



# **TRANSPORT PLANNING SKILLS INITIATIVE**

## **Graduate Work Experience: The 2003 pilot scheme and recommended way ahead**

**November 2003**

*Executive Summary*

**Prepared for:**

Transport Planning Skills Initiative

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## Acknowledgements

This report was prepared as a summary of the work of the Task 6 group over the period of the TPSI. As such it draws upon the work of several people.

The Work Experience Task was undertaken by a working group comprising:

- John Foley and Jon Buckett of Hampshire County Council who drew up the outline of the scheme and prepared early drafts of the promotion materials;
- Andy Costain, TPSI Project Manager, who undertook all the tasks associated with the clearing house for the pilot scheme;
- Martin Richards who undertook the final interviews and reported on the outputs of the scheme and the way forward;
- Chris Taylor, West Yorkshire PTE; Dorothea Carvalho, Institute of Logistics and Transport; Margaret Catran, Royal Town Planning Institute; Nick Fenton, Highways Agency; and Nigel Luniss, Transport for London; and
- I chaired the group with the help of Lindsey Wharton of Steer Davies Gleave who provided secretarial support.

We also drew on the valuable work by West Midlands employers in the development of their Transportation Opportunities web based database. Colin Eastman's help with considering how the database might be developed for a student work experience scheme, in the latter stages of our work was invaluable.

The full report is available free to TPSI stakeholders from the Transport planning Society or at a cost of £20 to others.

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## Executive Summary

The Transport Planning Skills Initiative was launched to address the shortage of transport planners that could well impede the delivery of the transport policies and plans of Government in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and by local authorities throughout the UK. It was decided the initiative should include the development of a structured work experience scheme to encourage more people to choose a career in transport planning.

Having reviewed best practice, and experience in other sectors, the task group gained agreement to pilot the scheme in Summer 2003. The proposal was to assess both student and employer interest, and to develop a cost effective approach to a full, ongoing, scheme, should the pilot indicate adequate demand.

Hampshire County Council drafted promotional materials and guidance for students and employers. M & N, the TPSI public relations company designed the brochure and produced an A4 leaflet/flyer based on the Initiative's *Changing Perceptions* graphics. Copies of the materials were circulated to careers departments within universities and also to about 150 university course directors.

Employers were recruited principally through the NMTP Employers Forum and TPSI contacts in the East Midlands. A total of fifteen employers expressed interest in participating in the Pilot; seven consultants and eight local authorities (including a PTE).

Over 300 initial inquiries were received from students, many requesting further information. The majority of enquiries came from students who had seen a short notice on their university website. The clearing-house process led to nearly 70 firm applications, which were reduced to 48 on an initial sieving.

Of the short listed students, 22 were female and 26 male; and 12 were not UK residents. They came from 25 different universities, with Heriot Watt and Manchester providing the most (6 each). A variety of disciplines were represented, 15 were studying some form of engineering, 7 transport, 7 business management of some form, 5 geography, 3 each came from town planning, environmental studies, and ITC courses and 2 each from economics and maths.

Potential employers were provided with the full list of short listed students, together with brief details. They were required to review the list and then request CVs for any in which they might be interested. It was the employers' responsibility to decide on selection criteria, approach individual students and to make any offers of employment. Of the original 15 only 6 employers took on students. Four students were placed with consultants and three with local authorities.

Task group members undertook interviews with employer representatives and students during their placements and later Martin Richards conducted discussions with them, at the end of the placements, to assess their views on the pilot scheme late in September 2003. The context for this research work was to understand what would be required for the scheme to be taken forward in year 2 such that it could be extended to accommodate more employers and students.

### Student's views

Three of the seven students had no prior knowledge of transport planning and one had only a very basic knowledge. Two had attended transport courses at their university and a "career changer" had made an explicit decision to seek a career in transport planning.

The students had learned about the scheme through a variety of routes, including an e-mail from Prospects; their university careers service, and the internet.

All four students interviewed after the placement thought that information on the scheme should be on the TPS web site, even though they advised the scheme organisers not to rely on the internet to inform students of its existence.

All seven of the students reported that their placement had extended their knowledge of transport planning and that their knowledge of the working environment had been enhanced. The interviews also demonstrated that the scheme had a strongly positive effect on the choice of a career in transport planning for four of the five who had not already made a decision on their future.

### Employer's views

The placements with one exception varied in duration from four to eight weeks and the students enjoyed payment of between £850 and £1600 per month with the majority towards the lower end of this spectrum. Duties undertaken by the students varied considerably, and in most cases they were given a varied work programme. All the employers reported being very pleased with their student, one saying that the experience *exceeded their expectations* and another that the student had *more than met their expectations*.

Overall, the employers considered that the Scheme had been successful, and they would be happy, in principle, to participate in future years complying with a basic Code of Practice. The principle of paying a reasonable salary and a commitment to providing exposure to transport planning were also both seen to be reasonable.

Those that commented were happy with the support received from TPSI during the placement and several useful comments were received as to how to improve the scheme from the employer's point of view, in future years.

There was general interest among both those who participated in the Pilot Scheme and others, in a regular (on-going) scheme for undergraduates managed by the Transport Planning Society (TPS). There was also general recognition that a web-based registration system for interested students, possibly based on that developed by the West Midlands Initiative, could have advantages compared with the arrangements used for the Pilot Scheme.

### Conclusions

Both participating employers and students saw the 2003 Pilot Scheme to be very successful. It was thus decided, given this success and the proven potential for such a scheme to encourage undergraduates to choose a career in transport planning, that the scheme should be continued. The working group advised that the scheme should continue in 2004 and be clearly badged as "TPS/TPSI".

The working group agreed the future scheme should have a more structured clearing house procedure and ideally build on and make best use of the web-site developed by the TPSI West Midlands employers for recruitment purposes. Martin Richards and Colin Eastman developed a specification for such a site, and a successful bid for funding was made to the Rees Jeffries Road Fund. The intention is that the proposed web-site will be up and running in good time for the 2004 work experience scheme intake.

Detailed recommendations were made for the successful introduction of the scheme in 2004 and the task group members are to continue their work to see it through its roll-out stage.