

## **Reflection in professional education: an investigation into the reflective capabilities of trainee town planners**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Trainee town planners are required to keep a log book of their experiences in the workplace as part of their professional qualification, and are directed 'to reflect' on their professional practice in these logs. One set of log books was analysed for examples of reflection taking place, exploring what we can learn from this about the candidates' understanding of the requirement. A number of different reflective forms were identified in the log books, although its occurrence varied from candidate to candidate and often sat within predominantly descriptive accounts. It was apparent, however, that description is not unrelated to reflection, with higher quality descriptions in turn more likely to produce reflection. A number of issues were also identified that could prevent or restrict the occurrence of reflection, such as the format of the log books and tensions around the public and private audiences for the document. Rethinking some of these tensions, and more fully articulating the purpose for reflection, could therefore be useful for the RTPI in encouraging more meaningful reflective responses and therefore bringing about more beneficial learning and improvement of professional practice.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In 2005 the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) introduced the Assessment of Professional Competence (APC) as the means of gaining Chartered Membership (the professional qualification) of the profession. In so doing, it introduced the concept of the 'reflective practitioner' (Schön 1983) as the aspirational professional characteristic. One of the key documents through which this reflective practice is to be demonstrated is the APC log book: 'a written record reflecting on work undertaken, skills developed and learning outcomes' (RTPI 2005, p.5). Using the log books of a number of successful candidates, this paper examines whether it is possible to identify examples of reflection in the log books; what, if any, form this might take; and what we can learn from this about how the candidates respond to the requirement to 'reflect', and the implications of this for the RTPI.

### **RATIONALE**

With its roots in the professional practices of architecture, engineering and surveying, town planning (loosely defined as 'planning of our towns, cities and countryside' - RTPI 2001, p.2) in the UK has emerged over the last century as a discipline and a profession in its own right, becoming by the 1970s increasingly influenced and subject to critique by the social and political sciences. These moves to 'turn an activity which had been place-based into one that was people-based' (Cherry 1996, p.179) were initially highly restricted by a statutory

planning system more concerned with regulation than design of future places. The 2001 publication by the professional body for planning, the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), of the 'New Vision for Planning' challenged this highly regulatory role for planning with the concept of *spatial planning* – a more dynamic form of planning concerned with plan-making and frameworks for the future, mediating the claims of politics, economics, society and the environment. This challenges planners working within this paradigm to become 'interpreters' rather than 'legislators' (Bauman 1987), exercising professional judgement in the 'swampy lowlands' (Schön 1983, p.43) of competing interests rather than in the previous, highly regulated, statutory framework. Planners as 'deliberative practitioners' (Forester 1999) are therefore positioned at the heart of a collaborative decision-making process, rather than presiding over it as 'omnipotent, knowledgeable specialists' (Swain & Tait 2007, p.243).

In direct response to this shifting role for planners, the RTPI undertook to review the requirements of the professional qualification, with the publication of the Education Commission report in 2003. With planners working in new roles requiring new 'spatial', integrative and mediatory approaches, so it was determined that planners required new approaches to learning and professional practice. Drawing directly on the work of Donald Schön, the concept of reflection was therefore introduced into professional planning education within the Assessment of Professional Competence (APC) – the new route to professional qualification. The guidance notes on this route state that 'Planners rarely encounter standard problems needing standard solutions, and it is this ability to learn in a reflective manner through taking action that is the hallmark of the true professional' (RTPI 2005, p.26). One of the main ways in which this reflection is to be demonstrated is through the APC log book, which is kept over the period during which the candidate is in the workplace gaining experience towards the professional qualification.

The format of the APC log book is prescribed by the RTPI, with entries in four columns headed 'Nature of professional work/task undertaken'; 'What skills/competencies has this work developed?'; 'What knowledge/understanding has been gained/developed as a result of this work?'; and 'What skills/knowledge do you feel you need to develop?' (RTPI 2005, p.37). Candidates keep this record on a monthly basis over a period of between one and two years and, while it does not form part of their formal assessment, it is submitted as part of their application for their professional qualification as evidence of their ongoing learning and reflective practice. It is this document that provides the raw material for this study.

## METHODOLOGY

The research was pursued through textual analysis of the APC log books using a critical framework derived from the literature on reflection, as set out in the section 'Understanding Reflection'. In order to obtain log books for analysis, agreement was secured from the RTPI to contact all candidates who had successfully completed the APC since its introduction, and whose agreement to being contacted by the RTPI and its partners was on record. This meant an invitation to participate in the study was issued to 118 planners, with 19 submitting their log books for analysis. Although this sample was drawn only from successful candidates, this included those who had experienced previous failed applications

as well as those who were successful on the first attempt. Although it is a requirement of the APC, the log book is not formally assessed, and no attempt is made in this research to draw conclusions about whether the frequency or nature of reflection in the log book has a bearing on success in the professional qualification.

The initial analysis was followed by a more detailed exploration of reflective responses and attitudes towards reflection through short telephone interviews conducted with three of the participants. These three were selected for their noticeable differences in approaches to the log book, from a largely descriptive approach to one which appeared to demonstrate an ability to consider the wider implications of the individual's work as well as the impact of planning more generally. Interview questions were designed to explore three key issues:

- The candidate's understanding of what it means to be reflective (Questions 5, 6 and 7)
- The candidate's attitude towards keeping the log book (Questions 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7)
- The candidate's approach to the log book (Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4)

The following questions were used:

1. Can you describe how you went about completing your log book? Thinking of things like when you completed it (ongoing/at the end of each month), by yourself or with someone, which column did you complete first?
2. How did you go about selecting examples to go into your log book?
3. Were there things that you found particularly useful about keeping your log book?
4. Were there things that you found particularly difficult or problematic?
5. The APC log book is a reflective document – can you say a little bit about what you understand that means?
6. What do you feel about the need to 'reflect' on your work?
7. Do you think the ability to reflect is a useful skill for planners? Why/why not?
8. Do you have any other thoughts, points or comments with regard to reflection and/or the log books that you'd like to express but haven't had a chance to do so up to now?

Candidates received these questions in advance of the interview, though they were informed that the interview would be semi-structured to allow the interviewer fully to explore their response, and thus would not necessarily rigidly follow this format. Although there was a risk that providing the questions up front would produce formulaic responses, this was outweighed by the benefit of having candidates approach the interview having had an opportunity to revisit their experiences of the log book, given that for some candidates it had been up to a year since successfully completing the APC process and gaining their professional qualification.

## UNDERSTANDING REFLECTION – DEVELOPING A CRITICAL FRAMEWORK

Identifying examples of reflection in the trainee planners' log books necessarily relies on developing an understanding of reflection itself. The difficulties in reaching a definition are well documented (see, for example, Warhurst 2008, who references Boud et al. 1985 and Kahn 2006), but the research began, as the RTPI does, with Schön, to examine what it is in his concept of reflective practice that the RTPI would like to see replicated by its trainees.

Schön proposes reflection as an alternative to what he sees as the outdated and prohibitive epistemology of 'Technical Rationality' (Schön 1983, p.21), where professionals are cast as experts presiding over a domain of knowledge and merely applying it in response to prescribed problems. Moving away from such an approach which, in Schön's view, artificially divorces theory and practice, he argues that this relationship should be reconceptualised, recasting practitioners as 'researchers in a practice context' (Schön 1983, p.68), constantly testing and developing their knowledge and understanding through action. To achieve this, the status of 'reflective practitioner' (Schön 1983, 1987) is set up as the aspirational professional characteristic.

This dynamic interaction between thought and action is central to Schön's work. Meaningful reflection, for Schön, is not simply thinking about action: practitioners must 'turn thought back on action, and on the knowing that is implicit in the action' (Schön 1983, p.50). In making knowledge the object of reflection, Schön echoes Dewey (though little acknowledged at the time: Boud, Cressy & Docherty 2006), who defines reflection as 'Active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends' (Dewey 1933, p.9). Many other authorities share this emphasis on knowledge as the object of reflection, with Van Manen (1977), Morrison (1995) and Mezirow (1990) all including within their definitions of reflection a questioning of existing knowledge and suppositions.

This consensus does not, however, imply that such a definition is entirely unproblematic. As Morrison notes, simply analysing practice from the basis of theory (what he calls 'hermeneutic reflective practice', Morrison 1995, p.88) does not by itself guarantee to improve practice. Dewey's assertion that reflection must be purposeful (Dewey 1993), and must therefore lead to action or a change in approach, is helpful in addressing this concern. However, even a strong will to act cannot guarantee that action will follow, where the constraints and pressures of the workplace (such as surfaced by Power 1994, 1997; Evetts 2003; and Swain & Tait 2007) could curtail the practitioner's ability to act on the understandings they derive from reflection. There is therefore a risk, as Morrison notes, that 'a hermeneutic understanding might be reproductive rather than transformative of the *status quo*; it is partially rather than fully empowering' (Morrison 1995, p.89).

While it is possible to identify some consensus around this form of reflective practice, it is not the only interpretation available. Morrison uses Habermas' *knowledge-constitutive interests* and *ideal speech situation* to draw up a continuum of reflective practice (Morrison 1995, drawing on Habermas 1972) which defines two further forms of reflection, positioned either side of hermeneutic reflection on the continuum. At the earlier stage,

'technical reflection' adopts an atheoretical approach to improvement of practice, rooted in improvement of the immediate action, which seeks to 'render more efficient the existing situation rather than to transform it' (Morrison 1995, p.87). Whilst continual improvement could be deemed a commendable aim for reflection, Morrison critiques this form of reflective practice from the perspective of teacher education for 'its behaviourism... its reduction of teaching to the performance of trained behaviours' (Morrison 1995, p.88). Morrison is concerned that by formalising and technicising reflective practice, its value is negated, an observation of particular interest given that this is precisely the approach taken by the RTPI by embedding it so firmly as a requirement for professional qualification.

At the higher end of Morrison's schema, what he terms 'emancipatory reflective practice' seeks to address some of the limitations of earlier reflective forms by going 'beyond craft knowledge and artistry to empowerment and emancipation' (Morrison 1995, p.90). Where this form also involves testing previously held assumptions, it more specifically involves 'a constant critique of domination, or institutions, and of repressive forms of authority' (Van Manen 1977, p.227). Through this form of reflection the professional is encouraged to look beyond his immediate practice, 'taking account of social, political and/or cultural forces' (Hatton & Smith 1995, p.45). The limits to this are, as with hermeneutic reflection, that 'the putative power of critical theory... to effect change and empowerment is not guaranteed' (Morrison 1995, p.90). Yet this form of reflection remains an attractive proposition for the RTPI given the particular position of spatial planning at the interface of social, economic, environmental and political domains. Encouraging trainee town planners to be aware of this and fostering, through professional education, the ability to manage it, could be seen as highly desirable.

Reflecting as it does a range of definitions of and responses to reflection across the body of literature, Morrison's schema provided a relevant framework against which to assess the occurrence of reflection in the RTPI log books. However, at this point an important aspect of Schön's concept of reflection remains unexplored; specifically, his distinction between reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Reflection-on-action is relatively unproblematic, occurring as it does after action and thus being closely allied with the reflective forms already discussed. However reflection-in-action, occurring as it does, 'in the middle of action, without interrupting it' (Schön 1987, p.26) is potentially significantly more problematic for the RTPI. Which form of reflection is it demanding of its trainees, and how can reflection during action be evidenced in written records that are necessarily completed after the event?

It is here that Hatton & Smith's (1995) study of reflection in teacher education provides a helpful accompaniment to Morrison's framework, focusing as it does less on the object or outcome of reflection but instead on the characteristics of reflective writing as a means of identifying whether or not reflection is taking place. The authors' inclusion of 'descriptive writing' in a reflective continuum draws attention to the value that simple description can add to reflection, and provides a means of identifying, through description, reflection-in-action where it has taken place. This is in keeping with Schön's own approach to description, where he notes that 'although some descriptions are more appropriate to reflection-in-action than others, descriptions that are not very good may be good enough to enable an inquirer to criticize and restructure his intuitive understandings so as to produce

new actions that improve the situation or trigger a reframing of the problem' (Schön 1983, p.227). The role of description in setting up reflection is therefore worth considering in the analysis.

Hatton & Smith (1995) define three further types of writing, two of which are also useful additions to the critical framework (the third, 'critical reflection', is deemed to share sufficient characteristics with Morrison's 'emancipatory reflection' as not to warrant separate inclusion in the critical framework, although it should be noted that it has distinctly less emphasis on empowerment and emancipation). The definitions given of 'descriptive reflection' and 'dialogic reflection' (Hatton & Smith 1995, p.40) allow for exploration of reflection – or early reflective capabilities – at work in units of writing that it might not, using Morrison's framework, be possible to identify as reflective. 'Descriptive reflection' involves an 'attempt to provide reason (sic) justification for events or actions but in a reportive or descriptive way' (Hatton & Smith 1995, p.48), and it can lead to dialogic reflection, 'a change of stance within the writing where further issues and alternative reasons were explored, usually in a more tentative way' (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p.41). Dialogic reflection, then, is characterised by a 'stepping back' which leads to 'a different level of mulling about, discourse with self and exploring the experience' (Hatton & Smith 1995, p.48). These three forms of writing provide a useful additional way to explore the reflective capabilities of the trainee planners, and therefore warrant inclusion in the critical framework.

## RESULTS

### Occurrences of Reflection – Technical, hermeneutic, emancipatory

From the first analysis of the log book using the Morrison (1995) schema, it was clear that technical reflection is the most frequently recurring form, with all candidates displaying evidence of technical reflection. Entries of this nature covered practical ideas for improvement of the task ('Some very unsuccessful consultation events were held in libraries, in future events will have to be publicised wider and developed more thoroughly', Candidate 6) and for personal improvement ('I feel I need to understand the requirements and process for housing allocations more clearly', Candidate 14). As Candidate 15 explains 'When I've made mistakes early on I wrote down what I really wasn't going to do the next time, and it did mean I learned my lesson if you like – you know, really won't be doing that again!' (Candidate 15, Interview Transcript). What was also apparent was that, unlike Morrison, the candidates experienced this technical reflection in a highly positive light. Whereas Morrison (1995) critiques technical reflection as maintaining the status quo, Candidate 15 views this as 'really good practice' (Interview Transcript), and something that her team aims to undertake at the end of each project in the future.

Whilst technical reflection is the most frequently recurring form, it is also possible to identify instances of both hermeneutic and emancipatory reflection taking place. Candidate 4 questions 'Why is the focus on new homes rather than the contribution of new buildings and existing homes/buildings?' (Candidate 4), and in so doing can be seen to be challenging the 'role frame' (Schön 1983, p.42) that has presupposed an emphasis on new homes.

Similarly, it is possible to identify instances of emancipatory reflection in some, though by no means all, of the log books, with candidates addressing some of the ethical dilemmas facing them and the system at large. Candidate 5, for example, muses in his log on 'the innately political and democratic nature of [the] planning process, whereby narrow political imperatives may occasionally win out over 'rational' professional opinion' (Candidate 5). However, undertaking this form of reflection was not necessarily a positive experience, with Candidate 5 commenting that he found this realisation 'dispiriting, and to an extent felt undermined' (Candidate 5). Here, increased knowledge and awareness as a result of reflection merely surfaces the limitations of the practitioner and does not lead to action on improvement, supporting Morrison's critique that such reflection is 'partially rather than fully empowering' (Morrison 1995, p.89).

### **Characteristics of Reflective Writing**

Although the analysis made plain that reflection is present in the log books, a significant portion of the log books could not confidently be coded as reflective according to Morrison's criteria. This is inevitable in the first column of the log book, where candidates are effectively asked to describe their experience to provide the basis for subsequent reflections. Yet just as Hatton & Smith (1995) and Schön (1983) perceive a clear relationship between description and reflection, so it was apparent from the log book analysis that the 'quality' of the description in the trainees log books seems to be affected by the 'quality' of the description that leads to it. More specifically, the more clearly the candidates use the first column to describe their experiences in first hand detail rather than as more generalised accounts, the more likely this appeared to lead to reflection occurring in subsequent columns. Fuller, more personal accounts of experience appear to act as a 'trigger' such that, in subsequent columns, candidates 'attempt to provide reasons based often on personal judgement' (Hatton & Smith 1995, p.41) which can therefore be coded as reflective under Hatton & Smith's criteria.

What this suggests is that generalised, de-personalised accounts omit the impetus for reflection – what Dewey characterises as a 'difficulty or obstruction' (Dewey 1933, p.12), and Schön sees as being 'stimulated by surprise' (Schön 1983, p.50). Where this is omitted, candidates offer up as 'reflection' simple lists of the skills and knowledge that *could* have been developed or acquired during the activity. This more 'computational' (Bruner 1996) approach to knowledge positions the candidates still within the traditional professional paradigm of 'Technical Rationality' (Schön 1983, p.21), rather than engaging with and exploring an activity as a 'researchers in a practice context' (Schön 1983, p.68).

### **DISCUSSION OF ISSUES ARISING**

The analysis of the log books provides clear evidence of reflection occurring, though arguably perhaps not as frequently as the RTPI would like to encourage. A number of possible reasons for this emerged, which are addressed here in turn. Seeking to resolve some of these tensions could provide a useful way for the RTPI to encourage more frequent reflective responses among a larger number of trainee planners.

## Log Book Structure and its relationship to Reflection

There was some suggestion during the research that the format of the log book itself could inhibit reflective responses. This suggestion is not without its detractors: Candidate 5 comments that 'I don't think it's down to the log book, really, I think it's down to the person. I think it gives enough scope to do it' (Candidate 5, Interview Transcript). However, there is some sense that the multiple column format of the log book overly-technicises the reflective process by artificially divorcing the experience ('nature of professional task') from the reflective responses that it seeks to encourage. There is therefore a risk that this rigidity inhibits more instinctive reflective responses, and leads to more descriptive accounts. The following extract is an example of this:

<b>Nature of professional work/task undertaken</b>	<b>What skills/competencies has this worked developed?</b>	<b>What knowledge/understanding has been developed as a result of this work?</b>	<b>What skills/knowledge do you feel you need to develop?</b>
<p>Responding to DC consultations, especially on loss of employment sites.</p> <p>Responding to requests for policy advice on suitable uses for 2 sites with closing schools.</p>	<p>Defining the problem, clarifying which issues are central, and interpreting policy.</p>	<p>Knowledge of SDC local Plan Review, especially policies on employment and conversion of rural buildings.</p>	<p>Understanding issues around employment in a rural district, and how farm diversification relates to sustainable objectives. Better knowledge of <i>(locations removed)</i> would be useful to give context to the planning policies and decisions.</p>

*Extract from Candidate 15 log book. Specific locations removed to protect identity of contributor*

It not apparent here that any form of reflection is taking place. The first column offers a fairly basic description of the activity, and subsequent columns are in turn essentially descriptions of skill development, with no clear link back to the experience itself. It is fair to ask, however: if reflection is not present in these accounts, what is it that leads candidates to progress from a simple description of their action to a consideration of the skills and knowledge underpinning this? It could be argued that the log book structure, rather than *preventing* reflection, simply *disguises* from the reader the reflection that has taken place, presenting as a result merely a summary of a more complex reflective response. Reading the log book in a more holistic way, overlooking the enforced separation of units of thought necessitated by the columns, means the example above could legitimately be transcribed as follows:

'I spent much of this month responding to development control consultations, especially on loss of employment sites. In particular, I was responsible for responding to requests for policy advice



on suitable uses for two sites with closing schools. I feel that this work has helped me to think differently about how I define the problem - making sure I clarify which issues are central – and in interpreting policy. It has also helped me to develop my knowledge of district council local Plan Review, especially policies on employment and conversion of rural buildings. However I do feel that my understanding of issues around employment in a rural district, and how farm diversification relates to sustainable objectives, would help me to improve my approach. Better knowledge of (*locations removed*) would also be useful, in order to give context to the planning policies and decisions’

(paraphrase of extract above, Candidate 15)

Rather than the somewhat bland and descriptive account suggested by the log book, syntactically developing the entries into a more discursive format begins to show evidence of the characteristics of dialogic reflection delineated by Hatton and Smith (1995): ‘weighing competing claims and viewpoints’ (thinking differently about how to define the problem); ‘exploring alternative solutions’ (by acquiring better knowledge of the area); and a tentativeness in suggesting possible ways to improve his practice. The introduction of linking phrases, necessary in the free-flow text, which are not present in the short-hand log book ('I feel that'; 'it has also'; 'however') immediately introduces a more conversational, dialogic tone, and this appears to support Hatton & Smith's conclusion that ‘certain language patterns and syntax are likely to ensure that a particular unit of reflection is so coded’ (Hatton & Smith 1995, p.42). The subjectivity in defining reflection is, of course, apparent here, but nevertheless the RTPI might wish to consider whether the log book template is the most helpful way of encouraging reflective capabilities to be demonstrated, or whether more freedom to reflect on action could produce fuller responses.

### **Private Reflections and a Public Audience**

One of the tensions in completing the log books of which candidates appear to be most acutely aware is the dual role of the log book as a tool for private reflection and as a public record of this reflection made available to a wider audience. Although this audience is small – limited to perhaps two Assessors and a personal mentor – the importance of displaying reflection plays heavily in the minds of candidates and can act as a barrier to reflection. As Candidate 15 explains 'I think when I thought about it as a document somebody else was going to read I found it quite difficult, but once I'd forgotten that in the end somebody was going to read it, I was chatting away, almost, to myself (laughs)' (Candidate 15 Interview Transcript). Candidate 5 had a similar experience, explaining 'Because you've always got one eye on the fact that someone's going to read it... and assess it... you started almost trying to invent... not invent... but kind of, you write things because you know someone's going to read it and assess it, as opposed to because you need to learn from it' (Candidate 5 Interview Transcript). In this candidate's estimation, personal reflections from which he can usefully learn are discordant with his perception of what assessors will want to read. An awareness of the log book as a document with an audience, then, rather than a private tool for reflection and learning, seems to impact upon how candidates are able to express themselves and serves to limit rather than encourage meaningful personal reflection.

## Understanding the Purpose of the Log Book

Other attitudes towards the log book appear to have a bearing on the types of responses produced. Candidate 3 is frank about what he sees as the more 'functional' purpose of the log book, which for him is 'just a task that needed doing' (Candidate 3 Interview Transcript). Candidate 15, with a log book more frequently displaying evidence of reflection, still notes that 'I got to the stage with some my entries where it's like... (sighs)... you know, two sentences, two sentences, two sentences, just to fill in each of them [columns]' (Candidate 15 Interview Transcript). For both candidates the log book has become an end in itself, echoing common critiques of the use of reflection in education where 'acts of reflection become ritualised (Boud, Keogh & Walker 1985), particularly when they are encouraged, even imposed through prescribed activities' (Light & Cox 2001, p.55).

Where both candidates see something procedural about the log book, the difference in attitude is that Candidate 15 sees this response as being in some way a deficient, suggesting that she can see that such an approach does not optimise the log books value. Candidate 3, conversely, *appears* to have adopted the discourse of reflection and professional development, but finds it difficult to explain this, tentatively ascribing its benefits to 'identifying training opportunities...and what have you' (Candidate 3, Interview Transcript). For this candidate, then, the log book 'needs doing' simply because it is a requirement of his professional qualification, and ascribed no benefits as a useful means of improving professional practice. Encouraging more candidates to understand the log book's purpose as a means of learning and improving their professional practice, rather than as simply a record of work, could therefore be a means of bringing about more frequent reflection.

## Workplace Pressures

Comparing the different attitudes of these candidates towards the requirement 'to reflect' implies that all things are equal in their experiences of the workplace. However, the discipline of town or spatial planning contains a number of different activities which exist at different ends of the regulatory spectrum, with the potential for varying degrees of freedom to reflect on one's practice. Candidate 15 expresses it well when she says 'I think, because, I work in the policy section, and I think we probably end up doing a bit more of that [reflection] in policy' whereas 'when you work in development control you don't have the opportunities to be quite so... to get a bit theoretical' (Candidate 15 Interview Transcript). The very new and still developing landscape for policy planning means that Candidate 15 and her team are almost *required* to adopt more exploratory approaches, such that she is able to say 'we have actually ended up, sitting round a table, discussing things that are, actually, quite theoretical I suppose' (Candidate 15 Interview Transcript). Even experienced members of her team have to 'think around the subject and... apply what they know, but apply it differently' (ibid.), and in this way Candidate 15 describes her team not only testing existing assumptions but also collectively reflecting in action – the only instance in all of the log books where we can see such a practice described.

Conversely, at the more prescriptive and highly regulated end of the planning system, Candidate 3 is working in development control and, when asked whether he sees reflection taking place in his workplace, is emphatic: 'No. No, I don't think so. I don't know, it's quite

easy to get wrapped up in what you're doing, and you feel that you haven't really time to do that' (Candidate 3 Interview Transcript). All three candidates interviewed acknowledged that time pressures can restrict reflection, particularly in a highly regulatory development control context where 'there's always the pressure to do things in the eight week or thirteen week time scale' (Candidate 5 Interview Transcript). This is not to suggest that reflection could not be equally useful in this context: merely that, in this more procedural sphere of planning, less space is created for reflection with the result that it can become more heavily proceduralised and, potentially, some of its value is lost.

## CONCLUSION

It is certainly possible to identify reflection taking place in the trainee planners' log books, across a spectrum of reflective responses, in spite of only Schön being explicitly referenced in the guidance to candidates, and even this with a lack of clarity as to what kinds of responses the RTPI would like to encourage. What is apparent is that where candidates are more able to articulate the rationale behind reflection – specifically, as an approach to, and a means of improving, professional practice – then examples of reflection as defined in the literature appear more likely to occur, compared to where candidates view it merely as an obstacle to be overcome and therefore tend towards more descriptive responses. This is not to dismiss the role of description, as it would appear that an ability maturely to describe one's experience can itself be a precursor to deeper reflection, suggesting that encouraging candidates to be more specific about their experiences, and to base their descriptions on personal action rather than more generalised accounts, could in turn encourage more productive reflection.

While it might be argued that the format of the log book could restrict reflective activity, this is inconclusive, and it appears more likely that reflection of some form is taking place, but the act of recording it disguises it for the reader. This tension manifest in the role of the log book as a document with an external audience should be borne in mind, and it is certainly something of which candidates are extremely conscious, with even one of the more reflective candidates feeling that her more natural reflective responses can be curbed by an over-consciousness of the interpretations being applied by an external audience. This suggests that if the log book is truly to be used as a tool for professional development and a means of improving professional practice, permitting or indeed encouraging more flexible and personalised approaches to the log book could be more productive, moving the log book away from being a means of assessment and more towards becoming an approach to learning.

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**While the RTPI will have access to the results of the study, the RTPI does not necessarily agree with or endorse the results, nor is it obliged to act on them**