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BSc (Class I) 1971, Chemistry ; PhD 1974 (Chemistry)



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After graduating with a PhD in 1974, I moved to a post-doctoral research fellowship at Cambridge University, and was appointed Supervisor in Natural Sciences (Chemistry) at Jesus College and Fellow of St Edmund's College. In a tough economic environment with no academic posts in Chemistry being advertised, I took the positive step of entering school teaching and taught chemistry in grammar, independent and comprehensive schools, becoming deputy head in a large split site comprehensive in 1982. In 1985, I was appointed to the Principalship of St Philip's Sixth Form College in Birmingham and then moved to Farnborough Sixth Form College as Principal in 1992. I retired from that post in 2010, after 25 years as a principal.

I am now Senior Education Advisor to Cambridge International Examinations, a part-time position which takes me around the world to visit Cambridge centres in some of the 160 countries in which Cambridge examinations are taken.

What is the best thing about what you are doing now?

As a principal, it was a genuine pleasure to work with thousands of young people and hundreds of dedicated teachers to improve students' achievements.

Currently I am able to see and experience education in different contexts and to learn from what I see and hear but also to give advice and guidance to head teachers, principals, teachers and students in the global context.

What was the best thing about your time as a PhD student here?

Back in 1971, I was given the opportunity to work with a brand new x-ray diffractometer and to be stimulated by a lively research environment – and to discover that research involved working in a variety of disciplines sensing coherence across what had previously been studied – and half-remembered!

In what way did living and studying in Birmingham live up to your expectations?

It was before the regeneration of the City Centre – but it was still a lively City with Louis Fremaux and the CBSO playing in the town hall and the Lickey Hills not far away! Birmingham exceeded my expectations as a place to study – and indeed I returned to Birmingham as a college principal in 1985.

What advice would you give to current PhD students?

Be resilient through the darker days of research when it can sometimes feel despairing – and focus on completion – treat it all as an invaluable learning experience. My PhD has been a great asset throughout my career – it provides the seed corn of experience which has helped in many managerial situations... and has assisted with self-awareness, awareness of others, self-motivation and motivating others