

## **Industry: speak up to stop its pressure on academia**

SIR — Your News Feature “Caught between shores” (*Nature* **440**, 144–145; 2006) suggests that scientists in industry sacrifice independence for influence. So do scientists in government. It’s a classic insider/outsider dilemma. As a former chief environmental scientist for Australian Mineral Development Laboratories, I’ve tried both sides. But companies and governments make no claim to put truth before profit or politics. Universities do.

A more severe and insidious threat to scientific integrity is when governments link research funding to industry involvement, or when universities hire people with a background in commercial cut-and-thrust rather than academic ethical practice.

What to do? As a scientist, you can keep your independence if you are cautious with unsolicited commercial contacts and careful with contracts, and if you have no dependents, so you can ignore threats — whether financial, legal or worse. You can keep your reputation if you publish in good journals, maintain competitive research funding as well as industry contracts, work (for free if need be) for community watchdogs on the industry concerned, and take part in public debate and expert advisory councils. Just don’t expect much spare time, or influence.

At a societal level, academic independence would be served by better separation between sectors: industry for entrepreneurship, government to regulate, universities for knowledge. This would work best with a fourth entity to develop and apply university research for industry and government and to insulate academics from commercial and political pressure. Some government research organizations used to do just that, but now their roles, too, have become blurred.

Currently, peer support is our best hope. Scientific and professional societies have a critical role. If your colleagues are being pressured improperly, help them. Your turn won’t be far away.

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