

Open All The Way

Peter Wilmshurst has given us a shocking account (SGR Newsletter 42) of scientific misconduct in medical research, driven by corporate interests. The problems also apply, although possibly to a lesser extent, to all branches of science and, wider again, to knowledge production.

Many of the obstacles to the generation of reliable knowledge, free of the distortions due to narrow interests, would be absent in a culture of radical openness.¹ Discreet and secret investigations would still occur but they would not even be considered for direct incorporation into the body of public reliable knowledge. While the call for openness in recent decades has become something of a mantra, a major reason for the lack of progress has, I believe, been insufficiently noted. This is that the production of reliable knowledge is a long process. Using a biological image, we may think of conception, gestation, birth, development, maturity, old-age and - ancestorhood.

If this long process is to be in the public interest, and not distorted by sectional interests, it must be funded in ways that require openness. This means, for example, that the costs to institutions (including publishers) and personnel must be funded by public and philanthropic bodies acting in the general interest and not by sectional interests. This implies a significant transfer of costs from the private sponsorship model to a public interest model. The road to reliable knowledge will however be shorter and smoother than the present crooked path.

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Reference

1. Cottey A (2014). Knowledge Production in a Cooperative Economy. *Policy Futures in Education*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 469 - 481.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2014.12.4.4469>

Author's accepted manuscript available at <http://www.uea.ac.uk/~c013/v2/KPICE-v1-5.pdf>

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