

Farmington Fellowships

Feeling isolated? RE-energise your teaching with help from the Farmington Institute.

The Farmington Institute serves to 'support, encourage and improve Religious Education in schools, colleges and universities'.

First conceived at the end of the Second World War by its founder Grenadier Guard Rt Hon Robert Wills, the Institute has published literature, hosted conferences at its home in Harris Manchester College, Oxford University and awarded more than 600 Fellowships (now the Farmington Scholarship).

Farmington Scholarships are open to teachers, Headteachers and members of Her Majesty's Armed Forces researching moral and ethical leadership. Teachers in receipt of a scholarship are awarded a maximum of 30 days released from school and are supported by a university tutor. At the end of the scholarship, findings are presented at the Summer Reunion, to which past scholars are invited. Resulting papers are held in the Farmington Library. This year's topics are diverse and include the ethical implications of the Parable of the Sower, the use of 'Big Questions' in RE and developing class-led Collective Worship.

If the idea of further study is not for you, you may be interested in accessing the Farmington scholars' papers, which can be found on the Farmington website www.farmington.ac.uk. Here you will find reports on a huge variety of topics, which could provide new ideas for your school, or simply re-ignite your interest when feeling a bit jaded.

My scholarship so far...

Associate Consultant Julia Watson is a Farmington Scholar 2015-16. We caught up with her to find out what it's like being a student again.

'Being a Farmington Scholar is a joy. Everyone has been so helpful and encouraging and I've loved meeting my Farmington cohort. Teaching RE can be a bit lonely, so it's great to talk to people who have similar experiences to you. Even with thirty days to do research, it can be hard finding time to fit in the study. My tutor is really supportive and has given me great guidance. My study is on the use of storytelling in RE. The first research stage is nearly complete and I now have the really exciting bit to look forward to; talking to children (and adults) about stories.'



‘If you want to live amongst people in an informed and positive way, you need to understand religion.’

Discovery RE talks to the Director of the Farmington Trust, Dr Ralph Waller, about the Farmington Scholarship, the importance of RE and why Hell is an empty multi-storey car park...

How did the Farmington Trust begin?

It was founded by my good friend Bobby Wills (Grenadier Guard Hon Robert Wills), who was very seriously injured in the Second World War. After his recovery, he drove to Oxford and gathered together a group of scholars, hoping to make the world a better place and perhaps to prevent further wars. He thought that RE would help people work together. When I became involved in the 1980s, I suggested to Bobby that the Trust might invest in people.

Why did you choose to invest in RE teachers?

RE teachers are often isolated in one person departments and I thought if we could help them to build a network and give them a prestigious scholarship, then this would raise confidence and morale. I think if you bring people together who are interested in the same thing, good things can happen.

I’ve always believed that the secret to success in education is discerning encouragement. We hope that the Farmington Scholarship makes teachers happier, perhaps better teachers and that children will ultimately benefit.

What do teachers do at the end of their scholarship?

Really that is up to them. The scholarship is for the individual, so we hope they write something that is useful and helpful to them. We hope that it will make them better teachers; that it reinvigorates their interest and gives them encouragement.

Why is quality RE important?

Good RE is a powerful force: it encourages children to think for themselves and it’s the only lesson where the child can argue with the teacher! If you want to read great literature like Milton, you need Religion to be able to understand it. If you want to live in any great city in the world and live amongst people in an informed and positive way you need to understand religion. RE involves critical thinking, languages, philosophy: it’s a great subject.

What is the memorable Farmington Scholarship?

Interdisciplinary studies are often very interesting. Art Master Stephen Bird painted a mural of the modern Last Judgement at Ampleforth School in Yorkshire. Hell was an empty multi storey car park. It raised so many questions: about how we live, about life after death, and whether it matters how we treat other people. Wonderful.

What would you study if you received a Farmington Scholarship?

Possibly something working with the church and young people. It’s important for the church not to lose sight of young people and it’s important for schools not to lose sight of the church.



Dr Waller was speaking to Julia Watson.

Application deadline for the Farmington Scholarship 2016-2017 is 25th January 2016.

Full details can be found at www.farmington.ac.uk

