

Council information pack 2025/26



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Foreword

Dear colleague,

I'm delighted to invite you to apply for our fourth cohort of Pathways to Planning. Highly skilled planners and other built environment professionals are fundamental to running a proactive, efficient planning service for the communities they serve and ensuring that new developments are well designed and facilitate local growth. This is more crucial today than ever.

From my own professional experience and my many conversations with stakeholders across the country, I recognise the importance of strategic investment in a wide and diverse talent pipeline for the sector. I am therefore pleased that the funding available through the programme has increased this year, with both education bursaries and salary bursaries available, alongside a broader range of roles to meet local needs. Investment in graduate talent in the public sector can be particularly impactful, delivering much-needed additional resource while growing the next generation of leaders in the built environment professions.

In its first two years, Pathways to Planning has attracted hundreds of talented graduates into town planning careers and invested in their professional development on RTPI-accredited postgraduate study. The programme goes above and beyond to add value through its own programme of events, enriching graduates' experience of the public sector to boost their capability and retention.

This year we have taken the decision to expand Pathways to Planning's reach beyond local authorities to include other public bodies such as statutory consultees and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). Participating employers will be able to choose from a wider range of accredited qualifications to meet their organisations' needs. We are also launching a second strand to the programme this autumn, resourcing local government with the surveyors and construction project managers they need to fulfil their ambitions.

Alongside Pathways to Planning, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) also funds Public Practice, which supports the recruitment of mid-career built environment professionals into the public sector through its Associate Programme. Pathways and Public Practice strengthen the sector's workforce at all levels – from new graduates to experienced practitioners – and help ensure that the public sector continues to deliver high-quality places across the country. I would encourage you to consider taking part in both of these programmes as part of your resourcing strategy.

Joanna Averley

Chief Planner for England

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

What is Pathways to Planning?

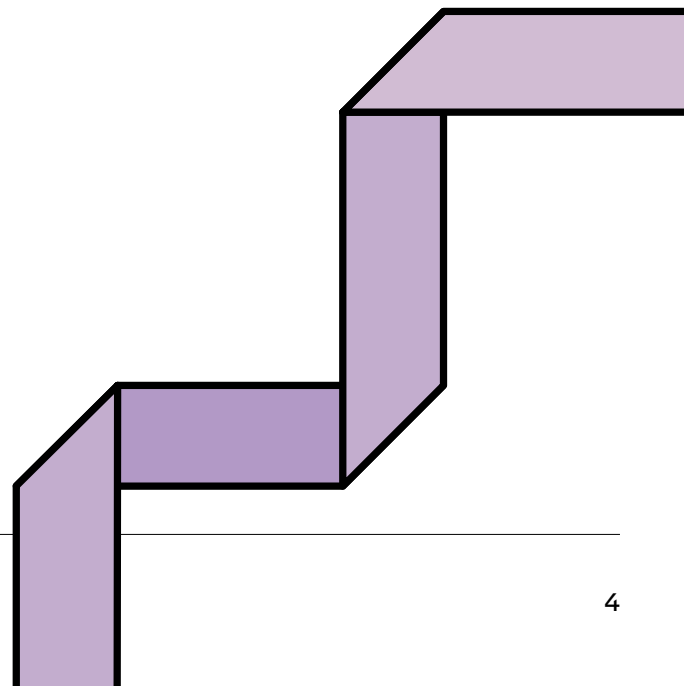
A national graduate programme for the local government built environment sector

Pathways to Planning is the Local Government Association's (LGA) graduate programme for built environment professions. It offers councils an unrivalled opportunity to access top graduate talent, and it also provides support to see these new professionals grow on the job. More than 200 high achieving graduates have been recruited into local planning authorities since the programme launched in September 2023, with a retention rate in the sector over 99 per cent. This year we will build on the strength of our offer by recruiting graduates to work as surveyors and planners in local councils, while also recruiting planners for statutory consultees and NSIPs.

Pathways to Planning is a two-year programme, where graduates are recruited through the programme, employed by councils and funded to study on a relevant accredited qualification. Your organisation has the flexibility to use a vacant post, create a new post, rotate a graduate through different placements in your team or keep them in one specific area. Graduates will study alongside work to fast track their growth on the job, and you as the employer will be able to select the most relevant qualification for their role from a range of accredited options.

The LGA has a strong track record of recruiting and retaining top graduate talent in the public sector over more than 20 years. Building on this experience, the pathways team offer pastoral support, a wide array of networking and socialising opportunities, and a learning and development programme which complements graduates' roles in the built environment.

By the end of the programme the graduates will hold a masters level qualification and have gained direct experience in the sector. They will then be equipped and qualified to work in local councils in their chosen profession.



Why should my council take part in Pathways to Planning?

Building capacity

Pathways to Planning takes a specialised approach to graduate recruitment which can combat some of the challenges that individual public bodies face. We run a national marketing campaign to attract graduates from a wide range of backgrounds who want to work in locations across England and Wales. Our competency-based recruitment process is job predictive, allowing us to assess high achieving graduates in a specific employment context rather than using limited work or educational experience as a basis. We also recruit on a public sector ethos, making it more likely that we can find the right talent for your organisation.

National networking

By employing graduates as part of Pathways to Planning, your trainees will have access to a large national network of other early careers professionals in the built environment, along with links to key organisations sharing best practice. This not only enriches the experience for the graduate but also brings a wealth of best practice and knowledge back to your council.

Making recruitment easy for you

As a national scheme, Pathways to Planning promotes built environment careers to graduates across the country on behalf of councils, statutory consultees and NSIPs. The scheme is highly popular and competitive, with less than 10 per cent of our large pool of applicants securing a role.

Each Pathways to Planning graduate will be supported to study alongside work on an accredited degree relevant to their role and chosen by their employer. This year, eligible courses include RTPI, RICS, RIBA and CIEEM postgraduate accredited qualifications. Other accredited options can be discussed with the team at the employer's request.

Graduate recruitment can be time-consuming and demanding on your resources. Pathways to Planning gives councils and public bodies access to a national marketing and recruitment campaign to draw from a large talent pool, reducing costs and helping to identify the most promising future leaders for your council.

Represent your community

Pathways to Planning recruits graduates from a range of different backgrounds, universities and degree disciplines; our aim is to reflect the diverse communities that we serve.

Pathways to Planning has done a huge amount of work to ensure the graduates applying to and succeeding within our recruitment process can reflect the diversity of the communities you serve. Find out more about this by visiting our [diversity and inclusion webpage](#). We also perform a detailed assessment of graduate preferences as part of our offer, ensuring that you interview candidates with a strong interest in your local area.

Multiple streams to work for you

Pathways to Planning offers a range of options for organisations to take part

Planning stream

Within the planning strand, councils, statutory consultees and NSIPs will be able to hire graduates to work as planners. Graduates can be based in a vacant role within development management, planning policy or enforcement, or they can rotate between different roles within your department. Graduates will study a part-time master's degree alongside work: this can be an RTPI, RICS, RIBA or CIEEM accredited course depending on the needs of the role/s within your organisation. Other accredited qualifications can be considered – please discuss this with our team.

The planning stream is designed to offer every participating council a £10,000 contribution towards course fees for a postgraduate-level accredited course, studied part-time over two years. For the planning stream, salary bursaries are also available at the total value of £40,000 per graduate place, with local plan and housing delivery need prioritised within the allocation process. Councils will need to fund any salary and on-costs above £40,000 over a period of two years.

Surveying stream

Within the surveying strand, councils can recruit graduates into a range of surveying and construction project management roles. Our assessment process is based on the core skills required to thrive in these professions. All graduates must study on an RICS accredited part-time master's degree in either general surveying or construction project management. Alternatively, qualifications can be discussed with our team. The programme has not been designed to recruit graduates to quantity surveying roles, but this can be explored at the interview stage if it is of interest to the council.

Under the surveying stream every participating council will receive a £10,000 contribution towards part-time master's fees on an accredited course. There is currently no salary support for the surveying stream.

What's expected of my council?

We ask councils to:

- Help us to promote and raise the profile of the programme locally, where possible.
- Conduct a local interview at the end of the recruitment process. At this stage the candidates will have been through a rigorous series of assessments, but we want to give you the opportunity to ensure they are the best fit for your council.
- Employ graduate trainees on a two-year fixed term contract at a minimum (permanent roles can be provided). The minimum salary for Pathways to Planning graduates is £25,000, but we encourage employers to match existing pay grades for graduate planners/surveyors if the salary for this role is usually provided at a higher rate. Graduates will be aware of the salary offer in advance of attending interview.
- Nominate a member of staff to be the key contact for the programme, once the council's trainee(s) are in place.
- Organise a range of experience for graduates to take part in within your organisation. Graduates could rotate between different placements, or they can be provided with opportunities outside their main role if based in one specific work area. This ensures that graduates are equipped to fast track their personal accreditation after they have completed their postgraduate study. Guidance is available on our website, or you can speak to our team for more information.

What does it cost my council?

There is no fee to councils to participate, the cost of the entire marketing, recruitment, and supplementary learning and development is funded by UK Government. Additionally, the programme provides educational bursaries towards the cost of a relevant accredited qualification. The cost of the qualifications above the bursary cost, and any salary/on-costs will need to be funded by councils.



Pathways to Planning timetable

Attracting, assessing and matching top graduates to your council follows a similar timetable each year. Below is a high-level overview of the recruitment timeline.

October 2025	The Pathways to Planning applications process open for graduates. Councils can start signing up to take part in Pathways to Planning.
January 2026	Candidate applications close. Graduates who pass the first stage begin video interviews.
February 2026	Top graduates complete an assessment centre and those who pass will have an opportunity to engage with participating councils.
March - April 2026	Candidates who have passed the assessment process are matched with councils for interview processes based on the candidates' preferences. Councils with vacant roles can sign up for interviews over the summer.
April - July 2026	Councils conduct interviews and offer places to their preferred candidates. Candidates accept council offers and prepare to join the organisation in the autumn.
Summer 2026	Councils with vacant roles can also sign up to hold interviews with our second recruitment intake of the year.
September 2026	Graduates recruited in May-July will begin in host organisations.
Autumn 2026 / Winter 2027	Councils will interview graduates recruited through our second recruitment window of the year, for roles starting before 31 March 2027.

How can my council apply to Pathways to Planning?

Applying to Pathways to Planning includes applying for bursary funding options

To apply to Pathways to Planning all organisations will need to complete an [application form](#).

In the form we will ask for a few essential pieces of information. This includes:

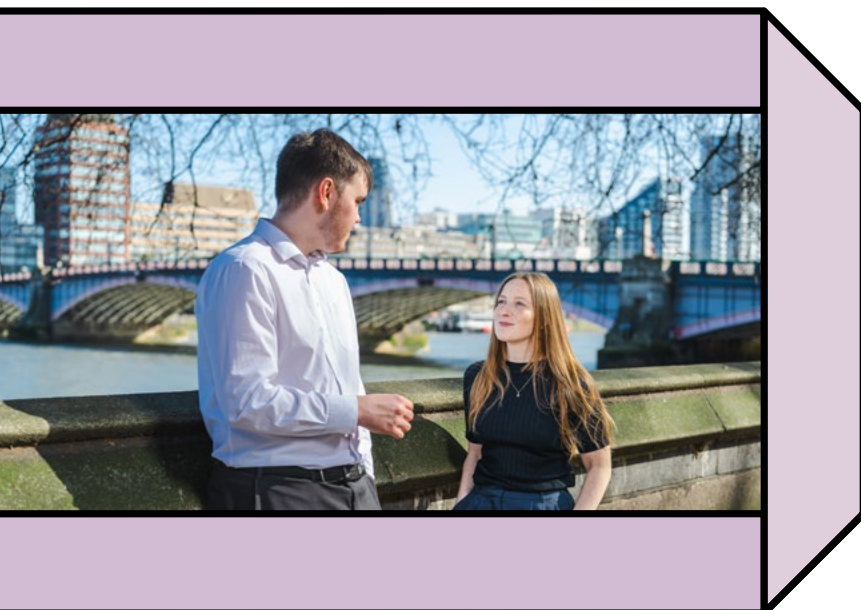
- details of your organisation
- which qualification route you intend to use
- how many graduates you are looking to recruit through Pathways to Planning
- confirmation you have permission from senior management to recruit through Pathways to Planning
- information surrounding your local plan and council house building targets
- how you intend to fund the role.

If you'd like to hear some first-hand experience of Pathways to Planning and how it has worked in another council, please let us know. The LGA can put you in touch with another authority that can tell you all you need to know about participating.

Please contact:

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