

# Wider research is victim of academic consultancy

*From Ms A Ouroussoff.*

Sir, The current debate on the compatibility of consultancy and research in business schools ("Unanswered Ethical Questions", February 28 and "Damned if they do and damned if they don't", March 15) has so far failed to disclose one crucial issue.

The difficulty arising from teacher/researchers who also act as consultants has, as George Bain rightly points out, little to do with diminishing the researchers' capacity for disinterested analysis. The complex issue of objectivity inherent in all types of research, whether pure or applied is a red herring. The problem lies in the selection of

research projects and the ends to which the research is directed. Given that an important criterion for selection and promotion of business school staff is their success as consultants, members of staff will tend to initiate and encourage research projects which help them to achieve that success; in other words, research that will supply unambiguous solutions to practical management problems. There is, therefore, an inbuilt tendency towards narrowing the scope of research to the most suitable means of attaining management goals.

Projects which take a wider view, or those which raise issues that may make manag-

ers uncomfortable or take considerable time for them to absorb are, in this context, superfluous. Yet it is the answers to the more general questions that will help us understand the deep-seated problems which have plagued UK management for more than 50 years and in so doing be of long term benefit to society.

It is difficult to see how, given the criteria for promotion and selection, and schools' dependency on industry for cash, one might revise this tendency. But recognising the limitations inherent in this method of proceeding is not a bad starting point.

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