

The Rt Hon. Bridget Phillipson MP  
Secretary of State for Education, Minister for Women and Equalities  
Department for Education  
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08 May 2025

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to express my concerns, on behalf of the Royal Town Planning Institute, regarding recent news published in FE Week on possible exemptions for 16 – 21-year-olds in proposals to remove public funding from Level 7 (L7) apprenticeships.

As you may know, the Royal Town Planning Institute is the UK's largest professional institute for the planning profession across all four nations and in England's regions. We speak for 27,000 planners across the UK and internationally and are the only institute to confer the title of Chartered Town Planner, the highest standard of professional and ethical achievement for planners.

The Chartered Town Planner degree apprenticeship is a L7 apprenticeship which provides an excellent pipeline of qualified town planners into an already under resourced sector. This apprenticeship will be significantly impacted by the limitations of the proposed exemptions. Many of our university delivery partners have stated that 100% of their Chartered Town Planner L7 apprentices since 2019 have been over the age of 21 at point of entry.

As L7 qualifications are equivalent to Master's degree level, many of our university delivery partners require an undergraduate qualification to enter onto the L7 pathway. Undergraduate qualifications are usually achieved at age 21 or over, pushing the typical age at which L7 apprentices start their course to the top end of the proposed exemption bracket.

In particular, planning apprentices often join the L7 route following the completion of an undergraduate degree and after undertaking relevant work experience to prepare them to embark on this specialised and technical career. Planners have to balance complex technical skills with equally complex social and political sensitivity whilst making decisions for the long-term public good. This acumen often, though not exclusively, comes with experience. This typical route onto the programme means that the vast majority of Chartered Town Planner Level 7 apprentices are over 21 when starting their course.

A 16 –21 age exemption also risks excluding students who have entered higher education later in life, whether that be due to taking less traditional routes in skills/career development or having other responsibilities that have affected their ability to undertake full-time education.

If levy funding for this apprenticeship is restricted to those aged 16 - 21 this will affect both the number of apprentices entering the profession via this route, as well as the viability of part-time provision. The

consequences of this will be felt severely across the Planning Schools offering the apprenticeship, as well as in the capacity and capability of local authority partners who employ apprentices.

This Government is driving forward a growth strategy and has already identified the key role that planners play in delivering this mission. The capacity constraints in the planning sector are well documented, but the Chartered Town Planner Level 7 apprenticeship supports a vital pipeline of new talent into the profession. With the missions and aims of Government to deliver planning reform, housing and growth, this pipeline should be safeguarded for the future.

We urge the Department for Education to re-assess the proposed age-based exemption and whether it will fully address the resourcing and capacity concerns of the sector, given the age cohort of apprentices the Chartered Town Planner Level 7 apprenticeship is directed towards and the nature of L7s being Master's Degree equivalent, therefore typically being undertaken by those aged over 21.

If the Department chooses to proceed with age-based exemptions for L7 apprenticeships, transitional arrangements need to be in place to support university delivery partners in maintaining their number of apprentices whilst they move to deliver programmes for a new age cohort.

Supporting a consistent pipeline of skilled and well-trained town planners into the sector, to deliver the homes and infrastructure that are a priority for your Government, is our primary concern. Within our specialised and under resourced profession, the relative impact of losing our L7 apprenticeship is hugely significant. The sector awaits confirmation from the Department that this key entry route into our profession will be supported and maintained.

If you, or your team, would like to further discuss any of the above, I would be happy to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Victoria Hills MRTPI FICE FRSA**  
Chief Executive  
Royal Town Planning Institute

CC: Mr Matthew Pennycook MP, Minister for Housing and Planning  
Joanna Averley, MHCLG Chief Planner