

Professor Christopher Turner (OM 66) Economist and Information Scientist

Having recently retired from my full-time role at the **University of Winchester** and just attended my first Old Monktonian reunion at the school, I was intrigued to look back and see how on earth I ended up **as a Professor and Pro Vice Chancellor**. I left school keen to get into publishing. Some of my family had been involved in the newspaper and printing industry, so it seemed a sensible move. As a preparation I got a job in the **Reference Library in Bath**. I should most certainly have gone to University straight away but didn't: the result of a mixture of poor A level grades, youth and a family background that didn't really understand the need for a university degree. I then did a course in **Librarianship at Birmingham Polytechnic**, worked in London for the **British Institute of Management**, and got interested in and excited about information retrieval systems as a way of interrogating large textual databases just at the time that computers were becoming accessible. In those days anyone with a bit of knowledge and experience in such things was snapped up, so I returned **to Birmingham to teach information retrieval systems and theory**.

I needed some decent quantitative skills to understand better how all this hung together, so got **a degree in economics**, wrote a book with a colleague on **the Dissemination of Information** and thus almost by chance started to progress through academia by way of conference papers, consultancy and research. I was excited by the overlapping pressures of control and creativity, and the way that innovation needed to work within ordered systems. I also enjoyed **the early days of teaching in the new Polytechnics**; they were vibrant and stimulating places, with new disciplines and new types of academic staff who came from industry and commerce.

...Projects like the NHS on-line, citizens advice bureaux, farmers in northern Greece, small businesses in India, GP and Nurse education, e-learning in the workplace, and particularly workforce planning...

Being involved in the new discipline – as we saw it – of **information science** that brought together libraries, computers, social change, indexing and information retrieval also allowed me to work across the world on a range of **projects funded by the British Council or the World Bank**, setting up systems and networks supporting universities and businesses in countries like **Brazil, Chile, India, Singapore and Malaysia**, using the technologies that eventually transmogrified into what is now the internet and the world wide web. Back then we were using tele-typewriters and dial-up modems that linked the various research and defence collections of the world together.

A new discipline needed new types of graduate, so much of my **work in the Polytechnics** was about developing curricula, working with **professional bodies across the world in Librarianship**,

Computing and Management. We also needed to identify the ways in which certain traditional professions such as Healthcare, Publishing and Education might need to change as information systems became more central to their operations. Such change could be systemic and strategic, or disjointed and incremental; I was always interested in the latter. Thus projects like the NHS on-line, citizens advice bureaux, farmers in northern Greece, small businesses in India, GP and Nurse education, e-learning in the workplace, and particularly workforce planning were all areas in which I was able to research, write papers and get involved in government agencies and professional bodies.

The deficit in the UK is major, when compared to countries I had worked in ...

Teaching undergraduate and masters students was always the thing I enjoyed most, whether in the UK or abroad but as time went along I became more involved in higher education management, **at Brighton University as a Dean of a Faculty, Gloucestershire as Assistant Director and then Winchester as Pro Vice Chancellor.** My enjoyment of teaching then shifted more to the process of convincing the various business communities of the need for research, innovation and university graduates. The deficit in the UK is major, when compared to countries I had worked in like Finland, Korea, Singapore and Japan, which invested heavily in raising the education levels of their workforces to equip them for this new information society in whose gestation I had been involved.

So of late I have helped set up organisations such as **Wired Wessex**, a networking group of new-media professionals; **Café Culture**, a group for the creative industry; **South East Media Network**; and working with local authorities and Chambers of Commerce on the vital roles that the information society and the creative industries have in economic development, innovation and long term social change. Thus, in the end, I find that most of my work has resulted from an interest in order and creativity, chaos and control, structure and innovation.