

Improving professional training for bicycle planning in the UK

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Summary

Following the launch of the UK National Cycling Strategy in 1996 one of the priorities identified for more detailed follow-up work was the area of professional training, to ensure an adequate supply of properly trained personnel promoting cycling.

In 1997 therefore a special working party was set up, under the auspices of the Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions (DETR) but with several outside representatives, to focus on this issue and the closely related issues of improving professional training for those involved in promoting walking, with the anticipated early launch of the DETR's walking policy statement: 'Encouraging Walking: Advice to Local Authorities'.

The paper describes the range of issues considered by this Working Party including the provision of training and up to date professional guidance and research, for people with different disciplinary and professional backgrounds and with differing levels of training and experience.

The paper particularly discusses the results of a survey specially commissioned in 1999 by the working party from Oscar Faber Consultants to obtain a clearer picture of the requirements for improved professional training and guidance. These findings and recommendations are related to the wider context of the major changes in UK Transport Policy following the publication of the 1998 Integrated Transport White Paper, the changes in funding and the introduction of Local Transport Plans.

1. Introduction: Background to the work of the group.

The UK National Cycling Strategy was published in 1996, after a long period of preparation with representatives of many different groups; central and local government, academic and other research organisations, and several private and voluntary sector representatives, including several from cycling groups. The NCS recommendations, based on the work of four specialist working parties, set a target of doubling cycling by 2002 and doubling it again by 2012 (Department of Transport 1996).. These targets were subsequently endorsed in the Government's Integrated Transport White Paper (DETR,1998).

Several of the recommendations of the NCS required detailed follow-up work, to be carried out under the auspices of the National Cycling Forum, set up to take the strategy forward and monitor progress in implementing its recommendations. The recommendations on the need to review professional training resulted in the establishment of a special working party, to report back both to the NCF and to the Walking Steering Group, linked to work on parallel National guidance on walking (DETR, 2000).

The Working Party's terms of reference were to:-

- Consider the training and technical information needs of professionals engaged in providing for cyclists and pedestrians; the incorporation of cycling and walking within the wider development and planning processes; and the promotion of cycling and walking issues, including conveying messages to senior staff.
- Propose actions that would improve the range and quality of professional training.
- Identify any significant gaps in the flow of technical and professional knowledge.

The group first met in May 1998. It has reviewed training needs both for those already actively involved in planning for cyclists and pedestrians, those coming into such work from related planning and transport activities and also those coming through higher education and other educational routes who might be interested in developing this kind of specialism. This paper concentrates on the training needs of those engaged in bicycle planning.

Since the 1980s several local authorities have appointed their own specialist cycling/walking officers but it seemed that they had in most cases acquired relevant knowledge and skills on the job rather than through any dedicated training other than occasional attendance at relevant meetings and conferences. These included the one-day seminars, held once or twice a year since 1984, of the Local Authorities Cycle Planning Group (LACPG).

This organisation, without any staff or other resources of its own, has depended entirely on the interest, enthusiasm and time of the individual local authority officers. In recent years there has also been substantial involvement by people from consultancies, both existing large transport planning firms and several newer smaller firms with particular 'green transport' specialisms. During the late 1990s numbers attending grew to well over 100 and in some cases many more would like to have attended but had to be turned away because of the limitations on the size of premises available. Many different local authorities, recently in collaboration with sponsoring consultancies, have hosted these events which have provided a most useful means of exchange of experience, both formal and informal.

Apart from these LACPG meetings the most important conferences have been those organised in different parts of the country by various organisations, including Aston University, PTRC (Planning Transport, Research and Computing, Ltd), Sustrans, the University of Leeds Department of Continuing Education. Following the publication of the National Cycling Strategy the DETR and the Cyclists' Touring Club (CTC) ran a series of regional cycling seminars.

In terms of technical guidance, the most important source of material since the early 1980s has been the series of Traffic Advisory leaflets produced by the DETR. These leaflets, freely available, have provided a very useful summary of technical guidance, in most cases based on research by the DETR or the Transport Research Laboratory.

Various cycling and professional groups, often in collaboration with other organisations, for example the CTC and Sustrans, have published important technical guidance. Among professional institutions, the involvement of the IHT (Institution of Highways and Transportation) has been particularly important, taking the lead on the publication of particularly important reports on Cycle-friendly Infrastructure and Cycle Audit and Review Guidelines, IHT (Institution of Highways and Transportation 1996 and 1998).

In terms of cycling, as opposed to walking, the group soon became aware that there was quite an extensive amount of relevant literature available covering cycle infrastructure and closely related fields like traffic-calming, safer routes to school projects, green travel plan development, travel behaviour education and awareness raising. An early priority of the group was to assess the state of knowledge and information gaps and to produce a consolidated list of relevant documentation, from a wide variety of sources.

2. Survey of professional training needs

It was also realised that relatively little was known about how those already engaged in planning for cycling (and walking) had acquired relevant skills and knowledge or indeed what skills they thought were important to do this work or how best to keep them up to date. It was therefore decided to commission a survey, from consultants Oscar Faber, to gather fuller information on these topics and to help make recommendations.

Oscar Faber were chosen because they had recently been involved in work for the DETR on compiling a Cycle Initiatives Register (Oscar Faber, 1998). Through this they had compiled relatively fresh information on relevant contacts.

The objectives of the study were to:-

- assess the need for education and vocational training for cycling and walking professionals
- identify gaps in technical and professional knowledge
- assess the level of provision for education and training that already exists; and
- propose actions to improve the range and quality of professional training

The survey produced a response rate of 61%, i.e. 214 respondents, yielding much important information to feed into the conclusions of the work of the group. The respondents included local government officers, consultants, and others responsible for promoting green transport plans for employees. 88% were in the public sector, with 36% only with cycling experience and 64% having experience of both cycling and walking. In both cases the top three most frequently mentioned responsibilities were developing transport strategies, planning of cycle networks/facilities' and the coordination of projects/schemes. The survey also showed that more than two-thirds of the respondents expected to develop their existing roles as cycling and walking practitioners.

Professional development was achieved largely through magazine and journal articles, with very little use of the Internet. DETR Traffic Advisory leaflets were regarded as being an important reference source, assisting directly in developing Traffic Management/engineering skills and generally with 'on the job' training.

Figure 1: Methods of keeping abreast of technical guidance/research in cycling (Cycling officers)	
Articles in magazines/journals	34%
DETR Traffic advisory leaflets	32%
Attendance at conferences/seminars	10%
Research reports	3%
The internet	-
Word of mouth	3%
Technical standards	2%
Other	2%

(adapted from Oscar Faber, 1999, Table 4.5, p9)

When asked about the skills that they considered important in the planning, delivery and promotion of cycling 'understanding the needs of cyclists' came out as particularly important, along with traffic management/engineering skills and planning and strategic skills such as links between land use and transport.

Figure 2: Skills important to cycling professionals	
Understanding the needs of cyclists, (pedestrians) and other road users	96%
Traffic management/engineering skills	47%
Planning and Strategic issues such as links between land use and transport	41%
Awareness of road safety issues	43%
Awareness of integrated transport issues	31%
Promotional/Marketing skills	30%
Other	5%

(adapted from Table 4.7 in Oscar Faber, 1999, p13.)

When asked about knowledge gaps respondents particularly identified user needs awareness and marketing skills. Over a third of respondents identified demand forecasting and monitoring as areas where they needed further knowledge and cycle audit and cycle review techniques were also felt to be an important knowledge gap. A higher proportion of those who had responsibility for both walking and cycling believed that there was a knowledge gap in terms of 'understanding the needs of disabled road users' and 'technical design issues' in both the fields of cycling and walking.

Figure 3: Knowledge gaps in cycling professionals		
	Knowledge gaps in cycling	Knowledge gaps in cycling and walking
Understanding the needs of cyclists (and pedestrians) and other road users	43%	79%
Forecasting cycle/walking demand	42%	79%
Promotional/marketing skills	37%	67%
Monitoring cycling / (walking)	31%	61%
Technical design issues	25%	44%
Understanding the needs of disabled road users	15%	36%
Traffic management/Engineering skills	17%	29%
Cycle audit/Cycle review techniques	37%	37%
Awareness of safety	10%	19%
Project management	15%	25%
Understanding the needs of drivers	2%	4%
Other	3%	3%

(adapted from Table 4.8 on page 17 of Oscar Faber 1999.)

59% of those involved in cycling did not feel that there was adequate provision of training in their field. Awareness of the needs of cyclists featured most prominently in the response on types of vocational training needed.

Figure 4: Types of vocational training needed to support cycling professionals	
Awareness of issues / needs of cyclists (and pedestrians)	61%
Marketing / Promotion of cycling / (walking)	51%
Develop local cycling / walking strategies	45%
Formal qualifications e.g. NVQ, degrees	19%
Technical aspect of design/Design standards	38%
Safety auditing	28%
Project management / Public Consultations / Consensus building	44%
Other	4%

(adapted from Oscar Faber, 1999, Table 4.10, p21)

Conferences, seminars and evening meetings were courses used by 138 of the 214 respondents, with 93 mentioning the Local Authority Cycle Planning Group. However, the importance of on the job training was also made clear. Correspondence training, however, received the lowest priority.

3. Conclusions from the work of the group

With work on the National Walking Strategy only starting some time after work on the National Cycling Strategy, and with less lobbying from pedestrian than cycling groups, it is not surprising that awareness of the relevant knowledge and skills required for promoting walking is very limited. However, it is also clear that this awareness for cycle planning is also low, despite some central and local government commitment to cycling going back to the late 1970s and much wider interest since the mid-1990s. A variety of skills are needed by those professionals including planning, design, management and marketing abilities.

It seems that the number of higher education departments with some involvement in walking and cycling-related courses is quite large but that they usually form only quite a marginal element of courses, whether full-time or part-time and whether degree courses or short courses. Relevant courses including Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Environmental Management and Geography as well as Town Planning and Civil Engineering, the disciplines that appear to be best represented in those professionally active. However, it is clear that professionals in the field have different training backgrounds and qualifications.

The importance of wider avenues to acquiring relevant skills was also recognised by the group including the system of National Vocational Qualifications (in Scotland Scottish Vocational Qualifications) and the need was recognised for a fairer and more consistent means of obtaining skills so that those from non-traditional backgrounds can progress. It is clear that NVQ/SVQs cover various aspects of training that relate to cycling (and walking) issues but might need to be expanded, particular in to address marketing.

One lesson from the work of the group has been to understand how much cycling and walking interact with other issues, not only wider transport policy and traffic management but also air quality and health issues and other important policy areas such as urban regeneration and urban design. Relatively little is known about some of these interactions, e.g. urban regeneration but urban design is clearly a very important way of achieving more livable cities that will encourage walking and cycling, carefully linked to policies to reduce the impact of traffic.

The new transport agenda since the publication of the Integrated Transport White Paper (DETR, 1998) has thrown up a number of challenges to employers and trainers to reorient training and

skills development. The requirements for planning for cycling and walking need to be seen in this wider context in which the development of travel awareness and marketing alternatives to the car seem to be of key importance.

There is a need for potential employers to forge links with higher education institutions through the professional bodies since improved linkages should result in better training and skills development. This would help to ensure that those who fund higher education ensure that the training of professionals to provide for walking and cycling are included as core mandatory subjects in those degree courses of particular importance, as well as getting involved in providing short courses.

It seems that there are now a few cases of cycle planning issues being brought into A level courses in secondary schools. The Working Group felt that this development should be encouraged since it provides an excellent opportunity to ensure that newcomers to the profession understand the key issues involved and, at an early stage, are interested in the possibility of developing this kind of specialism. With the help of the relevant professional institutions the group has produced a leaflet to encourage this trend by making people aware of the different routes available for a career in cycling and walking promotion.

As well as thinking about these medium-term and longer-term challenges there is a need in the short-term to give careful thought to improve the training and skills upgrading and maintenance of those in the field. This includes some people who have been actively involved for some years, with extensive experience and commitment, and others who have become involved only recently as work in more traditional areas of transport planning and traffic management like roadbuilding and road-widening has declined.

In the case of cycling much more than walking, as the Oscar Faber survey confirmed, extensive information is available and the problem appears to be more one of "information overload" for those involved. They need to be assisted to identify the most useful, up to date and relevant sources of guidance. This is particularly important not just of the increased policy importance of cycling, and increases in funding available, but because it is also clear that many practitioners undertake little training while in their employment, despite the increased importance in recent years of CPD (Continuing Professional Development) by many professional organisations.

The two problems may be cumulative in their effects since a decline in resources for training and information gathering may well mean that those involved are less likely to be aware of current information and guidance. Both problems may stem from a continuing lack of awareness by some senior officers in local government of the need to provide adequate infrastructure for cycling (and walking) as well as marketing initiatives. On the other hand, knowledge of courses available may be for some be less of a problem than the geographical disparity in access courses, making the cost of going to courses that are available that much more of a deterrent.

In some cases it is clear that the understanding of the importance of providing for cyclists and how to do it, has been sidelined in the organisation, with the knowledge confined to one 'Cycling officer', often at a relatively low grade, and not "spread around". How best to encourage a wider understanding in the organisation is a key challenge. This may be encouraged by the development of specific tools such as modeling, evaluation, audit and level of service review techniques which can add to the "respectability" with which cyclists are viewed.

4. Professional training for bicycle planning: Some challenges for the Future

- What are the most important professional skills required in the planning, delivery and promotion of cycling?
- What balance is needed in the provision, upgrading and maintenance of the skills between full-time and part-time higher education and other institutional courses, short course, conferences and seminars and between all such methods and directly 'on the job' training methods?
- How might the needs of cyclists be given more emphasis in different university courses including town planning, civil and highway engineering, transport planning, architecture, urban design and landscape architecture and in core elements as well as optional ones?
- How can the availability and dissemination of technical guidance and the lessons from the latest research findings best be improved both for those already actively involved in cycle planning and for those coming new to the field?
- What role is there for electronic, as well as printed material, in becoming a focal point for technical advice in information about training, seminars, conferences and relevant experience elsewhere. How can this be developed and maintained, to ensure its currency and relevance for differing local contexts?
- What is the appropriate balance between 'pre-packaged' technical information, in printed and electronic form and opportunities for direct tailored guidance (e.g. a helpline or helpdesk) and face to face contacts and focused discussions in obtaining and relevant technical knowledge and upgrading and maintaining current awareness?
- How can the most important sources of advice and guidance best be highlighted in the ever-increasing amount of relevant information now available?
- What are the respective roles in providing and maintaining technical guidance by international, European, regional, central and local government agencies, professional, academic and other research institutions, and local, regional, national, European and other international cycling and other transport and environmental groups?

5. References

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Note:

The authors are particularly grateful to Derek Palmer of Steer Davies Gleave (and formerly of the Institution of Highways and Transportation), the Chair of the DETR Working Party, for his notes on the draft conclusions of the work of the working party as of March 2000.