

Actively supporting talent

Worshipful Company of Chartered Surveyors education committee chair **Clwyd Roberts** reflects on the five years of the livery company's bursary programme supporting young people into the profession



Clwyd Roberts is education committee chair at the Worshipful Company of Chartered Surveyors

The Worshipful Company of Chartered Surveyors (WCCS) is one of 113 City of London livery companies that engage in charitable and educational projects in the UK, collectively donating over £80m in 2024. WCCS has for many years supported four London schools, encouraging pupils from diverse backgrounds into property careers by providing bursaries and practical guidance.

We knew, however, that in the livery tradition we could and should do more. So, in early 2020, under the strapline 'talent is universal, opportunity is not', work began on developing an enhanced undergraduate bursary programme. The object was simply to increase opportunity and diversity within the property industry, providing students from disadvantaged backgrounds with meaningful financial, professional and pastoral support to access property careers.

For us, meaningful meant £10,000 a year for three years of study for each student, dedicated career mentoring/ work experience and having someone to talk to when modules got tough. This package, £150,000 for an initial five students, was fully underwritten by WCCS in spring 2020. To identify students for the programme from within the UK's 4,200 secondary schools, we entered into an invaluable partnership with Reading Real Estate Foundation (RREF).

Pathways to Property

RREF's Pathways to Property initiative has an impressive track record of engagement with schools, introducing careers in property through outreach work with year 10 students and an annual summer school for year 12 students at the University of Reading. This provides a four-day induction into the world of property for more than 150 students from non-surveying backgrounds.

Those students who opt for a relevant degree could then apply for an RREF bursary to study at the University of Reading or a WCCS bursary to study anywhere in the UK. This meant that in autumn 2020, we were able to send five students to study RICS-accredited degrees.

While WCCS resources were limited, ambition was not, so attention turned to future funding. We had a product to engage potential sponsors: a live funded programme with real students on the first step of the ladder. We marketed this and within three months had five industry sponsors on board. They took over the financing and mentoring of the students, enabling WCCS to use its underwriting commitment to guarantee the second-year intake.

Five years on, we have a total of 50 students, including the 2025 intake, either on or having completed the programme. The aim has been to support students from diverse economic and social backgrounds to access higher education and the real estate industry. Our selection criteria takes into account factors such as free school meals, family circumstances and household income. No previous connection to the property industry and first generation to attend university are also important considerations.

Our 50 students have been educated at 16 universities and 23 have graduated, most with upper seconds or firsts. We gauge success on progression into the workplace, and of our 23 graduates, 16 are in relevant employment. At present, four are job-seeking and three are likely to pursue non-property careers. Of the cohort, 54% are female and, while we do not select on grounds of ethnicity, 90% are non-white British.

Professional authentication arrived in 2024 when RICS became a sponsor of three students, including our first-ever rural surveyor.

At an initial meeting with Pathways in the summer of 2020, WCCS's then master John Woodman boldly predicted that the livery would raise £1m for the programme. Eyebrows were raised and after the meeting Pathways was quietly advised over coffee to expect perhaps a 10th of that. Five years on, as the total raised passes £1.5m, we can see John's faith in the generosity of the industry was visionary.

With an effective management structure in place, we envisage continuing expansion of the programme, adding 10 to 12 students annually. The vision is to create a cohort of young professionals connected via shared experience of the programme, who will have a significant impact on the future of surveying, RICS and WCCS.

Talent is indeed universal and deserving of opportunity. ■

