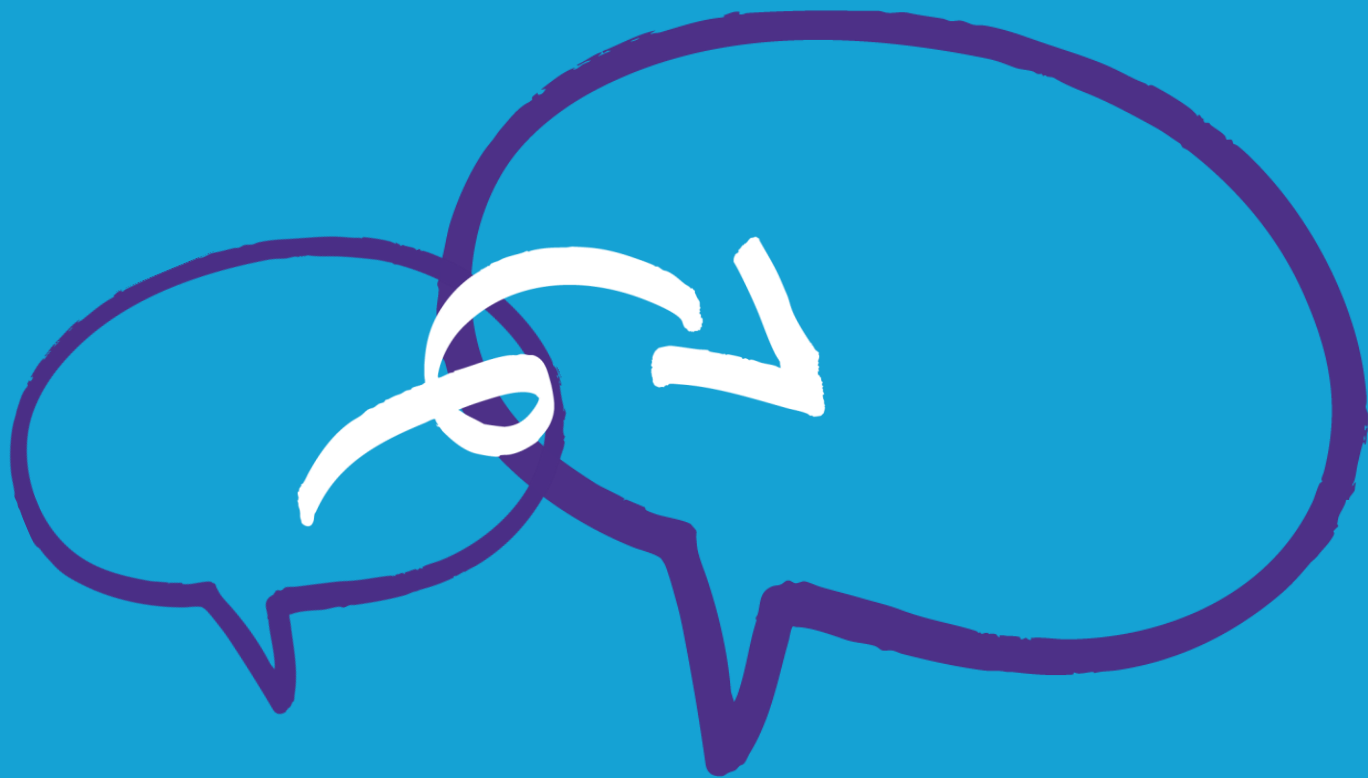




Subject Benchmark Statement

Town and Country Planning

April 2024



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About this Statement

This document is a QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Town and Country Planning that defines what can be expected of a graduate in the subject, in terms of what they might know, do and understand at the end of their studies. Subject Benchmark Statements are an established part of the quality assurance arrangements in UK higher education, but not a regulatory requirement. They are sector-owned reference points, developed and written by academics on behalf of their subject. Subject Benchmark Statements also describe the nature and characteristics of awards in a particular subject or area. Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as an expert quality body on behalf of the higher education sector. A summary of the Statement is also available on the QAA website.

Town and Country Planning is a devolved matter for the four nations of the UK, with some variance in legislation, policy and practice. However, there is a strong emphasis on the sharing of knowledge between the four nations through practitioner and academic networks, and also shared values in Planning as expressed through professional bodies. This includes Chartered Town Planner status, which is uniquely conferred in the UK by the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI). With this backdrop, membership of the Statement's Advisory Group included representation from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, to ensure UK-wide applicability.

Key changes from the previous Subject Benchmark Statement include:

- a revised structure for the Statement, which includes the introduction of cross-cutting themes of:
 - equality, diversity and inclusion
 - accessibility and the needs of disabled students
 - education for sustainable development
 - employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education
- a comprehensive review updating the context and purposes, including course design and content in order to inform and underpin the revised benchmark standards.

How can I use this document?

Subject Benchmark Statements are not intended to prescribe any particular approaches to teaching, learning or assessment. Rather, they provide a

framework, agreed by the subject community, that forms the basis on which those responsible for curriculum design, approval and update can reflect upon a course and its component modules. This allows for flexibility and innovation in course design while providing a broadly accepted external reference point for that discipline.

They may also be used as a reference point by external examiners in considering whether the design of a course and the threshold standards of achievement are comparable with those of other higher education providers. They also support professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with the academic standards expected of students.

While the professional requirements for Planning courses have informed the development of this Subject Benchmark Statement, the guidance provided here is deliberately wider than that required to inform professional accreditation. Providers may, however, wish to refer to this Subject Benchmark Statement as a guide when considering course design, content and delivery in light of the specific accreditation requirements of the RTPI).

You may want to read this document if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of courses in Town and Country Planning
- a prospective student thinking about undertaking a course in Town and Country Planning
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of Town and Country Planning graduates.

Relationship to legislation

The responsibility for academic standards lies with the higher education provider which awards the degree. Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them by their relevant funding and regulatory bodies. This Statement does not interpret legislation, nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements.

The status of the Statement will differ depending on the educational jurisdictions of the UK. In England, Subject Benchmark Statements are not sector-recognised standards as set out under the Office for Students' [regulatory framework](#). However, they are specified as a key reference point, as appropriate, for

academic standards in Wales under the [Quality Assessment Framework for Wales](#) and in Scotland as part of the [Quality Enhancement Framework](#). Subject Benchmark Statements are part of the current quality arrangements in Northern Ireland. Because the Statement describes outcomes and attributes expected at the threshold standard of achievement in a UK-wide context, many higher education providers will use them as an enhancement tool for course design and approval, and for subsequent monitoring and review, in addition to helping demonstrate the security of academic standards.

Additional sector reference points

Higher education providers are likely to consider other reference points in addition to this Statement in designing, delivering and reviewing courses. These may include requirements set out by PSRBs and industry or employer expectations. QAA has also published [Advice and Guidance](#) to support the [Quality Code for Higher Education](#), which will be helpful when using this Statement – for example, in [course design](#), [learning and teaching](#), [external expertise](#) and [monitoring and evaluation](#).

Town and Country Planning, while a unique profession, is not practiced in a vacuum. Rather, Town and Country Planners have key coordinative and leadership roles in place shaping, working collaboratively with other built environment disciplines. Depending on the specific operational context of the higher education provider and co-location of associated subject areas, consideration should be given to referencing other relevant [Subject Benchmark Statements](#), including Housing Studies, and Land, Construction, Real Estate and Surveying. Joint courses that combine Town and Country Planning with, for example, design-related subjects, should also note the provisions of applicable Subject Benchmark Statements.

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Subject Benchmark Statement can be found in [QAA's Glossary](#). Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Statement where appropriate.

1 Context and purposes of a Town and Country Planning degree

1.1 This Subject Benchmark Statement is concerned with degree courses in the field of Town and Country Planning. The name Town and Country Planning has a long history in the UK and is still used in legislation; however, degree courses may adopt a variety of names and comprise a range of closely interrelated fields: examples include Spatial Planning, Land-Use Planning, Urban and Regional Planning, City Planning, Environmental Planning, and Community Planning. This Statement uses the terms ‘Town and Country Planning’ and ‘Planning’ throughout as a shorthand to cover this range of activity. Related courses seek to understand how built and natural environments can be developed in ways that meet societally defined goals, mediate between potentially conflicting demands for space, and guide developments that contribute to the making and character of places.

1.2 Town and Country Planning is an activity that has an important role to play in delivering and safeguarding many of the aspirations that societies hold dear. These include **regenerative environmental sustainability, social equity, civic responsibility, cultural diversity** and economic prosperity. **Planning represents a key discipline for designing and delivering integrated solutions to complex socio-ecological challenges through its ability to balance competing priorities within finite resources and spaces.** It needs committed, talented and creative individuals to help deliver these evolving agendas, working across the private, public and third sectors.

1.3 Town and Country Planning can be closely linked to a range of important issues, including:

- the development of **sustainable, inclusive and healthy places that balance competing interests in the pursuit of collective well-being across current and future generations**
- **responding to the deterioration of global and local environments, biodiversity loss, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and impacts of human and natural disasters**
- the opportunities and threats posed by globalisation, new technologies and the speed of change
- resource management of, for example, waste, water and minerals
- the regeneration of declining or underused urban and rural assets

- changing living patterns, and redistributing populations nationally and internationally
- attempting to ameliorate social polarisation, disadvantage and spatial fragmentation
- the delivery of sufficient housing of the right quality, affordability and in optimal locations
- understanding and meeting the needs of diverse communities
- the conservation of places and cultural assets, buildings and landscapes of valued character
- the planning and delivery of physical, social and green infrastructure
- providing and/or protecting social and cultural infrastructure
- coordinating and integrating development under fragmented governance
- delivery and management of the public realm and public spaces
- considering the implications of alternative paradigms such as degrowth and circular economies
- promoting sustainable patterns of mobility
- balancing the needs and interests of private landowners with those of wider society.

1.4 In many cases, the causes of and potential solutions to these issues are increasingly contested. Climate change and other pressing societal and environmental challenges, as well as rapid technological development, mean that the contexts and purposes of Planning may be subject to significant change in coming years; this may in turn require significant agility in Planning education. **The increasing urgency of achieving just transitions to sustainable futures requires planners who can navigate contested values, address complexity and uncertainty, and develop adaptive responses that address both immediate needs and long-term transformation of socio-ecological systems.**

1.5 Intellectually, Planning studies are inter- and multi-disciplinary, given the range of knowledges, theories, processes and practices that can be utilised in understanding and shaping spatial development. Town and Country Planning courses necessarily draw on **and integrate** a range of social science, and environmental and design disciplines. There are important relationships with other academic disciplines, including geography, architecture, sociology, social policy, public policy and administration, economics, politics, law, health (including public and environmental health), landscape architecture, surveying, real estate, construction, urban history and management. Core concerns include the **intersectional** relationships between people and environment, place and space

and the application of different types of knowledge to resolving real-world problems. However, the subject's breadth means many of its core constituents may be approached through several different routes, and there is scope for courses to shape their own understanding and focus.

1.6 Course planning will usually involve vocational applications, with the aim of providing graduates with the knowledge, skills and ethical values to undertake Planning and related policy tasks within evolving social, cultural, legal, economic, environmental, administrative and governance frameworks. Town and Country Planning is a societal activity which is not necessarily linked to a particular professional framing, and Planning education does not have to be professionally accredited. In the UK, and a number of other national contexts, however, Planning is often a professionally accredited activity.

1.7 This Subject Benchmark Statement does not merely repeat the learning outcomes specified by professional accreditation bodies but, rather, seeks to provide a broad context for the standards of Planning studies in higher education. These requirements can be delivered by those courses with or seeking relevant professional accreditation, as well as by courses not intended for accreditation. The Statement addresses Town and Country Planning degree courses at both undergraduate and taught postgraduate levels, as well as helping to inform those designing other degree courses which have a substantial Planning content. The Statement therefore provides a point of reference for course development and review.

1.8 Planning education in the UK increasingly takes place in an internationalised context, **requiring critical examination of colonial legacies in spatial systems and integration of Indigenous practices**, with growing awareness of the varied contexts for Planning practice and varied origins of Planning knowledge, as well as increasing numbers of international students on Planning programmes. The Planning movement has a long history of policy mobility and a desire to learn from elsewhere while critically understanding specific contexts for application. Elements of Planning education will reflect global, national and devolved governance structures and courses should take account of differences in governance, law, policy and practice as appropriate for their focus.

1.9 This Statement includes new sections on equality, diversity and inclusion; accessibility; education for sustainability; and employability and education. These cross-cutting themes are complementary to each other, and the wider purposes of

Planning education and their principles apply throughout this Statement and in Planning degree courses.

Purposes and characteristics of a Town and Country Planning degree

1.10 Town and Country Planning generates creative proposals for change, by means of analysis, public participation and cooperative working within a complex web of competing interests. Positive action is at the heart of Planning, and it operates within a wide context of environmental, political, social, economic, legal and governance constraints and power dynamics. A Planning degree should seek to develop students' knowledge and critical understanding of these contexts, giving consideration to changing social, economic, environmental, legal, cultural, political, policy, administrative and ethical frameworks for Planning in a local, national and international context.

1.11 Town and Country Planning courses involve diverse types of knowledge related to the study of the built and natural environments, and how societies interact with their environment at a range of scales. This involves holistic thinking across a range of disciplines. Planning studies draw on both social sciences and design-based knowledges, **including Indigenous traditions**. All courses are encouraged to draw upon knowledge, theories and concepts from a wide range of sources. **This includes Indigenous and traditional ecological knowledge systems, as well as diverse cultural perspectives on human-environment relationships, providing students with the intellectual tools to challenge dominant development paradigms and imagine alternatives that better align with regenerative sustainability principles.** Planning courses enable students to develop skills around understanding socio-economic and environmental challenges (including the implications of climate change), gathering and evaluating evidence, and seeking to understand processes to design and implement **inclusive and equitable interventions** in space and place. This requires the ability to make critical judgements about the implications of different courses of action. An appreciation of competing demands for space (at various scales), the richness of place, and temporal change are central to Planning education

1.12 Town and Country Planning degrees provide students with opportunities to engage with academic research and critical scholarship, as well as vocational and professional development. This includes seeking to develop planners who understand the communities that Planning serves and are able to act as creative

problem-solvers, developing appropriate responses to spatial, development and design challenges and opportunities. Planning should be understood in relation to its consequences for diverse publics, including those relating to people's health and well-being, the quality of their environment, inequalities, and the vitality of local economies. Town and Country Planning degrees will also develop broader skills, including negotiation, leadership, teamworking, communication, a capacity for independent research and critical reflection. An emphasis should be placed on allowing students to become reflective and reflexive practitioners, able to understand and act within the ethical contexts and imperatives for Planning practice.

1.13 It is important to understand the diverse job functions and career paths available to Planning graduates, which are likely to further evolve over time. A Town and Country Planning degree cannot educate for every eventuality, situation or context; nor can it predict future changes in the profession or government policy. What it can do is help to educate student planners to be professionally agile and curious, with key framing knowledges and skills to equip them to deal with the evolution of professional practice and the changing contexts in which it operates over their career.

1.14 The benchmark standards in this Statement are intended to provide a broad framework to help develop Town and Country Planning courses that can respond to evolving contexts and ensuring employable graduates able to engage in continuous professional development throughout their careers. **Planners need to consider the needs of diverse communities and understand the social, economic and environmental consequences of their practices, and the ability for the Planning system both to cause harm and to promote quality of life and environment.**

Characteristics of a Town and Country Planning degree

1.15 As an academic subject, Planning is the study of the way societies plan, design, manage and regulate change in the built and natural environments. It therefore includes the study of why and how (and with what consequences) societies intervene, shape, organise and change natural and built environments, in order to secure a range of social, economic and environmental objectives. This will be reflected in the interdisciplinary pedagogies contained within a Planning degree.

1.16 The academic core of the subject is the study of the rationale for Planning and how it is practised. This necessarily involves understanding not only the processes of spatial change in the built and natural environments, both broadly and in specific contexts, but also studying arguments for and against intervening in these processes. It requires an understanding of the operation and outcomes of land, property and development markets from a variety of perspectives, including the political, social, **environmental**, economic, financial and legal aspects. It also requires an understanding of design, place-making, ecology, human and physical geography and the development of sustainable built and natural environments.

1.17 Town and Country Planning degree courses may be delivered as:

- a stand-alone or joint honours undergraduate degree
- an integrated master's degree
- a stand-alone master's degree delivering core Planning education and acting as a conversation course for graduates of other disciplines seeking to become planners
- more focused master's degrees which explore a particular specialism of Planning.

1.18 One-year taught master's degrees are now a major feature of Planning education. Some courses may include a sandwich year in industry or shorter work placement experience. Some courses can also be adapted and included within accredited degree apprenticeship programmes in Planning, in conjunction with the professional body. A [Chartered Town Planner Degree Apprenticeship Standard](#) has been established in England, and a Higher-Level Apprenticeship is available in Northern Ireland. Courses may be taught in conjunction with allied/related disciplines, including, but not limited to, geography, architecture, urban design, housing, real estate and community development.

1.19 While the benchmark standards in section 4 of this document are focused upon bachelor's with honours and integrated master's degrees, those designing and delivering postgraduate courses in Planning may still find this document useful in considering course content.

1.20 The mix between different types of knowledge and paradigms will vary between courses, and a diversity of approaches to knowing and understanding places and processes in the environment is to be encouraged. Planning courses should ordinarily involve a mix of scholarship and practical application of knowledge and skills. Planning has long been understood to involve survey – the collection of data – and the analysis of data before plan-making and decision-

making processes. Planning courses should consider a variety of sources and approaches to data analysis, including the use of technologies utilised with appropriate methodological rigour and in an ethical framework. In general, a student would normally develop core Planning knowledge and skills before focusing on a more specialist area of Planning subject matter and practice.

1.21 Town and Country Planning courses may be delivered full or part-time and will involve varying mixes of in-person and remote (distance) learning. Flexibility to meet the diverse needs of Planning students is encouraged. However courses are delivered, students should be offered opportunities to develop the interpersonal skills required for meaningful cross-professional teamwork, and be exposed to real-world places in all their richness and complexity. Given the real-world focus of Planning as a discipline, fieldwork, site and study visits and experiential learning should always form part of Planning education.

1.22 This Statement provides a framework for developing and delivering Town and Country Planning undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses. It does not differentiate between modes of study or specify how learning outcomes are achieved but contains guidance to support curriculum development. The Statement recognises that courses across the UK may adopt a variety of approaches and structures to meet national qualification and credit frameworks, drawing on the benchmark standards section of this Statement.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

1.23 Given that Town and Country Planning graduates will be practising Planning in societies with diverse populations, it is essential that courses are underpinned by an inclusive **anti-oppressive** curriculum where students are attentive to the challenges and opportunities of creating equitable places **and confront spatial inequalities and planning's historic role in perpetuating them**. The term 'inclusivity' is intended to mean an approach that embeds a barrier-free educational environment, with which underrepresented groups can fully engage. An inclusive curriculum therefore not only integrates employability to support career opportunities for diverse student groups, but also permits the development of a learning community both during and after studies. Through the latter, **students will be challenged to think about ways to promote a greater sense of belonging for underrepresented groups**. When underrepresented groups feel included, there is a greater sense of belonging within the wider cohort, not only in an educational setting but also later in the workplace.

1.24 Uneven growth results in the generation of a significant amount of variation in how opportunities and constraints are presented in urban/rural locations. Professional planners are at the centre of making these location-based decisions, for example on the provision of housing, transportation, and food and healthcare. These present complex challenges in ensuring places are equitable, healthy and regenerative. Challenges such as these should be covered both theoretically and practically in Town and Country Planning degree curricula and students should be encouraged to contribute towards solutions to these challenges.

1.25 Consideration of knowledge gained by students through an inclusivity lens therefore needs to be undertaken at various spatial scales. This might be in the form of questions that will be specific to a site or neighbourhood but that have equitable implications for the wider community. In other instances, students will need to draw on knowledge that is specific to certain groups in society; for example how to tackle barriers to accessing green spaces, especially for underrepresented groups (including those with health conditions, those of lower socio-economic status, and those from minority ethnic backgrounds).

1.26 Inclusive curriculum design requires an approach that considers how students engage with programmes of study at different points in the programme, and whether there are barriers in the achievement of learning outcomes. Such an approach includes an appreciation of co-creation of curriculum opportunities for students, as well as course content that is informed by viewpoints and inputs from academics from diverse backgrounds. Such an inclusive curriculum agenda will be guided by several key considerations, for example approaches to delivery and the value of effective learning environments to promote inclusive behaviours.

1.27 Some of the principles for embedding inclusivity in the Town and Country Planning curriculum might include:

- enabling potential (including creation of accessible, virtual/physical learning environments)
- nurturing belonging and engagement (including how the learning environment might foster a ‘sense of belonging’)
- increasing awareness and understanding (including how best to enhance knowledge and understanding of students)
- encouraging interactivity (including an opportunity to collaborate with staff and practitioners)

- developing self-reflection (including allowing spaces for reflection for both students and staff)
- **centring lived experiences of marginalised communities in planning education**
- **deconstructing colonial planning legacies in curriculum content**
- considering a flexible admissions policy **which accounts for the life and work experience and non-standard qualifications prospective students may have as well as standard qualifications**
- **tackling** issues around widening participation on courses
- ensuring **personalised** support for learning and progression on courses
- supporting students to go on and diversify built environment professions **through their participation and practice.**

1.28 An approach to delivering an inclusive Town and Country Planning curriculum is centred on adopting diverse teaching methods that are accessible to students from different backgrounds, as well as embedding the themes of equality, diversity and inclusivity into the learning materials.

1.29 Inclusive learning environments that ensure that both physical and virtual spaces are accessible to students are important in generating inclusive behaviours in Town and Country Planning students. These behaviours include:

- valuing diversity
- treating people equally and with impartiality, and also providing support to ensure equality of access to learning **and the benefits of learning**
- tackling **structural** inequality and **spatial** disadvantage through policy and practice

1.30 Planning education should critically examine its own role in perpetuating spatial exclusion, including through:

- **analysing discriminatory zoning histories**
- **positively critiquing and reflecting on the nature of knowledge, understanding, expertise and institutional hierarchies as they relate to the planning system and the planning profession**
- **amplifying community-based planning epistemologies**

Accessibility

1.31 Town and Country Planning courses should be **proactively** designed to be inclusive, recognising a full range of learner needs **across physical, cognitive and**

socio-economic barriers to ensure equitable access to learning. This requires recognition that what access looks like will vary for different groups and individual learners. Care should be taken to consider how all areas of programme design (learning environments, course materials, **teaching and** assessment methods and wider support structures) may affect learners in respect of protected characteristics (including neurodiversity) and socio-economic background.

1.32 All learning environments and course materials should be accessible to learners with **diverse bodily and cognitive needs including those with invisible disabilities**, or those with lived experience of disadvantage – including structural inequalities that impact on access to learning opportunities. Where appropriate, following national and institutional guidelines, students should benefit from **accessibility measures embedded throughout course design which make the course accessible to a wider variety of students by design. Where embedded accessibility measures are insufficient, course teams should work with individual students to provide** reasonable adjustments that reflect particular assessed needs. Programmes should also seek to ensure that all students have access to the facilities and resources they require to learn effectively both on and off campus.

1.33 Course designers should implement universal design for learning (UDL) principles throughout planning education, including:

- Multiple means of engagement with planning concepts
- Flexible field experience protocols
- Accessible technology including digital planning tools
- Consideration of student workload around assessment and assignment deadlines
- Considered use of in-person, online, hybrid and asynchronous teaching.

1.34 Town and Country Planning courses are taught across a variety of learning environments, including campus teaching spaces, site visits, field trips and placements. **They can include group project work, live projects and blended and digital learning technologies. Particular care should be taken to ensure that these environments are inclusive and fully accessible to all students, considering a full range of physical, social and financial issues such as space, lighting and sound, transport to and from locations, and assistance accessing expensive technology or resources.**

1.35 The range of different knowledge and skills covered by Town and Country Planning courses requires a diversity of teaching and assessment methods beyond traditional written academic outputs. It is important to ensure that this diversity is

used flexibly and sensitively to allow for diverse learning needs. Clearly expressed expectations for learners, particularly around assessment, are crucial to ensuring equity across cohorts with diverse learning styles and needs.

1.36 Recruitment to Town and Country Planning courses, including degree apprenticeship routes where appropriate, should be sufficiently flexible to enable learners with non-standard academic backgrounds or from groups underrepresented in higher education to flourish. In keeping with wider goals of diversifying professional practice in the built environment, course content should be designed to ensure that all members of the learning community can see themselves in the curriculum, have opportunities to learn about and from the diverse experiences of others, and are supported to explore the range of future career opportunities available to them.

Sustainability

1.37 Issues of sustainability underpin, and are woven throughout, the teaching and content of Planning education. In a similar vein, higher education providers delivering Planning degrees should engage with and promote critical thinking regarding the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) (see also section 3), other frameworks and sustainability more broadly. This includes developing students' capacity to identify tensions and synergies between different sustainability goals, and to facilitate transitions toward more sustainable and just futures through spatial planning interventions.

1.38 Town and Country Planning and professional planners are concerned with how sustainability is embedded in policymaking, and subsequently used to regulate the development of built environments and conservation of natural environments.

1.39 Sustainability as a concept cannot be narrowly defined in relation to Town and Country Planning. While sustainable development and environmental sustainability are fundamental facets of a Planning education, sustainability is not limited to teaching and learning about development and the environment. It includes critical consideration of social and economic sustainability to help achieve sustainable places for current and future generations. As sustainability is temporal, a matter which takes account of the needs of future generations, Planning education promotes debate about cross-generational factors. Planning education also appraises sustainability at different spatial scales, including national, regional, city, local and neighbourhood. Planning education should

therefore engage with transformative and regenerative approaches that seek to restore damaged ecosystems, heal social inequities, and create net-positive contributions to both human and ecological communities. This includes critical examination of growth paradigms and consideration of alternative economic models such as circular, regenerative, and wellbeing economies that challenge conventional approaches to development.

1.40 In this regard, Planning is often understood to be about four ‘Ps’: People, Place, Prosperity (beyond the narrowly economic) and Planet. These dimensions represent an integrated whole, recognising that human well-being is fundamentally dependent on healthy ecosystems, and that places are dynamic socio-ecological systems requiring holistic approaches.

1.41 Effective Planning education moves beyond accepting any definition of sustainability at face value. It makes space in curricula for critical debate about the meaning of the concept and its limitations. Students are part of this critical debate about the definition of sustainability and its application in Planning education, government policy and the profession more broadly

1.42 This debate includes discussion of what is meant by environmental protection, social well-being and economic prosperity, and the significant tensions involved in simultaneously pursuing all three. The framing of such debates can differ from place to place, informed by (often diverse) cultural values that impact on the understanding of, and approach to, concepts such as heritage, conservation, progress and success.

1.43 Approaches to teaching and learning in Planning and sustainability are inter- and multi-disciplinary, just as Planning is an inter- and multi-disciplinary endeavour. This leads to collaborative learning opportunities with other disciplines, which reflects the reality of the professional worlds in which Planning graduates work. Planning students develop an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders across the built and natural environments.

1.44 Planning courses should consider how to embed approaches to teaching and learning that are linked to the UN SDGs across modules, working towards the SDGs and associated frameworks, including the QAA and Advance HE’s [Education for Sustainable Development Guidance](#). Case studies, practical examples, reparative live projects and community placements can be used to embed sustainability practice in learning.

Enterprise and entrepreneurship education

1.45 [Enterprise and entrepreneurship education](#) supports behaviours, attributes and competencies that are likely to have a significant impact on the individual student in terms of successful careers. It prepares students for changing environments and provides enhanced impact through placements and activities that build links between academic institutions and external organisations.

1.46 Entrepreneurship and enterprise skills extend beyond more generic notions of employability to underpin the values and purpose of Planning. In this sense, entrepreneurship might be inculcated into module content to create awareness of **any** values that students may already have, and to then develop and attain skills to utilise these to deliver entrepreneurship in a Planning setting. In so doing, Planning can be seen as an activity for supporting place-based leadership, steering the development of places, and bringing people together. Beyond employment, entrepreneurship education provides competencies to help students lead a rewarding, self-determined professional life, and be well placed to add social, cultural, **environmental** and economic value to society throughout their careers.

1.47 Curriculum design is an important aspect of incorporating enterprise and entrepreneurship education into undergraduate degrees in Town and Country Planning. Higher education providers can introduce modules that give students an understanding of development-related business activities, property and land markets, and the processes and issues involved in employment generating and commercial economic development-related land uses. Examples include urban regeneration **with just transition protocols**, development project viability, and strategic and development Planning. **Providers can also introduce modules that provide students with an understanding of the impact of climate change mitigation/adaptation on urban Planning and the role of enterprise in addressing these challenges. For example, modules could cover topics such as sustainable transportation, renewable energy, green infrastructure and a circular economy.**

1.48 In addition to introducing new modules, higher education providers can also insert enterprise and entrepreneurship education into existing modules. For example, when teaching students about urban design, tutors can introduce them to the concept of mixed-use development and the opportunities it presents for property developers and entrepreneurs. **Similarly, when teaching students about environmental planning, tutors can explore the role of green businesses in**

sustainable development, and the role of urban land use management in supporting a circular economy. Additionally, the equitable role of digital technology in Town and Country Planning degrees might be embedded so that students could be equipped with the skills and knowledge to navigate and ethically utilise digital technologies (such as artificial intelligence, design tools, and virtual or online forms of engagement) to facilitate effective planning.

1.49 As noted in section 3 of this Statement, teaching and learning approaches also play a crucial role in enhancing enterprise and entrepreneurship education in Town and Country Planning degrees. For example, higher education providers might incorporate case studies, problem-based learning, and experiential learning into the curriculum. These approaches can help students develop their critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making skills. One effective approach is to use real-world projects to provide students with hands-on experience. For example, providers could work with local authorities or community groups to provide students with an opportunity to develop a planning proposal for a specific area or project.

2 Distinctive features of the Town and Country Planning degree

Design

2.1 The design of Town and Country Planning degrees reflects a balance between theoretical or conceptual learning and practical application of knowledge and skills. Programme design places an emphasis on **systems-based** critical thought and reflective practice aimed at developing high-level **transdisciplinary** thinking skills about **complex socio-ecological systems**, places and communities and the ability to utilise these in a range of professional settings. **This includes the capacity for systems thinking, understanding complex interdependencies, and envisioning alternative futures that promote resilience and regeneration in the face of environmental and social challenges.**

2.2 The design of Town and Country Planning degree programmes is usually (but not necessarily) influenced by the requirement of professional bodies. Degree programmes that are not accredited may also reflect some of these requirements. Degree programmes may in particular reflect the learning outcomes for initial Planning education of the RTPI (as the body able to confer Chartered Town Planner status in the UK). Programme design across different providers can therefore exhibit some common characteristics that are distinctive to Town and Country Planning degrees. There is also scope for individual providers to incorporate distinctive characteristics into their programmes – and in some cases professional bodies encourage individual providers to reflect on what is distinctive about their own programmes.

2.3 The overall structure and design of Town and Country Planning degrees usually reflect the following:

- The importance of promoting identity as a professional planner, and professional values. This requires coherence and organisation when creating an identifiable programme of study, through a strong set of core modules, alongside a managed range of option modules.
- Delivery within wider schools or departments that may include several disciplines. Town and Country Planning degrees can therefore reflect their institutional context. Programme design can reflect some of these other disciplines. For example, Planning courses may exhibit distinctive

characteristics from being located alongside other disciplines, such as architecture, geography or social sciences. This is sometimes particularly evident in the range of option modules that may be included in a Town and Country Planning degree.

- Delivery as either single honours Planning programmes or as combined honours programmes such as Planning and Real Estate, Planning and Architecture, Planning and Design, Planning and Geography.
- Lack of prior experience of Town and Country Planning as a subject prior to study at degree level. The first year of a Town Planning undergraduate degree often includes preparation of core content that recognises the range of different educational pathways and prior learning of students. This experience promotes opportunities for students to initiate or develop some degree of specialism, including through option modules.
- A balance between an international scope of the subject or discipline, and the application of knowledge within specific national or subnational contexts.

2.4 Town and Country Planning courses typically exhibit some distinctive characteristics and features. These include:

- significant involvement of practitioners and stakeholders, including community groups, in the delivery of the curriculum in the form of module contributors, guest speakers, and project sponsors or clients. There may also be opportunities for practitioners to influence curriculum content, for example, through practice advisory panels (see section on Partnership, below)
- the opportunity for students to secure practical experience in the workplace through short or extended placements, including placement year opportunities that may contribute towards professional experience requirements
- inclusion of field visit activities at varying scales, ranging from local sites to international field trips
- opportunities for students to engage in ‘live projects’, sometimes working to external organisations in client-driven learning activities, and that enable the synthesis, integration and application of learning across the curriculum while helping equip agile, reflexive graduates who can engage in lifelong learning
- the assessment of student learning through a variety of different forms of assessment that are designed to promote the practising and acquisition of

- a range of professional skills (including presentations skills, report writing, visual communication, participation, research)
- the delivery of specialist skills, including use of subject-specific software and technology.

Progression

2.5 Over the course of a degree with honours (FHEQ Level 6; FQHEIS Level 10) a Town and Country Planning student will progress from one level of study to the next, in line with the regulations and processes for each institution. However, it is expected that each level would see the attainment of knowledge, expertise and experience that builds towards the final achievement of meeting the threshold-level subject-specific and generic skills listed in this Statement. This will usually include successful completion and the award of credit for the full range of learning and assessment, including any practical components. Upon graduation from an undergraduate degree, it would be expected that a student who had achieved a second-class degree or higher would be capable of, and equipped for, undertaking postgraduate study in Town and Country Planning or a related discipline. Entry requirements to postgraduate courses are, however, determined by individual providers and may require specified levels of achievement at undergraduate level.

2.6 Undergraduates studying Town and Country Planning courses as part of a combined or joint degree with other subjects will achieve core elements of the specific and generic skills outlined in this Statement and will add others according to the topics covered in the other subject(s) of their degree. Additionally, they may explore the overlap between different disciplines, creating further opportunities for interdisciplinary study.

2.7 Integrated master's degrees (FHEQ Level 7; FQHEIS Level 11) are available (often referred to as an MPlan degree programme) in the UK and usually comprise a four-year full-time course or a part-time course of not less than five and not more than eight academic years.

2.8 In a standard undergraduate honours degree course in Town and Country Planning, students may exit earlier and be eligible for a Certificate of Higher Education, a Diploma of Higher Education, or other awards depending upon the levels of study completed to a satisfactory standard. At providers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the standard duration of a full-time undergraduate course is three years. Scottish undergraduate degrees with honours are typically

designed to include four years of study, which relates to the structure of Scottish primary and secondary education. Students following part-time routes accumulate academic credit in proportion to the intensity of their study, and their total study time and credit value would be the equivalent of the three or four-year degree.

2.9 Progression within an applied and professional subject such as Town and Country Planning will enable students to specialise and broaden their expertise as a practitioner. At the start of the studies, it would be helpful for students to be aware of these progression pathways.

2.10 As students progress through their course, their knowledge and expertise in understanding places, drawing on different methods of information gathering, moves through increased levels of complexity/critical thinking and greater acknowledgement of roles/influences of various stakeholders. They will also demonstrate a greater appreciation of the sophistication needed for making 'situated and evidenced judgements' on matters that are both 'spatial' (such as relating to a site, neighbourhood, urban/rural communities) and 'non-spatial' (for example on topics such as **young people and climate change, ageing-in-place, the role of AI in future practice, interdisciplinary/professional working**, and reflective practice). As they progress, students develop a greater depth of knowledge and gain an understanding of the vital contribution made by research in their subject. Students will demonstrate an increasing ability to undertake fieldwork or projects independently, using primary and/or secondary data. They will also need to be able to acknowledge that the theory and practice of Planning are not separate, but rather a continuum that commences by inquiring about the possibilities of improving a place, that pauses in order to reflect on the interventions made so far, and that then recommences by raising new questions on how best to improve the place further

2.11 Doctoral-level study related to Town and Country Planning studies is available across a range of disciplines, ensuring a diverse community of students studying a wide range of issues. There is a strong early career research community, through external networks such as the RTPi and the Urban Studies Foundation, which enables students to identify as early career researchers.

Flexibility

2.12 Higher education providers structure the courses they offer to support students' learning and attainment. Depending on the educational mission of the

provider, this may include opportunities to engage in learning on campus, online, and/or through hybrid learning, arranged in terms, by semester, year-long, block or other formats. These may be offered in full and/or part-time modes of study, and credit may be accumulated through the completion of micro-credentials or short accredited learning courses.

2.13 Town and Country Planning degrees offer flexibility of study through their delivery mode (including face-to-face, **hybrid, place-based** and distance learning), design and relationship with other subjects, making use of a range of learning tools and technologies from online webinars to site visits and field trips.

2.14 At both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, part-time and full-time programmes of study may be available, with increasing offers of study while working via Degree Apprenticeship routes. This encourages a student body with a diverse range of ages and backgrounds, including career changers. Many undergraduate programmes also offer an opportunity for a sandwich year in practice, and/or other practice placements.

2.15 Professionally accredited Town and Country Planning courses have to meet certain core learning outcomes; however, within these, students have scope and flexibility to pursue specialist interests through option modules, dissertations and work-based learning modules. Non-accredited courses will not have the same formal requirements but are likely to have complementary learning outcomes.

Partnership

2.16 Planning education in the UK is inherently influenced by partnership activities at a variety of scales, with a variety of organisations and with varying levels of formality. **Planning education must model equitable place governance through partnerships that compensate community co-producers and centre marginalised spatial knowledge.** These range from direct contributions to the curriculum and interactions with students, including gaining practical experience, to key networks and bodies that strategically influence the direction of Planning education. This also includes international partnerships that expose students to key cultural and technical contrasts in how Planning is practised globally.

2.17 As noted under Design (above), the involvement of practitioners and stakeholders, and the use of field activities, are distinctive features of Planning courses. These activities require partnerships to be developed with a range of organisations, including employers, which may be formal or informal, and range from short-term activities to long-term relationships. They are designed to be

student-centred and to support the understanding of the subject beyond the academic experience.

2.18 Planning graduates are employed by a variety of public, private and third sector employers, and this diversity will typically be reflected through a range of employer inputs into the curriculum. Traditionally, this has mainly focused on private sector consultancies and public sector Planning authorities, **but it has broadened to include third sector organisations such as national conservation charities and quasi-governmental organisations, as well as locally based campaign and/or community groups.**

2.19 Contributions to the curriculum developed through partnership may be expected to reflect an awareness of the wide-ranging impacts of Planning on a variety of groups and interests. Particular examples include engaging with community and campaigning groups that might be organised at a range of scales from the local (neighbourhood) to the global, and consideration of the formal and informal roles such groups have in Planning processes.

2.20 This form of contribution can range from ad hoc sessions on a particular theme of contemporary concern to practice, to formal structured contributions that might involve setting briefs for live projects and contributing to assessment. A common type of field activity is study visits, to either learn more about partner organisations or the work in which they are involved. The latter often takes the form of visits to sites and projects, including international visits.

2.21 Building on this, there may be formal partnerships with international higher education providers that enable students to study abroad for up to a year. This can allow a deeper critical appreciation of contextual differences to be developed, including of the varying extent to which Planning is recognised as a distinctive profession. These partnerships can also be valuable in bringing international students to the UK and allowing home students to benefit from a different perspective

2.22 A common feature of partnership working with employers is placements, which vary in length from informal work-shadowing experiences (typically of one or two weeks) to sandwich courses where students are formally employed for up to a year.

2.23 Formal, contractual partnerships with employers are a feature of the Chartered Town Planner Degree Apprenticeship courses. These build on experience with placement-based learning, making work-based learning a core

aspect of the curriculum. They are regarded as an important route to increasing the diversity of entrants into the Planning profession.

2.24 All forms of partnership that contribute to the curriculum require a shared understanding of the ethical and resource implications involved (for example, use of data, time required). This includes managing the expectations of the organisations involved, ensuring that students are exposed to a variety of perspectives, and enabling them to make independent judgements about the effectiveness of the external organisations to which they are exposed. **It is also important that external partners share the providers' values around sustainability, equality, diversity and accessibility to ensure all students have equitable opportunities to engage with them and understand how sustainable practice is/can be integrated into the Planning sector in reality.** Higher education providers may use a protocol or other form of formal agreement to manage relationships effectively.

2.25 By virtue of their shared interest in the effective education of planners, staff in higher education departments are often engaged in a variety of formal and informal networks that can contribute to enhancing the content and structure of the curriculum. Formal examples include the Planning Schools Forum, which brings together all Planning schools accredited by the RTPI in the UK and internationally, to share best practice and discuss common challenges and opportunities. At the international scale, a similar role is performed by the Association of European Schools of Planning. Other examples may include learned societies and groups such as the Town and Country Planning Association in the UK and, internationally, the Regional Studies Association and Commonwealth Association of Planners, as well as professional bodies associated with aligned built environment disciplines such as the RIBA or RICS. These organisations do not formally influence the evolution of Planning education but are nevertheless important partners in allowing Planning academics to engage in contemporary debates and discussions.

Monitoring and review

2.26 Degree-awarding bodies, and their collaborative partners, routinely collect and analyse information and undertake periodic course review according to their own needs. Considering the student voice will form part of **each stage of this process**. They draw on a range of external reference points, including this Statement, to ensure that their provision aligns with sector norms, **current and future sector needs for sustainable development best practice in employment and**

training. Monitoring and evaluation are a periodic assessment of a course, conducted internally or by external independent evaluators. Evaluation uses information from both current and historic monitoring to develop an understanding of student achievement or inform future course planning.

2.27 Externality is an essential component of the quality assurance system in the UK. Providers will use external reviewers as part of periodic review to gain an external perspective on any proposed changes and ensure threshold standards are achieved and content is appropriate for the subject.

2.28 The external examiner system currently in use across the UK higher education sector also helps to ensure consistency in the way academic standards are secured by degree-awarding bodies. Typically, external examiners will be asked to comment on the types, principles and purposes of assessments being offered to students. They will consider the types of modules on offer to students, the outcomes of a cohort and how these compare to similar provision offered within other UK higher education providers. External examiners are asked to produce a report each year and make recommendations for changes to modules and assessments (where appropriate). Subject Benchmark Statements, such as this one, can play an important role in supporting external examiners in advising on whether threshold standards are being met in a specific subject area.

2.29 Planning education providers may wish to consider the use of practitioners as external examiners, alongside suitably experienced academic external examiners. This can help ensure a diversity of perspectives as part of the annual cycle of quality assurance of courses. **When appointing external examiners, Planning education providers should, as a basic requirement, prioritise planning practitioners from a wide range of backgrounds, including the under-represented and disadvantaged, alongside suitably experienced academics who will also collect and take into account the views and experiences of Planning students.**

2.30 Professional accreditation will involve additional monitoring and review of courses. For the RTPI, this will include scrutiny and evaluation of each degree course to be accredited as well as an annual process of review. This partnership-based approach helps assure the quality of Planning education being delivered and gives universities an opportunity to engage with the RTPI, practitioners and external academics.

3 Content, structure and delivery

Content

3.1 As already outlined, Town and Country Planning can be considered vital for the creation, management and protection of built and natural environments. Town and Country Planning requires the deployment of a variety of skills, reflecting the reticulist nature of the Planning professional who may potentially need to act as a broker (of competing interests), a visionary (identifying potential futures) and an advocate (for a particular perspective). Planning education is a stimulating mix of theory and practice that develops graduate attributes in preparation for a professional career either in Town and Country Planning or related fields through transferable communication and analytical skills.

3.2 This is reflected in the learning environment which places emphasis on place-based education, as experienced through site visits and field study. These may be structured around local, national or international case studies. Typically, student learning is demonstrated through individual and group work contributions, reflecting professional work environments, which also incorporates assessment of individual knowledge, understanding, and skills.

3.3 The intention here is not to detail a lengthy and prescriptive list of contents for Town and Country Planning courses, but instead to establish thematic groupings that clarify aspects for consideration as part of degree programmes. The **complex adaptive systems** environment in which Planning is practised offers a diversity of **intersectional** debates requiring both general and specialist skills. Consequently, creative and adaptable approaches to educational content that reflects local, national and global challenges are essential. As noted in section 1 (above), **Town and Country Planning has a potential role, to varying extents, in meeting all of the UN sustainable development objectives (see diagram below), particularly through the interconnectedness of the goals. This provides an overarching framework for the design and delivery of Planning education, expressed at both course and modular level.**

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



3.4 Planning education should critically engage with all SDGs but especially those most salient to spatial governance, including:

- SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities): Teaching inclusive urban design (11.3), participatory planning (11.7), and heritage-sensitive regeneration (11.4)
- SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities): Addressing spatial segregation through equitable zoning and anti-displacement policies
- SDG 13 (Climate Action): Integrating UK Climate Change Act compliance with local planning (e.g., flood-resilient development)
- SDG 15 (Land Ecosystems): Balancing greenbelt protection with housing needs through biodiversity net-gain frameworks.
- SDG 5 (Gender Equity): Designing safer public spaces with gender-sensitive mobility planning.

3.5 Courses allow Planning students to demonstrate **critical** knowledge and understanding across key themes, including:

- Causes and processes of change in the environment
- Practice of Planning
- Debates in Planning
- Key Planning skills
- Specialist skills and knowledge

Causes and processes of change in the environment

3.6 Planning students demonstrate the complexity of Planning through knowledge and understanding of the:

- processes of socio-economic and political change and their spatial outcomes
- development processes, development economics and the nature of land and property markets
- processes of environmental, ecological and physical change, and associated global threats from natural or human-made disasters from climate change
- processes of interaction in and between the built and natural environments, including interrelationships between land uses, **the local ecosystem, climate and water cycle**, infrastructure and human activities at different scales and changing demographics at the different scales of urban and landscape design.

Practice of Planning

3.7 Planning students apply theory to practice, and translate knowledge into action through understanding of:

- the **intersectional** impact and **intergenerational** consequences of Planning upon **diverse** communities, interest groups and individuals **across different temporal scales**
- political and institutional frameworks at all levels, and their procedures/legal, regulatory and governance arrangements, including reference to relevant legislation (primary and secondary), policy and strategy on the basis of which Planning decisions are made **and their capacity to enable or constrain sustainable development pathways**
- plan and policy-making methods, techniques and processes available to planners, deployed across a variety of scales
- Planning systems and the administrative and management arrangements necessary for effective Planning
- participation in, and working with, **diverse and marginalised** communities
- **Planning as a tool for delivering health and well-being through sustainable, inclusive and accessible development which contributes towards just transitions in society in the places where people live and lead their lives**
- the practice of design, including aesthetic and inclusive design issues, and how places are delivered

- management, financing, implementation and delivery of Planning projects, through the appreciation of development, including viability and land value capture
- standards of ethical practice
- the practice of Planning in a variety of international, institutional, professional, legal and cultural settings
- the potential and ethical application of digital technologies in and for Planning – such as virtual and online engagement, generative AI, and spatial analysis – including analysis of the possible beneficial and adverse impacts on Planning from such technologies.

Debates in Planning

3.8 Planning students confidently identify and participate in debates in Planning through knowledge and understanding of:

- the development of Planning thought and practice
- the importance, practicality and requirement for transformational over incremental change when planning and in the Planning sector as a whole when creating ne equitable communities or redesigning current communities to be equitable
- the philosophical and theoretical explanations underpinning the evolution and practice of Planning and the relationship between state and market
- the arguments for and against Planning as a part of intervention or non-intervention in processes of societal and environmental change, including the distributional impacts of Planning
- substantive theory concerning the processes of societal and environmental change drawn, for example, from the subjects of geography, sociology, history, political science, legal studies, economics and environmental science
- the conceptual basis of value systems and ethics, incorporating moral philosophy, and the justification of the choices made in Planning in terms of goals, actions and outcomes
- political structures and democratic processes, and the nature and use of power in the public interest, informed by key debates from political philosophy
- the implications of the spatial dimensions and different scales of Planning across administrative and sectoral boundaries, including local, regional, national and transnational Planning.

Key Planning skills

3.9 Planning students demonstrate a wide range of transferable and subject-specific skills that might include:

- collecting, analysing, evaluating and synthesising Planning data and trends through academic research and professional investigation in the Planning field
- formulation, articulation and evaluation/appraisal of Planning issues, policies, strategies, plans and designs, including the writing of clear aims and objectives
- creative problem identification, problem-solving skills and propositions for action, recognising and providing appropriate resolution to potential constraints with reference, where required, to relevant legislation
- numeracy and use of statistical and quantitative data
- practical design skills in visual analysis and place-making
- forecasting, monitoring and evaluation of Planning interventions and outcomes
- preparing and presenting arguments and illustrative materials in a variety of presentational formats
- negotiating, mediating and communicating clearly and succinctly and working with diverse stakeholders with differing professional, ethnical and cultural backgrounds
- being aware of, **listening to and evaluating the opinions and values of others, demonstrating an ability to exercise initiative, original thought and independence, within a system of personal values**, including negotiating, facilitating, leadership, advocacy and networking skills
- using information technology in work preparation and presentation
- awareness and practice of digital Planning, including generative AI
- **critical reflection with an understanding of the need for lifelong learning**
- managing and producing work to time on an individual basis
- **the ability to work effectively as part of a diverse team, as well as individually**
- **the ability to work effectively within an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary environment**
- the ability to work under pressure while maintaining a work/life balance.

Specialist skills and knowledge

3.10 In addition to a defined set of core knowledge, understanding and skills, Planning courses generally expect students to obtain some specialist in-depth knowledge and skills in one or more areas of Planning activity. This may be a feature of undergraduate courses, and would normally be a key aspect of integrated master's courses.

Teaching and learning

3.11 Town and Country Planning as an academic discipline engages with, and is informed by, scholarly research and professional practice. The purpose of learning, teaching and assessment strategies designed for Planning courses is to foster a thirst in students to become independent learners and effective practitioners.

3.12 Education strategies incorporate a vision for teaching and learning, as well as the student experience, at a time of rapid change, complexity and precarity. These strategies aim to produce individuals who have a range and depth of requisite knowledge, understanding, skills and competencies applicable to their level of study. They also encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning journey, developing a lifelong appetite for critical reflection and continuous professional development.

3.13 To emphasise the essential interaction of theory with practice, these strategies should be designed through the collaboration of Planning academics and practitioners, combining the application of theoretical concepts with the processes of real-life scenarios to create a student-centred, inclusive pedagogy. Sustainability **and climate justice** in **their** broadest senses **underpin** all pedagogic considerations, being fundamental to the study and practice of Town and Country Planning as a place-making profession.

3.14 Teaching includes curriculum design, the selection and delivery of content, the method and type of assessment, moderation and reflection. This process, especially the delivery of content, should encourage the active involvement of professional practitioners, thereby enabling real-world challenges to be addressed.

3.15 Learning is the process of change in the individual brought about by the acquisition of information, understanding, skills, attitude and behaviour. Consequently, a variety of pedagogical approaches are to be used to accommodate the diversity of student learning styles and the evolving modes of hybrid, analogue and digital engagement.

3.16 Learning opportunities should actively involve interaction with a **diverse** range of stakeholders **including marginalised communities** and have the potential to include students co-creating with academics and/or practitioners, **interdisciplinary collaboration, work-based environments, scenario-based projects, real-life simulations, situations for problem identification and resolution, and community participation**. These opportunities would allow for both individual student study and group work to be undertaken. **A strong combination of these would help broaden understanding of social, attitudinal and physical barriers, and should be encouraged within Planning courses.**

3.17 Research skills are an important part of the educational journey across a programme of study. They are also important for Planning practice, given the need to understand the built and natural environments and their socio-economic contexts before considering any interventions. Students can develop their investigative skills to demonstrate independence through a student-led research or design project. They are challenged to think in critical, creative and applied ways and may devise research questions, design and conduct a research methodology, and potentially produce original knowledge which will be important to the discipline. As well as conducting their own project, students will communicate their research to academic and/or professional communities using professional communication skills and methods.

Assessment

3.18 Given the importance of demonstrating knowledge and understanding of theory and practice, it is important for students to be exposed to a range of assessment methods that reflects the types of context that may be encountered through employment. Such authentic assessment can reflect the various potential professional pathways of a planner and may involve individual or group work that communicates complex ideas, debates or defends a particular position or viewpoint.

3.19 **Reflecting on the learning outcomes of a Town and Country Planning course, which incorporates both critical thinking and practical skills, the implementation of a range of assessment types would be anticipated.** The following list is not intended to be exhaustive, particularly because Town and Country Planning, as a subject and as a discipline, is constantly evolving. New assessment opportunities and innovations may emerge in discussion with practitioners and as a result of contemporary higher education provider arrangements, including the evolution of generative AI (artificial intelligence)

tools and the role these may have in assessment design. **In addition, implementation of a range of assessment styles allows students with a wider range of learning styles, disabilities, neurotypes, educational backgrounds and strengths needed in the Planning sector to demonstrate their abilities and proficiency as a Planning student.** Consequently, assessment methods will need to adapt accordingly, and therefore this list is to be seen as a guide for programme design that best fits the intended assessment of module and programme-level learning outcomes.

- essays and assignments prepared to a defined timetable to assess knowledge and understanding of a topic, and communication, analytical and presentation skills
- design projects **or case studies** (which may be carried out over a prolonged period and developed in studio settings)
- examination through unseen and seen papers under timed conditions requiring written essays and/or multiple-choice questions to assess knowledge base, understanding and analytical skills
- graphical presentations in a variety of digital and/or non-digital media formats, including the production of posters
- online examinations, multiple-choice questions and electronic workbooks
- portfolios of work relating to practical exercises
- presentations to assess communication skills and group work
- presentations in other media and formats, for example, creating a video or web page, or the observed participation of practical team-based exercises in the field, laboratory and/or classroom, to assess skills in collaboration and group problem-solving
- reports on external placements as part of work-based learning
- reports to assess observational procedures, practical skills and methodologies
- role-play scenarios, such as participation in mock Planning committees, public inquiries, neighbourhood consultations.

4 Benchmark standards

Introduction

4.1 This Subject Benchmark Statement sets out the minimum threshold, typical and excellent standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in Town and Country Planning. Demonstrating these standards over time will show that a student has achieved the range of knowledge, understanding and skills expected of graduates in Planning.

4.2 The vast majority of students will perform significantly better than the minimum threshold standards. Each higher education provider has its own method of determining what appropriate evidence of this achievement will be and should refer to [Annex D in The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#). This Annex sets out common descriptions of the four main degree outcome classifications for bachelor's degrees with honours: 1st, 2.1, 2.2 and 3rd.

4.3 The standards apply to all the areas of knowledge, understanding and skills outlined in section 3. The intention is that the standards are used as a means to assess particular student learning outcomes for which Town and Country Planning courses have responsibility. In this regard, as the standards are generic rather than specific to particular areas of Town and Country Planning or individual modules, they can be applied across a diverse range of programme requirements.

4.4 These are the standards that it is expected students will achieve in a Town and Country Planning degree, and students should demonstrate an understanding and ability to apply these, as appropriate.

4.5 Threshold, typical and excellent standards are defined as:

- **threshold standard:** the minimum required to gain an honours degree; graduates at this level demonstrate an acceptable level of ability and skills
- **typical standard:** the level of attainment expected of the majority of honours graduates; such graduates demonstrate more developed competence and skills
- **excellent standard:** graduates achieving this standard have a range of competencies and skills at an enhanced level.

Threshold level

4.6 This is the minimum requirement that graduates of a bachelor's degree with honours can be expected to reach and addresses five core themes for standards:

- knowledge and understanding (KU)
- cognitive skills (CS)
- practical skills (PS)
- transferable skills (TS)
- professional competencies (PC).

4.7 These five themes can be mapped to standards required for student understanding, knowledge, analysis, evaluation and skills relative to:

- an appreciation of the interconnected nature of Planning interventions and the bearing these have upon the built and natural environments (KU)
- an ability to identify and resolve problems through Planning tools and processes (CS/PS)
- theories of Planning, its role in society, the underpinning arguments for the activity of Planning, and how best to relate theories to Planning practices (KU/CS)
- the political, economic, social, **environmental**, legal and institutional contexts in which Planning is carried out, the relative powers of actors involved, and the respective means by which planners might act within such contexts (KU)
- policy, its role in framing action at different scales, the processes by which Planning policy is made, and the potential of policy to shape outcomes (KU)
- the role of Planning in making sustainable and inclusive places, the contribution of design and finance to this process, and the need to consider different groups (KU/PS)
- the relationship between Planning and communities, the impact of Planning on people and places, and how best to work with diverse groups in society, **in particular, marginalised and excluded groups** (KU/PS)
- the potential of Town and Country Planning to tackle the climate and biodiversity crises, such as the role of infrastructure in meeting climate goals **through nature-based solutions, circular economy approaches, and transformative shifts in land use patterns** (KU)

- the use of technology in Planning, including an appreciation of the digital environments in which Planning is carried out (PS/TS)
- the significance of **intersectional** values, **anti-oppressive** ethics and **cultural humility** to the practice of Planning and an understanding of the role of the profession in upholding these (CS/PC)
- the relationship of Planning to other professional and disciplinary fields, including the importance of working effectively across disciplinary boundaries (PC)
- the importance of research to effective Planning, including the use of evidence drawing on a range of information sources, and the evaluation of alternative policies and arguments (CS/PS)
- the ability to effectively communicate through written, graphic, numerical and digital means (PS/TS).

Typical level

4.8 Graduates meeting the typical standard will achieve the criteria listed above under the threshold standard and, in addition, demonstrate:

- development beyond the minimum threshold of knowledge and understanding, cognitive skills, practical skills and professional competencies
- some critical discernment, insight, initiative, creativity and autonomy through effective and appropriate application of the criteria.

Excellent level

4.9 In addition to meeting the threshold and typical standards listed above, excellent graduates also demonstrate:

- an understanding and application of all criteria listed, with additional development beyond the typical threshold of knowledge and understanding, cognitive skills, practical skills and professional competencies to an excellent level
- through effective, fluent, sophisticated application, an excellent level of critical discernment, insight, creativity and autonomy.

Integrated master's degrees

4.10 Some institutions offer integrated master's degrees in Town and Country Planning, and this section briefly sets out the standards that would be expected from graduates at this level. Graduates of integrated master's degrees in Planning will have a similar attainment of knowledge, understanding and skills as graduates attaining the typical standard of bachelor's degrees above, but in addition can be expected to demonstrate.

- in-depth knowledge in one or more specialised areas of Planning activity and practice
- a **strong critical** awareness and understanding of professional working, roles, responsibilities, ethics and values
- a high degree of professionalism in undertaking assignments and/or working in groups
- the effective use of data collection and analysis, and an ability to conduct independent research in Planning studies.

5 List of references and further resources

Advance HE and QAA (2021) Education for Sustainable Development Guidance

www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development

Chartered Town Planner (MRTPI)

www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/about-rtpi-membership/apply/chartered-planner

Chartered Town Planner Degree Apprenticeship Standard

www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/chartered-town-planner-degree-v1-0

QAA The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

www.qaa.ac.uk/en/the-quality-code

QAA (2018) Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education: Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers

www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/enterprise-and-entrepreneurship-education

QAA (2018) Quality Code Advice and Guidance

www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/advice-and-guidance

QAA (2024) The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies

www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf

Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) (2023)

www.rtpi.org.uk/

United Nations (2023) Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

<https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

6 Membership of the Advisory Group

Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Town and Country Planning 2024

Dr Neale Blair (Chair)	Ulster University
Professor Ben Clifford (Deputy Chair)	University College London
John Blackburn	Cornwall College
Associate Professor Marvelle Brown	University of Hertfordshire
Oliver Carr	University College London
Dr Sebastian Dembski	University of Liverpool
Dr Deepak Gopinath	University of the West of England, Bristol
Dr Neil Harris	Cardiff University
Dr Andy Inch	University of Sheffield
Mike Kiely	Planning Officers Society (POS)
Dr Taimas Larimian	Loughborough University
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Kirsty Macari	University of Dundee
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Professor Danny Saunders	QAA Officer
Laura Sperry	QAA Coordinator
Robert Stevens	Sheffield Hallam University
Professor Malcolm Tait	University of Sheffield
Dr Judith Taylor	Royal Town Planning Institute

Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Town and Country Planning 2019

The fourth edition, published in 2019, was revised by QAA to align the content with the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education, published in 2018. Proposed revisions were checked and verified by the Chair of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Town and Country Planning from 2016.

Professor Georgia Butina Watson
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Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Town and Country Planning 2016

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Dr Malcolm Tait

University of Sheffield

Dr Tim Townshend

Newcastle University

Employer representation

A number of employers were invited to provide feedback on the draft Statement, including:

Adam Hendry

AECOM

Arup

Atkins

Berry's

Bidwells LLP

Boyer Planning

Bristol City Council

Caerphilly Council

Cambridge City Council

Cardiff City Council

Carter Jonas

The Coal Authority

Cornwall Council

Cundall

City of Edinburgh Council

Department of the Environment NI

East Midlands Councils

East Sussex County Council

ELG Planning

Gerald Eve

GVA

Hambleton District Council

Hunter Page Planning Limited

Indigo Planning Limited

London Borough of Hounslow

London Borough of Newham

Monmouthshire County Council

Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners

Newport City Council

NHS Property Services

Pegasus PG

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park
Redrow Homes
Smart Planning
Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Terence O'Rourke Limited
Three Rivers District Council
Turley Associates Limited
Welsh Government

Student reader

James Coe

QAA officer

Helen Kealy

The Planning Inspectorate
Savills L&P/Savills Commercial
South Staffordshire Council
Sussex County Council
Tetlow King Planning
Transport for London
Vale of Glamorgan Council
WYG Planning and Design

University of Liverpool

QAA

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