

Graduate Training and Development Research Findings

Context

During discussions with planning authorities and various other stakeholders within the planning system, including the Scottish Planning Education Forum (SPEF), the Improvement Service became aware of concerns about the extent to which planning graduates were prepared for employment in terms of their planning related skills and knowledge.

There are many aspects to the issue of initial planning education and the early years of a planning career. To achieve corporate membership of the RTPI, a planner must complete an accredited degree course and develop specific competencies during at least two years work experience. The issue of training and development support for planners in the early years of their career from their employers is of particular interest to the Improvement Service linked to the Planning Development Programme.

In 2007, Asset Skills and the Improvement Service agreed the objectives for a research project that would look at the training and development support being provided to graduate planners working across the planning system in Scotland. The findings of this research are presenting in this summary.

Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this research was to provide a snapshot of training and development of planners in the early years of their career from both the employer and graduate's perspectives. Focusing on planners currently working towards corporate membership of the RTPI through the Assessment of Professional Competence (referred to as licentiates) and organisations that have recently employed graduate planners, the following objectives were agreed for this research:

- To understand current practice and issues facing graduate planners and their employers regarding work based training and development
- To identify demand for external learning support and opportunities for graduate planners and support required by employers relating to maximising the potential of graduate planners, and
- To gather opinions from graduates and employers on the preparation for planning employment provided by planning education.

The methodology for the research was an on-line survey of graduate planners and recently chartered planners, and of employers of graduate planners. The employers' survey was sent to the 34 Scottish planning authorities and employers from other sectors that were known to have recently employed graduate planners. The graduate planner survey was sent via the RTPI to student members, licentiates and planners who had achieved corporate membership within the last 3 years.

An 18% response from employers was achieved and 47 responses from graduate planners. Copies of the questionnaires are provided in Annex 1.

Conclusions

This research, within the relatively limited sample, has shown that there is generally good support for training and development of graduate planners in Scotland who are in employment. There are some clear areas where graduate planners are seeking additional support and where employers would appreciate external training support to supplement the opportunities they can provide for graduates.

Findings – Employers

Ten responses were received from public sector employers and six from private sector employers. All but one of the employers currently employs graduate planners, eleven currently employ between 2 and 5 graduates and 14 have supported a graduate through to corporate membership in the past two years. Of those responding, eight have Investors in People or other training and development accreditation or formal recognition and three are an RTPI Learning Partner.

Seven employers (five from the public sector and two from the private sector) have experienced difficulties in recruiting graduate planners in the past two years. The implications of these difficulties have included:

- Increase in intensity of workload
- Inability to meet targets
- Customer complaints
- Need to increase timescale for work undertaken
- Need to restructure job roles

75% of employers responding to this survey intend to recruit new graduate planners within the next two years.

The main concerns raised by employers about the preparation for employment provided by accredited planning courses are:

- Insufficient development of technical knowledge
- Lack of development of design awareness
- Lack of understanding of political context

Generally most employers felt that they are able to provide work experience for graduates sufficient to enable them to develop the competencies required for the RTPI Assessment of Professional Competence, although some concerns were expressed in relation to leadership and creative vision. 50% provide a mentor from graduate planners working towards the APC, but only 17% provide mentor training.

Employers were asked for their views on effective ways to integrate learning and development into work. Most employers identified more than one method from the options given. The most popular were team workshops and in-house training.

The most significant barriers to providing training and support for graduate planners identified by the participating employers were insufficient time given intensity of workload and lack of support from external organisations, and to a lesser extent costs and lack of relevant opportunities.

The employers were also asked about what they consider to be the most effective ways of integrating learning and development into work. The most popular effective methods identified were in-house off the job training, using a structured graduate training programme and setting out learning objectives as well as business objectives for projects and work. Ineffective methods identified were e-learning and work based competency setting.

In terms of the external support that employers would like to help them to maximise the potential of graduate planners, the general preference was for face to face training delivered externally with groups from a range of other organisations. On-line learning opportunities were also a popular type of support for mentor training.

Findings – Graduate Planners

58% of respondents work in a planning authority, 28% in consultancy and 14% in other areas including property development, research or teaching. The length of work experience of respondents was:

- Less than 6 months 9%
- 6 – 12 months 7%
- 1 – 2 years 26%
- 2 – 5 years 51%
- 5+ years 7%

30% of respondents held an RTPI accredited undergraduate degree and 67% an RTPI accredited postgraduate degree. The main reason for deciding to become a planner cited by respondents was an interest in environmental issues (38%). Other reasons include personal experience or contact with the planning system and an interest in the built environment. 42% of respondents felt their academic qualifications prepared them for their work whilst 35% felt their studies had not prepared them well. Ways in which courses could be improved include:

- Practical examples 70%
- Technical knowledge 55%
- Work experience 45%
- Political context 30%
- Generic skills 16%
- Urban design 14%
- Environmental issues 9%

Respondents were also asked how well their course had covered a range of technical issues. Over 50% felt that planning policy, planning and environmental legislation, urban design and community engagement had been covered well or very well. However over 50% felt that the following issues had not been covered well:

- Development control issues and processes, appeals and enforcement
- Conservation and listed buildings
- EIA and SEA
- Transport planning
- Energy and climate change

When asked how employers help graduates to develop core skills, the most frequently cited method (31%) was the provision of specific work related projects with identified learning outcomes. The next most common method was through mentoring. Very few respondents indicated that a structured graduate training programme would be or was used. The types of employer support provided for CPD were funding from employer (52%), time off to participate in CPD (68%), personal development review (50%) and providing a mentor (34%). In terms of additional support that respondents would like from their employer, the most common preference was for job swap or secondment (52%), followed by training for APC submission.

- Job swap or secondment 52%
- Training for APC submission 45%
- Funding for courses or study 39%
- More clearly defined career path 36%
- More relevant work experience 32%
- Time off to attend courses 23%
- Mentoring 16%

Annex 1

Employers Questionnaire

In which sector does your organisation belong?

- Public
- Private
- Other

Is your organisation an RTPI Learning Partner?

- Yes
- No

Does your organisation hold Investors in People or other training and development accreditation or formal recognition?

- Yes
- No

How many student or graduate planners does your organisation currently employ? For UK wide organisations, please specify number for Scotland only.

Note: Graduate planners are staff with accredited planning qualifications who are working towards corporate membership of the RTPI through the Assessment of Professional Competence. Student planners are staff currently undertaking an accredited planning qualification.

- 0
- 1
- 2 – 5
- 6 – 10
- 11 – 20
- More than 20

What is the reason why your organisation has not recruited any student or graduate planners?

- Fully staffed
- Insufficient time to mentor and train given intensity of workload
- Level of work not appropriate
- Lack of senior staff available to mentor
- Unable to find the right graduate
- Cost of training
- Poor past experience
- Other

Have you experienced any difficulties in recruiting graduate planners in the last 2 years?

- Yes
- No

If yes, what that been the implications of this for your organisation? (If more than one please rank in order of impact – 1= most impact)

- Increase in intensity of workload
- Inability to meet targets
- Customer complaints
- Need to increase timescales for work undertaken
- Need to restructure job roles
- Other

How many graduate planners have achieved corporate membership of the RTPI whilst working for your organisation in the last 2 years?

- 0
- 1
- 2 – 5
- 6 – 10
- 11 – 20
- More than 20

Does your organisation intend to recruit new graduate planners within the next 2 years?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

What is the reason why your organisation has not or does not plan to recruit any graduate planners?

- Fully staffed
- Insufficient time to mentor and train given intensity of workload
- Level of work not appropriate
- Lack of senior staff available to mentor
- Unable to find the right graduate
- Cost of training
- Poor past experience
- Other

How well do you feel that the following types of planning degree prepare graduates for employment in your organisation? Please rank as 1 = very well, 5 = not at all

- RTPI accredited undergraduate degree
- RTPI accredited postgraduate degree or diploma
- RICS accredited degree
- Other

If you have scored 3 or below, what are the main concerns that you have?

- Insufficient development of technical knowledge
- Insufficient development of social values
- Insufficient development of professional values
- Lack of development of design awareness
- Lack of development of understanding of political contexts
- Lack of focus on environmental issues and sustainability
- Lack of development of transferable or generic skills
- Other

Is a mentor provided from your organisation for all your graduate planners registered as RTPI Licentiates?

- Yes
- No

Is training provided for mentors in your organisation?

- Yes
- No

For which of the following competencies required for the RTPI Assessment of Professional Competence (APC) is your organisation able to provide work experience for graduates? (Please indicate all that apply)

- Creative vision
- Project management
- Problem solving
- Leadership
- Collaborative and multidisciplinary working
- Communication
- Stakeholder management and conflict resolution

What, if any, barriers have you experienced in providing training and support for graduate planners? Please rank in order of difficulty from 1= no problem to 5= very problematic

- Prohibitive costs
- Lack of relevant training opportunities
- Quality of training is not satisfactory
- High staff turnover makes training unjustifiable
- Communication
- Insufficient time given intensity of current workload
- Lack of support from external organisations
- Other

What do you feel are the most effective ways to integrate learning and development into work? Please rank your top five in order of effectiveness 1= very effective, 5= not at all effective

- Providing mentoring
- Providing in-house off the job training
- Providing individual structured graduate training programmes
- Setting out learning objectives as well as business objectives for projects and work
- Regular team feedback workshops
- Setting work based competencies
- Using e-learning
- Other

Please indicate the external support that would help you to maximise the potential of graduate planners in your organisation.

- Coaching and training for mentors
- A mentor support network
- Support in developing training schemes
- Training for APC assessment submission
- Technical spatial planning training for graduates
 - Planning policy
 - Planning and environmental law
 - Urban design
 - Development management, appeals and enforcement
 - Conservation/ listed buildings
 - Environmental Impact Assessment
 - Community engagement
 - Transport planning
 - Energy and climate change
 - Other
- APC skills training for graduates
 - Project management
 - Leadership
 - Communication
 - Conflict resolution and negotiation
 - Access to external training mentors
 - Other

Please indicate the mode of delivery you would prefer for each type of support you identify

- On-line (web-based e-learning)
- Face to face delivered externally with groups from a range of organisations
- Face to face bespoke for your organisation
- Distance learning
- Blended learning (a mixture of modes)
- Other

Graduate Questionnaire

Please identify the type of planning work with which you are involved

- Planning authority – development management or enforcement
- Planning authority – development planning
- Planning authority – other
- Property development
- Consultancy
- Research and/or teaching
- Other

What is the main reason you decided to become a planner?

- Work experience
- A member of you family being in planning
- Recommendation
- Careers advice from school
- Interest in environmental issues
- Being out and about (not stuck in an office)
- Personal experience/ contact with the planning system
- Other

How many years work experience in planning do you have?

- 6 months or less
- 6 months to 1 year
- 2 – 5 years
- More than 5 years

What type of planning or surveying degree do you hold?

- RTPI accredited undergraduate degree
- RTPI accredited postgraduate degree or diploma
- RICS accredited degree
- Other

Where did you study for your planning degree(s)?

- Scotland
- Elsewhere in UK
- Other

What qualifications did you hold prior to starting your planning education?

- A Levels
- AS Levels
- Scottish Highers
- Scottish Advanced Highers
- Irish Higher Certificate

- Irish Leaving Certificate
- Irish Advanced Certificate
- HND or HNC
- Undergraduate degree
- Postgraduate degree
- SQA National Award
- Professional qualification
- Other

How well do you feel your academic qualification prepared you for your current planning work? Please select from 1 – 5, 1= very well, 5= not at all

How do you feel this could have been improved? Please select all that apply

- Additional development of technical knowledge
- More focus on urban design
- Development of a greater understanding of the political context for planning
- More focus on environmental issues and sustainability
- Development of transferable or generic skills
- Inclusion of work experience
- More use of case studies and practical examples
- Other

How well do you feel that your academic qualification covered the following technical issues? Please select from 1 – 5, 1= very well, 5= not at all

- Planning policy
- Planning and environmental legislation
- Urban design
- Development control issues and processes, appeals and enforcement
- Conservation/ listed buildings
- Environmental Impact Assessment/ Strategic Environmental Assessment
- Community engagement
- Transport planning
- Energy and climate change

Please identify whether you achieved or are working towards corporate membership through the APC process or the previous application process

- APC
- Previous application process

Are there any of the core skills for planners working towards corporate membership of the RTPI that you have either struggled to develop, or will be unable to develop within your current employment if you have not yet gained corporate membership?

- Developing creative vision
- Project management
- Problem solving
- Leadership
- Collaborative and partnership working
- Multidisciplinary working
- Communication
- Community involvement and facilitation
- Stakeholder management and conflict resolution
- Conflict resolution and negotiation
- Professional values and ethics of good practice

Please indicate how your employer helped or will help you to address these core skills

- Provide mentoring
- Providing in-house off the job training
- Through a structured graduate training programme
- Through specific work related projects with identified learning outcomes
- Support to attend external training or conferences
- Work shadowing or job swap

Please identify the support you receive or, if you are now qualified, received from your employer whilst a graduate for your training and continuing professional development

- Initial education
 - Paid by employer
 - Unpaid study leave for attendance at college
 - Paid study leave for attendance at college
 - Allocation of a mentor
- Training for APC
 - Fee paid by employer
 - Employer based mentor
 - Secondment, job swap or work shadowing opportunities
- Continuing Professional Development
 - Paid by employer
 - Time off to attend courses or conferences
 - Personal Development Review identifies CPD needs
 - Allocation of a mentor

What additional support would you like from your employer?

- Mentoring
- Time off to attend courses
- Funding for courses or study
- More relevant work experience
- More clearly defined career path
- Job swap or secondment opportunities
- Training for APC assessment submission
- Technical planning training in:
 - Planning policy
 - Planning and environmental legislation
 - Urban design
 - Development management, appeals and enforcement
 - Conservation/ listed buildings
 - Environmental Impact Assessment
 - Community engagement
 - Transport planning
 - Energy and climate change
 - Other
- Skills development in:
 - Project management
 - Leadership
 - Communication
 - Conflict resolution and negotiation
 - Access to external trained mentors
 - Other

What are your future career plans in the short term (within a year), medium term (1-5 years) and long term (5+ years)?

- Career progression with my current employer
- Change employers for career progression
- Leave the planning profession
- Set up my own business
- Moved from private to public sector
- Move from public to private sector
- Other

What were the main reasons for the answers you gave above?

- To gain a higher salary
- To obtain a more senior position
- Personal or family circumstances
- Not enjoying current work
- Stress
- Life work balance
- Other

If you could make one change about your job or about planning employment more generally what would that be?