

## PATH National Ltd

### New national initiative in the Environmental Health sector

Skills development agency PATH National is working in partnership with the Association of London Environmental Health Managers (ALEHM), the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) and Middlesex University to create a national programme that addresses staff recruitment and retention issues in the environmental health sector. Supported by Communities and Local Government (CLG) and London Development Agency (LDA), PATH's focus is on addressing skills deficits and enhancing workforce diversity through training interventions aimed at black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) individuals.

Working closely with several environmental health departments within London local authorities, PATH launched a three-year pilot programme in 2004 which offered nine traineeships in boroughs including Richmond, Ealing, Greenwich and Haringey. These traineeships incorporate work-based learning and the chance to gain a relevant accredited qualification – the first cohort is completing either a BSc in Environmental Health at Middlesex University or an MSc at King's College, London.

When the scheme expands its intake in September, trainees will also have the option of taking a Level 4 Certificate of Higher Education in Housing Practice and Environmental Health at Middlesex.

Rehana Begum, 26, signed up on the urging of her boss in the environmental health department at the London Borough of Newham where she had been an administrator since graduating from the University of East London in 2001. "My job often involved taking calls from restaurant owners and landlords who had taken issue with our work, wondering why they had to register their property, for example," she recalls. "I explained to my boss that it would help me to understand their concerns if I could go out with the officers and find out more about what they did. When my boss suggested the traineeship, I jumped at the chance."

As a trainee, Rehana has finished a series of placements around the department and is compiling an Experiential Learning Portfolio (ELP), documenting her experience in environmental health including food poisoning cases, noise complaints, food safety and community health. She is also studying one day a week for her MSc at King's. Rehana has also attended training events covering generic personal skills that have been organized by PATH, including sessions on public speaking, ICT skills, interview skills and writing essays.

PATH has delivered positive action schemes to recruit BAME individuals into professional employment for more than 20 years and has a good reputation with employers, sector representatives and other key agencies. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 gives public authorities a new statutory duty to promote racial equality and PATH has used this legislation to promote and recruit BAME professionals into professions such as environmental health, housing, health, planning and other areas across the public sector.

PATH's work has improved BAME access to the labour market: 95 per cent of their candidates secure permanent and senior positions in the public sector at the end of their traineeship.

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