

Note: This case study is extracted from the Good Development Management report, published in June 2019 on the [PAS website](#).

Oxford City Council – Trainee Planner Scheme

Summary  	
Wanted to...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract good candidates and provide in-house training
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form a Trainee Planner Scheme including rotation around the service. • Fees are were paid for planning masters course (day release learning)
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attracting the right skills - adapting corporate apprenticeship scheme to attract graduates interested in developing planning skills • Exposure across the service including major applications and committee • Valuable additional resource - increased service sustainability and resilience to risk • Recruitment – 4 graduates taken on full time
Learning / risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time for course requirements including dissertation • Initial time investment to train up staff

Introduction

Oxford City Council had been struggling to attract talented new planners to their high-performing development management team. Exacerbated by the high costs of housing in the area, managers feared that failing to recruit could pose a potential risk to service delivery. The head of service wanted to find a way to increase resource resilience and ensure service continuity.

What they did

The Council already has a corporate apprenticeship scheme, but it isn't aimed at attracting graduates with the right skills, qualifications and interest to become planners. So, in 2016 the team set up a two-year Trainee Planner scheme allocating an annual budget to support four apprentices.

The motivation for the scheme differs from Southwark's, being a 'grow your own' planner scheme as opposed to a service restructure or rebalancing exercise. Applications are invited from anyone with a degree that allows them to get a place on the RTPI-accredited masters' course in Spatial Planning. The Council pays the university course fees and enables day release.

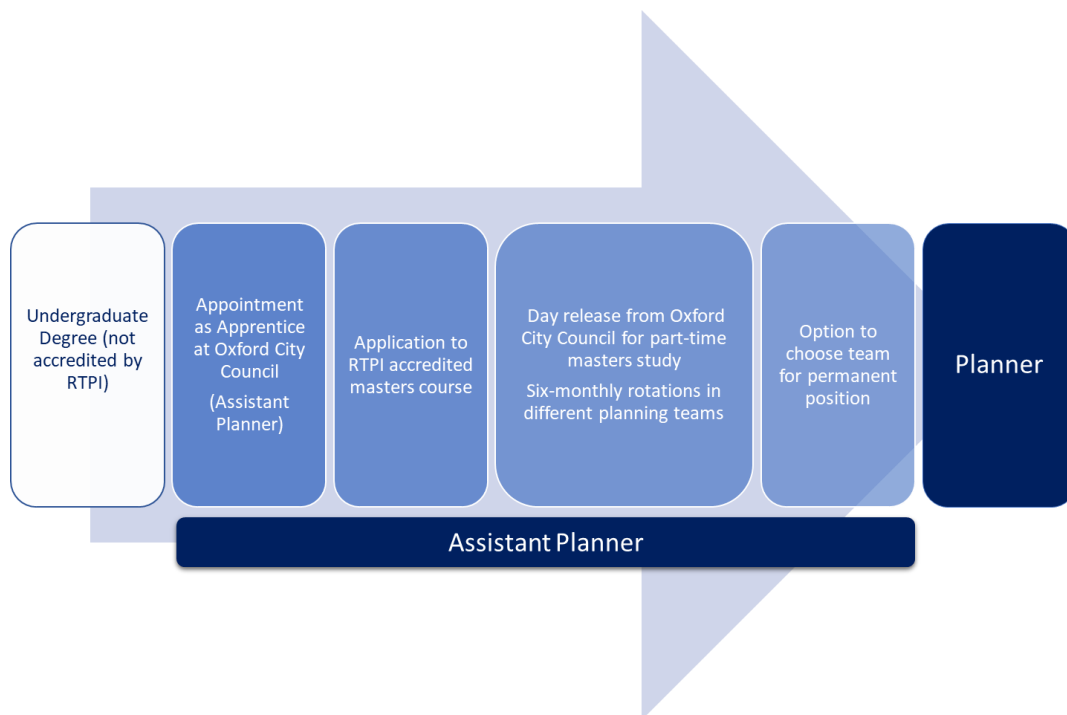
Each trainee rotates around each planning team, covering planning policy, development management, enforcement and design & heritage. This ensures trainees gain experience in all aspects of planning work. During each 6-8-month rotation, trainees are provided with the necessary support and training to contribute to the work of the team.

Beyond day-to-day responsibilities, trainees are also taken to meetings on major applications to gain experience in negotiation and design development. They attend planning committees and inquiries, and support senior staff in their work. This support keeps staff motivated and developing.

Mirroring the experience at Southwark, the team at Oxford City also emphasise the need to allocate time at the start of the training to ensure trainees can be inducted and set up with work.

Results and Learning

Because trainees are also studying for a degree-level qualification, the demands of their courses (such as coursework and writing a dissertation) can be stretching, particularly when they also have Council work to progress. However, the Council provides flexibility to allow trainees to successfully complete coursework and encourages trainees to benefit from and to use their growing 'on the job' expertise to help with their studies.



Although the Council gave no guarantee that there would be a permanent role at the end of the first scheme, each of the four planning trainees were taken on permanently and have provided valuable extra

resource. A further three planning trainees have recently joined the service to undertake a similar training scheme whilst undertaking a master's degree.