

Preparing for the Full Membership Interview

The membership interview is an important part of the process involved in becoming a full member of the Institute, it will test your knowledge, your experience, your planning philosophy, your commitment to the planning profession and the New Zealand context

The interview is conducted by a panel of members, to a consistent format throughout the country. The following competencies are examined:-

Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Range• Depth• Quality• Judgement
Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Soundness of philosophical thinking• Awareness of inter-generational issues and competing interests and values
Conceptual Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Planning as a profession• Ethics
Treaty of Waitangi Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Awareness of the Treaty of Waitangi• Awareness of RMA relationship to the Treaty• Awareness of principles of the Treaty of Waitangi
Legislative Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Political processes• Legislation
Contribution to Profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Level of commitment• Level of skills
Range and Depth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research• Analytical/technical policy development
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Written• Verbal

The interview will consist of robust discussion on the applicants experience, philosophy, conceptual framework and treaty issues. Questions will be asked at the interview covering all of the above categories. The interview will generally take 1-2 hours. On completion of the interview, the panel will assess the applicant's eligibility for membership and will decide either:

- (a) To admit the applicant immediately, or
- (b) To admit the applicant, subject to suggestions or advice about particular aspects of the applicants understanding of planning, or work experience, or
- (c) To delay admission (for a specified period) with a recommendation for additional experience, or
- (d) To refuse to admit the applicant.

If the applicant is admitted to Full membership he or she will be advised by the panel chairperson verbally soon after the interview. This will be followed by a letter confirming this action and passing on any advice to the new member that may have arisen during the interview. Unsuccessful applicants may be advised on what action is required to assist them in expanding their experience to make them suitable for a further interview. This may include wider experience, further study etc.

NB: A successful candidate is not a Full Member until the necessary subscription is paid. A certificate will then be prepared and forwarded to the member.

What The Interview Panel Wants To Learn

By Jennifer Dixon, NZPI® past president.

Questions posed at the interview explore two dimensions; first the “bigger picture” of how and where planning fits in an economic, social and political context, and second, the “nuts and bolts” of planning as a technical activity.

In dealing with the “bigger picture” the applicant is asked a range of questions that explore their understanding of planning philosophy and concepts, ethics, knowledge of institutional arrangements and statutes, principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, and knowledge of current issues facing planners and the profession.

The second component tests their depth and range of experience, skills and methods applied in their everyday work. Following completion of the interview, panellists score the quality of the answers in a matrix system, and decide whether the applicant is ready to be admitted to full membership. Applicants are usually advised of the decision immediately after the interview or within the next few days.

It is important to dispel one frequently heard misconception about the interview. There are no “correct” answers to the questions posed. That is, while some questions may involve matters of fact, most questions explore the ability of the applicant to reflect on opinions they have formulated in particular situations; particular scenarios that may be outlined to them; ethical issues that may have arisen; broad knowledge of relevant statutes; and the ability to analyse issues.

What the panel seeks is evidence that the applicant is conversant with key elements of planning practice and is able to articulate views and opinions confidently on a range of issues. This does not mean that the applicant has to be experienced in all facets of planning but rather that the applicant has developed sufficient awareness and understanding of what can be constructed as commonly accepted practice. For example, a planner who has specialised in transport planning and also maintained knowledge of wider issues should be able to complete an interview successfully. A planner who has specialised in policy development but kept up to date on implementation issues should be equally well placed. Obviously, well-rounded experience with good breadth and depth places an applicant in a strong position

The Interview Facts, Tips and Information

Facts – Interviews are a relatively informal affair

Interviews are usually carried out by a panel of three Full NZPI Members. An NZPI Councillor will be on the panel and is the chair. While each interview is run by a chairperson, the atmosphere is relaxed, with no set formal procedure, usually; the interviewers and interviewee sit around a table.

Tip – Preparation is a good idea

The submission of an essay used to be a compulsory part of the process, but now may only be requested at the discretion of the Membership Convenor. The process of sitting down, thinking through the questions and issues and writing down your views and opinions is good preparation for the interview. While you don't have to write an essay now, it is a good idea to prepare for the interview (and you don't need to research all the latest planning theory textbooks!). You can:

- Give thought to the general subject matters that interview will cover. For example, is planning a “profession”? What makes it different to other professions? What is the relationship between planning and resource management? What are some of the ethical questions faced by planners?
- Talk to other recent interviewees for handy hints.
- Identify and think about some of the issues facing planners today, particularly the relationship between planning policy and planning administration.
- Re-read or re-familiarise yourself with the examples sent in accompanying your application as the panel may ask questions on one or more of these examples.
- Read the [Planning Quarterly articles](#) on membership.

Fact – Work experience in only one area of planning won't be held against you

If you have worked in one area of planning, or haven't had a great breadth of work experience, don't let that deter you from considering making an application. While wide experience may help, the panel are more interested in your views, opinions, approaches to problems, and analytical processes. The panel will want to see that you have a big picture view of planning. They will try to ask a range of questions, drawing on your own experience. Very few questions will have a black and white answer. If you want to think about a question, don't rush the answer out. If you don't understand the question, ask for further clarification. If you get hit with a hard question, attempt to answer it, even if it is by “thinking out aloud”. A thoughtful reply is better than no answer. Interviewers like a good discussion, and a good topic will often generate debate and comments from everyone.

Information – Interviews last between 1 and 2 hours

Interviews vary considerably, in duration, questions, and procedures. The chairperson will outline the general procedure, including whether they expect you to wait after the interview while the panel makes its decision, or whether a decision will be relayed to you later.

Tip - Ask not what the Institute can do for you.....

You should be asked about your expectations of joining the Institute – why are you applying for membership? Remember, membership of the Institute is a two-way relationship. While the NZPI should provide its members with certain services, as a voluntary run professional body, it relies on all its members to work together to achieve common goals, at national or branch level or on a personal basis. While Full Membership may be useful in getting that job in the UK, joining the NZPI should mean more than just that.....