



In Focus The Radio Communications Foundation

Every month *PW* carries an advertisement for the Radio Communications Foundation (RCF) and I caught up with Steve Hartley G0FUW, who is one of the Trustees, to ask him about the RCF and what it has been working on.

PW: Steve, could you outline what the RCF is and what its aims are?

Of course Don. The RCF is a small charity that was set up by the RSGB to increase the engagement of people, especially young people, in radio communications and wireless technology. The RCF therefore encourages and assists students to pursue relevant higher education courses, leading to them being employed in the radio communications sector, and also works to raise public interest

and involvement in radio communications, including amateur radio.

It receives donations, mainly from radio amateurs, and uses its charitable status to get as much benefit as it can from the donations it receives.

PW: I thought the RCF was the amateur radio examination body for the UK. Has that changed?

Yes, the management of the UK amateur radio

examinations transferred from the RCF to the RSGB last September. After about a decade it was agreed by the RCF, the RSGB and Ofcom that there was no requirement to have so many bodies involved in the examinations. The RCF was happy to give up that role to allow it to concentrate on its charity work.

PW: So, what sort of charity work does the RCF do?

For a number of years the RCF has been sponsoring Arkwright scholars. The Arkwright Scholarships Trust identifies, inspires and nurtures future leaders in Engineering and Technical Design. It does this by awarding Arkwright Engineering Scholarships, through a rigorous selection process, to high-calibre students in year 11 (England and Wales), S4 (Scotland) and year 12 (Northern Ireland). These Engineering Scholarships support students through their A Levels or Scottish Advanced Highers and encourage students to pursue Engineering or Technical Design at university or through a higher-level apprenticeship and to take up careers in the field.

Every Scholarship is sponsored by industrial companies, universities, charitable trusts and the like. The RCF is one such sponsor. One of our current scholars, **Milo Noblet**, is licensed as **2E0ILO** and is a member of the RSGB's Youth Committee, **Fig. 1**.

The RCF has also been supporting the FUNcube satellite project and other smaller scale projects in the community such as a couple of Young Science workshops at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institute, **Fig. 2**.

This year we have funded 200 receiver kits to support the school Buildathons that the RSGB is offering as part of the **Tim Peake ISS** contacts arranged through ARISS, **Fig. 3**.

We are just embarking on an exciting new venture in partnership with the UK Electronics Skills Federation (UKESF) to sponsor prizes each year for the best RF projects by UK undergraduates at strategically chosen universities. UK plc needs many more RF engineers so we are very keen to help encourage them to develop and stay in the field.

PW: I saw something on social media about an RCF Day at Bletchley Park. What was that all about?

When I have attended the Arkwright Trust presentation ceremonies I have been struck by the number of scholars that are interested in radio control, electronics, and things like Raspberry Pi projects. I thought it would be a good idea to do something to show these



Fig. 1: Milo 2E0ILO and Ben, the RCF's 2015 Arkwright Scholars receiving their scholarships from Steve G0FUW.

bright youngsters what amateur radio can do for them.

After bouncing a few ideas around we came up with the idea of offering a number of scholars the opportunity to do the Foundation practical assessments as an activity day and to arrange an examination at the end of it.

PW: And how did it go?

We were amazed to have over 60 applications from the scholars and 16 were selected to take part. We had terrific support from the Arkwright Trust, the RSGB, the National Radio Centre and the Bletchley Park Trust and a great day out. Thanks to a superb team effort, fourteen of the scholars passed the examination and we have been asked to do it all again in the autumn, **Fig. 4**.

PW: I hadn't realised there was so much going on. Are these initiatives part of a bigger plan?

Yes indeed. The RCF revised its strategy in 2014 and we took input from a wide range of key stakeholders, including **Rob Mannion**, who many PW readers will know. The strategy is aimed at promoting radio communications by helping children in schools, university students and the general public.

We would like to do more but we are only a small charity and the Trustees are already busy people coming from radio industry and amateur radio backgrounds.

PW: How can PW readers help?

Donations are always welcome! We have a donation facility on our website (below) or you can write to the RCF Secretary, RSGB HQ, 3 Abbey Court, Bedford MK44 3WH. Remember too, that including the RCF as a beneficiary in your will is not only tax-effective but will make a lasting impact on the work of the Foundation.

www.commsfoundation.org.uk

We would also be interested in hearing about projects that might help us deliver our strategic aims.

And one final plea for assistance – if any readers are in a position to arrange work experience in the radio communication industry, we would love to have more places available so that we can show our scholars what the industry has to offer. Contact details are on the RCF website.

As an example, last year we arranged for one scholar to spend a week in Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd. and this is what he said afterwards: "I would like to thank you for organising the work experience. I had a fantastic week learning new skills, improving my soldering skills and



Fig. 2: Young scientists building 20m PSK receivers in Bath with Mike G3VTO.

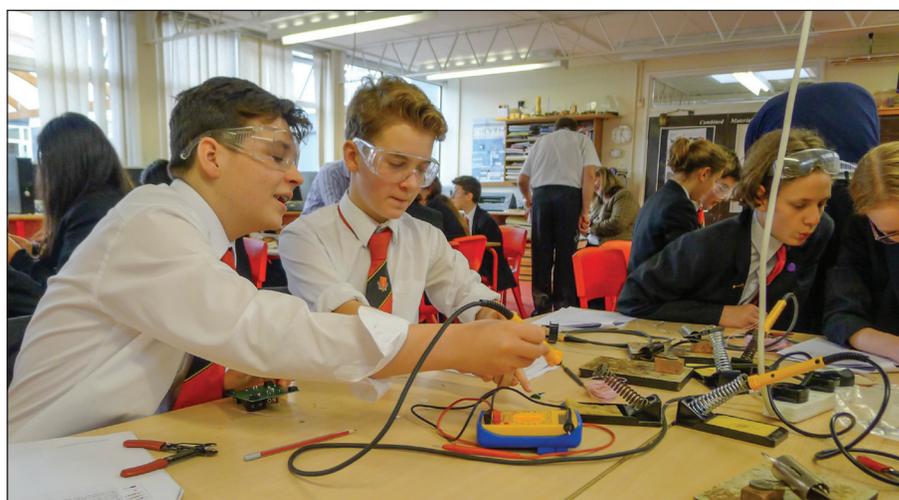


Fig. 3: Pupils at Sandringham School building Walford Electronics Rodway receivers as part of the preparation for their ARISS contact with Tim Peake.



Fig. 4: Robin, G3TKF, taking the Arkwright scholars through the Foundation Morse assessment.

learning about development in satellite and satellite communications. It was absolutely fascinating and I would like to thank you again for this fantastic experience." *I think that demonstrates the value of showing the young engineers of tomorrow what radio communications has to offer.*

PW: Thanks Steve, I am sure PW readers will want to help the RCF and I will pass on any offers of help that come my way. This month's RCF advertisement appears on p.56.