

## **National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP)**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion.

### **Summary**

This report provides members with an update on the National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP).

### **Recommendation**

That members:

- a) Discuss the progress of the NGDP and offer any reflections on the programme.
- b) Support the promotion of the NGDP to potential council partners.

### **Actions**

That officers will deliver the programme as agreed by members.

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## National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP)

### Background

1. The NGDP is the LGA's flagship management development programme, which aims to create a pipeline of talent into local authorities across the country. It has been running for over 20 years and is now recruiting for its 23<sup>rd</sup> cohort.
2. The LGA attracts graduates from across the UK, primarily through the extensive work we do on university campuses, as well as through online attraction media such as Times Top 100 and Target Jobs. This year we also commissioned a marketing company which broadened our reach into social media like Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.
3. The NGDP recruits annually, through an intensive multi-stage recruitment process. Candidates undertake:

Time period	Stage	Information
September to January	<i>Applications are open:</i> during the initial application stage, candidates need to confirm they have or are expected to achieve a 2:2 degree and have the right to work in the UK; candidates are also required to undertake 3 online tests: verbal reasoning, numerical reasoning and a Situational Judgement Test.	All test questions have been designed bespoke for the local government context, in partnership with our partner councils.
February	<i>Video interview:</i> Candidates record themselves answering three questions.	At this point we are testing candidates' motivations for working in local government.
March	<i>Assessment centres:</i> Candidates undertake our assessment centres, and take part in presentation, group, and written exercises.	Again, all the exercises are designed bespoke. In previous years this has been done in person but had to quickly pivot to virtual delivery during March 2020 and that remains the case for 2021.
April	<i>Information gathering:</i> Candidates have the opportunity to get to know the councils on board and think about where they would like to work.	Councils have until the end of March to sign up. We encourage councils to really use this opportunity to promote themselves to candidates as a great place to work.
May to June	<i>Interviews:</i> The LGA matches candidates with councils for interview. Councils interview candidates and decide who they would like to take on.	The rigorous recruitment process means that by the time councils see candidates for interview, they can be assured they will be of a very high calibre, and it is simply about ensuring best fit for the culture of

		the council and the nature of the work planned.
September to October	<i>Graduate trainees start in councils:</i> The two-year programme commences.	

4. The cyclical, annual nature of the programme means that the NGDP team is at any point concurrently working on: a current recruitment process (currently Cohort 23), planning for the next recruitment process (Cohort 24), and working with the graduate trainees and councils already on the programme (currently Cohorts 21 and 22).
5. Whilst on the two-year programme, the graduate trainees undertake a minimum of three placements within their host organisation. In doing so, they fast-track their learning about the organisation and its different service challenges, gaining broad experience and knowledge it may otherwise take a longer period of their career to build up. Placements can be in different council departments, or it may be on different projects; this is up to the council and can be based upon their organisational need.
6. Graduate trainees also undertake a programme of Learning and Development whilst on the NGDP, which is intended to equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to be the public sector leaders of the future. This is delivered by the Society of Local Authority of Chief Executives (Solace) in conjunction with INLOGOV at the University of Birmingham. As part of this, participants work towards the ILM Level 7 qualification. All content is specifically tailored to the local government context and should add value to the host council, as should the assignment requirements for the ILM.

#### *Cost to councils*

7. Councils must hire the graduate on a two-year contract. They may use their own terms and conditions, but the basic salary must be a minimum of Spinal Column Point 20 on the NJT scale, or £25,991 as of this cohort.
8. There is a one-off fee, per graduate of £2,800, covering both the recruitment and the learning and development programme. This is only charged when the graduate is successfully employed, and things are going smoothly.

*Recent numbers*

Year	Number of applicants	Councils on board	Places offered in councils/cohort size
2021 (Cohort 23)	7429	TBC by 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2021	TBC by end of 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2021
2020 (Cohort 22)	5444	49	149*
2019 (Cohort 21)	4484	56	147
2018 (Cohort 20)	2737	58	124

9. \*Please note: in 2020, a number of councils had to drop out of the NGDP part way through the process due to the unexpected pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, remaining partners opted to take on more graduate trainees, meaning the overall cohort size was able to reach a record high.
10. Candidate interest is growing, however the capacity of the programme to grow is bound by the number of councils who sign up each year.
11. The LGA takes on our NGDP graduates each year, and we have expanded how many we recruit from 3 to 4 as of the last cohort. Currently we have 2 graduates in Cohort 21 and 4 in Cohort 22, and we will continue to recruit annually. We also have a number of past NGDP graduates working throughout the LGA. Graduates rotate between placements every 6 months, undertaking 4 over the duration of the programme. In recent years, placements have included: people policy, place policy, workforce, our regional teams, Brexit, CHIP, OPE, Research and Productivity. Every 6 months managers are invited to bid for placements, which are then matched to our graduates based on organisational need and the graduate's own interests.

**Issues**

*Diversity:*

12. In recent years, several of our partner councils have emphasised the importance of the diversity of the candidates they receive through the NGDP. Indeed, the NGDP agrees that it is important that the NGDP graduates reflect the diverse communities they will serve.
13. In 2019, agreed by the Board, the NGDP hired an independent expert who also advises the Civil Service Fast Stream on diversity to undertake a 'root and branch' Equality and Diversity review of the programme, to explore both how the programme performs on diversity currently, and how we can attract and retain a broader diversity of candidates through all stages of the programme.

14. Whilst the NGDP received a broadly positive review and applications are increasing year on year from both BAME candidates, and those with disabilities, the report noted potential for adverse impact in our recruitment process, particularly during the assessment centre stage. The review produced a full report, against which we have taken action against all recommendations made.

15. A detailed report is available, but in summary, this includes:

*Marketing:*

- a. We commissioned an expert marketing company who have done work with the NHS and TeachFirst, to deliver targeted marketing for BAME students and graduates.
- b. We have specifically prioritised engagement with universities who rank highly for student diversity; we run bespoke sessions with key universities to further demystify the application process and to challenge misperceptions about local government.
- c. We have revised all our marketing and web content with diversity in mind, and to show it is a priority.
- d. We held a number of panel events potential applicants to hear from our diverse current graduate trainees, to address concerns around equality and diversity on the scheme and in the sector.
- e. We know that BAME graduates are more likely to find out about the scheme direct from council websites, and so we developed resources and guidance for councils to do this and also to promote the scheme locally and internally.
- f. We are commissioning further research into misperceptions of local government with a view to shaping and targeting our marketing messages in the next round of recruitment.

*Recruitment stages:*

- g. All our recruitment stages (e.g. online tests, video interviews, assessment centres) have been completely redesigned in conjunction with our partner councils with a view to reducing potential bias and adverse impact. Independent and professionally trained assessors are now used for all stages of assessment. Previously staff from the LGA and councils had acted as assessors, however potential for bias tended to creep in.
- h. Recruitment is blind until assessment centre stage when the candidates naturally must interact with others.
- i. We statistically test for adverse impact at every stage of the recruitment process.
- j. We have made it easier year on year for candidates to disclose a disability and make special requirements available at every stage.
- k. We took feedback that providing practice tests helps to demystify them and stop candidates being put off and now feature these on our website and within the actual testing platforms.
- l. Based on feedback around drop out, once candidates have applied, we send them regular, friendly, and supportive communications, talking them through the

next stages and signposting to advice to make the process seem less intimidating.

- m. A BAME mentoring scheme was established. For Cohort 22, this coached around 40 people through the final stages of the recruitment. A BAME mentoring programme is being piloted with The University of Brighton. This year we are piloting extending the reach of the mentoring and coaching available to include those with a disability or from a lower socioeconomic background.

*On the scheme:*

- n. We support NMTs to self-organise any networks they would like to. We have an active NGDP BAME network. They recently held a public event for which 300 people registered and have been an active voice in improving our recruitment practices. The Chief Executive of Newham, Althea Loderick, is the sponsor for the network. Other networks include: an LGBTQ network, a disability network, a social mobility network, a women's network.
- o. We work closely with our partner councils around issues of equality, diversity, and inclusion.
- p. We are putting more resource into our 'local' recruitment offer so employers can craft their recruitment around what local means to them, and which communities they wish to focus on; we provide resources to help them promote the scheme
- q. We have given greater focus with recent cohorts to the welfare and wellbeing of graduate trainees. We are currently organising a wellbeing session hosted by an external facilitator focused on their wellbeing whilst working from home during the pandemic.

*Data:*

- r. For the last two cohorts, we have improved the range of data we collect from candidates and made sure we have permission from them to use it for the purpose of improving the NGDP. We track the data of our candidates and cohorts against all the protected characteristics, as well against the key social mobility measures. We have formalised our processes for data collection and analysis, which will now be analysed independently by the LGA's research team – they will create deeper insights, and highlight trends (e.g. in drop out, or disproportionate elimination) which we can respond to in real time.
- s. We are working on improving our evaluation activity, including making sure EDI data is re-collected in later surveys to enable better journey tracking of our alumni.

*Impact of our work:*

- 16. Particularly in terms of ethnic diversity, an area where the report made particular recommendations, our efforts are already showing impact:

Cohort	Proportion of final cohort identifying as BAME
Cohort 22	28%
Cohort 21	19%
Cohort 20	14%

17. More applicants feel able to disclose a disability year on year, and we are accommodating more special requirements.
18. The proportion of graduates from the LGBTQ community who are represented on the scheme is higher than for the general population.
19. Our recruitment process shows no adverse impact in terms of gender, though we continue to attract more women overall.
20. We are attracting more older candidates (there is no upper age limit) and those with caring responsibilities, who see local government as an attractive and flexible place to work.
21. The virtual nature of the programme is making the NGDP more accessible to those from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

*Regional spread*

22. As noted, the continued growth of the NGDP depends on new councils signing up to take part, and on existing partners continuing to remain part of the NGDP.
23. The NGDP continues to be strongly clustered in London and the South East, despite a concerted strategy by the NGDP team, with support from LGA regional teams to prioritise less represented regions. COVID-19 has further exacerbated this challenge; for example, unfortunately, advanced conversations to sign up around 6 councils in the North West unravelled in 2020 due to the impact of the pandemic.
24. To illustrate further, the make-up of councils on the NGDP does not currently meet the regional demand from our graduate applicants. Looking at our most recent cohort, Cohort 22, who were recruited in 2020, for example:

Region (university)	Number of applicants	Number of jobs available in that region
East Midlands	319	2
Eastern	266	13
Greater London	711	69
North East	283	6
North West	421	2
South East	490	20
South West	298	5
West Midlands	432	14
Yorkshire and Humberside	419	18

25. The demand for trainee places in different parts of England is clear. When Sheffield joined the NGDP in 2020, they were the second most popular choice amongst all candidates.

#### *Council participation*

26. To better understand how to work with councils to attract them to the NGDP, in 2019 we commissioned research, undertaken by Shared Intelligence, into why councils do not join the NGDP.

27. We found that the main way councils find out about the programme is through word of mouth and exposure to NGDP alumni; this may be why we see such a significant cluster around London and the South East. A full list of participating councils can be found in **Appendix 1**.

28. Councils also lacked awareness of the potential flexibility of the programme, and its relatively low cost, indicating more can be done to promote this. Some councils were also more focused on apprenticeships as a recruitment and HR priority<sup>1</sup>.

#### *Flexibility for councils*

29. We have adapted our offer to potential new council partners to focus on the flexibility of the scheme, and how it can be used to meet different organisation's needs. As

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<sup>1</sup> Please note: Though this has been subject to a detailed review, it is not possible to provide the NGDP as an apprenticeship.



well as the conventional 'national route' in which councils recruit from our broad national pool of candidates, this flexibility includes:

- a. The option to undertake a 'Local Recruitment': the organisation decides what 'local' means to them and can shortlist only candidates who meet this requirement. 'Local' candidates are then put through the same recruitment stages as all other candidates; however they interview only at the organisation in question. If successful, they join the national cohort alongside all other graduate trainees.
- b. The option to 'Grow Your Own' member of staff: Existing members of staff are supported to apply for the NGDP. As with the 'local' route, candidates go through the same recruitment stages as other candidates, however they do not interview elsewhere and remain in their host authority if successful. They join the national cohort alongside all other graduate trainees.
- c. Councils can come on board with another organisation e.g. a county and a district working together. We also welcome participation from combined authorities, or regions. Participation is also welcome from other types of local authority. We are in conversations, for example, with a couple of housing associations about signing up.
- d. Councils can design the placements graduate trainees undertake around the needs of their organisation, filling hard to reach roles, or working on high profile but short-term projects.
- e. Councils can make it clear, they welcome interest from graduates with a specific focus e.g. finance, housing, or the environment.

30. We continue to seek new ways to promote the NGDP to councils, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Virtual delivery:*

31. Key elements of the NGDP programme have been shifted to virtual delivery, including:
  - a. Marketing activity with universities: This year we have attended a number of virtual, as opposed to in-person, careers fairs. We use a lot of our current graduate trainees and alumni to promote the scheme, and the virtual nature of this activity has made it a lot easier to facilitate their participation. Our reach remains UK wide.
  - b. All stages of the recruitment process: This year we undertook some big procurement projects, in particular to take our assessment centres fully virtual. This year's recruitment looks set to be delivered fully virtual, though with no less attention given to providing a great candidate experience.
  - c. Delivery of the Learning & Development programmes: After a full OJEU procurement process, Solace won the contact again to deliver this programme for the NGDP. The team are now delivering all programme content fully virtually. Initial feedback from councils and their graduate trainees is really positive. We are able to hold sessions much more regularly which enables a greater feeling of

connectedness between peers on the programme. It also cuts down costs in terms of venues.

- d. Many graduate trainees are working from home in their councils, though many have also been moved to front line work.

### Alumni journeys

32. We are aware of at least one current Chief Executive, who started on the NGDP in 2007 and became a Chief Executive in 2019. We also aware of a number of Directors who are NGDP alumni.

33. We hope to undertake a further alumni impact study soon. However, some evaluation work was paused in 2020 in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the most recent impact survey undertaken in 2020, with the cohort who completed the NGDP in 2019, one year on from completing the NGDP, we found that:

- a. 70% were still working in local government.
- b. 18% were in parts of the public sector, such as the NHS or the civil service.
- c. 100% said the NGDP had helped them to fulfil their current role.
- d. 100% said the NGDP had helped them be able to progress in their careers e.g. such as to take on management responsibility.

34. Testimonials:

- a. *“It allowed me to gain such a wide amount of experience and knowledge in just two years.*
- b. *“It has given me great insight into the different services within a council, allowing me to be more collaborative within my work and projects. The programme gave me a great awareness of the role and challenges within local government. Allowing me to see the big picture when delivering projects. I also developed my confidence and project management skills- giving me the belief that I can have a successful career in local government.”*

35. A 2016 survey which covered all past NGDP graduates (from Cohorts 1-15) we were able to contact, found:

- a. 60% were still working for a local authority.
- b. 12% were working for other parts of the public sector.
- c. 62% were in a managerial role, of which 27% described themselves as senior managers.

36. You can find out more personal stories from our graduate alumni here:

<https://local.gov.uk/national-graduate-development-programme/ngdp-candidates/ngdp-stories>

### **Implications for Wales**

37. Newport City Council hired graduates in Cohort 21. Welsh councils are not eligible for the grant subsidy.

### **Equalities Implications**

38 As detailed in the report, the NGDP is working to improve the diversity of the graduates it recruits, and in doing so, will contribute to diversifying senior leadership in local government. NGDP graduates are also taught about equality, diversity and inclusion as part of their learning programme and will bring this to the work they do within the sector.

### **Financial implications**

39 This programme requires continued funding from the MHCLG grant.

### **Next steps**

- 40 Members are asked to:
- a. Discuss the progress of the NGDP and offer any reflections on the programme.
  - b. Support the promotion of the NGDP to potential council partners.

**APPENDIX 1 – breakdown of participating councils**

<i>Cohort 22 Participating Councils</i>			
<b>Council Name</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>CONTROL</b>
Ashfield District Council	D	EM	IND/OTHER
Basildon Council	D	E	NOC
Bedford Borough Council	UA	E	NOC
Black Country Transport			N/A
Bradford Council	MD	YH	LAB
Brent Council	LB	GL	LAB
Cambridgeshire County Council	C	E	CON
Cheshire West and Chester Council	UA	NW	NOC
City of Wolverhampton Council	MD	WM	LAB
Cornwall Council	UA	SW	NOC
Coventry City Council	MD	WM	LAB
Croydon Council	LB	GL	LAB
Doncaster Council	MD	YH	LAB
Enfield Council	LB	GL	LAB
Gloucestershire County Council	C	SW	CON
Horsham District Council	D	SE	CON
Local Government Association			N/A
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Barnet	LB	GL	CON
London Borough of Hackney	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Harrow	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Havering	LB	GL	NOC
London Borough of Hounslow	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Islington	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Newham	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Redbridge	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Sutton	LB	GL	LD
London Borough of Waltham Forest	LB	GL	LAB
London Councils			N/A
North Lincolnshire Council	UA	YH	CON
North of Tyne Combined Authority			N/A
North Tyneside Council	MD	NE	LAB
Northumberland County Council	UA	NE	NOC
Oxfordshire County Council/Cherwell District Council	C	SE	NOC
Rotherham MBC	MD	YH	LAB
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea	LB	GL	CON
Royal Borough of Kingston	LB	GL	LD
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead	UA	SE	CON

Sheffield City Council	MD	YH	LAB
Slough Borough Council	UA	SE	LAB
South Kesteven District Council	D	EM	CON
South Norfolk and Broadland Council	D	E	CON
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council	UA	E	NOC
St Albans City and District Council	D	E	NOC
Surrey County Council	C	SE	CON
Warwickshire County Council	C	WM	CON
West Midlands Combined Authority			N/A
Westminster City Council	LB	GL	CON
Winchester City Council	D	SE	LD
Wokingham Borough Council	UA	SE	CON

Type of Council	Number of Councils	Percentage
County	5	9.8
District	7	13.0
London Borough	18	35.3
Metropolitan District	7	13.7
Unitary Authority	9	17.6
Other	5	9.8
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>51</b>	

Political Party	Number of Councils	Percentage
Conservative	13	25.5
Independent/Other	1	2.0
Labour	20	39.2
Liberal Democrat	3	5.9
N/A	5	9.8
No overall control	9	17.6
<b>Total councils</b>	<b>51</b>	

<i>Cohort 21 Participating Councils</i>			
Council Name	Type	Region	CONTROL
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council	MD	YH	LAB
Bedford Borough Council	UA	E	NOC
Birmingham City Council	MD	WM	LAB
Black Country Transport			N/A
Bracknell Forest Borough Council	UA	SE	CON
Buckinghamshire County Council	C	SE	CON
Cambridgeshire County Council	C	E	CON
Chelmsford City Council	D	E	LD
Cherwell District Council (partner with Oxfordshire)	D	SE	CON

Chorley Council	D	NW	LAB
Cornwall Council	UA	SW	NOC
Coventry City Council	MD	WM	LAB
Dacorum Borough Council	D	E	CON
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council	MD	YH	LAB
Dorset Council	UA	SW	CON
Gloucestershire County Council	C	SW	CON
Horsham District Council	D	SE	CON
Local Government Association			N/A
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Barnet	LB	GL	CON
London Borough of Bexley	LB	GL	CON
London Borough of Brent	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Croydon	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Enfield	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Hackney	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Haringey	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Havering	LB	GL	NOC
London Borough of Islington	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Redbridge	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Sutton	LB	GL	LD
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	LB	GL	LAB
London Borough of Waltham Forest	LB	GL	LAB
London Councils			N/A
Luton Borough Council	UA	E	LAB
Newport City Council	UA	W	LAB
Northumberland County Council	UA	NE	NOC
Oxfordshire County Council (partner with Cherwell)	C	SE	NOC
Royal Borough of Greenwich	LB	GL	LAB
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea	LB	GL	CON
Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames	LB	GL	LD
Sefton Council	MD	NW	LAB
Slough Borough Council	UA	SE	LAB
South Norfolk and Broadland District Councils	D	E	CON
Southend on Sea Borough Council	UA	E	NOC
St Albans City and District Council	D	E	NOC
Stevenage Borough Council	D	E	LAB
Surrey County Council	C	SE	CON
West Midlands Combined Authority			N/A
Westminster City Council	LB	GL	CON
Winchester City Council	D	SE	LD
Woking Borough Council	D	SE	NOC
Wokingham Borough Council	UA	SE	CON

Wolverhampton City Council	MD	WM	LAB
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Type of Council	Number of Councils	Percentage
County Council	5	9.3
District Council	10	18.5
London Borough	19	35.2
Metropolitan District	6	11.1
Unitary Authority	10	18.5
Other	4	7.4
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>54</b>	

Political Party	Councils	Percentage
Conservative	15	27.8
Labour	23	42.6
Liberal Democrat	4	7.4
N/A	4	7.4
No overall control	8	14.8
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>54</b>	