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# City Planners

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CHAPTER 12

# City planners

*Alison Todes*

City planning is a small profession, with only 3 790 graduates by 2004. Data sources on the profession are limited, and there are only a few, mainly qualitative studies. 'Planning', as it is described in the Planning Professions Act (No. 36 of 2002), was designated as a 'scarce skill' in the context of the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (Asgisa) and the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (Jipsa) (Berrisford 2006; DoL 2006b). Lack of planning capacity was seen as constraining development in two main ways: through slow processing of land development applications, which was seen as holding up development; and through the lack of transformation of South African cities, perpetuating conditions such as long and costly travel to work, with impacts on labour costs. Further, the focus on infrastructure-led development would also require increased planning capacity.

The nature of planning work has evolved over time in South Africa, as it has internationally. Under apartheid, planning (then usually called 'town and regional planning') was focused largely on the design and layout of settlements, and on the management of land-use change, primarily in areas reserved for whites. Planning in the post-apartheid period is a far broader set of practices, and has diversified in various ways. While settlement design and land-use management are still significant, there is much greater focus on broader development agendas, including developmental and participatory approaches. Considerable attention is now paid to the development needs of the poor and to redressing the spatial effects of apartheid. Thus, strategic planning for the future development of cities, towns and regions is an important focus, as is the revitalisation of historically marginalised areas such as townships, informal settlements and rural areas. Planning of this sort includes not only physical design, but also the integration of policies, programmes and development initiatives within particular areas. Although planning, as defined in the Planning Professions Act (No. 36 of 2002), focuses largely on spatial planning, many planners are involved in far wider arenas. The development of statutory Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), intended to direct the work of municipalities and other agencies in their areas, has become an important focus area for planners, although other professions also work on this terrain. Many planners have moved into areas such as local economic development (LED), environmental management and housing. Planners have also played key roles in many of the area-based development initiatives, such as the special integrated presidential programmes (SIPPs), the urban renewal programmes (URPs), and the regionally based spatial development initiatives (SDIs). Thus planning as a field is relatively diffuse, and overlaps with other areas of skill and training, although there is arguably a fairly clear core.

In the late apartheid era, it was assumed that the demand for planners post-apartheid would grow considerably due to the diversification of the field and a focus on the needs of the majority, rather than the minority. A study of the demand for planners in 2001 (Todes et al. 2003), however, found that this

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expectation had not been realised. The fact that planning has been defined as a scarce skill by Asgisa and Jipsa (DoL 2006b) suggests that this situation has since changed – that there might be a growth in the demand for planners which has not been matched by supply.

This chapter explores whether this is the case.[1] It uses data compiled by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (SAQA 2007) on graduates, supplemented with data from planning schools and previous research, to discuss supply issues. The Municipal Demarcation Board (MDB) and Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA) provide partial figures for conditions in local government, possibly the most important sphere of employment for planners (LGSETA 2006; MDB 2005–2006). Vacancy data, as reflected in advertisements for planners in the *Sunday Times,* provide some indication of trends (Erasmus 2008). Due to the paucity of hard data on the demand side, the research has relied on previous studies, documents and minutes from the Jipsa committee on town and regional planning, and on some 16 key respondent interviews with representatives of the planning profession and registration council, a selection of private consultants, senior planners in some of the metropolitan municipalities and provincial governments, and some researchers and academics who are close to these processes.[2]

## An overview of planning and the planning profession

In 2002, the Planning Professions Act defined planning as follows, after much debate:

> the initiation and management of change in the built and natural environment across a spectrum of areas…in order to further human development and environmental sustainability, specifically in the fields of:
> (i) the delimitation, regulation and management of land uses;
> (ii) the organisation of service infrastructure, utilities, facilities, and housing for human settlements; and
> (iii) the co-ordination and integration of social, economic and physical sectors which comprise human settlements, through the synthesis and integration of information for the preparation of strategic, policy, statutory and other development plans within the South African development context.

Planning, according to this definition, is concerned with land development, with the management of change on a day-to-day basis, and with proactive future planning. Its function is to co-ordinate and integrate development.

Many planners work beyond this realm, most importantly in IDP planning, which deals with the overall priorities and development directions of a municipality, and its appropriate management. IDPs are also intended to play a key role in inter-governmental planning and co-ordination. This broader sphere of planning, however, is also occupied by other professionals. Similarly, planners work alongside professionals with other skills bases and training in areas such as LED, housing and environmental management.

In the recent deliberations of the Standards Generating Body (SGB) for planning, spatial planning was seen as the core focus for planning education, and also as the main set of skills that are seen as being in

1 This chapter draws on a longer report by Alison Todes and Nelisiwe Mngadi (Todes & Mngadi 2007). Thanks to Gill Lincoln, Vanessa Watson and Phil Harrison who read and made comments on a version of the longer paper.
2 Details of interviewees are listed at the end of the chapter.

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short supply, although commentators also point to a shortage of LED practitioners (Davies interview), and weaknesses in the capacity of those undertaking IDPs (Coetzee interview).

The Planning Professions Act provides for the registration of planners, and allows for work reservation, although none exists at present. The previous Town and Regional Planners Act (No. 19 of 1984) did not reserve work for planners. The South African Council for Planners (SACPLAN) was established in 2004 in terms of the 2002 Act, replacing the previous South African Council for Town and Regional Planners (SACTRP). SACPLAN is responsible for the registration of planners and the accreditation of planning education, inter alia, but has taken some years to be established. By June 2007, 1 300 planners were registered, well below potential. There is little to compel registration or the use of registered planners, although this is likely to change in future. The effective 'deprofessionalisation' of planning is a concern for SACPLAN, and for the South African Planning Institute (SAPI), which represents the profession.

The 2002 Act provides for the registration of two categories of planners: technicians and professional planners. Registration in either category requires education through a SACPLAN-accredited training programme at tertiary level (to National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 6 for technicians, and NQF Level 7 for professional planners), two years of practical training, and the passing of a competency test, although this latter provision has not yet been implemented. There are four main educational routes towards registration:

- A three-year national diploma in planning (including a year of supervised on-the-job experience) leads to registration as a technician.
- These graduates may go on to study towards a bachelor of technology (BTech) in planning, which, under the 2002 Act, leads to professional registration. This differs from previous practice, whereby a university degree was required.
- A four-year undergraduate/honours degree in planning leads to professional registration.
- A two-year master's degree in planning, which is open to graduates from other disciplines, leads to professional registration.

Planning educators face a difficult task since the range of skills required for planning is diverse, and the field has broadened significantly over time. A set of broad competencies were developed by planning schools in 2000, and their validity was generally confirmed in a study of employers by Faling (2002). The formal process of defining competencies through a SGB was delayed, and the process is still in its early stages. Thus agreement on the range of skills and competencies required has still to be established, although there seems to be consensus that the focus should be on spatial planning. This is also likely to be the arena in which any job reservation for planning will occur.

Institutionally, SACPLAN and the 2002 Planning Professions Act fall under the Department of Land Affairs (DLA).[3] The DLA is also responsible for the Development Facilitation Act (No. 67 of1995), interim legislation which remains to be replaced by national legislation on spatial planning and land-use management. A White Paper on Spatial Planning and Land Use Management was passed in 2000 (DLA 2002). In the absence of national legislation, the complex, fragmented and unequal system of apartheid land-use management remains – a concern also raised by Asgisa (South African Government Information 2006). Planning is a small component of a department that is concerned primarily with agriculture and land reform. Planning in the form of IDPs has been a major focus of the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG), as has urban renewal, while responsibility for sustainable human settlements falls under the Department of Housing, and environmental impact assessments, which overlap significantly with assessments of planning applications, fall under the Department of

3 This has been the case for historical reasons. Most professions in the built environment fall under the Council for the Built Environment in the Department of Public Works.

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Environmental Affairs and Tourism. The effective fragmentation of responsibility for planning, and the lack of a strong institutional base for it, has long been a concern for the profession.

## Assessing the shortfall of planners

### The size of the planning profession

Some 1 300 planners were registered with the SACPLAN in April 2008 (SACPLAN 2008), while 1 599 people were members of the SAPI in June 2007. The Association of Consulting Town and Regional Planners (ACTRP), representing private firms, had 220 members, and each firm is likely to have at least 2.5 principal planners (Dacomb interview), so firms registered with the ACTRP are likely to have at least 550 planners, in addition to junior planners. No gender or race breakdowns were available for these groups. However, many planners are not registered with any institution. In 1999, for example, a survey of planners known to be operating in KwaZulu-Natal (Harrison & Khan 2002) found that only 63.5 per cent of them were registered with the then SACTRP, and only 44 per cent of planners were members of the SAPI.

The SAQA graduate database provides the best source of data on the likely number of planners in South Africa, incorporating data from 1965 to 2004 (SAQA 2007). In their data, there were some 3 790 graduates by 2004, although not all would have had qualifications that made them eligible for registration. A further 301 planners graduated in accredited, and 31 in non-accredited, programmes in 2005 and 2006, according to data from planning schools. Thus the total number of planners in 2006 would have been about 4 125. These figures do not take into account those who have retired, have left the profession, or have emigrated. There are no available figures on any of these categories. While the numbers of the former are likely to be small, since the real growth of the profession and of graduate numbers has occurred since the 1980s,[4] anecdotal evidence suggests that both the numbers leaving the profession and those emigrating are likely to be significant, particularly since the demand for planners in English-speaking countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Ireland and the UK has been high in recent years.

Some 71 per cent of planners who had graduated in South Africa by 2004 were white and only 19 per cent were African (and 9 per cent were coloured or Indian) (Table 12.1). Although there is an overwhelming dominance of whites in planning, the picture has changed since 1994, at which time 90 per cent of planners who had graduated were white. Under apartheid, Africans had to apply for permits to study planning, since courses were offered by institutions which were designated for whites only, and the first African planner only graduated in 1981 (Badenhorst 1995). Since the early 1990s, however, the number of black (that is, African, coloured and Indian) students in planning schools has increased significantly, rising from 30 per cent in 1994 to 78 per cent in 2003 (Todes & Harrison 2004). This shift is beginning to be evident in graduate numbers, where the proportion of white graduates dropped to 30.7 per cent by 2004 (Table 12.2). The SAQA figures also show a rising proportion of women in planning, although they accounted for only 34 per cent by 2004 (SAQA 2007).

Planners work in a range of spheres, both public and private, but no figures are available on the distribution between the two. Badenhorst's (1995) survey of SAPI members showed a shift away from planning as a predominantly public-sector activity in 1983 towards the private sector in 1993, with 47.7 per cent in the private sector, 40.6 per cent in the public sector, and 11.4 per cent in other organisations. By 2001, this picture had changed, with a decline in the number and size of the private sector (Todes et al. 2003).

4 Several of the planning schools were only established after the late 1970s.

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**TABLE 12.1:** *Cumulative total of planning graduates in South Africa, by race, 1994 and 2004*

| | 1994 | | 2004 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % |
| African | 112 | 5 | 721 | 19 |
| Coloured | 24 | 1 | 148 | 4 |
| Indian | 55 | 2 | 172 | 5 |
| White | 2 009 | 90 | 2 702 | 71 |
| Unknown | 44 | 2 | 48 | 1 |
| Total | 2 244 | 100 | 3 791 | 100 |

Source: SAQA 2007

**TABLE 12.2:** *Graduates, by race, 1994 and 2004*

| | 1994 | | 2004 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % |
| African | 47 | 23 | 85 | 56 |
| Coloured | 3 | 1 | 16 | 10 |
| Indian | 9 | 4 | 5 | 3 |
| White | 148 | 71 | 47 | 31 |
| Unknown | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 208 | 100 | 153 | 100 |

Source: SAQA 2007

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This situation seems to have changed again, and all private-sector firms interviewed reported a huge growth in demand for their services, and that of the planning private sector in general.

Within the public sector, most planners work in local government, but there are also substantial numbers in provincial planning (and sometimes in housing, environment and economic development) departments, and in national government. Planners are also employed in parastatals, academic and research organisations, and in NGOs. According to MDB material published in 2005–2006, which provides data for the 272 non-metropolitan municipalities, some 682 people were employed to undertake the planning function and a further 232 were brought in as and when needed (MDB 2005–2006). Thus a total of 914 people were employed in local government outside the 6 metropolitan municipalities, although this number includes people in planning departments who are not necessarily planners. It is estimated that about 380 people are employed in planning positions in the metros .[5]

5 This estimate is based on figures for eThekwini and the City of Johannesburg, which each have approximately 70 planners. These figures differ from numbers for planning departments, which are far larger. It can be expected that the Nelson Mandela metro will have far fewer planners.

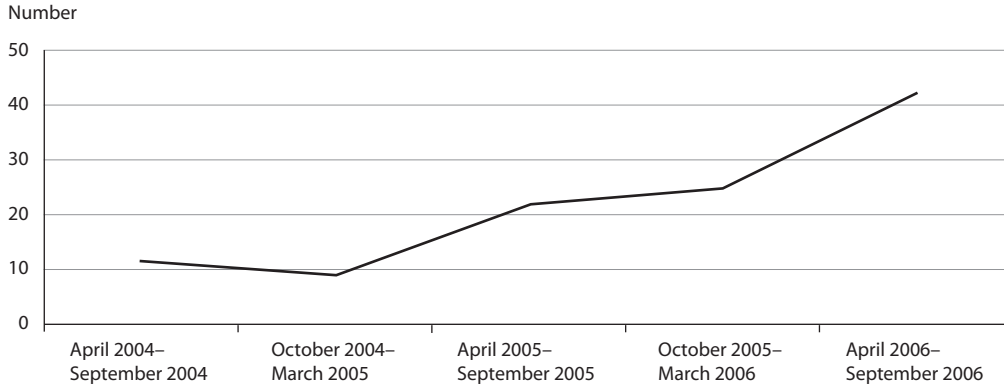
## Vacancy data

There are no good sources of data on vacancies for planners. The LGSETA records a need for 300 planners[6] (Davies interview), but this reflects departmental needs, and includes a range of other skills such as building plan inspectors, who are not necessarily planners. MDB data for local government similarly reflect 310 municipal planning vacancies outside metropolitan areas, again at departmental level. Numbers may, however, under-reflect the need, since positions that are taken by unqualified people will not be shown as vacancies (Davies interview). LGSETA data are used as the main source for the Department of Labour's (DoL) *Master List of Scarce and Critical Skills* (DoL 2006a), although the list incorrectly records this figure as 50. A shortage of planners is also flagged here by the Construction SETA and the Department of Science and Technology. No other official data sources exist on whether planning is in fact a scarce skill, or on the size of the shortage.

The DoL's database on vacancy advertisements from the *Sunday Times Business Section* (Erasmus 2008) was analysed for the period April 2004–September 2006 for South African Standard Classification of Occupations (SASCO) numbers 2141, 3118 and 3119 (Stats SA 2005).[7] The analysis may, however, have missed advertisements classified under other SASCO numbers.[8] Further, many organisations do not advertise in the *Sunday Times* as it is too costly, and recruitment often occurs through networks and local advertising. Over the period of study, April 2004–September 2006, some 109 jobs were advertised. Importantly, the number of job advertisements grew over the period of study (Figure 12.1), suggesting a rising demand for planners.

Unfortunately, information provided on qualifications, experience, employer and location in the DoL database is not complete, but available data indicate that most employment advertised in this way is for middle- to senior-level professional planners, in the public sector, and primarily in municipalities.

**FIGURE 12.1.** *Advertisements for planners, April 2004–September 2006*




Source: Erasmus 2008

6 Based on data submitted by municipalities, mediated by provincial workshops. Not all municipalities submitted information. The City of Cape Town, which has a significant shortage of planners, did not submit information.

7 These numbers cover the following categories: architects, town and traffic planners (2141); draughtspersons (3118); physical and engineering science technicians not elsewhere classified (3119). The job titles in the advertisements were all for planners, however.

8 For example, the DLA advertisements for planners are excluded.

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## Qualitative insights

While the data above suggest that the shortfall is probably small, if it exists at all, interviews and other evidence suggest that the problem may be deeper than appears at first sight. Unfortunately, no norms have been established with regard to the number of planners that are needed. This is a significant gap in assessment of the shortage of planners.

Local government is probably the most important sector where planners are employed. Interviewees argue that while capacity shortfalls for planning exist in all types of municipalities, conditions are generally better in the metros, and worse in the smaller and more rural municipalities. None of the metros researched as part of this study, however, are employing the full complement of staff on their organogram. In all three cases, the process of amalgamation of various entities in 2000 had led to a moratorium on employment of planners and/or a decline of planner numbers, as very slow processes of replacing staff were coupled with significant attrition of planners. Capacity levels dropped substantially, and together with cumbersome regulatory systems, resulted in slow processing of development applications (Sim et al. 2004).

Since then, Johannesburg has been able to argue for significant increases in employment, and is now at around 75 per cent of capacity. Gaps exist primarily at the level of more skilled and experienced staff. Although it would be possible to find staff to bring numbers up to 100 per cent, it would be difficult to find the level of skills and experience needed. Turnover is high, with significant competition for staff among the three metros in Gauteng.

In eThekwini, capacity levels have recently increased from 50 per cent to 60 per cent. They would like to move to 75 per cent of capacity, but there are budget constraints, and they want to avoid bringing in inexperienced staff who cannot be mentored and managed. Experienced and skilled planners are not easily available. Further, despite staff shortages, some staff under-perform, and there is an unwillingness to employ additional staff who might be unproductive. Nevertheless, capacity constraints are affecting the quality and efficiency of planning and environmental assessments. This has been exacerbated by the growing number of applications.

The City of Cape Town is experiencing a significant capacity constraint, particularly as the strength of the building boom has placed huge demands on the municipality, but has also expanded the demand for private-sector work and hence the competition for planners. Capacity levels are at around 35–50 per cent, depending on the unit, and jobs are being advertised nationally to find the necessary skills.

The situation is worse outside the metros, particularly in more rural and peripheral municipalities, although some larger cities also face serious shortages of planners. For instance, in Buffalo City, some 47 per cent of the 36 planning positions were vacant in 2005 (MDB 2005–2006). A staff of 14 (3 planning professionals and 11 technicians) are responsible for land-use management for a population of 702 279. Parnell et al. (2007) comment that most of these staff members came from the previous East London Transitional Council, and might have been adequate for this area, but they now have to cover a far larger area, including King Williamstown, Bisho and large rural and semi-urban areas. Planners now have to deal with legislation covering all of the previous entities, and are greatly stretched in this context. Staff turnover is high, and the training of new staff takes time and resources.

MDB data also show that while almost all municipalities provide a planning function, only 30 per cent say that they have adequate staff to perform the function, and 58 per cent say that they do not have adequate staff to do so.[9] Some 20 per cent have no full-time staff and rely entirely on external providers.

9 The remaining 9.6 per cent did not respond to the question.

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Insufficient staff (often in combination with insufficient budgets and/or equipment) is a reason for a failure to provide a planning service to all parts of the municipality in 30 per cent of municipalities. Although municipal capacity reports indicate that most municipalities have some capacity to deliver the planning function, it is problematic or uneven in several districts.

A large number of IDP managerial posts are not filled, and people in this position frequently have limited experience and qualifications. Some 62 per cent of IDP managers have 5 years or less experience in local government, and only 14 per cent of IDP managers have experience related to planning and development.

A study of municipal development planning capacity in seven municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal found that in most districts there is a lack of spatial planning capacity, and a lack of staff with relevant planning qualifications (Ovens 2006). There is an absence of experienced personnel who can do the integrated and strategic planning that is required in terms of current legislation. Thus work undertaken tends to meet minimum legal requirements, rather than fulfilling actual intentions. Although posts might be filled, staff are not necessarily appropriately qualified, and there has been a tendency in some places to fill positions on a political basis, rather than according to appropriate qualifications and skills. Further, municipal managers do not always understand the planning function and what is required, and do not give it the attention or support it needs. Only a small proportion of staff has a planning qualification, and in some cases, staff employed have a lower level of qualification than that required. Where planners are employed they are usually overworked, and vacant posts are common. Municipalities also lack enforcement capacity. In some municipalities, all planning is outsourced to the private sector, raising potential conflicts of interest when the same firm acts for private developers as well as for the municipality.

A study in 2003 by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) on IDP capacity (Coetzee & Van Huyssteen 2004) found significant deficits in municipal capacity. The study found that only 7 per cent of municipalities were able to undertake and implement a good IDP, while 20 per cent lacked the basic resources to do so, and 53 per cent required support to produce one. The remaining 20 per cent were able to produce a good basic IDP, but were unable to implement it (Coetzee & Van Huyssteen 2004). Provincial capacity to support IDPs in many provinces was also seen as wanting, with understaffing, lack of skills and experience, and high staff turnover.

A recent report on urban land management (Parnell et al. 2007)[10] found that the limited number of planners at provincial level was a problem, as it resulted in a slowing down of planning approvals. For instance, Gauteng province has a two-year backlog of applications to process, due to capacity constraints. A similar situation pertains in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. In the Eastern Cape, there are only three planners covering the needs of the whole province, while in KwaZulu-Natal there were only seven qualified planners in early 2007. In the case of KwaZulu-Natal, capacity constraints are the result of a three-year moratorium on employment in the context of departmental reorganisation, and these levels are seen as way below needs (Brooks interview). Although a new organogram is being approved, recruitment processes could lead to it taking up to a year to fill new posts. Nevertheless, this department at least has several staff at senior level who are highly experienced. Western Cape provincial departments dealing with planning also note shortages of planners and difficulties in recruiting them, particularly at more senior levels. Junior staff often stay only for short periods of time and then move to other parts of the country.

10 The study focused on Johannesburg, eThekwini, Buffalo City, Mangaung and Cape Town.

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Several interviewees argued that in many municipalities and provinces, the need for planners is not recognised or understood. Thus staffing levels are low, and the range of tasks that planners might perform is neglected. Some argued that several national departments would also benefit from a greater use of planners, with their potential to co-ordinate across sectors, institutions and spatially.

In general terms, planning shortages are at the level of more skilled and experienced people, rather than at entry level. Given that black planners have only recently come into the profession, the shortage of black planners at this level is particularly notable. There has been a tendency to push graduates into positions well beyond their levels of experience, and given shortages, there is often insufficient mentoring. The private sector also experiences constraints in their capacity to mentor new staff, and some have difficulty in finding experienced planners, particularly black planners. One respondent commented that they could not compete with the much higher wages in the public sector. Others point to the difficulty of finding middle- to senior-level staff who can run projects. Some firms experienced difficulties in finding particular sets of skills, and a few respondents are employing people with qualifications outside of planning, either due to the skills needed (for example, architects) or due to their availability. In several cases, planning firms have remained relatively small, and senior planners frequently set up on their own, although firms have grown in recent years.

Although there are still many problems with the skills available for production and implementation of IDPs, most respondents argued that it is particularly spatial planning skills that are in short supply, ranging from strategic planning, to land-use management, to practical design and implementation.

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## Explaining the shortage of planners

### Contextual conditions

In the transition from apartheid to democracy, it was assumed that a much larger number of planners would be required for a wide range of purposes, inter alia, to work with communities in developing plans to improve local physical as well as social and economic conditions; to plan new development areas; to plan for the integrated development of towns, cities and regions; to undertake more developmental and participatory planning; to unify land-use management systems and to reconstruct them in terms of a different set of values. In practice, it has taken some time for these predictions to be realised, and in the interim, the demand for planners declined until 2001 (Todes et al. 2003).

While much of the legislation is now in place to move in these directions, it has taken some years for this to occur. Legislation for IDPs and spatial frameworks has only been in place since 2000, and legislation on land-use management is still outstanding. In the early post-apartheid period, the main focus was on delivery, particularly of housing and services, and while many planners were employed in relation to housing development, there was less emphasis on integrative planning. In many cases, the outcome of such development was to exacerbate apartheid divides. Land-use management was almost entirely neglected, with a greater planning focus on facilitative, developmental planning (Harrison et al. 2008).

For some stakeholders, planning was associated with apartheid, and its potential for assisting in transformation was not recognised; thus it was downgraded in importance (Ovens interview). Authorities emphasised that IDPs were management rather than spatial plans, and spatial planning tended to be marginalised. Some of the large integrated projects, such as the Katorus, Alexandra and Cato Manor Development Projects, all of which were Presidential Lead Projects, nevertheless did provide an alternative approach to planning, even if results were less transformative than had been desired (Robinson et al. 2004). The marginalisation of planning, and the difficulties experienced in moving towards desired

ends, did however contribute to a loss of image and identity of the profession (Harrison & Khan 2002). Planning did not benefit from the growing sustainability agenda, which has in part underpinned its resurgence internationally, as environmental management developed in parallel to planning, although some planners went into this field.

In addition, in the early post-apartheid era, the economy grew slowly, and plans for housing and service delivery took some time to be realised, affecting the demand for the traditional areas of work of planners. The private planning sector came under pressure in this context, and many firms declined in size or disappeared (Todes et al. 2003).

Local government, the main employer of planners, was subject to two rounds of reorganisation in 1996 and 2000. In many cases, these processes were associated with an initial freezing of positions which, in some cases, lasted several years. In some municipalities, constant political change also underpinned instability in employment of planners, amongst others. In these conditions, numbers of planners in several municipalities declined as experienced people left, and were not easily replaced. Within local government, employment of planners was affected by a relatively unskilled and inexperienced management (LGSETA 2006) and new councillors, who did not understand planning, and the skills required. The employment of un- and under-qualified people occurred in this context.

Harrison and Khan's (2002) study of planners in KwaZulu-Natal in 1999 found that while most were positive about change, they experienced difficult working conditions. Key problems included the confusion caused by rapid change in legislation and procedures; increasing work pressures and workloads; the weakness of the bureaucracy dealing with planning; affirmative action influencing promotion and appointment prospects; the low status of planners; poor financial rewards; the time-consuming and difficult nature of community participation; and negative attitudes towards consultants. The responses also reflected a predominantly white planning profession: black planners were far more optimistic. These perceptions are likely to have affected the numbers of entrants going into planning, particularly amongst whites, and are also likely to have contributed to movement into fields other than planning, and to emigration to places where planning is on the rise as a profession.

Since about 2002, the demand for planners appears to have grown. Perhaps the key reason is the boom in the economy, a strong element of which has been a property boom. There has been a significant growth in the number of applications for new developments, and thus demand for increased capacity to process these applications. The construction and property boom has been particularly strong in the major metros, and in Cape Town, interviewees argued that it is responsible for a significant growth in the demand for planning work and planners. This growth in demand affects both the private sector, which would be involved in submitting planning applications, and the public sector, which has to assess and respond to them. For instance, in KwaZulu-Natal, the provincial Department of Local Government and Traditional Affairs has faced a rapidly increasing number of planning applications that need to be assessed. The value of applications has increased from R5 billion in 2004/2005, to R7 billion in 2005/2006, to R15 billion in 2006/2007 (Brooks interview).

In addition, rapid growth in new development areas is highlighting the need for proper spatial planning at a regional and sub-regional scale. For instance, in Gauteng, rapid but fragmented growth without appropriate macro- or even local planning occurred in the area between Johannesburg and Pretoria. The lack of adequate infrastructure and facilities and the associated congestion (inter alia) are factors leading to the emerging crisis in this area, for instance in Fourways. In eThekwini, the rising number of development applications in the Hillcrest/Kloof area led to a moratorium on approvals and the development of a detailed plan in terms of which applications could be assessed. In Cape Town, there is increasing demand for spatial planning frameworks from communities, portfolio committees

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and developers who want greater certainty about how particular areas are to be developed over the long term (Southworth interview). More generally, there is growing recognition of the need to move beyond the rather broad spatial development frameworks which were developed in the 1990s, to better researched and detailed planning, which is increasing the demand for planning work and hence for planners.

The current emphasis on infrastructure-led development is also leading to a growing demand for planners to plan for new developments and to respond to plans. For instance, planners have usually been involved in planning for major developments such as 2010 in diverse ways: in overall planning for the event in cities and initiatives to create a 'legacy' for the city; in redevelopment of areas around the stadia; in planning of the stadia themselves; and in planning applications linked to these developments. Similarly, planners are involved in projects such as the proposals for the new airport in Durban – in its design, in debates over the airport and the way it is developed, and in assessing and planning for its impact in the city.

Although national planning legislation is still outstanding, parts of the planning system are beginning to be put in place, and the various administrative requirements for IDPs, spatial development frameworks and land-use management systems (in some provinces) are coming through. In addition, now that a level of delivery has occurred, there is growing concern in government with the quality of delivery, and the quality of places which are being created. There are several initiatives to address these issues (for instance the urban renewal nodes), all of which are leading to a growth in demand for planning work, both within the public sector, and outside of it. More generally, there is growing acceptance of the contribution that planning can make to transformation, and this is leading to a greater demand for planners, although there are also fears that expectations are overstated and that, given the complexity and difficulty of development, disappointment is inevitable (Oranje interview).

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## The supply of planners

Table 12.3 and Figure 12.2 show the number of planning graduates, by type of qualification, from 1995 to 2004. Overall, the decline in the number of graduates from 1995 to 2004 is striking, suggesting that there may well be a supply problem. The decline in graduates is particularly evident for master's students, and for university-based bachelor's and honours degrees. At the same time, the number of graduates in National Diplomas and BTech degrees has increased, suggesting a shift from planning education based at universities to that offered at universities of technology, but this does not make up for the overall decline in output. If BTech graduates and bachelor's and honours degrees are taken together as the main graduate output for NQF Level 7,[11] there is an overall decline in graduate numbers from 1995 to 2004, albeit with a spike in 1998.

These figures are broadly consistent with trends noted by Todes and Harrison (2004), based on overall student numbers sourced from planning schools for the 1994–2003 period. They attributed the decline in student numbers at universities to the market for planning, the rapid growth in employment in better paid fields such as business and computer science, and the growth of alternative outlets for students with similar interests, such as development studies and environmental management. These patterns do, however, seem to be changing.

Data from planning schools on intake, student numbers and graduates over the 2005–2006 period (Table 12.4) suggest that both intake and graduate numbers have increased. There has been a significant increase in applications for places, and students are finding it easy to access employment.

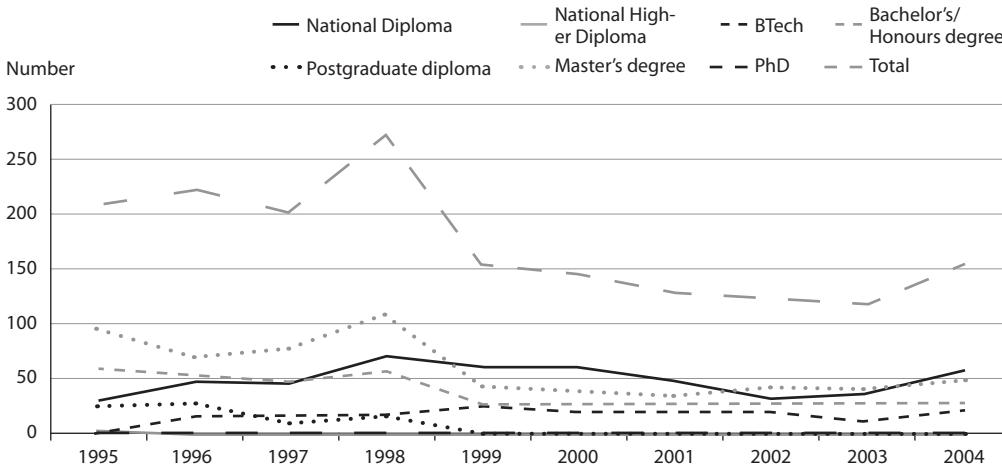
11 National Higher Diplomas were discontinued after 1994, and were replaced with the BTech.

**TABLE 12.3:** *Number of planning graduates, by qualification, 1995–2004*

| NQF level | Qualification | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | National Diploma | 30 | 46 | 46 | 71 | 59 | 61 | 49 | 32 | 36 | 57 |
| 7 | National Higher Diploma | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 7 | BTech | 0 | 17 | 17 | 18 | 26 | 21 | 20 | 20 | 12 | 22 |
| 7 | Bachelor's/honours degree | 60 | 56 | 48 | 58 | 27 | 27 | 26 | 30 | 30 | 28 |
| 7 | Postgraduate diploma | 23 | 30 | 10 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 8 | Master's degree | 94 | 70 | 77 | 107 | 43 | 37 | 33 | 41 | 39 | 46 |
| 8 + | PhD | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| | Total | 209 | 222 | 200 | 271 | 155 | 146 | 130 | 124 | 117 | 153 |

Source: SAQA 2007

**FIGURE 12.2:** *Number of planning graduates, by type of qualification, 1995–2004*




Source: SAQA 2007

The decline of graduates from universities, particularly at postgraduate level, is of concern. In the past, the work of technicians and professional planners was clearly demarcated, although there has always been movement in the system, with technicians becoming professional planners over time. In the current environment, differentiation of work occurs in various ways across institutions, but there is also greater fluidity, in part due to the lack of professional planners (Watson 2006). Current demands are both for planners with a stronger technical base, and also for deepening and extending strategic planning, which requires a combination of high-level conceptual and analytical skills, amongst other

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**TABLE 12.4:** *Planning graduates, 2005–2006*[a]

| Qualification | 2005 | 2006 |
|---|---|---|
| National Diploma | 72 | 77 |
| BTech | 25 | 50 |
| Bachelor's/honours degree (university) | 40 | 54 |
| Master's degree | 38 | 54 |
| Total (all degrees/diplomas) | 175 | 235 |

Source: Data supplied by planning schools

Note: a. Excludes thesis master's and PhD graduates. Includes non-accredited degrees.

things. In addition, the quality of planning is lacking, and processes currently treated in a mechanistic way in some contexts (such as land-use management) require the application of complex knowledge and judgement.

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## The impact of capacity shortfalls

Current expectations of the planning system are ambitious. Concerns have been raised about the lack of integrated development across spheres and sectors of government, and planning is seen as playing a key role in promoting integration. Intentions to create an intergovernmental system of planning, linking the work of national and provincial departments to provincial and local plans, as well as to the National Spatial Development Perspective (NSDP), are affected by planning capacity, inter alia.

Linking the NSDP to provincial and local plans requires a good understanding of the space economy and an ability to think in spatial terms. These skills are lacking, affecting not only the production of provincial growth and development strategies, but also the way sectoral departments relate to these processes. There is also a deficit of people with the skills to develop terms of reference for such exercises, and to lead and manage these processes (Coetzee interview).

A critical issue is that the quality of planning and decision-making is inadequate. Since 1994, there has been a slew of legislation attempting to engender a planning system which promotes development and sustainability. This system includes a new set of values and approaches, which requires that planners are able to exercise judgement in terms of normative principles, to involve communities and other stakeholders in planning processes, to think strategically, and to plan in ways which bring together various sectors and agencies. Creative and synoptic thinking is required. The new approaches to planning are therefore predicated on the existence of planners who are relatively skilled, and they are demanding in terms of time.

Lack of capacity is thus being seen as a major reason for the poor quality of IDPs and spatial frameworks. Properly developed IDPs and spatial frameworks should provide a clear future development path for a municipality, its key priorities and values, and its major programmes into the future. Spatial frameworks should indicate where and how development should occur in space, and the phasing of various developments. They should provide a co-ordinating tool for infrastructure and property development, and a basis for site-level decision-making. In the absence of strong and defensible plans, as is frequently the case at present, there is a lack of co-ordinated development, and disjunctures between the places where various types of infrastructure are provided, and those where development occurs.

Social goals such as restructuring the city away from its apartheid legacy are also more difficult to achieve in a context where land development decisions are made on an ad hoc basis, often in favour of property developers. At the same time, there is no certainty for property developers on how particular developments are likely to be viewed. Arguably, several of the facilities and services crises in Gauteng province and other cities, such as congestion in some areas, and the absence of schools, inadequate sewerage and energy capacity in others, are the result of the lack of planning and inadequate co-ordination between agencies responsible for infrastructure development.

Decision-making about land development applications is also often done in a mechanistic way, without reference to the range of norms and principles contained in policy and legislation (Sim et al. 2004). Lack of capacity is affecting the time taken to process planning applications, and thus investment. This problem is exacerbated by the current complexity of the legislative system and by capacity limitations in departments outside of planning, which comment on applications.

Planning potentially plays an important role in redeveloping or designing parts of cities, yet this aspect has not been sufficiently recognised, and there is an under-investment in the design of low-cost housing settlements. Lack of capacity in planning also affects the quality of work undertaken in various developmental initiatives.

Finally, the long-term viability of the planning system is threatened by lack of capacity to mentor and monitor staff. Initiatives to provide support also depend on capacity. For instance, centres established to support integrated development planning were only successful in the 15–20 per cent of districts where they were able to attract skilled and experienced staff (Coetzee interview).

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## Conclusion

While policy and legislation since 1994 seemed to broaden and elevate the role of planning, in practice, planning went into decline for several years. The immediate demands of delivery, institutional restructuring, and an association of planning with apartheid in the minds of some stakeholders tended to marginalise its importance. There is, however, growing recognition of its significance for government's attempts to create more integrated development, and more sustainable and liveable cities and regions. Coupled with economic growth, and in particular, the property boom, which has led to a rapid rise in land development applications, the demand for planners is on the increase.

The evidence available suggests that there is a shortfall of planners, although it is difficult to quantify its extent. There is a small number of vacancies, according to official sources, but importantly, the need for planners has not been sufficiently recognised, leading to an under-use of planners in a variety of areas. In addition, the need for planners is masked by the employment of people who have neither the qualifications nor the experience for their positions. There is a need to benchmark the number of planners required against international practice.

The demand for planners is for skilled and experienced professionals. Emigration, attrition from the profession, and movement out of the public sector have contributed to deficits here. The lack of value accorded to planning for many years, and opportunities elsewhere, are factors. New or recent graduates are being put into positions without sufficient experience or mentoring. Capacity deficits are worse outside the cities, particularly in rural areas. Nevertheless, the cities are under pressure as a consequence of the property boom, and the complex development pressures that they face.

Although the capacity deficit is primarily at the level of more skilled and experienced planners, the decline in the graduate output of planning schools does seem to have been a contributing factor. Both

student numbers and quality declined for several years – seemingly the effect of the shrinking market for planners, opportunities in other areas, and the image of planning. Numbers are growing again, but there is a need to improve the status and profile of planning to enable it to attract stronger students.

Capacity shortfalls affect the extent to which planning is able to play its intended role in development, as well as the quality of planning, and the time taken to process applications. The concerns raised by Asgisa do seem to be justified in this context.

Yet as several commentators have noted, there is a host of other problems affecting planning in the current environment: the lack of an adequate legal framework for planning, institutional problems, and the broader capacity of the public sector, amongst others. While rationalisation of planning systems will improve efficiency, it is unlikely to lead to a significant reduction in the need for planners. Initiatives elsewhere to consolidate fragmented systems have not generally led to a reduction in the need for planners, and the introduction of new systems generally makes increased demands on capacity, as new processes, procedures and ways of understanding and assessing are introduced (see, for example, Todes et al. 2007 on New Zealand).

Thus planning capacity does need to be built, particularly within the field of spatial planning. Initiatives to address capacity issues will require resources, and will depend on acknowledgement of the importance of planning, a strong institutional base for taking forward proposals, and co-operation between various stakeholders.

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