Hilary Pilkington (1987-2005)

The academic performance and reputation of CREES is thoroughly evidenced (something to thank the over-regulated British academic system for…?). Less easy to measure or brand is the feeling in CREES, passed down through generations of scholars attached to it, of belonging to a warm and caring family.

I came to CREES in 1987 as a part-time MSocSc student on the advice of John Barber, himself an active member of the CREES extended family. I had gone to talk to him about postgraduate study in the hope that he would suggest staying on at Cambridge and, at first, interpreted his advice not to stay but to apply to Birmingham as a gentle indication that I wasn't really up to the Cambridge mark. From the moment the CREES administrative staff put their metaphorical, although later often literal, collective arm around me, however, I knew the advice was sound. CREES was, and is, a place that promotes and thrives on the intellectual growth and diversity of its staff and students and it hooked me.

Mine was a long addiction – I remained in CREES for 18 years, leaving finally in 2005 at the end of a three year period as Director. I left to try the disciplinary – Sociology - path, first at Warwick and since 2012 at Manchester. The moves have been rewarding but there remains something special about the CREES experience. In the absence of any more scientific explanation I put it down to whatever was slipped into our drinks during those long staff/student post-seminar sessions in Staff House bar.

Whether chemically induced or not, it is that appetite for passionate intellectual, political and cultural debate that makes CREES stand out in an increasingly sanitized academic environment. I retain, with a genuine sense of honour, Honorary Senior Research Fellow status at CREES.

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