

Charles Jones

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Interviewed by Marie Synakewicz

Originally, Charles and his wife, Linda, wanted to retire simultaneously. As some plans often do, this did not work out as expected. During a meeting in 2013, Charles and the other members of the Department's executive committee discussed the future of the Department in conjunction with the up-coming REF. It was at that time, Charles put his formal semi-retirement on the table: if he vacated his post as a Reader, it would free up the space for a new and younger person. After the required month or two of unemployment he would then come back on half-time. His Head of Department was understandably surprised but very happy to accommodate Charles.

The half-time arrangement suited Charles immensely. He could still perform the tasks in the Department that he liked most. As co-director of a part-time Master's degree in international relations he continued to teach the core materials, and he supervised MSt and MPhil dissertation students. He also continued in his role as the Director of the Centre of Latin American Studies until his term was up in 2014. During his time at the POLIS, Charles was responsible to liaise between the Department and the armed forces. About 10% of MPhil students every year are officers who study international relations to gain expertise and to further their career within the army, navy and royal air force. Charles particularly enjoyed teaching cohorts that included military personnel (MPhil) and mid-career professionals (MSt). "The young MPhils are surprised to see these people in their 40ies, but then after a few weeks they realize these people read, they get up in the morning and work hard. They become pace makers," Charles says. They bring their individual experiences along to the class-room which is very advantageous to the course.

Although, most people would not be sad to leave the various kinds of administrative and managerial work behind, Charles had to admit that he misses some of the committee work that he has been involved with for the past decades. He is still part of the graduate committee, being the co-director of the MSt, but has to try to sit back instead of getting more involved. Last year, he was originally supposed to "fully" retire, but the people who were to take over his responsibilities were not able to do so at that point of time. Therefore, he continues with his roles in teaching and liaison with the armed forces until the end of this academic year or a per diem basis.

Being half-retired also freed up time for other things. For example Charles is re-visiting many of his old research notes and, with help of his grand-son, he is archiving them digitally. In the age of technology, some forms of investigative research and analysis are now possible that were inaccessible some 20 or so years ago. Maybe there will even be another publication in the making! Moreover, he can now spontaneously join his wife on her work-related trips, something that was rather difficult when both had a very full diary of events. After his formal retirement Charles started taking piano lessons, but he laughingly admits that he can rarely spare an hour of practice a day due to all his other commitments.

Charles and his wife, now officially retired from her responsibilities at the Open University, are engaged more with their old functions than they expected. Both still have some work they continue with and enjoy: he at the POLIS and she at the NHS. However, they very likely would not have it any other way. They are looking forward to travelling and spending their winters in Spain, which is better for his wife's health. They will read at leisure and ponder over a student's essay for as much time as they want to, only interrupted by good food and the occasional hike up the mountain.