

Mr Matthew Pennycook MP
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30 July 2025

Dear Minister,

I am writing, on behalf of the Royal Town Planning Institute, in response to recent announcements on changes in access to levy funding for Level 7 apprenticeships and the significant implications this will have on the Chartered Town Planner Level 7 Apprenticeship. I want to outline the RTPI's concerns around these changes and the possible short, medium and long-term solutions that we look forward to discussing and developing further with your team within the Ministry.

The impact of changes in funding for Level 7 apprenticeships

Whilst we strongly support the principle of introducing new education opportunities for and the upskilling of younger people, the RTPI was extremely disappointed with the decision to restrict the use of levy funding for Level 7 apprenticeships to those aged 16-21. The Department for Education (DfE) has stated that only 17% of current Chartered Town Planner degree apprentices would be eligible for funding via the Growth and Skills Levy once the age restrictions apply. The change in funding eligibility, therefore, threatens to undermine a well-established and increasingly popular route into the profession that recruits around 200 planners annually, of which around 70% are employed in local government.

Whilst HM Treasury has committed to recruiting an additional 300 planning officers, [research by Unison](#) suggests an additional 600 planners on top of that figure are in fact needed. The [Home Builders Federation](#) goes further in its estimations, calculating an existing shortage of over 2,200 planners in local authorities. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's [Local Authority planning capacity and skills survey 2023](#) further highlights the constraints within the system, with over 90% of planning departments reporting some difficulty with recruitment. We are concerned the investment in 300 new planning officers does not appropriately address the existing capacity gap, let alone the expected demand.

The Government's ambitious growth agenda and programme of planning reform will increase the demand for planners across the country. This growth agenda will require more consents across development types including strategic housing sites, renewable energy and nationally significant infrastructure. To achieve timely consents and effective development management, services will require additional workforce. We recognise and welcome measures in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill for the reinvestment of planning fees into services, which will go some way to support the funding of local authority planning. However, the recruitment demand for development management teams will also increase and therefore more investment and coverage are required across all aspects of local authority planning to prepare for the increase in demand outlined. Further to this, the preparation of emerging Strategic Development Strategies could also require 150-200 new planners, alongside increased workforce demands from the Government to expedite and improve local plan coverage and establish more development corporations.

The levy funding changes will have a profound impact on the delivery of university planning education. The RTPI is aware that one Planning School has already taken the decision to withdraw from offering the Level

7 Apprenticeship from 2026 and another has suspended recruitment to undergraduate-entry apprenticeship provision with immediate effect. All others are reviewing the situation, and we expect decisions to be made soon.

The expected drop in Level 7 apprentices, due to funding changes, affects the viability of the part-time study route, a popular option at Master's level, and the obvious alternative to the apprenticeship route for employers. Given the role of planners as agents of change and drivers of growth, priority should be given to ensuring that the wider delivery of planning education is not negatively impacted by Level 7 funding changes and that our Planning Schools are supported to continue enrolling students in planning courses and providing high quality planning education.

Unless significant intervention is made, we believe that the changes to Level 7 apprenticeship funding could lead to a net-loss in planners within the next 12-18 months. This loss could hamper the successful implementation of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill.

Proposed solutions

As mentioned previously, the RTPI is grateful for the opportunity to be working with MHCLG in finding ways to support new planners into the profession and support the Government's growth agenda.


As a matter of urgency, immediate measures are needed to support our Planning Schools with the viability of delivering planning courses and maintaining the number of student planners. The redirection of existing or equivalent Level 7 funding to scholarships or bursaries for students undertaking planning courses will help to mitigate some of the previously mentioned impacts on the viability of planning courses.

The sector is facing a potential loss of 200 planners a year through changes to Level 7 Apprenticeship funding. It costs approximately £3.4 million to fully train a cohort of 200 apprentices. A capital investment of £6.8 million, over the remainder of this Parliament will support Planning Schools to recruit and train 400 planners, whilst an alternative programme is developed to fill the gap created by the funding restrictions.

The RTPI will continue to develop other medium to long-term solutions with the Ministry to ensure planning departments are appropriately resourced and have the capacity and skills to deliver on the Government's ambitions. Longer-term focus should be given to increasing the routes of entry into the profession, with the potential to explore, develop and promote alternative apprenticeship routes into planning, such as Level 6, as well as bolstering bursaries and scholarships programmes to support students from under-represented groups or backgrounds to embark on a career in planning.

As an Institute, we look forward to working closely with the Ministry in finding productive solutions to our concerns around recruitment into the profession as a result of the Level 7 Apprenticeship funding changes. There is a clear need for urgent action, and I should like to take the opportunity to discuss interventions. My office is at your disposal to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely,



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Chief Executive
Royal Town Planning Institute

CC: Joanna Averley, MHCLG
David Waterhouse, MHCLG