

Consultation Paper -
Review of Qualifications for Planning Posts
in the Local Government Sector

Background

Local government is at the heart of local community, economic and social life in Ireland. Local authorities offer more than 1,000 individual public services and have a mandate to take action to support the interests of the local community. The local government system has a long tradition of local leadership and of serving the public, with directly elected City and County Councils being first established under the Local Government Act 1898 and constitutional recognition given to local government in 2001.

The 31 local authorities that now exist are constitutionally independent statutory bodies with their own democratically elected councils and management structures.

It is essentially that local authorities have workforces with the capability and capacity to deliver for communities as the primary means of public service at local level.

Declaring qualifications for posts in the local government sector first originated with the Local Authorities (Officers and Employees) Act 1926. The purpose of declaring qualifications for roles in the local government sector is to provide a consistent approach to recruitment across all 31 local authorities.

It is essential that qualifications declared for posts in the local government sector meet the needs of the sector while also respecting wider obligations including employment law, the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and the CPSA Codes of Practices (where relevant).

Working Group

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage has recently established a Working Group to Review Qualifications for Planning Posts in the Local Government Sector declared by the Minister under section 160 of the Local Government Act 2001. A copy of the Terms of Reference for the Working Group is under at Appendix A. The Working Group is reviewing the existing suite of planner qualifications and may recommend changes to those qualifications.

Qualifications

The power to declare qualifications for posts in the local government sector rests with the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage under section 160 of the Local Government Act 2001. Section 160 of the Act also provides that a person should not be appointed to any post in a local authority for which qualifications have been declared by the Minister, if he or she does not possess the prescribed qualifications.

In total, there are currently 5 national qualifications (available at the following link <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/collections/planning-services-in-local-authorities-qualifications/> and also attached for ease of reference) declared for planning posts in the local government sector in the following order:

- graduate in planning
- assistant planner
- executive planner
- senior executive planner
- senior planner

In addition, there are 2 local qualifications declared for Dublin City Council:

- Deputy City Planning Officer
- City Planning Officer

These qualifications, all declared under section 160 of the Local Government Act 2001, detail the essential eligibility requirements that currently apply to candidates for planning posts in the local government sector. A candidate must be in a position to meet these eligibility requirements before applying for any one of the seven planning roles.

The declared qualifications cover character, health, education and experience. The requirements under health and character are standard across all the planning qualifications. In terms of education, all 7 qualifications require candidates to hold a “qualification in planning at least level 8 in the NFQ”. Depending on the planning grade, the number of years of experience that is required will vary. A summary of the educational and experience requirements pertaining to each of the qualifications is provided under at Appendix B.

Submissions

The Department is inviting submissions from key stakeholders and other interested parties in relation to any aspect of the current qualifications for planning posts. Please email your submission to LGPersonnel@housing.gov.ie .

The closing date for receipt of submissions is **5pm, Wednesday 11 March 2026**.

Alternatively, you may forward your submission by post to:

Local Government Human Resources
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
Government Buildings
Newtown Road
Wexford

Terms and Conditions

Respondents are advised that the Department is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2014 and Data Protection legislation. With the exception of a name and address, personal, confidential or commercially sensitive information should not be included in your submission or observations and it will be presumed that all information contained in your submission is releasable under the Freedom of Information Act 2014.

Please note that the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage may publish a summary of the submissions received.

Queries

Email: LGPersonnel@housing.gov.ie

Appendix A

Terms of Reference of the Working Group

Review of Engineering Qualifications (declared under section 160 of the Local Government Act 2001) for Planning Posts in the Local Government Sector 2025

Purpose:

The purpose of this Working Group is to:

- evaluate the current qualifications (declared under section 160 of the Local Government Act 2001) required for planning posts within the Local Government sector;
- assess whether these requirements align with the needs of the sector and the diverse pool of talent available;
- identify any barriers in the current qualifications as declared that may prevent access to planning roles; and
- provide an assessment of and recommendations for improving or modernising the qualifications eligibility criteria to attract a wider pool of talent into the Planning profession for consideration by Working Group 4 (System Review) and the Steering Group established under the Ministerial Action Plan for Planning Resources.

The Working Group will:

1. Define the objective of the review, scope and approach;
2. Define the proposed review timeline;
3. Bring broader public service-wide insights to bear on the work being undertaken;
4. Examine both the educational and experience requirements set down in the current qualifications at each planner level as appropriate;
5. Examine the practical application of the requirements at 4 above in the recruitment process to ensure consistency across the sector;
6. Engage with the sector to aid understanding of the roles currently undertaken by planners in local authorities;
7. Determine what changes are required in order that the qualifications are appropriate and relevant to the role of a planner at the various planner levels in a local authority;
8. Determine how the qualifications can serve the sector in attracting as wide a pool of qualified planners as is possible;
9. Determine how the qualifications can provide for career progression through the different levels in order to retain planners in the sector;
10. Review statutory and other requirements and ensure compliance, as required;
11. Review current education trends / awards in the field of planning to ensure that any recommended changes reflect these;
12. Have regard to HR / industrial relations / strategic workforce planning perspectives in the work being undertaken;

13. Consult as appropriate prior to the submission of recommendations to Working Group 4 (System Review) and the Steering Group;
14. If issues arise during the course of the work of this WG that are outside the scope of this WG, such issues will be referred up to Working Group 4 (System Review).

Chair: Sinéad Carr, Chief Executive, Tipperary County Council

Membership:

Michael Rainey, Chief Executive, Laois County Council

Leonora Earls, Director of Services, Organisational Development, Wicklow County Council

Alan Dunney, Director of Services, Planning, Enterprise, Economic Development and Emergency Services, Kildare County Council

James Clune, Head of Human Resources and Business Improvement, Limerick City & County Council

Helen Murray O'Connor, School of Architecture, Building and Environment, Technological University Dublin

Danny O'Sullivan, Principal Officer, Planning Division, Dept. of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Sinéad Coleman, Head of Talent Acquisition for the Public Service, Public Appointments Service

Dr. Seán O'Leary, Irish Planning Institute

Dr. Caroline Browne, Royal Town Planning Institute

Niall Cussen, Chief Executive and Planning Regulator, Office of the Planning Regulator

Ray Rochford, A/Asst. Chief Executive, Local Government Management Agency

Sharon Finegan, Principal Officer, Local Government Human Resources, DHLGH

Secretariat: Local Government Human Resources, Dept. of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Meeting frequency: As required.

Duration: Work is to be progressed as a matter of priority with a view to concluding the WG's work at the earliest possible date.

Appendix B

Local Authority Qualifications for Planning Posts			
Grade	Date Current Qualifications last reviewed	Educational requirements	Minimum no. of years satisfactory relevant experience required
Graduate in Planning	11/01/2018	Honours degree (level 8 or higher on the NFQ) in Planning	0 years
Assistant Planner	20/04/2021	Qualification in Planning (<u>at least</u> level 8 on the NFQ)	2 years
Executive Planner	20/04/2021	Qualification in Planning (<u>at least</u> level 8 on the NFQ)	5 years
Senior Executive Planner	23/11/2023 ¹	Qualification in Planning (<u>at least</u> level 8 on the NFQ)	7 years
Senior Planner	23/11/2023 ²	Qualification in Planning (<u>at least</u> level 8 on the NFQ)	8 years
Deputy City Planning Officer – Dublin City Council	16/07/2016	Qualification in Planning (<u>at least</u> level 8 on the NFQ)	9 years
City Planning Officer – Dublin City	28/07/2017	Qualification in Planning (<u>at least</u> level 8 on the NFQ)	10 years

¹ While these qualifications were most recently declared in 2023, this was to deal with a procedural issue. The qualifications were most recently reviewed in 2021.

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