

LI COMMUNICATIONS SURVEY 2015

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1. INTRODUCTION

LI members were invited to complete an annual online survey on the Landscape Institute's print and digital communications, which ran from 24 March to 21 April 2015. A prize of £100 in book tokens was offered as an incentive for completion. All current members (5624) were mailed twice, and 374 surveys were completed, a response rate of 6.65%, which although lower than usual can be taken as reasonably likely to be indicative of the views of the LI membership. This report summarises the quantitative and qualitative findings with comparisons to last year's survey, and 2013 where available.

There were two changes to this year's survey. A new question asks for membership grade, to enable results to be analysed in more detail, and the questions on Talking Landscape were expanded to gain more insight into users' experiences of the forum.

2. OVERVIEW

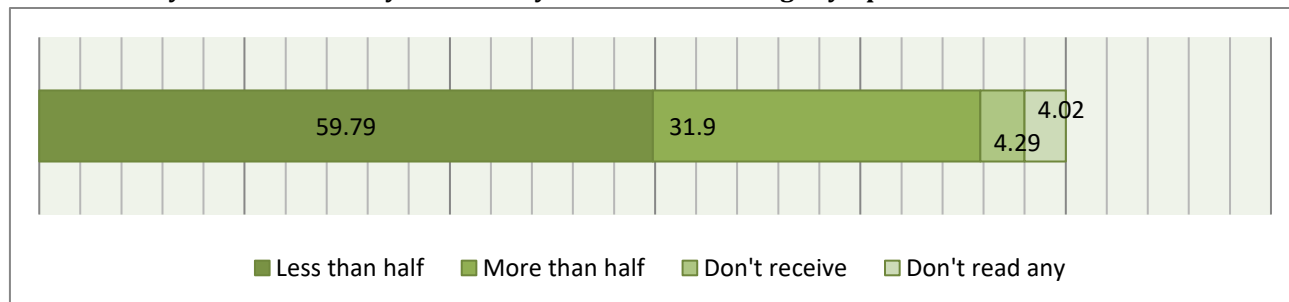
- The LI Update email continues to be very highly rated in terms of relevance, practical use and design.
- The main LI website is increasingly highly rated as an information source, and for ease of navigation and design, with more members visiting the site more frequently.
- Talking Landscape has shown an improvement in terms of awareness, number of visits and interaction between members.
- The LI twitter feed is used by an increasing number of members, with a much higher proportion finding it a useful source of information compared to last year.
- Landscape journal continues to be highly rated for relevance, interest and practical use.

3. LI UPDATE EMAIL

3.1 Interest

97% of respondents receive the LI Update email. Almost a third (32%) read most of the stories (i.e. more than half); 60% read less than half and 4% do not read any of it – a slight increase from last year (3%). Just over a third (36%) keep the email for future reference.

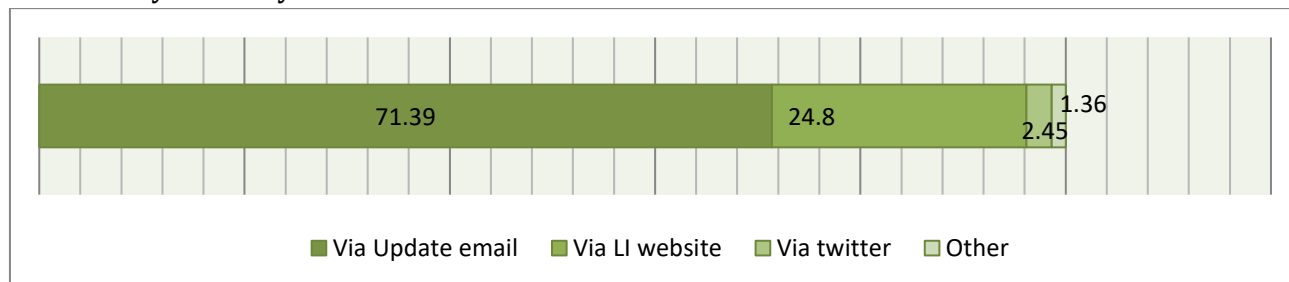
3.1 How many news stories do you normally read in each fortnightly Update email?



3.2 Access

71% access news stories on the LI website via the Update email. 25% go direct to the website and 2% click through from twitter. This represents an increase in members visiting the news page on the website from 20% last year, and a decrease in members clicking through from the news email, down from 76% last year.

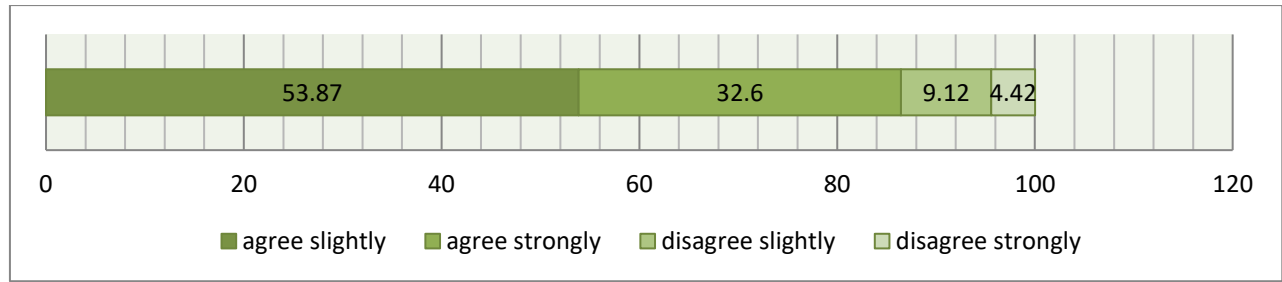
3.2 How do you usually access news stories on the LI website?



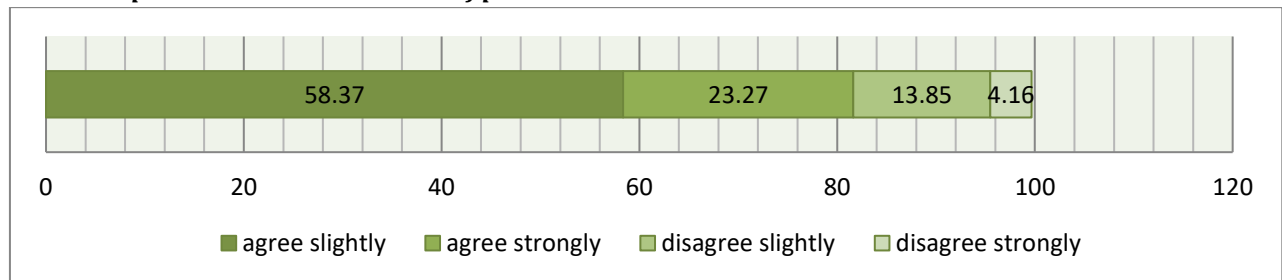
3.3 Relevance, content and design

Responses to LI Update in terms of relevance, content and design are more positive all round than last year, with a substantial increase in approval of the design. It continues to be highly rated for relevance with 86% agreeing with the statement “*The fortnightly news is relevant to my working life*” (up from 82% in 2014), about a third agreeing strongly (up from 30%). The content is felt to be of practical use by 82% of respondents (up from 76% in 2014) with just under a quarter agreeing strongly that it is useful (23%). The design is more highly rated than in 2014, with 88% giving a positive response to the design, up from 76% in 2014.

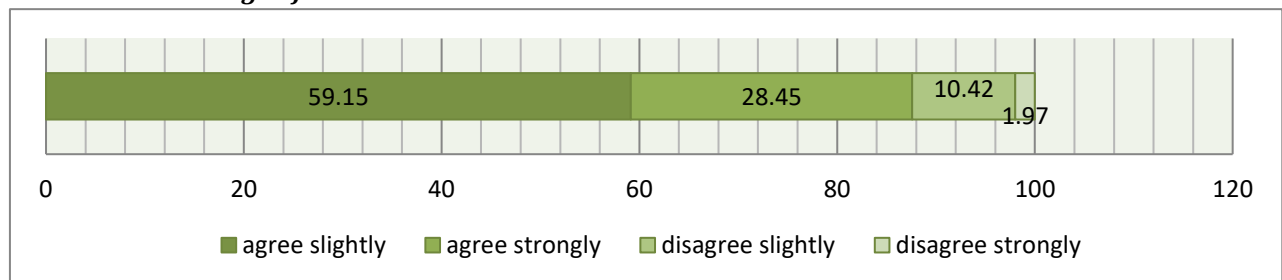
3.3.1 "LI Update is relevant to my working life"



3.3.2 "LI Update has content which is of practical use to me"



3.3.3 "I like the design of the news bulletin"



3.4 What else would you like to see?

About a quarter of respondents gave suggestions in response to this question. Of those that did, the areas most in demand were broadly (in order of popularity):

- Information on new projects - completed new schemes, with suggestions for more technical detail, and a greater range of practices and types of work, including overseas. Also more on landscape management, planning and policy projects, not just design/implementation.
- Technical information - with specific suggestions for content on BIM, renewables, EIA/LVIA, plant and tree profiles, CDM, detailing and graphics.
- Public sector news – including local authority news, procurement issues, information for local authority members, and illustrations of the diversity of local authority members' roles and services provided.
- Branch and local news – reports on branch activities, devolved nations policy news, focus on a branch each month, completed projects in branch areas, regional practice profiles.
- LI updates - what the LI is doing politically and in education, responses to government, and how we are advocating on landscape issues.

- Planning - more on landscape planning matters; recent appeals and call-ins; neighbourhood planning; community infrastructure and economic development planning; legal updates.
- People – who is doing what, news from practices, profiles of members.
- Legal - updates on planning policy, changes to legislation/regulations affecting landscape and practice management.
- Competitions and tenders.
- Events, including non-LI events.
- Format – suggestions for apps, RSS feed, better legibility, printable pdf version.

Due to the relatively low response rate to this question, no definitive conclusions can be drawn from the data, beyond a broad indication of subject areas of potential interest to readers.

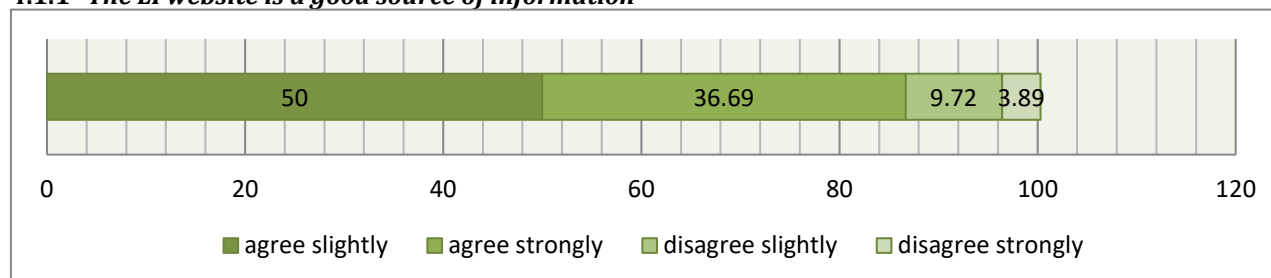
4. LI WEBSITE

4.1 Overall view of the website

Satisfaction with the website remains high and has continued to improve across all areas.

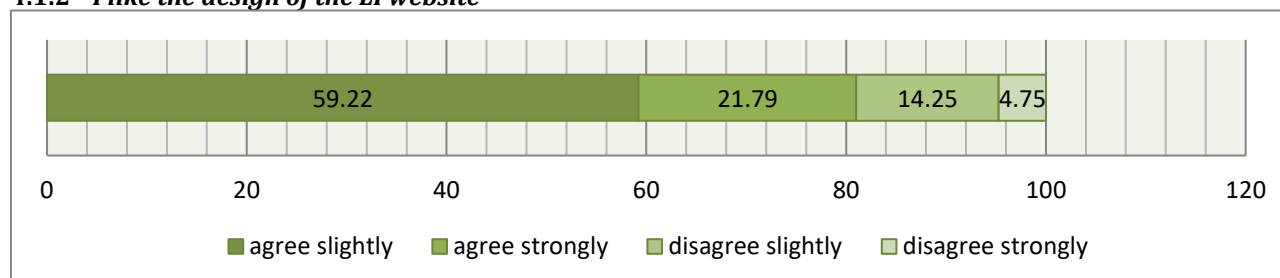
The website is viewed as a good information source by 87% of respondents, up from 84% in 2014 and 81% in 2013.

4.1.1 "The LI website is a good source of information"



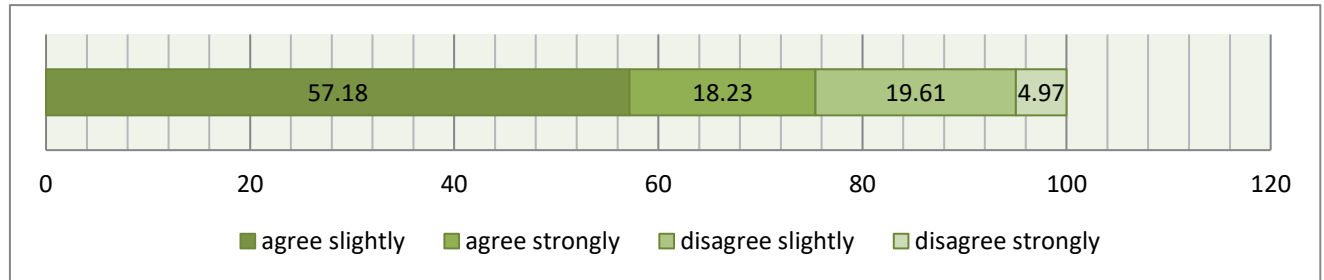
81% agreed with the statement "I like the design of the LI website", up from 76% in 2014 and 74% in 2013.

4.1.2 "I like the design of the LI website"



Over three quarters of respondents find locating information on the site easy (77%, up from 73% in 2014 and 72% in 2013). As in previous years, there were a number of suggestions for improvements to the navigation and design, which are summarised in section 4.3.

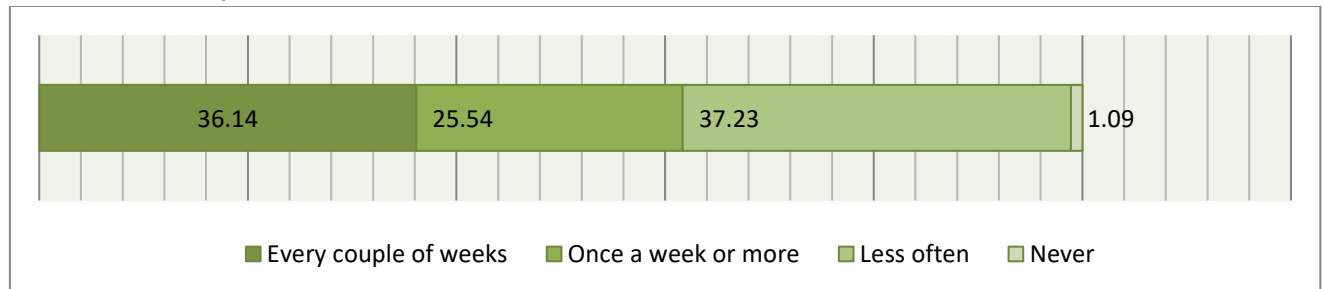
4.1.3 "It's easy to find information on the LI website"



4.2 Frequency of visits

More members are visiting the website more frequently than in 2014. 26% visit once a week or more (up from 21% in 2014 and 19% in 2013) and 36% visit every couple of weeks (down from 39%). 37% visit the site less than once a fortnight, unchanged from 2014.

4.2 How often do you visit the LI website?



4.3 Other comments on the website

96 people left additional comments on the website, about a third of respondents. Over half relate to the site's navigation and structure; just under half relate to content, and the rest were comments on the look and feel of the site and miscellaneous issues.

The most common comments on navigation were the limitations of the search facility and a lack of clarity or intuitiveness in the structure. As well as general comments that the site is not always easy to navigate, some specific comments were made regarding:

- Lack of prominence of links to branches and their work
- Confusion over what is in members' section or not
- Need for multiple logins to the members' section, Pathway and Talking Landscape
- Lack of prominence of key documents

There were positive comments on the site's appearance, usability and relevance, about a fifth of all comments, higher than previous years. For example:

"It has improved enormously over recent years and contains a lot of useful information"

"Always interesting and useful; good links to other sites; great resource of landscape projects, technical matters, discussions on current topics"

"Good source of technical information and policies"

"Gives the LI a strong professional image"

"A very informative website with clearly way marked access to issues, topics, etc"

"I like the news column on home page and increased clarity of browser options"

As usual there are many constructive criticisms in all areas, and suggestions for specific improvements.

In terms of content, several comments were made about the site's currency.

"The news section always seems slightly out of date. Maybe good to prop up with the LI twitter feed so that current news is getting through."

"Minutes of meetings take months to be entered."

"News items are very slow to be updated therefore they become old and no longer news very quickly."

"Some stuff is quite out of date e.g. minutes"

"It's hard to see when new information/tech notes/updates have been put up"

There are concerns that the site is unrepresentative of the whole range of landscape work and features large practices disproportionately. For example:

"Content still seems skewed to particular individuals associated with the organisation's own interests"

"I would like to see a greater representation of the day to day work of the smaller practices, not just lavish prizewinning projects by a few major practices"

"Too focussed on private practice. Not enough about other branches, practitioner or work streams outside private practice."

There were a number of requests for more technical content, in particular construction details, and plan drawings, but considerably fewer comments relating to technical content than in previous years, however.

Other specific suggestions include:

- Glossary section on what the LI believes what s sustainability, community, words that individuals in the industry use but in different contexts
- Clearer information about who at the LI to contact for what
- More on planning
- More images in news stories, particularly design projects
- History of the LI
- Short courses around the country
- More book reviews
- A clear editorial / content strategy

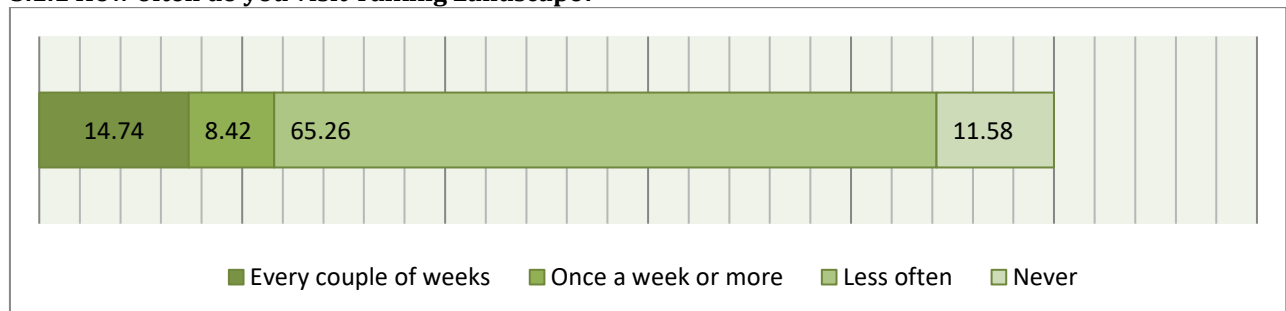
5. SOCIAL MEDIA

5.1 Talking Landscape

51% of respondents are registered on Talking Landscape, up from 45% last year. Talking Landscape now has 2633 members, up 7% from the time of last year's survey.

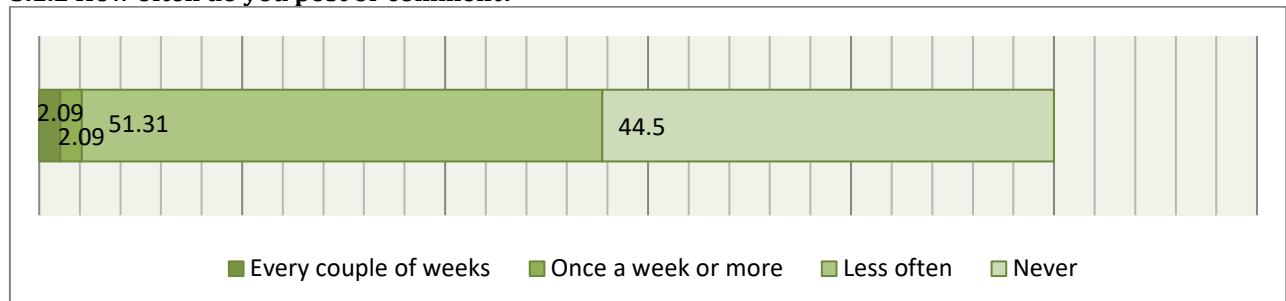
Talking Landscape has shown an improvement in terms of awareness, number of visits and interaction. A quarter of respondents who are registered on the site visit every week or two weeks, up from 13% last year. 12% never visit the site, an improvement on a third last year and half the year before.

5.1.1 How often do you visit Talking Landscape?



Half of respondents report posting or commenting occasionally, up from 38% last year, with 4% posting every week or two. 44% report never posting on the site, an improvement on 62% last year and 73% in 2013. The Knowledge Forum continues to be the main reason for using the site.

5.1.2 How often do you post or comment?



The main reason given for not signing up to Talking Landscape was lack of time, cited by about a third: in previous years “I don’t use social media” has been the most commonly given reason.

A new question was included in this year’s survey asking “How would you describe your experience of Talking Landscape?” 45% find it ‘positive and friendly’, a quarter ‘professional but not particularly friendly’, and 2% ‘negative and unprofessional’. Comments in the ‘Other reasons’ section tended to focus on two issues: Talking Landscape having too few active members, and a small number of members dominating discussions. For example:

“Threads tend to be dominated by people who have time to spend time making entries and not by people you would really like to hear from - e.g. recent education thread was essentially a dialogue from two people retired from the same institution talking to each other.”

“Monopolised by a small number of people posting small essays which are not appropriate for the format. Contributions need to be limited in length”

“Some people taking over the platform venting their thoughts too much”

Suggestions for improvement were mainly related to more integration with the main LI website, and better publicity - for example:

“Advertise it to the members more as an efficient and convenient place to go to discuss matters”

“I think it needs to be integrated more into the main LI website and sphere. There's lots of info and links that you only find on TL, such as technical advice which should be being incorporated into the main LI site/be being linked across more”

“Links from li website news articles/resources/publications to relevant discussions”

“More marketing of its presence and function, few landscape architects are aware of it or its purpose”

There were also suggestions that staff and Board/Council members should use it more regularly.

5.2 Twitter

27% use Twitter in a professional capacity, up from 23% last year, with slight rises both in the numbers tweeting and just reading twitter feeds.

39% of respondents who use twitter follow the LI's tweets (@talklandscape). Of those that expressed an opinion on the LI's twitter feed, 84% found it relevant, up from 60% last year. 85% agreed it is a good way of getting news from the LI, and the same percentage were happy with the frequency of LI tweets.

The number of members completing this section of the survey was relatively small (less than 100), so may not be representative of the LI membership as a whole.

5.3 Other comments on social media

Beside generic complaints about lack of time for or interest in social media, some specific comments related to Talking Landscape having insufficient active members to create a critical mass. It is clearly found to be useful by P2C candidates and study groups, but many other members consider it lacking in relevance and engaging content.

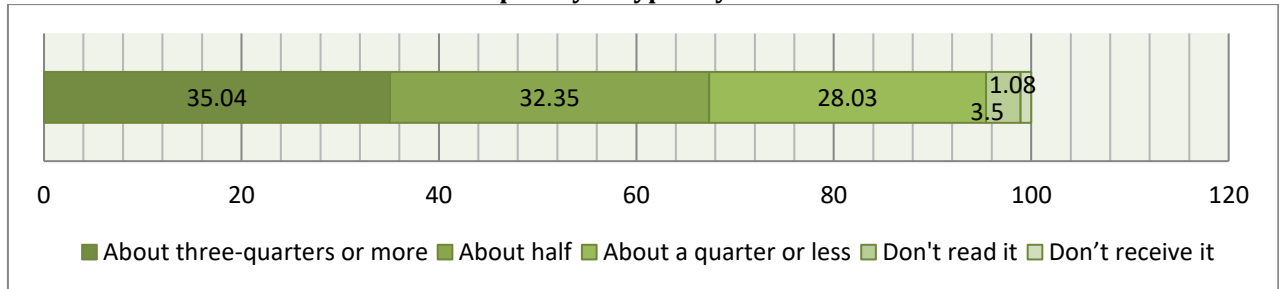
Feedback on the Twitter feed was more positive, and it is felt to be a useful complement to existing LI communication formats.

6. LANDSCAPE JOURNAL

6.1 Interest, relevance and design

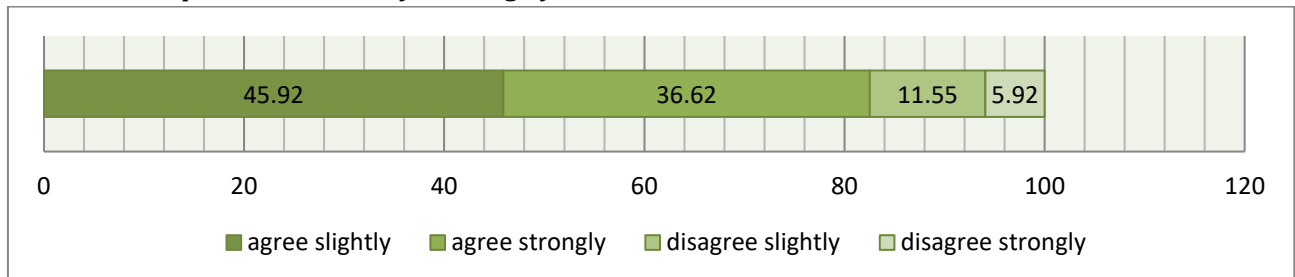
35% of respondents read more than three-quarters of each issue of the journal, the same proportion as last year but a substantial increase from 25% in 2013. 28% read a quarter or less, a slight increase from 26% last year. 32% read about half of each issue.

6.1.1 How much of each issue of Landscape do you typically read?

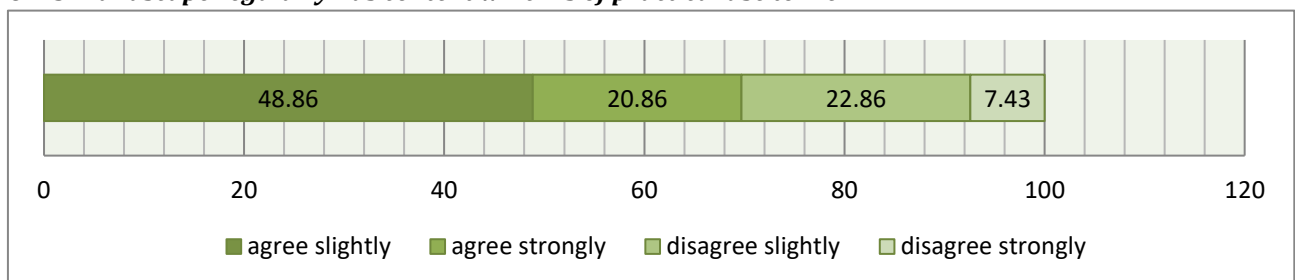


The journal is felt to be relevant to the working lives of 83% of respondents, up from 78% last year. It is rated more highly for practical use at 70%, up from 63% in 2014, and over three-quarters find it intellectually stimulating (76%, unchanged from last year), with 31% agreeing strongly that *"Landscape regularly has content that I find intellectually stimulating"*.

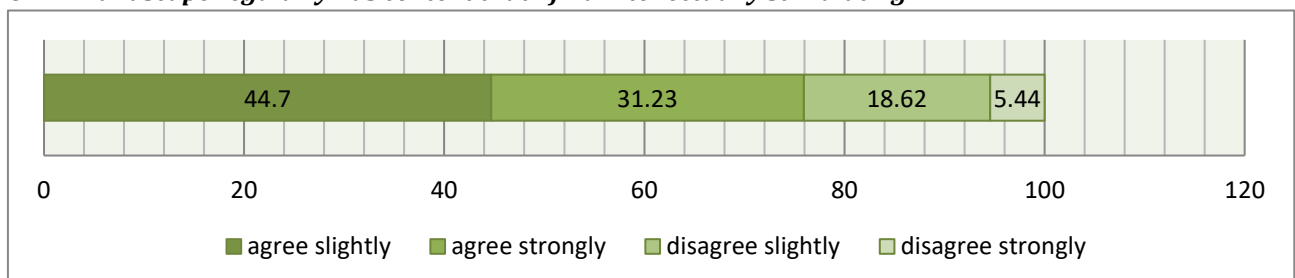
6.1.2 "Landscape is relevant to my working life"



6.1.3 "Landscape regularly has content which is of practical use to me"

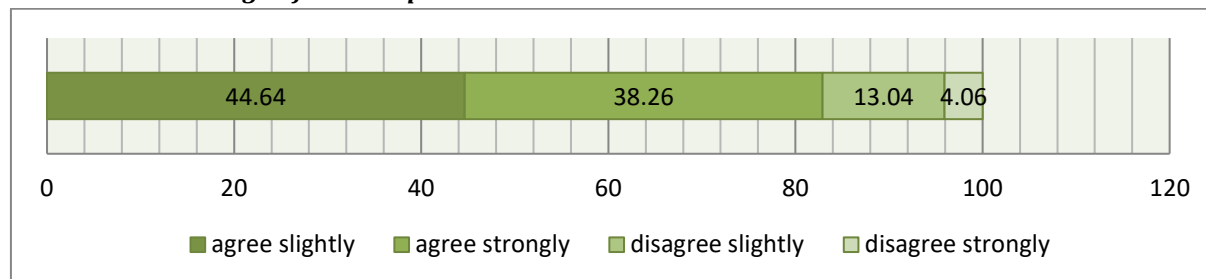


6.1.4 "Landscape regularly has content that I find intellectually stimulating"



The journal's design is rated increasingly positively (83%, up from 81% last year and 77% in 2013), with a over a third (38%) agreeing strongly with the statement "I like the design of Landscape".

6.1.5 "I like the design of Landscape"



Awareness of the iPad and online editions of 'Landscape' is broadly the same as last year, with over two-thirds unaware of these formats. 3% are aware of the iPad edition, 20% are aware of the online edition only, and 9% are aware of both. About one-fifth of the free-text comments on the digital editions are requests for an Android edition of the journal.

6.2 Other comments on 'Landscape'

Just over a third of respondents (36%) added comments on the journal. Most were feedback on content and editorial policy or suggested topics for inclusion in future issues. A small number relate to the journal's frequency and design/format/visual style.

General content/editorial policy

Although 'Landscape' continues to be rated highly by members for relevance, practical use and interest, the free-text comments show considerable dissatisfaction with many aspects of the journal's content. Some recurring themes include:

Photography/visual standards:

"The photos are generally poor, so finished schemes are not shown to best effect."

"Picture editing and quality is poor."

"It still lacks visual quality and falls between two stools as neither a high quality visual journal nor a readable, well-written, academic or theoretical journal."

Coverage of projects:

"Fed up of seeing the same stuff about a new bling paving or hard landscape scheme."

"More about issues and they were how solved rather than all the glossy aspect"

"I feel articles are too 'look at me, look at me, emperor's new clothes' "

"Editorially I find the constant drum-beating to be banal and irritating; it gives off a strong whiff of insecurity"

Types of projects featured:

"More about local branches and local government or other practitioners, landscape managers, scientific branch, trends in education, NGOs. We do not all work in private practice."

"The main landscape companies seem to dominate the news stream and there is also a fair bit of shameless self publicity in some articles"

"I would prefer a less design based editorial policy. There are an awful lot of landscape architects who work solely in landscape planning - with so few articles / opinion pieces the magazine is only occasionally relevant to my work."

Lack of variety of contributors/submissions from members:

"You say you encourage small practices to submit material yet rudely dismiss the material on dubious grounds. Currently there is zero incentive to submit more projects or articles."

"I would like to see more articles by members and less headline authors flown in for feature pieces - a journal produced in the large part by its members. "

"I tried emailing the editor about an article and did not get a reply which was disappointing."

"The journal seems to have many of the same contributors/favourites of the editorial panel. It would be good if it had a broader range of contributors and real debate about the profession as a whole."

Lack of debate/critique

"We want every shade of debate and criticism, not whitewash."

"Less congratulation, more intelligent critical review."

"Landscape typically has an anti-critique and slightly dull tone, like we are talking politely to ourselves in our silo"

"The quality of journalism is rarely high and generally lacks critique."

Specific topics for inclusion

As in previous years, most suggestions relate to technical content, across the whole range of landscape practice from design to planning and management. Requests for more on design detail and planting were prominent, along with more specialised areas such as BIM, LVIA and restoration of historic landscapes. Readers are also keen to see more updates on legal/regulatory/policy changes affecting landscape and planning, more on public sector projects and issues affecting local authority practitioners, and practice profiles.

7. AWARENESS OF LI COMMUNICATIONS AND EVENTS

Respondents were asked to indicate which LI publications, online communication and events they were aware of.

Apart from continued near-universal awareness of the journal and the main LI website (97% and 96% respectively), 87% are aware of the fortnightly news and reviews email, up from 84% in 2014.

Awareness of the LI's policy position statements remained reasonably good, with two-thirds aware of the GI position paper and the client's guide, and just over half aware of the public health paper and 'Profitable Places'.

Respondents are least aware of Capability Brown 300, the @talklandscape twitter feed , blogs and videos.

8. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

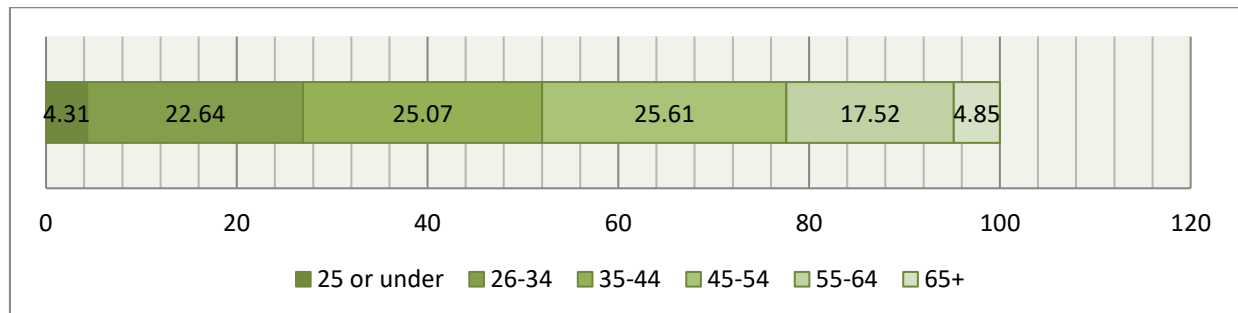
8.1 Summary

Gender

The gender balance of respondents was an exact 50/50 split.

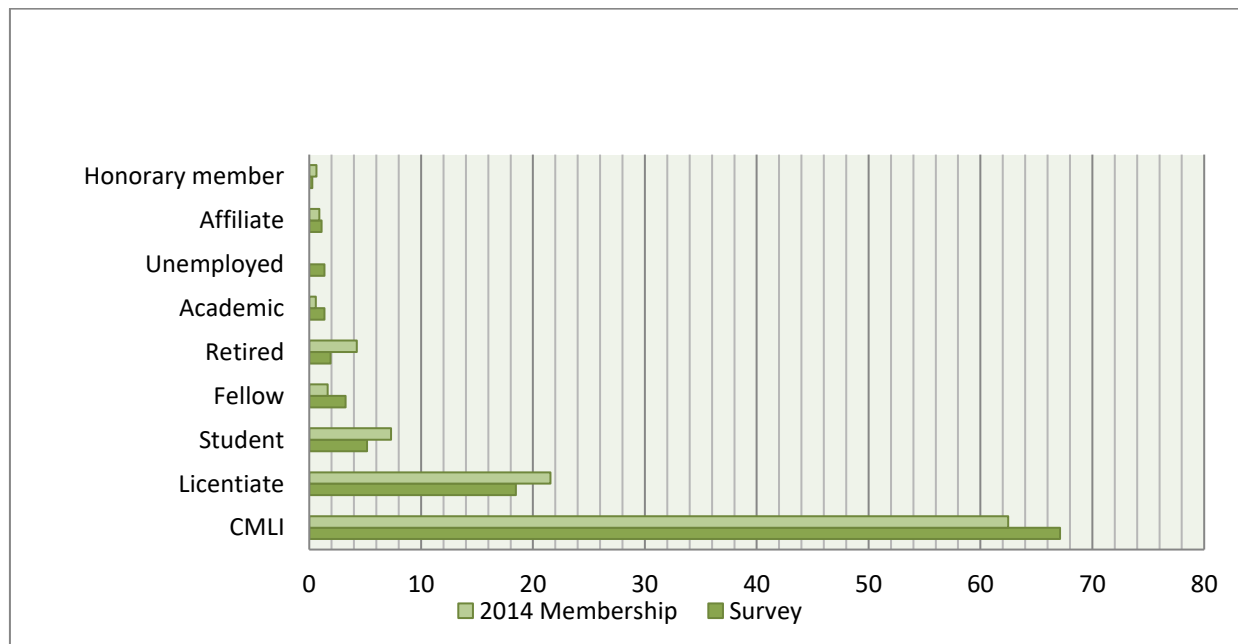
Age

Respondents were fairly evenly distributed across the main working age groups this year, with 23% aged 26-34, 25% aged 35-44, 26% aged 45-54 and 22% aged over 55. There was a drop in the proportion of respondents in the 25 and under age band (4%, down from 7% in 2014).



Membership category

In previous years respondents were asked their occupation. This was replaced with 'membership category' this year, to help give a greater insight into the communications preferences of specific grades of member, and to check the representativeness of the survey results. Over two-thirds were CMLIs (67%), 18% Licentiates and 6% students, with the remaining categories each represented by less than 5% of respondents. This broadly matches the proportions of members in grades across the whole membership.



8.2 Media use

Newspapers and periodicals

The Guardian remains by far the most popular daily newspaper, read by 40% of respondents. The other daily papers read by members are in order of popularity The Times, The Independent and The Daily Telegraph.

Other frequently-read periodicals are, in order of popularity, AJ, Building Design, Topos, Horticulture Week, Landscape Architecture (the ASLA journal), Planning, Garden Design Journal and Urban Design Journal – more or less unchanged from last year.

Other useful emails

In response to the question “Are there other regular work-related email news bulletins which you find useful or interesting?” planning resources are the most often cited, as last year, including Planning and RTPi bulletins, Planning Portal updates and legal bulletins.

Other websites visited for work

The question ‘Which other work-related websites do you visit most often?’ yielded very different results from previous years. Usually government and agencies’ websites top the list; this year by far the most mentioned site was the international landscape design project library Landezine, mentioned by 31 out of 211 respondents (15%). Planning Portal was the second most mentioned, again a major increase from previous years, and ESI/External Works was another newcomer to the top of the list. Building Design continues to be popular, as do government sites, mapping/GIS sites, suppliers/manufacturers and other organisations such as the RHS, RIBA, and ASLA.

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May 2015