

# **Student Governors in HE-**

# **How to lead change when you're not the leader and people don't want change**

**Jim Dickinson @jim\_dickinson**  
**Wonkhe**



# **Student Governors in HE- Partner or pushover? What is the role of the student on the governing body?**

**Jim Dickinson @jim\_dickinson  
Wonkhe**



# **Student Governors in HE- Rubber stamp or lethal weapon: Can Student Governors lead institutional change?**

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# **Student Governors in HE-**

**Rubber stamp or lethal weapon: Can Student Governors lead institutional change in a VUCA world?**

**Jim Dickinson @jim\_\_dickinson**

**Wonkhe**



# **Student Governors in HE-**

**How to stop being on the governing body being  
terrifying and a spectacular waste of everyone's time**

**Jim Dickinson @jim\_\_dickinson**

**Wonkhe**









Opinion

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## May warns universities over high cost of tuition fees

PM's proposal to cut charges for courses including humanities is branded unworkable by critics



▲ The prime minister also hinted at the return of grants to help students from poorer families. Photograph: Chris Ison/PA

Theresa May is to press ahead with attempts to force universities to charge

### most viewed



Salisbury novichok poisonings: police name Russian suspects



**Live** Theresa May: Russia attackers were Russian military intelligence  
Politics live



Elon Musk calls Th... diver 'child rapist' in baseless attack



Ditch the almond n... everything you know sustainable eating wrong



Rachael Bland, hos... podcast You, Me an... C, dies at 40

and Peter

GMT

1,597

months old



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## Tuition fees in Wales 'could end' if Labour win election

12 May 2017



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**BREAKING**



Two Salisbury attack suspects are believed to be Russian military intelligence officers, UK PM Theresa May says

Wales could follow England's lead and abolish tuition fees if Labour wins the

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#### Russian 'agents' named over Novichok attack

The men accused of the Salisbury poisonings are believed to be from Russia's military intelligence service.

6 minutes ago

#### Salisbury poisoning: PM updates MPs

4 September 2018

#### BBC presenter Rachael Bland dies at 40

29 minutes ago

### Features



# Theresa May has made a devastating admission about the failure of Tory tuition fees policy

Tories are launching a review ahead of the second huge shake-up of higher education funding in less than a decade

Facebook Twitter LinkedIn Email Comments

By [Mikey Smith](#) Political Reporter & [Dan Bloom](#) Political Reporter  
08:37, 19 FEB 2018 | UPDATED 10:19, 20 FEB 2018

NEWS



## RECOMMENDED

School places shortage will affect thousands of kids over next five years amid population boom

The little known council scheme that could get parents £150 off school uniform - how to



## Three-quarters of students won't pay off their tuition fees



**Toby Meyjes** Wednesday 5 Jul 2017 12:15 pm



### MUST READ



**Child forced to have abortion after being 'raped in a forest by sex gang'**

She was driven to Sherwood Forest by three men, given cannabis and warned she would be left there if she didn't do what they told her. »





**R** News ▸ Politics ▸ Universities and Colleges

# Scotland risks becoming a 'cash cow' if it tuition fee cap to students from the rest

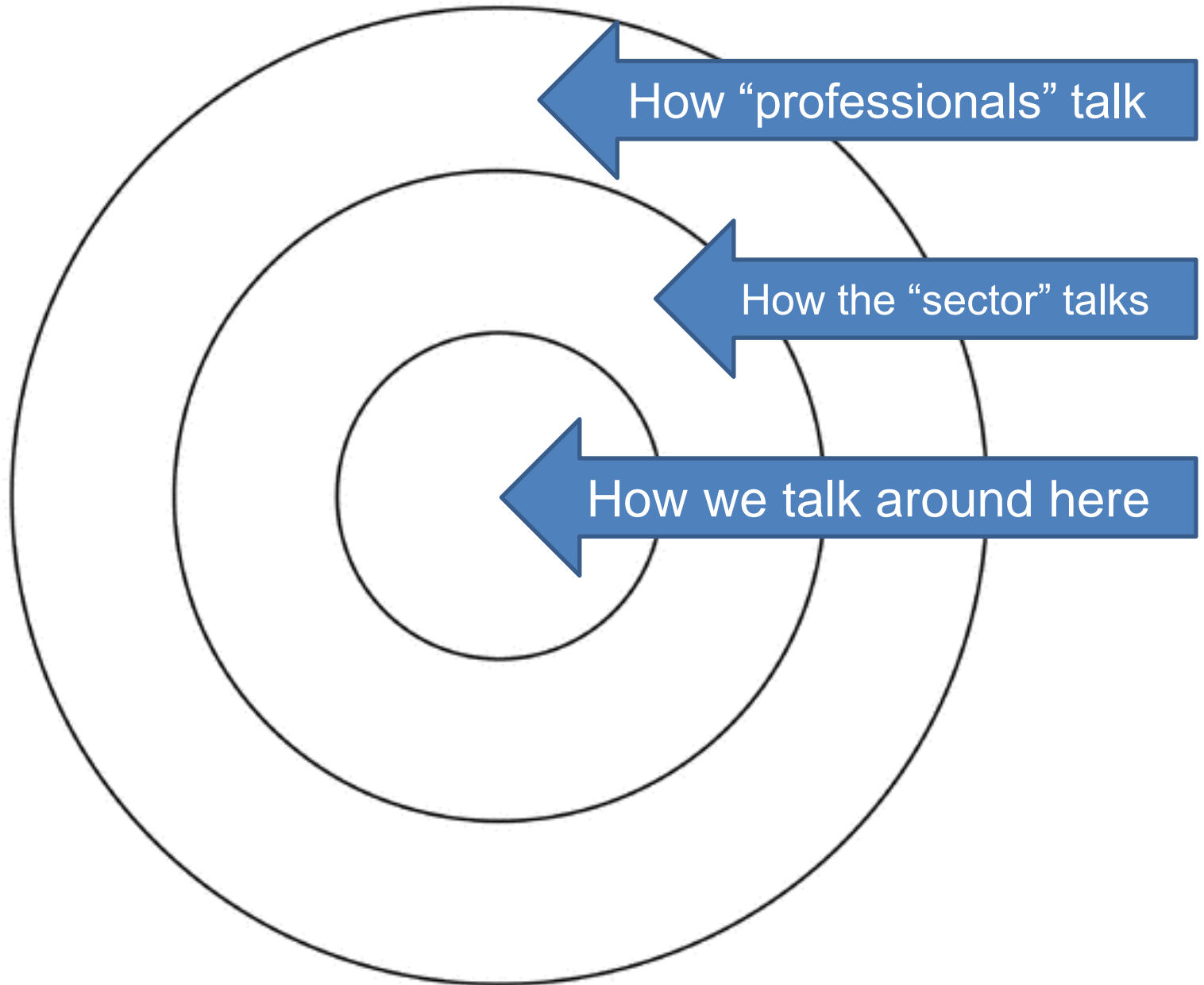
ORGANISATIONS including the NUJ and University and the College Union gave evidence to MSPs questioning plans to scrap the university fees cap.

SHARE     

By **Dailyrecord.Co.Uk**  
12:59, 19 FEB 2013







# Structure Matters

## Scottish universities face penalties if gender inequality is not addressed

The Scottish Government is demanding that universities and colleges place more women on their governing bodies, or face financial penalties.

Francis Rougvie

Wednesday, 10 September, 2014 | 00:00



Education Secretary, Michael Russell, has stated that the governing bodies of higher education institutions should include more women.

He also ordered that more be done to achieve greater gender equality on courses that are dominated by men or women.

Russell addressed these concerns in a letter to Professor Alice Brown, the chair of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), which funds colleges and universities.

He said that these initiatives should be "an immediate priority ahead of the 2015-16 academic year" before adding that he wanted "a renewed focus on reducing gender segregation in participation: too many college and university courses are dominated by either men or women."

Colleges and universities are reported to be positive about addressing these gender imbalances and the likelihood of financial penalties has been played down.

A spokesperson for the Scottish Government said: "Engagement from educational institutions on gender equality at board level has been positive and we would expect this to remain the case going forward.

The spokesperson added: "Theoretically, penalties would be possible should boards not meet our expectations - but only in very extreme circumstances."

A spokesperson for the University of St Andrews told The Journal: "these are complex issues that require real commitment and thought, and do not benefit from

### Related Articles

[Merger proposal to be submitted to Scottish Government](#)

[Stow College launch entrepreneurship course](#)

[Russell "arrogant and dismissive"](#)

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- 1370 [When a University Chooses Reputation Over Academic Integrity](#)
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- 1004 [Cypherpunks, 'Nakamoto' and Anarchy: Why Bitcoin Won't Change the World](#)
- 968 [The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership: Getting the Criticism Right](#)

### The Journal in print



The Journal



989 people like The Journal.

# Other things matter too

- Culture
- What is said (and not said)
- Who says it
- Why they say it (and the role they think they're playing)
- What is “curated”
- How people behave
- What people think good performance looks and sounds like

# In this session

- Examine purposes and meanings of Governance in HE
- Examine some underpinning Governance theory
- Examine the challenges that creates for you
- Examine some behavioural strategies for overcoming the challenges

# From this morning

We're often told that governors need to think over the long term...

- Demand remains high and is still growing – but how pay for it?
- Transfer of costs to parents
- Transfer of costs to graduates
- Increases in “efficiency”
- Reduction in quality
- Never admit it! But tactics on funding and legal risk...



# Higher education policy

- The most important issue in the ballgame for governors is market(s) and money
- Competition for student numbers
- Governance is about governing institutional behaviour
- Competing (via copying) (but by being better at what?)
- Complying (navigation)



# Institutional behaviour matters

- How is the institution run and managed?
- Fee setting (including discounting)
- Market positioning
- Provision choices
- Batten down the hatches?
- Take risks and secure competitive advantage?
- Uniquely you can offer a view on Institutional behaviour from both a strategic (moral/political) viewpoint and a day to day viewpoint (did this really affect us)

# The problem is

- Our VCs have never had to save money on HE
- They might be bad at it
- “We” normally just “resist” but that won’t work
- In this role we need to know if/how they’ll tackle the challenge
- It might fall to you to point out that we can see the emperor’s nakedness



# And now the problem is

- Nobody has done this before
- Higher education is highly “mimetic” and generally conservative
- VUCA requires all sorts of skills and smarts that have not previously been necessary or even desirable
- And everyone’s knackered





“If we want things to stay the same as they are, things  
will have to change”

The Leopard, Giuseppe di Lampedusa

# Change

- Change is in the air
- Students, students' unions and education are all going through rapid change
- Higher education appears to be actually going through change for a change (for a change)
- We ought to be interested in change (but not for its own sake)

# Change Trends

- Revolution in information and communication technology
- Internationalisation and globalisation of higher education
- Wider social and economic trends
- Market based reforms and the drift to consumerism and copayment
- Citizens as consumers v Citizens as coproducers

# Everything's Changing

- Science and technology
- Values
- Demography
- Environment
- Geography
- Social structures

# Everything is getting worse

- Environment degrading
- Morals in disarray
- Family collapsing
- Culture dumbing down
- Politics by media sound bite
- Democracy corrupted
- War always on the horizon
- Globalisation = a gale of disorder



# Daily Mail Islander

Island Newspaper of the Year 4 Pebbles

**The greedy foreign ducks  
who make a mockery of  
our unselfish nature**

A Daily Mail Islander investigation page 4



15-year-old Sarah guilty of horrifying masturbatory act

# DEPRAVED BEYOND



# Everything is getting better

- People living much longer lives
- Democratic cultures spread by media, Internet
- World more interconnected
- Education spreading
- Position of women improving, somewhat
- Technological innovation critical to environment
- Asia: tens of millions lifted from poverty every year

# Change

- **Private** optimism, about our lives, families
- **Public** pessimism about the state of the world
- The two come together in organisations and institutions
- Organisations provide people with a sense of private identity
- But critical to how we cope with the world together

# Responding to change

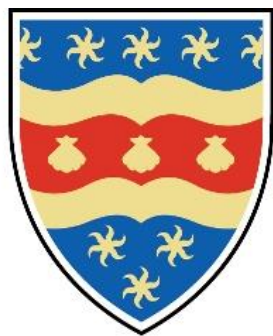
		Confrontation	Retreat
Radical	Reactionary	Anti Globalisation Students, ethnic minorities Left populism	New age Downshifting
		Rural protests Right national populism: Europe	Melancholy Nostalgia

# Responding to change

	Confrontation	Retreat
Radical	Adapt entrepreneurially Create new delivery models Abandon things Very risky Ask lots of questions	As long as what I do doesn't change I don't mind what is going on around me Comfortable (y numb) Support and praise
Reactionary	Get back to basics but with a vengeance, cut costs, streamline Very tough Take charge, slash and burn	Do you remember the old days when things were so much better? Miserable Moan and comfort

# Educational change

- Massification
- Time demands
- The way “learning” is done
- Social organisation
- Technology
- SSR
- Contact hours
- Competition
- Regulation
- Metrics



UNIVERSITY OF  
PLYMOUTH

**PLYMOUTH  
UNIVERSITY**



# Universities as organisations of change

- Adaptive, nimble, agile organisations able to learn fast about environment around them, sense opportunities and mobilise resources to exploit them
- But organisations that just do that would be in perpetual turmoil, constantly reinventing themselves
- So as well as being adaptive, nimble and agile organisations need to have a sense of stability, continuity and purpose, but a sense of stability that does not inhibit ability to adapt
- Universities are a curious mix of the radical and conservative
- What does an optimum mix of stability and flux come from?
- It comes from **challenging conventional wisdom** and asking **tough questions**

# Choices

# **Choices**

**Working out what they are**

**Working out which one to pick**

# What I've been thinking about...

## Warning applicants

- A: Students should be told if their institution is financially failing as the state and its apparatus should act to warn about failure and poor delivery given the financial and opportunity cost of HE
- B: Students should not be told if their institution is financially failing as the state and its apparatus should act to protect the interests of the staff and students at the HEI and maximise the chance of its survival and recovery- Option B

# What I've been thinking about...

## The Academic Appeal

A: The process of judgment, validation, marking is sacred and should never be able to be challenged (lest floodgates of illegitimate chancery)- ANTI

B: The thing that matters most to students is judgment, validation, marks. They are paying for a service and if they think this has been done badly (it probably has) they should be able to appeal. PRO

# What I've been thinking about...

Efforts to diversify the HE intake have always focussed on expansion

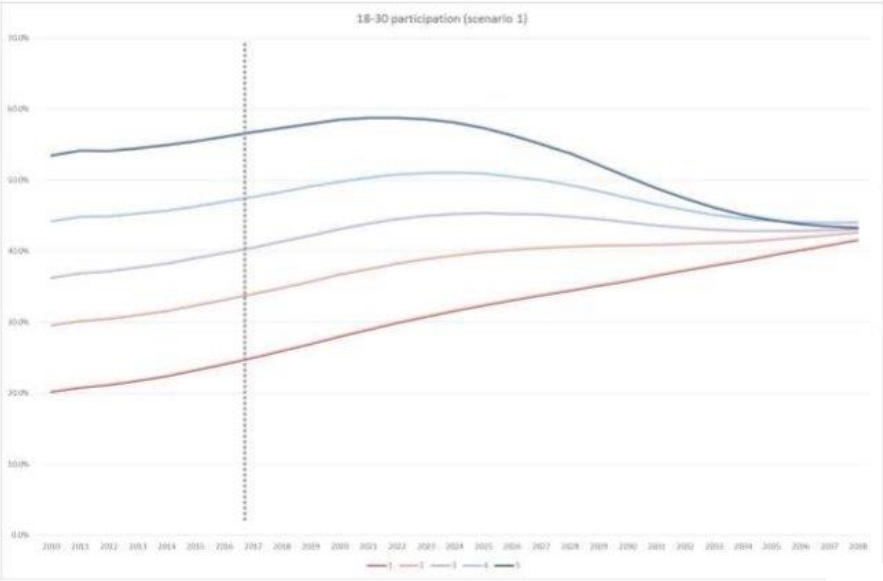
Should we:

A: Expand to allow the working classes to go to uni

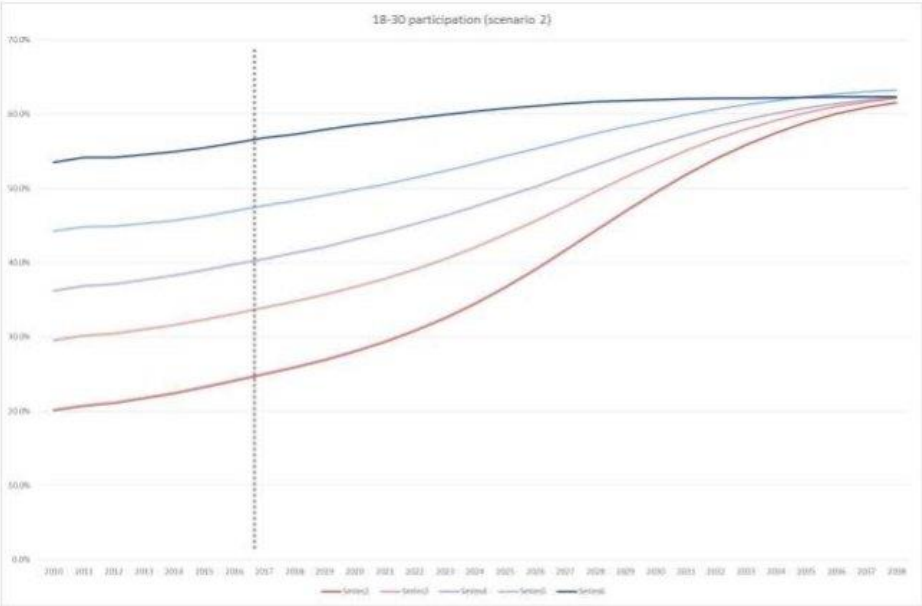
Or

B: Prevent some middle class people from going

**Scenario 1:** Maintaining the current size of the higher education sector (relative to the wider population) so that the participation rates for all quintiles converge at the current sector average.



**Scenario 2:** Expanding the size of the higher education sector so that the participation rate for quintiles 1-4 increases to that of quintile 5. This would mean increasing the size of the sector by about half over the next 10-20 years.





# What I've been thinking about...

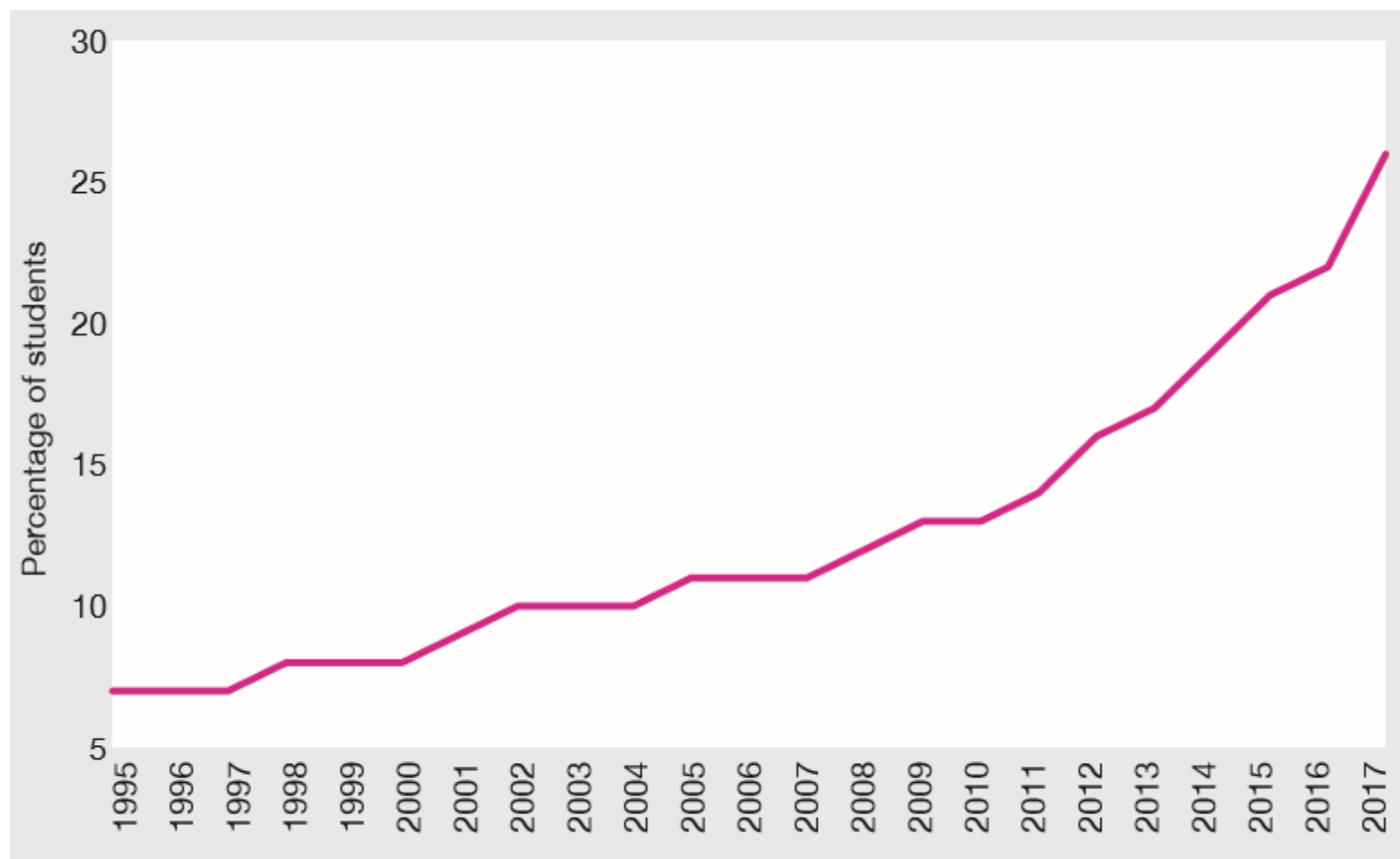
Grade Inflation

A: A sign of declining standards and Universities cheating their algorithms

Or

B: A sign of students working harder and better teaching and support

## Proportion of students awarded a First for their first undergraduate degree



Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency, *Publications (Open Data: Students in Higher Education)*, 2018.

# What I've been thinking about...

Strikes!

- Asking for a refund on tuition fees undermines the sector and would crash it financially

Or

- Students have paid for a service and are entitled to financial redress when that service isn't delivered

# Congratulations!

- You're now legally and collectively responsible for your institution's response to these issues
- Power / Autonomy / Market / Competition
- Is it too easy just to blame marketisation?



# Discomfort and comfort

- Real choices are uncomfortable
- Simpler choices keep us asleep at night
  - Hoodies
  - The name of things
  - Process
- Same in Higher Education
  - Budget scrutiny
  - Climb up or down league tables
  - Awards and Regulation

# BIKE SHEDDING

THE TENDENCY TO GIVE  
DISPROPORTIONATE WEIGHT  
TO TRIVIAL ISSUES OF A LARGER  
OR MORE COMPLEX PROJECT.  
IN OTHER WORDS, PRIORITIZING  
SOMETHING EASY TO GRASP  
AND/OR IS DEBATABLE.





# The Bike Shed Effect

a/k/a Parkinson's Law of Triviality

*Organizations spend disproportionate time on trivial issues. -- C.N. Parkinson, 1957*

## 1. Nuclear Plant

Cost: \$28,000,000

Discussion: 2.5 minutes

## 2. Bike Shed

Cost: \$1,000

Discussion: 45 minutes



# Power

# Student power!

- There are some bike sheds you might be interested in...

But:

- You are partly a member of the academic community
- You are partly a paying customer
- The first implies “Voice Power”
- The second implies “Exit power”
- There is a problem with exit (or complaint) in HE

# Why consumer power is faulty

- Consumerism aligns the following roles into a single actor
  - Chooser
  - User
  - Payer
- 
- Higher Education fatally splits these roles over time

# Student power

- “Students even sit on the University Governing Body”
- “You are not here to represent students”
- Uh?
- Even if you were...

# The problem with HE governance

- Current university governance arrangements are “ramshackle” and should be replaced with a two-tier system in which separate “courts” represent staff and student interests.
- That is the view of Roger Brown, professor of higher education policy at Liverpool Hope University. In a speech... the corporate model of governance that has been promoted by the Government since the 1980s “will not do” for higher education.
- Under the corporate model, governing boards are as small as possible, have a lay majority (ideally with business expertise), limited staff and student representation and are distanced from universities’ work.
- The drive towards this structure has resulted in unaccountable governing bodies that are “on the one hand, not small, expert or time-committed enough to be able to take effective decisions, but are, on the other hand, not large and democratic enough to be properly representative of the institution and its stakeholders”, Professor Brown will say.





calibre

# The two traditions

- Self help/mutualism and Charity
  - Charity- Philanthropy by the well to do
  - Mutuality- Centred on working class traditions- credit unions etc
- Unincorporated associations
- Mutuality dies out across 20C, Charity grows

# The two traditions

- The two traditions are accompanied by different forms of Governance
- Mutuals are run by members (sometimes with external input)
- Charities are run by “the great and the good” (sometimes with beneficiary input)
- HEIs mix the two

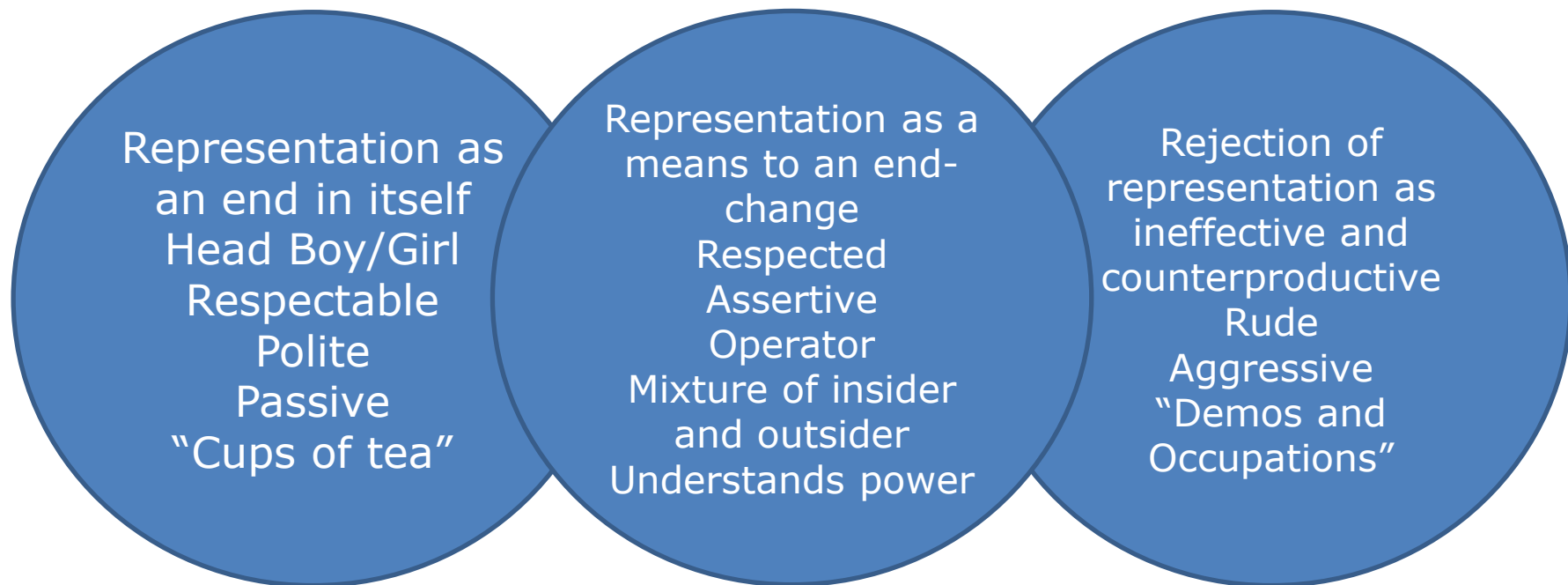
# The two traditions

- The academic “stuff” is run as a mutual (of academics)
- The infrastructure is run as a charity to empower the above (TGATG)
- You are not an academic
- You are not member of the TGATG
- You are also not great
- You are also not good

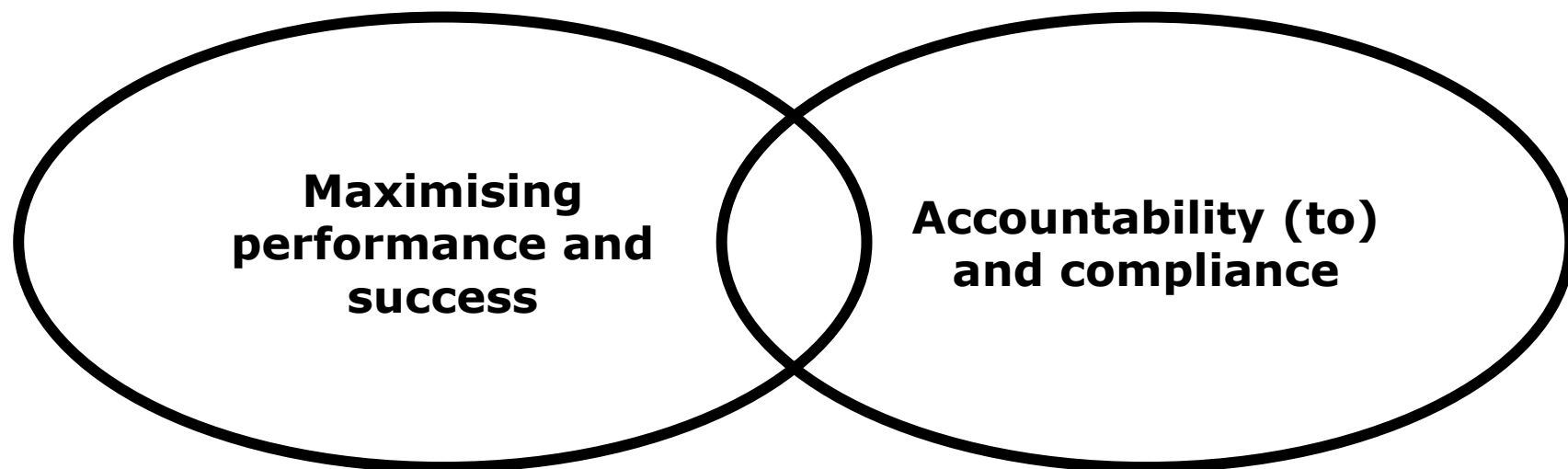
# So why are you here?

- (Coproduction with academics)
  - Symbolism
  - To end occupations of the 1970s
  - Insights (as opposed to evidence)
  - Other Governors like you
- 
- Also: You can test link between macro and micro

# The Theory of Change

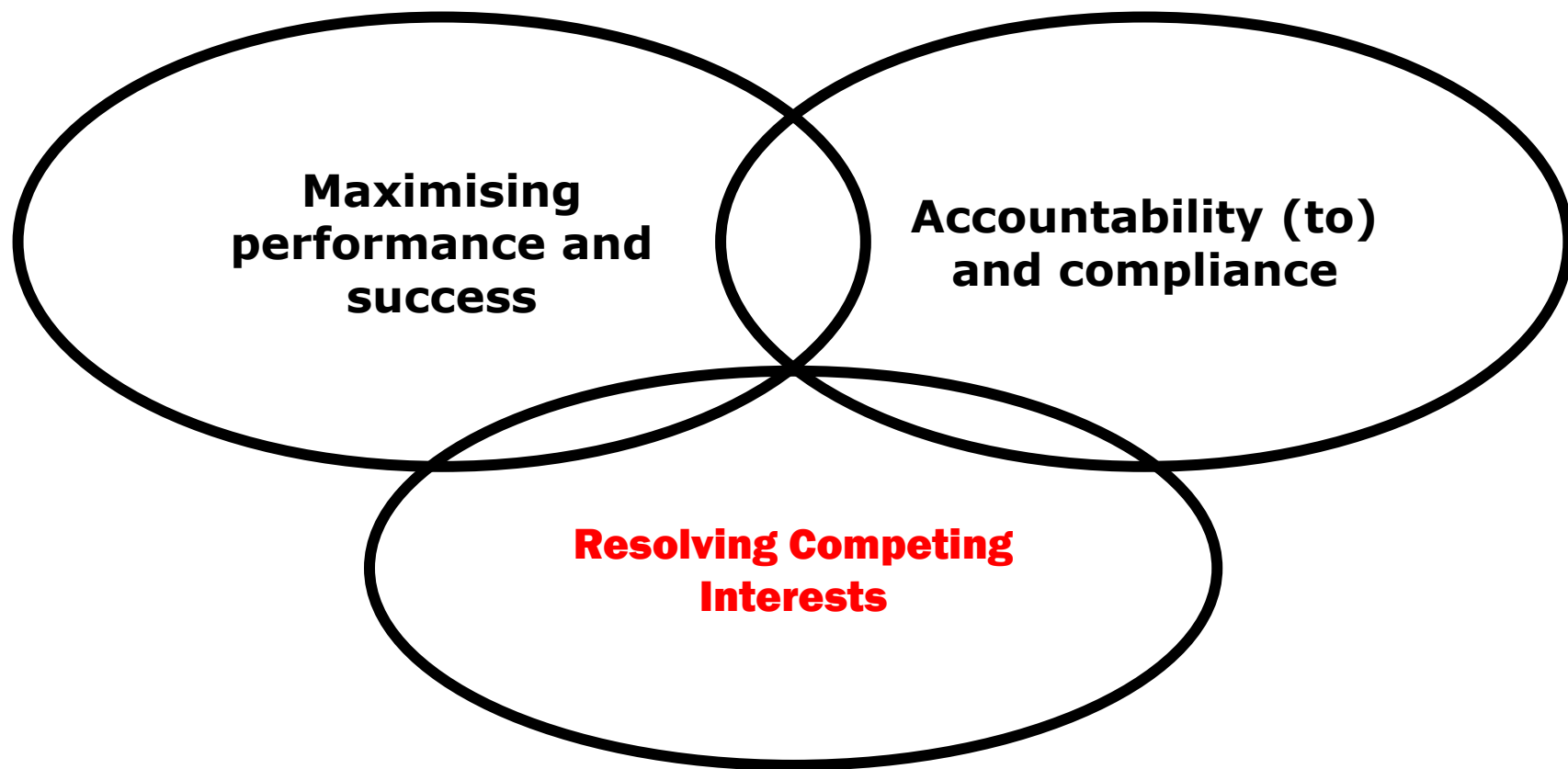


# The Traditional Board





# The Traditional non-profit Board



# What gets discussed

- Conformance (Compliance)
- H&S, Law, Regulation
- Attention to detail, exercise of care, skills in monitoring, evaluation reporting
- Performance
- Setting mission & character, vision
- Vision, Strategic Thinking, Risk Taking, Pro Activity

# It's the teal that matters



"Staff and student participation (and that of parents in sixth form colleges) in governance may work best within this approach"

# Resolving Competing Interests

- Homeless charity in Watford
- North or South?
- Long term or short term?
- Prevention or Cure?
- Homes? Blankets? Shelter? Toothbrushes? Love?
  
- What choices did your SU make last year? Who made them? How? On what basis?

# Resolving Competing Interests

- General FE College in Watford
  - Academic or Vocational
  - Success rates and “interests”
  - Failure and second chances
  - Bifurcation of class/ability
- 
- What choices did your SU make last year? Who made them? How? On what basis?

# Who do you serve

- The Watford Homeless Fable
  - The A Levels Fable
- 
- Who
  - Who gets
  - Who doesn't get
  - Why
  - Where
  - How



**Resolving Competing  
Interests**

# How do you decide?

- Communities can have debates between their members and their leaders
- They can also have debates between sections of the community
- Significant shift to the former both in universities and SUs
- But you sort of “exist” in the tradition of the latter!



# Performance?

## *Performance by train operator*

The table below shows the average PPM for Britain as a whole and by train operating company. The moving annual average is calculated over the 365 days to 16 August 2014.

Franchise	Punctuality % period 5 2013/14	Punctuality % period 5 2014/15	Moving annual average
Arriva Trains Wales	93.8	89.1	92.1
c2c Rail	97.5	96.3	96.6
Chiltern	93.9	95.9	94.8
Crosscountry	88.9	87.4	86.9
East Coast	85.8	87.1	85.7
East Midlands Trains	88.3	92.9	91.4
First Capital Connect	90.0	88.2	85.2
First Great Western	88.7	87.4	87.5
First Hull Trains	79.7	86.4	83.4
First Scotrail	90.9	84.7	91.5
First Transpennine Express	87.5	84.3	89.2
Grand Central	83.9	85.9	82.2
Abellio Greater Anglia	91.1	87.5	90.8
Heathrow Express	93.0	95.0	93.7
London Midland	86.9	88.8	86.6

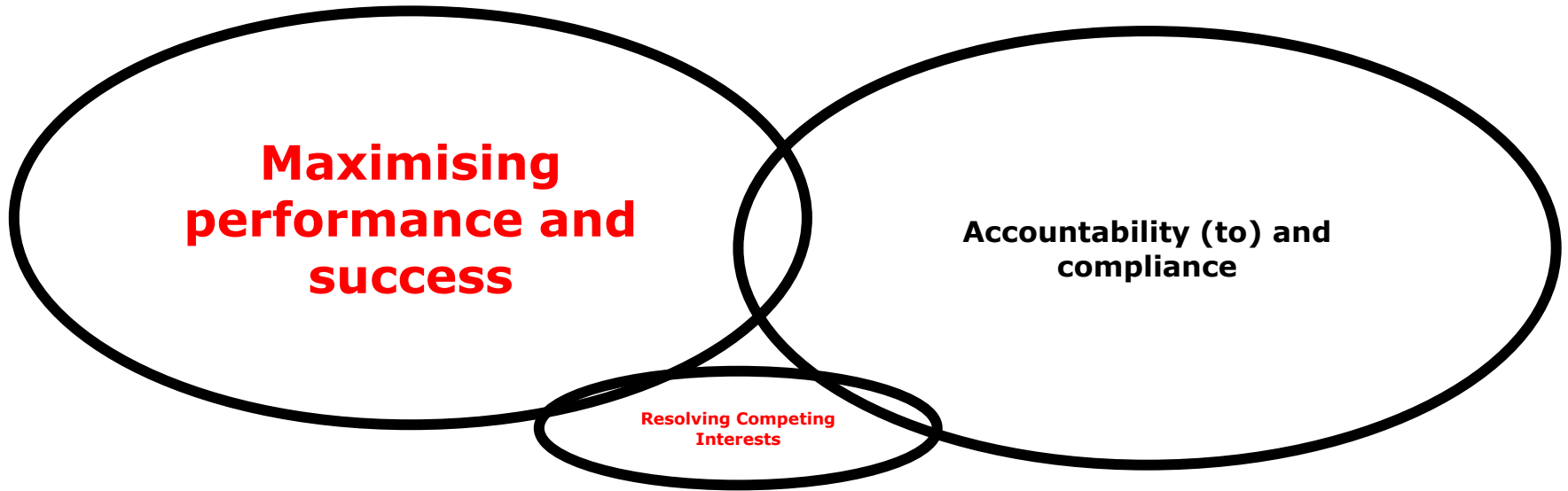
# Culture!

- How much time is spent on policy deliberation versus performance of those policies?
- ie ATs, Mental Health, Advisors
- Are there differences between the academic governance (senate, academic board) and the corporate governance (BOG, council)

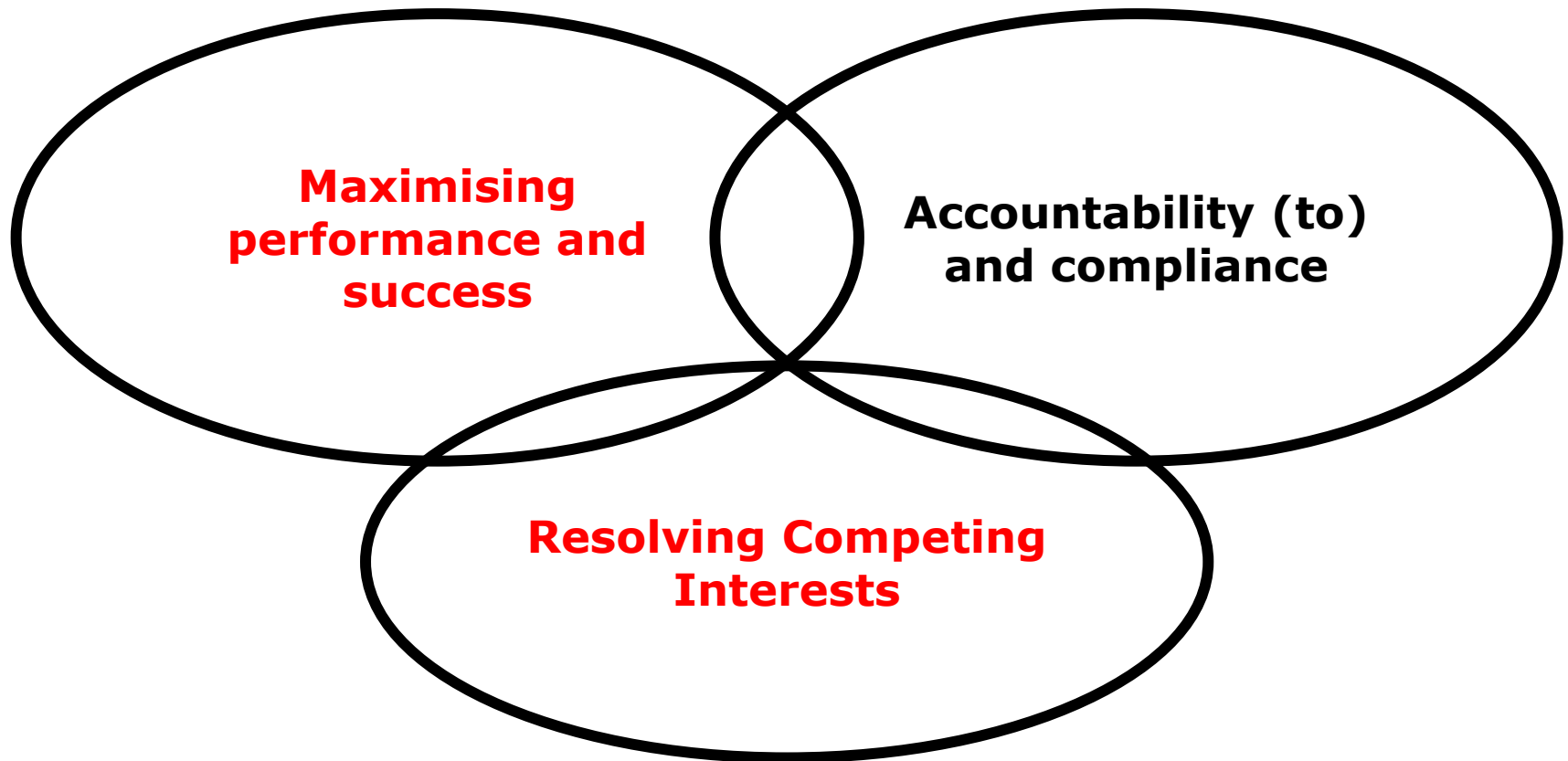
# Proportions



# Proportions



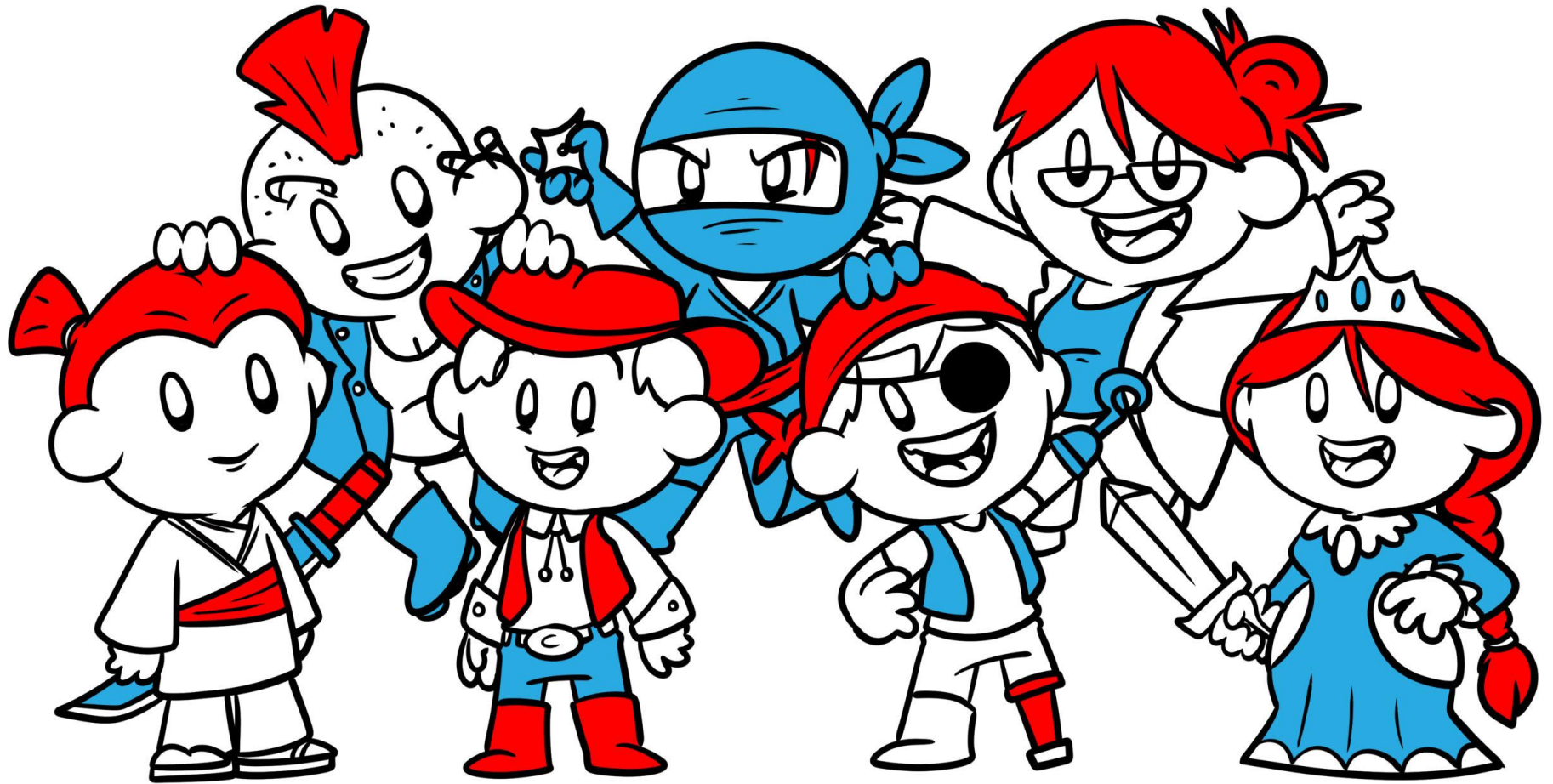
# Deciding versus ticking?



# Ten classic challenges

1. “What’s the students’ view on X or Y”
2. Students’ union scrutiny
3. The tyranny of politeness
4. One question, one answer
5. The focus on scrutiny of performance and compliance (to the detriment of EC&M)
6. The legitimacy of an opinion tends to be linked to the age of its deliverer
7. Same old brand new you
8. The whole process in a single paper
9. Confidential, innit
10. Sub committee syndrome

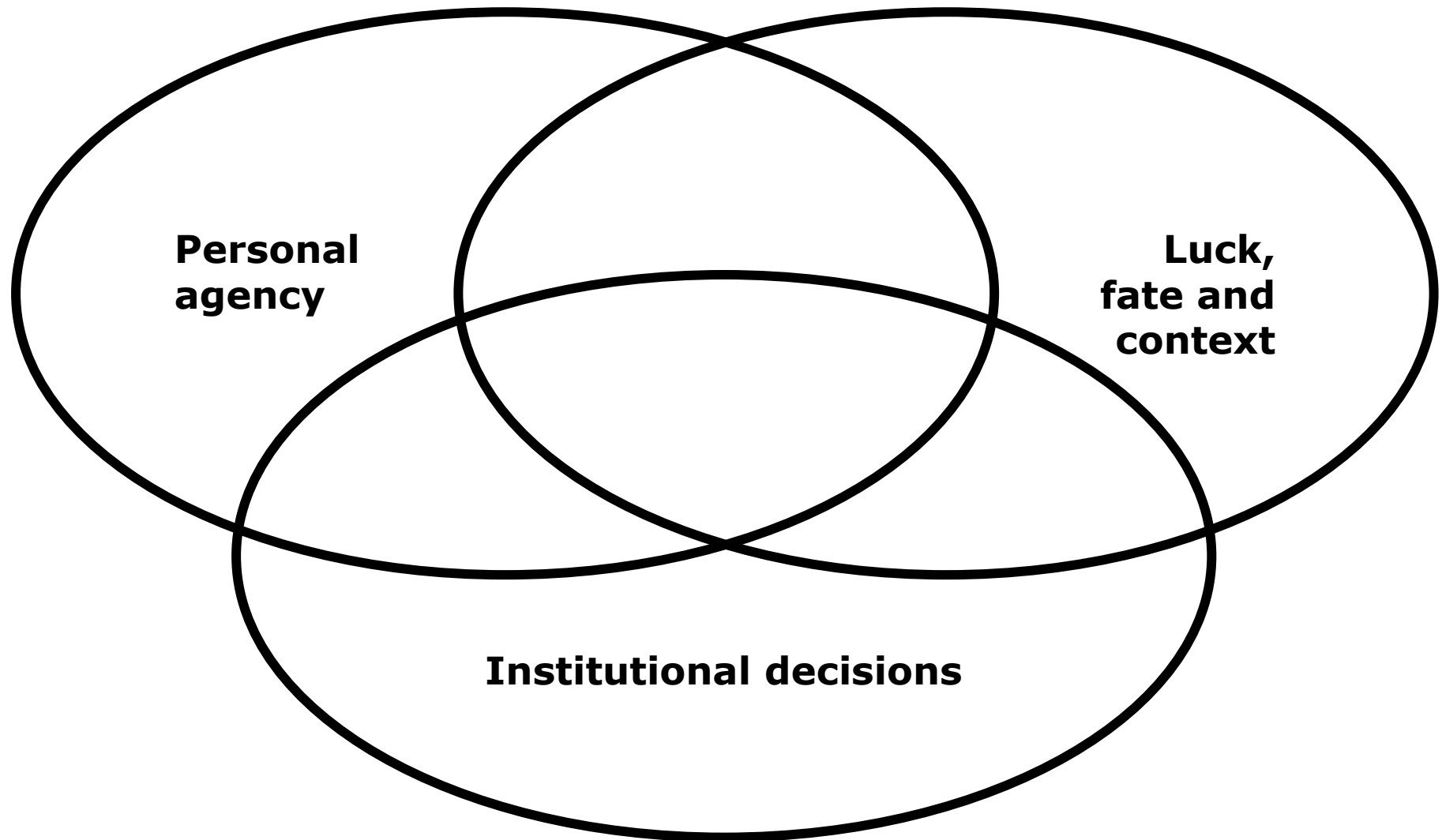




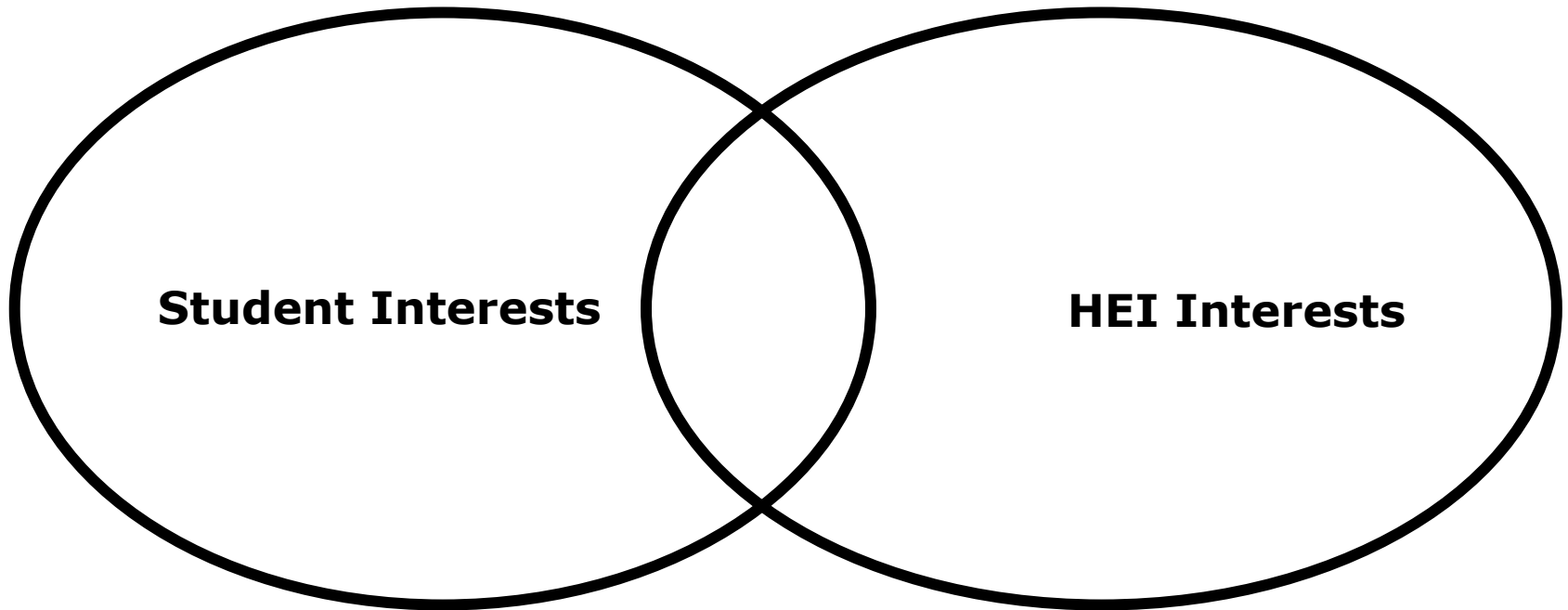




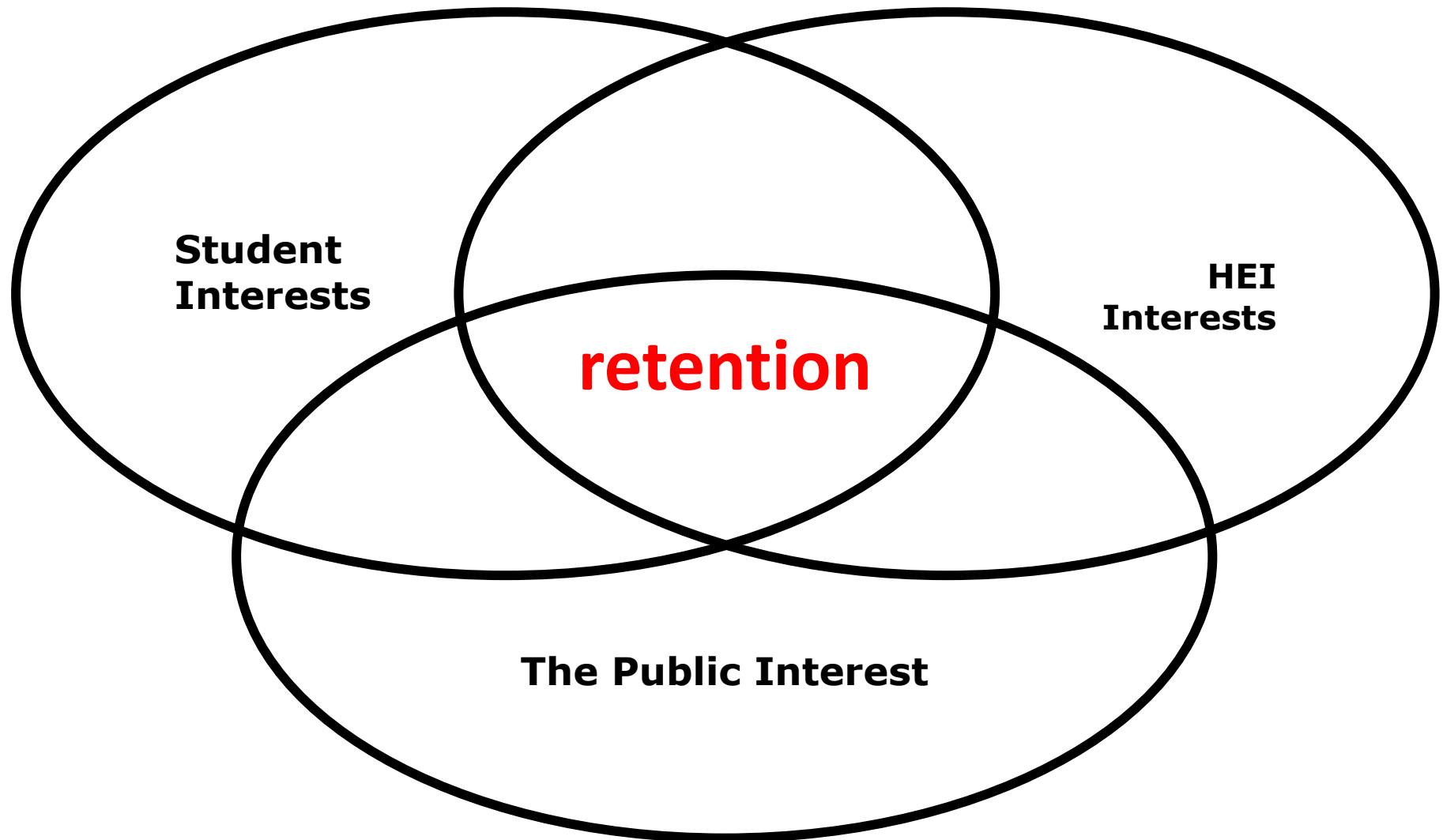
# Interests



# Interests



# Interests



# Accountability

- Huge focus on accountability for
- But what about accountable to?
- Who are Governing Bodies accountable to?
- Who are a Governing Body's "Public" in the "Public" interest?



**Accountability  
(to) and  
compliance**

# Can I really be powerful

- SMT appraisal
- Intel on delivery and interpretation of data (why)
- Remembering prior commitments
- Ensuring things are looked at (spotlight) (SS)
- Causing things to be factored in
- Chunking up and down
  - UP: Is there a policy on that
  - Down: Does that fit the policy we agree
- Welcome to my world
- Asking killer questions



# Chunking up and down

- 5 year Strategic Financial Plan
- Annual Budget
- Departmental Budget
- GP, Cost of Sales, Staffing Ratios
- Weekly Target
- Hourly target
- Price of a Mars Bar



# Killer Question Tactics

- Are you sure your question hasn't been answered in the meeting materials?
- Why are you asking it?
- What kind of answer do you want?
- Is the agenda item a discussion item or an action item?
- Would it be better to email your question?

# Question Theory

- **Why** does the university have a confucious institute?
- **How** are you going to improve assessment and feedback?
- **What** is the black attainment gap for undergraduate students in the Faculty of Law?
- **When** will the clinic open?
- **Which** section of references sexual assault?
- **How** do you know things have improved?
- **Explain** why you think this will help
- **Plus:** What I expect as a governor is...
  - What would give me confidence would be...

# Question Type

Type	Characteristics	Example
Interpretative	Opinion, what happens if	What happens if the government reduces the University's funding again this year?
Evaluative	Strengths/weakness, anticipated challenges	What are the pros and cons of hiring graduate students as teachers?
Factual	Data-oriented, yes/no	What is the projected increase in enrolment for the next 3 years?

# Winning Questions

- Annoyance v Discomfort v Violence
- What would everyone agree with?
- Ensuring Commitments make it into minutes
- Chasing up commitments
- Failure – Spot - Why
- Success – Frame - How
- Setting out your expectations as a Governor is powerful

# Leading Change

- Influence the agenda
  - What is discussed
  - How it is discussed (formative)
- Set the institution in context
  - The interests of students and the public and HE in general are compatible, not separate
- Identifying real choices
  - Who serve (and who not)
  - Why so same
- Resistance is not futile

# Leading Change

- Creating more space for participative and deliberative work
- Jumping on elephants
- Hovering above performance
- “I feel my attendance at meetings has made a genuine difference to the strategy of the University”
- Steering, not rowing or poking

# Five levels of discussion

## 1. Rowing

You are doing the work of managers yourself

## 2. Nodding

Your mere presence validates the actions of managers

## 3. Poking

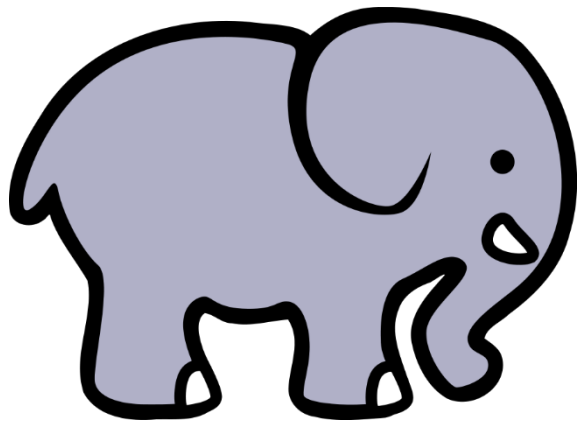
Your role is to ask a tough question and see if the managers buckle

## 4. Steering

You are feeding back on an issue from your perspective at the formative stage of a proposal or strategy

## 5. Guiding

You are involved in a real discussion focussed on the genuine strategic choices facing the institution in context



“occasionally [...the rep] has to raise issues at a time and a pace that the institution wouldn't have chosen, and [...they have] to say things that, given a choice the institution, wouldn't have said out loud, and as such it is hard to envisage those things happening unless there were representatives that were in some way either democratically or culturally charged with raising things out of sync, raising the uncomfortable, and issuing challenge”

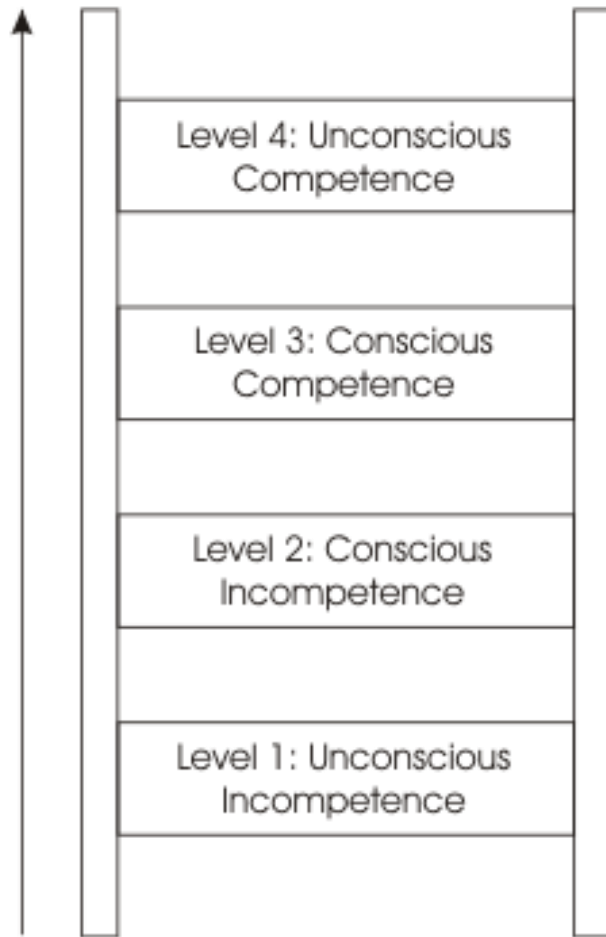


# Thoughts

- It's not that you have a tough job as a student member.
  - (The others feel like you but aren't really allowed to admit it)
- It's that if a clerk and a chair create the conditions for you to feel confident then governance will succeed.
- If not, a culture of professional politeness will ensure that you blame the system and lay trustees blame themselves for shallow participation.

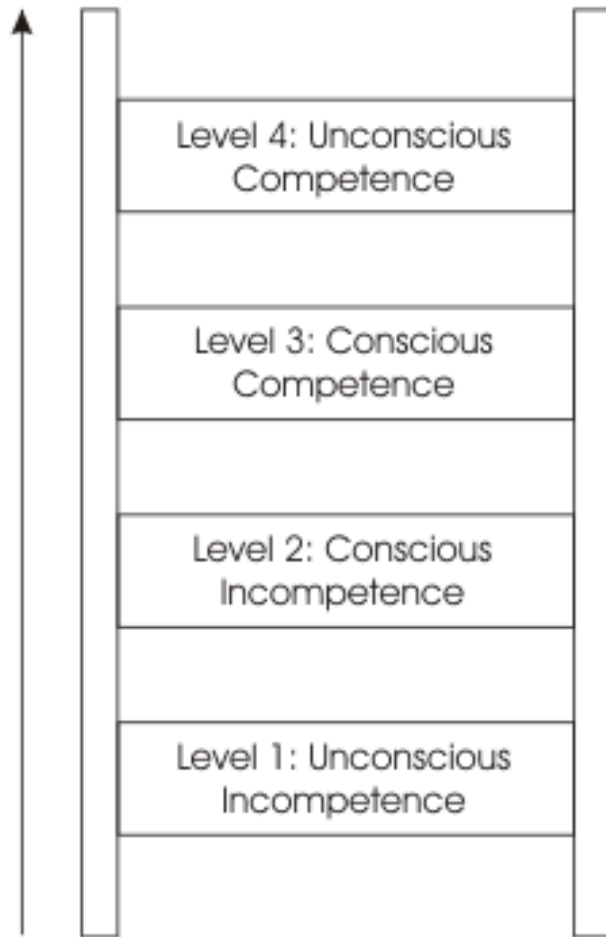
# Enjoy the discomfort

Figure 1:  
The Conscious Competence Ladder



# ...you'll be less brave in the future

Figure 1:  
The Conscious Competence Ladder



# Thanks!

Twitter: @jim\_\_dickinson

I write on HE student issues at [wonkhe.com](http://wonkhe.com)