

ARTICLE

Meet our Future Planners: 2023 Bursary Recipients

In 2023, RTPi Scotland secured funding from the Scottish Government to grant bursaries to several planning students in Scotland. **Graeme Brown**, Bursary Recipient at the University of Dundee, **Caitlin Arbuckle-MacLeod**, Bursary Recipient at the University of Glasgow, and **Tilly Mason**, Bursary Recipient at the University of Glasgow, reflect back on their studies over the last year, including how the bursary has helped them to achieve their goals.

Q What prompted you to study planning?

GRAEME – With over 15 years in the built environment sector, specialising in public realm and transport, I've seen firsthand the transformative power of planning. My career has given me the opportunity to work closely with planners, and it's been incredibly rewarding to witness how their expertise can help shape vibrant, sustainable communities. I'm particularly passionate about the planner's role as an advocate, ensuring that all voices within a community are heard in the development process. I thrive at the strategic, master-planning level, laying the groundwork for projects rooted in sustainability. A planning

qualification is the next step to deepen my impact, from small-scale developments to city-wide initiatives.

CAITLIN – I studied architecture from 2014-2021 and was working as an architectural assistant at Collective Architecture – we are involved in a lot of masterplanning and strategic design work in our practice, and I had been reflecting for some time on the potential value of having someone specifically trained in spatial design/planning alongside our architects to benefit this particular strand of our work. I therefore decided to work part-time at Collective while studying City Planning full time in order to fulfil this role!

TILLY – I studied geography at LSE for my undergraduate degree and developed an interest in the relationship between people and place. I think urban design and planning are the most important factors affecting sense of place, with tangible impacts on community and sustainability. I have always been politically active and see planning as central to building justice and equality into space. Finally, my undergraduate dissertation was on field recording and planning, to see how the 'sensory city' can better inform policy and development. I loved this research, and wanted to further study the relationship between sound, sense of place, and planning.



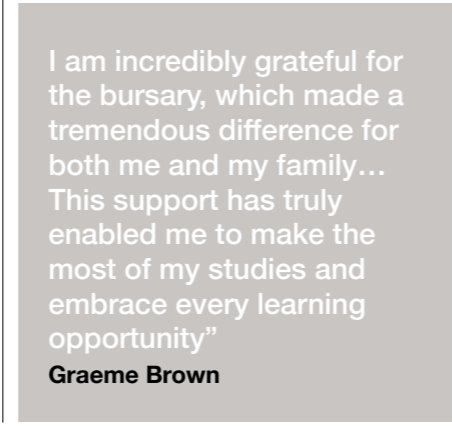
"I want to continue doing work I care deeply about"

Tilly Mason

Q What have you gained (or achieved) over the last year of your studies?

GRAEME – Over the past year, I've gained so much knowledge and have truly enjoyed collaborating with my fellow students in group projects. Completing this year felt like a major accomplishment, especially with the support from the fantastic staff at Dundee University. Balancing full-time work and a young family was no small feat, but their flexibility made all the difference, allowing me to progress through the coursework successfully. I was eager to deepen my skills and gain hands-on experience, particularly in design and visualization, and I found these aspects of the modules incredibly engaging and rewarding. It's been an exciting journey!

CAITLIN – Studying planning involved some familiar challenges and fields of expertise – those relating to spatial design, for example – but also some new and surprising ones; I learned much more about the processes and logistics of planning that sometimes occur outwith the architects' traditional scope, particularly those related to land acquisition and assembly, economics, and even the wider political, social and cultural drivers for planning processes and outcomes. I also



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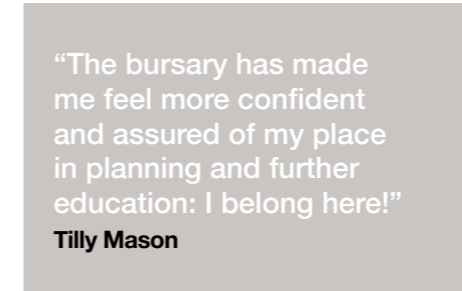
Graeme Brown



"I was able to allow myself sufficient time to dedicate to my studies"

Caitlin Arbuckle-MacLeod

got the chance to study a course dedicated to Community Engagement, which has long been a professional focus of mine, which gave me new tools and fresh insights into this core aspect of our practice.



"The bursary has made me feel more confident and assured of my place in planning and further education: I belong here!"

Tilly Mason

TILLY – I have gained knowledge and experience of planning in theory and practice. From learning how to write policy papers, to AutoCAD, I have developed a range of new practical skills. Meanwhile, I have gained research skills, completing both individual and group projects. In my dissertation, I could explore my more creative interests in planning, about how field recording can inform planning decisions and priorities. I'm so happy to be graduating with a distinction, including getting 100% in the module Housing, Inequality and Society, and winning 2nd prize for my group's project proposing a spatial plan for a neighbourhood in Glasgow.



Q How has the bursary helped you over the last year?

GRAEME – I am incredibly grateful for the bursary, which made a tremendous difference for both me and my family. As a mature student, balancing the financial demands of full-time study was daunting, and this additional support eased a significant burden. The bursary allowed us to cover extra childcare and travel expenses, which meant I could spend more

time on campus, especially during group work sessions. Without this funding, attending these sessions and fully participating would have been challenging. This support has truly enabled me to make the most of my studies and embrace every learning opportunity.

CAITLIN – Going from full time work to part-time hours as a mature student meant taking a significant payout, which was likely to provide a significant financial challenge for me over the year. Fortunately, I was awarded the RTPi bursary, and was able to use the funds from this to keep my working hours to a minimum and allow myself sufficient time to dedicate to my studies. I'm extremely glad for this, as the course involves a lot of reading and personal study in order to get the most out of each subject, which I was able to do.

TILLY – It has allowed me to put all my energy into the course, and not have to worry so much about finding a part time job while studying. Beyond concrete financial support, the bursary has motivated and empowered me to feel confident in taking on a new subject in a new city. The bursary has made me feel more confident and assured of my place in planning and further education: I belong here!



Q What are your hopes for your future planning career?

GRAEME – I hope to continue working alongside communities, contributing in my own way toward a more sustainable future. Eventually, I'd love the opportunity to work abroad, experiencing the unique challenges of developing cities and towns outside the UK. One of the most important lessons I've learned through my university course is that no matter where we are in the world, we all face similar challenges - limited resources, climate concerns, and a rapidly growing population. My aim is to use my career in planning to support communities in adapting to these challenges and to be part of our collective journey toward sustainability.



"I hope to be a useful asset to the team and continue to contribute to the sustainable and socially-responsible work of the practice as a whole by utilising my new (and old!) skills"

Caitlin Arbuckle-MacLeod

CAITLIN – I'm continuing to work at Collective Architecture, where we have recently set up a specialist division called 'Collective Strategy' that is dedicated to large-scale spatial design and other strategy work. I hope to be a useful asset to the team and continue to contribute to the sustainable and socially-responsible work of the practice as a whole by utilising my new (and old!) skills, including an in-depth knowledge of local and national planning policy guidance and procedures, expertise in spatial design strategies, and new perspectives on processes of community engagement and collaboration.



"I hope to continue contributing toward a more sustainable future"

Graeme Brown

TILLY – In the past year, I have learned the importance of the local scale, whereby communities can feel empowered in their neighbourhoods. I want to do work that focuses on the local, to build an urban future based on the genuine needs of people. I have started working for Living Rent, Scotland's tenants' and community union, where I'm learning the real-life impacts of planning policies and decisions on the local scale. I want to continue doing work I care deeply about, and make the planning system fairer for those that need it most. **SP**

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In 2023, RTPI Scotland secured funding from the Scottish Government to grant bursaries to several planning students in Scotland. **Sarah Morton**, Bursary Recipient at the University of Glasgow, **Ross McFarlane**, Bursary Recipient at the University of Dundee, and **Seona Macbean**, Bursary Recipient at the University of Glasgow, reflect back on their studies over the last year, including how the bursary has helped them to achieve their goals.

Q What prompted you to study planning?

SARAH – I was attracted to the interdisciplinary nature of planning. The scope it offers to be both highly rigorous in terms of complying with policy and procedure, while also encouraging a creative and visionary approach to imagine what a place could be like in the future, seemed like an ideal balance. I have come to planning having previously studied social anthropology and art history and spent the early years of my working life in heritage and arts organisations and wanted to be more directly involved in shaping the environment in which cultural activity happens. Working in a variety of historic buildings which had been repurposed having outlived their original purpose, I became particularly interested in the challenge of sustainably adapting the historic built environment to accommodate modern demands while conserving its historic character. This ultimately became the focus of my dissertation.

ROSS – I have always found the built environment interesting in terms of its function, design and the incredible impact that cities and places can have on people and the environment. Originally, like many others, I thought this meant I wanted to be an architect. However, a day's work experience with an



“It was encouraging to have the vote of support from an external body”
Sarah Morton

urban planner showed me it was urban planning and design I had a passion for. This, along with my care for heritage, battling climate change and improving the lives of people is what therefore prompted me to study planning at the University of Dundee.

SEONA – My initial interest in planning came from my undergraduate degree in geography where I particularly enjoyed human geography. Throughout my undergraduate degree the modules I enjoyed revolved around development and the impact this has on everyday lives such as attachment to places, health outcomes and even deprivation levels. Whilst my Geography degree taught me lots of transferrable skills, I struggled to determine what to apply these to as the degree provided no specific job direction. The MSc in City Planning provided a sense of stability and grounding in relation to beginning a career, as

I was aware that there was demand within the planning profession. I have since learned that the planning profession is multi-faceted and provides a range of career paths within both the public and private sectors.

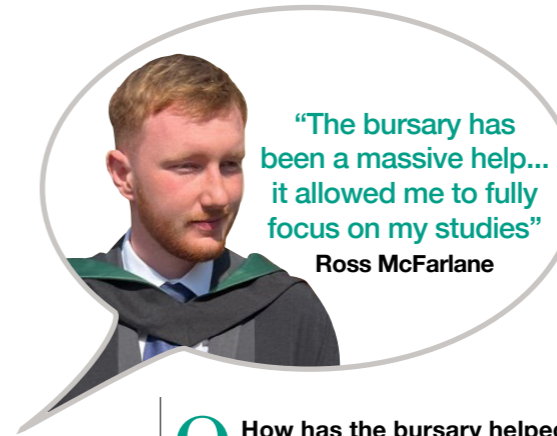
Q What have you gained (or achieved) over the last year of your studies?

SARAH – Returning to university after a gap of several years felt like a daunting step, but it has been a pleasure to dedicate a year to learning from academics, practitioners, and the diverse cohort of my student colleagues. The programme at the University of Glasgow was broad; I feel simultaneously that I have learnt a huge amount but also only just scratched the surface of such a wide-ranging subject as planning. A particular highlight was working as a small group to develop an ambitious strategic spatial framework for a neighbourhood of Glasgow, for which my team won first prize. This was a great opportunity to bring together elements of all the preceding classes and apply theory to a real-world example. I also enjoyed meeting and interviewing planning officers, architects and conservation specialists in the course of my dissertation research.

“I am looking forward to being part of a community of talented and thoughtful planners across the country who care about enhancing and building people-centred and sustainable places.”

Sarah Morton

ROSS – Completing my masters degree has allowed me to greatly strengthen many analytical and research skills. As well as this, the design specification of the degree has greatly improved my knowledge of urban design and developed skills which has improved the visualisation of my work through an increased use of design tools and skills. Gaining a better knowledge of urban design and building on my understanding of planning through completion of the master's degree has helped me become a more well-rounded planner which will benefit me as I go into my career.



“The bursary has been a massive help... it allowed me to fully focus on my studies”
Ross McFarlane

Q How has the bursary helped you over the last year?

SARAH – In returning to study after some years out of education, I am grateful for the support of the bursary which gave some financial breathing space and allowed me to give more focus to my studies. It was also encouraging to have the vote of support from an external body as I embarked in a new direction.

ROSS – The bursary has been a massive help over the past year. By providing financial support it allowed me to focus fully on my studies and reduced the stress of needing to balance university studies and a job. As well as this, illness in my family meant it also took the pressure off them to help support me. With the masters course being 12 months, it meant I was given significantly less each month than my undergraduate degree (with the same amount being awarded over 6 months). Therefore, this bursary helped bridge that gap and significantly reduced any financial stress.

SEONA – The bursary helped to confirm that undertaking the master's in planning was the correct decision for my academic progression. The financial support was very welcome, particularly during the cost-of-living crisis. The bursary also helped to aid the transition of beginning a master's as I found I was less stressed having had financial support that made the course more accessible.

Q What are your hopes for your future planning career?

SARAH – It feels like an exciting time to be entering the world of planning, with many policy and technological changes on the horizon. I am looking forward to being part of a community of talented and thoughtful planners across the country who care about enhancing and building people-centred and sustainable places. Through my studies I particularly enjoyed learning about approaches to development planning and thinking about strategies for

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Ross McFarlane

building meaningful and positive community engagement and consultation into the process of vision setting and strategizing.

ROSS – I hope to work in a sector where I can fully utilise planning and its many benefits. Throughout my career as a planner, I hope to be able to aid in improving the lives of people and have a positive impact on the environment, climate and work to retain the character and heritage of places. The completion of my masters, aided by this bursary, has helped greatly in beginning my journey to making these positive impacts. I also hope to continuously develop as a professional planner, working towards my RTPI chartered status and beyond.



“The bursary helped to confirm that undertaking the master's in planning was the correct decision”
Seona Macbean

SEONA – During the MSc City Planning course I was fortunate enough to begin my planning career and gain experience in the professional field by working part-time alongside my studies which I found to be extremely beneficial. I have recently just passed my probation period with Icen Projects within the Glasgow Team where the next step I intend to take is to begin the APC process to gain chartered status with the RTPI in the coming years. I also hope to work abroad due to a personal interest in travel and yet on a professional level I feel much can be learned from working in different planning systems to identify best practice and innovative solutions that can be adapted and applied to different scenarios. **SP**