

# Northfields on top

A THREE-office estate agency in west London beat off strong competition from big name firms across the country to win a top accolade at last week's Estate Agency of the Year Awards.

Three hundred and fifty delegates from across Britain saw the Ealing firm Northfields carry off the title for Best Estate Agency Training and Development at a

by **PAT BRAMLEY**

glittering awards ceremony in the City of London hosted by BBC news presenter Fiona Bruce.

The awards are the first of their kind in the UK to reward excellence in this sector of the service industry.

Northfields MD Richard Palfreeman who bought the agency in

1988 was cock-o-hop at winning the training and development accolade. It was a further triumph for the company which achieved the Investors in People award in 2002.

"We're delighted," beamed the boss. "It recognises the importance that we place on recruiting, training and retaining staff."

Judging was based on a written submission setting out the firm's strategy for training, backed up by a visit from the judges. "They spent some time talking to staff and evaluating our procedures," said Mr Palfreeman. "Our training is a mixture of in-house and courses. When it comes to recruiting, I am more influenced by life skills and the right attitude - a willingness to learn - than previous estate agency experience."

Kathy O'Connor, who was appointed lettings manager last April, joined the company five years ago having previously worked in publishing. She says it



The Northfields office in Ealing



Left to right: Peter Stimpson, product development manager, GMAC Residential Funding. Richard Palfreeman, managing director of Northfields and BBC News presenter Fiona Bruce

was a brilliant move. "I wanted to try a different career. I started off as a Saturday girl and I loved the job from the start. I liked matching people with the right properties and it just grew from there. I've learnt by listening to my colleagues and getting lots of feedback. I've been on a few courses but learning on the job is the most valuable."

Mr Palfreeman added: "Our customer service and professional expertise is monitored by customer feedback to help see where training and development is needed. As a company we pride ourselves on recruiting people who live near our west London offices (Ealing Broadway, Northfields and Shepherds Bush) and have a valuable knowledge of the area."