Becoming, Being and Doing

Biography and the everyday practices of sociologists

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Outline of project

- Implications of university reforms since 1979 for the everyday activities and practices of academic sociologists.

- What is the dialectical relationship of everyday life to the socialisation of individuals, social reproduction and social change?

Case Studies

Case Study 1
- Large civic university (1880)
- Recent merger
- No. staff: 29
- 2001 RAE (Sociology): 5*
- 'World class research'

Case Study 2
- Ex-polytechnic (1992)
- No. staff: 35
- 2001 RAE: 3a
- 'for World class professionals'

Case Study 3
- small civic university (1903)
- Sociology with social policy
- No. staff: 26
- 2001 RAE (Social policy): 4
- ?

Case Study 4
- Merger institution (1967)
- No. staff: 21
- 2001 RAE: 4
- 'Bursting with choice'

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How do the activities of individual academics across their careers intersect and interact with processes of institutional and policy change?

…a note on terminology

- ‘Everyday activities’/ ‘activities’

- ‘Everyday practices’/ ‘practices’

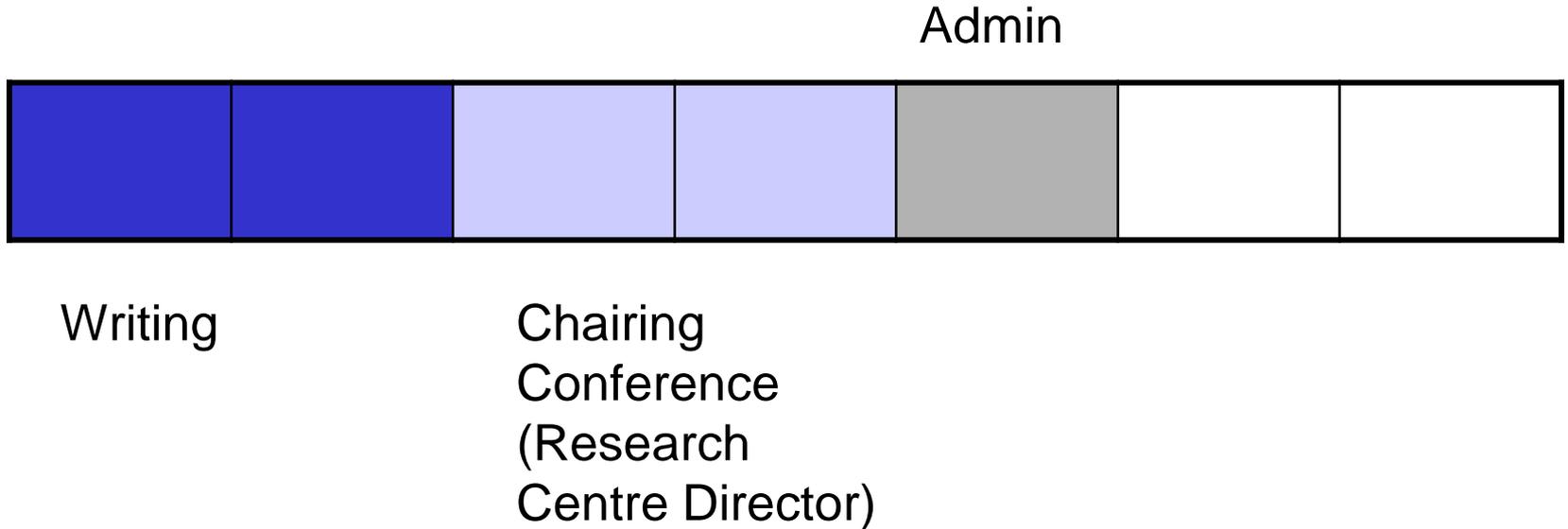# Prof A: Everyday activities

School
Research
Director

Admin

Geneva
(Research
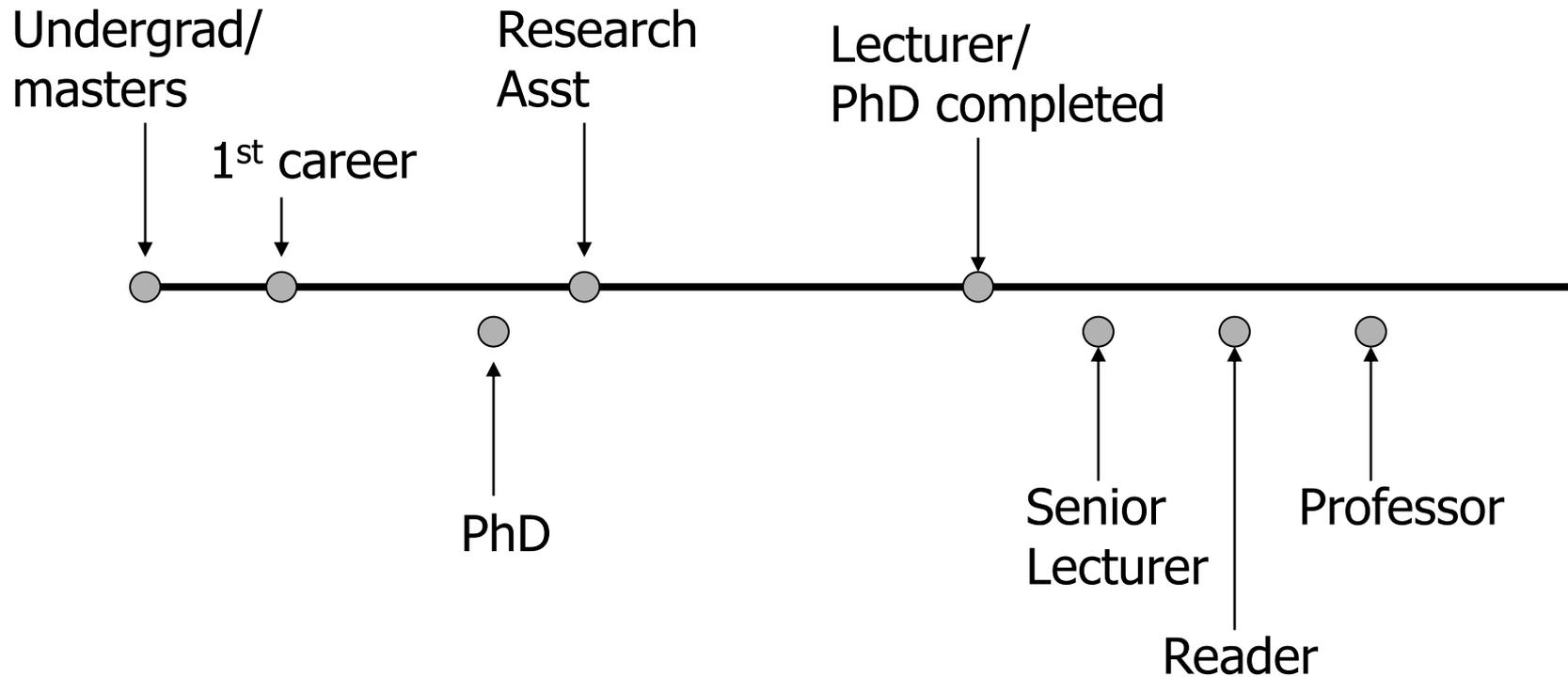Centre Director)

Supervision

Prof B: Everyday activities

Admin

Writing

Chairing Conference (Research Centre Director)

Becoming and Being
Doing Supervision
Doing Research

Prof A: 'Becoming and being'

Undergrad/
masters

1st career

Research
Asst

Lecturer/
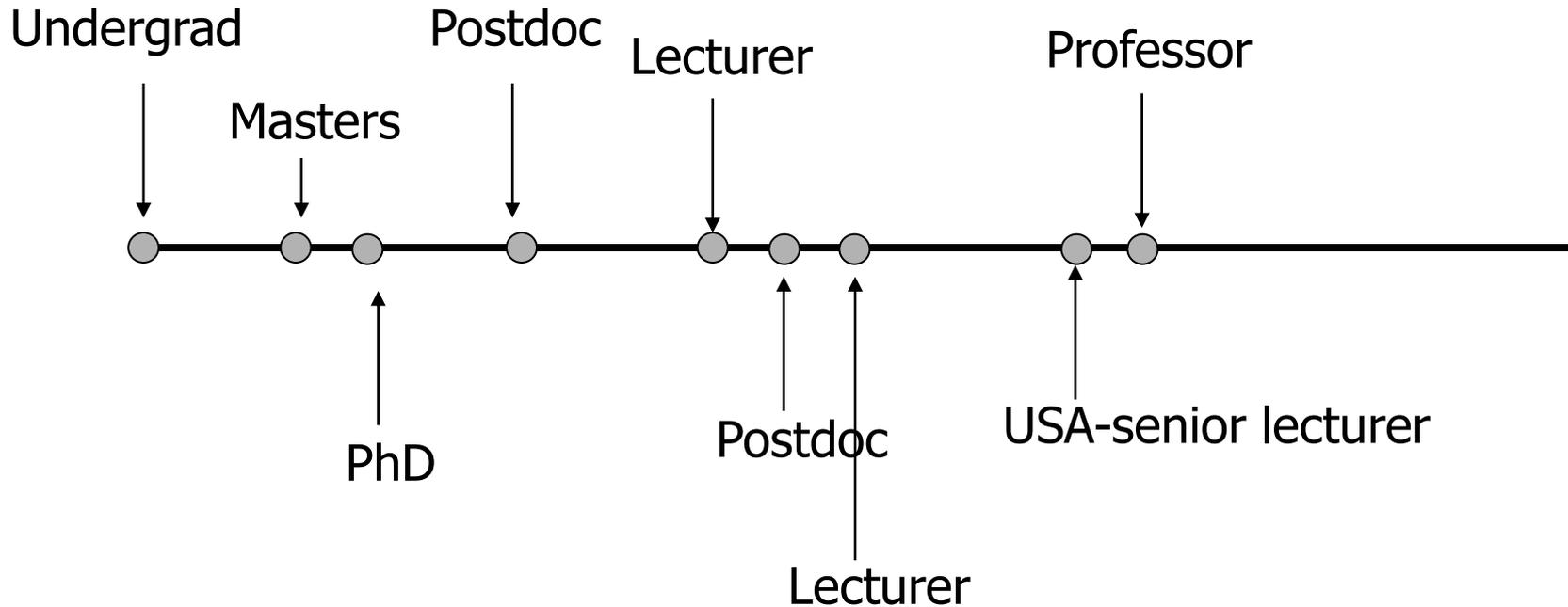PhD completed

PhD

Senior
Lecturer

Reader

Professor

Prof A: 'Becoming and being'

- To 'fill a gap': *kind of knowledge* & its transmission

- 'Normal' socialisation = hierarchical development

- Career development related to opportunities available

- Research based around European funding

Prof B: 'Becoming and being'

Undergrad

Masters

Postdoc

Lecturer

Professor

PhD

Postdoc

Lecturer

USA-senior lecturer

Prof A & B: 'Becoming and being'

- To 'fill a gap': *kind of knowledge* & its transmission

'Falls into it': academic work is exciting

- 'Normal' socialisation = hierarchical development

'Culture of sociology' = unhierarchical, sharing ideas & knowledge in informal settings

- Career development related to opportunities available

Career development related to opportunities available

- Research based around European funding

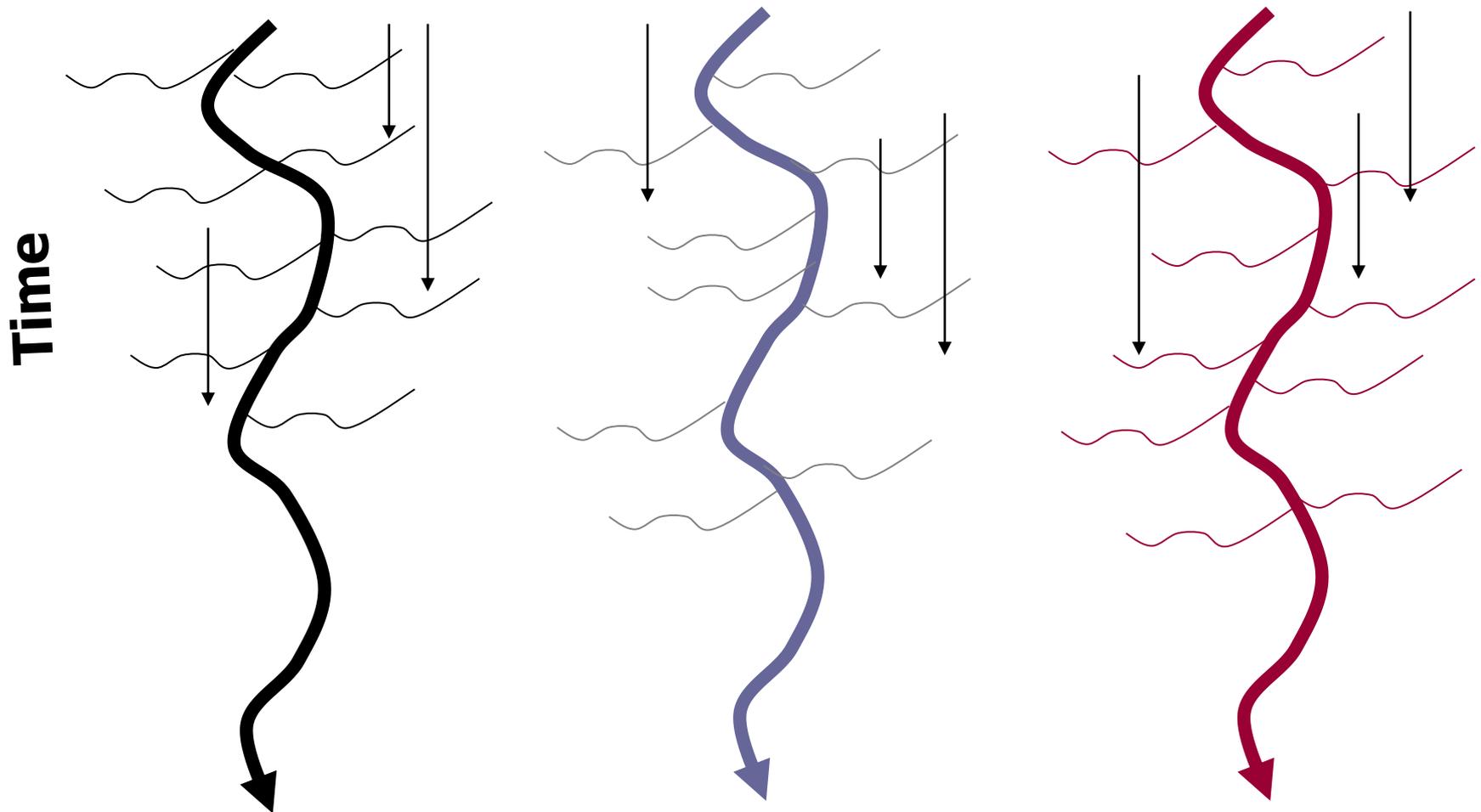Research based around ESRC funding and publication

Prof A & B: 'Becoming & being'
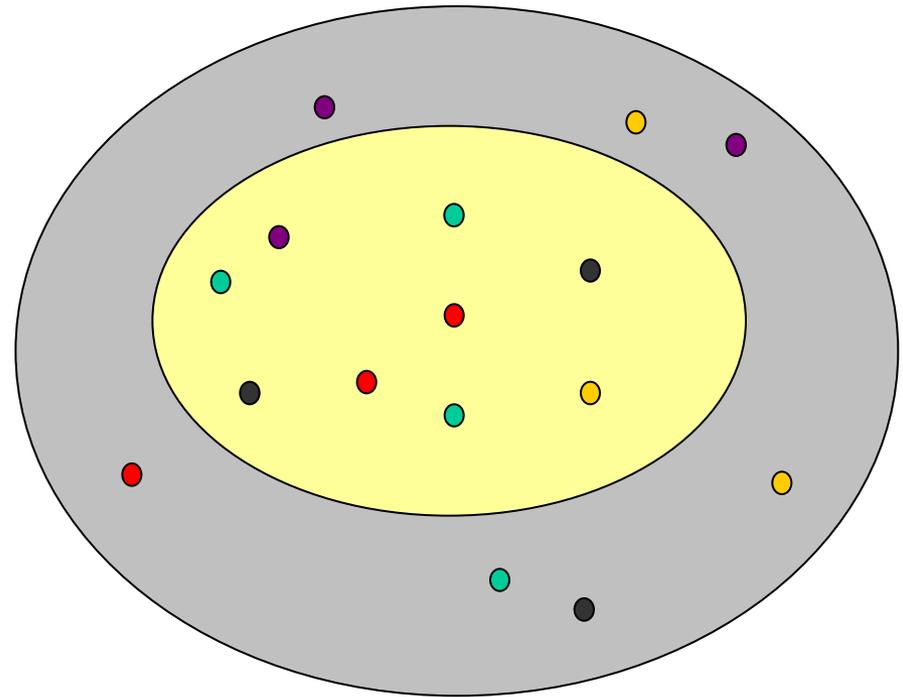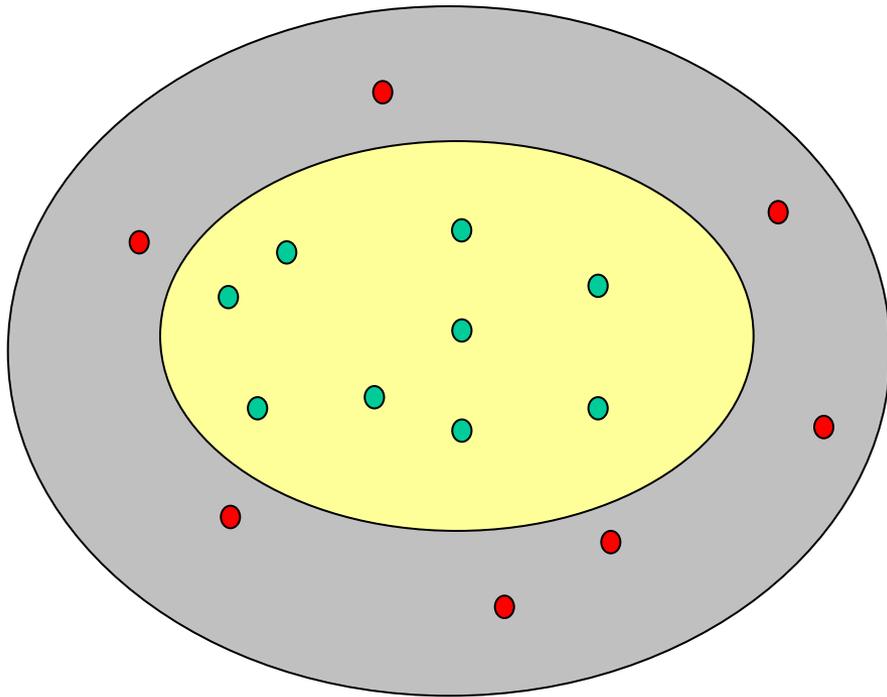
Prof A & B: 'Becoming and being'

Doing Supervision

Doing Supervision
Professor A

"…we sign a contract at the start, what that translates into is that as a rule I would meet my students once a fortnight, and you can relax that at certain periods of writing of course, but that's kind of the. I have them in my diary, through"

"I don't tend to see PhD students much in between. Some are located in a different building, and frankly if I'm in and they catch me that's fine, we don't have a lot of corridor chat… it's not really a drop-in culture"

"I've always been quite conscious at the start of protecting my own time, and I was mentored very carefully that women do too much pastoral work, so I try to have clear lines. I've had needy students in the past, it's strange the amount they expect; to be their mother and everything. I find that emotionally draining."

"…we're not going to be friends. Or if we are … that's not a presumption at the start."

Doing Supervision
Professor B

"…minutes of the meetings are meant to be kept by them, but to be honest I don't worry about it too much, I don't always think there's a need for them… I don't think it's necessary, and it definitely isn't my style."

"On some occasions a bit more formal is useful, yes, if I'm worried about them, are they doing the work, are they going in the right direction, but then I think the better way to do it is to talk to them about it! If they want to - some of them have wanted to do it and that's fine"
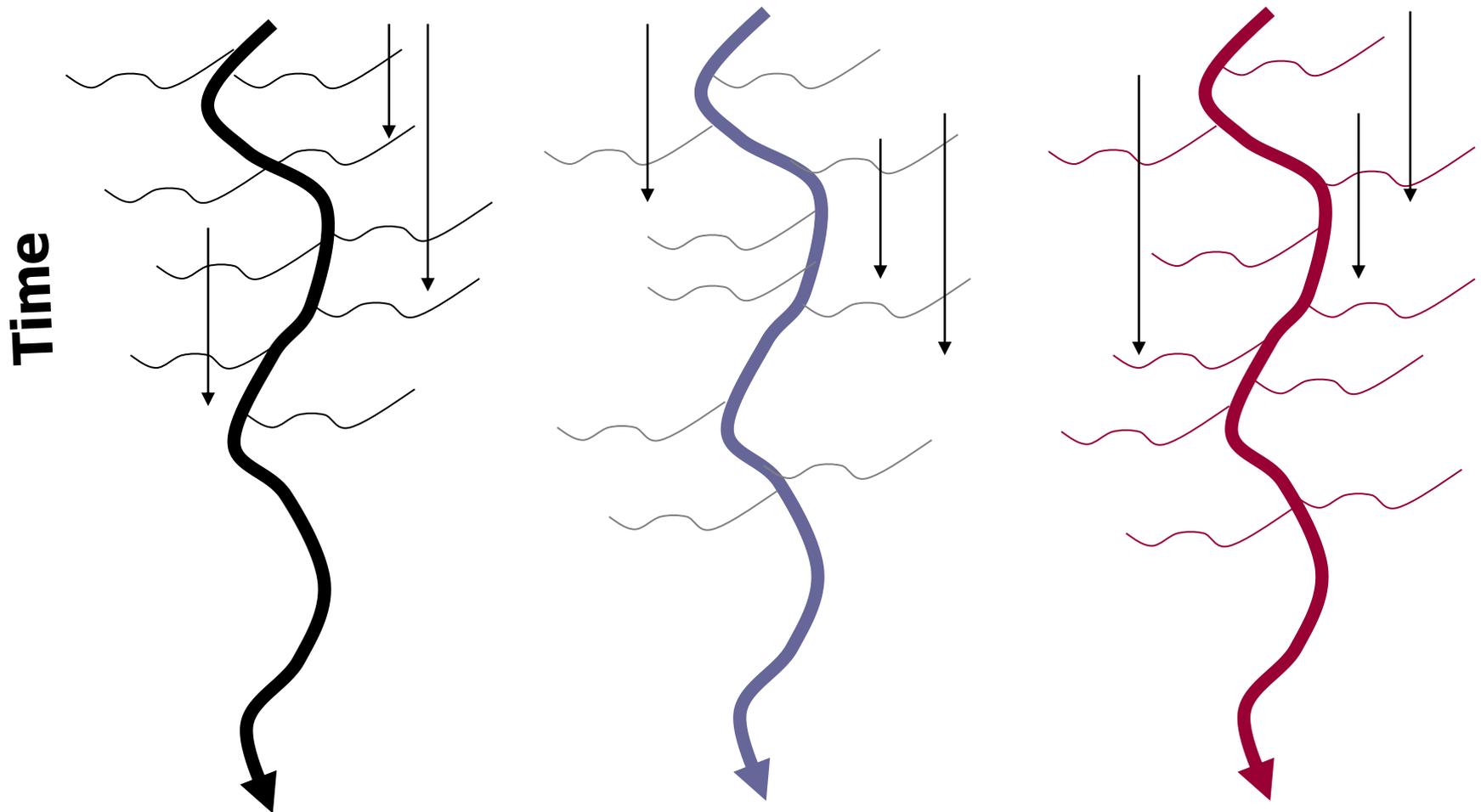
"…informally it's partly because of my personal life and the nature of the University, the thing where we used to meet in the evening and get together doesn't happen… the PhD students here do have their own seminar, which they run every 3 or 4 weeks and present papers, which I try to go to, so we try to keep the informal collegiate thing going…"

Doing Supervision

Doing Research

Doing Research: Prof A

- Considers her research valuable
- Harnesses European funding
- Valued by Department – for the RAE & post RAE
- Commitment to PhD students & contract researchers
- Reciprocally embedded in external networks

Doing Research: Trade-offs

- Lacks time to write
- Publications not as valuable for RAE

Conclusions

The field of academic work is a nexus of practices, a field of contestation, a politicised field.

This plurality of practices is (currently) possible because of a plurality of work being valued.

When thinking of how policy interacts with everyday practices it is useful to consider how some practices become dominant and others die out…

Conclusions

… A practice may die out if the everyday activity that underpins the practice never forms part of the daily path

… Practices may become dominant if individuals are socialised in a particular manner – (though need to remember that individuals bring their own politics & opinions with them)

A practice may become dominant if an individual who 'carries' that pratice is in a position of power

Conclusions

A key area where policy change has influence is on the range of career opportunities within the field of universities

How institutions mediate these policies provides the plurality of ways in which a role might be occupied (though these are not predetermined – rather created through individuals interacting with institutions to make their identities)

References

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