Paul Geroski’s untimely death from cancer on 28 August 2005, at the age of just 52, has shocked and saddened many people. It has also deprived us of one of our best applied industrial economists. Everywhere he worked, Paul had made an enormous impact and contribution. I first came across him just four years ago at the Competition Commission, where he was Deputy Chairman (from 2001) and then from 2004 the Chairman leading the Commission as it got to grips with its new powers under the Enterprise Act. In the worthy and serious training sessions set up for rookie members of the Commission, Paul was the speaker who had us captivated and roaring with laughter, reflecting his evidently extraordinary gift for teaching.

No single individual defines a whole institution, but Paul's contribution to the Competition Commission in the course of implementing the new legislation has been profound. The Enterprise Act gave the ultimate responsibility for merger and monopoly decisions to the Commission, rather than government ministers. The test for these decisions is whether or not there would be a 'substantial lessening of competition'. In shaping the Commission's formal guidance on its decision making, and in chairing inquiries including high-profile cases such as the Carlton-Granada merger and earlier this year (until he became too ill) the bid for the London Stock Exchange, Paul ensured the process is both analytically rigorous and eminently pragmatic.

It was a masterclass in applied economics to see him exercise this analytical rigour in the context of a specific inquiry: how to gather and assess the relevant empirical evidence; how to quiz business executives appearing at formal hearings in order to figure out what makes a business tick and how the market works; and how to weigh up the analysis and arguments put forward by other members of the inquiry team. I think perhaps some people found him too argumentative, but he could always be persuaded to change his mind by good analysis and evidence. And it was also always fun, which is really saying something in such a painstaking and legally exacting procedure.

Paul’s egalitarianism and deep respect for others also made him an ideal leader in such a team-based and inter-disciplinary process. His informality is legendary. At the Competition Commission, and in contrast to his teaching days, he mostly conformed to the suit and tie dress code, but would usually shed his shoes and jacket. One of the benefits of informality is, of course, approachability. Paul was also very much the New Yorker, unmistakably so despite his many years living in the UK. His personal style helped shape an institution which is probably more open and less tied to tradition than it might otherwise have been. An indicator of this which I particularly notice, working in such a very male-dominated profession, is the high proportion of senior women in the Commission team.

The Competition Commission was a natural extension of Paul's previous work and interests. He was a graduate student in Keith Cowling’s group at Warwick University in the late 1970s, applying new econometric techniques to industrial economics. He then taught at Southampton University, in another strong applied department. In 1987 he moved to the London Business School, where both his academic reputation and his pedagogical reputation continued to grow, at the same time as his interest in the detail of business and policy.

He wrote a vast number of papers and also loved to write books. The latest of these, with Costas Markides of the LBS, was Fast Second, published earlier this year, arguing that conquering and profiting from a new market requires different skills from those needed to make the breakthrough innovation in the first place. Paul grumbled, a bit, that it was harder to find time to write given the burden of his duties as Chairman of the CC. He was rightly proud of his writing skills, which demonstrated the same clarity of thought and explanation as his lectures. He was one of the rare economists who place as much importance on communication with people outside the profession as on academic output. He also loved to read, and had a breadth of interest reflecting his liberal arts education at Bard College in New York. Until a few days before his death he was exchanging emails with friends and colleagues discussing books and ideas and the state of the world.

It was not until May this year that Paul had to stop work, and early August before he started to tell more people about his illness, so his death so soon afterwards has been a shock. He was one of the best economists I’ve had the privilege to work with. There are many of us who found him a joy as a colleague or teacher, and we will miss him. Paul leaves a wife, Alice, whom he met during a year spent in Manchester in 1975, and a son and daughter.

Diane Coyle