

**BUILDING  
FUTURES IN  
BIRMINGHAM**

# MEET THE APPRENTICES **TRANSFORMING THEIR LIVES** WITH WILLMOTT DIXON

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BIRMINGHAM**

“The talent is out there - we want to help motivate, nurture, support and develop it”

As one of Birmingham's largest privately owned property repair and regeneration specialists, responsible for maintaining over 60,000 homes in the city, we want to improve the very fabric of the society where we work.

This is about how we can enhance the lives of people - not with gimmicks or box-ticking exercises, but with tangible initiatives that support skills and long-term job prospects. Our aspiration is to give people an opportunity to realise their potential.

Our 4Life Academy in Aston was set up in 2013 to equip more than 5,000 people a year with new and additional skills that increase their value in the economy. Likewise, our Opening Doors programme is a valuable gateway to the workplace, providing over 25,000 hours of work experience each year to Birmingham teenagers.

We have seen how the 59 apprentices in Birmingham that we've trained have grabbed the opportunity and are now thriving as our employees: people who now have a life-long trade and contribute to the city's economic growth.

We are proud to be literally Building Futures, providing opportunities to people who left school with little or no qualifications but have bundles of energy and ambition - we want to help them realise the huge potential they have.

The talent is out there - we want to help motivate, nurture, support and develop it!

The stories of four current apprentices illustrate how Willmott Dixon is Building Futures in Birmingham, creating a lasting impact on real lives and leaving a legacy of opportunity in the city.

**Mick Williamson**  
Managing director  
Willmott Dixon Partnerships

## DETERMINED TO WORK



**Ellie King** is a single mum from Selly Oak who is working hard as an apprentice plumber. Last year she was highly commended by the UKCG National Apprentices Awards, a far cry from her days trying to get on the jobs ladder just a few years ago.

Ellie is not the sort of person who likes to sit around, so as soon as her daughter was old enough to go to nursery, she enrolled on an electrical installation course at a local college. "I didn't want to

be sitting at home on my bottom," she says. "I enjoy working."

Despite achieving NVQ levels 2 and 3 in electrical installation, finding a job proved difficult. "I couldn't find a job because I didn't have the site experience. And I couldn't get the site experience because no one would give me a job. I was going round in circles."

Ellie, now 23, did a Prince's Trust course which included work experience and was placed with Willmott Dixon. "That's how I found out about their apprenticeship scheme," she says.

Although there were no electrical apprenticeships on offer when she applied, Ellie didn't let that stop her. "I was desperate to do something, so I broadened my horizons. I thought

I'd learn another trade, and plumbing is a life skill," she says.

Comparing the two years studying at college and the two years she is spending learning via an apprenticeship, Ellie would recommend the apprentice route every time. "You are earning while you are learning and you get a qualification at the end of it."

It's not easy working a full day, and having to send her daughter to childcare before and after school, but Ellie says that if she hadn't won the apprenticeship, she would have to be doing unskilled work instead.

Now she has her sights set on gaining a level 3 NVQ in gas fitting and more experience on the tools. "After that there are options to go wherever you want, really."

## A NEW CHAPTER



**Chris Rowlands**, 39, a building maintenance operative from Shard End, was Willmott Dixon's Apprentice of the Year in 2014. From having few skills, Chris has really grasped the opportunities provided by Willmott Dixon, although he wasn't optimistic about his chances when he applied for an apprenticeship.

However, that outlook changed once in the interview. "The interviewers listened to my story," he says. "I told them that I wanted to make a better life for myself

and they seemed to be impressed enough to give me a chance."

Chris is now 18 months into a two-year apprenticeship in plumbing, carpentry, painting and decorating, plastering and tiling, and attends college one day a week. "College is great. I am coming top of the class on everything because I am trying really hard," he says. "Willmott Dixon has given me a second

**"It's a great place to work. They bend over backwards to teach you and pass on all their knowledge"**

chance at life so I just want to do my best."

Chris says he was also anxious about how his colleagues would view an older apprentice. Again, he was pleasantly surprised. "It's a great place to work," he says. "They bend over backwards to teach you and pass on all their knowledge."

Chris's efforts culminated in the Apprentice of the Year award last year. "After I won, they invited me to a team-building event, staying in a posh hotel. It was like a life I had never lived before."

Now he is looking to the future with Willmott Dixon. He wants to spend a few years learning his trade and then look at the career paths open to him. "I could be a supervisor, manager, health and safety, HR, tenant liaison officer, there's so many options."

# THE DRIVE TO SUCCEED

**Taylor Robbins** is a first-year apprentice from Newtown, a young dad who wanted to put his drive and energy to good use. He came to Willmott Dixon via Midland Heart's Back on Track programme, which offers apprenticeships to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

If you had asked Taylor what he thought of college 12 months ago, the answer may well have been "not much". He never enjoyed school, didn't really see the point of it and consequently didn't get the qualifications he could have done.

It is a different story today. Taylor is eight months into a carpentry apprenticeship with Willmott Dixon thanks to Back on Track. "I've got people to support me, to make sure I'm doing the best I can," he says. "I've got the drive to do well, to be successful and I can see something at the end of it."

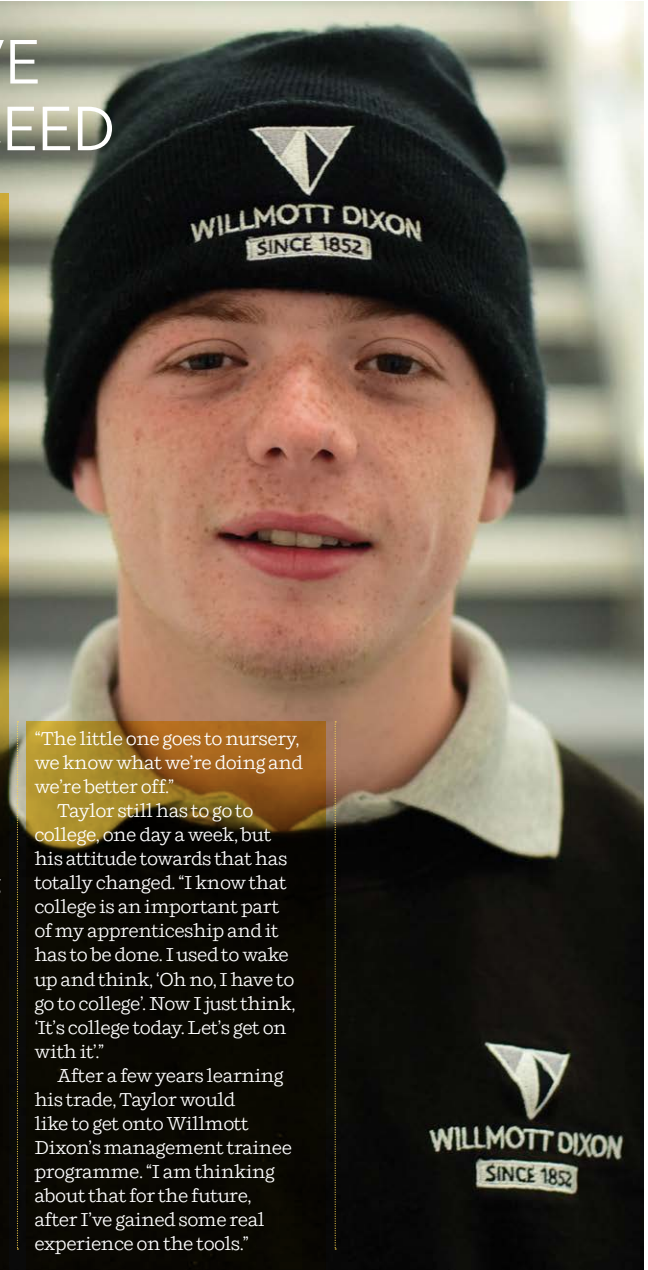
When asked how his training is going, Taylor replies: "I'm really enjoying it, that's the best way to put it. My mentor - the person I work with every day - really wants me to succeed. He cares about what I do. And all the tradespeople at the depot are good people, they are good to work with."

By his own admission, Taylor, who is 18, has had to grow up quickly in the last year. He and his partner have a son who has just turned one. "We have a routine now," says Taylor.

"The little one goes to nursery, we know what we're doing and we're better off."

Taylor still has to go to college, one day a week, but his attitude towards that has totally changed. "I know that college is an important part of my apprenticeship and it has to be done. I used to wake up and think, 'Oh no, I have to go to college'. Now I just think, 'It's college today. Let's get on with it.'"

After a few years learning his trade, Taylor would like to get onto Willmott Dixon's management trainee programme. "I am thinking about that for the future, after I've gained some real experience on the tools."



## A CAREER, NOT A JOB



**Mark Taylor** is an apprentice whose career is going places. We spotted his potential and put him on our Management Trainee programme after he won our Willmott Dixon's Got Talent award for exceptional performance.

Originally, Mark turned down a place at university because he wanted to work. But finding the right job was hard. "I tried several things, including working as a bookie and a personal trainer, but none of them was right and I was unemployed," he says.

Mark admits he probably would have been drifting today, had a bricklayer friend not told him about Willmott Dixon's apprenticeships. Just over two years ago he started as an apprentice carpenter at our Birmingham North branch. "It's a great team there, a really great bunch of people," says Mark.

As well as his carpentry skills, Mark gained something even more valuable: a sense of ambition. "One month before the end of my apprenticeship, I was asked to give a talk to the

"If I hadn't found Willmott Dixon, I think I would probably still be looking for work"

Birmingham City Housing Liaison Board about apprentices. It was quite well received," he says. "That made me think that maybe I could do more than just joinery."

He was encouraged to apply for Willmott Dixon's Got Talent in 2014. The scheme took 24 members of staff from a variety of job backgrounds on a residential course to do group exercises, team building and mock interviews. The final stage was an interview at head office with the company's operational director and director of human resources.

"I was one of three winners, which means I get the opportunity to be a management trainee, working in different parts of the business to learn about the company and to gain new skills," says Mark. He started in September last year and is currently working in the Business Solutions team, helping parts of the company all over the country to improve the way they do things.

And he did end up going to university after all: every Wednesday to study a degree in business management and communications. "If I hadn't found Willmott Dixon, I think I would probably still be looking for work. I've got a great job now, but it's more than that: it's a career."



# WILLMOTT DIXON

**SINCE 1852**

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Willmott Dixon is a privately owned contracting, residential development and property support company. Being a large company means we have the scale to create a huge and lasting positive impact on our society. This is not only done through what we build and maintain - it's achieved through the fantastic efforts of all our people who make a major contribution to enhancing their local communities. In 2014, this contribution saw us become the only company in our sector to win a Queen's Award for Enterprise for sustainable development.



### **Making an impact with Opening Doors**

Opening Doors is our gateway to work for dozens of young people. Each year we provide 25,000 hours of work experience to nearly 300 teenagers, giving them an opportunity to get involved and make an impact in the workplace. Every one is guaranteed an interview for an apprenticeship, and since the programme's launch, more than 30 have gone on to become apprentices and gain full-time employment.

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