense of serving the public at large	609	4.35	.680	4.00	0.5	2.0	2.8	51.4	43.3
A sense of providing a good service to customers	606	4.37	.640	4.00	0.3	1.5	2.3	52.3	43.6
Working in the public sector	606	3.58	1.009	4.00	1.7	17.5	18.3	46.4	16.2
Delegation from local councilors	605	3.75	.958	4.00	2.3	11.7	12.2	59.9	17.9
Good relations with developers	606	3.90	.763	4.00	0.8	6.9	8.6	68.3	15.3
Good relations with community groups	608	4.09	.658	4.00	0.3	2.6	7.6	66.4	23.0
Good working relationships with other planners	608	4.22	.564	4.00	0.2	0.8	3.8	67.1	28.1
Strict controls to regulate development	604	3.43	.976	4.00	2.5	18.0	23.0	46.7	9.8
Ability to work to targets	608	3.52	1.004	4.00	3.3	17.1	15.1	53.6	10.9
Sense of making a + difference to people / places	608	4.67	.527	5.00	0.2	0.2	1.3	29.4	68.9



**Figure 13 – Comparison of the mean averages scores of responses to the Likert agreement measuring how important responding planners thought various factors were to their sense of being a professional planner (with a score of 1 representing ‘Not at all important’ and 5 representing ‘Very important’)**

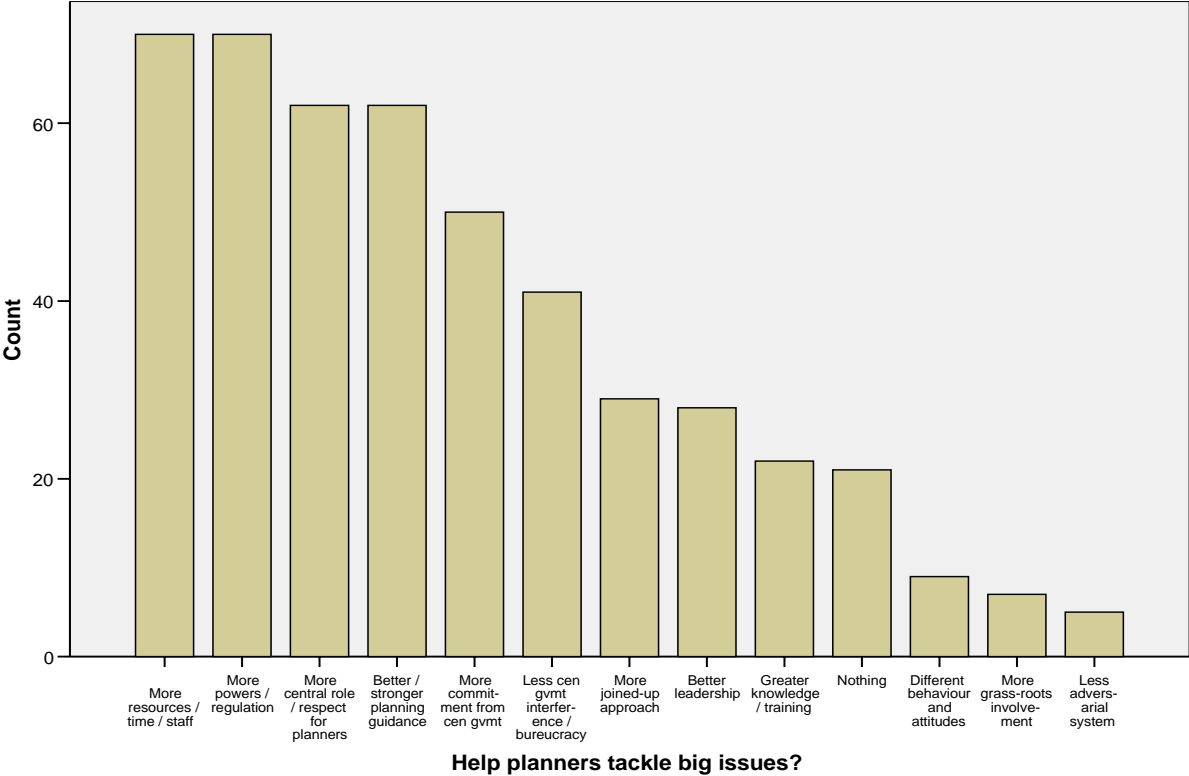
An additional insight into ideas of local authority planners as a professional group was provided by an open question which asked planners if there was any one thing they felt would place them in a better position to contribute to ‘big’ issues such climate change and regeneration. The answers were then coded based on what respondents actually wrote down. 12 categories appeared more than once, plus several people specified that they thought no one thing could help. The results are illustrated by table 10 and figure 14 (opposite).

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**Table 10 – Factors respondents thought could help them tackle ‘big issues’ (Groups created from responses)**

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Nothing	21	3.4	4.4	4.4
	Less adversarial system	5	.8	1.1	5.5
	Less central government interference / bureaucracy	41	6.7	8.6	14.1
	More commitment from central government	50	8.2	10.5	24.6
	More grass-roots involvement	7	1.1	1.5	26.1
	Better / stronger planning guidance	62	10.1	13.0	39.1
	More powers / regulations	70	11.4	14.7	53.8
	More resources / time / staff	70	11.4	14.7	68.5
	Different behaviour and attitudes	9	1.5	1.9	70.4
	Greater knowledge / training	22	3.6	4.6	75.0
	More central role / respect for planners	62	10.1	13.0	88.0
	Better leadership	28	4.6	5.9	93.9
	More joined-up approach	29	4.7	6.1	100.0
	Total	476	77.8	100.0	
Missing	99	136	22.2		
Total		612	100.0		



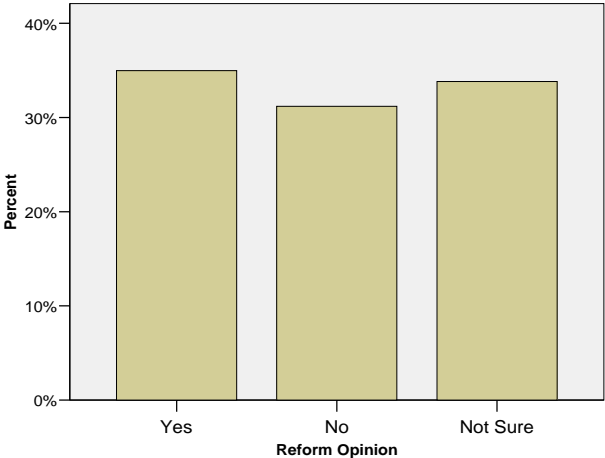
**Figure 14 – Factors respondents thought could help them tackle ‘big issues’ (Groups created from responses)**

As illustrated by table 10 and figure 14, the two factors most frequently cited by responding planners as putting them in a better position to tackle ‘big’ issues such as climate change and urban regeneration are more resources and time to spend on such issues and more specific regulatory powers. With regards to the latter, many respondents commented in terms of specific abilities to direct developers in urban regeneration projects and to compel developers to take more account of climate change in their projects. Other factors which were cited quite often include a more central role and respect for planners and better quality planning guidance focused more specifically on key issues. Interestingly, while 41 respondents mentioned less central government ‘interference’ (seen in terms of targets and bureaucratic impositions), 50 respondents wanted a greater level of commitment (and probably thus involvement) from central government.

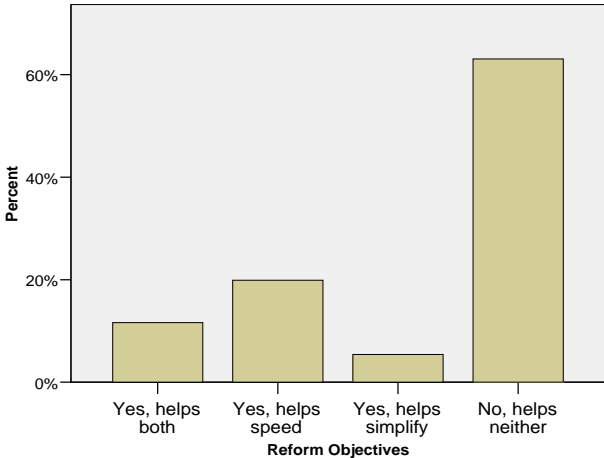
**3.3 Planning Reform: Support in principle but red-tape concerns**

The recent (and ongoing) programme of planning reforms being pursued by central government planning departments (i.e. the DCLG, SEDD and WAG) provides the background to the whole PhD and was addressed by a number of questions in the survey. It should be noted that the survey was sent out prior to publication of the Barker Review (Barker, 2006). The first two questions simply asked planners if they thought that, on balance, this reform agenda was a good thing or not and whether they thought the reforms help (or will help) achieve the objective of speeding up and simplifying the planning system.

Figure 15 (below) illustrates mixed opinions on whether or not planning reform was a good thing, with 35.0% thinking the reforms were, on balance, a good thing, 31.2% thinking the reforms were not a good thing and 33.8% unsure either way. Figure 16 (below), illustrates a less balanced view with a strong majority of 63.1% of respondents believing that the reforms would help neither the objective of speeding up or simplifying planning as opposed to 11.6% believing the reforms would help both objectives, 19.9% believing the reforms would help speed up the planning system and 5.4% believing the reforms would help simplify the process.



**Figure 15 – Did respondents think that the planning reform agenda was a good thing on balance?**



**Figure 16 – Did respondents think the planning reforms would help the objectives of speeding up and simplifying the planning system?**

Given the different stage and approach to reforms in Scotland compared to England and Wales, it seems useful to break down the answers illustrated by figure 15 according to location. A cross-tabulation allows comparison of whether or not respondents thought the planning reforms were, on balance, a good thing compared to where they were located in Great Britain (table 11, overleaf). This shows differences between each Government office region in England. More significantly, it shows that there are many more respondents in Scotland in favour of the reforms (60.4%) compared to anywhere in England or Wales. With results such as these it is unsurprising that a chi-squared test of statistical significance showed that there was a significant relationship between location in Great Britain and opinion on the planning reform ( $p \leq 0.015$ ,  $df = 22$ ). These regional differences are also clearly illustrated by figure 17, which shows a graph for each area's results on whether respondents thought the reforms were, on balance, a good thing or not.

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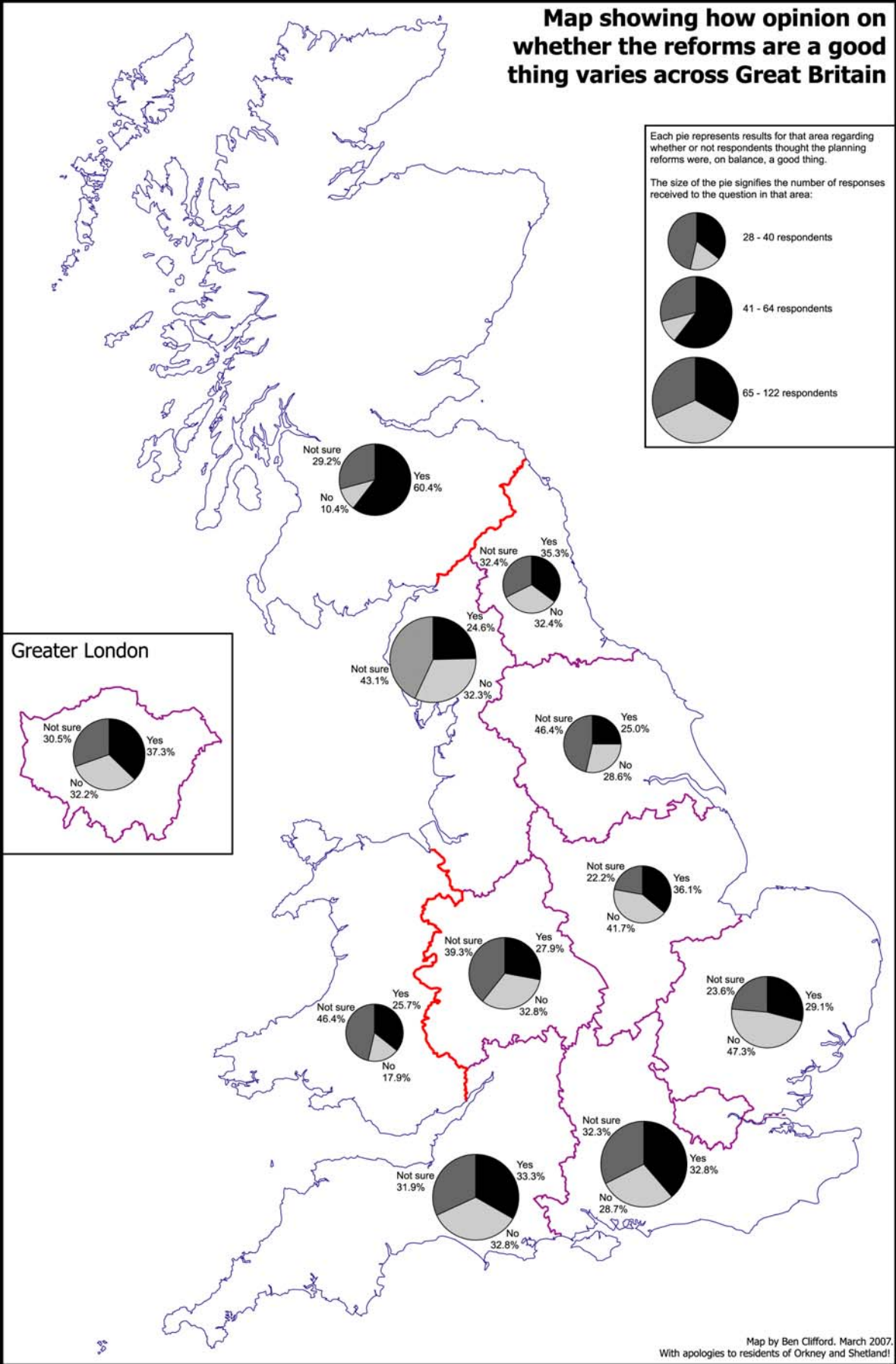


Figure 17 – Map illustrating the relationship between opinion on the planning reforms and location in Great Britain

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**Table 11 – Cross-tabulation examining the relationship between opinion whether or not the reforms were a good thing and location of the respondents**

		Location in GB											Total
		E Mids	E of Eng	Grtr London	NE Eng	NW Eng	SE Eng	SW Eng	W Mids	Yorks	Scotland	Wales	
Yes	Count	13	16	22	12	16	47	23	17	7	29	10	212
	% within Location in GB	36.1%	29.1%	37.3%	35.3%	24.6%	38.5%	33.3%	27.9%	25.0%	60.4%	35.7%	35.0%
No	Count	15	26	19	11	21	35	24	20	8	5	5	189
	% within Location in GB	41.7%	47.3%	32.2%	32.4%	32.3%	28.7%	34.8%	32.8%	28.6%	10.4%	17.9%	31.2%
Not Sure	Count	8	13	18	11	28	40	22	24	13	14	13	204
	% within Location in GB	22.2%	23.6%	30.5%	32.4%	43.1%	32.8%	31.9%	39.3%	46.4%	29.2%	46.4%	33.7%
Total	Count	36	55	59	34	65	122	69	61	28	48	28	605
	% within Location in GB	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Another similar cross-tabulation that can be conducted is to compare opinion of the reform with the responding planner's age group. Table 12, below, shows that whilst there is little difference between age groups in terms of those thinking the reforms are a good thing (broadly a third throughout), the percentage of people who do not think the reforms are a good thing markedly increases with age group whilst the percentage of people not sure one way or the other decreases with age group. This would suggest older planners were more likely to oppose the reforms with younger planners having not made their mind up if the reforms are good or bad. Again a chi-squared test showed this relationship between reform opinion and age was statistically significant ( $p \leq 0.018$ ,  $df = 6$ ).

**Table 12- Cross-tabulation examining the relationship between opinion whether or not the reforms were a good thing and age group of the respondents**

		Age group					Total
		20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 plus	
Yes	Count	33	44	67	63	4	211
	% within Age group	34.0%	33.8%	36.6%	36.2%	21.1%	35.0%
No	Count	15	40	63	63	8	189
	% within Age group	15.5%	30.8%	34.4%	36.2%	42.1%	31.3%
Not Sure	Count	49	46	53	48	7	203
	% within Age group	50.5%	35.4%	29.0%	27.6%	36.8%	33.7%
Total	Count	97	130	183	174	19	603
	% within Age group	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

A 'Planning Reform' Likert agreement examined these opinions in greater depth by asking planners how much they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements referring to the planning reforms. Table 13 and figure 18, opposite, illustrate the results.

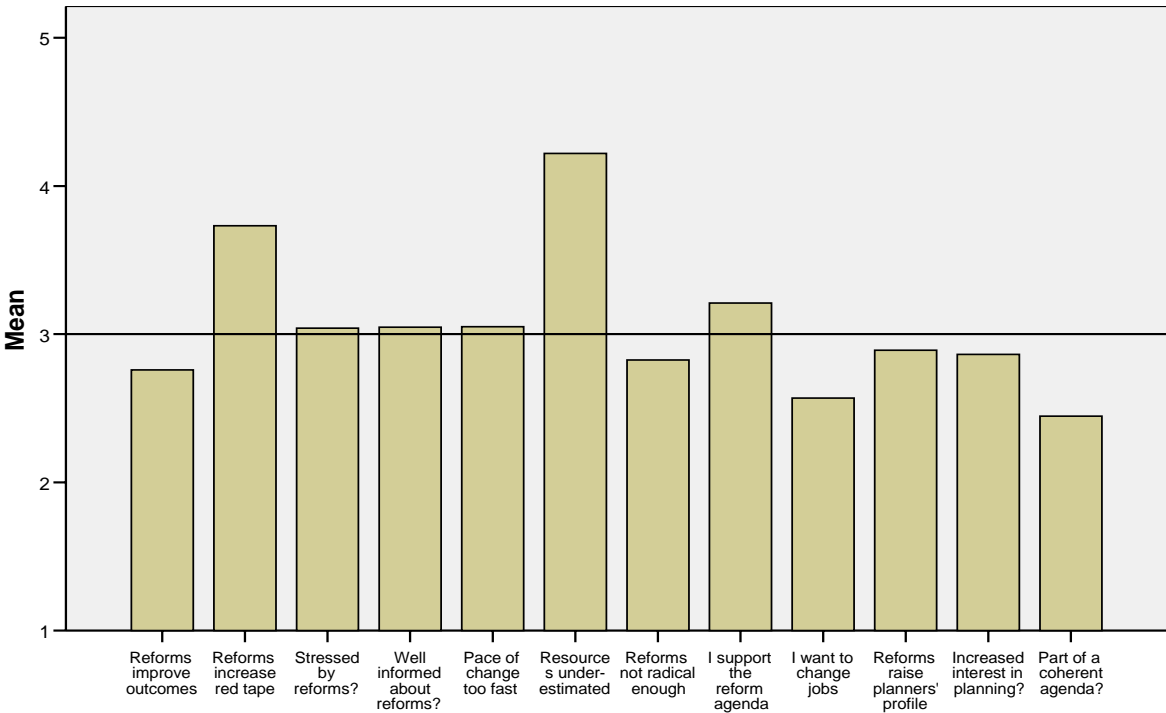
The statements included both positive and negative statements about planning reform but as table 13 and figure 18 illustrate, it is not simply the case that people are more likely to agree with just positive statements and disagree with negative statements (or vice versa). Instead, a majority of planners seem to either disagree that the reforms have improved planning outcomes or be undecided on the matter and yet a majority also either support the reform agenda or are undecided on the matter. The statements with the strongest agreement are that "the resource implications [of the reforms] have been underestimated" (by some margin) and "the reforms increase red tape", whilst those with the strongest disagreement are that "the reforms are part of a coherent agenda" and "the reforms make me consider changing jobs".

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**Table 13 – Summary of responses for Likert agreement measuring how much respondents agreed or disagreed with statements relating to various aspects of planning reform**

Likert Statement:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	% Strongly Disagree	% Disagree	% Undecided	% Agree	% Strongly Agree
The reforms improve planning outcomes	597	2.76	.881	3.00	7.4	30.3	42.0	19.3	1.0
The reforms increase red tape	596	3.74	.975	4.00	2.0	10.2	21.3	45.0	21.5
I feel stressed by the reforms	597	3.05	1.065	3.00	5.2	32.0	22.1	34.0	6.7
I feel well informed about the reforms	599	3.04	1.033	3.00	5.2	32.6	18.4	40.7	3.2
The pace of change is too fast	597	3.07	.996	3.00	2.3	32.7	27.6	30.7	6.7
The resource implications have been underestimated	600	4.22	.829	4.00	1.2	2.7	10.8	44.2	41.2
The reforms have not been radical enough	600	2.82	.977	3.00	5.2	37.2	34.0	18.0	5.7
I support the reform agenda	598	3.20	.952	3.00	5.7	17.1	32.1	42.0	3.2
The reforms make me consider changing jobs	596	2.56	1.096	2.00	13.6	45.1	18.3	17.4	5.5
The reforms have raised the profile of planners	601	2.90	1.002	3.00	5.2	37.1	23.6	30.9	3.2
The reforms increase interest in the planning system	599	2.86	1.033	3.00	7.5	36.1	22.5	31.1	2.8
The reforms are part of a coherent agenda	600	2.45	.873	2.00	14.7	36.8	38.2	10.0	0.3

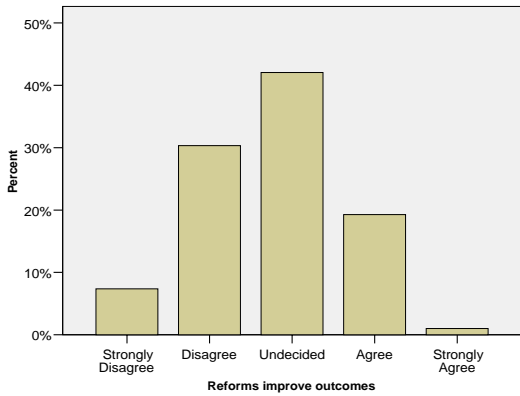


**Figure 18 – Comparison of the mean averages scores of responses to the Likert agreement measuring how much respondents agreed or disagreed with statements relating to various aspects of planning reform (with a score of 1 representing 'Strongly disagree' and 5 representing 'strongly agree')**

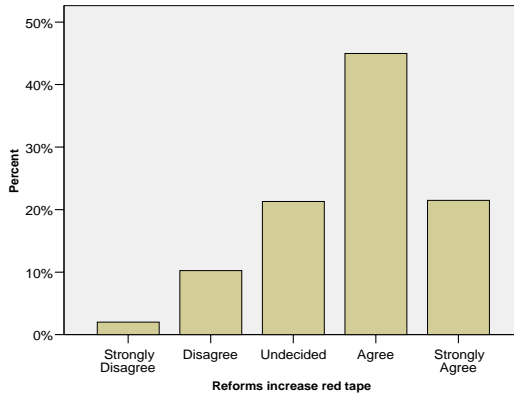
Although the mean scores are useful for comparison between the various statements within the reform Likert agreement, it is also interesting to see, graphically, the distribution of answers to each individual statement, which figures 19 – 30 (below), do. Figure 19 (overleaf) indicates slightly more planners disagree the reforms have improved outcomes than agree, but with the largest category being people who are undecided either way. Figure 20, however, indicates a strong majority feel the planning reforms have (or in the case of Scotland, will) increase red tape.

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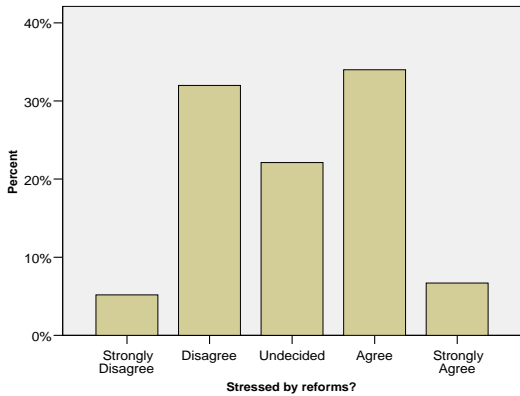


**Figure 19 – Opinion on whether the reforms improved planning outcomes**

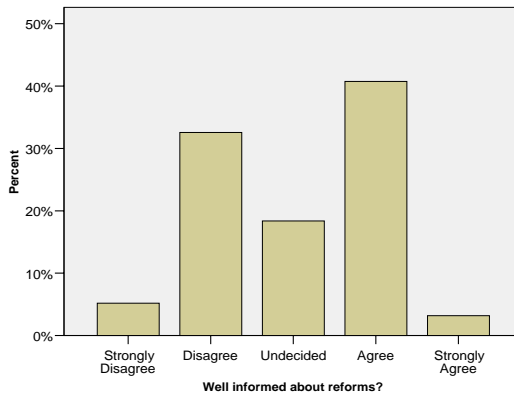


**Figure 20 – Opinion on whether the reforms increase red tape**

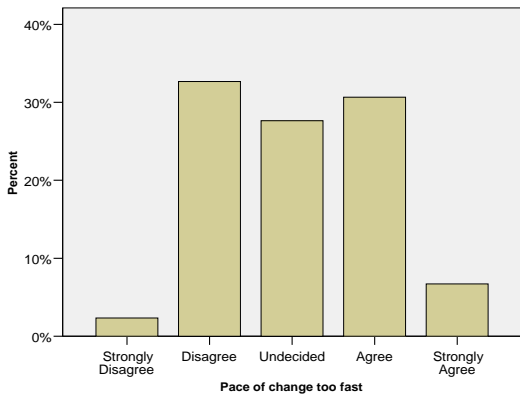
Figure 21 indicates opinion is strongly divided on the matter of whether or not the responding planners felt stressed by the reforms, but with a slight tendency towards being stressed. Similarly, there is a spread of opinion indicated by figure 22 on the matter of whether or not responding planners felt well informed by the reforms, but with a tendency to agree that they had been well informed. The question of whether or not the pace of change associated with the reforms was too fast strongly polarised opinion, as illustrated by figure 23, with similar percentages disagreeing, agreeing and being undecided on the matter. Figure 24, however, is very different, indicating a very strong feeling that the resource implications of the planning reforms have been underestimated by central Government.



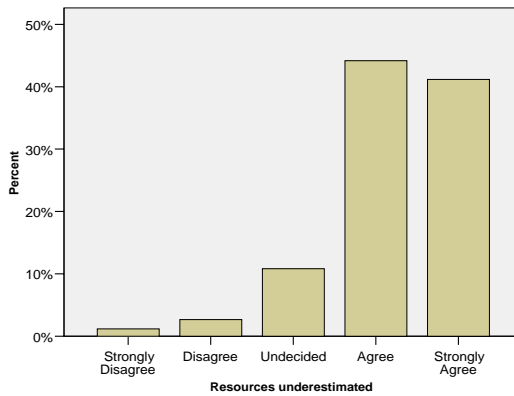
**Figure 21 – Opinion on whether respondents felt stressed by the reforms**



**Figure 22 – Opinion on whether respondents felt well informed about the reforms**



**Figure 23 – Opinion on whether the pace of change was too fast (with respect to the reforms)**

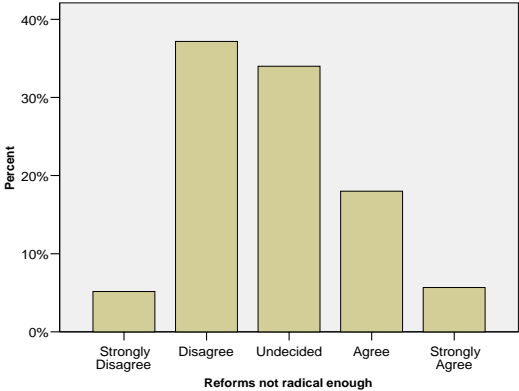


**Figure 24 – Opinion on whether the resource implications of the reforms had been underestimated**

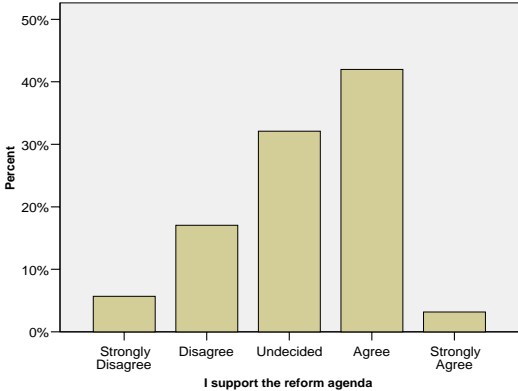
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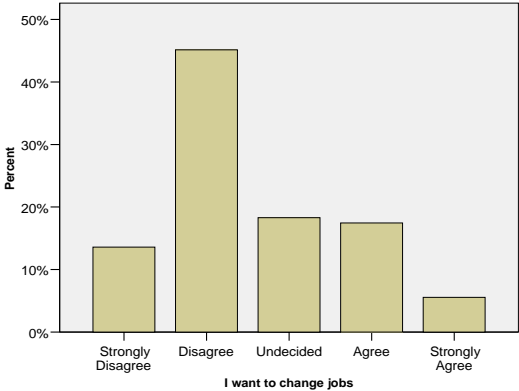
The statement that ‘the reforms have not been radical enough’ (as illustrated by figure 25) was one planners were more likely to disagree with than agree with, although a significant group were undecided. A significant minority were also undecided on the questions of whether or not they supported the reform agenda, but most planners fell on the ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ side, indicating support (figure 26). Reassuringly for many managers, perhaps, a clear majority of planners indicated that the reforms did not make them consider changing jobs (see figure 27). Less clear-cut were responses to the question of whether or not the reforms had raised the profile of planners, with opinion fairly evenly divided, but slightly more disagreeing (figure 28).



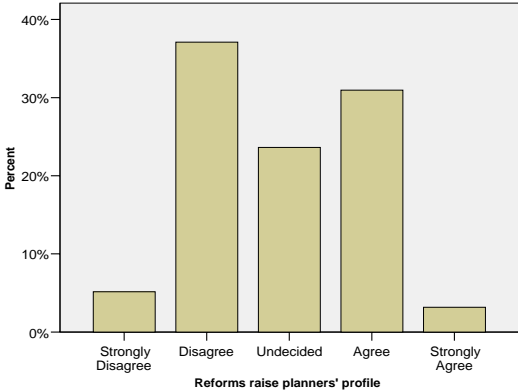
**Figure 25 – Opinion on the statement ‘the reforms have not been radical enough’**



**Figure 26 – Opinion on whether respondents supported the reform agenda**



**Figure 27 – Opinion on whether the reforms made responding planners consider changing jobs**

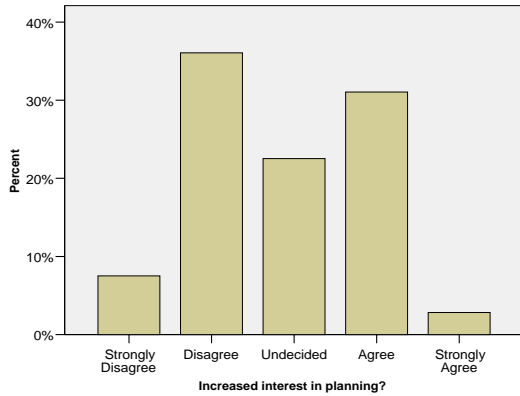


**Figure 28 – Opinion on whether the reforms had raised the profile of planners**

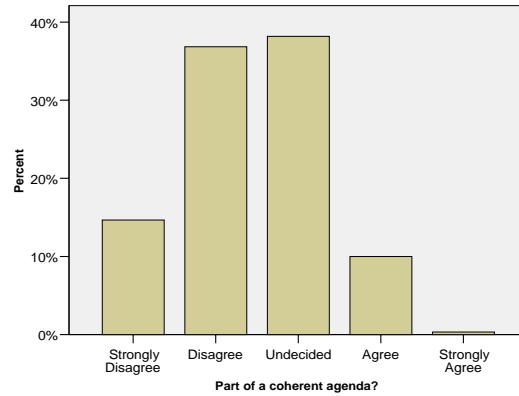
The final pair of reform graphs address whether or not respondents thought the reforms had increased interest in the planning system (opinion was divided but with slightly more planners disagreeing than agreeing – figure 29, below) and whether or not planners felt the reforms were part of a coherent agenda (many more respondents disagreed than agreed, as figure 30 clearly shows).

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**Figure 29 – Opinion on whether the reforms had increased interest in planning**



**Figure 30 – Opinion on whether the reforms were part of a coherent agenda**

Given the different stages of, and approaches to, planning reform between England, Scotland and Wales, it does seem interesting to break down the results for the reform Likert agreement between the three. It is important to note here that this reduces the sample size, but this can be balanced against the fact that interesting patterns might well exist. Table 14, opposite, indicates the results of the Likert agreement statements concerning how much planners agreed or disagreed with statements about various aspects of planning broken down between England, Scotland and Wales. In this table, the mean for each is shown, and then the percentages agreeing and strongly agreeing have been totalled for each case, as have the percentages disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

This table illustrates that opinion is broadly similar across all 3 parts of Great Britain with respect to some aspects of planning reform and quite different with respect to others. For example, whilst the exact percentages differ, opinion trends are the same in England, Scotland and Wales with regard to agreement that the reforms increase red tape, agreement that the resource implications have been underestimated, and disagreement that the reforms are part of a coherent agenda, make the planners want to change jobs or improve planning outcomes (but with significant numbers undecided on the last point, especially in Scotland).

Differences can be seen with regard to whether or not planners feel stressed by the reforms (less agree in Scotland and Wales than disagree, unlike England), whether or not planners feel well informed about the reforms (more respondents in England felt well informed than did not, completely unlike Wales, with opinion fairly divided in Scotland) and whether or not the pace of change was too fast (more planners agreed in England than disagreed, unlike Wales or Scotland, in particular). In terms of whether or not the reforms have been radical enough, Scotland differs here in that more planners think they have not been radical enough than think they have been. Opinion on whether or not the reforms have raised the profile of planners and interest in the planning system, finally, also differs between all three with what might be considered a more upbeat assessment in Scotland and Wales with regard to the first statement and in Scotland alone with respect to the second statement.

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**Table 14 – Summary of responses for Likert agreement measuring how much respondents agreed or disagreed with statements relating to various aspects of planning reform broken down according to whether those respondents worked in England, Scotland or Wales**

	ENGLAND				SCOTLAND				WALES			
	Mean	% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	Undecided %	% Agree / Strongly Agree	Mean	% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	Undecided %	% Agree / Strongly Agree	Mean	% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	Undecided %	% Agree / Strongly Agree
The reforms improve planning outcomes	<b>2.74</b>	38.8	41.1	20.0	<b>2.96</b>	26.1	52.2	21.8	<b>2.75</b>	39.2	39.3	21.4
The reforms increase red tape	<b>3.80</b>	11.3	19.7	69.1	<b>3.28</b>	21.7	28.3	50.0	<b>3.46</b>	14.3	39.3	46.4
I feel stressed by the reforms	<b>3.10</b>	35.4	21.5	43.0	<b>2.67</b>	52.2	26.1	21.7	<b>2.89</b>	42.9	25.0	32.2
I feel well informed about the reforms	<b>3.05</b>	36.6	18.6	44.8	<b>3.02</b>	43.4	15.2	41.3	<b>2.86</b>	46.4	25.0	28.6
The pace of change is too fast	<b>3.12</b>	33.3	27.2	39.4	<b>2.61</b>	52.1	30.4	17.4	<b>2.89</b>	35.7	35.7	28.6
The resource implications have been underestimated	<b>4.22</b>	4.1	9.8	86.0	<b>4.33</b>	2.2	13.0	84.8	<b>4.07</b>	0.0	25.0	75.0
The reforms have not been radical enough	<b>2.77</b>	44.7	32.8	22.5	<b>3.28</b>	19.6	45.7	34.8	<b>2.89</b>	39.3	35.7	25.0
I support the reform agenda	<b>3.16</b>	23.6	33.1	43.2	<b>3.63</b>	15.2	17.4	67.4	<b>3.23</b>	23.1	34.6	42.3
The reforms make me consider changing jobs	<b>2.60</b>	57.4	18.7	23.8	<b>2.37</b>	67.4	13.0	19.5	<b>2.36</b>	64.3	17.9	17.9
The reforms have raised the profile of planners	<b>2.88</b>	43.3	23.1	33.6	<b>3.07</b>	34.7	26.1	39.1	<b>3.04</b>	32.2	28.6	39.3
The reforms increase interest in the planning system	<b>2.84</b>	44.2	22.2	33.6	<b>3.07</b>	36.9	21.7	41.3	<b>2.82</b>	39.3	35.7	25.0
The reforms are part of a coherent agenda	<b>2.43</b>	52.5	37.7	9.9	<b>2.59</b>	39.1	47.8	13.0	<b>2.50</b>	57.1	28.6	14.3

### 3.4 Central Government and Planning Guidance: Necessary co-ordination taken too far?

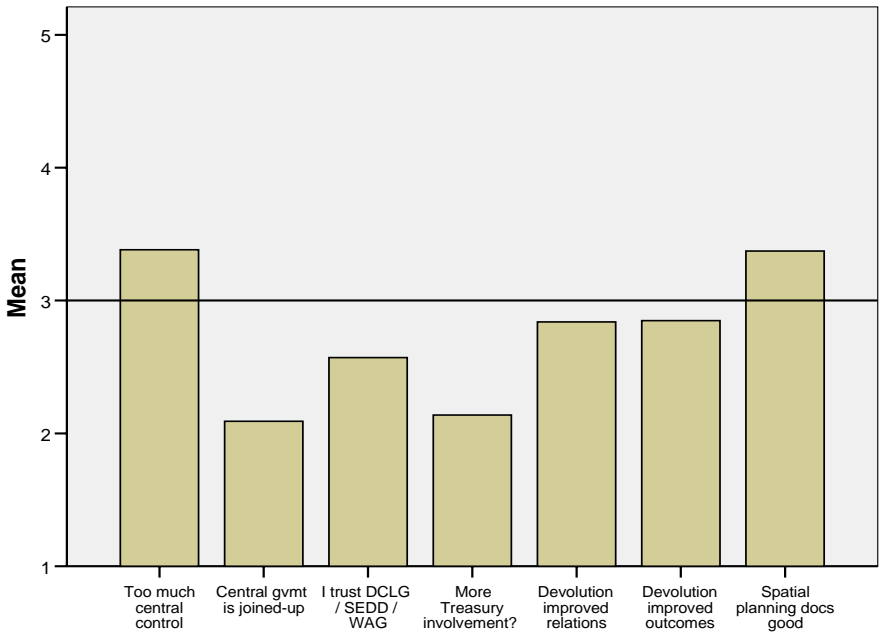
Although planning is a function delegated to LPAs, central Government continues to oversee the system, control the appeals process and issue planning guidance and, as such, central Government is obviously a key figure in the professional life of a front-line local authority planner. Planners were therefore asked, via a 'Central Government' Likert agreement, how much they agreed or disagreed with some statements relating to central Government and central Government initiatives. The answers given by respondents are summarized by the figures in table 15 (below) and illustrated by the comparison of means in figure 31 (overleaf).

**Table 15 – Summary of responses for Likert agreement measuring how much respondents agreed or disagreed with various statements relating to central Government**

Likert Statement:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	% Strongly Disagree	% Disagree	% Undecided	% Agree	% Strongly Agree
There is too much central control of planning	605	3.39	1.025	4.00	0.5	26.6	18.3	42.1	12.4
Central government is sufficiently 'joined-up'	606	2.08	.880	2.00	25.2	50.5	17.0	5.9	1.3
I trust DCLG / SEDD / WAG to manage planning (as applicable to your location)	602	2.55	.843	2.00	8.6	41.7	35.9	13.5	0.3
I think HM Treasury should be more involved in planning	603	2.12	.974	2.00	29.7	39.1	21.9	7.8	1.5
Devolution has improved central-local relations	591	2.84	.812	3.00	4.7	26.7	50.3	16.8	1.5
Devolution has improved planning outcomes	589	2.84	.804	3.00	5.4	23.9	52.5	17.1	1.0
Spatial planning frameworks are useful tools	601	3.37	.866	4.00	2.8	13.1	32.3	47.6	4.2

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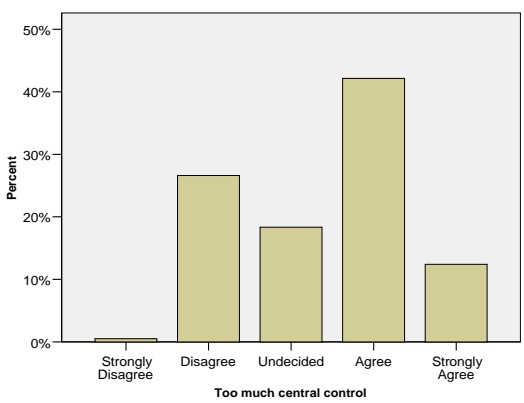
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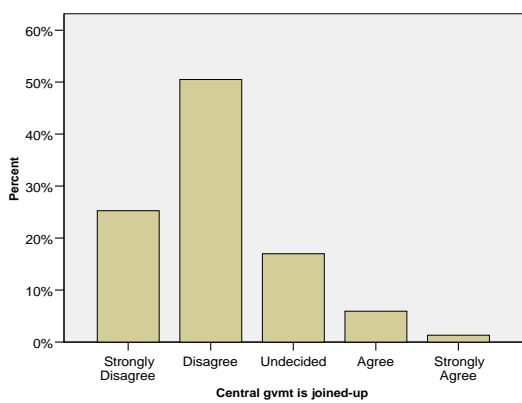
**Figure 31 – Comparison of the mean averages scores of responses to the Likert agreement measuring how much respondents agreed or disagreed with various statements relating to central government (with a score of 1 representing ‘Strongly disagree’ and 5 representing ‘strongly agree’)**

The statement which respondents most agreed with was “there is too much central control of planning”, with over 54% either agreeing or strongly agreeing. Similarly, the statement which planners were least likely to agree with was “central government is sufficiently joined-up”, with over 75% of respondents either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement. This suggests a quite negative view of central government amongst local authority planners. Indeed, the second lowest mean score was for the statement “I think HM Treasury should be more involved in planning”, which almost 70% of responding planners either disagreed or strongly disagreed with. On a more positive note, many more planners agreed than disagreed that new spatial planning documents were useful planning tools.

Although the mean scores are useful for comparison between the various statements within the reform Likert agreement, it is also interesting to see, graphically, the distribution of answers to some of the individual statement, which figures 32 – 35 (below), do. Thus, figure 32 indicates a majority of responding planners agreeing that there is too much central control of planning but with a significant minority undecided or disagreeing. Opinion is much more clear-cut in figures 33 and 34, a vast majority disagreeing that central government is sufficiently joined-up and disagreeing that there should be more Treasury involvement in planning. Figure 35, meanwhile, indicates the largest single response was agreement with the idea that spatial planning frameworks are useful planning tools, but with a significant number of respondents undecided (which may be due to the documents still being quite new).



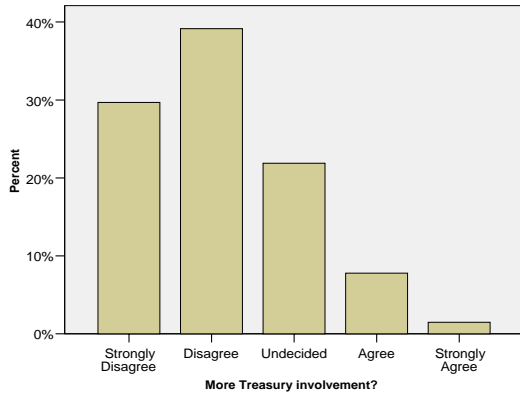
**Figure 32 – Opinion on whether there was too much central control of planning**



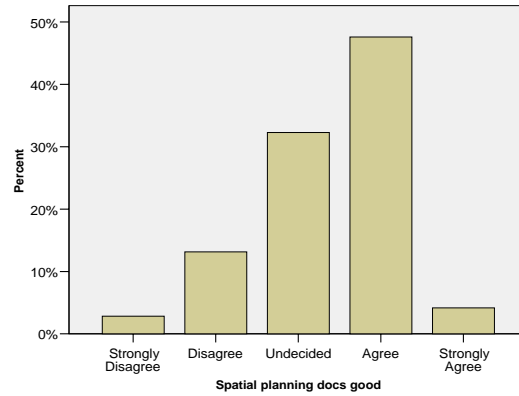
**Figure 33 – Opinion on whether central government is sufficiently joined-up**

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**Figure 34 – Opinion on whether HM Treasury should be more involved in planning?**



**Figure 35 – Opinion on whether spatial planning documents were useful tools**

Planning has long been dealt with by the Scottish Office for Scotland and post-devolution, it is now the responsibility of the SEDD for Scotland and WAG for Wales as opposed to the DCLG in England. This means it is interesting to also divide these results between the three countries. Table 16, below, illustrates the breakdown and includes a mean for each statement per nation, as well as the percentages agreeing and strongly agreeing (totalled for each case) and the percentages disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (also totalled).

**Table 16 – Summary of responses for Likert agreement measuring how much respondents agreed or disagreed with statements relating to various aspects of central Government broken down according to whether those respondents worked in England, Scotland or Wales**

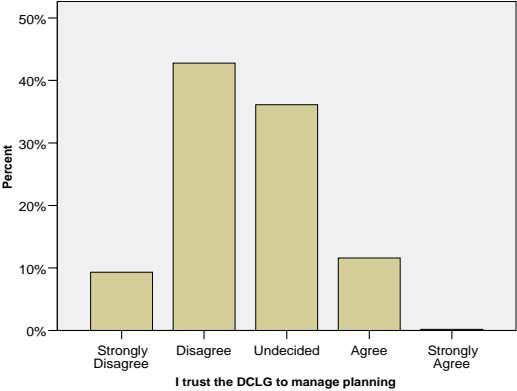
	ENGLAND				SCOTLAND				WALES			
	Mean	% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	Undecided %	% Agree / Strongly Agree	Mean	% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	Undecided %	% Agree / Strongly Agree	Mean	% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	Undecided %	% Agree / Strongly Agree
There is too much central control of planning	3.44	25.6	18.1	56.3	3.12	36.7	18.4	44.9	3.07	37.9	20.7	41.3
Central government is sufficiently 'joined-up'	2.06	76.3	17.2	6.6	2.20	69.4	16.3	14.2	2.10	79.3	13.8	6.9
I trust DCLG / SEDD / WAG to manage planning (as applicable)	2.51	52.1	36.1	11.8	2.73	40.8	40.8	18.4	3.03	37.9	20.7	41.3
I think HM Treasury should be more involved in planning	2.12	69.1	21.4	9.5	2.13	64.6	31.3	4.2	2.03	72.4	13.8	13.8
Devolution has improved central-local relations	2.77	33.2	52.6	14.2	3.22	22.4	38.8	38.8	3.38	20.6	24.1	55.2
Devolution has improved planning outcomes	2.81	29.6	54.4	16.0	2.94	32.6	40.8	26.5	3.24	24.1	34.5	41.4
Spatial planning frameworks are useful tools	3.38	15.4	32.9	51.7	3.41	16.3	24.5	59.2	3.18	25.0	32.1	42.9

Other than opinions on central government planning departments, the majority of other opinions about central government are similar between all three countries, with quite similar means in a number of cases. The two exceptions to this are the two questions about devolution. Asked whether they agreed or disagreed that devolution had improved central-local relations (in England this question was asked in terms of the regional agenda), it was only in England that more responding planners disagreed than agreed with the statement, in striking difference to Scotland in Wales. But asked if devolution had improved planning outcomes, it was only in Wales that the more planners agreed than disagreed with the statement, in contrast to both Scotland and England.

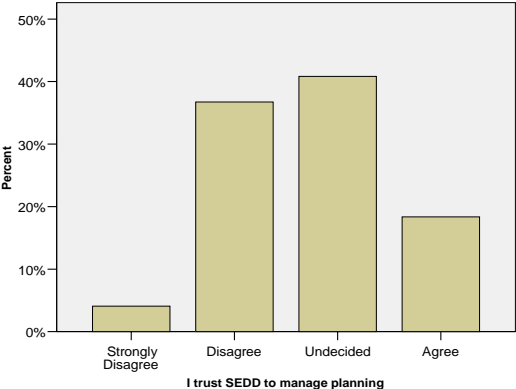
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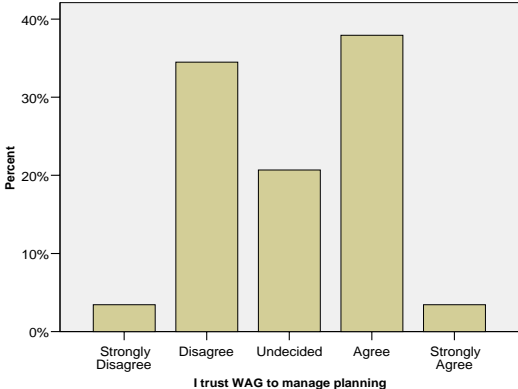
With regards to the statement on whether planners trusted the central government department responsible for planning to manage planning, this was the only question explicitly set out to distinguish between each country. Figures 36 – 38, below, illustrate the answers for each government department. In both England and Scotland there are many more responding planners who disagree that the DCLG or SEDD is to be trusted to manage planning (particularly in England but also noticeable in Scotland). The situation in Wales is quite different, with less planners undecided in their answer and more planners agreeing than disagreeing that they trust WAG to manage planning. Possibly this is because it is a much newer institution or possibly it is linked to personality factors such as the first Planning Minister in Wales being herself a former local authority planner turned politician.



**Figure 36 – Opinion on whether the DCLG could be trusted to manage planning**



**Figure 37 – Opinion on whether SEDD could be trusted to manage planning**



**Figure 38 – Opinion on whether WAG could be trusted to manage planning**

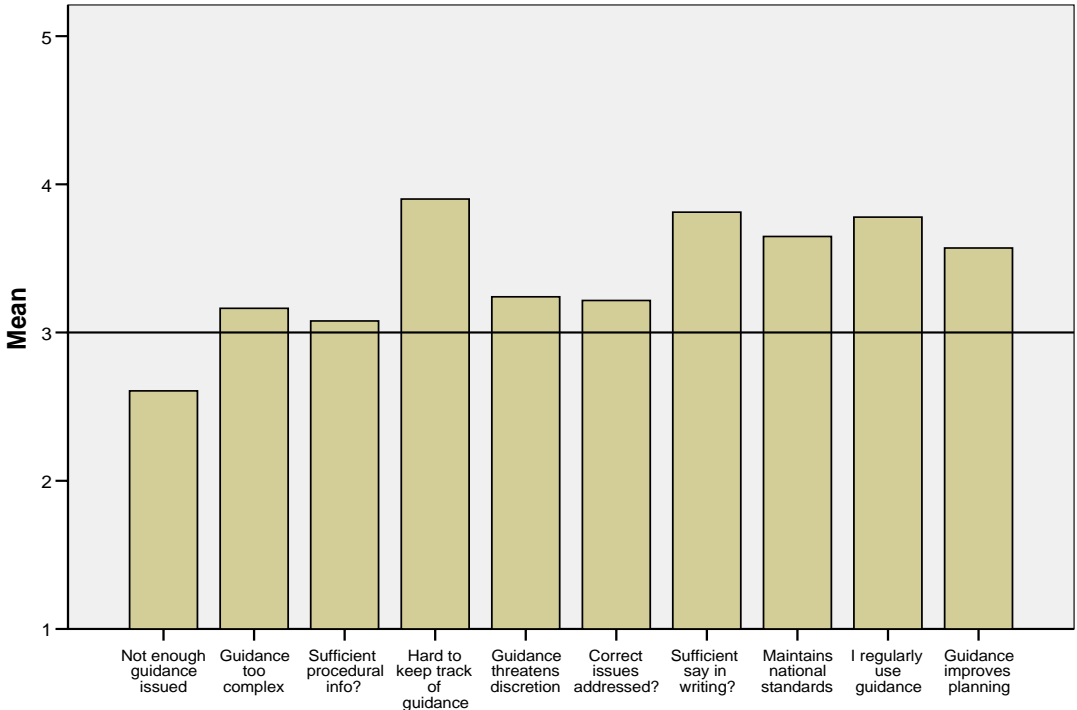
A full ‘Planning Guidance’ Likert asked planners to comment on who much they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements relating to central Government’s planning guidance. Figure in table 17 (below) and the comparison of means graph (figure 39, opposite) summarize the results.

**Table 17 – Summary of responses for Likert agreement measuring how much respondents agreed or disagreed with various statements relating to central Government planning guidance**

Likert Statement:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	% Strongly Disagree	% Disagree	% Undecided	% Agree	% Strongly Agree
Central government does not issues enough guidance	603	2.61	1.008	2.00	7.6	52.6	12.9	24.7	2.2
Guidance is too complex	604	3.16	1.059	3.00	0.0	39.9	13.9	36.8	9.4
Guidance provides sufficient procedural information	601	3.09	.947	3.00	4.0	28.6	22.1	45.1	0.2
It is hard to keep track of all the guidance issued	606	3.90	.960	4.00	0.0	15.5	5.1	53.5	25.9
Guidance threatens local discretion	604	3.25	1.006	3.00	0.0	32.0	20.5	38.2	9.3
Guidance addresses the correct issues	602	3.22	.810	3.00	1.5	19.4	35.4	43.4	0.3
Front-line planners have too little say in writing guidance	604	3.81	.846	4.00	0.0	9.6	17.9	54.0	18.5
Guidance helps maintain important national standards	603	3.65	.777	4.00	0.8	10.4	17.6	65.3	5.8
I regularly refer to guidance notes	603	3.78	.868	4.00	1.2	13.3	4.0	69.2	12.4
Guidance notes help improve the quality of planning	603	3.56	.756	4.00	0.7	9.0	29.2	55.9	5.3

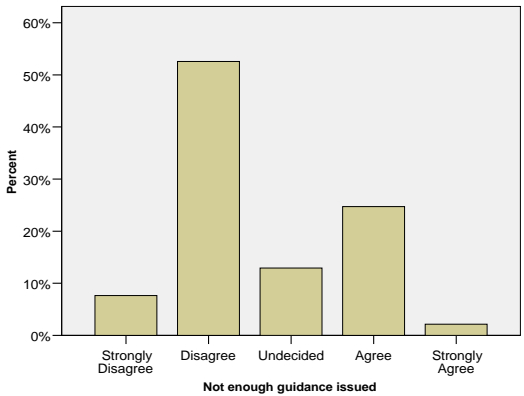
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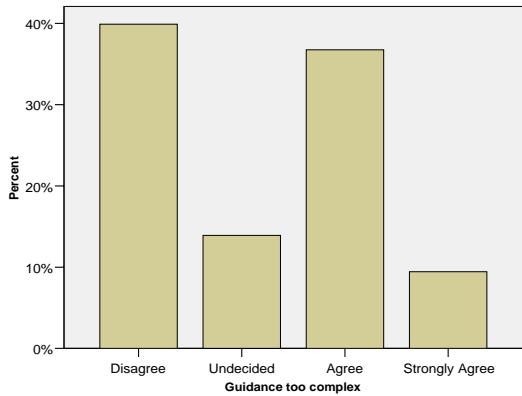


**Figure 39 – Comparison of the mean averages scores of responses to the Likert agreement measuring how much respondents agreed or disagreed with various statements relating to central government planning guidance (with a score of 1 representing 'Strongly disagree' and 5 representing 'strongly agree')**

The answers provided by respondents provide an interesting mix of opinions and attitudes to planning guidance documents. On the one hand, 60.2% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that government did not issue enough guidance (untangling the double-negative here, most planners seem to think government issues too much guidance) yet on the other hand a very similar 61.2% of planners either agreed or strongly agreed that guidance notes “help improve the quality of planning”. This interesting mixture of answers can further be explored through graphs illustrating the distribution of answers for each statement within the Likert agreement (figure 40 – 49 below).



**Figure 40 – Opinion on the statement 'Central government does not issue enough planning guidance'**



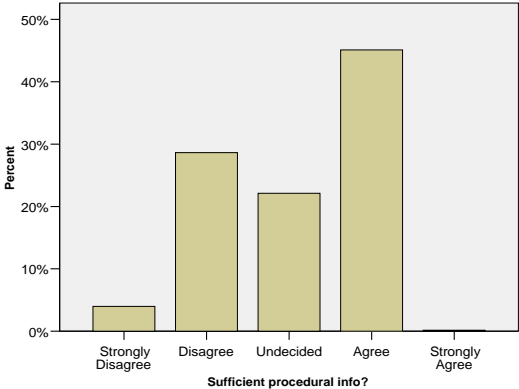
**Figure 40 – Opinion on whether planning guidance is too complex**

Figure 40 clearly indicates that the majority of planners disagree that central government does not issue enough planning guidance. Opinion is more mixed in figure 41, however, with opinion very slightly weighted towards the view that planning guidance is too complex but the largest single category of

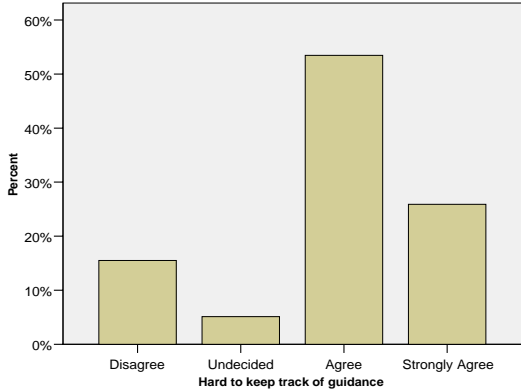
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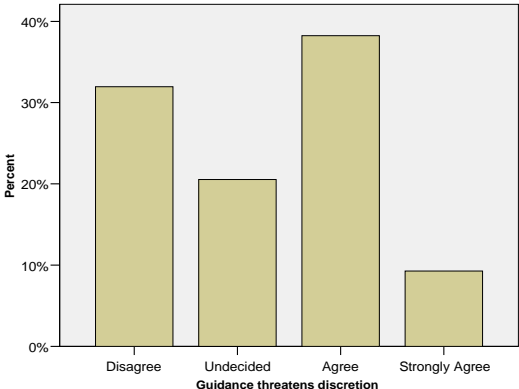
answers being disagreement with that statement. Opinion is also quite divided on the matter of whether or not planning guidance contains sufficient procedural information (figure 42, below) but there are clearly more who agree than disagree that there is sufficient procedural information. Figure 43, meanwhile, indicates a much more clear-cut opinion amongst responding planners, with nearly 80% wither agreeing or strongly agreeing that it is hard to keep track of all the guidance issued.



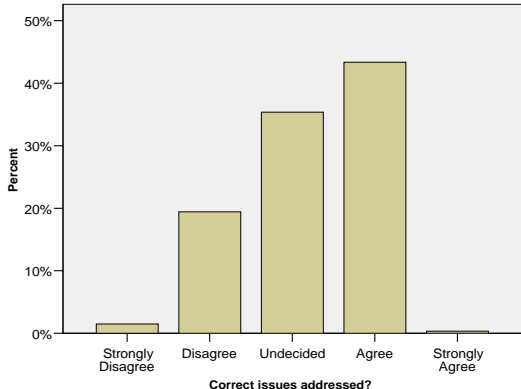
**Figure 42 – Opinion on whether planning guidance contains sufficient procedural information**



**Figure 43 – Opinion on whether it is hard to keep track of all the guidance issued**



**Figure 44 – Opinion on whether guidance threatens discretion**

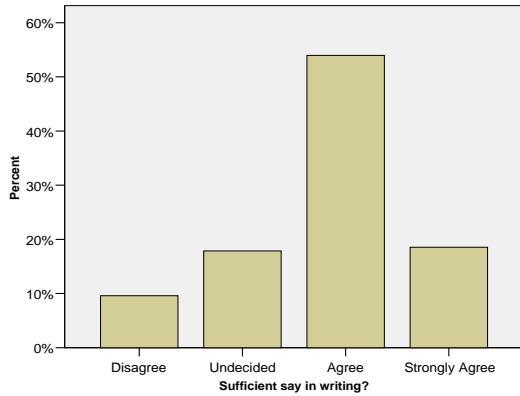


**Figure 45 – Opinion on whether guidance addresses the correct issues**

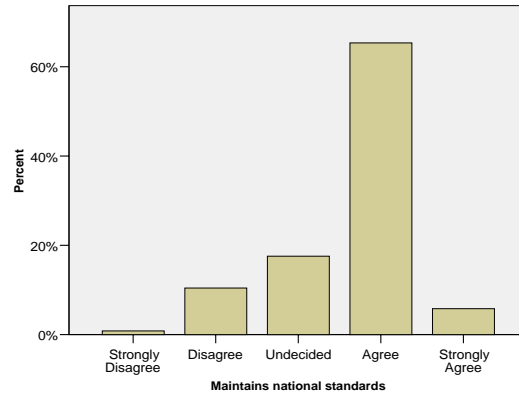
There seemed to be some concern amongst respondents that planning guidance threatened their discretion, with figure 44 (above) indicating more agree with the statement than disagree but with opinion still quite mixed on the matter. There were also, however, more respondents agreeing than disagreeing that guidance addressed the correct issues (figure 45). Answers to the next statement, that front-line planners have too little say in writing guidance, were most likely to be agreement or strong agreement, with only a small number of planners disagreeing and none at all strongly disagreeing with the statement (figure 46, overleaf). Nevertheless, similarly strong opinion showed the vast majority of responding planners also agreed that the same guidance helps maintain important national standards (figure 47).

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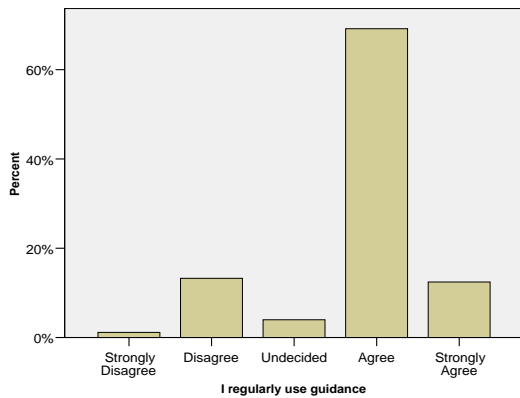


**Figure 46 – Opinion on whether front-line planners have too little say in writing guidance**

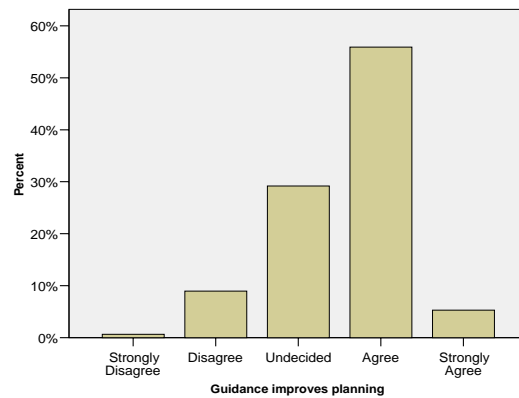


**Figure 47 – Opinion on whether guidance helps maintain important national standards**

The statement out of the whole Planning Guidance Likert with which most people agreed was that they regularly refer to planning guidance documents, with 69.2% agreeing and a further 12.4% strongly agreeing (illustrated by figure 48, below). Whether this was through choice or necessity is, of course, not stated. Finally, asked about whether or not guidance notes help improve the quality of planning, most planners agreed that they did (figure 49).



**Figure 48 – Opinion on whether respondents regularly refer to guidance documents**



**Figure 49 – Opinion on whether guidance notes help improve the quality of planning**

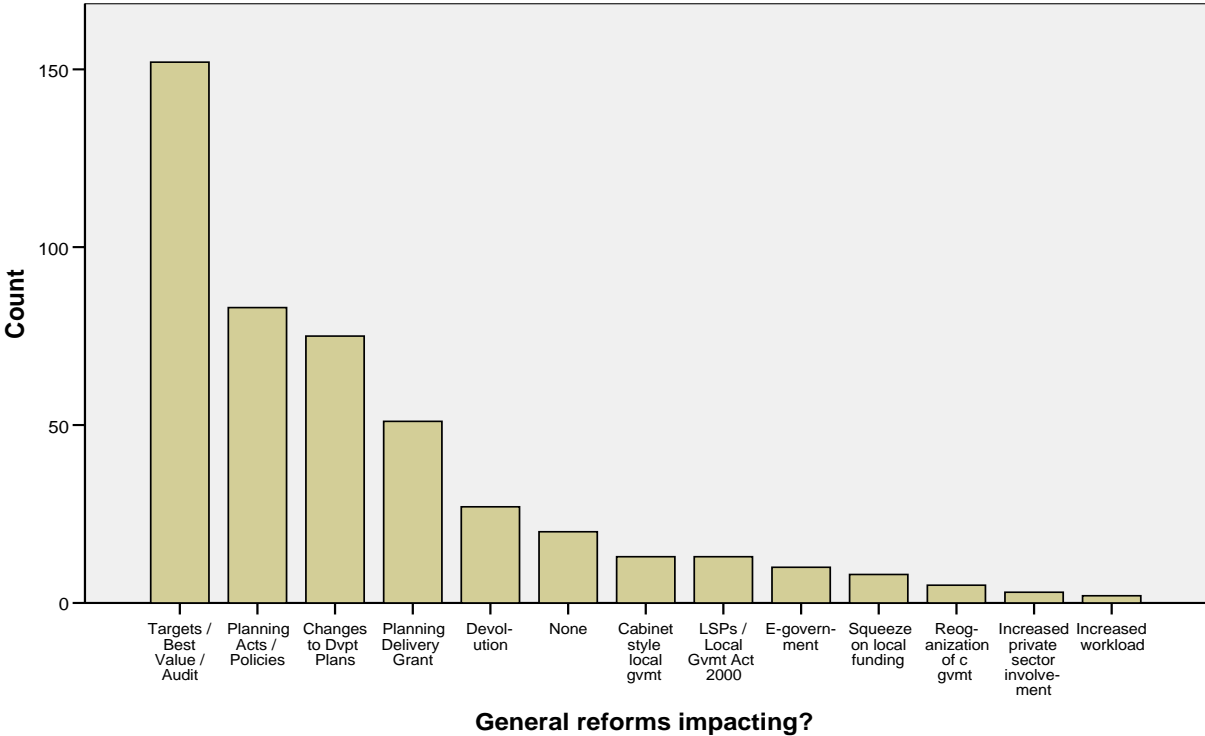
A further insight into views on central Government is offered by responses to an open question that asked which general New Labour reforms of local government had had an impact on responding planners most. The answers were then sorted into categories and coded according to what people wrote down. Table 18 and figure 50 (overleaf) illustrate the answers that were given. Although the question was designed to ask planners to think about reforms beyond the direct planning reforms, two of the most frequently cited answers were that the biggest impacts had been the changes to development plan systems (especially the LDF in England) and specific planning legislation or policies. Nevertheless, 51 respondents in England mentioned the Planning Delivery Grant (PDG). Many made further comments, of which approximately a third praised the grant for bringing extra resources into their department whilst approximately two-thirds disliked the grant since it was linked to performance targets. Performance targets and the auditing of local government in general was itself the single most frequently cited answer, mentioned by over twice as many planners as any other factor. Furthermore, the vast majority of comments made by planners concerning these targets were highly negative.

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**Table 18 – General reforms of local government which respondents thought had impacted them most (groups created from responses)**

	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid None	20	3.3	4.3	4.3
Targets / Best Value / Audit	152	24.8	32.9	37.2
Changes to Development Plans	75	12.3	16.2	53.5
Planning Delivery Grant	51	8.3	11.0	64.5
Planning Legislation	83	13.6	18.0	82.5
Devolution	27	4.4	5.8	88.3
Increased workload	2	.3	.4	88.7
Reorganization of central government departments	5	.8	1.1	89.8
Increased private sector involvement	3	.5	.6	90.5
E-government	10	1.6	2.2	92.6
Squeeze on local funding	8	1.3	1.7	94.4
Cabinet style local government	13	2.1	2.8	97.2
LSPs / Local Government Act 2000	13	2.1	2.8	100.0
Total	462	75.5	100.0	
Missing	99	150	24.5	
Total	612	100.0		



**Figure 50 – General reforms of local government which respondents thought had impacted them most (groups created from responses)**

### 3.5 View on Audit and Targets: Improving performance but at what cost?

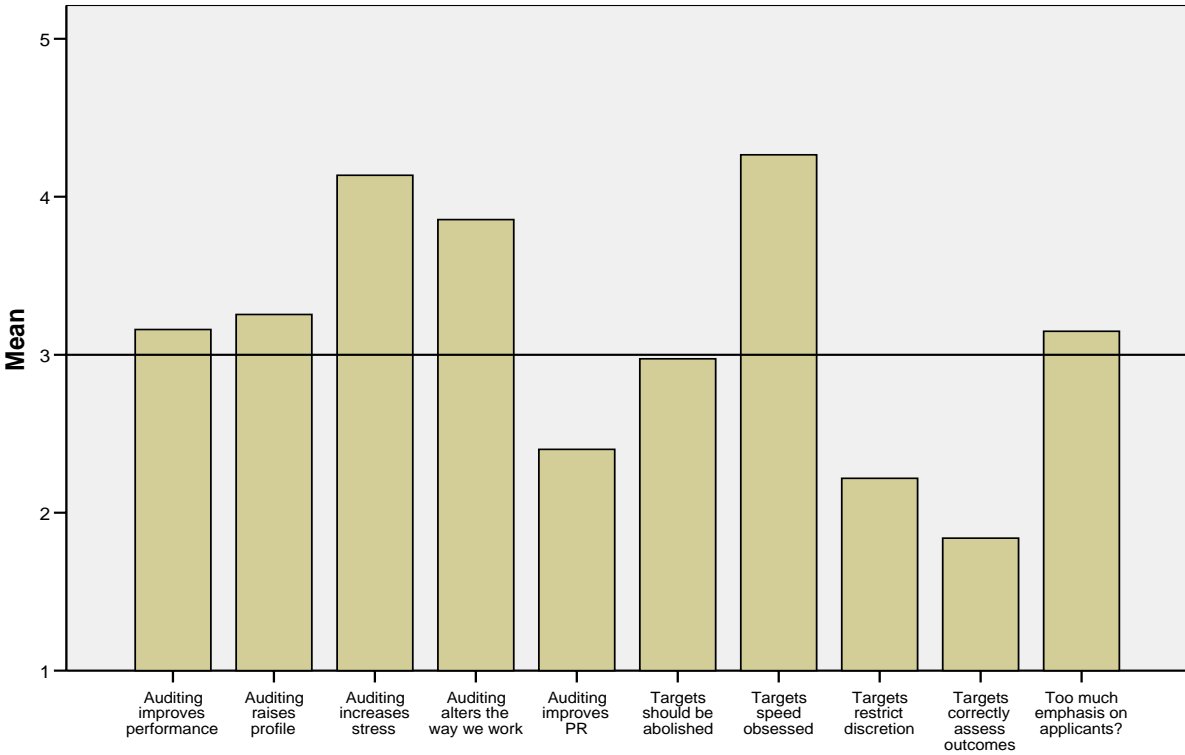
Through Best Value and related schemes for local government, auditing and targets have increasingly become a feature of the life of the local authority planner in recent years. An ‘Auditing Likert’ asked respondents how much they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements relating to auditing and targets. The answers given by respondents are summarized by the figures in table 19 and illustrated by the comparison of means in figure 51 (both opposite).

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**Table 19 – Summary of responses for Likert agreement measuring how much respondents agreed or disagreed with various statements relating to auditing and targets**

Likert Statement:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	% Strongly Disagree	% Disagree	% Undecided	% Agree	% Strongly Agree
Auditing has improved the performance of the service	599	3.16	.996	3.00	4.5	25.5	22.9	43.4	3.7
Auditing has raised the profile of planning in the council	599	3.26	1.029	4.00	3.5	26.5	16.7	47.1	6.2
Auditing has increased the amount of stress for staff	599	4.14	.716	4.00	0.0	3.5	9.2	57.4	29.9
Auditing has altered the way people work	597	3.86	.804	4.00	1.2	7.0	12.4	63.8	15.6
Auditing has improved our relations with the public	599	2.40	.816	2.00	10.7	48.4	31.1	9.5	0.3
Targets should be abolished	601	2.98	1.042	3.00	0.0	42.9	29.0	15.6	12.5
Targets are too obsessed with speed	600	4.26	.823	4.00	0.0	7.0	3.2	46.5	43.3
Targets restrict scope for professional discretion	601	2.22	.980	2.00	22.0	49.9	13.1	13.8	1.2
Targets correctly assess the quality of planning outcomes	600	1.86	.921	2.00	39.8	43.3	10.7	3.8	2.3
Targets places too much emphasis on applicants	597	3.15	.925	3.00	0.0	28.0	38.0	25.5	8.5



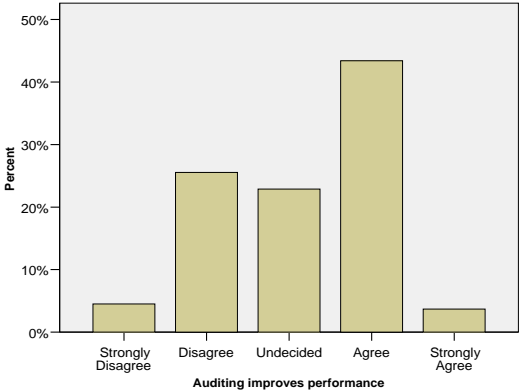
**Figure 51 – Comparison of the mean averages scores of responses to the Likert agreement measuring how much respondents agreed or disagreed with various statements relating to auditing and targets (with a score of 1 representing 'strongly disagree' and 5 representing 'strongly agree')**

Table 19 and figure 51 illustrate that some of the statements have a strong majority of responding planners agreeing with them, some have a strong majority disagreeing and others show opinion to be quite mixed or divided. The statement with the strongest agreement is that “targets are too obsessed with speed”, something with which almost 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. There were also strong majorities agreeing that “auditing has increased the amount of stress for planners” but also that “auditing has altered the way people work”. At the other end of the scale, over 83% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that “targets correctly assess the quality of planning outcomes”, over 70% disagreed or strongly disagreed that targets restricted the scope for professional discretion and almost

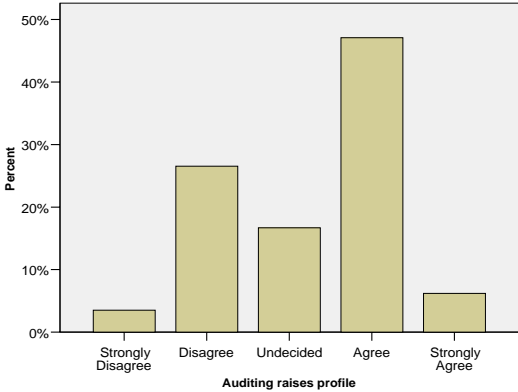
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60% disagreed that auditing had improved their relations with the public. Figures 52 – 61, below, illustrate the distribution of answers for each of the statements within the auditing Likert.

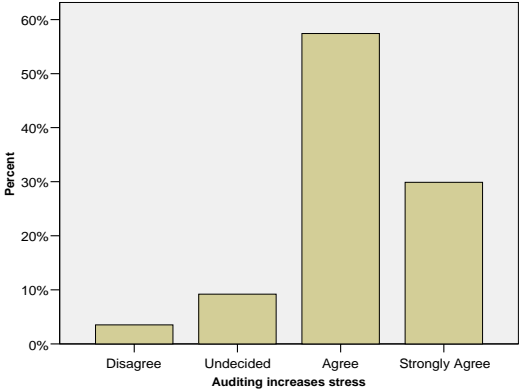
In terms of whether or not auditing has improved the performance of the service, more responding planners agreed than disagreed that this was indeed the case (figure 52, below). Furthermore, a majority of responding planners believed that auditing had actually increased the profile of planning within their own authority (figure 53). On the other hand, as already indicated, the majority of respondents seemed to indicate that this increased profile was at the expense of much more stress for planning staff (as clearly illustrated by figure 54). A majority of responding planners also agreed with the statement that auditing had altered the way people work (figure 55).



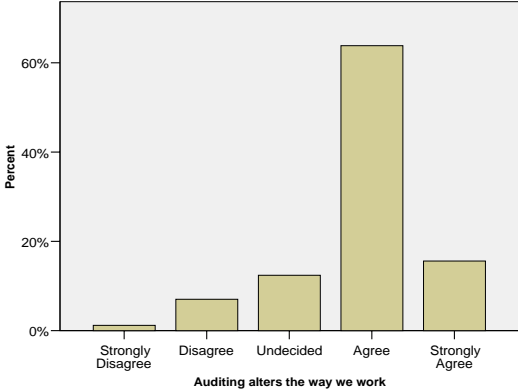
**Figure 52 – Opinion on whether auditing has improved the performance of the service**



**Figure 53 – Opinion on whether auditing has raised the profile of planning in the council**



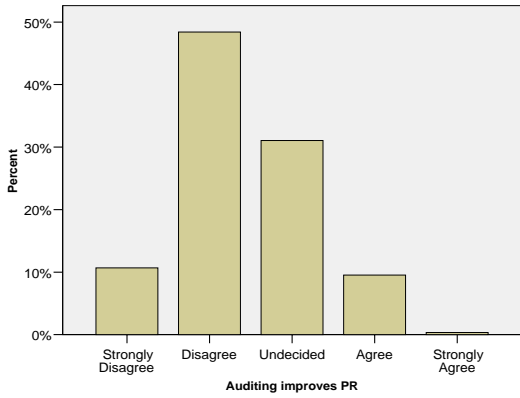
**Figure 54 – Opinion on whether auditing has increased the amount of stress for staff**



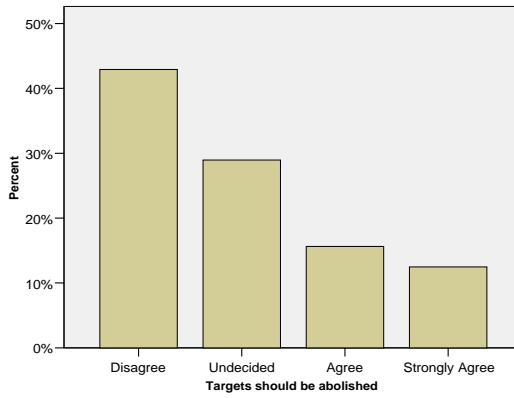
**Figure 55 – Opinion on whether auditing has altered the way we work**

Whatever changes auditing might have brought within planning authorities, the majority of responding planners either disagreed or strongly agreed that auditing had actually improved their relations with the general public (see figure 56, opposite). Despite this, and interestingly, the largest single category of response to the statement “targets should be abolished” was ‘disagree’, as illustrated by figure 57. Nevertheless, an unusually strong majority of responding planners agreed and strongly agreed that the targets they currently had were too obsessed with speed (figure 58) although a smaller majority also disagreed or strongly disagreed that targets restricted their scope for professional discretion (figure 59).

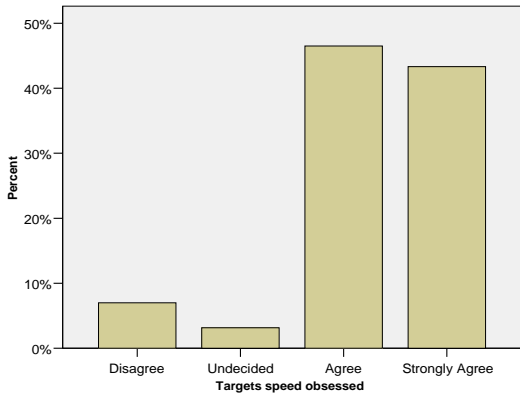
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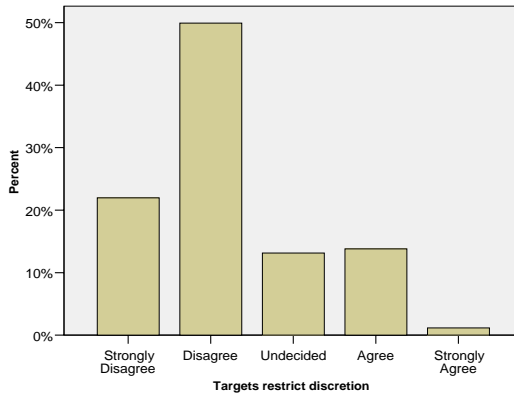
**Figure 56 – Opinion on whether auditing has improved relations with the public?**



**Figure 57 – Opinion on whether targets should be abolished**

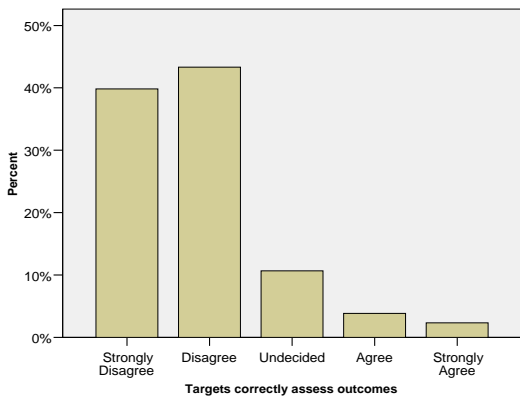


**Figure 58 – Opinion on whether targets are too obsessed with speed**

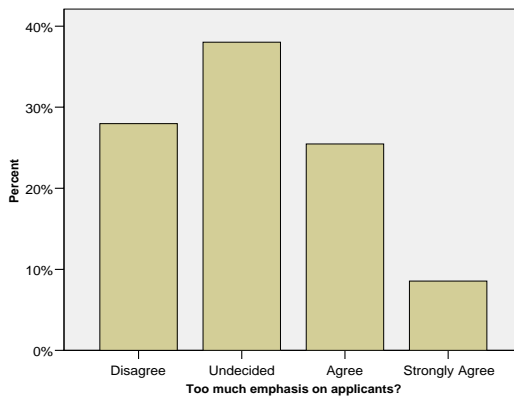


**Figure 59 – Opinion on whether targets restrict the scope for professional discretion**

As mentioned above, a very large majority of planners either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the targets correctly assess the quality of planning outcomes, as starkly illustrated by figure 60 (below). Opinion was much more mixed as to whether or not those targets place too much emphasis on applicants – more responding planners agreed or strongly agreed than disagreed but the largest single category of answer was ‘undecided’ (figure 61).



**Figure 59 – Opinion on whether targets correctly assess the quality of planning outcomes**



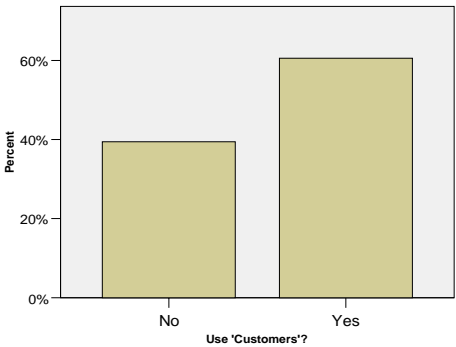
**Figure 60 – Opinion on whether targets place too much emphasis on applicants**

# Planning at the Coalface: The Planner's Perspective Survey

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### 3.6 Views on Customers, Culture and Community: Providing a public service in a customer-focused setting

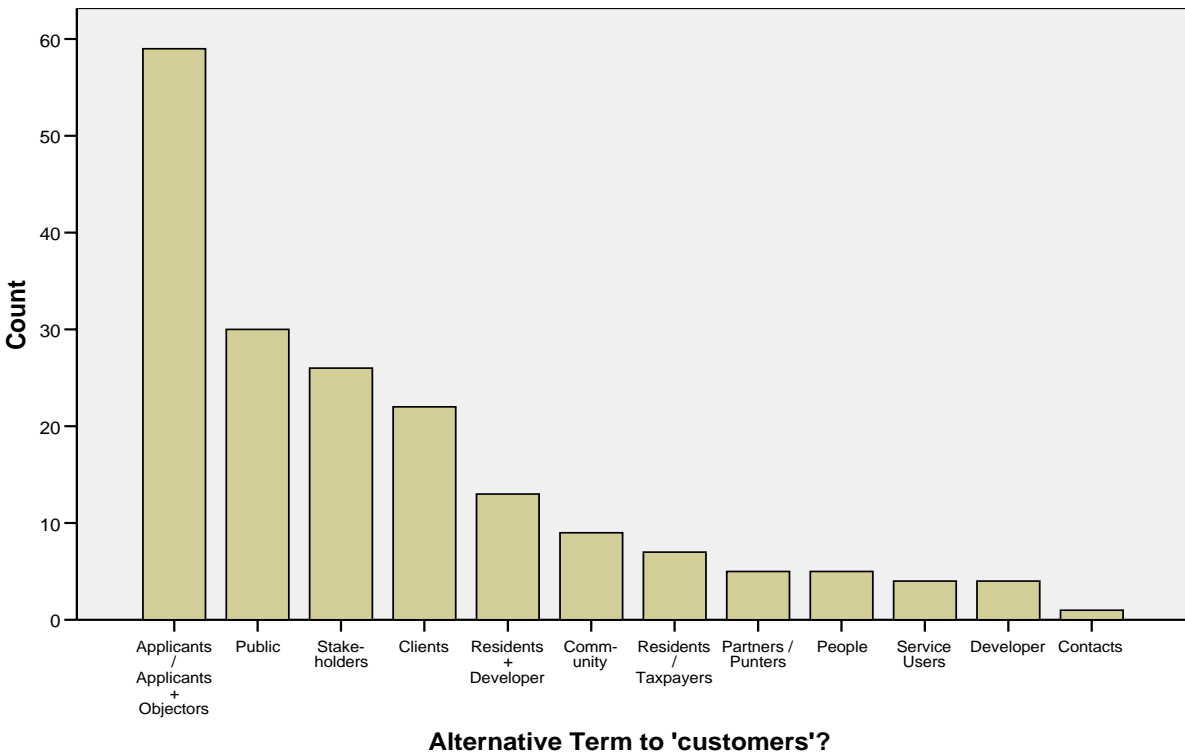
Alongside the growth of audit, the rise of the rhetoric of the 'customer' has been a salient feature of the modernization of public services in recent years (linked to the New Public Management (Ferlie *et al.*, 1996) and there have also been government attempts to change the 'culture' of planning and attitudes to public participation (also called 'community involvement' or 'community engagement') in the planning system. When asked whether they used the term 'customers' in their work, the majority of responding planners answered that yes they do: 60.4% answered yes, but that leaves a fairly significant minority of 39.4% who do not use the term (figure 62).



**Figure 62 – Do respondents use the Term 'customers' in relation to their work?**

**Table 20 – Terms which respondents used as alternatives to 'Customers' (groups created from responses)**

	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid Clients	22	3.6	11.9	11.9
Applicants / Applicants + Objectors	59	9.6	31.9	43.8
Public	30	4.9	16.2	60.0
Residents / Taxpayers	7	1.1	3.8	63.8
Community	9	1.5	4.9	68.6
Residents + Developers	13	2.1	7.0	75.7
Stakeholders	26	4.2	14.1	89.7
Partners / Punters	5	.8	2.7	92.4
Service Users	4	.7	2.2	94.6
Developers	4	.7	2.2	96.8
People	5	.8	2.7	99.5
Contacts	1	.2	.5	100.0
Total	185	30.2	100.0	
Do not use another term as an alternative	421	68.8		
Missing	99	1.0		
Total	427	69.8		
Total	612	100.0		



**Figure 63 – Terms which respondents used as alternatives to 'Customers' (groups created from responses)**

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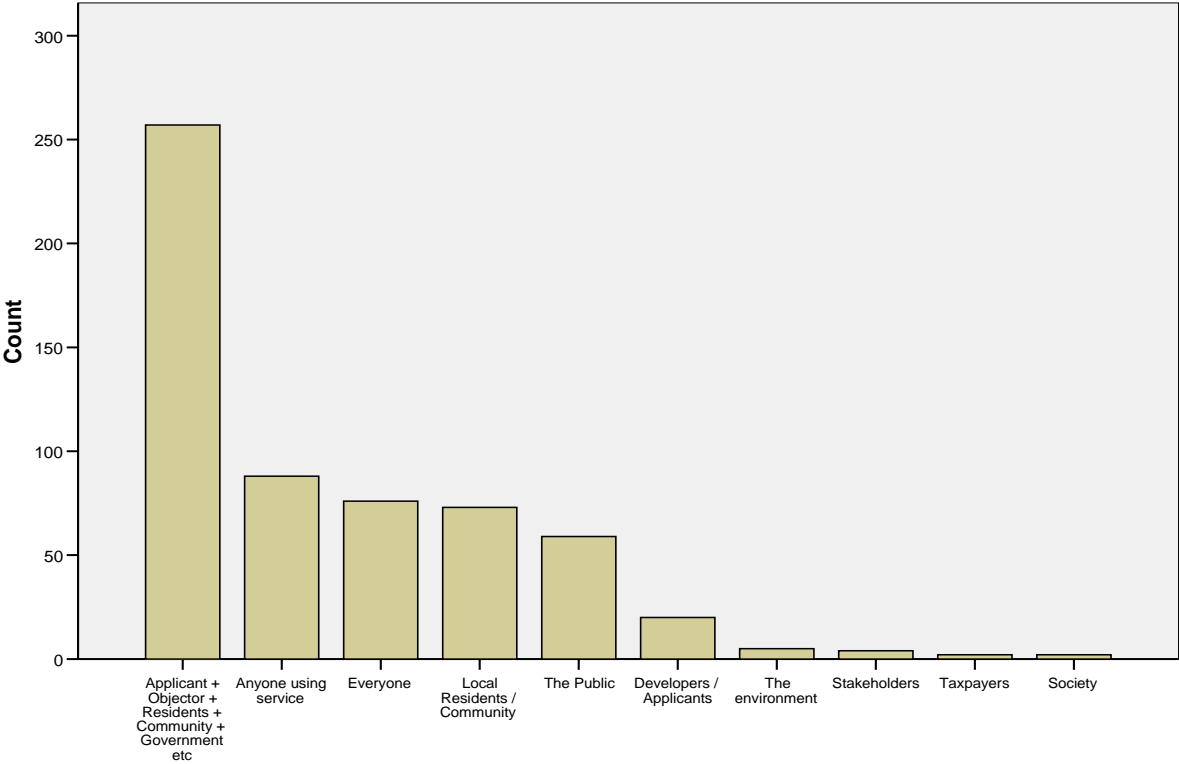
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When asked if they used the term 'customers', planners were then asked if they did not regularly use the term whether there was another term they preferred instead. This was an open question and answers were categorized and coded according to the responses written down. The results are illustrated by table 20 and figure 63 (above). These indicate that, although the majority of respondents did not specify another term as an alternative to 'customers', those that did indicated a large range. The main terms were applicants and objectors – focussing very much on the traditional image of development control. But the terms 'the public', 'stakeholders' and 'clients' were also suggested by a number of people each. Interestingly, a number of responding professionals wrote on their questionnaires that 'as professionals', they had 'clients'. The idea of 'the public' as an alternative to 'customers' is in itself of interest.

Asked to define who they thought the 'customers' of LPAs were (in an open question), planners gave a range of responses. The vast majority of respondents offered an answer here and those answers are illustrated by table 21 and figure 64 (below).

**Table 21 - Who respondents thought the 'customers' of LPAs were (Groups created from responses)**

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Everyone	76	12.4	13.0	13.0
	Taxpayers	2	.3	.3	13.3
	Local Residents / Community	73	11.9	12.5	25.8
	Applicant + Objector + Residents + Community + Government etc	257	42.0	43.9	69.6
	The Public	59	9.6	10.1	79.7
	Anyone using service	88	14.4	15.0	94.7
	Society	2	.3	.3	95.1
	Developers / Applicants	20	3.3	3.4	98.5
	Stakeholders	4	.7	.7	99.1
	The environment	5	.8	.9	100.0
	Total	586	95.8	100.0	
Missing	99	26	4.2		
Total		612	100.0		



**Who are 'customers' of LPAs?**

**Figure 64 – Who respondents thought the 'customers' of LPAs were (Groups created from responses)**

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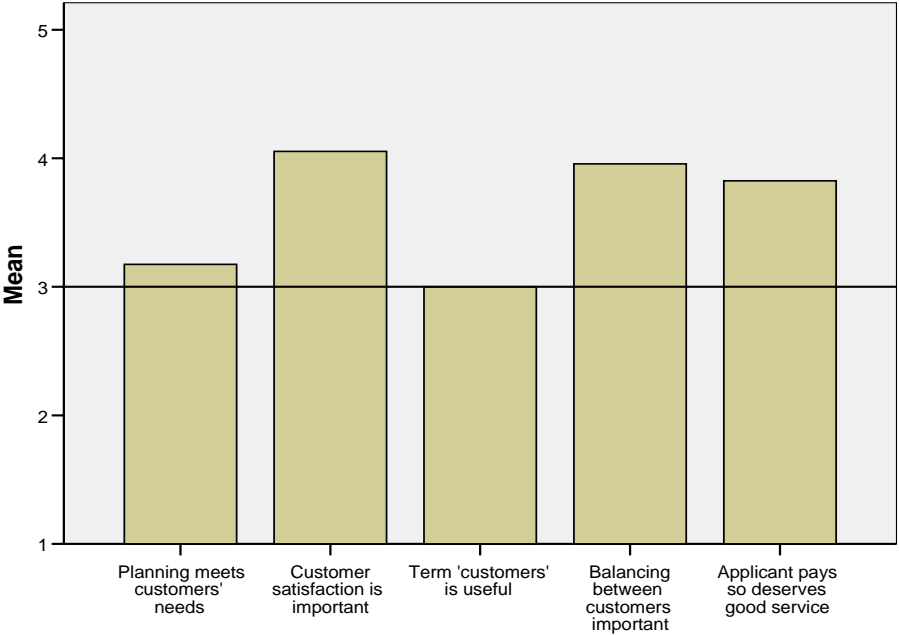
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The single largest answer here was a list of multiple ‘customers’, usually listing something along the lines of applicants, objectors, residents, community, councillors and government departments as the ‘customers’ of LPAs. Other popular answers included ‘everyone’, ‘local residents’ or ‘the community’, ‘the public’ and ‘anyone using the service’ or ‘anyone affected by planning matters’. The idea that developers were the primary customers of LPAs did not get much support.

In order to further examine the attitudes and opinions of planners on the issue, a full ‘Customer Likert’ asked respondents how much they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements relating to ‘customers’ and planning. The answers given by respondents are summarized by the figures in table 22 and illustrated by the comparison of means in figure 65 (below).

**Table 22 – Summary of responses for Likert agreement measuring how much respondents agreed or disagreed with various statements relating to ‘customers’ and planning**

Likert Statement:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	% Strongly Disagree	% Disagree	% Undecided	% Agree	% Strongly Agree
The planning service meets the needs of its ‘customers’	598	3.16	.933	3.00	2.5	26.9	24.4	44.0	2.2
‘Customer satisfaction’ is important to me	603	4.05	.695	4.00	0.7	3.6	6.8	67.8	21.1
The term ‘customers’ is a useful label in planning	602	2.98	1.064	3.00	7.6	29.6	24.8	33.1	5.0
It is important to strike a balance between ‘customers’	590	3.96	.717	4.00	0.0	5.0	11.9	64.2	18.6
The applicant pays so has a right to a good service	599	3.83	.815	4.00	1.5	9.3	6.2	70.8	12.2



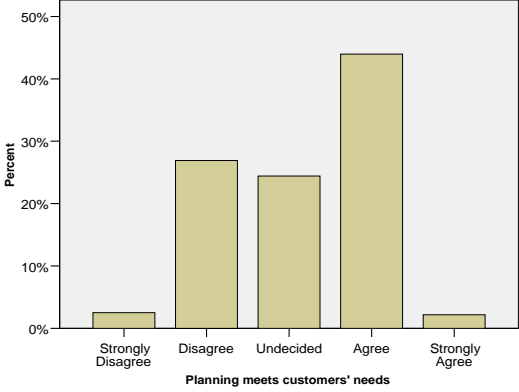
**Figure 65 – Comparison of the mean averages scores of responses to the Likert agreement measuring how much respondents agreed or disagreed with various statements relating to ‘customers’ and planning (with a score of 1 representing ‘strongly disagree’ and 5 representing ‘strongly agree’)**

The results in table 22 and figure 65 suggest a mixed picture with regards to the use of the term ‘customers’ in planning. A clear majority of 88.9% of responding planners either agree or strongly agree that ‘customer satisfaction’ is important to them, yet 82.8% agree or strongly agree with the statement “it is important to strike a balance between ‘customers’”. The latter seems a strange statement when viewed in the light of the traditional idea of one set of ‘customers’ and ideas such as ‘the customer is always right’ but instead suggests planners are viewing applicants, objectors and the wider community all as ‘customers’ and all with competing interests and needs that must be balanced. Indeed, the question of the applicability of the term ‘customers’ at all is one which strongly divides opinion – 37.2% of responding planners disagree or strongly disagree that the term is useful in planning compared to 38.1% who either agree or strongly agree.

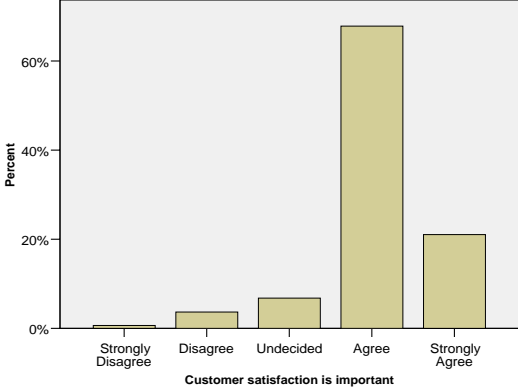
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As with other Likert agreements, more detail on the answers to each statement is given by graphs illustrating the distribution of answers for each statement in the customer Likert, these are figures 66 – 70 (below).

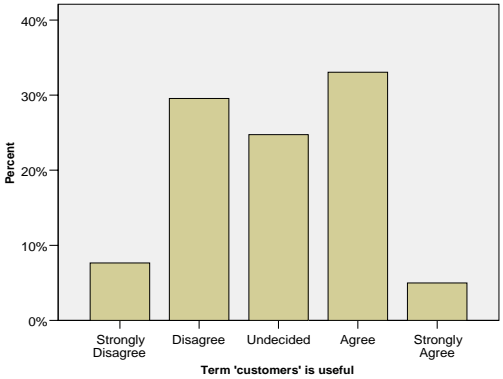


**Figure 66 – Opinion on whether the planning service meets the needs of its ‘customers’**

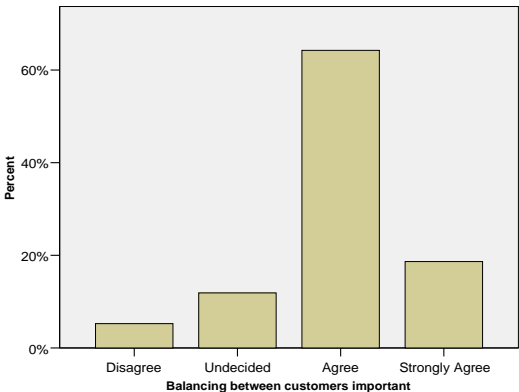


**Figure 67 – Opinion on whether ‘customer satisfaction’ was important to responding planners**

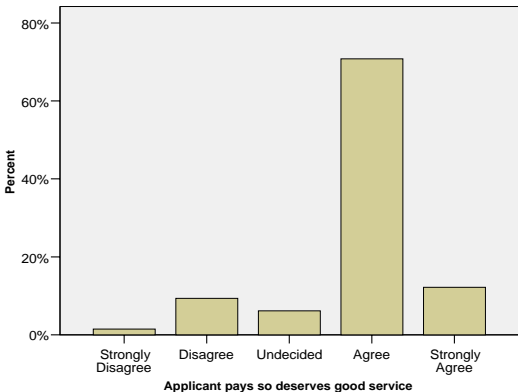
Figure 66 (above) shows that more responding planners agree that the service meets the needs of its ‘customers’ than disagree but that opinion is quite mixed, unlike that regarding whether or not ‘customer satisfaction’ is important, where a vast majority of responding planners agree that it is (figure 67). Another statement which gets a mixed reaction is that regarding whether the term ‘customers’ is a useful label in planning, illustrated by figure 68 (below). Although slightly more agree than disagree with the statement, slightly more strongly disagree than strongly agree, illustrating sharply divided opinion. The last two graphs, however, once again illustrate much more clear-cut opinions: clear majorities agree both that “it is important to strike a balance between ‘customers’” (figure 69) and also that “the applicant pays so has a right to a good service” (figure 70, overleaf), the latter statement conforming with a very tradition model of ‘the customer’.



**Figure 68 – Opinion on whether the term ‘customers’ is a useful label in planning**



**Figure 69 – Opinion on whether it is important to strike a balance between ‘customers’**



**Figure 70 – Opinion on the statement ‘the applicant pays so has a right to a good service’**

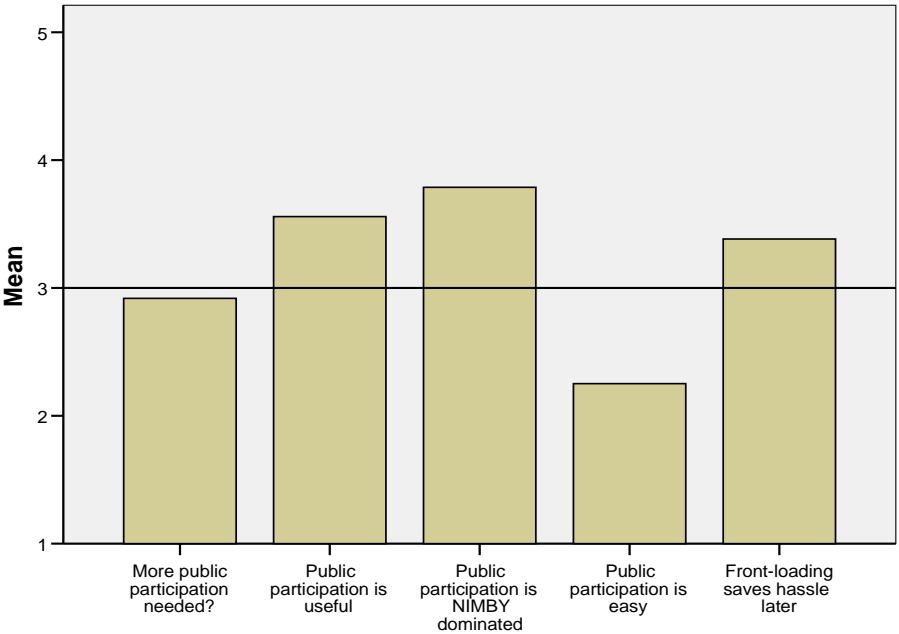
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Interestingly, while the results suggest planners rate highly the idea of providing a public service and many see the community as their key customers, the results also indicate some heterogeneous views with respect to responding planners' views about public participation. A 'Public Participation' Likert asked respondents how much they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements relating to public participation and planning. Table 23 (below) summarizes the answers given by planners and figure 71 illustrates the comparison of means of the responses for each statement.

**Table 23 – Summary of responses for Likert agreement measuring how much respondents agreed or disagreed with various statements relating to public participation and planning**

Likert Statement:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	% Strongly Disagree	% Disagree	% Undecided	% Agree	% Strongly Agree
More public participation is needed to improve planning	599	2.92	1.081	3.00	5.5	38.7	21.7	26.5	7.5
Public participation exercises are useful	601	3.56	.902	4.00	1.3	14.3	21.1	53.2	10.0
In practice, public participation is dominated by NIMBYs	601	3.77	.960	4.00	0	15.0	15.0	47.8	22.3
Being involved with public participation exercises is easy	600	2.25	.887	2.00	15.8	57.0	14.7	11.7	0.8
'Front-loading' can save hassle later in the process	595	3.38	1.028	4.00	4.2	16.3	29.1	38.3	12.1

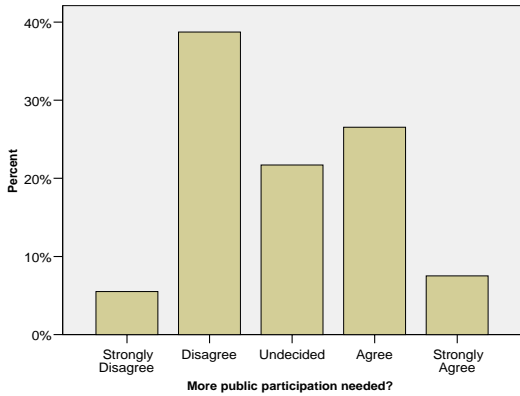


**Figure 71 – Comparison of the mean averages scores of responses to the Likert agreement measuring how much respondents agreed or disagreed with various statements relating to public participation and planning (with a score of 1 representing 'strongly disagree' and 5 representing 'strongly agree')**

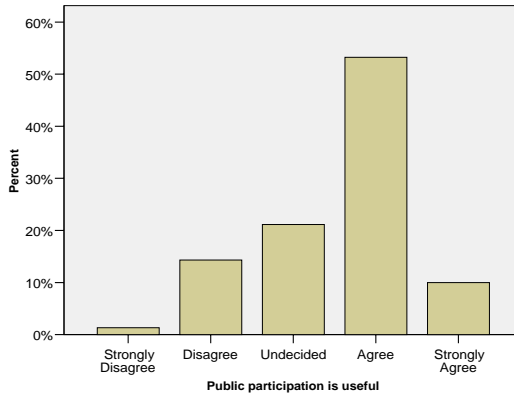
The statements with which most respondents agreed or strongly agreed were “public participation exercises are useful” (63.2%) and “In practice, public participation is dominated by NIMBYs” (70.1%), which is an interesting contrast. The statement with which there was the highest level of disagreement and strong disagreement was “Being involved with public participation exercises is easy” (72.8%). This indicates, perhaps, support for the idea of public participation but difficulties for planners faced with putting it into practice. As with other Likert agreements, more detail on the answers to each statement is given by graphs illustrating the distribution of answers for each statement in the public participation Likert (figures 72 – 76, below).

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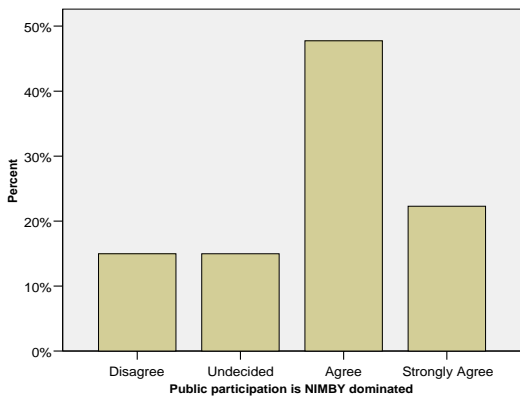


**Figure 72 – Opinion on whether more public participation is needed to improve planning**

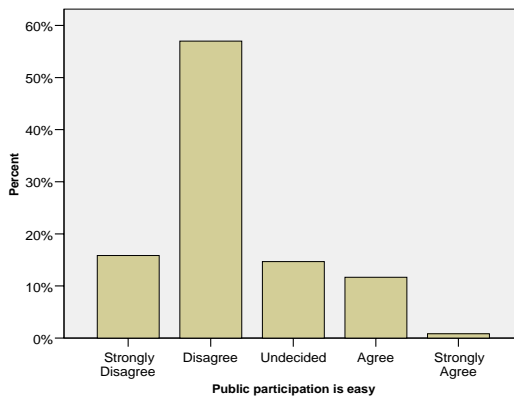


**Figure 73 – Opinion on whether public participation exercises are useful**

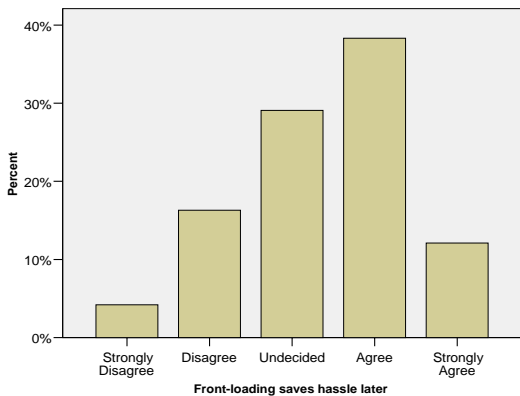
Figure 72 (above) illustrates that more planners disagree than agreed that more public participation is needed to improve planning but opinion is quite mixed, in contrast to the strong agreement that public participation exercises are useful (figure 73). There is also, as already mentioned, a good majority of responding planners agreeing with the idea that public participation is dominated in practice by NIMBYs (figure 74, below), and a strong majority disagreeing that being involved with public participation exercises is easy (figure 75). Finally, the matter of whether or not ‘front-loading’ can save hassle later in the process is something apparently open to debate amongst respondents but with most agreeing or strongly agreeing that it can (figure 76).



**Figure 74 – Opinion on the statement ‘in practice public participation is dominated by NIMBYs’**



**Figure 75 – Opinion on whether being involved with public participation exercises is easy**

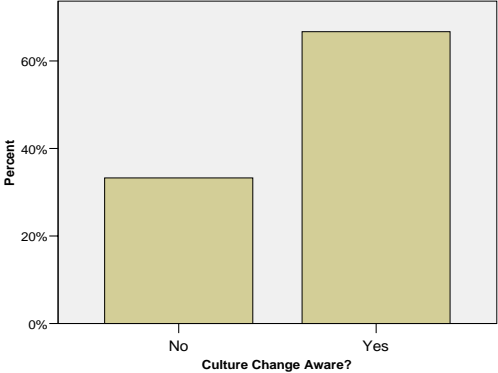


**Figure 76 – Opinion on whether ‘front-loading’ can save hassle later in the process?**

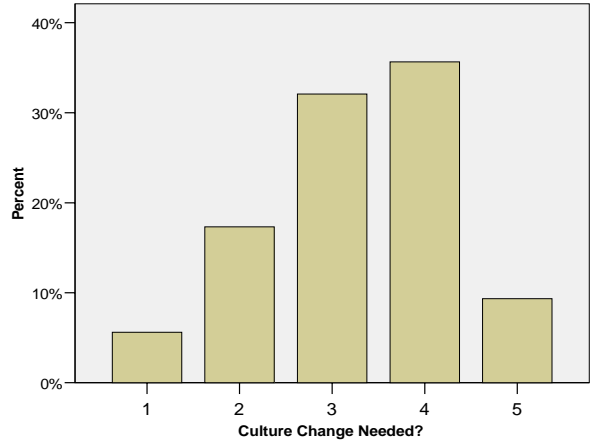
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Calls for a 'culture change' in planning have been seen throughout Great Britain. Asked whether they were aware of moves by government to change the culture of planning, two-thirds (67.7%) of planners said they were whilst one-third (33.3%) of planners said they were not (figure 77). Respondents were then asked how much, on a scale of 1-5 (with one being 'not very much' and 5 being 'very much') they thought there was a need for a culture change in planning. The mean average response was 3.26 (with a standard deviation of 1.031), which is very slightly in favour of there being a need for culture change (as illustrated by figure 78 and table 24, below), although the median of 3.00 indicates opinion is mixed.



**Figure 77 – Were respondents aware of government moves to change the 'culture' of planning?**



**Figure 78 – How much, on a scale of 1-5, respondents thought there was a need for culture change in planning (with 1 representing not at all and 5 representing very much)**

**Table 24 – Summary of responses for question on how much, on a scale of 1 -5, respondents thought there was a need for culture change in planning**

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	1	33	5.4	5.6	5.6
	2	102	16.7	17.3	22.9
	3	189	30.9	32.1	55.0
	4	210	34.3	35.7	90.7
	5	55	9.0	9.3	100.0
	Total	589	96.2	100.0	
Missing	99	23	3.8		
	Total	23	3.8		
Total		612	100.0		

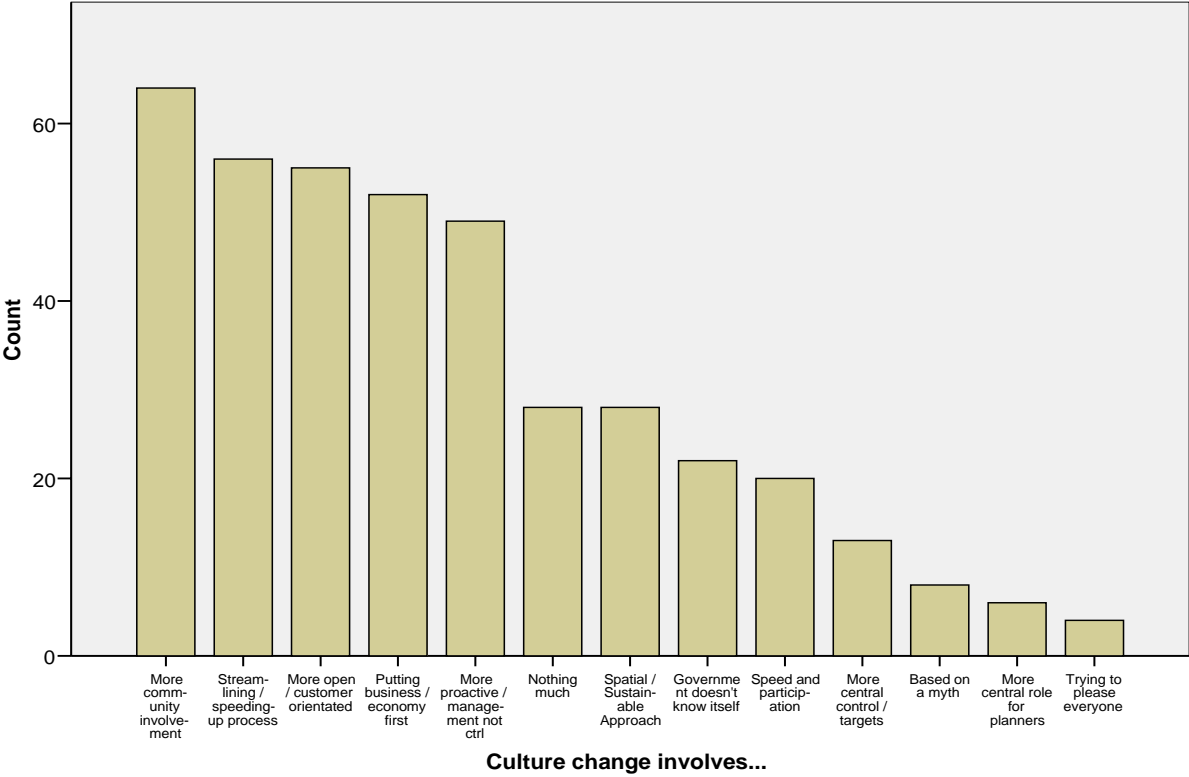
Respondents were also given the chance to comment on what they understood the 'culture change' in planning agenda to involve. This was an open question and results were put into categories and coded according to what people wrote in response. The results are illustrated by table 25 and figure 79 (below), which indicate a mixture of opinion concerning what was involved in 'culture change'. The most common answer was more community engagement but other common answers including further streamlining or speeding-up of the planning process (not always commented on positively), becoming more 'customer' focused and providing an 'open service', and becoming more pro-active and concerned with management rather than control. Much of this was commented on positively. There was also, however, a good number of planners who thought the culture change agenda involved putting the interests of business and economy first and the vast majority of respondents commented about this negatively, feeling the job of planners was always to balance economy with society and environment.

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**Table 25 – What did respondents think ‘culture change’ in planning involved?  
Grouped summary of open question responses**

	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid				
Nothing much	28	4.6	6.9	6.9
Spatial / Sustainable Approach	28	4.6	6.9	13.8
More central control / targets	13	2.1	3.2	17.0
More community involvement / consultation	64	10.5	15.8	32.8
Trying to please everyone	4	.7	1.0	33.8
Streamlining / speeding-up process	56	9.2	13.8	47.7
More proactive / management not control	49	8.0	12.1	59.8
More open / customer orientated	55	9.0	13.6	73.3
Government doesn't know itself	22	3.6	5.4	78.8
Based on a myth	8	1.3	2.0	80.7
Putting business / economy first	52	8.5	12.8	93.6
Speed and participation	20	3.3	4.9	98.5
More central role for planners	6	1.0	1.5	100.0
Total	405	66.2	100.0	
Missing	99	207	33.8	
Total	612	100.0		



**Figure 79 – What respondents thought ‘culture change’ in planning involved (Groups created from responses)**

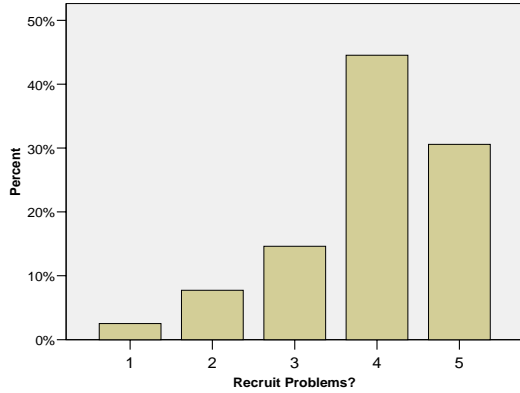
### 3.7 Recruitment and Retention Issues: Problems and possible solutions

Recruitment and retention are issues of concern in a number of LPAs (Durning and Glasson, 2004), and respondents were asked to rate to what extent they had problems with recruitment and retention at their authority on a scale of 1–5. The mean score for recruitment problems was 3.93 (was a standard deviation of 0.992) and the median was 4.00, indicating that the majority of authorities have some problems with recruiting planners. These results are illustrated by figure 80 and table 26 (overleaf). In terms of retention, the mean score was 3.47 (with a standard deviation of 1.026) and the median here was also 4.00, indicating that more authorities experience problems retaining planners than do not experience problems but that is less of an issue than initial recruitment. These results are illustrated by figure 81 and

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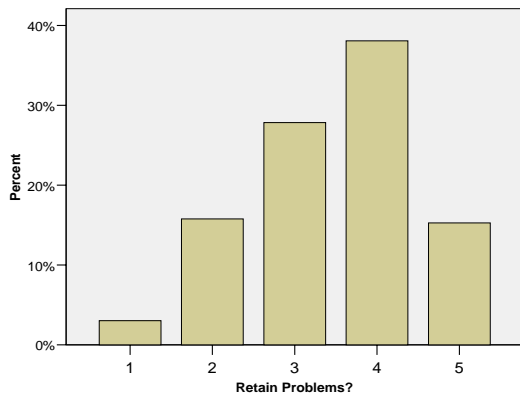
table 27 (below). Cross-tabulation of both recruitment and retention with location revealed 'severe problems' were reported by respondents in all parts of Great Britain.



**Figure 80 – How severe on a scale of 1–5 respondents judged problems with recruitment at their LPA to be (with 1 representing no problems at all and 5 representing severe problems)**

**Table 26 – How severe on a scale of 1–5 respondents judged problems with recruitment at their LPA to be (with 1 representing no problems at all and 5 representing severe problems)**

	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid 1	15	2.5	2.5	2.5
2	46	7.5	7.7	10.3
3	87	14.2	14.6	24.9
4	265	43.3	44.5	69.4
5	182	29.7	30.6	100.0
Total	595	97.2	100.0	
Missing 99	17	2.8		
Total	17	2.8		
Total	612	100.0		



**Figure 81 – How severe on a scale of 1–5 respondents judged problems with retention at their LPA to be (with 1 representing no problems at all and 5 representing severe problems)**

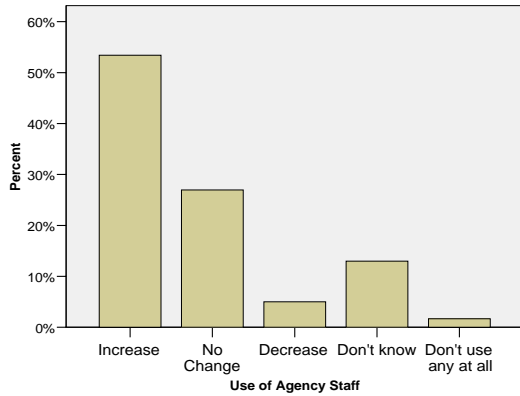
**Table 27 – How severe on a scale of 1–5 respondents judged problems with retention at their LPA to be (with 1 representing no problems at all and 5 representing severe problems)**

	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid 1	18	2.9	3.0	3.0
2	94	15.4	15.8	18.8
3	166	27.1	27.9	46.6
4	227	37.1	38.1	84.7
5	91	14.9	15.3	100.0
Total	596	97.4	100.0	
Missing 99	16	2.6		
Total	612	100.0		

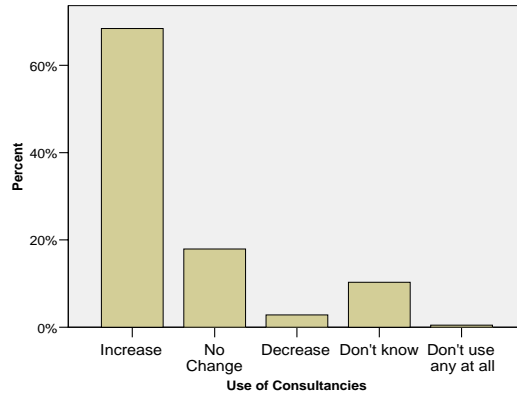
Linked to the issue of recruitment and retention is that of the use of agency staff and consultancies by LPAs. Responding planners were asked whether they were aware of any increase in the use of agency staff at and consultancies by their authority in the last five years. The response options were 'increase', 'no change', 'decrease' and 'don't know' but a number of respondents wrote in 'we don't use any at all' and this was added as a response during coding. The results indicate an increase in the use of both agency staff and consultancies by a significant number of LPAs, as illustrated by figures 82 and 83 and tables 28 and 29 (opposite).

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**Figure 82 – Had there been an increase or decrease in use of agency staff in the respondent's department in the last five years?**



**Figure 83 – Had there been an increase or decrease in use of external consultancies by the respondent's department in the last five years?**

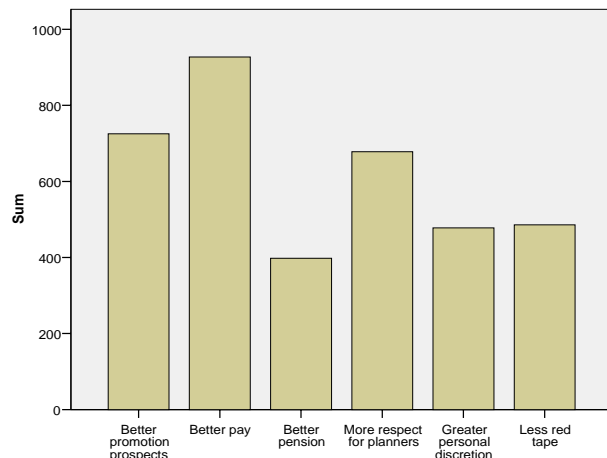
**Table 28 – Had there been an increase or decrease in use of agency staff in the respondent's department in the last five years? Summary of responses.**

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Increase	321	52.5	53.4	53.4
	No Change	162	26.5	27.0	80.4
	Decrease	30	4.9	5.0	85.4
	Don't know	78	12.7	13.0	98.3
	Don't use any at all	10	1.6	1.7	100.0
	Total	601	98.2	100.0	
Missing	99	11	1.8		
Total		612	100.0		

**Table 29 – Had there been an increase or decrease in use of external consultancies the respondent's department in the last five years? Summary of responses.**

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Increase	412	67.3	68.4	68.4
	No Change	108	17.6	17.9	86.4
	Decrease	17	2.8	2.8	89.2
	Don't know	62	10.1	10.3	99.5
	Don't use any at all	3	.5	.5	100.0
	Total	602	98.4	100.0	
Missing	99	10	1.6		
Total		612	100.0		

A final question asked planners what they thought could ease recruitment and retention problems in planning authorities. Respondents were asked to rate six factors on a scale of 1-6, with 1 being the most important and 6 the least, with the added instruction to leave any blank they did not think applied at all. This data was then reversed so that scores of 1 became 6, 6 became 1 and so on (with blank remaining blank). The total scores for each factor could then be added and a mean calculated for each factor, with a higher sum or mean indicating more planners thought that factor was important. The results are summarized by figure 83 and table 30 below. These indicate that responding planners thought that better pay was the key to solving recruitment problems, followed by better promotion prospects.



**Figure 84 – Graph showing factors respondents thought most important in helping ease recruitment and retention problems with sum of scores for each factor illustrated.**

**Table 30 – Graph showing factors respondents thought most important in helping ease recruitment and retention problems with sum of scores for each factor illustrated. Higher score means more responding planners thought that factor important.**

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Sum	Std. Deviation
Better promotion prospects	461	1	6	4.65	2144	1.326
Better pay	534	1	6	5.54	2958	.899
Better pension	257	1	6	2.84	731	1.670
More respect for planners	417	1	6	4.44	1850	1.440
Greater personal discretion	294	1	6	3.33	980	1.509
Less red tape	346	1	6	3.58	1240	1.613

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As well as the six pre-written options, respondents were also given the chance to make their own suggestions of what could help with recruitment and retention of planners in an open question format. The factor written in most often by responding planners was 'better working environment' (it was mentioned 38 times and using the same system as for factors analyzed above had a sum score of 191, with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 6). Comments here included less workload, particularly with respect to what was seen as bureaucracy and target chasing, and better leadership (both at the authority level and at central government level). The next most cited factor was 'better public understanding' (mentioned 12 times, with a sum score of 61 and a minimum of 1 and a maximum importance of 6). Included here were factors such as a better media image for planning, and more communication and understanding at the school level in particular. 'Better job security' was mentioned seven times (with a sum of 31, a minimum of 2 and a maximum score of 6) and comments alongside here referred to fears about job security for planners in face of continuing agenda. 'More training opportunities' was a factor mentioned five times by respondents (with a sum of 18 totalled from scores ranging from 1 to 6). Finally 'housing availability' was mentioned three times (with a sum of 15 totalled from scores ranging from 3 to 6). This was linked to schemes such as Key Worker housing in the comments made by respondents.

### 3.8 The next steps? Further in-depth interviews

At the back of the survey instrument planners were asked if they wanted to comment further on any of the issues raised through the medium of in-depth interviews or a focus group. The plan for the PhD research sets out individual in-depth interviews as the next stage of the research but I included focus group participation as well so as to keep my options open. A very encouraging 27.9% of responding planners – 171 people – agreed to be interviewed whilst 13.9% - 85 people – said they would be willing to participate in a focus group. Tables 31 summarizes the results for whether planners were willing to take part in in-depth interviews with a cross-tabulation against location. This indicates a good range of opportunities for further, in-depth, research which will complement the questionnaire results included in this report and add to the overall depth of the conclusions drawn.

**Table 31 – Crosstabulation of whether planners were willing to be interviewed against their location in Great Britain**

		Location in GB											Total
		E Mids	E of Eng	Grtr London	NE Eng	NW Eng	SE Eng	SW Eng	W Mids	Yorks	Scotland	Wales	
Yes	Count	13	14	15	7	19	35	20	14	8	19	7	171
	% within location in GB	41.9%	29.8%	28.3%	22.6%	32.8%	34.0%	33.9%	24.1%	36.4%	42.2%	29.2%	
	% within Interview?	5.0%	9.2%	10.6%	6.7%	10.8%	18.9%	10.8%	12.2%	3.9%	7.2%	4.1%	
No	Count	18	33	38	24	39	68	39	44	14	26	17	360
	% within location in GB	58.1%	70.2%	71.7%	77.4%	67.2%	66.0%	66.1%	75.9%	63.6%	57.8%	70.8%	
	% within Interview?	7.6%	8.2%	8.8%	4.1%	11.1%	20.5%	11.7%	8.2%	4.7%	11.1%	4.7%	
Total	Count	31	47	53	31	58	103	59	58	22	45	28	531

N.B. – percentages are calculated on the basis of those who answered either yes or no to the question – 81 did not answer the question at all and so are missing data

## 4.0 Preliminary Analysis

The results paint an interesting picture of the planning profession at a time of change and intense pressure to deliver and cover a number of interesting areas. The survey yielded a healthy response rate (for a postal survey) and various indicators suggest a sample that covers a good range of planners in factors such as location, age, and seniority of planners. In terms of 'mapping' the profession, results were received back from planners in all parts of Great Britain. More of the responding planners worked in the South-East of England region than any other single region but this is in line with the number of questionnaires sent out, and given the random sample, suggests that more planners work in this region than any other. This is hardly surprising given the region's high population and economic prosperity which means development pressures are constant. Planners from all types of Local Planning Authority are present in the response.

The demographic data suggests an overwhelmingly White profession, with most responding planners male and aged over 40 years old. That said, a break down of gender against age suggests a higher percentage of female planners amongst the younger age groups. The level of qualification is quite evenly split between those with a Bachelor's degree in planning, those with a Diploma in planning (normally taken after a Bachelors in another subject) and those with a Masters in planning, but overall this suggests a highly qualified profession. The majority of planners put their job focus down as either Development Control or Plans and Policy (with slightly more in DC) but a good number suggested varying other focuses for their jobs, from sustainability and environmental planning to regeneration, economic planning, conservation and design. The responding planners came from the junior, middle and senior ranks of the profession, suggesting a representative sample of opinion. Results indicate that the vast majority of respondents had worked for more than one employer as planners. That said, only 14.1% of those had worked in the private sector, indicating that most local authority planners move from one local authority post to another.

Opinion is fairly evenly split between the responding planners as a whole as to whether or not the current planning reform agenda is, on balance, a good thing, but the majority of planners do not think that overall the reforms help either the speed or the simplicity of the planning system. The exception to this was planners in Scotland, who were much more likely to be in favour of the reforms, possibly because they feel more involved in the reform process or because the reforms are at a different stage there compared to England and Wales. That said, younger planners across Britain were more likely to favour the reforms than older planners, perhaps because they are less used to old ways of doing things or because they are more willing to embrace change.

When examining reform opinion in more detail via a Likert agreement, it becomes clear that there is concern that the reforms do not, overall, improve the outcomes of the planning process and strong agreement amongst responding planners that the reforms increase red tape. The reforms seem to be causing some planners considerable amounts of stress and there is almost universal agreement that the resource implications of implementing the reforms have been underestimated by central Government. There also seems very strong opinion that the reforms are not part of a coherent agenda, perhaps reflecting differing messages coming from departments responsible for planning as opposed to the Treasury and also the many competing objectives Ministers seem to want planning to help meet.

Despite such concerns, more planners said they supported the reform agenda than said they did not support it. This suggests to me that the profession as a whole is inclined to embrace and accept change, and thinks there is a need for reform, but they are just not entirely happy with the reforms they have got. This is consistent with preliminary interview results and something that could be usefully explored further via the in-depth interviews.



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The use of the term 'the profession' is, of course, itself loaded and something itself explored in the survey. As a group, the majority of the responding planners are members of a trade union and a strong majority see membership of the RTPI as central to their professional status. When reflecting on their peers, most of the respondents agree that local authority planners are motivated by their work but believe that they are overworked, underpaid and bogged down by bureaucracy and red-tape. Perhaps this is partly why so many of them said that they did not feel their profession was respected. Respected or not, though, the factor rated most important to their sense of being a professional planner was a sense of improving places for people, and the ideals of providing a good customer service and serving 'the public at large' were also rated highly (as opposed to strict regulatory controls and the ability to work to targets, which were rated as less important). This seems to suggest a profession genuinely motivated by ideals of public service and with a genuine motivation to 'make the world a better place'. This is not something easily measured by audit and targets and may cause frustration when planners think they cannot fulfil these ideals. Indeed, in an open question on what could help planners better tackle 'big issues' such as climate change and urban regeneration, one of the two most frequently cited answers was 'more time and resources', often commented upon in a manner suggesting many planners feel they have much more expertise and could make a much greater contribution to delivery on these fronts if they were not spending so much time on more mundane bureaucratic tasks and trying to meet endless targets.

Given that central Government control seems to revolve increasingly around prescriptive guidance, audit and targets, it is perhaps unsurprising to see a majority of planners thinking that there is too much central control of planning. Furthermore, there is very strong disagreement with the idea that central Government is sufficiently joined-up. This is interesting because an early hallmark of New Labour thinking was that government needed to be 'more joined-up' yet differing messages seem to emerge from different departments, particularly the Treasury, which most planners did not want to see getting involved more in planning. This could be due to a perception that the Treasury wants to slim-down planning (seen as a barrier to increased economic competitiveness), which would obviously be bad for the planning profession, but perhaps also this symbolises that planners do not believe economic motivations should be the sole purpose of planning. The Treasury was not the only department to get criticized, however, with a majority of English planners disagreeing that they trusted the DCLG itself to manage the planning system and more Scottish planners disagreeing that they trusted SEDD than agreeing.

On the topic of central Government's planning guidance specifically, opinion can best be described as 'mixed'. Most responding planners seemed to think that the government issues too much planning guidance, and this makes it hard to keep track of it all. A majority of responding planners also agreed that they felt front-line planners did not have enough say in writing guidance, implying it is seen as too 'top-down'. Nevertheless, healthy majorities of respondents agreed that guidance helped maintain important national standards, said that they regularly used guidance notes and felt that overall guidance improves the quality of planning. Furthermore, when asked what one thing could help planners better tackle 'big issues' such as climate change and urban regeneration, better planning guidance was the answer given by a large number of respondents. This suggests support for guidance notes in principle, for the idea of national standards, but unease with the quantity, and possible quality, of that currently produced.

The story with auditing of, and targets for, planning services is much more negative. In an open question on which reforms of local government generally had most impacted planners, audit and targets were by far the most common answer. Another common answer in England was to mention the Planning Delivery Grant, sometimes positively noting extra funding received but more often commented on negatively for being linked to targets to access the funding. This really does suggest a dislike of the current targets in planning.

More information was provided by a specific section on audits and targeting, the balance of opinion is in favour of auditing having improved the performance of planning services, having raised their profile within authorities and having altered the way planners work, but this seems to have been at a cost of



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greatly increasing the stress staff are under. The majority of responding planners rejected the idea that audit had improved relations with the public. Instead, most planners seemed to believe that targets did not correctly assess planning outcomes because they were too obsessed with speed as the sole measure of quality. Even so, by a small margin the balance of responses disagreed with the idea of abolishing targets altogether. This suggests to me that planners are not totally adverse to targets, indeed perhaps seeing providing a timely service as part of their professional responsibilities, but the tendency is to reject what is seen as too much of a focus on speed alone and the resulting stress that this can cause.

Alongside the growth of audit, the rise of the rhetoric of the 'customer' has been a salient feature of the modernization of public services in recent years. Yet in planning it still seems to be a term causing some confusion, with nearly 40% of responding planners saying they never use the term. Perhaps this is because with both a responsibility to applicants and objectors, as well as wider community goals, planners find it hard to define exactly who their 'customers' are in the traditional sense of the word. In an open question on who the customers of LPAs were, the most usual answer was a long list of various parties such as applicants, objectors, the community, residents, businesses, government agencies and even the environment. These competing users probably explain why the majority of responding planners felt that it was important to 'strike a balance between customers'. Nevertheless, the results provide a strong indication that 'customer service' is important to planners. This suggests that planners are keen to provide a good service to all those they come into contact with – which may well link back to professional and public service ideals – yet this can be difficult when different 'customers' can frequently have contradictory demands.

Interestingly, while a many respondents indicate the importance to them of providing a public service and many see the community as their key customers, the results indicate some mixed views with respect to responding planners' views about public participation. Thus, the balance of opinion seems to be against more public participation being needed to improve planning, but the majority of respondents agree that public participation exercises are useful. Furthermore, a majority of respondents indicate they do not find public participation exercises easy even though many agree they can save hassle later in the process. Several factors are probably in play here: on the one hand, many planners seem to have an ideal of serving the public yet they also like the freedom (and discretion) to make decisions based on their own professional 'expertise'. This in itself may create some conflicting views. Additionally, however, most responding planners think that in practice public participation exercises are dominated by NIMBYs, so while they might support the idea of participation as a community-minded principle, their views of participants is much less favourable.

A focus on community engagement has been part of the package of promoting a so-called 'culture change' in planning which has been a key part of the recent moves by central Government to reform the system. Despite the rhetoric by policy makers and central Government surrounding this culture change, a third of all responding planners said they were unaware of moves by central Government to change the culture of planning. And of the two-thirds who were aware of culture change initiatives, there were many differences of opinion between them as to what exactly this culture change involved. An increased focus on community engagement was the most common answer in the question but also frequently cited were further streamlining the process, becoming more 'customer' orientated and being more pro-active and concerned with management rather than control. This range probably reflects fairly well the various messages being put out by central Government about planning reform. However, a number of respondents did express concern that the culture change agenda was too focussed on putting the interests of business over other concerns.

This range of answers concerning what culture change involves probably means responding planners were rating different things when they commented on how much they thought culture change was needed in planning, but it is interesting that the balance was towards there being some need for a culture change.



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Given the focus on spatial planning by central Government, it may also be pleasing to them to see that the majority of respondents thought spatial planning frameworks were useful tools.

Alongside resourcing issues surrounding the implementation of planning reform, staffing issues were another major area of concern highlighted by planners in their survey responses. A strong majority of respondents reported some or severe problems with recruitment and retentions of planners at their authority, and this was seen in all parts of Great Britain. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, many respondents answered that their authority was increasingly using agency staff – perhaps to fill the gap. The use of consultancies was also reported by a strong majority of responding planners to have increased, possibly linked to problems getting sufficient skilled staff to do work in-house, or perhaps linked to increasing complexity required in planning documents. Another reason might, of course, be local authority planners being too busy with ‘routine tasks’ (especially due to the need to meet targets) and so having to put out more specialist tasks to consultancies.

Given the focus on planners delivering various objectives which is so central to much of planning reform, these staffing problems must be of major concern. A mixed closed and open question addressed this topic. On the closed section, the key factors that respondents suggested might provide solutions to recruitment and retention problems were better pay for planners, better promotion prospects within their authority and more respect for the profession. On the open section, factors mentioned included a better working environment (including less bureaucracy, perhaps via a mixed upskilling and deskilling process in development control, and better leadership), better training opportunities and an increased public understanding of planning (for example through a school-based initiative). Nevertheless, it seems there are no easy solutions to this difficult problem.

The questionnaire survey thus in itself has yielded a large amount of good quality data. This analysis is, however, only preliminary since there is a need for more in-depth interview data to complete the picture. This will be obtained through a series of interviews with some of the many planners who have volunteered to take part in further research, the survey having performed very well in recruiting these interviewees.

## 5.0 Conclusion

The questionnaire survey has yielded a large amount of good quality data. From this, a picture emerges that the planning profession clearly includes a large number of highly qualified staff who genuinely wish to make a difference to people and places and to serve the communities in which they work. The vast majority see the local community (including residents and businesses) as their key 'customers'. Yet there are concerns that planning is becoming too bureaucratic, with targets that are obsessed with speed and a lack of time and resources to enable planners to play a bigger role in delivering agendas such as sustainability and regeneration. English and Scottish planners do not seem to trust their central government planning departments and planners in England, Scotland and Wales tend to feel there is too much central control and too much planning guidance issued, making it hard to keep track of. Nevertheless, there is support for the idea of guidance (just as there seems to be support for the idea of some sort of audit). Similarly, there is support for an agenda of planning reform but concern that the reforms that exist are increasing bureaucracy and have not been properly resourced. Problems with recruitment and retention are reported across Great Britain, which must be tackled if planning is to help deliver across the range of policy fronts it could help with. Better pay, working environments and public understanding are all suggested as ways of helping tackle these recruitment and retention problems. Further study will flesh-out the preliminary findings here.

These findings will be complemented and enriched by further in-depth interviews with planners across Britain. The results of this further data collection and analysis will be published in due course.

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### 6.0 Reference List

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### 7.0 Appendices

#### 7.1 Appendix 1: Covering Letter and Survey Instrument Sent Out

Below is a copy of the covering letter and questionnaire survey instrument sent out. The survey was printed out double-sided over 6 pages with a 7<sup>th</sup> page at the rear concerning interviews and focus groups.

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**RTPI**

mediation of space · making of place

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Patron HRH The Prince of Wales KG KT PC GCB

12th July 2006

Dear Member,

### Planning at the Coalface: The Planner's Perspective Survey

I am writing to invite you to participate in some exciting research which aims to explore your views and opinions with respect to planning reform, the planning profession and public sector modernization. This research is being conducted by Ben Clifford, a PhD student in the Geography Department at King's College London. You can participate simply by filling in the enclosed questionnaire, which should take about 10 minutes of your time.

Ben's PhD is entitled *Planning at the Coalface: Local Authority Planners, Planning Reform and the New Public Management* and is funded by the UK Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as an independent study. The project aims to understand how ongoing reforms of the planning system and of local government and the public sector more generally are affecting practising planners across Britain. Ben's PhD follows on from a long-standing interest in the planning system, and more details about the project and about him personally may be found online at: <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/geography/people/phd/clifford.html>

The results of the research will be shared with the funding bodies, the RTPI, UNISON, the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly Government, and disseminated through various publications. By spending a few minutes of your time filling in the enclosed survey form, your own views will become part of that research and will help inform national planning practice and policy. The research will also feed in to the Institute's own evidence base and help inform our policy work, training provision and support/advice that we give to RTPI members. I would therefore be extremely grateful if you could help out. Can I assure you, however, that all questionnaire data will be anonymized on receipt and careful steps taken to respect the confidentiality of all people completing the survey, in line with ESRC ethical guidelines?

Please note that this questionnaire is being sent out to 2,000 RTPI members nationwide selected at random from our membership list, including yourself. In accordance with data protection measures, this selection was made by RTPI staff, not by Ben, who had no access to our membership list.

If you have any queries regarding this survey or the research more generally please do not hesitate to contact Ben Clifford, whose contact details are on the back page of the questionnaire. In addition to the survey, he is also interested in meeting people in person to discuss the issues raised in more depth; details about this are also at the rear of the questionnaire. Many thanks for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Percy, MRTPI  
Director Membership, Education and Lifelong Learning

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This questionnaire explores your views on planning and public sector reform and your help with this research is greatly appreciated. Please answer all questions as fully as possible. All data will remain confidential. **Please note that, for the purposes of this questionnaire, 'central government' refers to the Scottish Executive Development Department (SEDD) and Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) as well as the UK Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG – the former ODPM) and 'devolution' refers to devolution to the English regions as well as to Scotland and Wales.**

### ▪ Section 1: About your work

Office  
use only

- 1.) How long have you been a practising planner?  
..... years
- 2.) In what part of Great Britain do you currently work?
  - E Midlands    E of England                       Gtr London    NE England
  - NW England             SE England                                       SW England         W Midlands
  - Yorkshire & the Humber                       Scotland                       Wales
- 3.) What type of authority do you work for?
  - County Council                       District Council                       London Borough
  - Metropolitan Borough    National Park                       Unitary Authority
- 4.) What is the prime focus of your job?
  - DC                       Plans and Policy                       Other - please specify: .....
- 5.) What is your current job title?  
.....
- 6.) Have you ever worked in planning or a related field for any employers other than your current employer? *(Tick all that apply)*
  - Yes – Other Local Authority                       Yes – Central Government
  - Yes – Private Sector                       Yes – Voluntary Sector                       No
- 7.) Do you have an RTPI approved degree? *(Tick all that apply)*
  - Bachelors                       Part-time Masters                       Full-time Masters    Diploma
  - Other - please specify: .....

### ▪ Section 2: Your views on planning reform

- 8.) Do you think that, on balance, the current planning reform agenda being promoted by central government planning ministers is a good thing?
  - Yes                       No                       Not sure
- 9.) Do you think the reforms help (or will help) to achieve the objectives of speeding-up and simplifying the planning system?
  - Yes, help both objectives                       Yes, help speed things up
  - Yes, help simplify things                       No, do not help either objective

P.T.O

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10.) How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the government's procedural reforms of planning? *(Tick one box per row)*

Office  
use only

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
The reforms improve planning outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The reforms increase red tape	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel stressed by the reforms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel well informed about the reforms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The pace of change is too fast	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The resource implications have been underestimated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The reforms have not been radical enough	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I support the reform agenda	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The reforms make me consider changing jobs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The reforms have raised the profile of planners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The reforms increase interest in the planning system	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The reforms are part of a coherent agenda	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

▪ **Section 3: Planning as a profession**

11.) How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to local authority planners as a group? *(Tick one box per row)*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
Planning is a well respected profession	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planners are motivated by their work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planners are resistant to change	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planners are overworked	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planners are underpaid	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planners are bogged down by bureaucracy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planners work well with other council staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planners work well with elected councillors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planners have a central role in local authorities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planners are better off in the private sector	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12.) Is membership of the RTPI important to your sense of being a 'professional'?

Yes  No  Don't consider myself a professional  Don't know

13.) As a planner, are you a member of UNISON or any other trade union?

Currently  Plan to be  Used to be  Never have been

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14.) How important do you think the following factors are to your sense of being a professional planner? *(Tick one box per row)*

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	Not at all important	Important Not that	Undecided	Important	Very important
Freedom to make professional judgements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planning guidance from central government	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A sense of serving the public at large	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A sense of providing a good service to customers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working in the public sector	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delegation from local councillors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Good relations with developers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Good relations with community groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Good working relationships with other planners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strict controls to regulate development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ability to work to targets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sense of making a positive difference to people / places	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

15.) As a planner, is there any one thing that you feel would place you in a better position to contribute to 'big' issues such climate change and regeneration?

.....

.....

.....

▪ **Section 4: Central government, devolution and discretion**

16.) How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about central government and the various devolution-related initiatives? *(Tick one box per row)*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
There is too much central control of planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Central government is sufficiently 'joined-up'	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I trust the DCLG / SEDD / WAG to manage planning <i>(As applicable to you in England, Scotland or Wales)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think HM Treasury should be more involved in planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Devolution has improved central-local relations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Devolution has improved planning outcomes locally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spatial planning frameworks are useful planning tools <i>(RSSs and the Scottish and Welsh national spatial plans)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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17.) How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about central government planning policy statements / guidance? *(Tick one box per row)*

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	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
Central government does not issue enough guidance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guidance is too complex	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guidance provides sufficient procedural information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is hard to keep track of all the guidance issued	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guidance threatens local discretion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guidance addresses the correct issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Front-line planners have too little say in writing guidance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guidance helps maintain important national standards	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I regularly refer to guidance notes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guidance notes help improve the quality of planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

▪ **Section 5: Local government reform, targets and audit**

18.) Which general New Labour reforms of local government have had an impact on you most as a planner? Why?

.....

.....

.....

19.) How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about targets and the auditing of local authority planning services? *(Tick one box per row)*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
Auditing has improved the performance of the service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Auditing has raised the profile of planning in the council	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Auditing has increased the amount of stress for staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Auditing has altered the way people work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Auditing has improved our relations with the public	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Targets should be abolished	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Targets are too obsessed with speed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Targets restrict scope for professional discretion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Targets correctly assess the quality of planning outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Targets place too much emphasis on applicants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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▪ **Section 6: Customers and 'culture change' in planning**

20.) Do you use the term 'customers' in relation to your own work?

Yes       No

If no, is there another term you use in preference? .....

21.) In your opinion, who are the 'customers' of local planning authorities?

.....  
.....

22.) How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about 'customers' of planning and public participation in planning? *(Tick one box per row)*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
The planning service meets the needs of its 'customers'	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
'Customer satisfaction' is important to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The term 'customers' is a useful label in planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is important to strike a balance between 'customers'	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The applicant pays so has a right to a good service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
More public participation is needed to improve planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public participation exercises are useful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In practice, public participation is dominated by NIMBYS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being involved with public participation exercises is easy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
'Front-loading' can save hassle later in the process	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

23.) Are you aware of moves by central government to change the 'culture' of planning?

Yes       No

24.) What do you understand this culture change to involve?

.....  
.....  
.....

25.) On a scale of 1-5, how much do you think there is a need for culture change in the planning profession? *(Please circle the number representing your position)*

**Not very much**      1      2      3      4      5      **Very much**

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### ▪ Section 7: Staffing issues

26.) To what extent are there problems with recruiting planning staff at your authority? *(Please circle the number representing your position. Leave blank if you don't know)*

**No problems at all**    1    2    3    4    5    **Severe problems**

27.) To what extent are there problems with retention of planning staff at your authority? *(Please circle the number representing your position. Leave blank if you don't know)*

**No problems at all**    1    2    3    4    5    **Severe problems**

28.) Are you aware of any increase or decrease in the use of agency staff at your department in the last 5 years?

Increase             No change  Decrease             Don't know

29.) Are you aware of any increase or decrease in the use of external consultancies by your department in the last 5 years?

Increase             No change  Decrease             Don't know

30.) If you are aware of any problems with recruitment or retention, do you think any of the following could help ease those problems? *(Please write 1 next to the factor you think most important, 2 next to the second most important factor and so on. Leave blank any you do not think apply at all)*

- Better promotion prospects                       Better pay                                       Better pension
- More respect for planners                       More personal discretion                       Less red tape
- Other - please specify .....

### ▪ Section 8: About you

31.) In which age group do you fall?

Under 20             20-29             30-39             40-49             50-59             60 or older

32.) What is your gender?

Male                       Female                       Transgendered

33.) How would you describe your ethnic background?

**White:**

White British             White Irish             Other - please specify .....

**Black/Black British:**

Caribbean             African             Other - please specify .....

**Asian/Asian British:**

Indian     Pakistani             Bangladeshi             Other - please specify .....

**Mixed:**

White/Black             White/Asian             Other - please specify .....

**Chinese or Any Other Ethnicity:**

Chinese             Any other background - please specify .....

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▪ **Can you help further?**

Thank you very much for your time completing this questionnaire. If you have any questions or further comments about any of the topics raised, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I am interested in meeting people in person to discuss some of the issues raised in this questionnaire in greater depth. Usually this would involve me coming to visit you and discussing topics such as your views on planning reform, the evolution of the profession and how you react to such change. There are no wrong answers, many people find the experience of discussing their work life quite therapeutic, and you really would be helping with the research.

Are you interested in meeting with me to discuss some of the issues raised in this questionnaire?

- Yes                       No

Additionally, there may be an opportunity to gather a group of planners in London to discuss some of the issues this questionnaire covers in a focus group. Are you interested in participating in such a discussion?

- Yes                       No

If you answered yes to either of these, please fill in your contact details below. Your further help would be greatly appreciated. If you cannot spare the time, thank you again for filling in this questionnaire. This alone is of great use to me. Please note that in the interests of confidentiality, this page will be detached from the rest of the questionnaire on receipt.

Name: .....

Job Title: .....

Employer: .....

Contact Address: .....  
.....  
.....

Contact Telephone: .....

E-mail Address: .....

**Please return all completed questionnaires to:**  
**Ben Clifford**  
**Department of Geography, King's College London, Strand, London, WC2R 2LS**

Tel: 020 7848 1623. Fax: 020 7848 2287. E-mail: benjamin.clifford@kcl.ac.uk

**7.2 Appendix 2: Copy of Articles in *Planning***

Two articles were placed in *Planning*, the newsletter and journal of the RTPI, to raise awareness of the research (and so, hopefully, raise response rates). One article appeared in July to highlight the survey just before the first questionnaires sent out (figure 84, below) and another appeared in September to remind planners to return any outstanding surveys before the final deadline in October (figure 85, below).



**Figure 85 – Article highlighting the research before surveys were sent out (Planning, 2006a)**



**Figure 86 – Brief reminder to planners about returning outstanding surveys (Planning, 2006b)**

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*Ben Clifford, March 2007*

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