

NZPI ACCREDITATION

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Not all practicing planners are professionally qualified. A planning position is an occupation or position designated as such by an organisation and may come under many different names (e.g. resource consents officer, policy analyst, etc). Organisations decide, using their own criteria, who they employ to fill planning positions.

Consequently, many people in planning positions are not 'professional planners'. A professional planner implies membership of a professional body. The New Zealand Planning Institute (NZPI) is the professional body for planners in New Zealand. Being able to claim professional membership (or eligibility for graduate membership) is often an advantage when applying for a job and means that you are able to claim professional status when giving an opinion to clients and decision-making bodies. It implies a commitment to a code of ethics, service to the profession and continued upskilling in the profession.

The main path to full membership of the NZPI is by completing a programme of education recognised by it (an NZPI accredited programme) and three years of subsequent planning practice. It is important to distinguish between the academic discipline of planning and the NZPI recognised programmes. Academic disciplines and programmes are approved by academic bodies. Thus it is possible for a tertiary institution to legitimately offer a degree in planning that is not recognised as an NZPI accredited planning programme. Accreditation is not an indicator of academic quality, but of acceptance by the

professional body.

The NZPI has a rolling programme of five yearly accreditation reviews to ensure that programmes it accredits have maintained the standards that it has recognised. From time to time the accreditation programme is out of sync with the academic approval of programmes.

In 2008, following a substantive academic review of its undergraduate programmes, Lincoln University's Bachelor of Environmental Management (Policy and Planning) was revamped with the BEM having its planning content strengthened and being renamed a Bachelor of Environmental Management and Planning (BEMP) and with a minor in Professional Planning being introduced. This enables those who want to pursue an academic or research career to do a relevant BEMP with a choice of minors (for instance in parks or transportation) that enables specialisation. Those who are interested in professional practice are expected to take the Professional Planning minor (see Kelly Fisher's article in this issue).

The Lincoln University professional planning programmes were reviewed in October 2008 by an accreditation panel appointed by the NZPI and chaired by Professor Steve Hamnett (Professor of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of South Australia). The panel has made favourable recommendations to the Institute for accreditation.

