

Built environment professional bodies and student members: The Australian employers perspective.

Sara WILKINSON and Clive WARREN
(Australia)
(Presented by Frances PLIMMER UK)

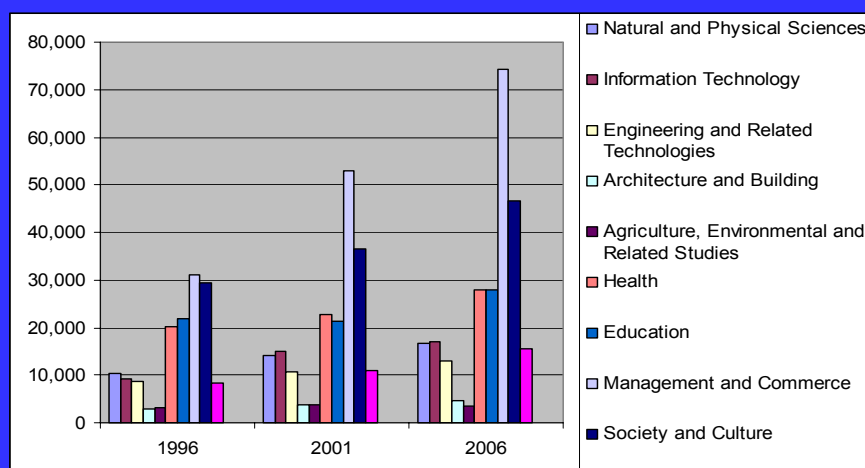
Overview

- Introduction
- Background and rationale for the research
- Research aims and objectives
- Research methodology
- Data analysis and findings
- Implications for surveying professional bodies and the next steps

Introduction

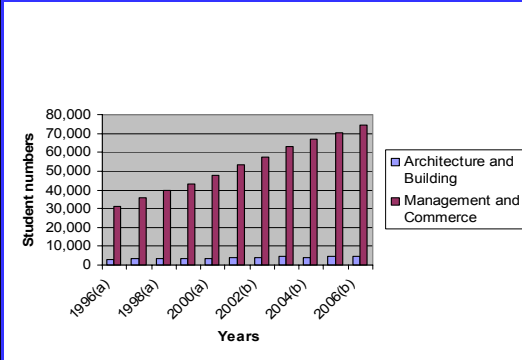
- All professional bodies seek 'the brightest and the best'
- In Australia built environment professions are ageing and failing to attract new members
- What are the issues facing built environment bodies from the employers perspective?
- What are the trends in tertiary education in Australia?

Figure 1 Total numbers of students enrolled on HE courses in Australia 1996, 2001 & 2006



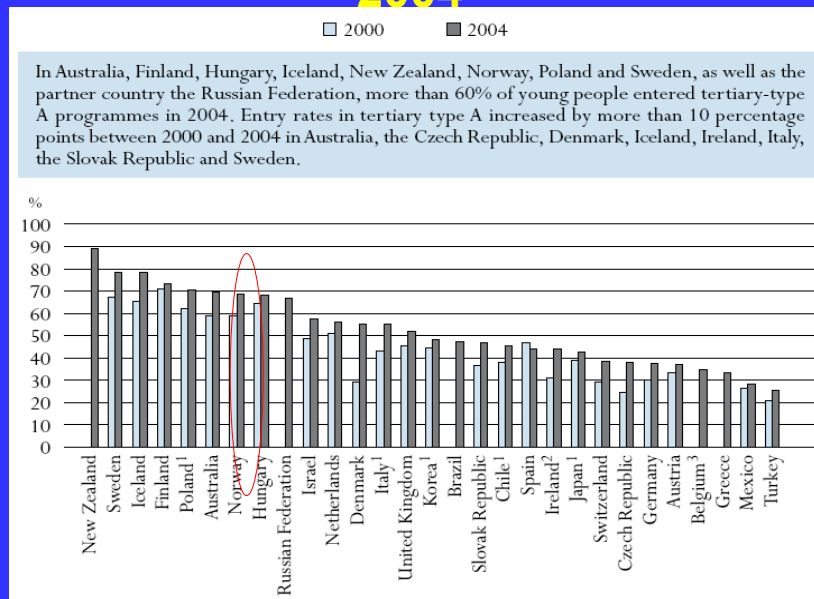
This is the picture for total numbers, but look at the completions for built environment course compared to commerce and management course in Figure 2 during the same period

Figure 2 – Students enrolled in Architecture & Building and Management & Commerce courses in Australia from 1996 to 2006



- Students are not choosing built environmental courses
- Management and Commerce increases 138% from 1996 to 2006.
- Architecture and building increase 59% (96-06) and also from a much lower starting figure.

Entry rates into tertiary education 2000 & 2004



The current state of affairs

- Total numbers increased for Architecture & Building between '96 and '06 but have not kept up with other fields.
- High levels of construction / property activity.
- Figures for year one HE students in Victoria (Jan '08) show 9.8% decline in architecture and building.
- Entry standards are declining too, e.g. Queensland.
- BE graduates fail to become full members of professional bodies.
 1. why don't students join professional bodies?
 2. why don't student members convert to full membership?
- This research sought the employers' perspectives
- Stage 1 surveyed 661 built environment students in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria for their views with regards to profession bodies and membership.

Research aims and objectives

- This research sought to;
 1. Ascertain the views and opinions of built environment employers about the attributes of graduate and early career employees in the sector
 2. Ascertain the views and opinions of built environment employers about the attitudes of graduate and early career employees towards the built environment professions

Research methodology

- A questionnaire survey was compiled by the Universities of Melbourne and Queensland in 2007.
- The questionnaire was piloted and amended, data collection occurred Sept to Nov 2007.
- Research population - selection based on four criteria.
 1. Geographical spread.
 2. Organisational size and influence
 3. Organisational diversity (regional, national and international)
 4. Private and public sectors
- This categorisation of survey participants was representative of the student destinations immediately following completion of their built environment degree courses.
- The total number of survey participants was twenty seven.

The questionnaire survey

- The survey comprised three sections.
- **Section one** asked the respondent about themselves and their organisation.
- **Section two** of the questionnaire posed questions about the organisations graduate employees.
- **Section three** asked questions about the employer's preferences for graduate and professionally qualified employees.

Data analysis and findings: Employer background information.

- 76% private sector, 24% public sector
- International 52%, National 26% and Regional organisations 22%
- All were senior managers / directors
- All were male
- 92% worked in large organisations (>31 employees). 8% were in organisations employing 11 to 30.
- Area of professional practice was identified.
- 70% operated in the property field, followed by QS (26%) and construction (22%).

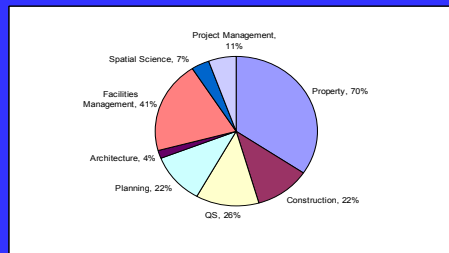


Figure 4 Area of Professional Practice

Employers' preferences for graduate and student employees

- No clear preference for the mode of study for employees. (10% preferred FT study, 43% preferred PT study and 48% accepted FT or PT).
- The degree which employees studied did not have a significant bearing on their employment, and all (bar one) equally employ UG and PG. One respondent preferred PG qualifications.
- Overseas graduates - Employers were asked about overseas graduates and whether they had a preferred country for recruits.
- 78% employed overseas graduates (of those 48% preferred UK graduates). 11% cited NZ, while Qatar and South Africa were also noted.
- 22% had no preferred country from which to recruit.
- The employers who did not employ overseas graduates attributed this to the fact that they had not received applications from overseas and had no bias.

Graduate employee attributes

- 81% considered academic qualifications very important to their company, 19% 'some importance' and none felt academic qualifications were of limited importance.
- The ranking of professional qualifications show 63% held professional qualifications as very important, 22% of some importance and 15% of limited importance.
- Academic qualifications are held in higher regard by employers (however two thirds of employers think professional qualifications are very important).

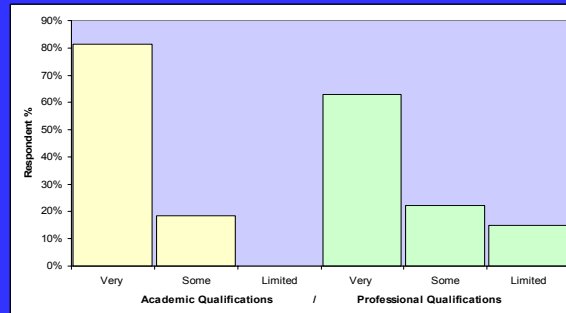
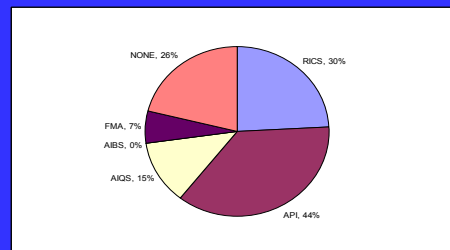


Figure 5 Academic & Professional Qualifications

Professional body memberships required of employees

- Respondents identified professional bodies they require graduates to join.
- Respondents had a choice of the 4 major institutions & could nominate others.
- 45% expected graduates to join API, 30% RICS, 15% AIQS and 7% FMA.
- 26% do not require professional membership.
- This distribution is expected given the firms in the survey but shows a large minority do not require professional qualifications. The 26% that did not require any professional membership, included the 16% who stated professional qualifications were of 'limited importance'.
- The remainder of the 26% were drawn from those ranking professional bodies as of 'some importance'.



Encouraging Professional Membership & Reasons for joining a professional body

- Employers used a mixture of methods to encourage membership: the most popular being (52%), at interview, followed by mentoring and review (both 41%) and 7% at induction.
- Employers were asked to rank the why they felt graduates should join a professional body.
- Most important was that professional membership is a benchmark of professional knowledge and skills, 2nd was the ability to keep up to date and, third to provide access to networks.
- Employer's reasons favoured those aspects that enhance skills and knowledge within employees. The mid ranked items related to employability and career advancement and lower ranked preferences related to pay and employee benefits. This reinforces a belief that professional membership does not translate into increased remuneration, in the eyes of the employers.
- Employers ranked their graduate employees expectations of professional membership. Networking and structured training were equally ranked and reinforces the answers to the question where training of new employees was seen as the most important aspect of their membership of a profession. Ranked last was salary (employers do not link professional memberships with enhanced earning capacity).

Professional Membership and Fees

- 52% required graduate employees to become members of the professional bodies. 48% did not.
- 81.8% pay fees, 22.2% pay for a single membership. 63% will not pay for multiple memberships.
- The level of fees charged could be a barrier and employers were asked about fee levels. The current fee charged by RICS is AUD166 p.a. and a one off fee of AUD200 to sit the APC, was reasonable. 72.7% felt that the fee was 'about right'; while 13.6% felt the fee was too low.
- Opinions of fees for student entry are shown in Figure 7. A similar opinion of AIQS and AIBS fees to those held about RICS fees. 63% felt the API (Victoria) fee scale of \$600 per annum plus a \$154 application fee was too high.

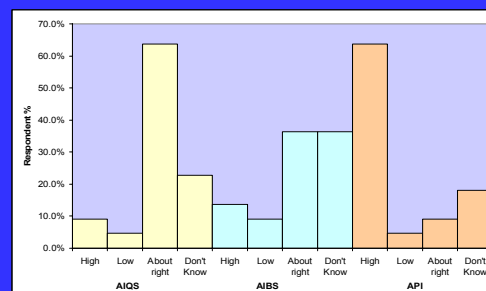


Figure 7 Student entry fees to professional bodies

Timescales for membership of professional bodies

- Discussion that training periods may be too long for graduate employees.
- Some institutions have considered altering their training structure to reduce the period required before becoming a full member of the institution.
- Respondents were asked if they thought the current 2 year RICS APC was too difficult or too long.
- 85.7% felt the APC length is appropriate. 9.5% felt the period was too long.

Conclusions

- The attitudes of employers from three Australian cities representing the private and public sectors.
- No preference for UG or PG employees.
- Opportunities for overseas trained professionals to find employment in Australia.
- Academic qualifications are very important - reinforces the need for professional bodies to work with HE sector to ensure access to the next generation. Need for professional qualifications and membership supported by employers.
- That employers value professional qualifications is only partially reflected in a requirement of graduate employees to join a professional body (52% require membership).
- Attitudes to joining a profession revealed that training and networking were most important and that advancement and salary were least important.
- All respondents were male and over 35 years of age. 52% were API members, 11% AIQS members and 63% RICS members. Those with RICS membership all also held membership of either the API or AIQS depending on their field of practice.

The next steps

- Professional membership is an issue which is affecting a number of professional bodies within the built environment and surveying.
- Questions arising from the findings include;
 1. What is the situation in other countries?
 2. What is the position in the developing nations?
 3. Does Europe face a different set of issues?
- This project is to be extended to incorporate the wider surveying disciplines across developing and developed countries and also three European countries and an African country to ascertain the situation there and to under take a comparative study. It is funded by FIG and the findings will be reported in 2009.