

The Challenge: Attracting and Retaining Female Planners in Local Government

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**(and proud Local
Government Planner)**



LGMA

Women in Local Government, Canberra 2008

Multiple hats

- PIA State President
- Chair SEQ DA Forum
- Local Government
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Inquiry into Planning Education & Employment

- 2003/04 PIA conducted a *National Inquiry into Planning Education and Employment*.
- Testing of anecdotal evidence:
 - There was a dire shortage of planning professionals
 - The number of planning graduates was in decline
 - Skills did not necessarily match workplace needs

Warning Bells

Local government planners were under particular pressure:

- High stress levels and low morale
 - Unmanageable workloads
 - Being understaffed
 - Lack of awareness of the seriousness of the issue
 - Ethical dilemmas and concerns about quality being compromised
- But equally there was strong support:
 - From employers wanting to improve
 - For mentoring/supporting professionals and young planners



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Have things changes since 2004?

- The statistics remain remarkably similar:
 - About 12,000 planners in market place
 - 47% in Local Government (30% private & 22% state) –
 - Vacancy rates of 13 – 19%– no real change in supply despite efforts
 - Demand expected to increase by 28% (over 5 – 10 years)
 - Around 46% of profession under 35 years of age
 - 1 in 4 women work part-time compared to 1 in 10 men
 - Around 5% of female professionals over 35 have left planning
 - Around 40% of employers have engaged planning assistants
 - Salaries are growing faster than CPI

Is local government worse off than other sectors?

- Was the most critical shortage in 2004 – unchanged
- Critical shortage exists in most areas – major cities and regional areas
- Longer term shortages exist in rural and regional areas due to the difficulty in attracting/retaining staff
- ‘Sea-change’ communities are badly affected due to volumes of work
- Key problem of professional “leakage” to alternative roles (particularly women)

Why is local government losing planners?

- Volume of work and new &/or complex legislation
- Skills transferrable to non-planning roles
- Planners don't want to work in rural/regional areas
- Demand has pushed salaries beyond local government's reach
- Overseas demand
- Women leaving for work choice/family reasons (not Qld)
- Unacceptable work environments – conflict, ethics, workload, lack of flexibility, work/life balance (particularly women)



So what can local government do?

- Planners nationally tell us that what they want in the workplace is:
 - Reduced workplace conflict and “toxicity”
 - Respect for their professional opinions and advice
 - Flexible conditions and part time work opportunities
 - Stronger internal support –induction, team building, mentoring, training
 - Identifiable career paths and encouragement to progress in local govt
 - Confidential help with ethical issues

How do you become an employer of choice?

- Active support for training and development
- Formal Codes of Conduct
- Clearer planning schemes/strategy/policies
- Recognition of professional status – senior job descriptions requiring CPP status
- DAF leading practice
- eDA
- Avoiding blame



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DA – The Inside View (SA Study, Dec 2007)

- DA resourcing and trends
- Planners occupied around 40% of staff positions in DA teams
- 36% of planner positions fell vacant, but only 15% of support positions
- This means the entire DA planning population turning over every 3 years
- 43% moved to other Councils, 15% went to private practice & 10% to state govt and 22% left the system altogether!
- Vacancies were often filled by staff less experienced than desired
- 20% of vacancies were not filled leading to backlogs
- Payment above award or beyond experience level is commonplace

The Inside View – What needs to Change?

- Improved information for applicants
- Support /tech staff crucial
- Streamlining of minor assessments etc
- Complexity and stakeholder tension
- Cost recovery from the DA process low
- Stabilise the workforce - bonuses, flexibility, salary increases, faster career pathing, greater resources and increase support staff ratios
- Optimise the use of IT as a process management and reporting tool



Qld Case study

- 60% Councils shortage of DA planners
- 49% Councils shortage of Strategic planners
- Skills shortage in Qld worse than 2004 survey due to unprecedented growth, migration from south and number of applications

Attraction and Retention survey 07 showed

- Clear loss of females at 5 and 10 years experience
- 49% with high to very high stress levels (councils and consultancies)
- 44% have considered leaving profession
- Females not leaving in Qld due to have children

What do planners in Qld like and dislike?

Like

- Variety
- Colleagues
- Ability to make a difference



Dislike

- High workload
- Low Salaries
- Level of political interference
- State policy - IPA

Qld Recommendations

21 Recommendations including

- Professional development programs
- Design jobs for a variety of work – DA/Strategic/State/Local
- Retention Strategy targetting planners 21-29 years old – in particular female DA planners
- Stress management program – workload and burnout
- Flexibility, part-time etc

PIA action on the work environment

- Advocating for e-DA including additional commonwealth/state \$\$
- Encouraging elected representative training
- Promoting Codes of Conduct in the workplace
- Providing ethics advice (Ethi-call: St James Ethics Centre)
- Supporting de-politicising of decision making through panels (SA)
- ^ the professional competencies and standing of planners (CPP)
- Raising profile with government, the community and within industry
- National Education committee

PIA support for DA reform and increased supply

- National President chaired DAF for the past 2 years and DAF endorsed as preferred system
- Strongly support the e-DA agenda
- Highlighting SA planning panels as leading practice
- Part of Reform processes in NSW, Qld, SA and Vic
- Providing immigration advice to overseas planners
- Working with Universities to increase places
- Introducing cadetships, traineeships and Cert IV courses

PIA's actions - Improving professional standing

- Increasing the professionalism of the profession
- Improving the profession's commitment to professional development and lifelong learning
- Improving professional standards through the introduction of CPP (mandatory PD and competency assessing)
- Matching skill gaps identified by the Inquiry with appropriate PIA provided or sponsored training programs
- National Education Committee bringing together Planning Educators and Practitioners to review course accreditation and advisory arrangements

For more information please go to:

www.planning.org.au

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