

Standing out from the Crowd

Getting a Job in Transport Planning

Transport Planning is an excellent career. It's about influencing the future. Get it wrong and we waste more of our days stuck in traffic jams or waiting for late buses and trains. Get it right and it may just be possible to travel how and when we want – in a way that helps tackle climate change, supports a vibrant economy and is right for society as a whole.

During recent years the economic climate has squeezed the opportunities available to transport planners; about one in three of those employed in 2008 are no longer directly involved in transport planning. The cuts have affected consultants and local authorities, as well as Government Departments and their agencies.

Despite these pressures, some organisations are still recruiting and it is expected that the number doing so will increase in coming years. If you want to work in transport planning you should remember that competition for jobs is strong. To secure a position you will need to demonstrate to employers that you are special: that you stand out from the crowd.

Your Ambition

Although you may know exactly what you want from your career, in the current climate you will need to be prepared to accept a job that doesn't align perfectly with your long-term ambitions. You will be in a much stronger position to apply for other jobs – or to progress in your new organisation – with some good experience of work under your belt.

Professional qualifications are also important in developing your career. The key qualification is the Transport Planning Professional (TPP), but others include CEng, CMILT and MRTPI. Be sure to educate yourself about those that are best suited to you; more information is available at www.tps.org.uk/main/transport_planning_qualifications/.

Your Skills

Take every opportunity to build your skillset, as this will help you stand out from the crowd.

If you are in work, try and be proactive in your role to gain as much experience as possible. Keep abreast of what is going on in your organisation, and be open to any opportunities to learn or develop new skills.

If you don't have a job, try and use your time as productively as possible. Although being unemployed can be disheartening, you can use the time to extend your knowledge and skills. Set yourself a series of realistic goals, and work steadily through them. If at all possible, secure some voluntary work. Think about how a prospective employer might value what you have been doing, and how what you do might help you stand out from the crowd.



Whether or not you are in work, it is vital that you continually build upon your knowledge of the transport planning profession. As well as reading relevant and topical literature, you may wish to join one of the professional organisations, and participate in their meetings and events.

You should also aim to have an excellent and up-to-date understanding of current issues relating to transport planning and policy. Things you should know include:

- Who the UK Secretary of State and Ministers for Transport are, and what they do
- Who the Ministers are in a devolved administration
- The structure and responsibilities of local government
- How transport is funded
- Legislation of relevance to transport, and any new or planned developments.

Your CV

Your CV is your primary marketing tool to recommend you to an employer and show them how you stand out from the crowd.

Your CV should include the following information:

- Full employment record, in chronological order
- Any work experience
- Education, including years and grades
- Any school or university prizes or awards
- Any conference papers or journal articles in your name
- Any professional memberships and activities
- Any interests outside work
- If possible, it is also good to have a CPD record for the last two years.

Being able to communicate effectively is a skill transport planners need, so make sure your CV is well written and presented, containing the key facts without being overly long, or discursive.

Keep text action-focused and positive: your CV should present you in your best possible light. Your CV must however be completely honest – come an interview, any exaggerated or misleading information could well be discovered.

Spelling and grammatical mistakes are inexcusable in a job application. If possible, get someone with good English skills to look at your CV before you send it out. Use a spell checker and read through your CV extremely carefully, searching for any typing and layout errors; a consistent and well-presented CV demonstrates good attention to detail.

Your Job Application

There are two main routes through which you can apply for a job: through an advertised role or via a 'cold' application.

Advertised roles

If you are responding to an advertised job, first make sure you have read and fully understood all the documents provided by the prospective employer and that you are satisfied that you have the competences and attributes they are looking for. Don't be afraid to ask questions if given the opportunity to do so.

You will either be asked to send in a CV and covering letter, or complete an application form. If sending in a CV, make sure it is fully up to date and if possible tailor it to the position for which you are applying. Use the covering letter to explain why you are interested in the job, and highlight the



skills and experience you hold that make you suitable for the role. As much as possible emphasise what you would offer the employer and how you stand out from the crowd.

Application forms should be completed carefully and fully. The information you supply should appear tailored to the role, rather than copied and pasted from your CV or a generic application. If completing the form by hand, try to avoid making and then having to correct any mistake and ensure your writing is clear. You may wish to word-process the application instead if this will be a particular concern.

All advertised roles give a closing date. If at all possible, try and send in your application in advance of this date as this will help you look keen and proactive, as well as able to manage deadlines.

'Cold' applications

It is also worth writing to key employers directly to introduce yourself and enquire whether they have any positions available. Even if an organisation doesn't have a vacancy when you get in touch, if they are impressed by you they are likely to keep your details on file for the future.

To make a cold application, you will first need to research organisations that employ transport planners in the area(s) you wish to work, finding out what type of work they do and considering what you might be able to offer them. You should then send each company an especially tailored and carefully written covering letter and CV.

Your covering letter will need to set out why you are writing, the type of job you are looking for and why you would be particularly suited to that type of role. If you are willing to work anywhere, or in a variety of different areas you should make that clear. Without overdoing it, you need to use the letter to show how you stand out from the crowd.

Be selective; don't fire off a whole lot of cold standard applications at the same time. Work steadily through your list and make sure your letter relates to the organisation to which you are writing. Make sure your CV is up to date and makes the most of your skills and experience that are particularly relevant to the needs of the job for which you are applying.

All job applications must be completed in good Standard English, and again mistakes should be avoided at all costs. Check, double check and triple check for any typos or errors and if possible get someone to look over your application for you before you send it.

Preparing for job interviews

In advance to being called for job interview, there are things you can do to help you prepare:

- Look online or ask contacts for examples of questions people ask in job interviews, and consider how you would answer these.
- Learn responses to particularly difficult questions, such as 'what is your greatest weakness' or 'tell me about a challenge you have faced in work, and how you overcame it'.
- Highlight key points about yourself you would like to get across in an interview, and think how you might do this.
- Think of questions you might want to ask a prospective employer in an interview, so you appear keen and interested.
- Consider role playing interviews with friends, with one or two being the interviewers, interviewing you, and vice versa.
- If you have or can find a good mentor, use them to test your interview responses as well as provide advice about your CV and job applications.
- Keep thinking about how you stand out from the crowd, and how you can evidence this in an interview situation.



The Interview

If you are successful in securing an interview – congratulations! This is an excellent opportunity to show a prospective employer how you stand out from the crowd.

Preparation for an interview is vital. As well as the following the advice outlined above, be sure to find out as much as possible about the organisation interviewing you and the role that is on offer. Prepare a set of questions to ask on the day: be sure to focus these on the role or company rather than on matters such as salary or holiday- these things can be discussed after a job offer is made.

Find out well in advance of the interview exactly where you have to be and how you get there. Arrive in plenty of time; don't risk being late or arriving unavoidably stressed because of late buses or trains, or not being able to park or find the building. If necessary, do a trial run of your journey prior to the interview day.

On the day, dress smartly. Although you might know that most staff employed by the company dress casually, for the interview itself you must be well turned out.

In the interview, answer all the questions put to you succinctly but fully. If you don't know an answer say so; don't try to talk round it. Be sure you ask your questions to demonstrate, politely and gently, that you are really interested in the job on offer and want to learn more about it.

Body language is very important. Your handshake should be firm, you should look interviewers in the eye when talking to them, and you should try and appear engaged and confident throughout. Avoid negative body language such as crossed arms, looking away or at the floor, or fiddling with your hair, watch or fingernails. A smile goes a long way!

At the end, remember to thank the interviewers for seeing you and if they haven't told you, ask when you can expect to hear from them.

Again, remember the mantra – throughout the interview try to stand out from the crowd, in a way that impresses prospective employers!

If you are unsuccessful

There is a huge amount of competition in the jobs market, so even if you do your very best to stand out from the crowd, you may not be successful in a job application.

If this happens to you, don't despair. Learn from your experience, trying to identify where you might have not hit the mark, dust yourself down and try again. Those who persevere are among those most likely to succeed.

Transport Planning Society

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