

Professor Ron Amann (1964-1994)



I entered CREES as a postgraduate student in 1964, quite soon after it had been founded. At that time, Bob Davies was building the Centre up into the intellectual powerhouse it was to become, and the resources still flowing from its special Hayter status were abundant. Looking back, it seems like a golden age.

Along with Mike Berry and Julian Cooper I was one of the team producing a succession of influential books on Soviet science and technology policy, published by the OECD and Yale University Press. In 1984, I became the Director of CREES for a period of 5 years, subsequently Dean of the Faculty of Commerce and Social Science (as it then was), and, in 1991, Pro-Vice-Chancellor.

I left the university in 1994 to become the Head of the ESRC at a time when the government was looking to give greater weight across the UK research base to policy relevance as distinct from purely curiosity driven research. The specific task was to devise transparent processes of consultation and funding that would bring this about. It was a considerable challenge, as I was to discover. Having struggled to win over the hearts and minds of the UK social science community over a five year period my next, and final job, was to encourage government policy-makers to take more account of the rich social science research that was potentially available to them. This was the era of 'evidence-based policy' and 'joined up thinking'. To that end, from 1999-2002 I was a Permanent Secretary in the Cabinet Office, charged by the Prime Minister to develop new systems of policy-making across government and, also, with the training of the UK civil service (including new programmes for the training of ministers, which were the first of their kind in the world).

Being a member of CREES was undoubtedly the most important period of my working life and, with the benefit of hindsight, I can now see what a deep mark it left on me. I have many wonderful memories. But the most abiding one is of the sheer quality of the colleagues with whom I worked for many years and, in particular, of the inspirational influence of Bob Davies upon us all. I can still almost hear Bob's tactful voice at my shoulder or, even worse, his significant silences. CREES, to my mind, has always represented a gold standard for clear thinking, for meticulous use of evidence and an instinctive capacity to recognise and reject all kinds of ideological twaddle - standards I did not always encounter later on in my career. In an interview with the THES at the time of my appointment to the Cabinet Office Julian Cooper (rightly) observed that I was someone who was intrigued by the "corridors of power", always wanting to find out what really went on behind the closed doors. Unfortunately, I found out - but it was an insight that I wouldn't have missed for the world!