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Abstract:	In the context of change and pressures to refigure formal planning education, the paper draws on Bourdieu's field theory to frame the experience of graduates in initial planning education in the UK. The research situates education in a contested professional context. The findings hold import for the profession given that relevant knowledge is expanding, core knowledge must be retained and instilled early, while training about specific policy or process can be maintained over a longer run. Greater integration and coordination of education and training must be developed if the profession is to maintain quality and integrity, as well as relevance.

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Introduction: education, knowledge and change

This paper discusses planning education and the interplay between planning education and professional practice, particularly from a UK perspective. This follows from recent work exploring knowledge, lifelong learning and CPD in planning (see Maidment and Parker, 2023; Parker and Maidment, 2024). Those contributions made a case for careful efforts to be sustained to ensure that perceived skills gaps between initial planning education and the needs of professional practice are reconciled and kept under review. That agenda invokes a more nuanced understanding of knowledge and its use and calls for a more coherent approach to lifelong learning. Questions about the attention paid to when and what is covered in the design of formal education programmes, and professional training in planning practice are relevant. They are particularly germane in a period where planning has broadened in scope, there is greater pressure to deliver and an erosion of confidence amongst professionals to guard the public interest, and, moreover, to plan progressively (Tasan-Kok and Oranje, 2018; Clifford *et al.*, 2024). Such points provoke thought about *why* and *how*, as well as *what* it is that is being brokered through lifelong learning. Taken together these points provide impetus for greater understanding and collaboration between accrediting bodies such as the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), university planning schools and employers and particularly concerning ongoing lifelong learning.

In this paper, and given the above, we examine how the fields of planning practice and planning education inform and shape each other, even though there is observable *hysteresis* or disconnect (Graham, 2020). This contribution deepens previous work on planning education and practice inter-relations by drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's work on field theory. This provides a conceptual frame from which to analyse the tensions apparent between some practitioners and employers, and some planning schools, over curriculum, coverage and preparedness for the professional world (see also, Frank, 2006). This, as we explain, is set in a long-run context of professional flux where the roles and scope of planning is expanding, while resources and the ability to educate and train planners are stretched.

What is actually understood as the profession and professional practice are also important pillars here, as are the processes and dynamics of socialisation of a professional planner. Higgs (2013) argues that, for the professions, the goals and expected outcomes of (field) socialisation are at stake, and that *"the goal of professional socialisation is to develop and shape capable and accountable members who contribute constructively to the services provided to society"* (Higgs, 2013, 83).

As we go on to discuss, this situation can cause tension over *what* priorities are pursued and *how* these are realised in formal planning education. We provide an empirical base and generate an agenda to explore early career planner experience. Data derived from planning graduates is discussed reflecting on their experience both at university and in the professional world. Moreover, how the coverage of the subject in the terms discussed is considered and linked to our theoretical framing i.e. how their experience can be understood by reference to conflicts over the recognition of legitimate knowledge and skills or educational capital is explored.

The overall contribution made here is to highlight how knowledge imparted during a university programme in planning is recognised and used during early years as a professional planner. We apply social theory to this question in a novel way and highlight tensions and gaps in coverage and understanding. This helps place education into the wider context of pressures faced by key actors in the field. While there are limits to the research presented here, it represents a conceptual and empirical insight on the need for reflexive and ongoing knowledge development across key actors in planning. In our view this is made even more important where change, challenge and fragmentation is manifest in the politics and practice of planning.

Applying Bourdieusian field theory to planning education

The paper takes as its cue an ongoing debate over the scope, timing and design of planning education which has persisted for decades, as Frank (2006, 16) puts it:

> "*ever since a decline in the support of planning in the late 1970s, planners and planning academics are under considerable pressure to reflect on their profession, its achievements, and their educational structures to demarcate and justify the discipline and profession, as well as contemplate its position with respect to societal needs and ideas*".

This ongoing reflection is understandable and surfaces most obviously in discussions between accredited planning schools, employers and accrediting institutions (such as the RTPI - as a body attempting to intermediate the planning practice and planning education fields). Whilst such debates have recurred over time, a significant shortage of planners (RTPI, 2023), the increased complexity of planning practice, along with the initiation of a review of the RTPI's education policy in 2021, has produced a renewed tension in the UK context.

In view of the shortage of trained planners in the UK, a recent interjection from a practicing planner in English local government posited that "*novice town planners will have to hit the ground running to make a meaningful impact – which poses a challenge…the majority of UK university planning courses focus on theory rather than the actual practice of town planning"* (Ustic, 2024, p.22). This view can be seen as aligning with the rather simplistic idea of 'oven readiness'; a commonly heard metaphor applied to highlight the extent to which graduate planners should already hold knowledge of how the 'planning system' operates. That is the student should be ready to go into the 'oven' of planning practice (Croft, *et al*., 2022; Peel and Frank, 2008). Tropes such as better preparing students for 'practice' forms an ongoing feature of debates over the form and knowledge in and of planning (Tasan-Kok and Oranje, 2018; Davoudi and Pendlebury, 2010; Brown *et al*., 2003; Rodriguez-Bachiller, 1991; Batty, 1984).

However, being 'practice ready' requires a much greater range of knowledges and skills than ever before. The RTPI's own *New Vision* (2001) heralded the recasting of planning as 'spatial'; and pointed towards recognition of multiple issues and objects beyond narrow land-use planning. Subsequently UK planning practice has been on a path to ever greater complexity and widening of scope, from links to health, active travel, biodiversity and overt consideration of development viability. Such a broadening has exacerbated tensions over what the emphasis and coverage of initial planning education (IPE) should involve have surfaced numerous times, while the increasing range of topics potentially in scope for planning education and professional competency being recognised since at least the 1980s (Frank, 2019). This situation is compounded by the standard length of a full-time UK Masters degree, of the type

usually required to pursue Chartered membership of the RTPI, which was reduced from two years to one in the mid-2000s. Consequently, the knotty question of what to cover and the possible squeezing, or indeed inflating, of the 'layer-cake', of planning education (Batty, 1984) has been reflected in several reviews of UK planning education.

Set against this backdrop, the following statement made by the RTPI, about the recent review of its educational policy, positions future change in approach:

> "*the review concentrated on the Institute's degree accreditation procedures and guidance; whether it remains fit-for-purpose. This is because the context for initial planning education, the profession at large and the Institute has changed significantly since 2003 when the current principles of accreditation were adopted. We wish to retain the strong principles for initial planning education of academic quality and preparing graduates for planning practice, while supporting expansion of course delivery and numbers of students studying, and completing, a planning degree".* (RTPI, Education Policy Review, no date)

It is notable that the final sentence rather unproblematically pairs the retention of academic quality with preparing students for practice. This contrasts with tensions highlighted above and jars somewhat with the literature about planning pedagogy and so too with evidence of young planners' experience. Internationally, the review of the experiences of young planners by Tasan-Kok and Oranje (2018) highlights a gap between practice and education; centring on normative aims of the profession and tensions in educating planners to be 'public interest guardians'. They also point to instances where education had given planners confidence to try and push *"the boundaries of bureaucracy, institutional limitations, informalities, and political and economic pressures*" (Tasan-Kok and Oranje, 2018, 297). This brings into view questions of who, and on what basis, the planning field is maintained and defined even before considering the form and content of planning education.

Tensions and debate about purpose, scope and accessibility of planning education are, in general terms, healthy. However, in order to sustain education effectively and usefully, a clear understanding of the stakes and the roles of key actors is needed. This includes consideration of the 'pipeline' of trained planners i.e. the question of numbers entering the profession, and time taken to qualify. Moreover, the

attractiveness of the profession and related programmes of study are also highly relevant. This context of the politics of education and of demarcation of relevant knowledge (and of field boundaries), is where theory can assist in providing insight. This involves consideration of why the debate is recurrent, and secondly how to ensure that the fields of planning practice and planning education are functionally effective, progressive and mutually understood.

Contributions regarding planning skills and knowledge over the past twenty years have either been voiced explicitly about education, or have more indirectly touched on that topic when considering planners' roles. Frank (2006) provides a detailed bibliographic review of education in the period prior to 2005, identifying themes ranging from curriculum content to pedagogy and programme accreditation to differences across international planning education. More recently professional competency and education (Frank, 2019) and consideration of new policy areas, including green infrastructure inclusion and use of technology has emerged (Frank *et al*., 2021; Minner *et al.,* 2019). Notably, Stubbs and Keeping (2002) discuss questions of employability, while Sartorio and Thomas (2022) consider space for radical planning, and questions have also been asked by Phelps and Valler (2024) about the erosion of 'imagination' in planning; pointing to issues of professional confidence and lack of space to envision (see, also Dobson and Parker, 2024 on time to deliberate in planning practice). Hickman and Sturzaker (2022) discuss how a diverse profession responds to questions of ethical practice, and issues of 'decolonising' planning education have also been aired (Weseley and Allen, 2019). These calls to add, or reassert such matters, in parallel with a diversification of professional scope, further adds to pressure on initial education providers.

Indeed, the recognition of a diversifying planning field has been one driver for the creation of specialist degrees in planning (see Davoudi and Pendlebury, 2010) which sit alongside core or 'spatial' planning programmes. Commentaries on planning education have recognised core and elective distinctions and flexibility across programmes of study, as well as how "planning curricula continue to respond to the challenges and demands posed by neoliberal market economies" (Galland and Othengrafen, 2019, 211). Close (2023) has contributed to the debate by bringing into view the voices of professional planners working in organisations outside of the

traditional public sector-private sector binary, stressing the generic or core skills valued by planners in such settings. This also points to how planners may go on to specialise in a diverse range of employment, covering many distinct aspects of practice (Leigh, *et al*., 2019; Parker and Street, 2021).

In parallel to the planning education literature, several reports and reviews of skills and knowledge requirements for planners have been published over the past 25 years (see Parker and Street, 2021, 23), and it is striking how much emphasis has been placed on generic and soft skills. Indeed, in the context of a widening and shifting of planning activity, such planning skills and knowledge were recognised by the RTPI's *New Vision* review of 2001 (see Brown *et al*., 2003; RTPI, 2001), where multi-disciplinary and collaborative skills would be required. Moreover, that flexibility in dealing with changing circumstances was necessary. In foregrounding the dynamics of professional practice and planning education, the *New Vision* report had a starting point which seems to reflect a remarkably similar context to that seen in the 2020s, wherein *"…the competitive context of higher education, organisational change within universities, the diminishing prestige of planning, the cost of planning education with its relatively low numbers of students, the multiple pressures on departments and their staff, and more, are all taken into account*" (Boyle, 2003, 356).

While this is only a partial review of a wide accumulation of outputs discussing planning education, it highlights how competing issues and coverage vie for position in the debate and can both provoke more pressure on universities to cover an expanding range of content material, and for others to ask for different formulations to be offered. There is little point in thinking there is an ideal template to follow. However, effective, joined-up processes for enabling education across and between institutional settings, and reflection on when and how this is achieved, is clearly important.

In prior contributions to the planning education debate greater communication, partnership and career-long consideration of planning education needs and priorities have been argued for (Maidment and Parker, 2023; Parker and Maidment, 2024). While planning education has its own literature, few, if any, have considered in depth the tensions apparent about what to cover and why, and, moreover, tried to diagnose the causes of that tension. There are a series of drivers of change set across the

political environment, institutional policy and prioritisation, emergent new policy areas, and new technologies, collectively part of a 'multi-change environment' for planning (Parker *et al*., 2018). Together these either add to Batty's (1984) 'layer-cake' or increase the depth of the existing 'layers'. Few things seem to be seen as redundant and, even if they are omitted, they are more than replaced by new material, and whether according to Batty, it is replacement / new theory, emphasis on particular aspects of design or process or policy coverage. It is notable that, while setting up a basis for understanding of educational change, the Batty model lacks a temporal dimension, i.e. *when* coverage should be achieved, or consideration of *who* is best placed to deliver different elements or layers of planning education. There is also little offered on questions of political pressure and ideological monotheism, as Galland and Othengrafen (2019) highlight.

So, the main questions pursued here concern the applicability of knowledge as discerned by graduates, and secondly, reconciliation of coverage with professional educators and other actors in the practice field. This includes pressures faced by employers and providers and provokes consideration of how planning education should be kept under constant review across the span of professional learning, confronting issues of depth, span and types of knowledge (Parker and Street, 2021, 21), as well as pressure to conform to particular ideological norms. Together such factors reinforce the idea that certain principles need to be attended to in ongoing considerations of planning education across a career span.

Planning as a field of practice

To frame the questions posed, we draw explicitly on the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. His ideas have been gaining greater recognition in the planning discipline, with use of his social theory informing consideration of the structure–agency dynamics of social fields and the cultures and dispositions that sustain them in planning (see Gunder and Hillier, 2016; Mace, 2016; Dobson and Parker, 2024). Shin (2013, 268) argues that Bourdieu's work can 'help planners strategically participate in urban planning and politics' and, more widely, Bourdieu's ideas have been applied to education and other professions (see Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Higgs, 2013; Reay, 2019; Graham, 2020).

In particular the concepts of *field* and *hysteresis* are drawn upon here to analyse the underlying conceptual dynamics of ongoing debates over the shape, form and content of planning education set in its socio-political context. This is particularly germane given that a key thread of Bourdieu's work concerned how people learn and normalise behaviour through what he termed 'diffuse education'; that is wider learning beyond formal education (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) and how this socialises individuals (Nash, 2003). Such work earned him the label the 'sociologist of education' (Dalal, 2016) and holds potential to highlight how planners come to develop competencies over time. This includes how particular knowledges and skills are deemed important.

It is necessary to briefly explain the concepts that we apply here. We begin with the structuring concept of *Field*. Bourdieu views social fields as constructs that sustain a set of beliefs that, in turn, rationalise rules of behaviour. We note that other parallel labels include 'epistemic communities', often used to demarcate groups who maintain common norms and practices (see Davoudi, 2015). Each field will have its own 'logic of practice' and features dominant agents and institutions which have considerable power to shape behaviour within them. Actions or outcomes hold value in the field; some actors will act to preserve pre-existing aspects of field practice and others to evolve it. Indeed, within those dynamics, what is considered legitimate forms "an unending game, and this always has the potential for change at any time" (Thomson, 2012, 76). Actors jostle to maximise their positions and have "a particular point of view on proceedings based on their positions…through time and experience" (Maton, 2012, 53).

Bourdieu's theory raises questions over who determines the rules and on what basis, and how the consequences of such interplays are valued. This is shaped by dimensions of human, temporal and financial resources. Such dynamics also set up a questioning of the knowledge, skills and education valued in service of the field, and which reflect (shifting) priorities of dominant actors, and moreover the purpose of planning itself. Associated to the idea of the field are cultures and practices, with *Doxa* highlighting Bourdieu's concern that existing rules are mediated by the day-to-day experiences of established practices which form "a set of fundamental beliefs" (Bourdieu, 2000, 16). Such dominance can obscure what is implicit and taken for granted. Together these highlight a need for reflection and 'double-loop' learning to be

sustained, where the identification and understanding of causation, along with action to address a problem is enabled (see Parker and Maidment, 2024, 255; Schmidt-Thomé and Mäntysalo, 2014; Argyris and Schön, 1978; Higgs, 2013).

We can discern that social fields change and the Bourdieuian idea of *hysteresis* is deployed to help explain how and why conflicts are expressed and resolved. Indeed, hysteresis represents a change or disruption between actors in the field. Essential features of hysteresis are recognisable where "dispositions [are] out of line with the field and with the 'collective expectations' which are constitutive of normality" (Bourdieu, 2000, 160). When hysteresis occurs, new opportunities are potentially created. However, there is a high level of risk associated with hysteresis, since field struggles can take place in the context of an unknown future. The outcomes of field change can therefore be loss of position, due to "the revaluation of symbolic capitals and sources of legitimacy" (Hardy, 2012, 144). As Graham (2020) explains, the idea helps to explain behaviour in times of disruption. This feature of Bourdieu's thinking is relevant to the ongoing debates over planning education and consequential struggles to define boundaries, standards and priorities across the planning education and practice fields. Widin (2010), discusses *illusio* in terms of how different groups orient themselves to particular interests and perform roles in maintaining and shaping the (planning) field. The concept draws attention to where and how dominant actors can regulate field conditions as a means of normalising behaviours. Accordingly dominant individuals or groups may obscure their true interests using a variety of tactics to pursue change or to defend existing regularities.

When applying Bourdieu's conceptualisation to the relationship between planning education and planning practice, education is both a source and part of the processes that Bourdieu's work identifies as contributing to the 'shape' or logic of the planning practice field. The ongoing *hysteresis* described above raises the question of whether planning practice and planning education are one contiguous field or two separate fields. We argue that seeing them as separate fields explains how each develop their own *doxa*, without reference to each other, belying their interdependencies. As such, given the different cultures and evident dissonance we can safely regard them as overlapping fields.

Formal planning education and Bourdieu

When bringing this theoretical perspective to bear on planning education, the planning practice field shows considerable attenuation of scope; such that the core may remain more or less durable, but the range of technical and bureaucratic tasks or processes continues to alter. In common with other fields, the field of planning practice is a contested one; made more complicated and conflict-prone because of multiple sources of change and other external pressures which act to destabilise norms or render them contingent. For example, the expansion of roles and tasks for planners is attendant on new knowledge being required. This can act to challenge what is previously considered legitimate or relevant; acting to stretch and reshape the field and underpin arguments over priorities.

The dynamics of the planning field rest on several bases beyond substantive questions of relevance, and which are largely pragmatic or practically expedient. These are reduced here to *time, priority,* and *application*. In straightforward terms, how long study is required, what is covered and the definitional scope of what the learning is *for* (i.e. what is considered to be 'planning' as practiced and what is considered necessary to be a professional planner). Added to this are other agendas pursued by individual actors, for example membership growth on the part of professional accrediting bodies, as exemplified in the RTPI education review quote set out above.

In this situation tensions between what some practitioners want of graduates and those knowledges, skills and attitudes deemed more important by pedagogic instructors in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) or 'planning schools' are recognisable. Those matters have become recurrent debate points, as already indicated. This includes challenges to core knowledges as extra skills and knowledges become prominent and that may consequently squeeze out other coverage. Furthermore, pressure to recognise deemed relevant content and reconcile this with extant resources become ever more challenging.

To pursue our analysis, we reflect on how the above are stabilised by accreditation. In this assessment, via the RTPI, all 'planning school' HEIs enjoying RTPI accreditation are required to address the same 'Initial Learning Outcomes' (see Maidment and Parker, 2023; RTPI, 2012/2017), reflecting a loose attempt to maintain the basis for

field entry (both for HEIs and for students to gain membership of the RTPI) and via lifelong learning. This is ostensibly to ensure that members of the professional field are competent and adopt appropriate dispositions. While this provides an attempt at defining the field, Figure 1 indicates how different actors may want different things from planning education and hold different interest positions. For instance, some employers may want to see a quicker pipeline, different skills or maintain a narrow view of the planner (perhaps to suit their particular activity range). Given there are many different roles and tasks for planners now, and these are performed across sectors, employers cannot be viewed as an homogeneous group.

Figure 1: The actor-field constellation of planning education
[about here]

Descriptive note: figures shows indicative interest and pressure across: employers, accrediting bodies, education providers and students in relation to planning education.

Flexibility happens to aid HEIs in different locations which 'compete' for students, and offer slightly different curriculums. These embody distinctive offerings, based around a similar core of agreed planning 'competencies' and learning outcomes. However, as part of the flexibilisation of offer in terms of coverage, it is acknowledged that learning is also stretched. Indeed, learning clearly does not cease at the point at which initial planning education is completed. Instead, the concept of lifelong learning was explicitly recognised after the 2001 New Vision report. This is supposedly effected by the maintenance of relevant training via continuing professional development (CPD), as well as 'on the job' training.

While we do not intend to reopen discussions and distinctions across labels of education, training, knowledge and skills here, it is germane to note that *what* is covered and *when* it is covered and absorbed remains a critical point of contestation. At the heart of this issue lie questions of what is deemed important enough for HEIs to cover at the IPE stage and what is to be covered under CPD / lifelong learning. Secondly, how do the outcomes of both elements reflect the interests of actors within the field and therefore what coverage is argued for. This latter point is important as instability can become problematic. As per Figure 1, this is either, due to i.

attractiveness (from a student perspective), ii. *quality* (from the viewpoint of accrediting bodies) or, iii. deemed *relevance* in the field (as discerned by employers). For the HEIs they are likely to feel pressure to reconcile all three.

Different groups act to shape the planning practice field, and hold potentially divergent interests in planning education; governmental action pays a part in shaping legal and other policy parameters, but within the practice field there are individual planners and firms who bring different views and knowledges into the field along with tactical behaviours. In Bourdieusian terms these are aspects of *illusio*, or strategising, which may present a challenge to field conditions. Institutions such as the RTPI attempt to balance the priorities and reify aspects of planning education field conditions through the learning requirements, accreditation practices and lifelong learning obligations they manage. The planning schools will need to be mindful of their own institutional requirements and attempt to reconcile those pressures, along with student expectations, and those of the accrediting bodies and employers in the planning practice field.

This review and theoretical frame helps in setting up a series of questions about the process, the drivers and basis of conflict and strategising (i.e. hysteresis / illusio) in the planning practice and education fields and external change and extensification of planning. It also informs the empirical focus on early career planners' reflections below, about their planning education and practice.

Methods

The primary research was designed to draw out data about student experience in initial planning education and their early career, and in the light of our concern to understand the relevance and timing of education in a situation of field divergence (Bathmaker, 2015). The data collection was conducted by facilitating three focus groups with early career planners, with each lasting ninety minutes, striking a balance between in-depth exploration and maintaining participant engagement. The focus group approach was adopted for the research given the ability to reflect in depth on matters of mutual relevance (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2014; Cameron, 2005).

The participants were recruited from past cohorts of the University of Reading 180-credit masters level RTPI-accredited post-graduate planning programme in Spatial Planning and Development (see Figure 2). The participants had to be at least one-year post-graduation and a maximum of 5 years in relevant employment in planning practice. The participants were evenly split across the private sector and the public sector with a majority being female graduates. This gave a balanced sample in terms of workplace, and reflects the overall profile of graduates from the programme.

While carefully considered, the approach has several limitations which we wish to acknowledge. Firstly, we used a relatively small sample and we derived this from postgraduate students, which may differ from undergraduate experience due to the period of study involved. The third aspect is that the sample is derived from one HEI and one programme; although deliberately so, to ensure commonality of experience and that the integrity of the sample could be preserved. These limits do however leave scope for further research with different cohorts from other planning schools, and from undergraduates, as useful additions to knowledge in this area of study.

Figure 2: University of reading MSc Spatial Planning and Development programme design (until academic year 2024-25)
[about here]

Descriptive note: blocks are modules with titles and numbers in brackets indicate module credit weighting

The programme is fully accredited as a ‘combined’ degree by the RTPI and ‘development’ is the recognised specialism. The modules total the set level of 180 credits of study, and the MSc was designed to run as either a one-year full-time or two-year part-time programme.

The theoretical frame and context that we have set out provides a base from which a series of questions were generated and this centred on how can HEIs reconcile *relevance*, *breadth and depth with reasonable student workload / time constraints*. This is particularly relevant in an environment where practice is diverse and unlikely

to be comprehensively studied, but where high level ideas and principles can be learned within a concentrated learning period (i.e. during initial planning education) and are unlikely to be delivered and absorbed via CPD / in later learning.

In the light of some years post-graduation in relevant practice the focus groups were facilitated to reflect on questions of purpose, utility of programme content, different elements of education, and the participant's view, in hindsight, of formal planning education. We also wanted to gain a better understanding of *influences* on their view of what is important or relevant *knowledge a*nd their experience of CPD with questions covering: the relationship between experiences of studying and working; the skills/knowledges derived from the programme; institutional influences and personal practice reflections.

Findings

Firstly, in considering the purpose and value of planning education, *e*xploring their education with early career professionals gave an insight into how the early professional years had progressed and what knowledge and skills they relied upon. Several key themes were explored, beginning with their view of initial planning education *purpose* and then overall reflections. Where a specific purpose for choosing the Programme was expressed, this centred on an instrumental need for an RTPI-accredited postgraduate degree to become a chartered planner (R7, R8, R9). This came with a corresponding expectation that the Programme would prepare them to become a planner. Although this varied from instilling them with the basics of what planning is and how it functions (R9), to filling in some of the contextual background for day-to-day practice (R8). Added to this, some participants noted the attraction of the Programme a being accredited by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) as well as the RTPI.

We also asked participants about how they perceived the value of undertaking the course of initial planning education. Participants clearly saw value in the programme content and its relevance, seeing applicability of skills and knowledges developed through their academic studies to their day-to-day work. A range of knowledges were identified, which became relevant at different points in time and across both public and private sector roles:

> *"...you learn the process and the transactional side in post; what we were given was the tools to be the sort of deeper thinkers in the planning system [...] anyone can go in and learn to do planning...But we've got the ability to sort of put that into a much deeper context. Which I find is very useful on the policy side"* (R1)

> *"when I was doing the course I was really aware of how applicable everything that we were learning was to everything that I was doing in my job… And I was learning about stuff on the course, I was applying at work like the next day...what I was doing at work was always getting more challenging the further through the course that I was getting...I guess the course was helping me keep up with that"* (R5)

> *"the value in the degree is that it gives you a foundation for going forward. You know, it can't and to an extent probably shouldn't, teach you everything. The core should be designed in a way to make you think about things..."* (R4)

In terms of the timing of knowledge and relevance there were contrasting perceptions of the value of the Programme. This stemmed from the timing of when the knowledge became relevant, with participants in consultancy making use of the knowledge almost immediately, whilst two other participants noted how this had become directly relevant to their work one or two years later:

> *"I can see how it doesn't necessarily relate directly to my specific job today, but if I was a manager, a director of a Council...then I can see that that becomes more and more important and understanding those different dynamics and how to politically manoeuvre yourself within that system"* (R8)

The topic of development viability provides a specific example of this:

> *"We didn't have much appreciation for where [viability] might come up at work, but…we kind of sell it now as part of our services. And so I'm really glad that I know what viability is"* (R1)

> *"I'm really glad that I know what viability is and how to understand a report when it comes through on whether a scheme is viable,* [and] *feed that information back to clients, that kind of thing which I would have no experience in if it wasn't for that"* (R3)

> *"I found a real challenge to get my teeth into the viability one. And then, lo and behold, this year I have been working on local plan viability. So, actually very grateful that I did that"* (R6)

This issue also highlights the question of how closely a planning education should follow, or even prefigure contemporary developments in planning practice, with strategic planning being a case in point:

> *"…things like the cyclical nature of planning, I suppose, and how things come back around again like the, you know, strategic planning and all that sort of thing, quite a hot topic"* (R6)

> *"the stuff we did on strategic planning and the history of strategic regional planning...now that we're in a position where people are talking about that again I feel very much more armed with a depth of knowledge that I wouldn't have had otherwise"* (R1)

Participants also commented on other specific topics, for example the usefulness of teaching planning law (R9), albeit with varying views on its direct practicability (R8, R9). A topic given particular emphasis was the value of a grounding in urban design and site planning (R7, R6, R5), with the normative nature of this being highlighted in relation to a lack of urban design skills and capacity in the public sector (R7; R8):

> *"Happier, healthier, socially supportive, which is…one of our purposes, isn't it? Then how do we influence that? And what does the course do to help us think about influencing that or think about that as being our role when we get out to, particularly commercial environments"* (R7)

Continuing from the theme of knowledge relevance, the relationship between teaching theory and day-to-day practice is also worth consideration. This related to the importance of organisational and institutional context and how participants' organisational settings and role perceptions coloured their view of the programme. Participants highlighted both the direct applicability of theory, and its indirect value compared to other skills, where participants did not perceive its utility until later:

> *"working in consultancy whilst I was doing the masters was eye opening because I could sort of see where that theory was actually applied a bit in practice"* (R3)

> *"mine was probably theory, remembering that because it was a hard topic. But I think it's the one I felt that it's more like I learned something that way. It actually applied to my job. That's probably yeah, the main thing because*

> *I'll say it felt like I learned something from the history that I think 'oh, this is where we're going to go'"* (R2)

Another participant was emphatic on the relevance of planning theory to being ethical in their day-to-day practice (R8). Relatedly, another participant expressed a normative purpose for the Programme beyond their own instrumental reasoning for choosing it:

> *"… I actually think it should be front and centre of everything you're drilling into the students; that this is a force for good and that you know you can influence that…I see a lot of people now in the private sector and I think you probably did start off thinking you were going to create these really nice places for everyone to live. But you're in a commercial environment and nobody's talking about it and nobody's really prioritising it… But actually, most planners really care about places. So, it's maybe just really drilling into them that whatever environment you're in, you can still have a voice…"* (R7)

In contrast, other participants cautioned about the limited scope of day-to-day practice (R1), with one strongly expressing how minimal they felt their role was in the context of the wider development process (R9).

Another participant described the completion of the programme as a key turning point in terms of being trusted, for example, to meet clients independently (R3), whilst another, working in the public sector noted that the programme gave them a better understanding of how the planning system might evolve in the future (R2). A further contextual dimension was added by a participant who highlighted the differences, between organisational cultures, showing how the same fundamental principles of planning are given differing levels of importance depending on the employment setting:

> *" ...the culture comes from the top and people and those organisations, they vary drastically in terms of some places where there's a clear 'we want to do good planning'. You know ''let's deliver good outcomes' and then there's other places that are very much [not]...some places do bend over backwards to engage with the public before submitting an application and other places are just 'we'll do the minimum necessary' and get the application in"* (R1)

The participants then discussed the relevance of CPD offered and, building on the relationship between education and practice, CPD was seen as useful but, at times,

the participants thought it too limited or not challenging enough. A range of organisations were named when influences on thinking and ongoing learning was prompted, including the District Councils Network (R6), Planning Advisory Service (R1; R9) and the Town & Country Planning Association (R5; R7; R8), with the latter seen anecdotally as providing more relevant activities (R4; R1). In contrast, the RTPI's own training offer was perceived by multiple participants (R4; R7; R8) as somewhat 'idealised' and disconnected with the reality of day-to-day planning practice:

> *"I think that the stuff that the RTPI offer-up is a lot more, I want to say, simplistic…I'd say more idealised maybe... a lot more broad-ranging, which obviously once again they're trying to, you know, speak to a very large audience"* (R4)

The RTPI were perceived to have a relaxed approach to CPD compared to the RICS (R4), reflecting that participants and their colleagues often accessed materials from other organisations, including internal information and training from peers (R4; R8):

> *"…the direction I get from my managers…is that CPD could be anything from researching something related to a case you're on, to reading the planning resource magazine, looking at DCP to doing a course"* (R8)

A further participant gave the example of the Institute's training on development viability as being too 'simplistic' (R6), illustrating the range of knowledge depth that may be present across the profession. One participant identified obligations to attend CPD events organised by clients, in order to maintain good relationships (R8), whilst another participant noted their use of LinkedIn to keep up with planning debates. This illustrates the range of sources deemed by practitioners to hold relevant planning knowledge but also opens-up a question around quality and prioritisation of inputs.

In addition to discussing how the programme had developed planning-specific knowledges and skills, participants also highlighted how the programme had helped develop soft skills, including confident attitudes (R4; R5; R6) and confidence in relation to raising ethical issues:

> *"…you come away proud that you've done it. It was really hard and you got to the other side and then applying it at work and feeling more*

> *confident about it…to go forward. In hindsight I don't know whether I'd be where I am if I hadn't done the course"* (R5)

> *"I think it gave me the confidence to actually go to my manager and say, look; got a few queries about this and I'm not feeling quite comfortable about this, can we discuss this please?"* (R6)

Participants working in both sectors (e.g. R4; R6), reflected on the significant role of research and background work in their daily practice, echoed in a similar point about simulating real world pressure via the use of presentations as a form of assessment:

> *"…making people do presentations...that's a really key skill because I think that gets a bit lost nowadays with us working from home so much, some of my colleagues that are more junior, when you say you've got to do something in person they kind of go, 'oh God'; they just get really worried".* (R6)

> *"I think some people were probably quite daunted by the amount of information that you were expecting people to take on. But that is exactly what it's like at work"* (R4)

A discussion of the relationship between group work in an academic setting, particularly some of the perennial issues around tensions and uneven contributions, reflected that it tended to actually reflect the professional environment:

> *"…when I'm putting together a planning application for example, I've got to then you know, liaise with transport highways, you know, pull everybody together, look at all of their reports etc…I've had consultants say the clients are not being nice to me. And then, you know, you've got to try and be that peacemaker…It's definitely something that is a skill that sets you up"* (R4)

Offering a different perspective, one participant noted the social connections they made with a more diverse range of people than they might typically have interacted with (R6).

Reflecting on the overall scope of the programme, participants acknowledged the 'impossibility' of achieving total coverage of planning in a one-year programme of study, with one commenting:

> *"… I don't think there's anything that that stands out that it shouldn't have been in there… So the units I found particularly hard, because it was very*

> *maths-based, I knew wasn't relevant for me because that's not where my brain kind of strengths are. But I know that they would have been really useful for people that wanted to get into the more commercial side of planning"* (R7)

Participants noted positively that the programme had covered elements that they were unlikely to return to in their practice or through CPD (R8; R9). One noted the parallels between IPE and the RTPI's Assessment of Professional Competence, feeling that passing this was likely to increase the value they placed on having completed the programme (R8). Conversely, they perceived possible gaps in the IPE programme which were partly of scope, such as differences between planning in the devolved nations, whilst other gaps were specialist; such as attention to GIS skills and technical aspects such as Local Plan proposals maps.

Together, these show a number of themes of timing, depth, coverage, confidence, post-qualification training and diversity of roles and tasks in planning. Aspects such as those expressed above invite reconsideration about how graduates can be considered 'practice-ready'; a readiness that is less directly about knowledges and more about the skills and attitudes needed to *adapt* to the workplace. We now reflect on the empirical findings in light of the review and theoretical frame.

Discussion and Conclusion

What our application of theory to the dynamics of planning education helps with directly is to examine the experiences and views from recent graduates. The theoretical frame set out the context of planning practice and planning education as one that is contested, changing and diversifying. Bourdieu's work helps explain the tensions over education content, form and timing and puts into perspective the constraints and pressures faced in the numerous roles and workplaces found across (UK) planning practice. The findings drawn from the graduates, as individuals operating in this context, indicate that practice is varied, knowledges may be applied immediately or later and that many forms of CPD provision is available, although variable in quality and type, with apparently little compunction to cover particular skills and knowledges after graduation.

The graduates see value in theory and analytical capability and recognise the limits over possible coverage of 'practice' in the IPE stage of career development. What this tells us is that emphasising practice coverage at IPE stage may be useful but must avoid replacing other coverage. Instead, equal attention to type, quality and timing of CPD needs to be brought into view, in order to tackle the dual challenges of quantum and mutability of relevant knowledge. This approach would also help to stabilise the interdependent planning practice and planning education fields and go some way to addressing ongoing hysteresis. Perhaps ironically, learning about and developing theoretical understanding in professionals helps objectivise and comprehend such tensions.

The wider literature concerning professions clearly argues for critical perspectives and, by association, theory that helps understand and question practice norms. In the context of reflexive practitioners needing to be theoretically aware, Higgs reminds us of some basic considerations for a professional working in the public interest, notably that this requires critical faculties, alongside a strong knowledge base:

> *"Professionals are expected to use their professional judgement and decision-making abilities against an up-to-date knowledge base in this critical-practice approach...being critical means adopting a critical perspective to the status quo. This means that working with status quo knowledge and practices in an unquestioning manner is not appropriate or professional"* (Higgs, 2013, 84).

There are some greater issues still to be debated fully, and which touch and concern the above. Some of these have been aired by Hickman and Sturzaker (2022), which confront ethical practice and also the space to challenge and consider radical planning futures (cf. Sartorio and Thomas, 2022), as well as planners being 'imaginative' (Phelps and Valler, 2024). To ensure that such attributes and elements are present, two principles appear useful; firstly, learning foundational material early, which enables the professionalism that Higgs (2013) cites to flourish. And second, that material best delivered in HEIs should be the basis for initial planning education. This suggests a need for greater recognition and organisation of further skills and knowledge development, as well as top-up activity across all elements or layers of education post-qualification.

The RTPI's view, set out earlier, is that several aims are relevant when thinking about planning education, namely the *principles* for initial planning education and *academic quality,* alongside a need to *prepare graduates for planning practice* (these are then linked, rather uncomfortably, to other aims i.e. supporting *expansion* of course delivery and *increasing numbers* of students studying, and completing, a planning degree).

Our discussion focusses on the questions of principles, quality and preparation and this helps focus on the basis or foundational aspects of planning education that help shape the professional and instil some more enduring understandings that, in reality, form a core of the planning field. There are other interested parties who need to be actively considered too. The pressures that managers in practice face ripple out to HEIs, who are themselves attempting to offer relevant, attractive programmes of study within the constraints of the commercialised, if not neo-liberalised, university sector operating in a time of knowledge capitalism (see Lynch, 2006; Feldman and Sandoval, 2018; Rustin, 2016).

Recognition of a shortage of planners in the UK is a significant opportunity for more coalescence of purpose and agreed principles. Yet, in the context of the fragmentation of planning into public and private components we may ask whether the contrasts between the role of each is sufficiently captured in Bourdieu's consideration of the struggles between different actors within the field? Our theorisation of the fields of planning education and practice highlights themes of tension and fragmentation and raises questions about whether there is a single or stable planning 'practice' and how can we better stabilise the overlapping goals of the practice field and the education fields. Clearly, the role of intermediary or stabilising forces is critical in preventing further fragmentation. This prompts a need for effective communication, amongst the actors highlighted in Figure 1, to engage with the practical realities of change, and of diversity and timing of education, and in terms of the relevance and application of evolving knowledges and skills.

Planning education is challenged by multiple pressures and, without careful stewardship and consideration of the balance of what to cover, how, by whom and when, both the planning practice and education fields can become unstable. Bourdieu helps us anticipate that field resistance and challenge is important - as is stability.

What he cannot advise about is the need for those with a stake in effective planning education to accept, both, imperfection, but also difference and 'distributed' learning across the whole career span. In this sense the paper highlights a need to better understand how actors perceive the relationship between education and practice; not only how a wider range of graduates value IPE, and what their post-IPE CPD needs are, but how these should be best be met. This underscores a need to pay attention to the proper relationship between different actors that shape planning practice (and education). This includes a broader role for planning academia as a 'critical friend' to practice and underlines the need to stabilise the core of IPE as a shared and valued resource for understanding what it is to be a reflective professional planner.

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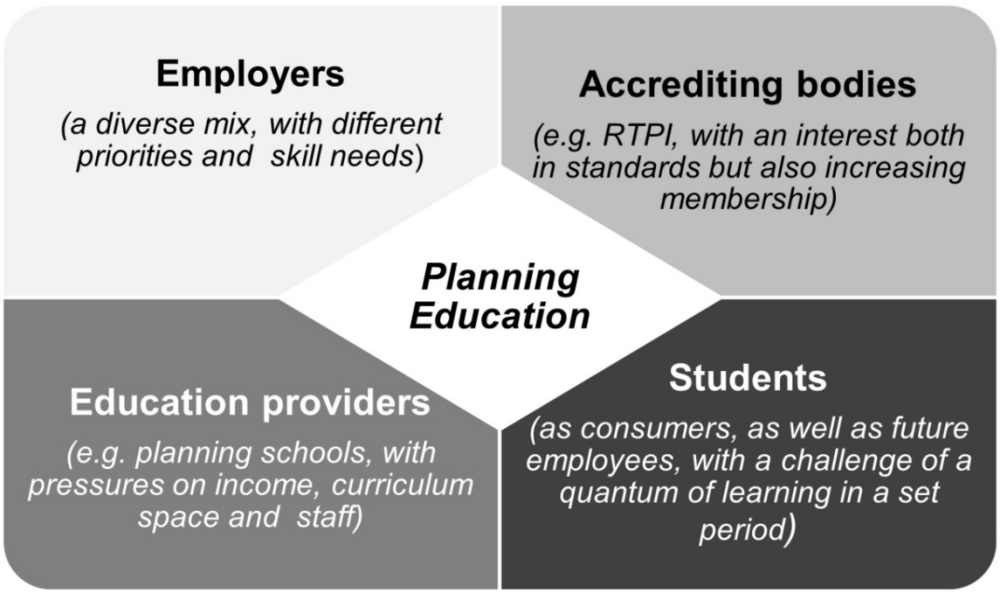

Figure 1: The actor-field constellation of planning education
Descriptive note: figures shows indicative interest and pressure across: employers, accrediting bodies, education providers and students in relation to planning education.

103x60mm (300 x 300 DPI)

Figure 2: University of Reading MSc Spatial Planning and Development programme design (until academic year 2024-25)
Descriptive note: blocks are modules with titles and numbers in brackets indicate module credit weighting

134x69mm (96 x 96 DPI)