



RTPI

mediation of space · making of place

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Patron HRH The Prince of Wales

Dear Mr Craig

Consultation: Teaching funding subject price groups for higher education institutions

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the consultation on 'Teaching funding subject price groups for higher education institutions' which proposes simplification to the SFC's 'price groups'.

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is the professional membership organisation for spatial planners in the United Kingdom. It is a charity with the purpose to develop the art and science of town and country planning for the benefit of the public as a whole. It has over 20,000 members including approximately 2100 in Scotland who work in central government, local government, government agencies, the voluntary sector, private consultancy, the development industry and Higher Education.

The response to this consultation was discussed by members of the Scottish Planning Education Forum, which includes representatives of RTPI accredited planning courses in Scotland.

The RTPI is very concerned about the SFC's proposal to include Architecture, the Built Environment and Planning within the proposed subject price group D. The Institute considers that this approach fails to recognise the increasing importance of 'place making' within the Government's key objectives and the contribution that these subjects make to the Scottish, UK and global economies. The proposal does not take into account the future needs of planning practice; the diverse teaching requirements of complex and inter-disciplinary subjects, and the current shortage of planners. We consider that planning should be located in a higher price group, and would be more appropriately placed into the proposed group C. Our reasoning and detailed response to the consultation is set out in the Annex to this letter. We would be willing to meet your officials to discuss these proposals in detail if you would find that helpful.

The Institute trusts that these comments are of assistance and has no objection to its comments being made available to the public in the usual way. Should you wish any clarification or further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me at brian.o'callaghan@rtpi.org.uk on on tel: 0207 929 9485.

Yours sincerely

Dr Brian O'Callaghan
HEAD OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Annex 1

Consultation response by the Royal Town Planning Institute to the Scottish Funding Council's consultation on 'Teaching funding subject price groups for higher education institutions.'

Introduction

The RTPI is very concerned about the SFC's proposal to include Architecture, the Built Environment and Planning¹ within the proposed subject price group D. The Institute considers that this approach fails to recognise the increasing importance of 'place making' within the Government's key objectives and the contribution that these subjects make to the Scottish, UK and global economies. The proposal does not take into account the future needs of planning practice; the diverse teaching requirements of complex and inter-disciplinary subjects, and the current shortage of planners. We consider that planning should be located in a higher price group, and would be more appropriately placed into the proposed group C.

The proposal to include planning in Band D fails to take account of the very different development environment which future-facing HEIs should be resourced to address. Specifically regulatory powers are now in place for delivering a much more sustainable built environment and the related issue of global urbanisation is increasingly urgent. An increased supply of appropriately skilled personnel in planning and related subjects is vital to addressing these challenges. The Scottish HEIs should be strengthening the capacities to provide education in planning and urban management at this time.

Higher education provides a preparation for professional practice. As such its funding should anticipate emergent requirements. The funding of subjects should not simply reflect a historic spend on past provision.

Increased importance of place-making within the Government's key objectives

Planning is central to Government initiatives to achieve sustainable development and to address critical issues relating to the quality of environments in both towns and country, and the achievement of climate change programme objectives. New legislation such as the Planning etc (Scotland) Act, 2006 and the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2008 have introduced major changes to planning practice. Planners have to acquire the additional knowledge, understanding and skills essential for the effective integration of development-related activities in the challenging context of sustainability. Planning practice is essentially one of integration, but this function is increasingly complex as an ever-expanding range of specialist competences now contribute to the management of the natural and built environment.

The range of the Scottish Government's Directorate of the Built Environment bears witness to this complexity. The activities which the Directorate coordinates include: architecture, community engagement, development planning, development management, development promotion, environmental assessment, historic and natural

¹ Because of its diversity, planning has been referred to by a variety of terms (including 'spatial planning', 'land-use planning', 'town and country planning', 'town planning', 'city and regional planning', 'urban planning' and so on). In this statement, 'planning' is used as a generic title, and 'planners' as a general term to include all those involved in planning as an activity, whether professional, statutory or otherwise.

heritage. All have to be comprehended at national and local levels within the imperative of sustainable development and contribute to the Government's overall objective of increasing sustainable economic growth. As a result, there is an urgent need to provide an increased supply of appropriately skilled personnel in planning and related subjects to addressing these challenges.

Global importance

The RTPi represents communities of planners worldwide. Urbanisation is a global phenomenon. The Population Division of the United Nations predicted that by 2008 more than half the world's population, 3.3 billion, would be living in towns and cities. They projected that the urban population would continue to grow quickly rising to 4.9 billion by 2030. In the face of such rapid urbanisation, there is an urgent requirement to strengthen the capacity for urban management. Scottish planning schools are attracting overseas students, but much more requires to be achieved. We note the increased mobility of students from emerging economies such as India and China and the growing worldwide demand for trained planners, as discussed in articles in the October issue of *Scottish Planner*, which is available on the RTPi in Scotland website at <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/download/7502/Issue-131-091023-Scottish-Planner-October-09-electronic-version.pdf>).

Scottish planning schools need to be well positioned in terms of academic rigour and scholarship to address global challenges and to attract talented students from overseas. It is considered that the Scottish HEIs should be strengthening the capacities to provide education in planning and urban management at this very important time and that this will require more effective resourcing of relevant University departments.

Shortage of Planners

As reported by the Audit Commission (2006) and recently by the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee (2008), there has been a growing shortage of planners across the UK. Although the current recession has led to a downturn in demand meantime, in the immediate future changes now being introduced in the planning system and through new climate change regulation together with factors such as an aging workforce will lead to a new skills shortage. Until sufficient and appropriate supply-side delivery is in place a shortage of planners will constrain performance in securing a more effective planning system and achieving a more sustainable environment.

Relations with other disciplines

Planning practice is essentially one of integration, but this function is increasingly complex as an ever-expanding range of specialist competences now contribute to the management of the natural and built environment. The QAA subject benchmark statement (2007) indicates that planning education has therefore to be inter-disciplinary and also to operate an effective academic-practice relationship. It requires an understanding of the operation and outcomes of land, property and development markets from a variety of perspectives, including the economic, financial and legal aspects. It also requires an understanding of design, and the development of sustainable built and natural environments. The learning process requires developing students' skills through project-work and applied research. A well-founded planning course should have a variety of teaching and learning spaces, including spaces for project work. A diverse range of situations and locations should be used, including, where appropriate, the use of the professional workplace for case studies and study placement opportunities. A

quality course satisfying this specification cannot be delivered in a low-cost environment. The relatively small class numbers necessitated by project-work cannot deliver economies of scale.

For the purposes of teaching funding subject price groups, planning has been grouped with architecture and other built environment subjects. This acknowledges that there are clear interdependencies between these disciplines. However, planning also has clear linkages with geography and the environmental sciences. Whereas it may be held that it is up to a HIE to decide how it distributes its block grant amongst its departments, it is probable that the lead provided by the SFC in setting subject pricing will be adopted as a 'rule-of-thumb' when an institution makes internal decisions on resource allocation. Guided as it is by a historic pattern of HEI spending made in a very different development environment, the impact of the proposed subject price within subject price group D will likely be to depress the resource-base for the teaching of planning. This negative impact will apply also to key subjects with which the planning education provider has to collaborate.

Conclusions

The Institute considers that the allocation of Planning to proposed subject price band D may lead to serious under-resourcing of the planning, architecture and the built environment subjects at a time when there is an increasing necessity for a well trained workforce. The Institute urges the Scottish Funding Council to revise the current proposal regarding the funding of planning education and to include it in higher more appropriate price band.

References:

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- The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2008) *The QAA subject benchmark statement 2008 - Town & Country Planning*. Mansfield, The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.
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