

Paul as academic

There are three legs to the academic role; indeed, if we were in a different university, we might even refer to it as a tripos. Any good academic must be at least competent in research, in teaching, and in administration – or, as it has become fashionable to call it, management. Great academics are those who are excellent at all three. Paul was, and I had the privilege of working closely with him in all of them.

Steve Smith and other senior Exeter colleagues have spoken of Paul's role in central management at Exeter. But it should not be forgotten that, before being called in to the centre, he had served with great distinction for ten years as head of the Department of Psychology; in the middle of that time, it turned into the School of Psychology, a change of name which signalled much greater financial autonomy, and correspondingly greater responsibilities for its head. I was one of Paul's predecessors as head of department, and his successor as head of school, and of course I was one of his staff while he was head. So I am in the best possible position to say that he served with rare distinction and skill, both in the role of head of department – not quite the complete mug's role of responsibility without power, but going on that way – and that of head of school – exploiting the enhanced freedom it gave him to the great advantage both of our discipline and of the university. Paul was the kind of head who led by being involved – whether it was a question of being active himself as a teacher and researcher, showing that it could be done no matter how busy you were, or of always being there at the department's social events, and always ready to plunge in: almost literally when it came to the five-a-side soccer team (there were many bruised shins in other departments to bear witness to his total and physical commitment), or of being first down a pothole on a caving expedition. Not that he always had to be the centre of attention or the life and soul of the party: one of his most endearing qualities as a friend as well as a leader was his self-effacingness, and at a conventional party you were most likely to find him kneeling on the floor among any children present, making sure that they too were having a good time, or up to his elbows in the sink, washing up.

But at the end of the day, university management is only a means to an end, and the end is the enhancement and dissemination of knowledge. Paul came to Exeter pretty well fresh from a PhD in social psychology, specialising on children's understanding of the geography of their home towns, and he seemed likely to embark on a career in developmental and environmental psychology. But events took another turn. When he arrived, he inherited a number of roles from me, since I was the next most recently arrived colleague, and so we often chatted. And one day I mentioned that I, as a natural scientist with a PhD in rat behaviour, was trying to develop a line of work in the psychology of economic behaviour, and I really needed to work with a social psychologist if I was going to make any headway; and was he interested in collaborating? His immediate enthusiasm started us on a collaboration that continued for nearly 35 years – our last joint paper appeared in 2014 – and set the course for most of his research career, so that when he was awarded a chair at Exeter, he took the title of "Professor of Economic Psychology". He and I worked together on the psychology of money, of giving, and of debt; with other collaborators, notably Alan Lewis at Bath, Dick Hessing and Henk Elffers in the Netherlands, and Ellen Nyhus from Norway, he did equally important work on the psychology of taxpaying, of ethical investment and of saving – often focussing on how children come to understand and acquire these economic behaviours. To all these fields, he brought his skills as a social and developmental psychologist; he was brilliant at taking an idea and turning it into a feasible

and often lightly humorous experiment (and, the next year, into a first year practical class). He also brought a broad social scientific orientation that I, trained as a natural scientist, always envied: for example, from reading ethnography he became a great believer in the “native informant”, so when we were investigating children’s use of money, he recruited Elizabeth, then aged about nine, to talk to her classmates about it, and the information she brought back became the backbone of our thinking. But he brought more than his skills and knowledge to research collaboration: he brought his own personal style. Paul was simply a great person to collaborate with: he would always share your enthusiasms, and if necessary puncture them with humour and good will. Drafts sent to him for comment always came back promptly, with real constructive work done on them. Working with him never felt like a chore; he was always ready to pick up his share of the load when it was his turn, and yours, too, when other work, or just life, was pushing you down. Personally, I believe that my best work was done in collaboration with Paul, thinking especially about our work on money, and debt; and for as long as those topics are researched psychologically, I believe that papers we wrote together will have to be cited.

But Paul was not one of those academics for whom their own research is the be-all and end-all of the task. He gave equal enthusiasm, and creativity, to teaching. For many years, he and I shared an advanced seminar course on economic psychology; and in those distant days before workload models swept away such luxuries, both of us attended almost every session. Teaching with Paul was a revelation, especially in a seminar context. The course was popular, and always full, so for much of each session we would divide the class up into small groups for discussion, and then go round and join the groups in turn. So I would turn up in a group, and everyone would fall silent and wait to be told something; while out of the corner of my eye I would see Paul on the other side of the room, and I’d hear the hubbub and laughter of the group he was with, as he got them all talking – even the shyest – and led them to give voice to ideas they never realised they had. But we did not only share teaching in the seminar room. Although as a social psychologist there was no earthly reason why he should, he volunteered to join the small team that annually took a group of students on an animal behaviour field course to Lundy Island, the start of a long love-affair with the island which he successfully passed down his family. When I asked him why he was willing to come, he said that, well, he understood we looked at social behaviour, and he was a social psychologist, so why not? A field course is a very special social situation, as well as a very special pedagogical one, and a field course on a small island is even more so. Paul was the ideal companion, in every way. “Look at Dr Wobbly”, said my colleague who had created the course, in despair, “running up and down the gullies like a young goat!” Paul could easily have come along just for the ride, or as a statistics expert, as other non-experts had – but no: he volunteered to supervise the projects on deer, which entailed reading up some very unfamiliar literature, and then on the island getting up at 4am, crawling through thickets of rhododendron bushes, checking the patterns of deer droppings – and enthusing some very unwilling psychology students to want to do all those things, too.

Somewhere between teaching and research sits the matter of supervising research students. It’s no accident, I think, that so many of Paul’s former PhD students turned up, at short notice on a grey March day, for his funeral. Paul was an exemplary supervisor: available without being overbearing, supportive but providing necessary correction, treating every research student as a friend and colleague. I shared a number of students with him over the years, and as we both got more involved in university management, often we would have to take turns at seeing them for their weekly supervision meetings. Even if I had not known, I could always tell when they had been talking with

Paul. Some new idea, or some sharpening of an old one, would come out, that with all respect to the students, they would never have reached unaided.

After today's event, I am going on to a conference in Romania, where I will be talking about research work that I have been doing over many years. As I often do, I have put on my first slide pictures of the collaborators who have contributed the ideas I will be summarising. Paul's is the first name to appear. As I positioned his portrait, I still could scarcely believe that I will not be able to send him the file, for his pleasure and his comments; it is still such a reflex with me to think, "I must tell Paul about that." It was a privilege to work with him, in all the branches of the academic trade; and I am sure that I speak for all his collaborators, and indeed all his students and his managerial colleagues, when I say: it was through working with Paul that I did what I have done; indeed, it is in a great part through working with Paul that I became who I am. If only he was still with us so that we could express our thanks.

Stephen Lea

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