

## TRANSPORT SKILLS FOR THE NEXT MILLENNIUM

### A research project supported by the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund

#### Background

The trustees of the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund foresee a growing potential mismatch between the demand for transport professionals and the supply of appropriately trained people. The mismatch is both qualitative (skills required in the past likely to be less appropriate in the future) and quantitative (absolute shortfall in numbers required). The Fund has therefore commissioned research to:

1. Assess the potential demand for and range of transport skills likely to be needed over the next 10 years and the degree of urgency attached thereto;
2. Review the scale and scope of training opportunities;
3. Examine the resource implications of meeting future needs;
4. Make recommendations in the light of any gaps or deficiencies revealed;
5. Devise a national transport training strategy and recommend how best to deliver it.

The time table envisages a draft report by end-March 2000, with a final report in June.

#### Scope

The scope of the project is potentially very wide. It has therefore been decided to focus on the following key areas:

- **The market for transport professionals:** An assessment of the present and future size of the UK market for transport professionals. There is a question what exactly constitutes the transport profession. Provisionally it has been defined as people with at least a graduate level qualification working as specialists in the transport field but this definition will need to be further refined as the research proceeds. The project will consider particularly the position in transport industries (private and public), consultancies, central and local government and in higher education (including research). The focus will be on land transport, including rail, covering also transport policy and planning and, to some extent, land use planning.
- **Types of transport expertise required:** An initial appreciation is that in future transport problems will need to be seen in a broader context – for example, taking in environmental, land use and behavioural aspects – and that a wider range of skills will be needed. Yet at the same time, mastering existing disciplines (such as bridge engineering or traffic forecasting) is becoming more demanding so that this will be difficult to achieve. The project will ask what are the key skills required by transport professionals in the future.
- **Types of transport training currently available:** This will need to cover both graduate and post-graduate courses, and also training aimed at practising transport professionals. Could there be a first degree in transport studies? What other subjects provide suitable grounding? What should the content of post-graduate transport courses be?
- **Funding of existing training:** It will be necessary to establish how the training presently available is funded, and how secure this funding is likely to be in the future. Of particular importance will be the scope for funding from industry sources.
- **Sources of recruitment to the transport profession:** As with many multi-disciplinary professions, those working as transport professionals can have a variety of backgrounds, ranging from civil engineering, through operations research and economics to town planning environmental and behavioural sciences. This helps to give strength to the profession but it adds to the complexity of defining appropriate professional training.

## Method of Research

The research programme will gather information and opinion on the priority issues identified above by a combination of interviews and study of relevant documentation.

- **The market / Expertise required:** Structured interviews with selected senior people in Government (central and local), professional and representative organisations, consultants active in the transport field, funding bodies, regulators, and large transport operators (public and private) to identify likely future requirements. In addition documents produced by these organisations will need to be screened for relevant information.
- **Types of training available:** Information on graduate and post-graduate courses will be obtained from university departments, to be supplemented by interviews with selected heads of department, who will be also be asked about future plans and perceived gaps. Information will also be obtained on the training and qualifications offered by professional bodies (such as the Institute of Logistics and Transport and the ICE) and by commercial training companies (such as PTRC). The opportunity will be taken to explore what is known about sources of recruitment and how the transport sector is regarded by people embarking on professional careers.
- **Funding:** A section of each of the interviews above will cover funding issues. Information will also be sought from ESRC and EPSRC about their future policies and intentions relevant to the transport field.

In the light of the information obtained in these ways, it should be possible to identify the areas of potentially greatest mismatch and to formulate options for addressing them. Provisional conclusions and recommendations would then be tested with key transport professionals (including some of those interviewed), probably through a one day workshop in January 2000, followed by further research to clarify key points prior to drafting of the project report.

## Possibilities to be explored

Without wanting to anticipate the conclusions of the project, it seems likely that the potential mismatch foreseen by the trustees will be confirmed by the research. It is also likely that there will need to be flexibility in the provision of training to accommodate changing requirements as the market for transport professionals evolves. Some questions which will be explored through the project include:

- How far the relevant transport specialisms are suitable to be taught as components of first degree courses in other subjects, and which subjects provide a good grounding for transport specialists;
- How important it is to keep open the option of a Masters level qualification in transport studies, and what it should include;
- How best to provide for continuing professional development in the transport field, with particular reference to the work of the professional institutions, such as ILT and ICE.

15 September 1999