

INSPIRING NEW TALENT

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It's with great pleasure that I'll be taking up the baton of this column from my great friend Chris Harris. Chris and I have pounded the streets for KOREC offering the latest compelling geospatial products to industry professionals for many years and during that time there has been one question asked more than any other, "Do you know of any surveyors that are looking for work?"

It is no secret in our industry that there is a skills shortage. Back in 2017 a Construction and Infrastructure Market survey by the RICS detailed that whilst order books were still being filled, 53% of respondents cited a worrying lack of skilled labour as being a key barrier to growth.

Is this trend set to continue?

Ageing profession

If we were to look at recent university intakes into construction related degree courses then sadly the answer looks to be yes. In 2016/17 there were only 51,185 students enrolled in courses in this sphere, compared to more than 63,000 in 2007/8 and there is a noticeable knock on effect. In 2018 the UK boasted around 55,000 chartered surveyors. A concerning number when we consider that this has fallen from 63,000 in 2011. This trend is compounded by the fact that people are retiring and not being replaced. As Jeff Matsu of RICS commented in 2017 "With nearly 430,000 construction workers set to have retired between 2010 and 2020, the industry must ensure that it can inspire new talent into the profession"

With all of the above in mind I was extremely heartened on a recent visit to New College Durham (NCD) where I met with course leader Richard Byers. NCD offer BTEC, HNC, HND and Apprenticeship courses covering all elements of surveying, engineering and the built environment. The enthusiasm of the students shone through and it was a fantastic experience to spend time with the surveyors and engineers of tomorrow.

Access to the latest and greatest

What really came across was not only the importance of learning the very basics of the profession but also that the students must have access to the latest and greatest technology in order that they can progress into a market where robotic total stations, laser scanning and mobile mapping are now commonplace.

As Richard Byers commented, "Ensuring the students have access to the various manufacturers of these instruments gives them experience in the hardware and software used in each, and also a chance to try the latest instruments in the market". What really topped off my visit to the area was seeing one of those very apprentice students the following day beavering away in the offices of a sizeable local survey firm.

So, what are we, as a geospatial community, doing to make sure that our industry receives the lifeblood it so desperately needs?

Neil Pollock reflects on industry's need to attract the next generation of geospatial professionals

There is a responsibility on all of us to make sure that our industry continues to grow and prosper and we can only achieve this if the young people making the choice to enter the Geospatial world can grow and prosper in turn. There are some fantastic initiatives emerging for the surveyors and engineers of tomorrow. Schemes such as 'Get Kids Into Survey' - "Educating and exciting the next generation of surveyors while bettering the geospatial industry globally" and of course Design Engineer Construct® (DEC) for secondary school pupils, developed to create and inspire the next generation of Built Environment professionals – anyone who saw Alison Watson (CEO of Class of Your Own, the business that delivers DEC) speak at this year's GEO Business will have been hugely impressed by her approach.

Nurturing future talent

But can we do more? Manufacturers, distributors and practitioners all have a responsibility to ensure that the nurturing of future talent is part of the day to day and not a knee jerk reaction to an industry shortfall. Let's not forget that our industry has much to offer a new generation of surveyors growing up in a tech savvy world – Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, mobile mapping, drones, and 3D laser scanning are all exciting technologies that ignite interest in young minds.

Our hard work now may not be to inspire youngsters to take up the challenge of our industry in our time, but as the ancient Greeks said, "A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in."

Let's make sure this great industry of ours lasts as long as they did.

