



Planning pains? Don't Panic!

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“DO I HAVE TO ANGLICISE MY NAME TO GET A PLANNING JOB IN NEW ZEALAND?”

This is a question put to our professional staff on a number of occasions by students with non-European sounding surnames, usually non-New Zealand born Asian students. The technical response is that you don't have to anglicise your surname because there are strong anti-discrimination laws in New Zealand, but you do have to be eligible for employment and your visa status may be seen as an obstacle by potential employers.

But that students should be raising the question hints at an issue that perhaps should be of concern to the NZPI and New Zealand planning employers generally. A perusal of the list of full members of the NZPI in its most recent (2011) annual report found less than 20 with clearly Asian surnames. This appears to significantly under-represent the New Zealand population mix. There is clearly potential for a research project on the lack of visibility of non-European surnames, but before students start to complain of racism they need to reflect on what employers of planners are seeking.

Communication skills are extremely high on the list – especially professional written communication. A cover letter for an application that shows an adequate comprehension of the position being applied for and how the student's skills fit with the person specifications is important. These letters and the CVs must be free of typographical errors and should be free of

obvious grammatical errors. A poorly laid out or error-ridden CV and cover letter will turn off employers no matter what the ethnicity or native language of the student. English is the key language for planners in New Zealand, but a University degree is no guarantee that your written language is up to the standards that professional organisations desire, nor does a degree guarantee you a job.

There are bound to be some racists in employing positions in New Zealand, just as there are in any country, but New Zealand has a substantial and growing Asian population and Asian connections and it would be surprising if councils and consultancies did not see people who could readily identify with Asian communities, who also have high English language proficiency, as very valuable staff. So, before looking for race as a reason for lack of success on the job market, and rushing to anglicise a surname, students should look at the quality of their written and oral English language skills and ways to improve and demonstrate their skills with language. Having articles published in the *Lincoln Planning Review*, the NZPI's *Planning Quarterly* or even *Caclin* is a good way to improve and demonstrate those skills, and would be infinitely more beneficial than anglicising a surname.