

## Written Evidence by Royal Town Planning Institute (FES0040)

### Education Committee

#### Further Education and Skills

1. The RTPI champions the power of planning in creating prosperous places and vibrant communities. Using our expertise and research we bring evidence and thought leadership to shape planning policies and thinking, putting the profession at the heart of society's big debates.
2. We set the standards of planning education and professional behaviour that give planners a unique ability to meet complex economic, social and environmental challenges. We are the only body that awards Chartered Town Planner status to planners, the highest professional qualification sought after by employers in both private and public sectors. We support our members – 27,000 worldwide – throughout their careers, offering them a wide range of opportunities to learn and share ideas and skills.

#### Curriculum and qualifications in further education

3. The skills and qualities of great town planners come from a broad range of subjects on the curriculum, and we believe these options should be open to as many students as possible, for as long as possible. A broad and balanced curriculum, including social sciences and humanities, helps young people to understand community and how the world around them works, which in turn can lead to interests in the built environment, climate science and public health, all of which are foundational to town planning. Aspects of planning can be found across the curriculum, within geography, the sciences, the arts, economics and other humanities-related subjects, and keeping options open for students to make their career choices at any stage of their education allows for them to be able to move into shortage sectors such as town planning, which are vital to meeting the Government's growth plans for the UK.
4. To support any future curriculum development consideration should be given to key aspects of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the vital role planners play in ensuring we meet the targets of the Goals. Goal four, "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all", should support and help to frame lifelong and inclusive learning within this curriculum reform, and ensure that all students have access to education no matter their age within the system. Goal eleven, "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable", not only means that town planners are vital to sustainable settlements, but also that climate-aware young people will be necessary to achieve this. Planners are key players in helping to achieve the UN SDGs, by providing innovative and sustainable solutions to problems, particularly on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
5. Planning and the current Government's plan for green jobs and making Britain a clean energy superpower will be reliant on each other to plan and approve new wind farms, invest in new infrastructure and improve local communities. To ensure that Local Government has the capacity to allow these projects to go ahead, a broad education at school and post-16 level that feeds into planning and built environment jobs is essential.
6. There is currently a construction T level called [Design, Surveying and Planning for Construction](#) which whilst welcome, does not contain town planning content to

effectively introduce and encourage students into a career in town planning. We would consider this to be a weakness with the current qualification leaving no technical route into the profession. There have been reported difficulties with securing industry placements for T level students, but with no involvement, this is not something we can comment on.

## Skills and apprenticeships

7. The RTPI was instrumental in developing both the L7 Chartered Town Planner and L4 Town Planning Assistant apprenticeships in conjunction with a Trailblazer Group of employers from the town planning sector. These apprenticeships were developed to help create a new route into the profession and provide an excellent pipeline of qualified town planners into an already under-resourced sector. There are currently approximately 850 apprentices enrolled in L7 apprenticeships.
8. Funding for L7 apprenticeships is currently under threat and is a real concern for both the RTPI and its members. With the Government aiming to strengthen capacity and capability within planning departments in order to deliver on their growth mission, the RTPI is concerned about the negative impact of a reduction in employer access to the Growth and Skills Levy. There is a need to recruit and upskill town planners at this time as the sector needs to increase capacity with qualified town planners to drive forward the ambitions of Government.
9. Apprenticeships take a lot of time and effort to develop, and it is only in recent years that the profession is beginning to reap the benefits of having well trained, qualified apprentices successfully achieving Chartered Town Planner status. To date around 170 apprentices have completed their training and become Chartered Town Planners. We consider any decisions to introduce restrictions on employers using the Growth and Skills Levy to be counterproductive to the government's mission.
10. In December 2024, the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) [released a joint statement](#) pressing the Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern, to urgently consider the impact changes to levy funding will have on the sector's ability to address future skills demand in our contribution to the Government's growth priorities.
11. Level 7 apprenticeships are an additional access route for people from underrepresented groups to participate in built environment professions, ensuring that a wide range of voices and experiences are reflected in the communities and places we create.
12. The [Local Authority Planning Capacity and Skills Survey 2023](#) highlighted that almost all (97%) local authority planning departments reported some planning skills gaps. In anticipation of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, the RTPI have published [Priority areas for consideration](#) which notes that impending changes to the planning system will result in further new demands on planners which may exacerbate existing skills shortages. We are calling on the Government for a comprehensive skills development programme and innovative solutions to improve the planning workforce pipeline. Funding should be allocated to facilitate a competence and capacity building programme, enabling the recruitment of Chartered Town Planner apprentices, as well as the provision of accredited training courses of education and skills development for existing town planners.

13. There are challenges with apprenticeships, not least the difficulty of retaining apprentices through to completion of End Point Assessment (EPA). A formalised approach to prevent awarding the compulsory qualification until the completion of EPA would be welcome to overcome this. The simplification of funding rules and processes for employers, training providers and End Point Assessment Organisations would be also of benefit – particularly to SME’s who often do not have the resource or knowledge to navigate the requirements to access funding.
14. The role of Skills England in meeting the Governments industrial strategy and boosting economic growth will be important and we encourage Skills England to include dialogue with Professional Bodies when fully established.

### **Supporting young people, widening access, and narrowing the attainment gap**

15. Access to careers advice and the opportunity to experience and see what different jobs look like is a really important part of the education journey. Investment in this area of education would be welcome.
16. The RTPI have developed programmes to help with this namely:
  - A schools’ engagement project (BALANCE) that targets schools of greatest educational need and diversity. This outreach project involves Chartered Town Planners delivering sessions to schools, to introduce learners aged 7-18 to town planning in accessible ways that use areas of the curriculum that students relate to, including geography. The goal of the initiative is to attract young, talented individuals who could then contribute to their own communities from their positions of strength within the planning and development systems.
  - The RTPI previously ran a work experience pilot called **EXPLORE** designed to engage with young people considering career options. Launched in January 2022, EXPLORE provided approximately 200 young people work experience in the planning profession. This provided them with the opportunity to explore the many rewarding roles and opportunities that the planning profession can offer. Students welcomed this opportunity describing it as “lifechanging” and in some cases have gone on to study relevant subjects with a view to entering the profession.
17. The RTPI recognizes the importance of broadening access into the planning profession, encouraging diverse talent from a range of backgrounds, and have therefore developed a bursary programme in partnership with universities and government departments to support the current and next generation of planning students. Offers within the programme are designed to support undergraduate and postgraduate students access planning qualifications:
  - The RTPI Trust Undergraduate Bursaries were established by the Trust to promote and support a diversity of talent in the planning profession, supporting and celebrating students from a variety of backgrounds at the beginning of their town planning career. The Trust awards up to four Undergraduate Bursaries each year of £2,000, which can be used to purchase equipment to support their studies or as a contribution towards travel or living costs associated with their studies.
  - The RTPI Michael Welbank Bursary is open to students on accredited undergraduate degrees at London accredited Planning Schools. A single,

one-off payment of £2000 will be awarded to one successful recipient from each of the RTPI accredited London Planning Schools.

- The British Chamber of Commerce Planning Scholarship will support at least 100 scholarship recipients over the next three years to undertake the one-year RTPI-accredited Masters, full-time. The RTPI will broker these scholarships through existing strong partnerships with its Accredited Planning Schools.
18. In addition, the Government's own Pathways to Planning programme, a £1.59 million grant to the Local Government Association to support aspiring students into the planning sector is designed to recruit diverse talent and ensure councils represent the communities they serve. This programme currently uses the apprenticeship levy to fund the training and will be severely impacted if changes to the L7 funding as referenced above take place.

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