



**GREEN TEMPLETON COLLEGE** | OXFORD

# **Misunderstanding contemporary HE: some category mistakes**

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**Honorary President**

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# William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930)

- Meaning several things simultaneously
- Resolving two or more things into one
- Two ideas in one word
- Two meanings not agreeing
- Incomplete performance
- Saying nothing
- Having two opposite meanings



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  - Two ideas in one word
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  - Saying nothing
  - Having two opposite meanings
- QUALITY  
EFFICIENCY  
TEACHING  
CHOICE  
DIVERSITY  
MODULARITY  
THE UNIVERSITY

Watson, D. (1994) Living with Ambiguity: some dilemmas of academic leadership. In Bock, J. and Watson, D. (eds.) *Managing the University Curriculum: making common cause* (SRHE/Open U. Press).



# Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (1949)

The “foreigner visiting Oxford or Cambridge for the first time” is “shown a number of colleges, libraries, playing fields, museums, scientific departments and administrative offices. He then asks ‘But where is the University? I have seen where the members of the Colleges live, where the Registrar works, where the scientists experiment and the rest. But I have not yet seen the University in which reside and work the members of your University.’ It then has to be explained to him that the University is not another collateral institution, some visible counterpart to the colleges, laboratories and offices which he has seen. The University is just the way in which what he has already seen is organized. When they are seen and when their coordination is understood, the University has been seen.” (pp. 17-18)



# The “category mistake”

- “a sentence that says one thing in one category what can only intelligibly be said of something of another, as when speaking of the mind located in space”
- “what does blue smell like?”



# 1. University “performance”

- *to what extent the individual university is the most sensible unit of analysis.*

Ramsden, P., Batchelor, D., Peacock, A., Temple, P. and Watson, D. (2010), *Enhancing and Developing the National Student Survey: report to HEFCE by the Centre for Higher Education Studies at the Institute of Education*. Bristol: Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (August).



## 2. Access

- *the pursuit of “excellence,” or “social mobility,” or even “social justice”*
- *“Widening participation” or “fair access”*
- *“Wasted talent.”*

Sutton Trust (2008), *Wasted Talent? Attrition Rates of High-achieving Pupils Between School and University*. London: Sutton Trust



### 3. The HE “sector”

- *talking about “higher” when we should be talking about “tertiary” education.*

University of Peshawar: [http://www.upesh.edu.pk/about\\_uop.html](http://www.upesh.edu.pk/about_uop.html)





## 4. Research “selectivity”

- *talking about institutional research intensity when we should be talking about inter-institutional collaboration.*



The scientific world is becoming increasingly interconnected, with international collaboration on the rise. Today over 35% of articles published in international journals are internationally collaborative, up from 25% 15 years ago.

The primary driver of most collaboration is the scientists themselves. In developing their research and finding answers, scientists are seeking to work with the best people, institutions and equipment which complement their research, wherever they may be.

The connections of people, through formal and informal channels, diaspora communities, virtual global networks and professional communities of shared interests are important drivers of international collaboration. These networks span the globe. Motivated by the bottom-up exchange of scientific insight, knowledge and skills, they are changing the focus of science from the national to the global level. Yet little is understood about the dynamics of networking and the mobility of scientists, how these affect global science and how best to harness these networks to catalyse international collaboration (RS, 2001:6).

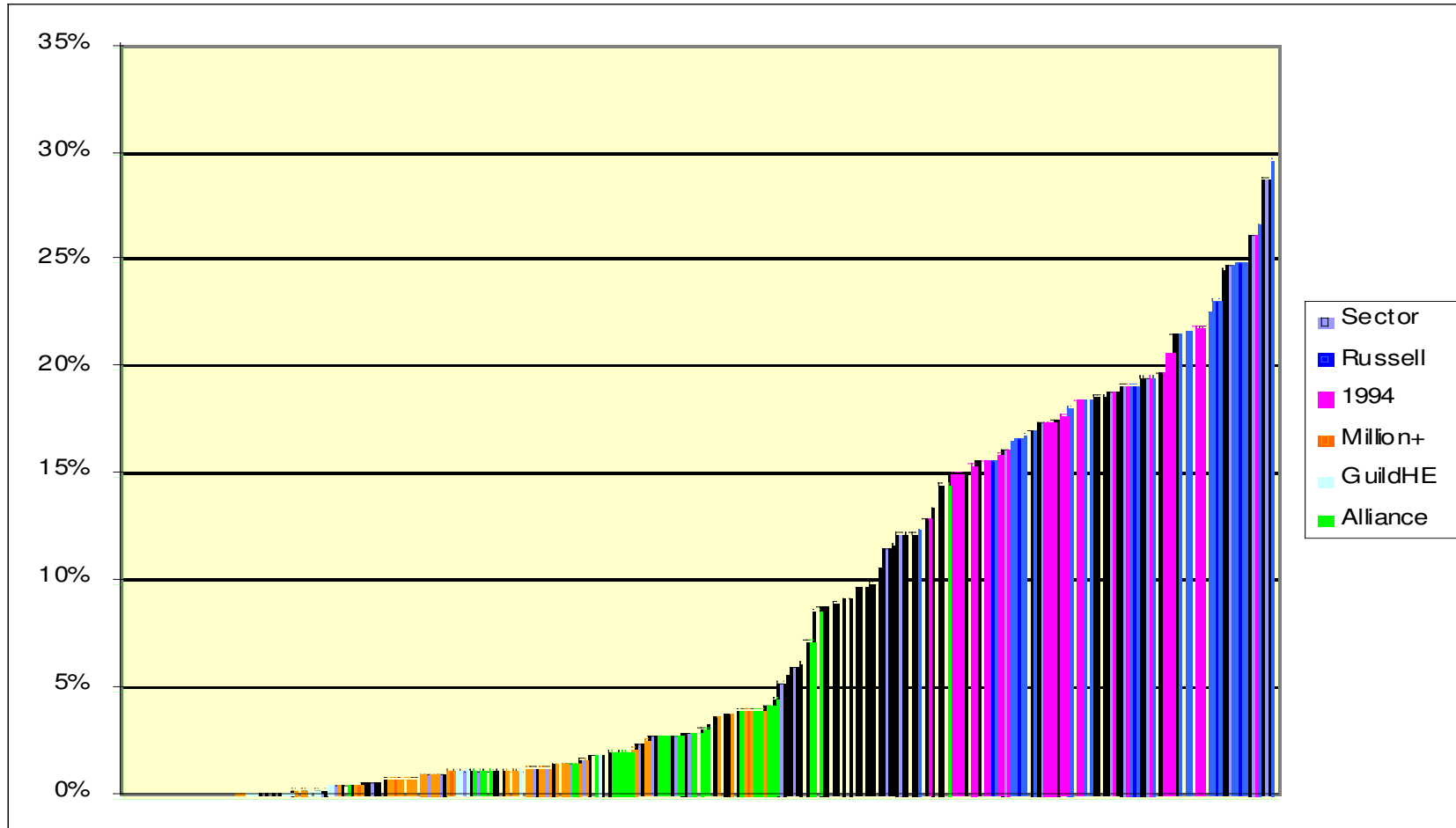
*Knowledge, Networks and Nations: global scientific collaboration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*

Royal Society Policy Document 03/11. London: The Royal Society DES2096

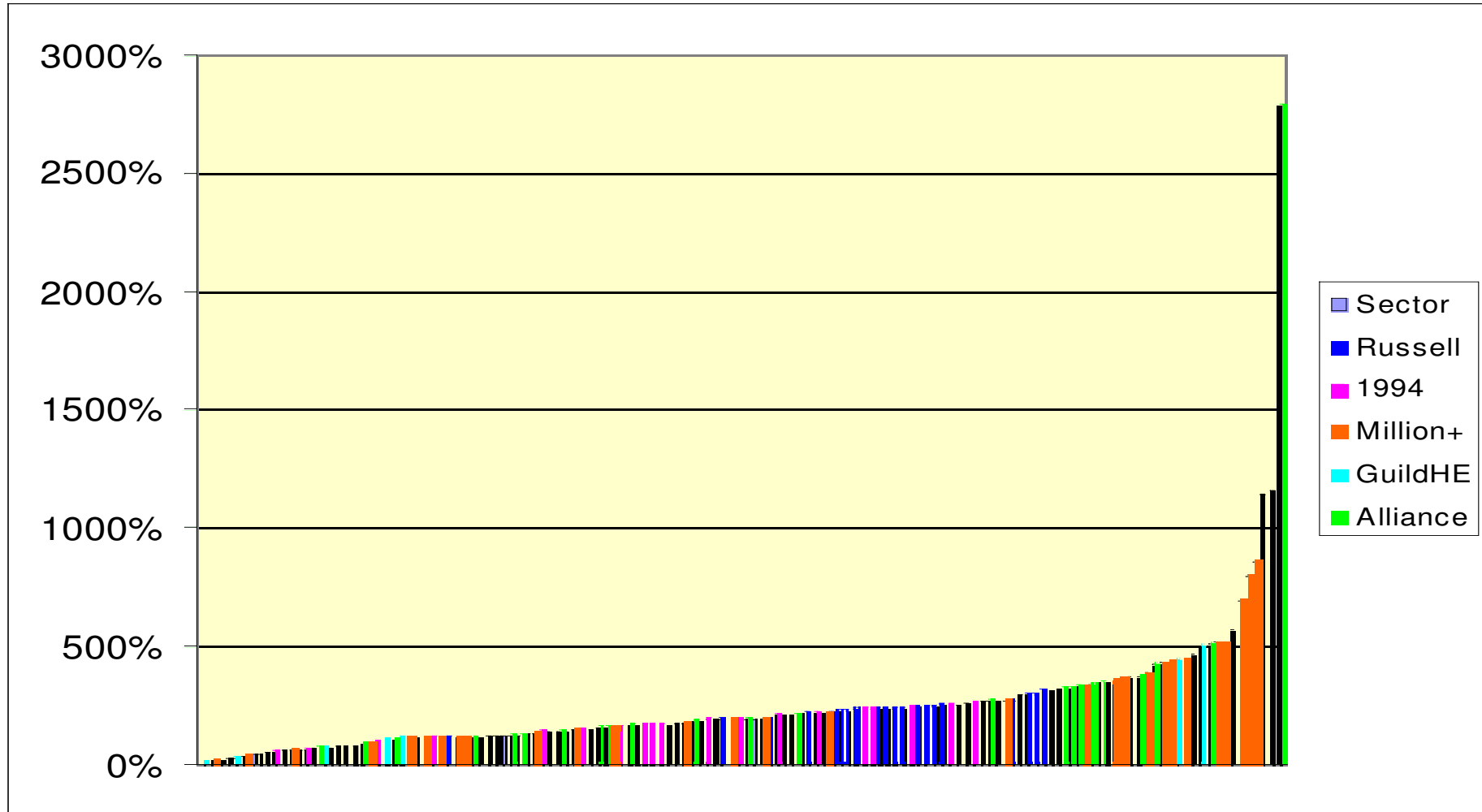
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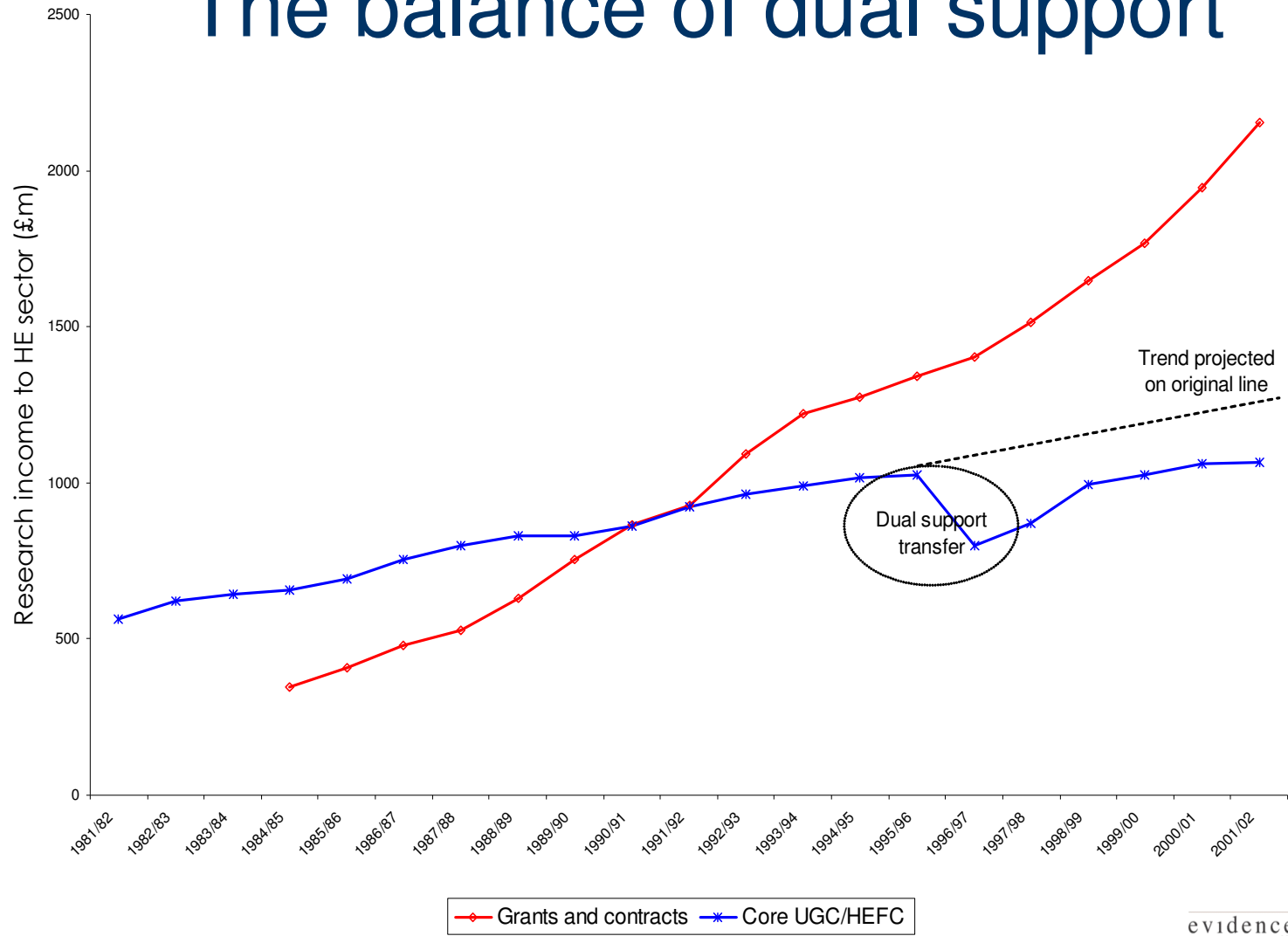
## Funding of research through the dual support system as a percentage of total income, 2008/09, by interest groups



## Research grants and contracts as a percentage of funding council research grants, 2008/09



# The balance of dual support



# Life after REF

## QR winners

- Decline in dual support
- The mirage of Full Economic Costing
- Narrowing of mission
- Dominance of medicine and science
- Partnership aversion
- Gearing reduction

## The rest

- Mode 2 opportunities
- Creative and service economies
- “Liberal” curriculum
- “Translational research”
- “The science of performance”
- “University-like businesses”



## 5. “World-classness”

- *politicians and institutional leaders (the latter should know better) are obsessed with a poorly designed concept of comparative “world classness” when they ought to be talking about geographically specific “engagement.”*



# International league tables: what doesn't count

- Teaching quality
- Social mobility
- Services to business and the community
- Rural interests
- Other public services
- Collaboration
- The public interest





# International league tables: what counts

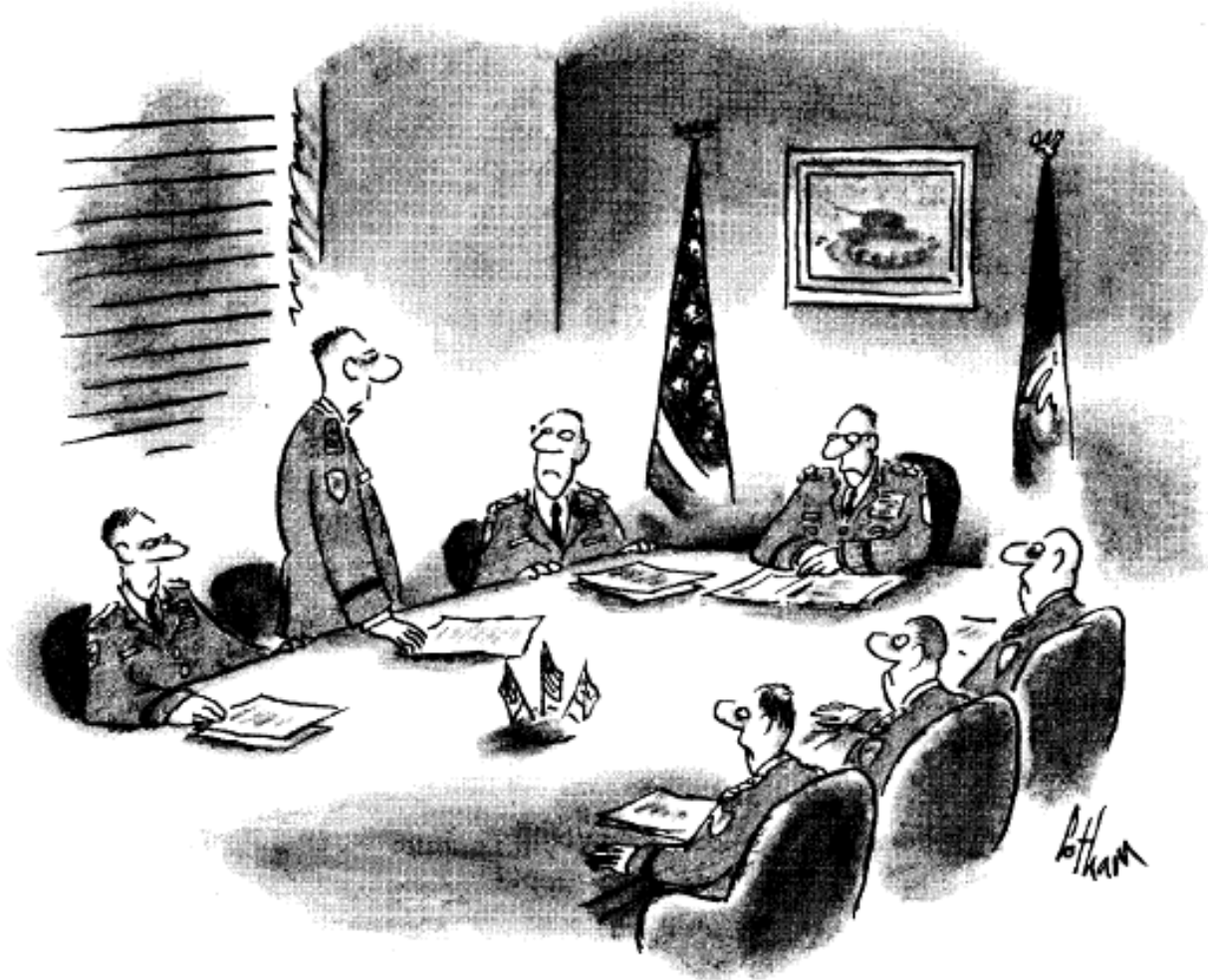
- Research
- Media interest
- Graduate destinations
- Infrastructure
- International “executive” recruitment



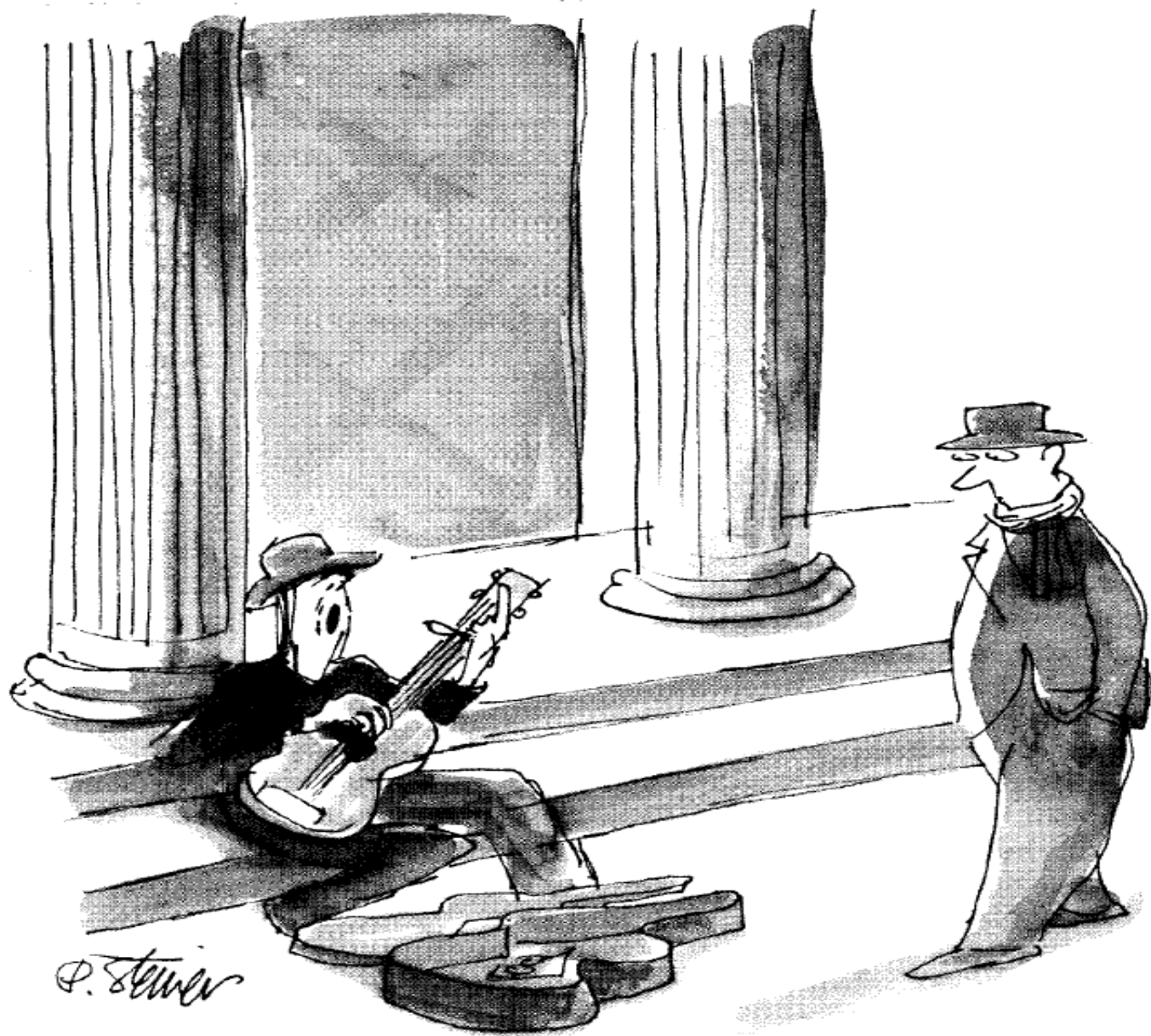
## 6. The “public/private divide”

- *how the private sector can be used for public purposes.*
- *The “university-like business”*





*"I've decided to pursue a military career in the private sector."*



*"This bank is your bank, this bank is my bank..."*

# “University-like businesses”

“Anyone who has ever run a university, a film studio, or an open source software project will tell you that getting the most out of people seldom means managing them more, and usually means managing them less” (60).

“Whole Foods approach to management twines democracy with discipline, trust with accountability and community with fierce internal competition” (72).

“[W.L.] Gore wins big by not betting big, but betting often and staying at the table long enough to collect its winnings” (95).

“Like an elite engineering school, Google’s management model is built around small work units, lots of experimentation, vigorous peer feedback, and a mission to improve the world (107).” “As is true in academic life or on the Web, control at Googled is more peer-to-peer than manager to minion (111).”

“Torvalds [Linux] understands that in a community of peers, people bow to competence, commitment, and foresight, rather than power” (207). “Like professors vying to get published in prestigious journals, coders hanker for the peer recognition that comes from making a visible contribution....The lesson: a successful opt-in system is one that allows contributors to take their ‘psychic income’ in a variety of currencies” (209).

Gary Hamel, *The Future of Management*, Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2007.

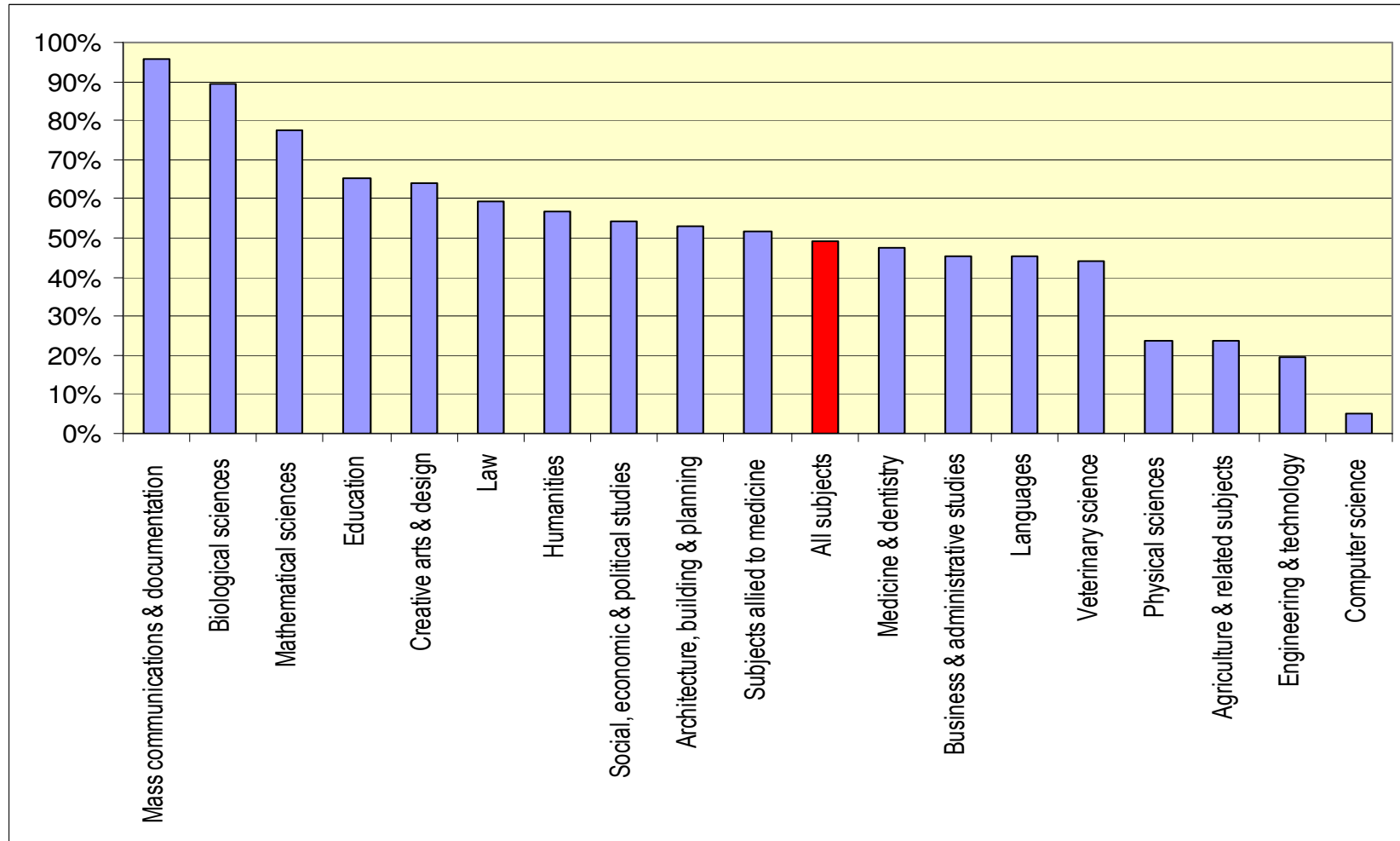


## 7. “Informed” choice

- *who is really running the show?*



# Percentage change in enrolments by subject area, 1999/2000-2008/09



# Percentage of full-time first degree students in each subject area, 1994/95-2008/09

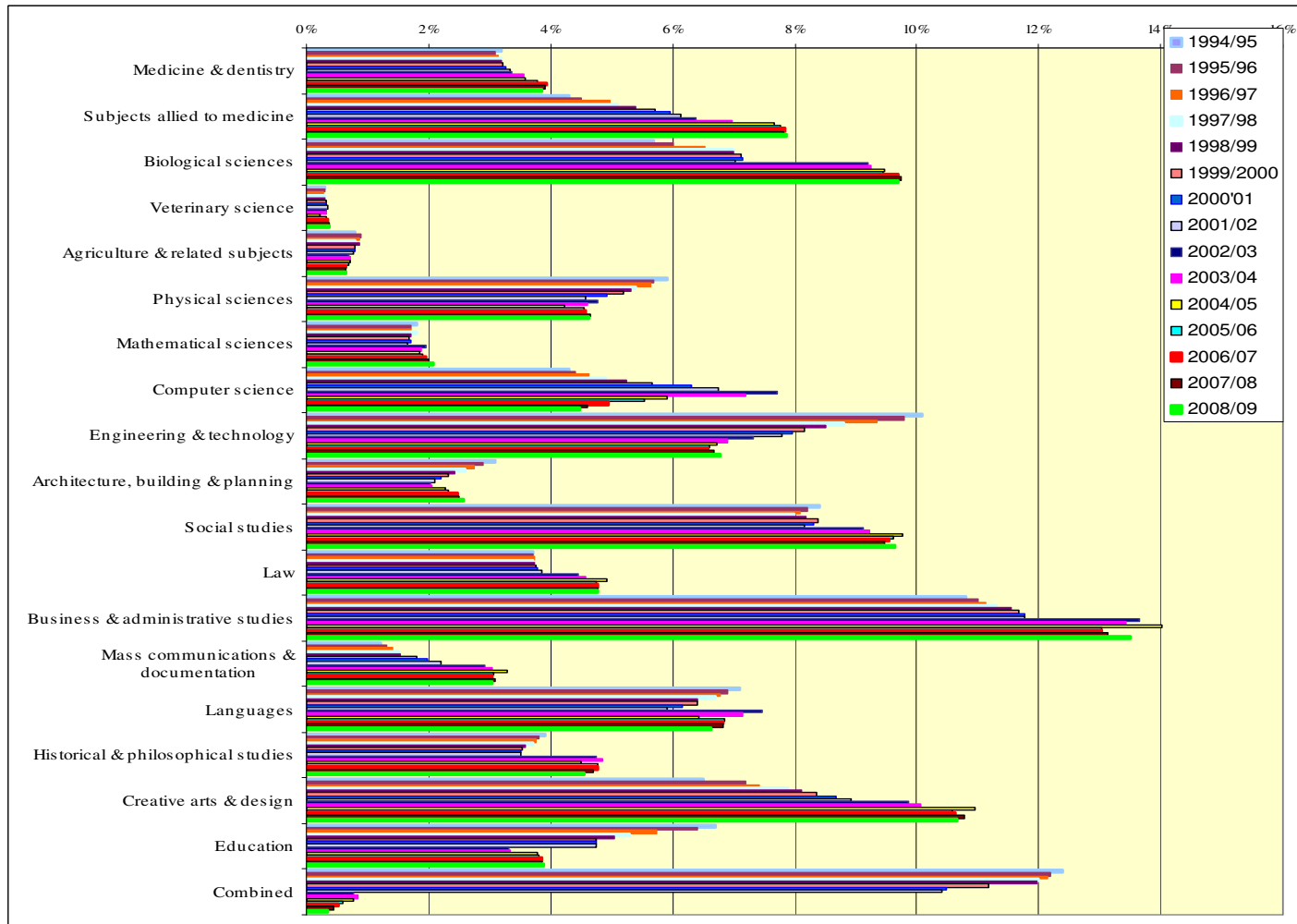
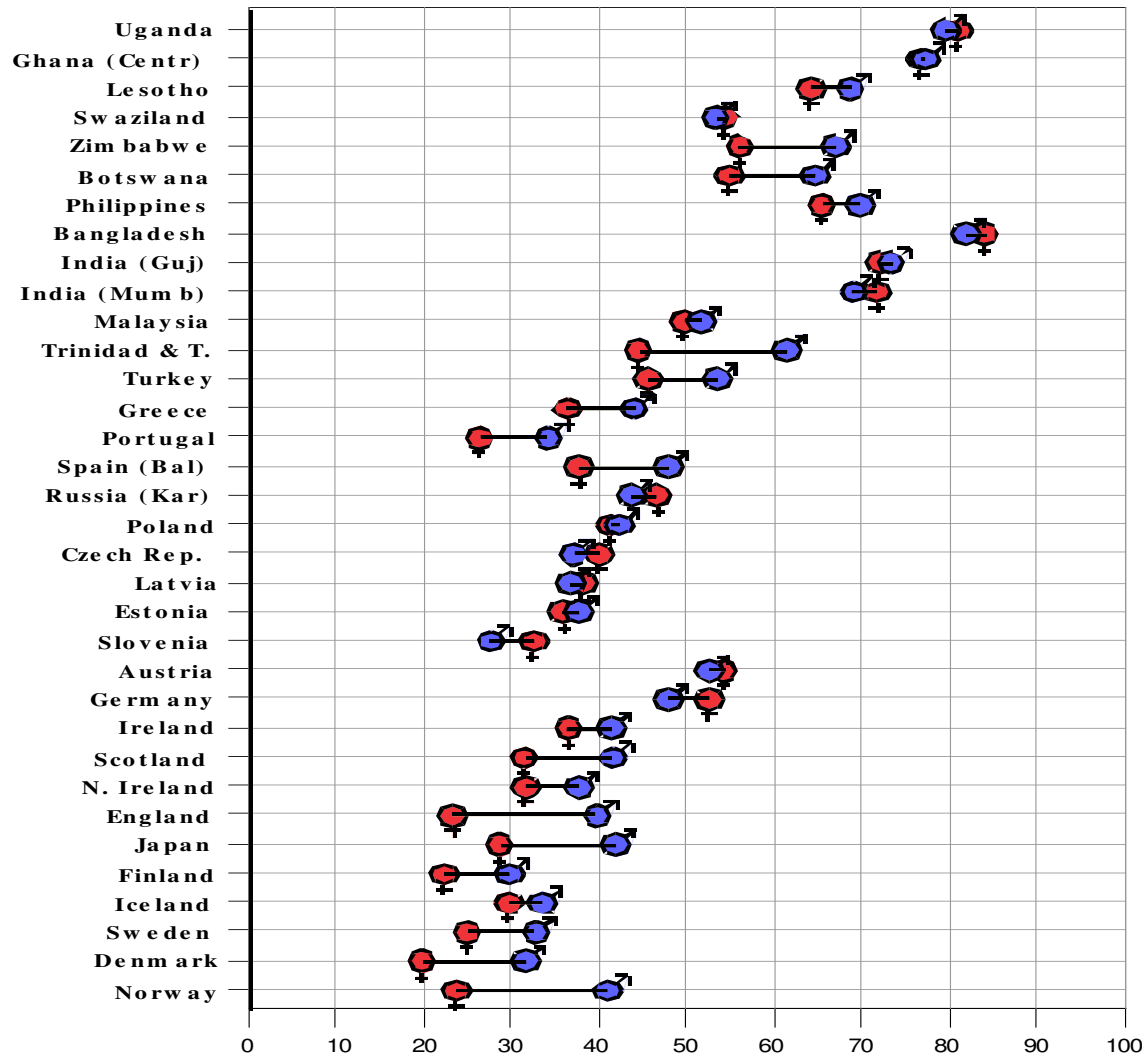




Fig 1: Data from the ROSE study showing students' responses to the question 'I like school science better than most other school subjects'. Percentage answering Agree plus Strongly agree. Male and female symbols.



Science Education  
in Europe: critical  
reflections

The Nuffield  
Foundation  
January 2008



# Frand, “the information age mind-set” (2000)

- Computers are not technology
- Internet better than TV
- Reality no longer real
- Doing rather than knowing
- Nintendo over Logic
- Multitasking way of life
- Typing rather than handwriting
- Staying connected
- Zero tolerance for delays
- Consumer/Creator blurring

*Educause Review* 35:5, 14-24

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## 8. Reputation and quality

- *“you won’t necessarily learn more if you go to a posh place”*

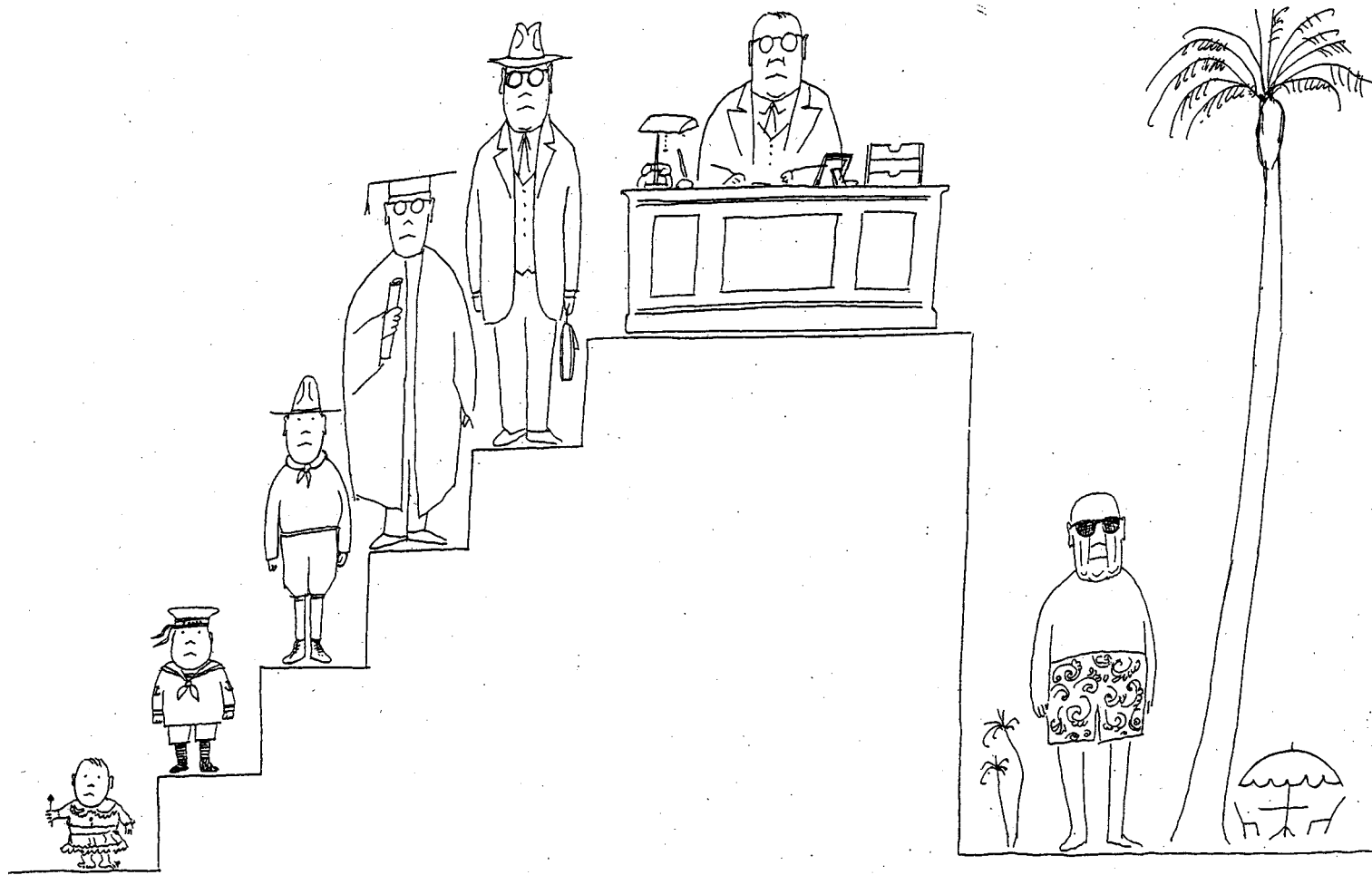
Social and Organisational Mediation of University Learning (SOMUL)  
(2005) *Working Paper 2*. SOMUL: York (December).



# Truth to power and truth to ourselves

1. University “performance”
2. Access
3. The HE “sector”
4. Research “selectivity”
5. “World-classness”
6. Public/private
7. “Informed” choice
8. Reputation and Quality





# SRHE 1965-2015



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