Where wine and finance meet

24 Jan 2012 by Jancis Robinson

See complete list of last night's WSET scholarships.

Last night I had the great pleasure of performing my first duty as Honorary President of the Wine & Spirit Education Trust, the world's leading wine educator, taking over for a two-year stint from Hugh Johnson, who succeeded Michael Broadbent MW.

In the 900-year-old Great Hall of the Guildhall in the City of London, Britain's financial capital, I handed over a certificate case and corkscrew to hundreds of Diploma graduates from 25 different countries (12 seconds per graduate, I was instructed) and witnessed presentations of scholarships to 25 Diploma students and 13 from lower levels - as well as the Vintners' Scholarship and Cup, which went to Emma Harrison, who has been working at The Sampler in South Kensington but is about to leap to Wines of Australia.

It was heartening to witness in such concrete form how popular wine studies are today. The number of WSET students worldwide grew by 30% last year, with a total of 35,737 taking a WSET qualification in 2011 in 55 countries. There was particularly marked growth in China (including Hong Kong), whose total number of WSET students is now greater than in any country other than the UK. (Many Asian, especially Indian, students take their spirits qualifications apparently.)

I was particularly struck by the rise in the number of students from outside the wine trade. There was a professional airline pilot, a tax official, someone who runs a charity, someone who had been on night shift in A&E, but the most noticeable phenomenon was the number of people currently in financial services who were hoping to move into wine professionally. And I couldn't help noticing the rather alarming number of graduates whose professional speciality was wine investment.

Let's keep it pure, boys and girls. You know what wine's *really* there for. Don't you?