

Bright future for planning system depends on today's membership

Membership, education and lifelong learning are vital to the RTPI's success, as **Olawale Omishola** and **Jacqui Ward** remind us

Positive Action Training Highway (PATH) National held the first graduation from the Tomorrow's Planners programme on 22 November in Birmingham. It was attended by PATH trainees, supervisors, planning managers and PATH representatives.

The awards recognise the achievement of trainees who have completed the programme by securing full-time positions in planning. Of a total 81 trainees recruited over the last three years, 21 from different ethnic backgrounds have now graduated from the programme. During the ceremony, some of the trainees spoke about their personal experiences.

■ **Pratima Ahuja** was placed with the London Borough of Redbridge in September 2004. Since February 2006, she has been working as a planning officer at the London Borough of Hounslow.

■ **Bhupinder Thandie** also started his traineeship in September 2004 and has been working as a full-time planning officer with Birmingham City Council since he completed his training with the planning division.

■ **Abel Musabayana** was a trainee planner at Bristol City Council from September 2003 until joining Stafford Borough Council as a planning officer in the development control unit.

"I never felt alone," says Musabayana. "My supervisor was interested in my progress on a day-to-day basis. I could communicate with PATH at any time if I had problems, in addition to their regular reviews. The traineeship was hands-on. I was given almost the same status as practising planners and I had a sizeable caseload of my own to manage that included appeal cases. This made me feel confident and needed."

Other speakers included RTPI lifelong learning manager George Law, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council planning



Tomorrow's Planners: awards presented at inaugural ceremony in Birmingham

development manager John Harden and Luton Borough Council head of planning, environment and regeneration Ian Slater.

PATH National Ltd chief executive Paul Butler says: "The planning profession provides an exciting opportunity for members of the black and minority ethnic (BME) community to be actively involved in the development of their communities and for employers to benefit from a more diverse workforce. These inaugural awards provide an important launchpad for the project over the next seven years."

Olawale Omishola is recruitment officer for Tomorrow's Planners.

PATH National is a skills development agency that targets under-representation

'I was given almost the same status as practising planners and I had a sizeable caseload of my own to manage'

and inequalities faced by BME groups in the professions. For further information on the Tomorrow's Planners programme, visit (website) www.pathuk.co.uk or contact (e-mail) generalinfo@pathuk.co.uk.

Associate membership

The RTPI will soon introduce the class of associate membership to complement current membership categories.

It is designed to appeal both to planners who are not currently eligible for chartered status and to a wide range of professionals who are closely engaged with spatial planning.

The class was established following recommendations in the RTPI's education commission report in 2003 and approved for introduction by the institute's executive board in 2005. Consultation has been taking place since 1 December and will close on 2 January 2007.

Associate membership is intended to formally recognise the diverse range of planning and other professionals involved in spatial planning in its broadest sense, bringing them into dialogue with the RTPI. It also aims to embrace the contribution

this variety of professions makes to the spatial planning agenda.

Associate membership is a partial professional qualification that is awarded by virtue of the holder's existing academic achievements and ability to demonstrate involvement with particular fields of spatial planning. Associate membership indicates that candidates have achieved a certain level of knowledge, understanding and competence in their chosen spatial planning field.

As well as providing a partial professional qualification, it offers a structured route to chartered status for candidates who do not hold an accredited qualification. This route will ultimately replace the arrangement for special entry to chartered status.

The associate member route to chartered status will be the subject of separate consultation. But it will require the same rigorous tests of knowledge, understanding, skill and professional competence as the route through initial professional education and assessment of professional competence (APC).

This route will remain the standard path by which most planners will gain chartered status. The consultation document is available from the careers and membership section of the RTPI website. This also poses key questions for consultees.

Respondents to the consultation who are also potential associate members are invited to provide an outline of their professional background along with their response, including academic attainment, professional experience and an indication of whether, through the proposed guidelines, they would seem to be eligible for associate membership.

In this way, we should be able to build up case studies of potential associate members as well as testing the eligibility criteria for this membership class.

Jacqui Ward is RTPI APC and associate membership development officer.

■ For more details, please contact (e-mail) jacqui.ward@rtpi.org.uk or visit (website) www.rtpi.org.uk/careers-and-membership.