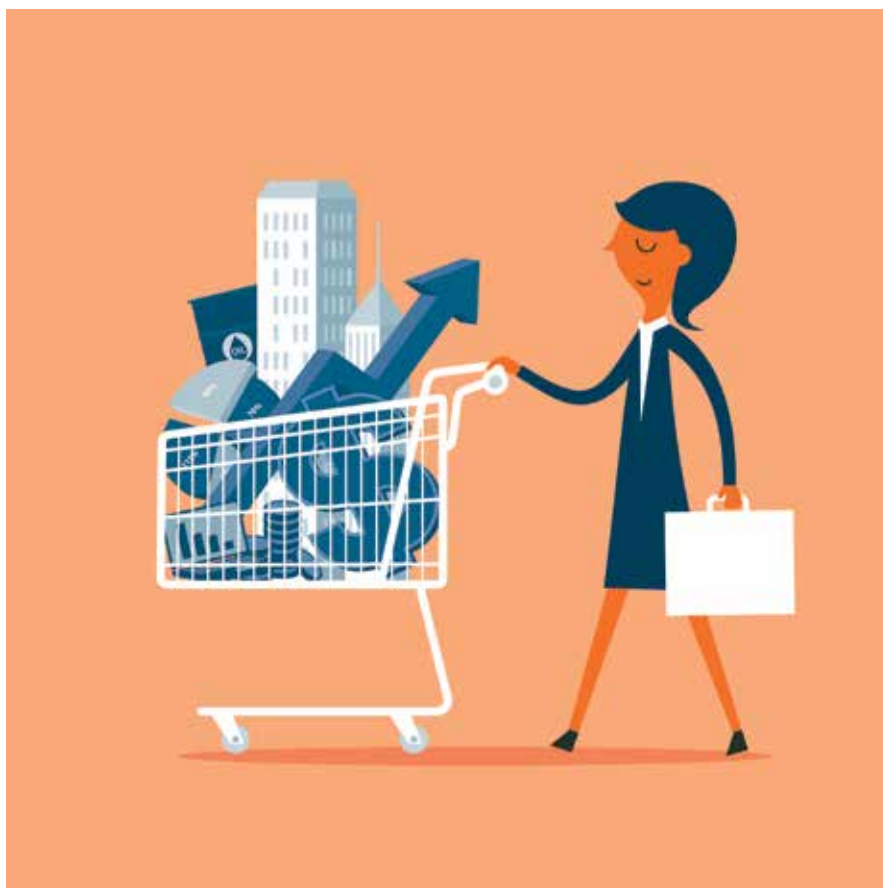


# Parting shot

*“CAGE tries very hard not only to produce top-quality research output but also to disseminate it to the policy-making community.”*



AM A FULLY-paid-up grumpy old man. There is much to dislike or fear that I couldn't imagine would be a problem when I was young – for example, airport security, climate change, HS2, ISIS, and political correctness. On the other hand, some things never change and one of those is the regrettably low standard of public debate on economic issues.

This is really disappointing because the quality of economics research has improved greatly and the stock of useful knowledge has grown out of all recognition during my academic lifetime. This has resulted amongst other things from advances in econometric technique, much expanded availability of data and phenomenal increases in computing power.

As Joel Mokyr said recently, “Scientists can now find the tiniest needles in data haystacks as large as Montana in a fraction of a second”. Moreover, academic economists in the UK are clearly making considerably greater efforts to ensure that their findings accessible partly driven by the requirements for ‘impact’ imposed by the ESRC and the REF. CAGE tries very hard not only to produce top-quality research output but also to disseminate it to the policy-making community. Yet our main political parties appear to be dominated by ideologues who much prefer policy-based evidence to evidence-based policy. Not ‘what works?’ but ‘what confirms my prejudices?’

Can anything be done to improve matters? It seems doubtful in a world dominated by Facebook, Twitter and tabloid newspapers. The BBC has a role to play but dismally failed the big challenge of Brexit. The *Financial Times* stands more or less alone in the British press in maintaining a high standard of economics reporting and comment and what appears in its pages carries relatively little weight with politicians or voters. Ignorance is not bliss in the making of economic policy as we are about to find out. I don't expect to stop being grumpy any time soon. ◀

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