

Guidance

Quality Recognition Criteria

Introduction

The aim of this Guidance document is to support AESOP members in the process of filling out the Quality Recognition (QR) application form.

The Guidance comprises a total of 13 QR criteria and a final item (14) to nominate best practices.

For each QR criterion, the Guidance:

- i) Outlines a rationale.
- ii) Poses questions to prompt reflection.
- iii) Provides possible examples to consider when filling out the QR application.

The QR criteria are intended to foster collective reflection on the range of practices, pedagogies, mechanisms, and outcomes of the programme. In doing so, the purpose behind the criteria is to ask applicants for evidence across the programme.

1. Programme Distinctiveness

This criterion asks for evidence regarding the autonomy and identity of the planning programme. In general terms, it is quite simply about demonstrating that the programme is, in fact, a planning programme in line with AESOP's Core Curriculum – and **not** a programme in either architecture, engineering, geography, public administration including some planning content.

Applicants should clearly:

- Evidence the extent of planning content within the programme and where it sits within its academic institutional environment and wider national context (i.e., how it distinguishes itself from other existing planning programmes in its country of origin).

- Elaborate on whether the planning programme specialises in any key subfield(s) of the planning discipline (e.g., community planning; spatial planning; urban planning; regional planning; environmental planning; development planning; urban design; urbanism, etc.).

A planning programme can evidently focus on imparting broader planning knowledge – or be more specialised in a particular planning subfield. Both situations may elicit cases of programme distinctiveness, e.g., a programme’s structure, its broader or specific contents, and/or its learning outcomes. A programme’s distinctiveness can emphasise its particular planning tradition, i.e., how planning is substantially embedded in the course modules, their learning outcomes, etc., so long as it is aligned with AESOP’s Core Curriculum.

2. Professional Ethics

This criterion first asks for evidence concerning the normative standards which planners should adhere to in their professional practice, i.e., the aspirational principles that planners should commit to in their everyday work. The ethical framework of reference pertaining to planning programmes may include (but is not limited to) the following principles: (i) serving the public interest; (ii) independent professional judgement; (iii) protection of the profession’s integrity; and (iv) facilitating the public understanding of planning activities.

Applicants should consider the following questions:

- How are different ethical reasonings embedded in the teaching?
- How are ethical attitudes promoted within the programme?
- How are ethical dilemmas discussed in the programme?

Examples of how this could be achieved include (but are not limited to):

- Reference to some of the global and/or local codes of ethical practice (RTPI, AICP, national chambers of planners, etc.).
- Implementing the normative standards in practice-oriented courses (e.g., studios, labs, etc.).
- Acknowledgement of professional ethics through different topics relevant to the general field covered by the academic programme.

3. Spatial Foci

This criterion asks for evidence concerning the specific territorial/spatial scale(s) and type(s) of geographical area on which the programme focuses and builds its identity. It asks for evidence illustrating how a specific territorial/spatial scale or type of geographical area integrates spatially-relevant content or problems pertaining to *inter alia* land use patterns, mobility and transport, housing, the natural environment, etc. Spatial foci could also address the interplay between theoretical and more practice-oriented issues at the particular scale.

Applicants should consider the following questions:

- Which specific territorial/spatial scale(s) (e.g., national, regional, subregional, neighbourhood) is/are emphasised in the programme?
- Which types of geographical area(s) (e.g., rural, urban, coastal, marine) are emphasised in the programme and how is spatially-relevant content integrated?
- How do students gain awareness about relationships between territorial/spatial scales?

Examples of how this could be achieved include (but are not limited to):

- Core planning courses (e.g., planning theory, planning law, policy-making, data collection) that incorporate cases with a specific spatial foci.
- Courses focused on a specific territorial/spatial scale (e.g., regional planning) and the scalar implications of specific issues (e.g., climate change; economic development; innovation; etc.)
- Courses that visualise spatial foci through technical skills (e.g., mapping, surveying, GIS, 3D visualisation).

4. Global Context

This criterion asks for evidence concerning how planning students get exposed to the global context (beyond Europe), (i.e., how students come to understand contemporary planning challenges in an interconnected world). Exposing students to the global context is also about increasing their awareness about global driving forces beyond national and European borders, and their relevance and implications.

Applicants should consider the following questions:

- How are students introduced to issues and processes operating at the global scale, e.g., neoliberalisation, climate change, migration, financialisation, inequality, geopolitics, urbanisation, digitalisation, pandemics, etc.?
- How are different global perspectives embedded in the programme, e.g., climate change mitigation, financialisation, conflict, etc.?
- How are students encouraged to see themselves as global citizens?

Examples of how the above questions can be addressed include (but are not limited to):

- Students covering similar curricular themes but in different geographical contexts (i.e., Global South and Global North), e.g., through international comparative studies or by participating in a joint programme delivery between planning schools.
- Use of case study material from different geographical contexts, beyond the national context targeting the above questions.
- In course modules, workshops, studios, etc.
- International field trips, including virtual field trips.
- Student direct interaction with international teaching staff and practitioners.

5. Contemporary Socio-spatial Challenges and Opportunities

This criterion asks for evidence concerning how programmes address contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities driven by interdependent multiscale processes. It asks for evidence on how students: (i) develop competences to address these challenges and opportunities at a specific territorial/spatial scale, (ii) acquire skills and competences to influence the socio-cultural and institutional spaces in which planning operates, and (iii) develop awareness and attitudes to work collaboratively with different societal actors.

Applicants should consider the following questions:

- How do students acquire skills to understand the multiscale processes driving socio-spatial challenges and opportunities in a geographical area and/or at a specific territorial/spatial scale?
- How do students engage with the implications of contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities in a geographical area and/or at a specific territorial/spatial scale?

Examples of how this could be achieved include (but are not limited to):

- Course modules looking at one or more contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities, exploring how they influence planning policies and practices at a specific

territorial/spatial scale(s). (e.g., students understanding how climate change is implicated in local flooding; how neoliberalisation is implicated in gentrification of a neighbourhood)

- Course modules looking at a specific territorial/spatial scale(s) and positioning them in a wider socio-spatial context, to build more robust approaches to meet specific development challenges. (e.g., students working on flooding issues connecting this to climate change; students working on gentrification and understanding how it is shaped by neoliberalisation)

6. Cross-Disciplinarity

This criterion asks for evidence of different disciplinary knowledges, methods and orientations embedded in the programme and/or course and project modules, i.e., how the students become exposed to different disciplinary cultures and learn to integrate and critically assess the contribution of various disciplinary knowledge bases which are relevant to addressing planning issues. Cross-disciplinarity can include multi/inter/trans disciplinary approaches achieved through cross-disciplinary enquiries and tasks (NB The disciplinary diversity in teaching staff and student recruitment can only be a starting point).

Applicants should consider the following questions:

- What disciplinary knowledges, methods and action orientations are embedded within the programme and/or course and project modules?
- What pedagogic practices encourage students to integrate cross-disciplinary approaches into their thinking, problem-framing, and action orientations?
- How are different cross-disciplinary approaches brought into a programme and/or course and project module?

Examples of how this could be achieved include (but are not limited to):

- Course and project modules integrating work by, for example, architects, economists, and climate scientists drawing on trans-disciplinary concepts and/or methods such as resilience, sustainability, justice, etc.
- Course and project modules exposing students to integration of different sectors and policies that draw on different disciplines/professions (e.g., engineering, geography, architecture, urban design, economics, policy sciences, environmental sciences, sociology, law, etc.).

- Course and project modules (e.g., studio courses, problem-based courses) using pedagogies (e.g., role-play scenarios and group exercises mixing students with different disciplinary/professional backgrounds) that encourage dialogue between different disciplines.
- Course and project modules encouraging students to reflect on different disciplinary biases, strengths, and weaknesses of various disciplinary bodies of knowledge in planning (e.g., debate, group negotiation, simulation).

7. Research and Inquiry

This criterion asks for evidence concerning how research and inquiry are embedded in the programme. The embedding of research and inquiry fosters a spirit of curiosity and critical thinking.

Applicants should consider the following questions:

- How are students encouraged to identify research problems and formulate research questions?
- How do students learn to design research and choose appropriate research methods?
- How does the programme provide opportunities for students to develop analytical and critical research skills?
- How do students learn to articulate evidence-based arguments to different audiences?
- How do students learn to link research to societal impact?

Examples of how this could be achieved include (but are not limited to):

- Workshops encouraging students to identify real-world planning problems and define associated research questions.
- Courses and project modules dealing with different methods of data collection and analysis (e.g., project-oriented, problem-based learning).
- Research-based teaching to demonstrate analytical and critical research and inquiry skills leading to evidence-based arguments.
- Student-led exhibitions, blogs, social media posts, newsletters, publications, etc.
- Student involvement in action research, intervention projects, living labs, etc.

8. Practical Reasoning and Judgement

This criterion asks for evidence illustrating how students develop practical reasoning by drawing on a range of knowledges, skills, and ethical principles. Practical reasoning is about the capacity to make an informed, judicious evaluation/decision that can be implemented.

Applicants should consider the following questions:

- How are practical reasoning and judgement promoted through the course and project modules?
- How are students given opportunities to test their practical reasoning and judgement?
- How do students learn to synthesise multiple knowledges and ethical principles as a basis for practical reasoning?

Examples of how this could be achieved include (but are not limited to):

- Group project work promoting practical reasoning (e.g., problem-based learning modules, simulations, etc.).
- Internships relevant to professional development where students develop their capacity for practical reasoning.
- Course and project modules that combine theory and practice, enabling students to learn with other stakeholders (e.g., citizens, planning practitioners, elected officials, consultants, developers, etc) involved in the modules.

9. Reflexive Praxis

The criterion asks for evidence regarding how the programme curriculum stimulates reflection and self-evaluation within the complexity of a given situation. This is particularly relevant for practice-oriented courses (e.g., studio courses, living labs, simulation exercises or internships).

Applicants should consider the following questions:

- How are students equipped to make decisions within a practical situation and reflect on it?
- How is self-reflection encouraged on practical decisions made in a particular situation?
- How are students given opportunities to zoom out to the 'big picture' and debate the dilemmas and ethical implications of planning decisions made?

Examples of how this could be achieved include (but are not limited to):

- Internships, project work, workshops, etc.
- Modes of reflection, including self-reflection, peer assessment, reflective learning logs, group discussions, etc.

10. Independent Learning and Group Learning

This criterion asks for evidence concerning how students actively take responsibility and initiative to manage their own learning. It asks for evidence showing how the programme enables students to become resourceful, lifelong learning professionals who can keep their knowledge constantly updated. This criterion also asks for evidence on how planning programmes enable the necessary conditions for group learning, where planning students improve their capacity to interact, collaborate and contribute to peer learning.

Applicants should consider the following questions:

- How do students set their own goals?
- What opportunities are given to students to develop their skills as independent learners?
- How is group work embedded in course and project modules?
- What opportunities are given to students to reflect on the quality of their independent or group work?

Examples of how this could be achieved include (but are not limited to):

- Opportunities that allow students to define and explore their own areas of interest and/or their role in a team (e.g., dissertations, problem-based learning, project work, electives, living labs).
- Self-evaluation and peer-evaluation exercises that demonstrate independent and/or group learning.

11. Student Diversity

This criterion asks for evidence illustrating how the programme recognises the benefits and addresses the challenges of student diversity (e.g., cultural background, academic background, knowledge and skills, gender, etc.).

Applicants should consider the following questions:

- What safeguards and mechanisms exist to address the challenges of student diversity?
- How are students provided with environments where they can discover and confidently draw on their identities, abilities, and experiences?

Examples of how this could be achieved include (but are not limited to):

- Disability resource centres, counselling services, accessibility guidelines for teaching materials.
- Instances creating exposure to and awareness about cultural diversity (e.g., student exchanges, international internships, international comparative planning courses, group discussions).
- Assessment regimes that are inclusive of a diversity of learners.

12. Student/Alumni/Employer Engagement in the Development of the Programme Curriculum

This criterion asks for evidence detailing student/alumni/employer engagement in curriculum development at the programme level. The challenges involved in keeping planning education relevant demand a constant review of curriculum formats and content as well as continuous development of innovative and suitable pedagogies.

Applicants should consider the following questions:

- How is feedback from students/alumni/employers sourced and embedded in the development of the programme curriculum?
- How are dialogue and debate between planning education and practice facilitated and conducted in developing the programme curriculum?

Examples of how this could be achieved include (but are not limited to):

- Regular student assessments, surveys, and evaluations of programme, course, and project modules.
- Institutional forums such as study boards and programme committees comprised of teaching staff, students, professional bodies, and practitioners.

13. Recognition and Promotion of Excellence

This criterion asks applicants to identify and explain established institutional mechanisms, policies, or initiatives (at university, faculty, department, or programme level) aimed at promoting excellence in staff teaching practices and students' achievements to encourage and sustain quality in the programme. It is important to stress that this criterion asks for evidence aiding the promotion of excellence rather than examples of excellence themselves.

Applicants should consider the following questions:

- How is pedagogic innovation within the programme identified and promoted?
- How are exemplary teaching practices identified and shared within the school?
- How is excellence in students recognised and rewarded?

Examples of how this could be achieved include (but are not limited to):

- Institutional mechanisms for identifying and evaluating an initiative (e.g., student involvement in assessments, using social media, online tools, etc.).
- Institutional mechanisms for recognising and disseminating an exemplary initiative (e.g., financial support, high-quality documentation of teaching case studies for publication, internal newsletters or seminars, teaching-oriented events to promote excellence in education, etc.).
- Competitions and rewards for encouraging solutions to particular issues in pedagogic practice (e.g., improving ways of student peer assessment or student group working).

14. Best Practices

Which particular practice(s) would you consider best showcase the quality of the programme and is/are worth disseminating within the AESOP community? Please provide no more than two examples.

Each nominated best practice should be able to relate to at least three criteria. Please explain why you selected the best practice with reference to the contents, pedagogies used and the criteria that it relates to.