



Growing Abroad to Further Our Profession

Crossing Borders

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) has been building links overseas for more than 40 years, and already has members in five continents and over 20 countries.

As an organisation CIH has strong links with the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) in the USA and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA), who have been our partners in the Tri-Country Conference since 1989. On the other side of the world CIH has supported the development of the housing profession in Australia and South Africa. Our charitable work too has helped develop links in places such as Nicaragua, Grenada and the many countries across Asia affected by the Boxing Day Tsunami in 2004. And the range of countries looking to develop links with CIH is growing. In the past year CIH have met representatives from countries as diverse as Botswana and Nigeria.

The majority of the CIH's members overseas are based in Hong Kong, where the CIH's Asian Pacific Branch celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2006. The success of the Branch is testament to the vision of CIH (then the Institute of Housing Managers) and the hard work over many years of our colleagues in the Asian Pacific. Their efforts are now paying dividends and opening doors in new regions like Taiwan and Macao, but especially China.

Links with some of the UK's closest neighbours in Europe are less developed, but here too change is taking place. A business delegation from Russia visited CIH in 2007 eager to learn from the UK's latest housing developments and the CIH's South East Branch is at the forefront of developing relationships with the European Union. Recent study trips have embraced Barcelona and Rotterdam and plans are underway to visit Berlin in 2007. CIH Scotland also has links with Pact Arim in France.



Driving Forces

In recent years interest in the CIH and in our experience of housing policy and management has been increasing worldwide. At the same time we recognise that the UK can learn much from the experiences of our international friends. In each case the driving force is the thirst for knowledge both to develop housing and regeneration policy on areas of common interest, and to support the work of housing professionals.

One particular issue which has been prominent in those discussions is about the creation of sustainable mixed communities, which was the main theme at last year's Tri-Country Conference in Edinburgh. Delegates in Canada and the USA face similar challenges and have much to share with the UK in this key area of housing policy.

Two other major policy issues affect communities and therefore housing professionals worldwide: the lack of decent affordable housing and environmental sustainability are shared problems which all of us are trying to grapple with in different ways.

CIH's status as an educational charity and an awarding body is an essential element of our overseas appeal, particularly as the lack of knowledge and skills in some countries is hindering the development of effective housing policy and practice. CIH accredits qualifications all over the world but few have been more significant in recent years than the first CIH accredited course in mainland China at Wuhan University in 2005.

In the UK, housing professionals operate within a well-defined and established code of professional conduct and professional practice and we have the benefit of a strong housing education system established over many years. In many countries this educational infrastructure and system of self-regulation is often still in development and for many of our international colleagues the CIH's strength in this area is of real interest in helping address the problems they face.



Responding Flexibly

In developing our international role we have recognised that many countries and organisations are at different stages in creating and supporting the work of housing professionals. For this reason CIH has, and is continuing, to provide help in a variety of ways. From its roots in Hong Kong the Asian Pacific Branch is now working successfully to support the development of housing management in Taiwan, Macau and China.

In Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales we have created a new business model (National Business Units) offering greater ability to respond to devolved government and which is capable of working successfully in other countries.

Elsewhere CIH has provided help and advice to establish new organisations such as the Australasian Housing Institute and to support representative housing bodies in South Africa.

But in response to increasing enquiries from around the world particularly from people overseas who don't have the benefit of a

professional housing organisation, CIH has reviewed its services to existing and potential members overseas. From 1 January 2007 we introduced a new grade of International Member featuring an improved range of exclusive member benefits. The development of the Internet means CIH can now offer International Members a virtual meeting place with an opportunity to share knowledge and experiences. Our new service includes an e-newsletter 'Housing World', which includes features and news from the CIH and from international housing workers around the world.

CIH has recognised that in many countries, with low wages, membership fees can be a major barrier to joining a professional body. In response our new International Membership grade incorporates a flexible pricing policy to reflect local economies. CIH uses the World Bank Economic Index to ensure that fees are linked to the ability to pay.

International exchanges and visits will continue to be an important aspect of CIH's strategy. One of the many duties of a CIH Presidential Year is to act as an international ambassador for the CIH membership. For the first time, in 2006, CIH held a Council meeting in Hong Kong, which provided the opportunity for an international housing conference to further develop CIH's relationship with officials from the wider Asian Pacific. CIH also continues to host visits to the UK and provides subsidised prices for visitors to major events such as the CIH's Annual UK Conference and Exhibition. A significant international delegation now attends the conference, which has become a key component in the event's programme.

Looking to the future CIH will continue to respond flexibly to supporting the development of housing professionals. Our mission is to maximise the contribution that housing professionals make to the well being of communities – wherever they work. The effects of globalisation mean that countries have never been more inter-dependent and that people around the world are more connected to each other than ever before. In this context the creation of an international standard for the housing profession is a realistic and worthwhile goal.

