Warning

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

The Federation of Australian University Staff Associations has issued a warning about the University of Cape Town, South Africa. It is aimed at those who would be willing to seek employment in that University if they believed it was as liberal as its advertisements suggest and that they could join in the struggle for change in South Africa.

The warning results from the Federation's enquiry into the University's actions towards an Australian academic, Dr. John Howes. In 1978 the Council of the University of Cape Town declined to confirm Dr. Howes' professorial appointment, in spite of a unanimous recommendation from the official committee of review.

The Federation warns that *"the University of Cape Town's behaviour towards Professor Howes has been incompatible with any claim it may make to be a liberal institution."*

Noting that Cape Town's advertisements suggest that it is liberal, and that the Council had held it against Professor Howes that he had been, as their Chairman put it, *"criticizing people of importance and standing in the University"*, the Federation says:

> The Council cannot deny that Professor Howes' charges are well-founded. The crucial test of a liberal institution is openness to well-founded criticism, even of *"people of importance and standing"*, and Cape Town in this case has failed that test.

A copy of the Federation's detailed statement is available to those interested, along with a letter by Professor Howes to The Cape Times (28/8/78), of which nothing has been shown to be false by any of the letters the Federation has received from the Chairman of the Council, and from the past Principal, of the University.

Authorised by: Mr. L. B. Wallis
General Secretary
Federation of Australian University Staff Associations
33 Bank Street, SOUTH MELBOURNE. VIC. 3205

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

LIST OF CENSURED UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATIONS

According to information supplied by the Canadian Association of University Teachers the following university administrations are under CAUT censure:

President and Boards of Regents, Memorial University of Newfoundland (1979).

Board of Governors, University of Calgary (1979).

The third stage of censure was placed on these universities in May 1980. Under this stage of censure, the CAUT recommends that members of faculty associations not accept appointments at the censured universities.

Requests for information about the events which led to censure should be sent to:

The Executive Secretary
Canadian Association of University Teachers
75 Albert Street, Suite 1001
Ottawa, Canada, K1P 5E7

UNIVERSITY CENTRES FOR POLICY RESEARCH

Glenn Withers
Associate Professor in Economics
Macquarie University
(currently Principal Economic Adviser,
Bureau of Labour Market Research)

The Australian Background

One of the most interesting organisational developments in recent years has been the emergence of university 'centres', 'institutes' and 'units'. While difficult to define precisely their basic distinction is the pursuit of particular research interests outside the organisational boundaries of the traditional departments or disciplines. There are, of course, various service and teaching entities with such titles, but the major growth is of research centres.

And growth there has been. On the basis of a survey of all Australian universities that the present writer conducted in 1979, the half a dozen centres of this type identifiable in 1964 had blossomed into 95 centres by 1979 (Table 1). Casual observation suggests that more are on the way.

TABLE 1.
University Research Centres in Australia

Period Established	Number of Centres
Pre 1960	4
1960-64	2
1965-69	10
1970-74	31
1975-79	58
TOTAL:	95

Source: Direct survey of University registrars. Complete response obtained except for Melbourne University where source is **University Handbook**.

Of the 95 centres, 30 were in the fields of scientific or medical research, 13 were devoted to regional or area study, 10 to humanities or private business policy and 42 were concerned with public policy issues. By June 1981 this latter total has risen to 54. The classification of what constitutes a policy research centre is, of course, arbitrary at the boundaries. However a reasonably indicative list of Australian policy research centres as at June 1981 is given in Table 2. This list reflects the writer's judgement as to the nature of policy research. Since it is these policy research centres that have dominated recent growth in this form of organisation and since such policy centres offer some significant risks for universities, this paper is focussed on them.

TABLE 2
Policy Research Centres in Australia Universities, June 1981.*

The University of Adelaide
Road Accident Research Unit
Aboriginal Research Centre
Centre for Environmental Studies
Waite Agricultural Research Institute

The Australian National University
Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies
Centre for Continuing Education
Development Studies Centre
Centre for Research on Federal Financial Relations
Urban Research Unit
Centre for Economic Policy Research
Australia-Japan Research Centre

Deakin University
Institute for Studies in Education

Flinders University of South Australia
Educational Research Unit
National Institute of Labour Studies
The Centre for Applied Social and Survey Research
Institute for Energy Studies
Centre for Development Studies

Griffith University
Institute of Applied Social Research
Science Policy Research Centre
Centre for the Study of Australian-Asian Relations

James Cook University
Centre for Disaster Studies

La Trobe University
Institute of Immigration and Ethnic Studies
Human Resource Centre

Macquarie University
Centre for Environmental Studies
Centre for Money, Banking and Finance
Centre for Research in Education and Work

Melbourne University
Institute of Applied Economics and Social Research
Centre for Environmental Studies
Centre for the Study of Higher Education

Monash University
Aboriginal Research Centre
Higher Education Advisory and Research Unit
Centre for Migrant Studies
Centre of Policy Studies
Centre for Human Bioethics

Murdoch University
Institute for Environmental Science
Institute for Social Programme Evaluation

Newcastle University
Institute of Industrial Economics
Institute of Coal Research

*Excludes centres predominantly devoted to pure scientific and medical research, humanities, regional or area studies wholly outside Australia, and private business policy. Allocation was primarily guided by the centre title, though secondary information on programmes was also used when provided or available.

The University of New England
The Institute for Higher Education
Australian Rural Adjustment Unit

The University of New South Wales
Centre for Applied Economic Research
Energy Research, Development and Information Centre
Social Welfare Research Centre
Tertiary Education Research Centre
Industrial Relations Research Centre

University of Queensland
Australian Studies Centre
Schonell Educational Research Centre
Tertiary Education Institute

The University of Sydney
Planning Research Centre
Energy Research Centre

The University of Tasmania
Higher Education Research and Advisory Centre
Centre for Environmental Studies
Centre for Regional Economic Analysis

The University of Western Australia
Research Unit in University Education
Child Study Centre
National Centre for Research on Rural Education

The University of Wollongong
Centre of Multicultural Studies

The method of investigation chosen is to review experience with a non-random sample of 12 overseas public policy research centres. This review will form a basis for lessons that might be applied to this phenomenon as it now emerges in Australia. It seems to the author that this form of university organisation has emerged suddenly without adequate general consideration being given to the problems and principles governing such arrangements.

Recent policy decisions give extra import to such a review. The Prime Minister's policy speech prior to the October 1980 election committed the government to new support of 'Centres of Excellence' in Australian universities, a policy endorsed in February 1981 by the Tertiary Education Commission in its *Report for the 1982-84 Triennium*. In May 1981 the government announced the appointment of a committee of four headed by Mr S. B. Myer, Chairman of Myer Emporium, to make recommendations about the establishment of Centres of Excellence in universities. An amount of $1 million is allocated for spending in 1981 with a total of $15 million between 1981 and 1984. The government has stipulated that normally a centre will be a group of about 10 persons and will be based on universities' existing research, although new programmes will be considered subject to the availability of suitable leadership. Of course, 'Centres of Excellence' is a broader notion than policy centres, but this new policy initiative will clearly influence the growth of policy research centres along with others.

Overseas Developments

In the other major Anglo-American countries there has also been an emergence of renewed interest in special centres for public policy research. Thus in addition to long-standing organisations such as the Brookings and Hoover Institutions there are now a number of university centres devoted to similar research.

Presumably the burgeoning of university interest in such centres is related to such factors as:

- student and (some) faculty demands for more 'relevance' in teaching and research;
- financial pressures on universities and hence a felt-need to demonstrate a clearer and more immediate social return, in order to sustain continued public funding and to tap new sources of revenue;
- the improved analytic and quantitative applicability of some social sciences e.g. the econometric revolution in economics and the extension of economic analysis to a wide range of human behaviour; and
- the increased role of government in social and economic affairs and the associated difficulties experienced in developing effective public policies.

This paper examines the nature of a number of Policy Research Centres in Britain, Canada and the United States. Since the ultimate intention is to acquire lessons for Australia the large-scale privately financed U.S. research institutions are not covered, e.g. Brookings, National Bureau of Economic Research, American Enterprise Institute, Hoover Institution etc. Also the list is selective and illustrative even in the area of smaller research organisations, usually university-associated, in these English-speaking countries. The sample is largely based on economics-oriented centres with which the present writer became familiar during two months overseas field research in 1978. The organisations so embraced nevertheless cover a wide spectrum of size, interests and administration and hence should be a useful indicator for Australian options. Table 3 lists the centres covered and the abbreviations used for them.

Table 3.
Sample of Overseas Centres for Public Policy Research

Britain		
1.	Public Sector Economics Research Centre University of Leicester	(PSERC, Leicester)
2.	Institute of Social and Economic Research University of York	(ISER, York)
3.	Centre for the Study of Public Policy Strathclyde University	(CSPP Strathclyde)
4.	Fraser of Allander Institute Strathclyde University	(FAI Strathclyde)
5.	Department of Social & Economic Research University of Glasgow	(DSER Glasgow)
6.	Centre for Defence Studies University of Aberdeen	(CDS Aberdeen)
Canada		
1.	Institute for Policy Analysis University of Toronto	(IPA Toronto)
2.	Institute for Research of Public Policy University of Montreal	(IRPP Montreal)
3.	Centre for Public Sector Studies University of Victoria	(CPSS Victoria)
United States		
1.	Harvard Institute for Economic Research Harvard University	(HIER Harvard)
2.	Institution for Social & Policy Studies Yale University	(ISPS Yale)
3.	Institute of Policy Sciences & Public Affairs Duke University	(IPSPA Duke)
4.	Centre for the Study of the American Political Economy Cornell University	(CSAPE Cornell)

Staffing

The largest full-time research centre staffs are at Glasgow and York Universities with 25 and 21 Fellows, respectively, and the largest total staff affiliation is at Yale with 127 Associates. The association of teaching staff with the centres is the most common basis for staffing. This is accomplished by 'buying' teaching time or by offering improved support facilities, the opportunity for interaction with like-minded researchers, and the challenge of interesting research topics.

There is a feeling (e.g. DSER Glasgow) that a core of permanent full-time research staff forms a basis for originating and continuing research for which short-term personnel can be recruited as suited to the particular projects. The danger here is with the morale of those short-term staff and the difficulty of recruiting good people for short-term jobs. When a mixed strategy of full-time research staff and teaching associates is used, the latter can resent the former for their better publication prospects. Most centres encourage visitors, especially those from elsewhere on sabbatical leave requiring little or no supplementation. In turn centres free of teaching responsibilities are a congenial environment for many academics on leave. The practice particularly encourages the interchange of ideas.

Disciplines

While many of the centres restrict their activities to economics, some seek to attract other social scientists and, in several cases, researchers from non social-science disciplines.

Where staff derive from a number of disciplines the opportunity for inter-disciplinary work arises. But only in the cases of ISPS Yale, IRPP Montreal and IPSPA Duke is there any real belief that genuine inter-disciplinary work does eventuate. Elsewhere the work is multi-disciplinary i.e. individuals may approach a common topic from their different disciplinary perspectives but rarely is their own work greatly affected by their own studies in other disciplines or by colleagues from other disciplines. In cases such as ISER York, IPA Toronto and DSER Glasgow earlier endeavours to foster inter-disciplinary research have been abandoned.

Team Research

There is a considerable difference of opinion and practice over the use of team research methods rather than traditional individual academic research. By and large, the U.S. organisations produce individually attributable research results even where these together may relate to a particular project or topic. In the U.K. and Canada there is a mixture of individual and team research aproaches. CSPP Strathclyde, for instance, feels that team research in applied social science is an efficient way of obtaining outside research contracts and producing research results under tight deadlines. The difficulty, however, is that academic promotion may depend on identifiable individual publications. The compromise technique is therefore to focus researchers on a particular project or theme but have them produce separate contributions. The problem would lessen if more team research employment options were to emerge, and individual abilities can still be defined to some extent by project associations and through interviews and references.

It should be noted that team research need not be inter-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary, and that inter-disciplinary research need not be team based. The latter point is illustrated by individuals who themselves use the approach of having inter-disciplinary seminars devoted to monitoring the ongoing research of particular individuals within a discipline and providing comment and suggestions from a range of disciplinary perspectives.

Teaching

Where centre staff are part-time or associated there is usually a continuing teaching obligation in a regular university department. Such association is the normal pattern and it is rare for public policy research centres also to become closely involved in operating degree or diploma programmes of their own.

Where centre staff are full-time the usual practice is *ad hoc* teaching, the conduct of special seminars and conferences by the Centres, and supervision of graduate research (but not conduct of coursework programmes).

There is some argument about the importance of teaching involvement for basically full-time research staff. While some *ad hoc* teaching is seen as a valuable way of conveying the general research experience and particular findings and techniques and abilities of the researcher, extensive teaching is sometimes seen as tying up valuable time without much benefit to the researcher. The researcher, it is argued, can keep up with a subject by reading.

Against this is the argument that occasional teaching even of basic courses enforces a wider perspective and valuable feed-back and challenges what could otherwise become a very narrow and limited view of only small parts of a subject. Teaching is also of value for enhancing career prospects in subsequent applications for regular departmental appointments.

The comment has also been ventured that 'teaching keeps you human', but clearly this depends upon the nature of the students and the nature of contacts made during research. The point probably has some substance in relation to pure or theoretical research but its import is lessened for applied public policy research.

At Yale ISPS, all staff are also appointed in teaching departments. It is felt that this ensures maintenance of minimum academic standards of appointment. The perceived danger is that, especially for team research, it may be convenient to hire some less qualified staff to complete a team or to conduct the less attractive elements of the research. The key question with this sort of arrangement is the weight teaching departments will give to the requirements of the centre when making appointments.

Funding

Most centres receive external (non-university) funding in varying degrees. Often overheads are provided by the university with all or most operating costs (especially salaries) coming from outside funds.

In the case of Yale ISPS these outside funds are restricted to general grants and contracts, and project grants are not accepted. For several organisations (IPA Toronto, CSAPE Cornell) almost all funding is external. ISPP Montreal is unique in having an endowment as well as current income from contracts and grants. (At the other extreme, in Australia, the Research School of Social Sciences has a large fully university-funded tenured research staff — though research need not be policy related, so this organisation differs from the others discussed here.)

The sources of external funding range from government research grant bodies (SSRC, ARGC, Canada Council, NSF etc.) through private foundations (Ford, Rockefeller, Nuffield, Fraser of Allender etc.) to private companies and government departments. The latter categories more frequently commission specific research projects rather than providing ongoing or general grants.

Reliance upon external funding provides the opportunity to expand research beyond what would be possible from general university funding and, it is claimed, in the process also provides valuable constraints and information for research: deadlines can be imposed; a need for clear and relevant presentation of research results is made evident; access to data and information is made possible and feedback on research results is facilitated.

Concern is also expressed in some quarters however at the way in which external funding and indeed, too close a contact with the rest of the world, can bias and compromise research objectivity and academic integrity. This can mean: that the need to raise external funds restricts the range of topics to be pursued to those for which funds are available; that research of these topics may be superficial because of deadlines and the need to be intelligible to laymen; and that research may be biased towards producing results pleasing to the sponsors to guarantee continued access to information, to maintain friendly personal relationships and to ensure continued funding.

No doubt, such dangers do exist, but they can be over-estimated. Superficial and biased work can readily be exposed as such in the professional literature (the 'market-place of ideas') to the detriment of the reputation and hence the future appointments and funding of the researchers involved. Apart from constraints, moreover, there is the internal motivation of professional ethics and standards, which can be relied upon to direct most research in universities. Indeed for many this is the major justification for applied public policy research within universities; such research by academics of integrity is a major constraint working for good and honest public decision-making. The issues so examined are often of great social importance and benefit greatly from having an independent and informed analytical examination. The key question is whether external funding enhances or compromises that function. Such research is also seen to feed back into moulding and structuring more fundamental and 'pure' research, which is really only removed by degrees from the 'real world'. Certainly the history of science and ideas shows the close interaction.

The cause of independent research can nevertheless be enhanced by regulation of the conditions governing acceptance of external funds. In particular, it is common to almost all the research centres surveyed here that no grant will be accepted if it conveys rights of censorship or suppression of results (as opposed to the rights of first receipt or of comment and rebuttal) or if it includes secrecy clauses beyond the protection of personal privacy and of business confidentiality. (The IPA Toronto accepts a 'one year hoist' in contracts where if a contractor fails to publish a report within a year of receipt, publication rights revert to the Institute without limitation.)

Most of the universities also impose some restruction on the remuneration that members of staff, including research centre personnel, may earn over their basic salaries. If enforceable, this limits the incentive to trade-off research interest for monetary return. There are, however, almost as many rules governing supplementary earnings as there are universities, and enforceability is admitted to be a real problem, though proven failure to report or comply can be a ground for dismissal. The governing rules vary in terms of differing percentages of individual's base salary, differing percentages of a nominated base salary, differing absolute amounts and various permitted proportions of time. Special permission may be sought for amounts exceeding these limits. Finally there is the general principle which underlies such rules of thumb, which is that outside earnings/activities may be pursued only to the extent that they do not interfere with university responsibilities.

In most cases contracts and grants arranged through policy research centres do not carry any stipend for researchers beyond base wages and salaries. But there are other perquisites, such as expenses for travel and accommodation and for research support and assistance. There is also a fine line between centre sponsored research and private consultancies, since some approaches can be converted to individual consultancies and a centre position can be used to solicit consultancies. But here, as elsewhere in universities, individual integrity (which implies particular care in the crucial senior appointments) must be relied upon along with enforcement of earnings regulations to limit abuse. At the same time liberality in permitted earnings levels does permit private consulting to be brought under control rather than hidden. A compromise is for excess earnings to go into university research funds (perhaps through a formal 'Unisearch' organisation) to be available to the 'contributor' for research purposes. Needless to say, this latter approach also typically carries significant taxation advantages. It is also to the university's benefit to enforce earnings regulations as most research contracts, if organised through the university, would include a substantial contribution to university overheads.

A remaining problem with external funding is its uncertainty. It is often 'discretionary money' for the grantor and so may quickly dry up during times of financial stringency. A mix of university and grant funded appointments thus at least guarantees the continued operation of the centre's core staff. The negotiation of extended-period grants e.g. five year programmes, is also important here from the viewpoint of guaranteeing non-permanent staff some minimum tenure; and a mix of sponsors and research programmes is a further guarantee of some organisational stability.

Advisory Groups

Most centres pay relatively little attention to formal internal or external advisory groups, where they exist. They are certainly not emphasised as vital forces in centre activity — though external groups were occasionally said to be useful sources for access to external funding and general goodwill from business and government, as well as sometimes providing some incentive to re-think research directions and interests.

Formally, internal advisory groups were of two sorts: those representing participating teaching departments and those representing centre staff. But these internal advisory groups seemed to play little real role, the major emphasis instead being on the importance of having an entrepreneurial director who, while academically sound and respectable, had the social presence and initiative to tap funds, to promote the work of the centre and to recruit and inspire enthusiasm in good research staff.

The question of internal advisory groups also carries over to status within a university. DESR Glasgow has regular departmental status and hence equal status in bargaining for resources, along with Senate membership. Such status also facilitates teaching involvement and can attract staff by offering a regular university appointment. On the other hand it can create friction and resentment with other departments and makes association of other teaching staff more difficult. Separate 'Institute' or 'Centre' status, while financially more precarious, does in a sense permit an 'institutional overlay' across or within existing institutional arrangements, making joint appointments and affiliations easier.

Research Topics and Strategy

As is seen from the illustrative research areas and topics in Table 3, the focus of research varies widely across policy research centres.

Some centres are established and funded for a very narrow and clearly defined research objective e.g. FAI Strathclyde's function of econometric model-building for the Scottish economy.

Others cover the whole gamut of social and political analysis (ISPS Yale) or of economic analysis (HIER Harvard). In between are programme centres such as CDS Aberdeen on national security issues and PSER Leicester on public sector economics. And there are also centres where interests are not fixed but change over time in response to personnel and funding changes e.g. ISER York, DSER Glasgow.

The process of **internal** initiation of areas and topics seems to follow one of two models: centralised or decentralised. In the former, particular individuals (usually the Director perhaps with some close associates) define areas of interest and set about finding funds and recruiting personnel for specific projects. In the decentralised case, suggestions and proposals are put forward by individual staff members who often are involved also in arranging

funding for that work, albeit under the centre's auspices and/or with the centre's advice and support. Of course, both processes can be found at various times in the one organisation.

The other source of initiative is **external**. Here particular organisations approach a research centre to elicit interest in researching a topic or field of concern to the organisation. There is the danger previously mentioned of appearing to be willing to respond to any topic for which funding is available. None of the organisations surveyed here seems guilty of that sin. Rather their funded areas of interest are well-defined and restricted in terms of the basic competencies and inclinations of the staff.

Whether a centre should have an overall schema of emerging problems suitable for it to research or simply select on a more *ad hoc* basis from the myriad of issues available is a moot point. The most explicit in pursuing a 'grand plan' is the IRPP Montreal which focuses on emerging issues in Canada which will pose real policy problems and are not yet adequately researched elsewhere and which have important Federal-provincial or public sector-private sector implications. Researchers are hired on a decentralized basis for short periods to research particular topics within this schema. At the other extreme most Yale ISPS staff select their own research topics on their own criteria and arrange their own funding.

Location

The location of the research centres surveyed ranges from isolated provincial cities (Aberdeen, York, Victoria B.C.) to major international metropolises (Toronto, Montreal). Interestingly, none are located in centres of national government, though some are in regional capitals.

This raises the issue in public policy research of proximity to policy makers. It can be argued that such centres benefit most from being in major government cities so that policy-making can be better observed and contacts with policy makers can be better maintained.

But location at the periphery also has decided advantages. In particular there may be some merit in 'arm's length' relationships if there is danger of subornment as discussed above. More clearly there is also the advantage of reducing the distractions of day to day minor administrative and consultative involvement in public affairs, thus permitting more time for uninterrupted reflection and research. For this to work however it seems there must also be a sufficiently generous travel budget to allow easy and frequent official contact, without causing undue strain on the researcher and his/her family.

Political Balance

Research organisations may come to represent particular ideologies or political viewpoints. For instance, IESR York is identified with a generally 'liberal' brand of economics and CSAPE Cornell is concerned to promote competitive market/free enterprise economic and social processes. Such political identification is also the case with larger private research organisations such as Brookings and the American Enterprise Institute.

Of course, 'balanced' appointments and choice of research areas and topics may guard against dominance by particular partisans, but there are the questions of whether research institutes are different from other academic departments in this respect and whether this is really a problem. As to the former, while the need to cover a range of subjects restricts teaching appointments somewhat, particular ideologies clearly can and do dominate regular teaching departments too — from Chicago Economics to U. Mass-Amherst Economics in the U.S., or from Monash Economics to Sydney Economics in Australia. Further one may argue that clients for research are likely to be more informed and discerning than clients of teaching. In research the prejudices will often be well known and any errors of analysis thereby induced will be open to further exposure (if not defeat) by professional criticism. Accordingly political balance, short of extremism, should not be a real concern in the operation of public policy research centres.

Conclusion

The recent growth of centres of policy research in Australian universities is a significant but little-remarked development. In part this is because each centre is usually the result of an individual initiative within a university, and not any central policy or plan. But the results of these initiatives add up to a new direction for universities.

This author's view is that the change is basically a healthy one. The unquestioning days of plentiful funds for universities are past, and there is an increasing requirement to justify the significant proportion of national resources diverted to tertiary education and research. Policy centres provide an important vehicle for such justification and in a way that will be evident to political decision-makers.

At the same time it is crucial to ensure that this contribution does not come at the expense of enduring university values. There is a danger in Australia that the little-monitored development of research centres as new entities pays insufficient attention to basic problems and principles in this respect. This article has sought to review some of the major issues in this area, as revealed by overseas experience in similar institutions.

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A HIPPOCRATIC OATH FOR ACADEMICS?

Richard Davis
Department of History
University of Tasmania

> *The President* [of the University of California, Los Angeles] *was a man for whom I conceived, I think justly, a profound aversion. If a lecturer said anything that was too liberal, it was discovered that the lecturer in question did his work badly, and he was dismissed. When there were meetings of the Faculty, the President of the University used to march in as if he were wearing jack-boots, and rule any motion out of order if he did not happen to like it. Everybody trembled at his frown, and I was reminded of a meeting of the Reichstag under Hitler.* (Bertrand Russell, *Autobiography II*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1970, p. *218*.)

The hieratic Hippocratic Oath still persists as a myth in the medical profession. Not all doctors take it on graduation and its implicit promise to supply medical attention regardless of remuneration is openly flouted, especially in America where doctors fear to stop for accidents which might result in costly negligence litigation. Even its updated versions, the 1948 Declaration of Geneva and the 1949 International Code of Medical Ethics, are sometimes ridiculed by doctors. Nevertheless, the ideal, like the American Declaration of Independence and the UN Declaration of Human Rights, at least provides a focus for moral debate in the profession. Academics, though their power over the actions and future prospects of many people is almost as great as that of doctors, have, Sir Eric Ashby points out, 'no such code'.[1] Instead there is a vague belief that some norm of academic behaviour operates miraculously on the initial appointment of a university teacher. His or her training is expected to ensure subsequent adhesion to certain ill-defined criteria.

This unexamined belief deserves scrutiny. Confusion is increased by the widespread employment of phrases such as 'the pursuit of excellence',[2] 'the community of scholars',[3] 'academic freedom',[4] 'extending the frontiers of knowledge', and 'the maintenance of standards', to mask some of the uglier realities of tertiary educational institutions. As Bell and Grant point out, current British education is 'dominated by unexamined words'.[5] This apparently harmless rhetoric has two r.ain dangers: first, it creates an atmosphere of mysticism, inimical to what should be the real function of a university. Second, academic cliches sometimes justify practices diametrically opposed to the original meaning of the rhetoric.

Mysticism negates all work of a university. Consensus for a number of different disciplines is extremely hard to achieve, but a rough common denominator is feasible. Students are not initiated into esoteric mysteries, though the attitude of some betrays such an expectation. Most disciplines demand conclusions based on facts, not prejudices, and the systematic citation of sources.[6] In many of the natural sciences results can be verified by testing; in the humanities this is sometimes impossible. Nevertheless, the principle of argument according to ascertainable and communicable fact is of fairly general application. All academics have completed some training on such a basis. Scholars are presumed to act in their professional capacity according to these principles. Emotion and intuition also play a vital part in their lives: Isaac Newton may have discovered the law of gravity through intuition,[7] but his scholarship enabled him to justify it by an apparently rigorous logic. Academic training is therefore practical and down to earth.

Several current academic cliches originated in this practical training. We need not seek them in a golden age: have they any meaning today? 'The community of scholars' indicates the priority of logical exposition over the status or influence of any disputant. Today the phrase masks the increasing separation of academic 'other ranks' from the professoriate which in a 'no growth' age sometimes rules according to the letter of a law relevant to a period when few qualified staff were available.[8] Again, 'academic freedom' implies the need to protect a scholar whose conclusions impinge on powerful vested interests. Unfortunately, it can be perverted into a rejection of accountability by the ruling faction of a tertiary institution.[9] Phrases like 'extending the frontiers of knowledge', and 'the pursuit of excellence', may have originally referred to the scholar's desire to follow the argument to its logical conclusion. They now imply a rigidity which fails to accept the process by which approximate truth is beaten out by equals in the confrontation of thesis and antithesis. As Milton said in 1644, 'Let her and falsehood grapple; who ever knew truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter.'[10] If, as in the fair-ground, there existed a device to peal when struck with adequate force by an intellectual hammer, then 'frontiers', 'excellence', and 'standards' might be objective. Unfortunately, they have little meaning in a continuing debate whose limits will never be reached. An arbitrary judgement by an academic of 'status' is necessary to support an artificial attribution of temporary excellence. To make such judgements barely tolerable we need clear norms of acceptable behaviour: hence the suggestion for an academic Hippocratic oath.

Such guidelines would be unnecessary could we assume that the ability to sit examinations and write theses correlates positively with personal integrity. To some extent examinations and theses encourage