

HOW WE DID IT...

Sector distinguished by professional standards

PROJECT Standards and development scheme for transport planning staff.

BACKGROUND Transport planning evolved from civil engineering but today's professionals have a wide range of first degree subjects and no specific qualification is available.

WHO IS BEHIND IT? Transport Planning Society, Institution of Highways and Transportation.

PROJECT AIMS To define the skill requirements of transport planners, who require a broad range of knowledge and capabilities, and to increase recognition by developing a professional qualification.

SKILLS INVOLVED Consultation, professional development.

Since its emergence after the Second World War, transport planning has been in the shadow of civil engineering. Indeed, while becoming a chartered engineer is a badge of honour, transport planners have never had their own qualification.

Now the drive to receive proper recognition has taken a big leap forward with the launch of professional standards and a development scheme by the Transport Planning Society (TPS) and the Institution of Highways and Transportation (IHT).

The seeds were sown by the society's transport planning skills initiative in 2002. This aimed to raise the number of specialists with the skills to deliver deputy prime minister John Prescott's ten-year transport plan and similar strategies around the UK. While these have gone the way of all flesh, transport planning skills are as in demand as ever.

The initiative identified a common set of experience and skills that would benefit employers and allow full membership of the professional bodies that support the TPS — the IHT, the RTPI, the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport and the Institution of Civil Engineers.

It also recognised the need for a model professional development scheme that could be readily adopted by employers while setting an industry standard. Since 2005, the TPS has worked with sector skills council GoSkills to draw up national occupational standards for transport planning. After extensive consultation



Transport: qualification helps codify professional skills and experience

with employers, this has borne fruit in the form of professional standards and a qualification.

Today's transport planners must see the bigger picture, taking account of their work's social, economic and environmental context as well as its legal, regulatory, policy and resource framework. They need to be able to design the right policies, plans, projects and services and understand the commercial aspects of transport systems. They must also be numerate, analytical and competent in oral and written communications, personal skills and project management.

The TPS standards cover six areas — policies and regulations, tools and techniques, management, communications, commitment and ethics and

design and operations. Each is divided into units designed to reflect the wide range of skills that a professional needs. For example, the tools and techniques unit covers data, transport modelling and analysis, assessment and public engagement.

Employers are free to add units to meet technical or corporate requirements or fulfil the criteria of specific professional institutes. Each unit is split into objectives with a targeted level of competence, namely "awareness", "knowledge", "experience" and "proficiency" — the ability to work alone or supervise others.

To obtain the qualification, transport planners must have a first degree or equivalent and a portfolio showing that they have the necessary knowledge and experience, as well as satisfying reviews of their competence in a 75-minute interview. Once qualified, they must commit to a programme of continuing professional development.

JMP director Alan Beswick says the scheme sets "a level playing field with engineers". He adds: "You make increasing progress through it, gaining skills, knowledge, experience and then proficiency and making improvements all the time. Psychologically, it is very important for junior members of staff to know that they are making progress." ■

Huw Morris

“Transport planners must take account of their work's social, economic and environmental context”

THE THINGS I KNOW



REBEKAH PACZEK
Director, PPS Group

What skills did you have when you graduated?

I studied politics and communications at the University of Liverpool then did a sabbatical year as a National Union of Students official. So politics, lobbying and communications have been integral from day one.

What attracted you to planning?

I did a lot of work in housing and development as a student officer. This is the most interesting form of lobbying and political consultation as you can actually see tangible results.

What did you learn in your first job?

Never assume that any two projects or developments are the same. There is no one-size-fits-all formula.

What skills have you had to learn over your career?

Understanding both the planning and the political systems and how they work together is critical.

What or who have been the biggest influences on your career?

When I left my first job I was still quite junior but one client came to me with a project on the grounds that they thought I was best for the job — and also referred me to other clients.

What is your career highlight?

Being brought on board after a unanimous refusal of a controversial scheme in London and turning it round to a unanimous approval by talking to people was good. Another was a scheme in the Midlands where we established a strong community relationship and again got unanimous approval after a shaky start.

What have you learnt outside work that has influenced you?

Trekking has taught me that in every situation it's individuals concerned and their motivations that make the difference. Life has also taught me that you needn't follow the pack.

What further skills do you aim to obtain or develop?

You never stop learning. But I would like further qualifications in the development side of the industry.

How important is it to keep abreast of developments in allied professions?

Incredibly important. Our work is very much planning-led so understanding that sector is critical.