

LI COMMUNICATIONS SURVEY 2014

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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 13 March to 14 May 2014. A prize of £100 in book tokens was offered as an incentive. All members (5074) were mailed twice, and 456 surveys were completed, a response rate of 9%. This report summarises the quantitative and qualitative findings with comparisons to the last survey, conducted in February 2013.

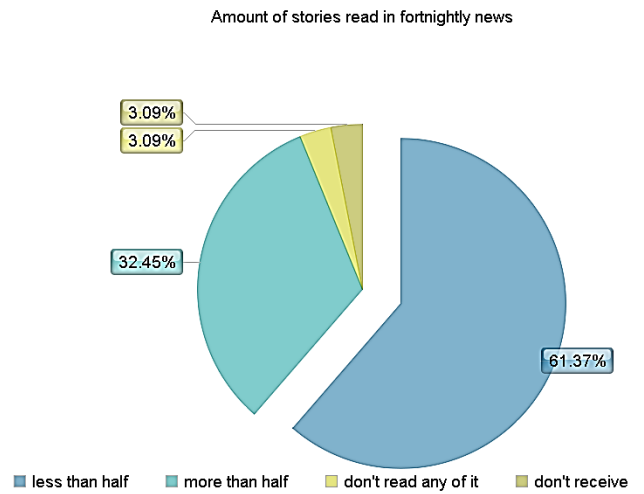
2. OVERVIEW

- The fortnightly News and Reviews email continues to be rated as highly relevant and of practical use.
- The main website is seen as an increasingly useful source of information and a greater proportion are happy with the design. Visits to the site have increased, but navigation continues to present problems. Awareness of the LI's other websites is low.
- Talking Landscape remains under-used, although registered members are visiting more often.
- The LI Twitter feed is rated as much more relevant than last year; slightly more members are using Twitter in their working lives.
- Members are reading more of the journal. It was rated less highly as relevant this year, but satisfaction with the design has increased.
- Awareness of policy position statements has increased greatly.

3. NEWS AND REVIEWS EMAIL

3.1 Interest

97% of respondents receive the News and Events email newsletter. Almost a third (32%) read most of it (i.e. more than half the stories), 62% read less than half and 3% do not read any of it. Just over a third keep the email for future reference. Changes to the email's format and its relationship with the website do not allow valid comparison with previous years.

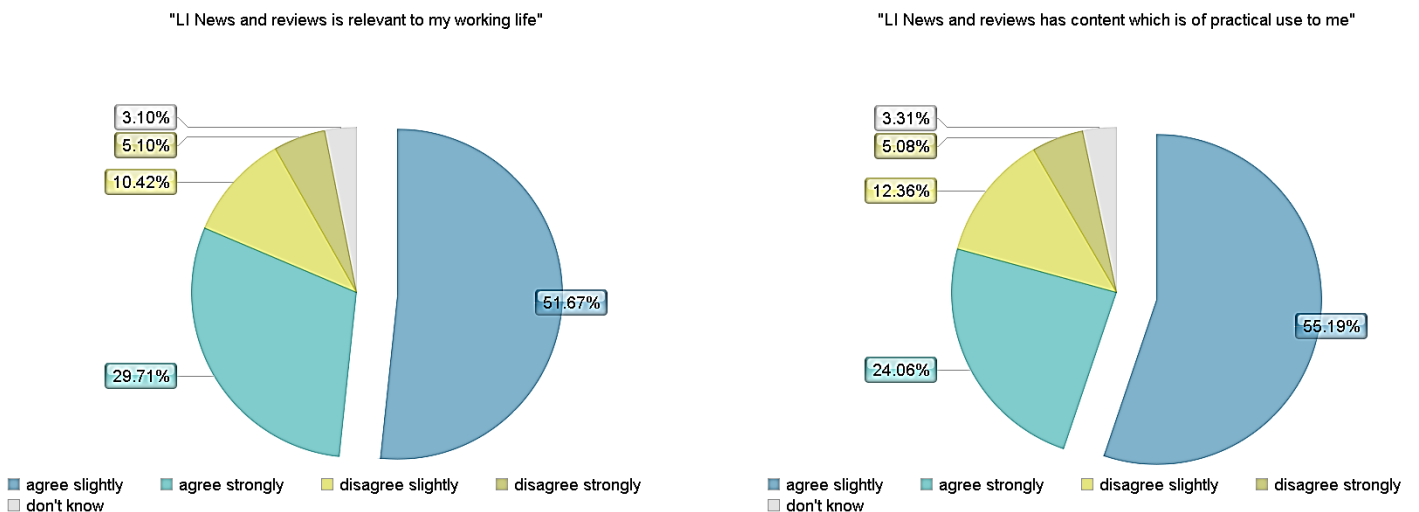


3.2 Access

News stories are usually accessed via the fortnightly News and Events email. Just over three-quarters (76%) click through from the email, down from 82% in 2013, and more members now click through from the website's home page to the news section (20%, up from 16%).

3.3 Relevance, content and design

The fortnightly news continues to be highly rated for relevance (82%, up from 81% in 2013), with a greater proportion agreeing strongly with the statement *"The fortnightly news is relevant to my working life"* (up to 30% from 26%). The content is felt to be of practical use by over three quarters of respondents (76%, no change from 2013) but with an increase in the proportion agreeing strongly that it is useful (24%, up from 21%). The design is less highly rated than in 2013, with 76% giving a positive response to the design, down from 81% in 2013.



3.4 Other useful emails

In response to the question “*Are there other regular work-related email news bulletins which you find useful or interesting?*” more planning resources were cited than last year, including Planning and RTPI bulletins, Planning Portal updates, legal bulletins and planning blogs. LinkedIn group updates and branch newsletters were also cited by more respondents than before. Fewer cited BD, AJ, Construction News and general construction bulletins. Otherwise the same selection of Hort Week, CIRIA, Urban Design Group, Topos, Susdrain were mentioned.

3.5 What else would you like to see?

Less than a quarter 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 on costs and technical detail, and a greater range of practices and types of work
- Technical information - with suggestions for detailing, techniques, practical issues, technology, sustainability issues and construction advice (in previous years the most requested area)
- Planning news - including key planning decisions, legal updates, and policy and regulatory developments
- Jobs and tenders
- News from the LI - including the work of committees, work on promoting the profession and influencing policy, and feeds from Talking Landscape and Twitter
- Local and branch news
- Events, including non-LI events
- Training and CPD opportunities
- News from related institutions and disciplines (architecture, ecology, planning etc)

Although many suggested news topics recur each year, the emphasis changes, with the 2014 survey showing more demand for planning and project information, and less demand for technical material. As in previous years, there are members who want more practical and hands-on guidance, and those who would like more on theory and policy. Some suggestions were made for features which already exist, such as book reviews and links to the rest of the LI website.

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.

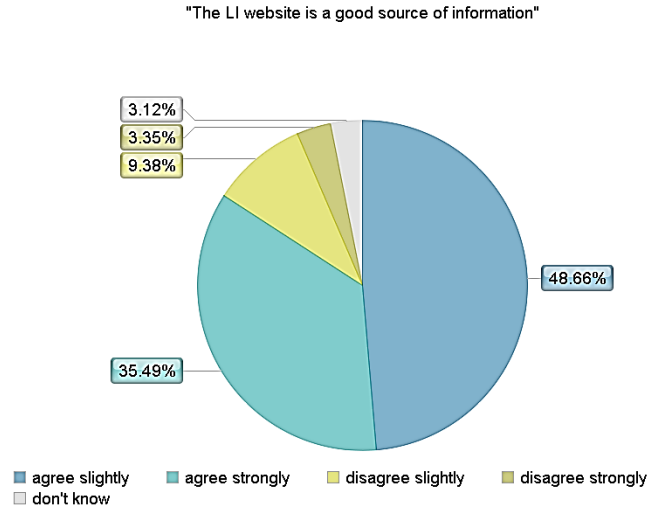
4. LI WEBSITE

4.1 Overall view of the website

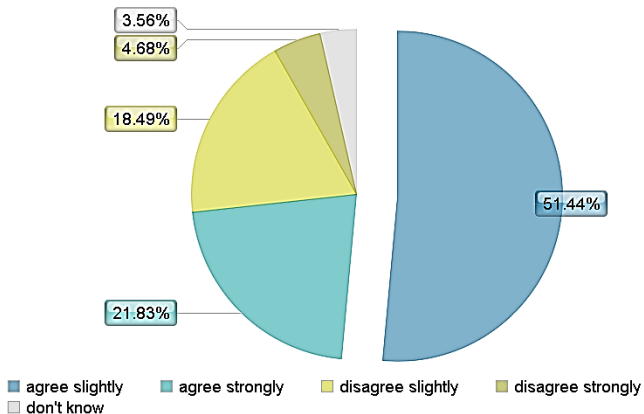
Satisfaction with the website remains generally high and has improved across all areas since 2013. The website is viewed positively as an information source by 84% of respondents, up from 81% in 2013. Over a third of respondents agreed strongly with the statement *"The LI website is a good source of information"*, compared to less than a quarter in 2013.

Just over three quarters responded positively to the website's design (76%, up from 74% in 2013), with almost a quarter (24%) agreeing strongly with the statement *"I like the design of the LI website"*, up from 19% last year.

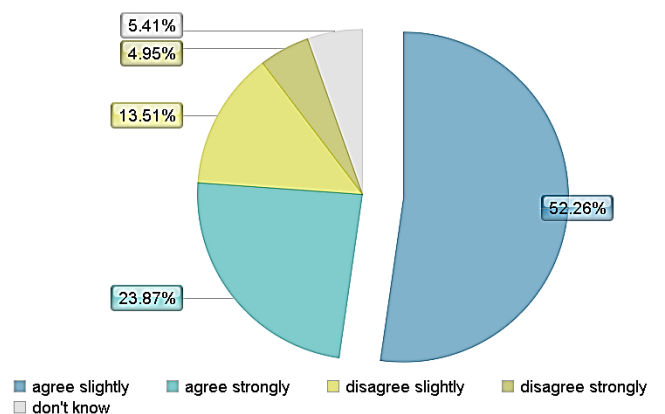
Just under three quarters find locating information on the site easy (73%, up from 72%), but with a greater proportion agreeing strongly that information is easy to find (22%, up from 17%). However many comments in the 'other comments' section refer to navigation difficulties.



"It's easy to locate information on the LI website"



"I like the design of the LI website"



4.2 Frequency of visits

More members are visiting the website more frequently than in 2013. 21% visit once a week or more (up from 19%) and 39% visit every couple of weeks (up from 30%). 37% visit the site less than once a fortnight, down from nearly half in 2013 (47%).

4.3 Most visited sections

Jobs, Events, News, Case Studies and Publications were named as the most visited sections of the website, the same top 5 as 2013 but with News now ahead of Case Studies. The Knowledge Base, Publications, Case Studies and Policy were rated as the most useful for work.

Future surveys could usefully complement self-report data with data from Google Analytics, to enable more detailed quantitative insight on website use.

4.4 Other websites visited for work

Government and agencies' sites were mentioned as those most often visited for work, specifically Natural England, English Heritage, Defra and SNH. The next most popular were design/magazine-style sites, including Landezine, Dezeen and World Landscape Architecture. Resources such as Planning Portal and MAGIC were also frequently used.

4.5 Other comments on the website

164 people left additional comments on the website. About half of those related to content and navigation, as in previous years. Finding content on the site still presents a problem to many users, and the search function was named by several as a specific problem. Most comments related to a general lack of clarity in the structure and navigation – for example, not always being obvious where content will be found, and the distinction between members-only and public content.

In terms of content, most requests were for more technical material, and more on completed projects and design ideas – including more detailed information and better images. There were also suggestions for more on competitions, something about the history of the Institute, better promotion of Registered Practices, more content for and by students, greater connection with other disciplines and professions, and more international content.

Several comments were left about the branch websites, specifically the lack of content and disconnection with the main LI site. Mentions were also made of the need to identify devolved nation issues across the main site.

Some general positive comments were left in the 'Other' section, including that the website had improved, that the design and navigation are satisfactory overall, and that the content was useful.

5. SOCIAL MEDIA

5.1 Talking Landscape

45% of respondents were registered on Talking Landscape, which now has 2456 members, up from about 2300 at the time of the last survey. A third of Talking Landscape members never visit the site, an improvement on 50% in 2013, with over half (54%) visiting less than once a fortnight and 13% visiting every week or two weeks. 62% of Talking Landscape members never post on the site, down from 73% in 2013, with 38% posting occasionally. The Knowledge Forum continues to be the most cited reason for using the site.

The main reason given for not signing up to Talking Landscape was “I don’t use social media”, cited by just over half, as in previous years. Lack of relevant content, and difficulty in logging in and finding content accounted for 12% of non-use. The remaining ‘other’ reasons included forgetting/not knowing of its existence, lack of time and employers blocking access.

The most commonly used work-related social media sites are LinkedIn (257 respondents), Facebook (110), Google+ (38), Land8.net (37) and Flickr (28).

5.2 Twitter

23% use Twitter in a professional capacity, a slight overall increase from 21% last year, with the proportion reading Twitter feeds rising from 8% to 10%, and the number tweeting remaining at 13%. 21% of respondents (90) follow the LI’s tweets (@talklandscape). Of those that expressed an opinion on the LI’s Twitter feed (this question was also open to non-followers, in error), 60% found it relevant, almost double last year’s figure (31%), although over a quarter strongly disagreed that it was relevant.

Opinion is divided on Twitter as a source of news from the LI. While 56% of those that responded gave a positive response to Twitter as a source of LI news, 25% agree strongly and 25% disagree strongly with the statement *“Twitter is a useful way of getting news from the LI”*.

The number 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 as a members-only site with a separate login, which is felt to be an obstacle by some. It was also queried why non-members should be excluded, to enable other practitioners and the public to participate in discussions. It was felt that the site does not have enough active members to create a critical mass. It is clearly found to be useful by P2C candidates and study groups, which was reflected in the responses, but members seem to stop using it after completing the Pathway. Difficulties navigating the structure and using the forum’s format puts some members off, as does a perceived lack of relevance.

Feedback on the Twitter feed was more positive, and it is felt to be a source of lively debate, news and a useful addition to existing LI communication formats. Suggestions for improving the feed included posting more on non-LI news and items of interest to those outside the landscape industry.

General comments in this section tended to reiterate reasons for not engaging with social media. It was also suggested that the LI could promote both Twitter and Talking Landscape content, by reporting regularly on trending topics, or staff and committee members contributing more.

6. LANDSCAPE JOURNAL

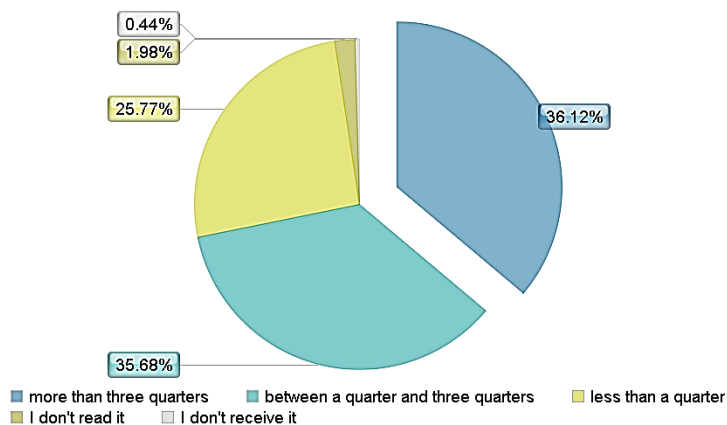
6.1 Interest, relevance and design

Members are reading more of the journal than last year. 36% read more than three-quarters of each issue, a substantial increase from 25% in 2013. Correspondingly fewer members read a little of each issue, with 26% reading a quarter or less, down from 34%.

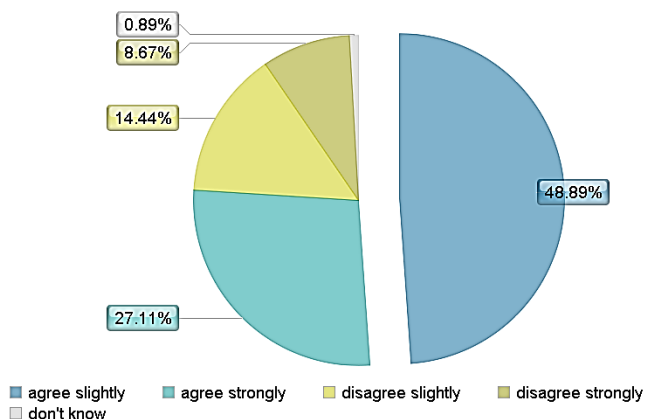
The journal is felt to be relevant to the working lives of 78% of respondents, down from 83%. There was no change in how the journal was rated for practical use and intellectual stimulation (63% and 76% respectively), although the proportion agreeing strongly that *“Landscape’ regularly has content that I find intellectually stimulating”* was up from 23% to 27%.

The journal’s design was rated positively by 81%, up from 77%, with a third agreeing strongly with the statement *“I like the design of ‘Landscape’”*.

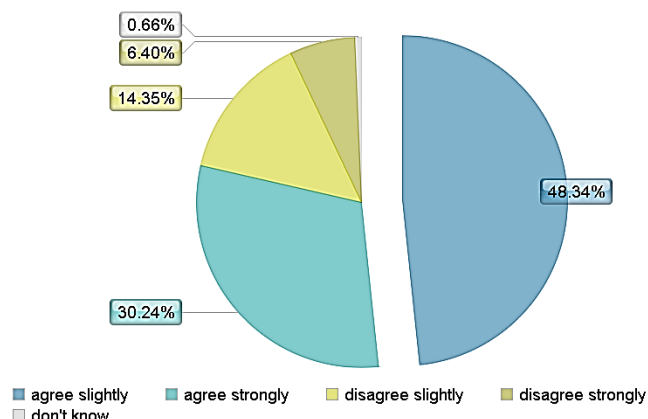
"How much of each issue of Landscape do you typically read?"



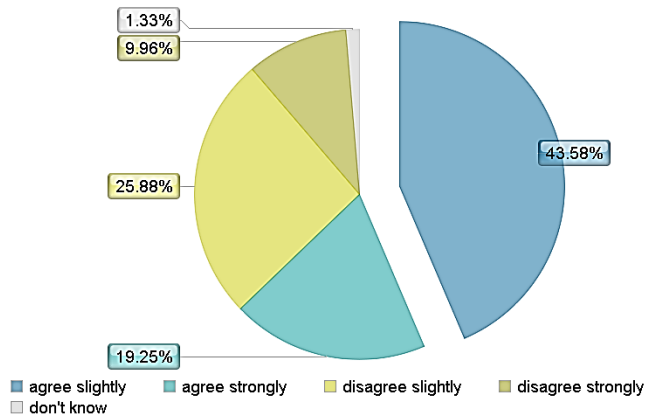
"Landscape regularly has content that I find intellectually stimulating"



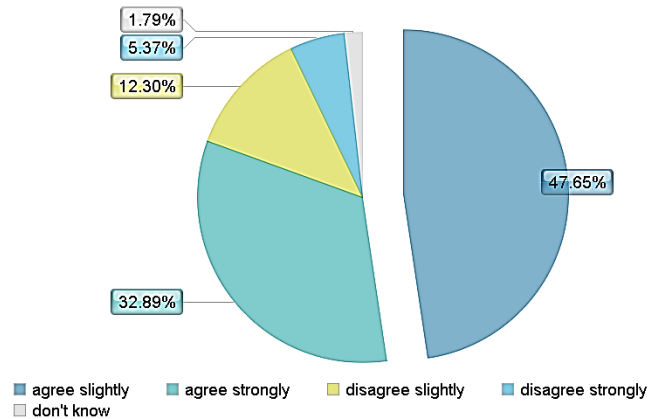
"Landscape is relevant to my working life"



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



"I like the design of Landscape"



Asked about awareness of the iPad and online editions of 'Landscape', a smaller proportion than last were aware of the new formats (29%, down from 31%). 3% are aware of the iPad edition, 20% are aware of the online edition only, and 7% are aware of both.

The 'other' comments broadly welcomed the choice of formats, although many still prefer print. There were requests for the journal to be available for other platforms (Android and Kindle, and as pdf). There were also suggestions for more interactive content in the digital editions.

6.2 Other comments on 'Landscape'

About 40% of respondents added other comments on the journal, the great majority of which related to content, with only a very small number on frequency and design/format. The main request is for more technical content, as previous years, with 3D visualisation, plant knowledge, BIM, construction details, new technologies and materials, specification, biodiversity, LVIA, SuDS and procurement mentioned specifically. As in previous years, calls for a more technical hands-on focus are counterbalanced by requests for more theoretical, discursive and artistic content, but overall the comments asking for more practical content were more numerous. The distinction is illustrated by the number of members wanting 'Landscape' to be more like 'Topos', and those wanting it to be more like 'Vista' (the LI's weekly two-page newsletter, discontinued in 2008).

Several comments related to the types of projects featured, with suggestions for more schemes outside London/the south-east/the UK, more voluntary sector and local authority projects, work by small practices, and more detailed technical information (for example on costs and specification) included. The need for featured projects to demonstrate exciting, high-quality, innovative design was mentioned in several comments, along with the need for high-quality detailed accompanying information.

Other areas of interest included the role and future of the landscape profession, non-design disciplines, business management and profiles of practices and individuals.

A greater range of contributors would be welcomed by some, particularly more practitioners and industry experts. Others wanted to see more articles from outside the profession in order to stimulate

debate and bring in new perspectives. Themed editions received a mixed response, with positive and negative feedback in equal quantity.

There was a good level of positive general feedback on how the journal has improved in recent years, with a good mix of articles and more technical content. General negative feedback related to an overall lack of interest in the content and a lack of cutting edge in design and insight. Previous years' complaints about the amount of advertising and quality of photography were absent this year.

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 (98% and 93% respectively), 84% were aware of the fortnightly news and reviews email, the same percentage as 2013. Just under three-quarters are aware of the LI's policy position statements (73%), a very substantial increase from less than half (49%) in 2013.

Awareness of the LI's secondary websites and media channels remains lower amongst members. Over a third were unaware of branch websites (36%), as last year. Nearly half the respondents were unaware of Talking Landscape and I Want to be a Landscape Architect (56% and 59% respectively), slightly less than 2013 (54% for both).

Respondents were least aware of Capability Brown 300 (39%), the @talklandscape Twitter feed (37%) and the LI's videos and animations (30%). Awareness of the Twitter feed has improved a little since 2013 (up from 34%); questions about CB300 and videos were not included last year.

This year's survey also included one-off questions on topics of recent interest. Almost two-thirds were aware of media coverage of the LI's statements on flooding and water management policy (64%) and 61% were aware of the Landscape Futures lecture series.

8. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

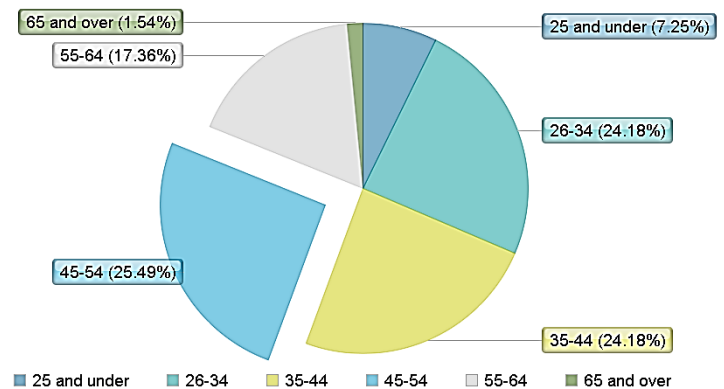
8.1 Summary

Gender

The gender balance of respondents showed, as in previous years, a slightly higher proportion of female respondents (47% male, 53% female).

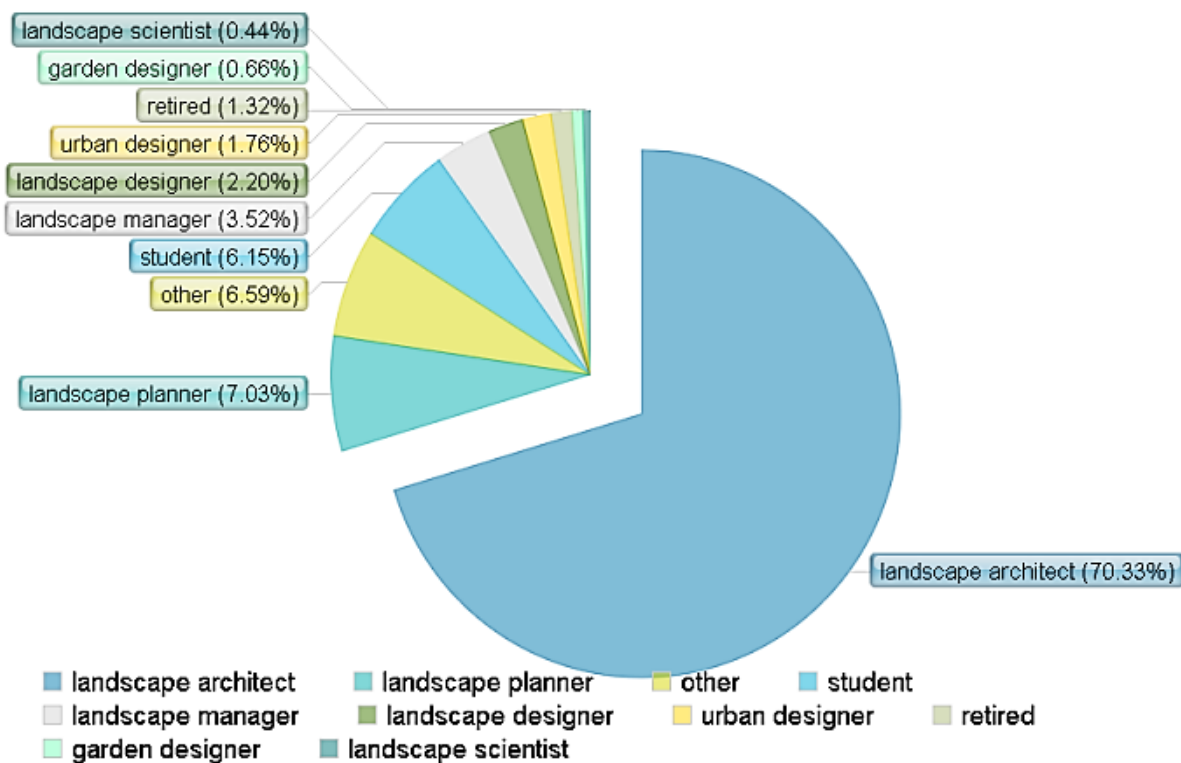
Age

Respondents were evenly distributed across the main age groups this year, with 24% aged 26-34, 24% aged 35-44 and 25% aged 45-54. There was a large increase in the proportion of respondents in the 25 and under age band (7%, up from 4% in 2013) and a fall in the proportion of older respondents (in both 55-64 and 65+ groups)



Occupation

Landscape architects accounted for 70% of this year's respondents, compared to 74% last year. Landscape planners (7%), students (6%) and landscape managers (4%) made up the main remaining groups. 7% described their occupation as 'other', which included academics, unemployed/career break, and those working in heritage and environmental sectors.



8.2 Media use

The Guardian remains by far the most popular daily newspaper, read by 41% of respondents. The other daily papers read by members are in order of popularity The Times, The Independent, The Daily Telegraph and The Financial Times.

Other popular periodicals are, in order of popularity, Building Design, Topos, ASLA journal Landscape Architecture, Planning, AJ, Horticulture Week, Garden Design Journal and Urban Design Journal.

9. NEXT STEPS

The survey findings will be discussed with the Policy and Communications Committee, the Editorial Advisory Panel, staff and others involved in LI communications, and our proposed actions and next steps will be published in response to members' feedback as soon as possible.