

We're in business! Sustaining economic geography?

A report prepared for the Economic Geography Research Group of the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers

Al James, Mike Bradshaw, Neil M. Coe, James Faulconbridge

Report to be made available on the EPA website, as a data appendix to the Exchanges

Commentary: *Sustaining Economic Geography?*

Business/Management Schools and the UK's Great Economic Geography Diaspora

13 February 2018

Word count: 18 063

Abstract

This report is concerned with the health of Economic Geography (EG) as a sub-discipline, and economic geography (as a wider community of practice) in the UK. Against a backdrop of sub-disciplinary achievement, recent years have witnessed a noticeable migration of economic geographers in the UK from Departments of Geography to academic positions in Business and Management Schools and related research centres. This report examines the scale and significance of this trend, as documented in new survey and interview data generated through research carried out by the Economic Geography Research Group of the RGS-IBG (2015-17). We assess the scale of this cross-disciplinary labour mobility evident at all levels of the academic career hierarchy in EG in the UK; explore the underlying motivations and variegated work-life experiences of those making the transition; and consider its implications for teaching, research and new forms of knowledge production in the face of contemporary economic change and upheaval. While economic geography clearly has a healthy appeal to Business and Management as an interdisciplinary community of practice, we raise multiple concerns around the largely unidirectional nature of this 'movers' phenomenon, and for the embodied reproduction of our sub-discipline in Departments of Geography in UK universities. In response, we make a number of suggestions for possible interventions to effect positive change.

We're in business! Sustaining economic geography?

1. Introduction: what's happening to Economic Geography in the UK?

'The first thing to say about 'economic geography'... is that, even according to this relatively expansive definition of the active research community, it is a relatively small world' (Foster, Muellerleile, Olds and Peck 2007: 297).

'Economic geography has achieved significant and frequently pioneering academic and policy impacts during the past decade... but at the same time overall shrinkage of economic geography across the higher education network. A shrinking base makes it harder to pursue new opportunities... and to expand a presence in public debate.' (ESRC / RGS-IBG / AHRC *International Benchmarking Review of Human Geography* 2012: 10-11).

This report is concerned with the current health of Economic Geography (EG) in Geography Programmes and Departments of Geography in the UK and its embodied reproduction.¹ While economic geographers have long been characterised as a self-conscious lot, there is arguably much to celebrate about the contemporary vibrancy and relevance of our sub-discipline. In the wake of a dizzying array of intellectual turns over the last two decades (cultural, relational, institutional, evolutionary, practice – to name just a few!), the pluralist project of economic geography involves more than just 'proper-noun Economic Geographers' (Foster et al. 2007: 297). Rather, it also includes human geographers who maintain interests in geographies of economies more broadly defined, and productive engagement in a series of 'intellectual trading zones' (Barnes and Sheppard 2010) with scholars in a range of 'near neighbour disciplines' (Murphy 2016). This healthy pluralism is immediately evident in EG's multiple - namesake and other - international journals, which consistently rank highly in Geography and beyond. Likewise, a recent slew of EG handbooks, readers and textbooks document the state of our disciplinary art, through the publication of an impressively diverse array of empirical and conceptual research (see e.g. Tickell et al. 2007, Sheppard and Barnes 2008, Barnes et al. 2010, Lee et al. 2011, MacKinnon and Cumbers 2011, Boschma and Martin 2012, Coe et al. 2013, Hudson 2016, Barnes and Christophers 2018). EG also sits at the heart of undergraduate

¹ Over the last decade or so Geography in the UK Universities has found itself re-organised into various new administrative structures, often with the loss of independence and identity. Equally, it is as often found in the science side of the University as the social science side, which has implications for the relative status of human geography more generally.

teaching in UK universities as a recognised sub-discipline in the *International Benchmarking Review of Human Geography* (ESRC / AHRC / RGS-IBG 2013), with popular courses spanning uneven development, globalisation, finance, labour geographies, gender work and employment, cultural economy, innovation, retail and consumption. It is also represented by major groups within the international scholarly communities of the RGS-IBG and AAG, both of whom maintain significant EG research groups (EG Research Group, EG Specialty Group respectively) underpinning communities of practice at the UK and international levels. EG theory also enjoys policy influence within the World Bank, OECD, and amongst multiple regional and national governments (see e.g. OECD 2008, World Bank 2009 2016, HM Government 2013). It also appeals to other disciplines, with not only economists taking EG seriously, but also with a clear appeal to business and management scholars. Major EG topics that lend themselves particularly well to business studies include financialisation, innovation, global business networks, industrial clusters, learning and innovation.

However, these achievements notwithstanding, recent years have also witnessed an increasing sense of unease amongst some economic geographers in the UK. On one level, concerns have been raised around growing external competition around ideas that economic geographers previously laid expert claim to (including a geographical turn in other social sciences, and the rise of geographical economics) (see e.g. Martin 1999). These concerns have been relatively well rehearsed. More worrying perhaps – and certainly much less commented upon – is an apparent decline of our sub-discipline in former major centres of EG in UK universities, and its retreat to a progressively small number of Geography Departments. Extending concerns formally raised in the *International Benchmarking Review of Human Geography* (ESRC / AHRC / RGS-IBG 2013), colleagues have pointed to the mystery of why some leading Departments of Geography in the UK have significantly expanded in size over the course of three Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) / Research Excellence Framework (REF) cycles, yet do not have any Economic Geographers working in them. Consistent with these staffing trends in UK Geography Departments (indeed consequent from them), the last decade has also witnessed a discernible decline in UK-based applications to and attendance at the Summer Institute in Economic Geography since its inception in 2003, with the UK EG contingent dropping from a peak of 18 in 2006 to just 2 in 2014 (these figures out of a total of 40 attendees typically at each SIEG event) (see also Peck and Olds 2007). Likewise, there have been concurrent reductions in the numbers of journal papers submitted by scholars employed in UK Departments of Geography to *Economic Geography* and the *Journal of Economic Geography* which represent the international flagship

mouthpieces for our discipline.² Individually, each of these shifts might not seem to be a big deal, and reflective of long-standing patterns of change in a dynamic discipline, whose advancement in the UK is inseparable from the personal biographies and career histories of leading scholars who have been highly influential within particular departments, but have since moved into university management or else retired. However, these changes have also occurred alongside a new phenomenon in the UK, namely a notable migration of economic geographers from Departments of Geography to Schools of Business and Management (hereafter B & M) and related research centres (see Jones 2016). In combination, we argue that these multiple trends suggest something significant and worrying seems to have happened to UK EG in the last decade or so.

This cross-disciplinary movement of economic geographers to B & M in the UK formed the focus of a workshop at Queen Mary University of London in spring 2014, and subsequent similar discussions at the RGS-IBG, Newcastle University, and at the National University of Singapore. Drawing on these earlier conversations, for the first time this report documents the scale of this phenomenon based on new survey and interview data generated as part of research carried out by the EG Research Group of the RGS-IBG (2015-17). We benchmark the numbers of movers from Departments of Geography to B & M in the UK and consider the implications of this mobility for teaching, research and new forms of knowledge production in the face of contemporary economic change and upheaval and, likewise, for reproducing EG and the next generation of economic geographers in UK universities. We argue that this UK phenomenon runs deeper than simply a labour market issue around EG staffing. Rather, it raises more fundamental concerns about the future of EG in the UK, and for sustaining a cadre of scholars at the centre of our discipline who can speak with authority about geographies of economies.³ And all this at a time when discussions around the economy (including Brexit, anti-globalisation, and economic nationalisms) have arguably never been more urgent and pressing. This report also speaks to wider debates about the role of sub-disciplinary identity in human geography in the wake of calls for more interdisciplinary research in the social sciences and beyond. As we detail below, Geography Programmes and Departments in the UK are increasingly organising researchers from different sub-disciplinary backgrounds into larger, combined thematic groupings. Whilst useful for marketing purposes, a consequent lack of critical mass around

² These patterns have been identified by the editors of *Journal of Economic Geography*, and *Economic Geography*.

³ We are grateful to Jane Wills for codifying this key insight.

particular sub-disciplines - in our case EG – has also led to disenchantment amongst some colleagues with the wider project of Geography itself.

The report proceeds as follows. In Section 2 we set out the multi-method research methodology employed in this study, unpack key characteristics of the cohorts of movers evident in the survey data, and assess the scale and significance of this trend relative to the larger population of economic geographers in the UK and internationally. In Section 3 we explore the major motivations for colleagues in EG to make these moves into B & M, in relation to commonly identified *push* factors (in Geography), *pull* factors (in B & M) and *mediating mechanisms*. Section 4 examines the consequences of these moves for movers' disciplinary identities, research activities, publishing strategies, teaching, and career advancement – alongside subsequent patterns of in-fill (or more often not) in the Geography Programmes and Departments that colleagues had exited. In Section 5 we extend this analysis to explore the consequences of these moves for sustaining EG in the UK and make a number of suggestions in relation to reasserting the core principles of EG and the distinctiveness of a geographical approach to economies.

2. Tracking the movement of economic geographers into business and management (UK)

Methods, sources and evidence base

This report presents new empirical research carried out over a two year period from 2015 to 2017 to track the movement of economic geographers previously based in UK Departments of Geography into Schools of Business and Management also in the UK. Stage 1 of this research (summer/autumn 2015) used published sources (personal staff websites, departmental EG cluster research webpages, jobs ads on the EGRG listserv), EGRG membership data, and input from EGRG members and UK Heads of Schools of Geography to compile a UK database of all economic geographers who have moved into B & M since 2000. Eligibility for inclusion in this mover sample was based on: PhD students in EG who were trained in Departments of Geography and then took up their first academic postdoctoral post in a School of B & M or a related research centre, alongside mid-career and senior economic geographers who moved from EG faculty positions in Schools of Geography in the UK into Schools of B & M or related research centres from 2000 to 2015 (chosen to include RAE2001, RAE2008 and REF2014). This then served as the sample frame for Stage 2 (winter 2015-spring 2016), a web-based questionnaire survey (N=54; 65% response rate). This focused on: movers' motivations; consequences of their moves

for subsequent patterns of teaching, publication, PhD supervision, research grant activity, conference attendance and identification with Geography; and subsequent patterns of 'infill' in the departments of Geography where they were previously employed. In Stage 3 (spring/summer 2016), 25 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with a purposive sample of economic geographers now working in B & M schools, to explore their lived experiences of making such a move, and its implications for their identities as Economic Geographers and/or economic geographers, research activities, teaching and mentoring. This purposive interview sample targeted movers at different career points across multiple institutions, female and male movers, as well as a handful of senior commentators. Interviews lasted 45-90 minutes, and were recorded and transcribed in full.⁴

The analysis developed in this report also draws on subsequent wider discussions around these data through presentations to: the RGS-IBG annual conference August 2016 (with panel responses from Nick Henry (Coventry), Jennifer Johns (Liverpool), Ron Martin (Cambridge) and wider audience discussion (with approximately 45 attendees); to the UK Heads of Geography meeting in October 2016, with audience feedback from approx. 40 Heads of Schools; and from a UK workshop in June 2017 at Cardiff University (with around 35 attendees, and panel responses from Jon Beaverstock (Bristol), Jennifer Johns (Liverpool), and Rob Huggins (Cardiff)). In this way, the diversity of concerns expressed in this report stretch beyond the four named co-authors. And for reasons which will quickly become apparent, all names and institutional affiliations of survey and interview participants have been anonymised in the report.

Assessing the size and scale of this 'Economic Geography diaspora'

A total cohort of 87 Economic Geographers was identified as having moved from Schools of Geography in the UK to academic positions in B & M since 2000. Whilst noting the difficulties of pigeon-holing colleagues with interests in EG as part of broader research portfolios, we are confident given the topics of PhD study evident by members of the mover group, spanning: clusters knowledge and innovation, local and regional development, geographies of money and finance, global production networks (GPNs), labour geography, regeneration, retail and consumption, digital economies, energy, entrepreneurship, and postcolonial economic geography. Likewise, several potential participants originally identified in Stage 1 declined to

⁴ We gratefully acknowledge all colleagues who took part in the various stages of research. Likewise the support of a talented team of RGS-IBG summer interns lead by Catherine Souch who provided valuable research support and transcription: Marie Gallagher, Emily Brunton, Jemma Hulbert, Patrick Chorley, Douglas Jenkins, Arif Hussein and Isabelle Green. We are also grateful for intern assistance from Anna Geatrell in earlier stages of this study.

take part in the survey and asked to be removed from the project because they did not identify primarily as economic geographers. None of the remaining 87 movers identified did so.

Table 1: Benchmarking 87 movers against the larger population of economic geographers (UK and international)

UK	
Global Conference in Economic Geography, Oxford 2015	UK contingent 171 (but not all UK economic geographers attended).
RGS-IBG Economic Geography Research Group (EGRG) membership list	2016 – 236 members (99 with an ac.uk email address) 2014 – 244 members (114 with an ac.uk email address) 2008 – 242 members Annual figures (November each year) used by RGS-IBG to calculate subventions for the Research Groups. These are only the RGS-IBG members, and not the total EGRG membership. Not all necessarily academics – non-academic Fellows and members are also able to sign up for Research Group membership.
Foster et al. (2007: 297)	1300 authors of (cited) economic geography papers 1982-2006 (26 journals, articles with 10 more citations) England + Wales + Scotland + Ireland = 45% ‘market share’ of these cited papers hence, estimate: 585 UK economic geographers (assuming even productivity across total global population).
INTERNATIONAL	
Economic Geography 2015 (international):	EGRG listserv: 801 (extends beyond UK) EGSG listserv: 887 (extends beyond UK)
Sheppard et al. (2004)	‘Perhaps a thousand practicing professional economic geographers worldwide’ (p. 2)
Foster et al. (2007)	‘The narrowest definition of proper-noun Economic Geographers so who have published cited papers in the subdiscipline’s ‘core’ journals, <i>Economic Geography</i> and the <i>Journal of Economic Geography</i> – a relatively cosy ‘club’ of just 142 individuals worldwide. ’

To date, audiences at both the RGS-IBG (2016) and Cardiff (2017) workshops have expressed surprise at the total figure of 87 movers – as significantly larger than they had expected. They also highlighted the need for the scale of the movement to be publicised widely. Following Henry (2016), we need to judge its numerical significance in relation to a range of benchmarks. As shown in Table 1, 87 economic geographers represents around one third of the total membership of the Economic Geography Research Group of the RGS-IBG (or indeed more given that not all EGRG’s 236 current membership have a UK university email address). It also

represents around half of the total UK contingent at the most recent Global Economic Geography conference in Oxford in 2015 (although we recognise that not all UK economic geographers attended that event). These figures are also significant at the international scale, with estimates suggesting an international community of around 1000 practising economic geographers worldwide, also consistent with the membership of the EGRG and EGSG email listservs (approximately 800 members each).

Significantly, movers from EG into B & M are evidently leaving from *all levels* of the academic career structure in UK Geography Departments. This includes Professors (10%), Readers (6%), Senior Lecturers/Associate Professor (8%), Lecturers (15%), RA/Research Associate (31%), and Doctoral Researchers (27%) in Economic Geography. Strikingly, the latter two cohorts of Doctoral Researchers and Postdoctoral Researchers in EG represent a combined 58% of movers, and their patterns of mobility suggest a lack of EG jobs at entry level (although of course this problem is sadly not unique to EG). Also interesting to note is that of all the lecturers in EG who had since moved into business/management, half had been on fixed-term contracts. This figure rises to two thirds for research associates in EG. In combination, these findings undermine the credibility of suggestions made at the UK Heads of School in Geography autumn 2016 meeting that this is not a negative labour market hiring issue, but simply a positive outcome of inter-disciplinarity (see also Section 3 on push factors).

Our survey data (N=54) also evidence *successive waves of movers* from Schools of Geography into Business and Management and related research centres, with 40% of movers having done so in the 2000s, and 44% between 2010 and 2015, with a steady drip feed of 1-4 economic geographers moving every year 2000-15.⁵ Indeed, these figures also suggest some acceleration in this trend over time given that the survey was carried out only halfway through the 2010-20 decade.

The primary substantive research interests of those movers can be summarized as: clusters, knowledge and innovation (17), GPNs/TNCs (6), labour geography (7), local economic development (12), business geography (7), regional development (18), retail and consumption (5), and gender work and employment (5). In short, there is broad-ranging receptiveness to the major research agendas in EG amongst B & M schools in the UK. Likewise, the attractiveness of B

⁵ Our data also highlighted some economic geographers who had moved in the 1980s: 1% and 1990s: 13%, but given that it had not been our original intention to capture these earlier phases of mobility, there is significant under-counting here.

& M to female colleagues in EG is evident, with 17 female colleagues (10 of whom took part in the subsequent survey) representing 20% of the total 87 movers. These numbers give further cause for concern given that they include female EG scholars at a range of levels in the career hierarchy, in a discipline that is already male-dominated. In sum, as one research participant put it, 'I don't think British Economic Geography is big enough to be able to absorb the loss of 80-90 people at all career levels, it's just not *that* big'.

The survey data also revealed the presence of multiple EG colleagues in new and growing clusters of EG research within B & M, including: the Centre for Business in Society (Coventry University); Southampton Business School; Birmingham Business School (City Region Economic and Development Institute); and Sheffield Management School. Much more than 'petty' worries over academic 'territory', our concerns around the movement of economic geographers into B & M emerge in relation to a simultaneous reduction in EG research capacity in previous centres of critical mass in UK Departments of Geography. As identified by our research participant sample, and our analysis of RAE and REF submissions (see Appendix 1), this includes the Universities of Manchester, Cambridge, Birmingham, Glasgow, and University College London – institutions that 10-15 years ago had very clearly defined groups of EG scholars, but have since lost them over quite a short timeframe. The outcome is a clustering of economic geographers in Geography programmes and departments in the UK in a progressively smaller group of institutions – most notably (in alphabetical order!) Cardiff, LSE, Newcastle, Nottingham and QMUL. And in response to one senior commentator who rightly highlighted the need to benchmark these changes against the wider population of human geographers in UK Departments of Geography over the same timeframe, it is clear that these trends are *not* occurring in tandem with a general reduction in human geography staffing more generally.

These changes are evident through a comparison of the 'research environment' statements for successive Research Assessment Exercises / Research Excellence Framework since 2000, namely: RAE 2001, RAE 2008, and REF 2014. This was expanded by analysing the webpages of those Departments and Programmes of Geography that had a recognisable EG cluster in 2014 to check the current state of affairs in 2017. The results suggest a dramatic decline in the visibility of EG in the research environment statements over the 2001-14 period (see Appendix 1, Tables A1 and A2). In RAE 2001, it was possible to identify an explicit EG Group in 19 (59%) Units of Assessment (hereafter U of A), and an additional 4 (13%) with a broader-focused research group that contained some economic geographers. By REF 2014 only 6 (19%) U of A's had a recognised EG research group and a further 7 (22%) had a broader-focused research group that

contained some economic geographers. Thus, we can conclude that in RAE 2001 EG was in rude health with almost 72% of U of A's having a research group or cluster that could be identified as EG or a group that included economic geographers. In REF 2014 less than 35% fell into that combined category.⁶

A final element of our analysis involved a review of the current (2017) websites of the 11 Departments and Programmes in REF 2014 that had an EG group or cluster or a group that included economic geographers. This review suggests that a combination of staff movements (both to B & M and elsewhere within UK Geography) and the promotion of senior staff to administrative roles has *further eroded* the status of EG as a sub-discipline. Only four Geography Departments and Programmes within that analysis — LSE, Newcastle, Nottingham and QMUL — can still be considered to have a critical mass of economic geographers supporting a named EG research group (see Table A3). Overall, notwithstanding the more general loss of sub-disciplinary identity with the discipline, EG seems to have disappeared from the majority of Geography Departments and Programmes as an identifiable research specialism. As we shall see below, this is both a driver and consequence of the movement of economic geographers to schools of B & M within the UK.

3. Major motivations for moving from Geography into Business and Management

To understand why so many Economic Geographers in the UK have moved from Departments of Geography into Business and Management, the survey and interview data reveal a series of interrelated motivating factors, that can be grouped in terms of 'push factors' (within UK Departments of Geography), 'pull factors' (perceived attractiveness of B & M schools), plus a series of mediating mechanisms which enable those transitions.

Push factors

As already noted, much more than restricted to a particular age cohort of scholars, our survey data reveal that the movement of economic geographers into B & M is occurring across all levels of the career hierarchy (from newly minted PhDs up to Senior Chairs). Underpinning this pattern, research participants consistently pointed to a general lack of Economic Geography job openings in Geography Departments. Over half of the survey participants also highlighted 'too

⁶ However, one caveat is that in REF 2014 U of A's were not required to provide detailed descriptions of their research group structures—though most still did—and this may have resulted in a more general reduction in reported research activity by sub-discipline. As noted earlier, there is now a tendency to use more general thematic research group descriptors spanning multiple strands of human geography.

many fixed-term positions' as a major push factor in their moving to B & M. Particularly worrying in this context is the loss of newly minted EG PhDs who otherwise would have resourced the next cohort of faculty in Departments and Programmes of Geography. And nor is this for want of trying: one research participant took employment benefit for several months in order to fund themselves writing papers at their parents' house, as a short term stop gap because 'there just weren't jobs coming up in economic geography'. And as other early career movers made clear:

'My primary motivation for moving was to find a permanent job after I finished my doctorate. The labour market for EG jobs was so dire, a good week was seeing a job advertised that I could apply for, let alone being invited to interview...'

Moreover, these labour market decisions are often being made at the same time as when junior colleagues are also starting young families, and often trying to establish two careers. The result for many, then, is that 'I just moved away from a geography affiliation merely because I didn't get any job offer in geography after my PhD, as simple as that'.

Reinforcing these identified push factors, interviewees also highlighted a growing tendency for UK university lectureship positions that *were* open to them as economic geographers having been advertised as 'part of a broader human geography mix, where you're up against applicants other subdisciplines; whereas, in the past, those jobs would have been ringfenced or at least framed in very narrow EG terms'. Likewise, two other economic geographers are now working in B & M schools on the basis that:

'When I was looking for posts a lot of the roles seemed to be around social and cultural geography and that seems to be a perception of what the students and departments want'.

'You think hang on a minute there's departments that don't even have an economic geographer, not even one! I go on jobs.ac.uk just to look and there's relatively few jobs advertised specifically for economic geography. I can't remember the last time I saw a job advertised for economic geography... [and] my replacement wasn't an economic geographer; I wasn't replaced as far as I can tell'.

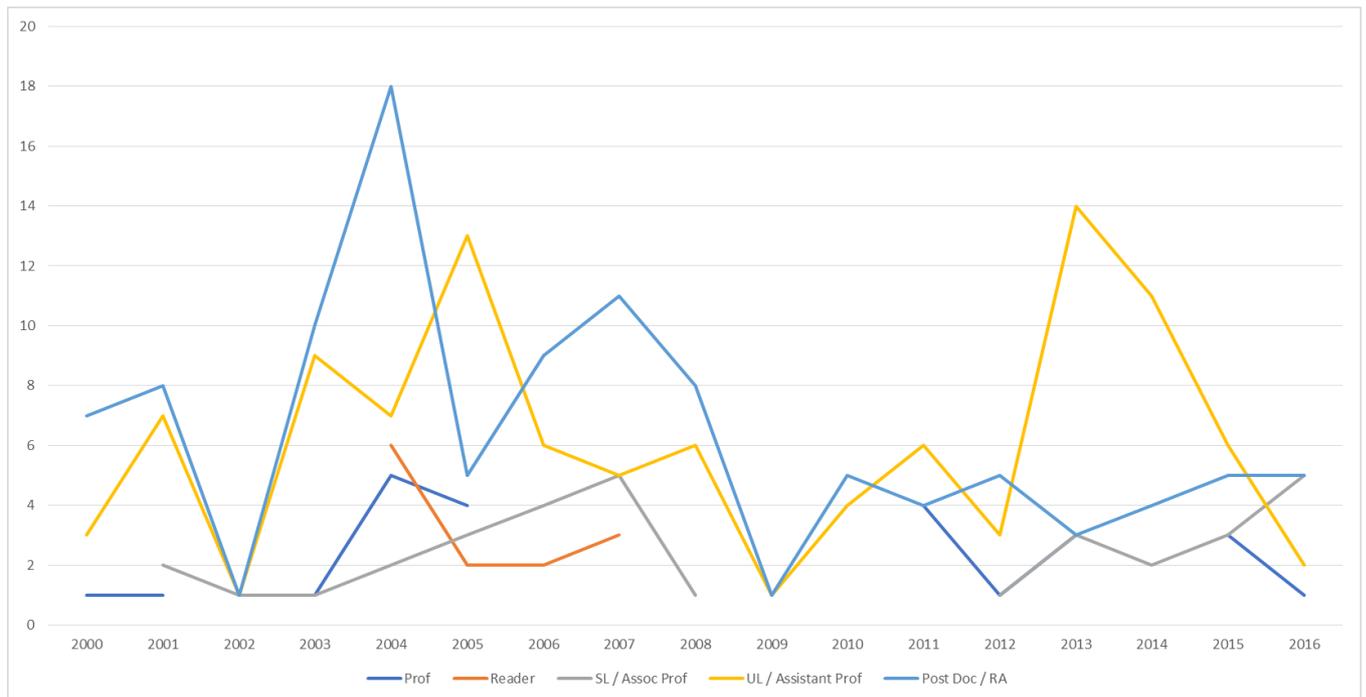
The knock-on effect then, is that 'there is nobody to lobby for a similar replacement or champion those that apply for the post - and there always plenty of staff with their own sub-disciplinary

and personal agendas'. Indeed, multiple research participants also highlighted that when senior economic geographers in their own respective departments had retired or moved into University Administration, they had not been replaced by someone with a similar research specialism, even at a more junior level⁷. As one colleague usefully summed up: 'things like this matter to a sub-discipline that is already concerned about its status'.

Importantly, the views and experiences identified through our survey and interview data are also consistent with secondary data on patterns of job adverts in human geography in the UK. These include the analysis of job adverts in UK Human Geography as part of the *International Benchmarking Review of Human Geography* (ESRC/RGS-IBG/AHRC 2013) which showed that Cultural and Social Geography accounted for 25% of all jobs ads for the three years 2010-12, over twice the figure for Economic Geography (10%) (p. 8). These data were collected directly by the RGS-IBG from UK Heads of School. To extend these data, we trawled UK academic job vacancies for economic geographers for the period 2000-16. Whilst jobs.ac.uk were not willing to share this information (!), job ads were instead retrieved from archived posts to the econgeog jiscmail list, which mirrors the majority of EG relevant ads posted to jobs.ac.uk. As evident in Figure 1, the general pattern is one of declining total numbers of jobs advertised in UK Geography which either include 'economic geography' in the advertised job title, or as one of multiple preferred sub-disciplinary specialisms. This pattern is especially evident from 2003 to 2016. One potential exception to this evidence of a general downward trend is a spike in Lectureship ads in 2015. However, this spike is underpinned by a set of Human Geography lectureships in which EG was named as but one potential applicant group – this in contrast to an earlier spike in 2005 in which the majority of advertised lectureships were EG specific. In other words, in this later period economic geographers are competing with other human geographers for the same posts. Also interesting to note is that while the majority of these jobs ads posted to the econgeog jiscmail listserv are located in Departments of Geography and related research centres in the UK, this pattern becomes less dominant over time. Significantly, the first job ad in a business school was posted to the econgeog list in May 2008: Lecturer in Economic Development, University of Birmingham Business School. The second was in July 2008: Lectureship, University of Middlesex Business School.

⁷ For example, when a very senior Economic Geographer recently retired at Cambridge University they were not replaced. And at Birmingham University, the retirement of a senior Economic Geographer and the movement of another to the Business School was identified as having 'all but ended Economic Geography research in the School of Geography'.

Figure 1: Charting advertised UK academic jobs vacancies for economic geographers: as posted to econgeog jiscmail list 2000-16



Note: where individual posts were advertised at two possible grades (e.g. reader/SL), the higher grade has been used as the datapoint. Cross-comparison of posts across three month ranges avoids double-counting of the same job ads. The majority of jobs posted to the econgeog list are located in Departments of Geography or attached research centres.

Reinforcing these labour market push factors, a second major theme that emerged is summed up by the phrase: ‘research agenda not taken seriously by colleagues’. A number of respondents talked of having felt sidelined within their respective former departments, including some comments around ‘an anti-economic stance’ in some Geography Departments and Programmes:

‘My institution stuck two fingers up to human geography and it then stuck a finger up to economic geography by not recruiting any more so the message couldn’t have been clearer. I wasn’t valued where I was so the only thing I could do was move to another geography department but there wasn’t any posts advertised at the time’.

‘There was definitely a kind of slight marginalisation of economic geography and political economy as a serious cutting edge human geography subject... a very senior colleague of mine, he used to read my stuff and say my gosh you’re actually doing some interesting stuff! And it was almost like a surprise when he was reading stuff for the last

REF or whatever but he should have known that already! And I think there was a frustration from that that built over time’.

‘It was quite clear that there was no institutional backing or support for what we were doing, so at that point I was thinking well I don’t really think I feel like I belong to the project of geography here anymore. ... So I began to look around to be somewhere where there is institutional backing for what I do. And a job came up in management and I already had a colleague in management.’

More specifically, other respondents felt that their field of study had been squeezed out by the cultural turn and the rise of Cultural Geography.⁸ An attendant negative attitude to quantitative methods was also identified as having impacted EG through the loss of numeracy skills, such that ‘human geography students coming through the system cannot engage with much EG research’⁹. Thus as one participant, now working in a B & M school, summed up:

‘It greatly concerned me that people can be getting geography degrees having not done any economic geography...of course I see that as a fundamental part of geography, so if they’re not even getting a basic overlook on economy course, if they’re not reading *Global Shift* in their geography degrees, that worries me’.

The overall pattern, then, is much more than simply an older generation who feel somewhat disaffected by wider changes in human geography and their marginalisation within their departments and who were thereby motivated to leave. Rather, it also includes a younger generation who are interested in geographies of economies but do not identify themselves as Economic Geographers, or else have little opportunity to pursue job opportunities in Geography departments, and have relocated to B & M and are ‘doing economic geography but not in a geography department’. But not all are happy with this compromise:

‘I applied for the job in management and I got the job in management... but it wouldn’t have been my preferred move. In the ideal world I would have moved within geography to a place that recognised economic geography and economic geography had more institutional kudos... I can’t say it was a massive desire to become a business school

⁸ The growing predominance of Cultural Geography was noted in the ESRC’s (2013) *International Benchmarking Review of Human Geography* and while many participants pointed to its positive impact in terms of research on the ‘cultural economy’, others maintained that EG has potentially lost a grip on its key focus of analysis—the firm—and key issues, such as uneven development (see also Hudson 2006).

⁹ Again this is not a problem unique to Economic Geography - it is equally problematic in Physical Geography.

person but I was aware that there was a landscape there that would offer kind of a welcoming place for someone doing the kind of work I do.'

For others, however, their move was also underpinned by a 'sense of more things in common between economic geographers and scholars in a business school than this "chaotic alliance" with physical geographers'.

Pull factors

Reinforcing the push factors described above (typically framed in rather negative terms), our survey and interview data also show that the movement of EG colleagues out of UK Geography Departments is motivated by a series of factors and conditions within B & M schools that also provide a positive motivation to move. At the core of these 'pull factors', respondents repeatedly pointed to the significant growth of B & M schools in UK universities over the last two decades, in which B & M has become a big income generator for universities. This has resulted in far more job openings in B & M than in Geography. It was also generally perceived amongst our mover sample that the pay and conditions in B & M are better than in Geography:

'I think there's long been a hierarchy that has said the business school is this less exacting place, where people come in from more diverse backgrounds and maybe less academic. And now, that's changing... they are a chosen site for all sorts of investment. So they're paying big salaries to get in people who can act as centres of gravity to co-ordinate all sorts of bigger initiatives, and they are seen as a place that can straddle and bring together economic sociologists and geographers and economists and lawyers. There's certainly a lot of money been thrown at them to try and make them into these key nodes of social science expertise'.

'I have been on so many business school panels for jobs and it's clear... there are so many jobs! I mean I think the business school is bank rolling this university to the tune of about £30 million surplus every year so...with the overseas masters market it's enormous. It means we have been promised across the business school 40 appointments in the next two or three years you know so that gives you an idea of the scale of expansion going on'.

There was also widespread agreement across our research participants that economic geographers are well qualified to apply for this wealth of B & M job opportunities, this in terms of 'the kinds of research that many economic geographers do offer[ing] a good fit with B & M',

and that 'a natural home for some economic geographers within B & M may be in strategy, international business and strategy, innovation, entrepreneurship. It also helps that economic geographers tend to publish in places that meet with approval in business and management'. Here, multiple respondents commented on the role of the 'ABS list', or Chartered Association of Business Schools' Academic Journal Guide, which ranks many journals across the social sciences.¹⁰ The list is instrumental in deciding on B & M hiring and promotion, based on its widespread use to judge the relative research quality of applicants. In B & M schools in research intensive universities, and those with research ambition, the expectation is that the publications in which staff publish should be in journals that are 3 and higher. As a significant pull factor:

'It just so happens that the leading economic geography and kind of regional studies type journals are rated 3 and 4 on the ABS list. So you can be an economic geographer in a business school and actually be really respected and valued'.

Many geography journals are highly ranked on the ABS list (2015), including: *Economic Geography*, *Journal of Economic Geography*, *Environment and Planning A*, and *Environment and Planning D* all at 4; and *Antipode*, *Economy and Society*, *Global Networks*, *Journal of Development Studies*, *Progress in Human Geography*, *Environment and Planning C*, *European Urban and Regional Studies*, *Regional Studies*, and *Urban Studies* all at 3. However a consequent problem for Geography as a discipline, and the visibility of EG within it, is that some of our most prestigious generalist journals, such as *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, are not on the ABS list. Consequently, economic geographers now working in B & M schools are not encouraged to publish their best work in the wider view of Geography.

Reinforcing these pull factors, the size of most B & M schools in the UK also means that they are better resourced, both in financial terms and provision of support for teaching, administration and research:

'That's the other thing about the business school, if we are being pragmatic: the amount of funding available for conferences here is incredible compared to what I had in geography. Annually, up to now I can go to any conference I want as long as I give them a paper and they will pay for it. I could go to probably 5 or 6 international conferences a

¹⁰ Chartered Association of Business Schools' Academic Journal Guide <https://charteredabs.org/academic-journal-guide-2015>). Ranks many journals across the social sciences 1 – 4*.

year. And just to give you the comparison, when I was in geography, you weren't given anything automatically, but you were told you could apply for £200 every year'.

Respondents also commonly identified 'better job security' as a major pull factor motivating their move to B & M. As noted earlier, Geography in the UK has been subjected to reorganisation and, in addition, increasing competition for students has undermined the financial stability of some Departments and Programmes. One result has been the casualisation of early career posts, but also the downsizing of some Departments and Programmes to make the books balance. By comparison, student recruitment in B & M is buoyant, particularly in relation to international students on Master's programmes and professional MBA qualifications that command a premium. Thus as two senior EG colleagues now working in business schools explained:

'What is new, and what is different, is the fact the business schools have become such significant actors with the university system. They are cash cows for universities, they are teaching engines that generate large amounts of money because they are able to recruit and therefore they need to recruit people so they are recruiting people from all over the place'.

'The constant rationalisation and restructurings, it's pretty destabilising for geography as discipline, in a lot of places. Whereas in business schools, with stronger revenue streams for a university, you're not worried about whether the department is going to exist in five years' time or whether the course you teach is going to exist in five years' time, because the student numbers are buoyant, and the funding stream is secure. That kind of thing, was definitely part of the consideration when I went into a business and management school, rather than trying to go into geography'.

One mid-career colleague who had recently moved into B & M was a little more colourful in their assessment of these possibilities:

'If you are a new good PhD graduate, what are you going to do? I remember thinking to myself what the fuck do I do...sitting around, getting a teaching position only for a year, living with my parents for six months and then going for temporary positions when I could get a permanent job [in business management] and settle down'.

Reinforcing these pull factors, the survey and interview data also point to agreement around the greater potential for career progression within B & M relative to Geography. In part, this was

explained in terms of Geographers' 'clear sense of where to publish' and 'the premium attached to obtaining external funding and engaging in impact-related activities' meaning that individuals that 'tick all the boxes' can gain rapid promotion. It is also the case that many B & M Schools are large enough to be able to keep their promotion decision-making processes 'in house' in a competitive labour market.¹¹ Among our respondents there was also the sense that the bar for promotion in B & M is not set quite as high as within Geography:

'Most business students move into business as practitioners, so there is a lack of student flow to MSc and PhD, and a shortage of good, qualified academic staff that can do research. Given that every university has a business school that has a substantial student body, there is very strong demand for staff. Some recruits can easily gain an SL role, when they wouldn't be even shortlisted for a lectureship in geography. This leads to rank and pay inflation, and offers a quick journey to a Chair for junior faculty, or a pay bump for a Prof in Geography and a larger conference budget'.

'I got my Chair at 35, I'd have never have got that within a geography department. A lot of that again goes back to this ABS list. It's become a metric-driven culture in business schools, the language of business schools is what 4 star 3 star have you got. Now this is not the quality of your paper it's the rating of the journal it's in. That that's the language of business schools. So if you can get papers in good quality journals, then that's the way you as a person are viewed'.

Finally, multiple research participants highlighted their increased influence on policy debates as an important pull factor that draws them to B & M. As a discipline, Geography remains self-conscious in its struggle to gain policy recognition and to make an impact. In contrast, there is a sense among the majority of movers (76%) that making the move from Geography into Business and Management has enhanced their career through greater engagements with policy makers and economic stakeholders. As one respondent put it: 'You have to leave geography to play in a bigger sandpit'. Likewise, one of the authors of this report moved from a post where they were 'Professor of Human Geography' to a Business School post with the title of 'Professor of Global Energy', and for whom there is no doubt that this has opened new doors into the policy and business communities and also resulted in greater media recognition.

Mediating mechanisms enabling 'the Great Economic Geography Diaspora'

¹¹ As articulated by several participants, these promotion possibilities also avoid the problem of human geographers having to satisfy promotion panels comprised of scientists as a result of being located within a College or Faculty of Science.

In addition to the fundamental conditioning role of the ABS list as identified above, the survey and interview data also reveal a number of other mediating mechanisms that enable and facilitate the growth of an 'EG diaspora' in the UK. These include EG colleagues who have *already* moved to B & M acting as role models and introducers for subsequent movers - significantly, 18 participants identified other economic geographers working in their current B & M school. Interviewees variously described the significance of there already being 'a number of economic geography researchers working at the research centre already when I joined and there was an attraction in some ways because I knew that I would find a home here quite easily - whereas if I was the lone economic geographer in the business school I would be in a slightly different scenario'. Likewise, one female participant spoke of her 'interview panel, all three of them would have been economic geographers'. This mechanism was identified as particularly important for early career colleagues:

'In terms of post-docs there were more over in the business school than there were in geography. So part of the appeal was to be part of that community of similar career stage people and that was far clearer over in the business school than it was in the school of geography'.

'Geographers follow other geographers. You have to. And what subsequently happened was... the business school ended up with more economic geographers than the geography department, each one of those individuals really followed the others'.

Likewise, the role of senior economic geographers actively advising younger colleagues to move:

'In the last two or three years some of the PhD students I had...who were very good and finished in geography and had great CVs, I used to say to them you might want to try to think about business school'.

In other cases, our data also identified instances of B & M schools actively head hunting senior economic geographers:

'So I didn't go looking for a chair in entrepreneurship they came looking to me, it just seemed a sensible career shift really. And then I discovered that professors in business schools get paid a lot more than professors in geography!'

Furthermore, the tendency of economic geographers to engage in inter-disciplinary working was also identified as making career moves into B & M relatively easy, coupled with their active engagement in primary research and ‘getting their hands empirically dirty’, against a backdrop in which B & M research is often characterised as overly theoretical and quantitative in nature.

Overall, most respondents who had moved from Geography into B & M variously articulated a sense of ‘feel[ing] more valued... because they recognise the value of economic geography’. This is in marked contrast to the lack of recognition and status reported by many economic geographers when they were in Geography Departments and Programmes. Perhaps then it is not surprising that few entertain the idea of a return to Geography. While some respondents remained somewhat open minded ¹², the general pattern from the survey is of a predominant one way flow (from Geography into B & M), rather than a more complex set of cross-disciplinary career trajectories which advance back and forth between the two disciplines. Even more worrying perhaps is our survey finding that a whopping 82% of EG posts previously held by movers in UK Departments of Geography were *not* subsequently replaced.¹³ This prevents thriving research groups being maintained (as evidenced by our analysis of the RAE and REF) and also explains the lack of posts for new EG PhDs to apply for. All of this speaks of a self-reinforcing process that has rapidly led to the loss of a critical research mass and teaching capacity in EG in the majority of Geography Departments and Programmes in the UK. Yet as we will discuss later, the ironic outcome is that there may be more economic geographers currently employed in the UK (albeit outside of Geography Departments) than would otherwise have been the case.

4. Lived experiences of moving from Geography into Business and Management

As part of both our questionnaire survey and interviews we also explored the lived experiences of those EG colleagues moving from Geography into Business and Management. Some were very positive. As one mid-career research participant now working in a school of management put it:

‘I’m happy enough in my current environment which I think feels more secure, in an uncertain higher education world. I feel more secure in management. We’re recruiting

¹² Case in point: ‘Would I be able to get back into Geography, or a geography department? – the answer is I don’t know... it’s certainly on my mind that it actually might be more difficult going back’.

¹³ This figure is for EG faculty only – i.e. excludes movers exiting Doctoral Research positions in Economic Geography.

still geography's hollowed out in my institution and I see it happening in other institution. I see more economic geographers in business schools'.

Another senior colleague gleefully extolled the virtues of working in a business and management school because:

'The one thing I didn't anticipate was the amount of time I have to do research here. I think it's quite interesting because I had a very heavy admin role in geography and I hadn't been able to be a PI on a research grant proposal for about 4 or 5 years in geography... But it meant that I was given a real big push behind my research when I came in so I was able to build up a momentum. So it's that time for research and ability to forge an agenda'.

As might be expected, the story is not always so positive however. One mid-career participant now working in B & M noted that 'Geography people still like working with other geographers. I get quite nostalgic when I think about having worked in other geography departments and I know several people who aren't happy in their business schools. Some of them very senior. Very very unhappy'. On balance, then, it is fair to say that our research participants, sometimes despite initial impressions, found 'the grass to be not much greener on the B & M side of the fence' in terms of conditions of research and working conditions. The only exception is the financial situation, with regards to number of posts and funding for research and conference activities. Here everyone was unequivocal that B & M is a richer and in turn more enabling space.

Of most interest to us though was the extent to which practicing EG in B & M schools affected the nature of teaching and research amongst movers. One important finding, which would support suggestions that moves are not necessarily bad news, is that the impacts on disciplinary identity are modest. The term 'Economic Geographer' continues to be used by the majority of movers, with two thirds of respondents to the questionnaire survey choosing as their identity either 'an Economic Geographer working in a Business or Management School' (57%) or an 'Economic Geographer' (8%). As one senior research participant suggested:

'You can take the economic geographer out of a geography department but not geography out of the economic geographer. There are many examples of geographers based in other departmental settings – planning, social policy, political science, sociology – and this tendency can be traced back decades. One could argue that a business school setting has fewer constraints than a geography department and perhaps more opportunities'.

There were, however, also indications that the experience of working in a B & M School has effects on identity and practice that are less positive for EG and often harder to spot. They are nonetheless very important for the health of EG. The majority (73%) of movers identified a reduced affinity to EG as a consequence of their move. Similarly, a majority (66%) of respondents reported less frequent attendance at EG conferences as a consequence of moving (22% no longer attend EG conferences at all). Also, only one third were members of EGRG at the time of the survey. Hence, whilst only 9% of participants described themselves as a 'former Economic Geographer', the move does seem to have an effect on what people do, how they do it, and thus *overall* how strong their affinity is to EG. Further investigation identified three important areas of consideration: research, professional practice, and teaching (including PhD supervision).

The impacts on the research practice of those moving to B & M could be seen as minimal. As noted above, one of the factors making moves possible is the receptiveness of B & M to a number of key areas of EG research. This meant movers felt able to continue with their research with, at least initially, few if any adjustments being made in terms of substantive foci or method. Indeed, some even felt enabled to do their EG research, compared with the situation when in a Geography Department or Programme in which EG was peripheral and perhaps not valued. As one participant put it: 'You are treated as a serious researcher in your own field'. Another senior colleague who had moved into B & M noted the consequent financial implications of 'being taken seriously':

'I am economic geographer based in a business school who leads a group of economic geographers. There is a lot more funding available here... this comes with a £4.8m investment the University has made to develop my team of economic geographers. This investment would not have gone to the geography department'.

Initial impressions, and the positive experiences of some, should not, however, be taken to mean that there are no impacts on research practice. For those who had been working in a B & M School for more than a year or two, the perhaps unintentional, often incremental and individually small changes that begin to happen are worth reflecting upon. Reflecting the proximity (physical and institutional) phenomenon well known to economic geographers, practicing in B & M makes research collaboration with scholars in this field – either in the same school or elsewhere – more likely. The majority (64%) of survey respondents said they

developed greater research network collaboration with B & M colleagues after their move. And significantly, this came at the expense of collaboration with those in EG. As one senior research participant noted:

'I feel quite remote from geography as a discipline really, I don't really know what is happening in geography, I don't really have a dialogue with people who are still active in geography departments'.

Evidence that EG is losing out can also be found in our survey data which indicates that 42% of movers, as a consequence of moving from geography to B & M, submit research grant applications more frequently; 23% also indicated an improved grant success rate since moving. Strikingly, the total grant income secured (as PI and/or Co-I) since moving into B & M by those completing our questionnaire survey was an impressive £44.1 million shared across 34 respondents. This grant income could/should have been going into Geography departments. Moreover, as a result of the tendency for movers to collaborate with others outside of EG, a clear EG voice on major issues of our times is less likely. Evidence of this can be found in the absence of a clearly EG project in the ESRC's Brexit priority funding round, the irony being that a project on the regional impact of Brexit, entitled 'The economic impacts on Brexit on the UK, its regions, its cities and its sectors,' is being conducted in a Business School, with a non-economic geographer as a PI. And again, whilst this might be seen as a reflection of an inter-disciplinary research environment, it results in the voice of EG being somewhat diluted, particularly when projects are badged as being run by a B & M School. Echoing our earlier discussion of impacts on career development, one senior research participant highlighted how:

'The business school kudos is actually huge to be honest. Far bigger than it should be... I'm getting far more attention as a business school professor than I would have done as a geographer, no doubt about it'.

Reinforcing these changes, the publication patterns of those moving to B & M also subtly evolve. As already mentioned, one of the drivers of movement is the recognition and value of EG publications in B & M. As such, the starting point for virtually all of our research participants was an ability to move because of their publication profile. This would suggest that movers can/would continue to publish as they had done previously – i.e. predominantly in EG journals. However, our research also reveals a slow yet cumulatively significant drift away from EG outlets. Almost two thirds of the survey participants stated that since moving from Geography

into B & M they target B & M journals more frequently as outlets for publication. One third identified no change in their publication strategy.

And while the ABS list has enabled colleagues' *initial* moves into B & M, it takes on a different role *after* people have moved. Over three quarters of respondents (79%) stated that since moving from Geography into B & M the ABS list has significantly influenced which journals they choose to publish in. This has multiple effects. It can lead to the exclusion of all but a select few geography journals. It can also even lead to the abandoning of the EG journals on the list. The latest version of the ABS list now includes a 4* category (previously the categories being 1-4). Only a select few B & M journals get the 4* ranking. As a result, as one participant explained: 'my happy place is the econ geog journals but increasingly these are not the journals you are pushed to publish in; to get your chair, you have to publish in management'. Specifically, there is tacit or in some schools explicit encouragement to abandon EG journals (even though the individual was hired because of their publications in the journals) for the 4* journals or a sub-set of business and management journals rated 4 that are considered preferable. This can, and for some of our research participants, *is* leading to a reduction in the number of articles they each send to EG journals. Such responses are consistent with reduced total UK submissions to *Economic Geography* and the *Journal of Economic Geography* in recent years.

In addition to publication, the professional practice of movers was also identified as evolving in ways which auger against movers retaining and/or strengthening their links to EG. First, as one of the main identity formers of academic life, conferences get prioritised in new ways after a move. This in general means adding new B & M conferences to the list, so as to look legitimate in one's new home and build research networks. But this is often a zero sum game. If new conferences are added, others are taken off the list, even in the context of greater financial resources in B & M. As a result, there is a tendency to attend geography conferences less. For most this means substituting a geography conference for a business and management conference each year (43% of the survey sample now attend Geography conferences less frequently). But for others it can mean abandoning geography conferences all together (one fifth of the survey sample no longer attend any Geography conferences since moving into B & M). As one interviewee noted: 'I have become more of an IB person, definitely. I don't go to many geography conferences now. I've only been to one RGS-IBG in the last decade, and it was the one where there was a call for a special session about a conversation between international business and EG'. Another corroborated this trend, noting that 'Because I don't go to the RGS-IBG anymore, I've lost track of what's happening in the UK geography'.

Such developments are concerning, and reveal the unintended consequences of movements – few of those we interviewed expected to abandon EG conferences before they moved. This pattern of abandonment can also be reinforced by the career developments of movers. There was a generally reported tendency for those in B & M to move up the academic hierarchy quicker than if had stayed in geography. As one senior economic geographer now working in a business school put it: ‘There are so many jobs in business schools at the moment. I find myself in a very difficult position because I have been on so many business school panels for jobs and it’s clear that the applicants are nowhere near the standard of some of my PhD students who are graduating now who can’t get decent jobs in geography’. Or put another way, ‘you will get an SL/Chair quicker in business and management’. Participants explained how promotion intensifies the pressure to engage with management scholar (through publications and conferences), and means that moving back to geography becomes difficult, given that a demotion and/or pay cut may be required. Effectively some movers have become locked into B & M in unintended ways. As one mid-career mover from Geography into B & M summarised:

‘When I first started I always said I would use this as a stepping stone to get back into the geography department... But it means that I only have one module. You see most of my friends that are in geography departments have several modules and don’t get as much time to do research. They still do research and publish but perhaps work-life balance is a bit more of a challenge’.

In terms of teaching, the story is certainly not one of significantly less teaching! One quarter of respondents saw a reduction a teaching load, but half saw no change in teaching load and some taught more. More important to our interests here is the nature of the teaching done by movers to B & M. This can be summarised as primarily B & M content, with some EG content, material relating to international management especially. Here Peter Dicken’s *Global Shift* is already a recognised resource. As a result, it is entirely possible to teach economic geographies of globalisation, perhaps with the label of ‘international business’ or ‘international management’. Much more than semantic, these labels are significant in terms of how students perceive the material, not seeing it as EG and not being introduced to the sub-discipline. As one interviewee noted: ‘I teach on one very large module, that holds 440 students in the first tier in international business. So its business not global economic geography 101’.

More generally, however, movers found themselves teaching core B & M topics, with EG ‘smuggled in around the edges’. This was common with topics such as human resource management and entrepreneurship. Each has clear connections to core EG topics – labour and regions respectively – but for reasons of perception the courses and much of the material need to reflect ‘standard’ B & M approaches. This is particularly the case when courses are part of accredited degrees, such as human resource management programmes accredited by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development. Table 2 summarises the UG courses taught by movers and reveals the connections to EG topics but also the absence of EG from titles.

*Table 2: UG courses currently taught by economic geographers in Business & Management schools
UK (survey, N=54)*

<p>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and Regional Economic Development • Uneven Development & the Global Economy • Regional innovation and smart cities • The Business of Neoliberal Globalization • Economic Development • Economic Geography • Energy in Global Politics • Crossing Borders • World Cities and Culture 	<p>BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multinational Enterprises and FDI • International Business Management • International Retailing • Business Studies • Business in Emerging Economies • Small Business • Innovation driven entrepreneurship • Community Entrepreneurship • Green and Sustainable Entrepreneurship • Entrepreneurship & Small Business • International Business • Global Business Environment • Internationalisation, Trades and Markets • Business in the European Union • Retail Location • Managing Retail Locations • Business and Society • Economic Crises and Depressions
<p>RESEARCH DESIGN / METHODS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Skills for Economists • Research Methods for Postgraduate Students in Social Science • Research Methods • Critical Analysis in Management • HRM Research Methods in Theory and Practice 	<p>CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding and Managing Creativity • Project Management • Corporate Governance • Work and Employment Relations • Learning from Part Time Work • Innovation Management • Business Awareness • International Human Resource Management • Human Resource Management • People and Organisations • Leadership and management development in an international context • International strategy • Marketing • Organisation

The tendency to disguise or evacuate EG from teaching is further revealed by analysing the impacts on PhD Supervision. This, of course, is the prime means of training the next generation of EG scholars. The story here is familiar. Some topics could be seen as EG, but rarely did students identify with EG (even if they read some literature). As one senior colleague now working in B & M put it: 'I don't try and turn my PhD students into economic geographers for the most part they're not doing EG work specifically... they're just kind of mainstream small business finance type people'. The net result is, as one interviewee reflected, that 'some of my early PhD's actually got employed in geography departments. Whereas all the later ones have gone either into policy or into business schools'. Combined, then, teaching by economic geographers in B & M schools has the effect of introducing students to EG topics, sometimes surreptitiously, but not making these students aware of EG as a sub-discipline and not leading to a new generation who identify with the field. Two interviewees now working in B & M summed up the situation:

'The problem is that the PhD students that come to us haven't even thought about economic geography, don't know anything about it and aren't really interested in finding out. I would love to be supervising economic geography work but I'm not. Because this group of students is not of that persuasion'.

'If I had been in a geography department supervising these people, they would have been coming out with geography PhDs. The fact that I am not, means that none of my PhD students are going to end up being geographers'.

So what might we make of these experiences of moving to B & M? Perhaps the most important message is that movers continue to be economic geographers, but in ways unexpected and unintended their connection to the sub-discipline is eroded, with consequences that could be significant given the scale of movement we have documented. Thus for some movers, they now identified as an 'undercover economic geographer' or 'economic migrant'. For others, as an 'interdisciplinary scholar', 'interdisciplinary social theorist', or 'innovation studies specialist with a spatial focus'. Another described how 'I used to say I am a geographer. Now I say I *trained* as a geographer'. The following examples are illustrative of the motivations and trade-offs underpinning these reworked identifications:

'I don't want to give up my economic geography identity, but I also have to, grow and develop my identity in the business management community outside of economic

geography, which means I have to spend more time in their conferences, and I have to try to publish in their more mainstream journals to get recognised’.

‘You present a version of yourself slightly differently depending on what the audience is. It’s funny, if I go to a conference with economic geographers, then I’m the economic geographer that went somewhere else and has different things to say, because I’m not an economic geographer in a pure sense. Whereas when I’m in an IB (international Business) field, then obviously I’m not someone who was trained in the core/body and knowledge of IB, I didn’t do an IB degree, therefore I am the interloper. You never kind of get away from that. You don’t want to give up the fact that you had a geography background it’s part of who you are. But on the other hand in some circumstances, it hasn’t got any credibility or weight’.

As these quotes reveal, then, there result significant tensions around everyday professional identities and presentation of self amongst EG colleagues who have made the move from Departments of Geography into Schools of Business and Management.

5. Discussion: Does it matter, and what, if anything, should be done?

In this report thus far we have detailed what we take to be a significant and apparently accelerating trend of Economic Geographers at all levels of the career hierarchy (from newly-minted PhDs to senior Chairs in EG) moving from UK Geography Departments to academic positions in business and management schools. In previous sections we have charted the scale, nature and significance of the trends, looked at the underlying drivers and motivations, and explored the variegated individual experiences of those making the transition. Here we stand back from that analysis to take a more normative perspective in tackling two key sets of questions. First, does this trend matter, and if so, how and why? Second, what if anything can or should be done to try and address the issues raised?

As much as we have uncovered different personal biographies of transition in this research, we have also come across a rich range of views on the extent to which the trends we have uncovered ‘matter’. While there are important nuances, here we will distinguish broadly between those who are generally sanguine – and in some cases positive – about a trend that may simply be an inevitable part of post-disciplinary academic life, and those who have substantive concerns about the impact of the trend on the future of UK EG as a distinctive intellectual project.

UK economic geography is doing fine as an interdisciplinary nexus

In terms of the former perspective, for some the trends we describe can be read as a positive intellectual move for EG from a sub-disciplinary to an interdisciplinary field better suited both to today's university funding landscape and to the understanding of complex economic phenomena which do not fit into neat disciplinary categories¹⁴. This aligns with a view of economic geographers as an interdisciplinary nexus of research activity that stretches well beyond Departments of Geography, and with 'economic geography' being produced by researchers with a fluid range of identifiers. This includes geographers interested in geographies of economies, but who do not necessarily identify as 'economic geographers', but rather look at aspects of the economy from a socio-cultural and/or urban geography perspective, for instance. These ideas resonate with Barnes and Sheppard's (2010) notions of 'engaged pluralism' and 'interdisciplinary trading zones' in which connecting up and initiating dialogue between different camps within the EG community, broadly defined, may create 'a more vibrant, interesting discipline, capable of generating complex, shifting understandings that reflect and shape equally complex and dynamic materialities' (p.208). Intellectual progress is seen to derive from trading ideas from different disciplinary starting points and thereby generating new ideas and understandings through exposing the limits of one's initial position. The aim here is not to get rid of the discipline completely, but rather to 'open it up' in progressive and non-defensive ways.

In addition to economic geographies practiced by a range of 'near neighbour' disciplines (Murphy, 2016), we also need to recognise that EG knowledge production also happens outside of academic 'disciplines' (and always has done), including in consultancy, practitioner and online communities. It is important, therefore, not to privilege a simple linear model of knowledge production that runs from universities to the outside world and which idealises a 'pure form' of EG generated within Geography Departments (Henry, 2016). Instead we should recognise that EG has always taken the form of a more dispersed, rhizomatic knowledge community ranging across the boundaries of both Geography Departments and universities. As one senior commentator in EG suggested:

¹⁴ Interestingly, this was the predominant response when we presented our initial findings to the Geography Heads of School meeting in October 2016 at the RGS-IBG. Indeed, from such a perspective, our methodology in this project might be called into question; by charting careers and job movements, does our labour market focus obscure broader and more positive intellectual trends?

'It doesn't matter *where* economic geography research is being done. It's not a problem if there are people who are going elsewhere and getting involved in interdisciplinary activities but still identifying as economic geographers; what's not to like? That strengthens the discipline in many ways. It means that economic geography arguments are going into other forums and other communities that will get picked up and carried further.'

B & M schools should perhaps therefore be seen as less of a threat and more as progressive interdisciplinary spaces for the development of EG; as an intellectual home for a range of like-minded researchers sometimes towards margins of their own disciplines, encompassing not just economic geographers but also economic sociologists, heterodox economists, and critical accountants and lawyers, among others. There may thus be intellectual synergies within such schools that can exceed the possibilities of what is available within Geography Departments:

'The growing numbers of economic geographers who are now located in business schools in the UK and other European countries... whilst such a trend may well promote the desire (or even institutional 'need') for economic geographers to look to these disciplines... the more fundamental motivation is conceptual and theoretical as both disciplines have become increasingly concerned with spatiality and the kinds of questions that have interested economic geographers for longer' (Jones, 2016: 8).

The arguments are persuasive and there are undoubtedly intellectual opportunities associated with the processes we describe. What was notable from our research, however, was that positive discourses of interdisciplinarity did not come through at all strongly from our respondents, either in terms of an aspiration for moving, or in describing the reality of subsequent interactions once within a business or management school. Few respondents mentioned new collaborations, or new research frontiers and synergies; rather their new environment tended to be presented simply as a space in which economic geographers could pursue the same or similar work and be rewarded for it, and that there were often a few kindred spirits, from Geography or otherwise, to provide ongoing interaction. More prevalent were negative representations of the Geography Department environments they were leaving behind:

'In an ideal world I would have moved within geography to a place that recognised economic geography and economic geography had more institutional kudos... I can't say it was a massive desire to become a business school person but I was aware that there was a landscape there that would offer kind of a welcoming place for someone doing the kind of work I do'.

Whether the intellectual synergies within B & M will come to fruition with time remains to be seen, but it should be noted that many of our respondents had made the move a considerable number of years ago.

Another set of issues relate to the labour market dynamics we are describing in our analysis. For some, the trend is not a new phenomenon, with other groups of movers readily identifiable in the 1980s and 1990s. In turn, the problems of securing a first lectureship position and the lack of opportunities for fresh PhD graduates may well be reflective of Geography more broadly as a discipline. And then there is the counterfactual question of what would have happened to EG *without* these opportunities to move? It may well be that there are considerably more ‘economic geographers’ in employment in the UK than would have otherwise been the case because of the job opportunities provided in business and management and the development of research centres with a focus on geographies of economies. Without these opportunities, the movers may have been lost to academia, thus diminishing the UK’s EG community further. Gaining an academic job in a B & M school, while not being first choice and maybe feeling a little alien at first, may be highly preferable to not being in a position at all.

While these are all valid observations, our study indubitably shows that the trend has intensified since 2000 and we feel that the gravitational pull of B & M places EG in a different position to other areas of human geography. And discursively, it seems to be described in far less positive terms than earlier phases of migration (when there were ‘too many economic geographers’ and there was a ‘wealth of opportunity’), with recent movers being concerned about the dwindling status of EG within human geography more broadly and there being a lack of available EG posts. Thus, while individually the contemporary moves make sense and sustain careers, in our view the aggregate effects threaten the very foundations of UK EG. We now move on to consider three interlinked elements of that argument.

UK Economic Geography: under threat?

We entirely concur about the merits of EG’s participation in the intellectual trading zones of a lively and open interdisciplinary landscape. At the same time, and at the risk of stating the obvious, disciplines remain fundamental *to* that interdisciplinarity. There is a risk that the processes we identify in this report are ‘hollowing-out’ EG within Geography Departments to such a degree that the sustainability of the broader project is being undermined. Our first argument, therefore, is that within Geography, EG is losing its critical mass in a process that is

very hard to slow or stop, and still harder to reverse. The movers we have identified are predominantly moving in one direction, and there is no discernible reverse trend. Due to non-replacement, the pool of Geography-based economic geographers is progressively diminishing in a ratchet-like process of transfers. Once individuals have relocated, the 'pull' factors noted earlier and in particular the higher salary levels undermine the feasibility of returning to Geography, especially for those with young families, even if they ideally would like to move back for reasons of disciplinary affinity:

'I am having a family next year and I will have quite a big mortgage and moving back to geography from a personal financial point of view wouldn't be practical. I do wonder if I would get a job if I moved back. I haven't observed anyone who has successfully moved back'.

These one-way movements are exacerbated by a wider post-2000 context in which (a) multiple senior EG colleagues have moved into university management; and (b) EG has seen the retirement of a range of influential figures including Peter Daniels, Peter Dicken, Ray Hudson, Roger Lee, Ron Martin and Linda McDowell, as well as absorbing the sad loss of Doreen Massey.

The net result—which is made clear in our analysis of the RAE and REF—is that the institutional landscape of EG in the UK has dwindled over the last ten-to-fifteen years. Places that were previously seen as bastions of EG – such as Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Glasgow, Manchester, and the Open University – are now far less so as a result of retirements, faculty moves into Business and Management, and lack of replacement hires. EG is now arguably concentrated in a small handful of Departments (Cardiff, LSE, Newcastle, Nottingham and QMUL), in addition to some 'nodes' within the B & M landscape (as identified earlier). While our main concern here are the implications for EG, is it also worth noting that something is being lost to Geography more generally at the same time in terms of both teaching and research. As one research participant opined in relation to their former senior colleagues 'you still need that presence within geography. I think geography needs EG and I think they've forgotten that'. Consequently, some Departments may even find it difficult to maintain an EG curriculum at the undergraduate level, which may enhance a sense of isolation for economic geographers, thereby propagating more movements in what becomes a self-reinforcing dynamic.

Fewer and fewer UK departments, then, have a 'critical mass' of economic geographers – defined very loosely as a group of four or five researchers working on cognate economic issues. Such

critical mass is important for engaging in substantive research programmes tackling big issues within the contemporary global economy. While institutional proximity can of course to a certain extent be supplanted by networks of different kinds, we maintain that 'local' critical mass is important in the generation of new ideas, theoretical innovations and, more pragmatically, the attraction of large grants. Such benefits are less obvious, or at the very least harder to accrue, in a context of isolated researchers in departments dominated by other forms of human geography. Thus from one senior colleague now working in B & M, the warning is quite stark:

'I think economic geography (in geography departments in the UK) is in terminal decline unless something drastic is done. It is actually flourishing in other parts of the world where the rest of geography hasn't given up on it! The main reason that a left political economist like me is in a business school is that there are more interesting heterodox people to discuss the economy with.'

In turn, this raises concerns about sustaining a cadre of thought leaders at the centre of our discipline who can speak with authority about geographies of the economy, at a time when discussions around the economy are particularly pressing (e.g. Brexit, rise of economic nationalism, anti-globalization movements etc.). A diminished EG within Geography Departments leaves Human Geography progressively less well positioned to contribute to major policy or media debates around the economy. (Illustrative in this context was the 2016 post to the UK EG email list from Australian economic geographer Phil O'Neill asking why there was so little EG commentary on the Brexit referendum. That email in turn drew little response).

Neither is it realistic for these gaps to be filled by economic geographers within B & M who, apart from some exceptional contexts, are always likely to be in the minority. As one senior economic geographer now based in a business school described:

'I am trying to get an appointment in economic geography at the moment but for political reasons internally we can't call it economic geography; we would have to call it something like regional innovation, entrepreneurship...So there are constraints internally...We couldn't just reinvent economic geography within a business school context... there is no formal economic geography network within the business school even though we have got all these people'.

The issue of critical mass relates to a second concern, namely how does the migration trend have an impact on the *kinds* of EG being done? Our data suggest that certain kinds of economic

geographers are most likely to move, most notably those who do firm-based research and/or work on clusters/innovation. The risk here is that a certain kind of EG gets reproduced within business and management schools, and other more critical/normative approaches get squeezed out entirely or are left in isolated pockets in Geography Departments. To take one example, it seems fair to say that labour geography work on worker resistance and agency – and concerned to see the making and remaking of economies through the eyes of workers rather than firms - is a long way from the Human Resource Management approaches that are commonly found in B & M Schools. Indeed, as one respondent described:

‘Many topics of interest to undercover/former geographers are not of interest to wider management scholars, who prefer less theory and more quant. This is driven by the dominance of US journals that are very positivistic, also by an earlier exodus of economists and psychologists into business schools in the 1970s and 80s. In some ways, business schools could be considered to be economic geography departments in a parallel universe that never went through the “cultural turn”. As such, there is plenty of boundary spanning, but less genuine interdisciplinary *dialogue*’.

Again, one can look at this positively: people working in ‘traditional’ areas of EG that are less popular within human geography are finding a new home and are valued in the business studies arena. However, the risk is that there is an important *qualitative* as well as quantitative redistribution of economic geographers taking place, with certain stripes of ‘critical’ economic geographers choosing to stay put – albeit with declining numbers of economic geographers based in UK Departments of Geography taking a critical look at that key capitalist actor, the firm. This redistributive trend is reinforced through several critical geography journals *not* featuring on the all-important ABS list (with *Antipode* as an important exception rated at 3). The larger question, then, is whether this migration trend is blunting EG’s critical teeth? (cf. Hudson 2006).

To stretch the argument a little further, in what ways might EG be seen to benefit from being undertaken within Geography Departments? There is a case to be made that EG profits intellectually from interfacing with other human geography sub-disciplines, a possibility which is lost in business and management schools. There are many examples of theoretical ideas – for example from cultural and poststructural theory – that have profoundly influenced the intellectual development of EG as a result of its embedded position within human geography more generally. These ideas are part of parcel of the vibrancy and pluralism of contemporary EG that Barnes and Sheppard (2010) describe. And one can even argue that co-presence with

physical geographers and environmental scientists on a daily basis has benefits in terms of chipping away at what is generally an ecology-blind field of research. At the very least it is worth considering how far, and in what ways, EG is affected if its centre of critical mass moves from Geography Departments to B & M schools.

Our third interlinked line of concern is perhaps the most important, and relates to the ability of the discipline to reproduce itself within Geography Departments. For reasons described above, EG is only likely to survive as a vibrant intellectual field in the UK if key thought leaders continue to be produced and reside within Geography Departments. As we saw in earlier sections, individual movers have a variety of perspectives on the extent to which they are able to maintain and practice their identity as an economic geographer (should they want to). However, almost without exception all respondents were clear that the PhD students they are producing within B & M schools do not self-identify as economic geographers, even if their work may be inflected with EG ideas due to their supervisor. The strength of the economic geography identities inculcated amongst their own PhD offspring thereby seems weak (as ‘credentialed practitioners’ (Barnes and Sheppard 2010)) who are instead trained to speak with authority in B & M:

‘The idea that geographers in business schools will produce more geographers, is probably quite unlikely - if you did train up a geographer in a business school, it is unlikely that they would have the connections and the capital to go into geography for a job anyway. So in that sense the idea of reproducing new scholars for the future outside doesn’t necessarily hold true’.

To try and quantify this element, the movers identified in our survey have supervised approximately 50 students to completion in their new B & M school environments, a significant number in the context of the overall scale of the UK EG community. Of course, not all would have got academic jobs post-graduation, but this is still a large pool of potential talent lost to Geography Departments.¹⁵

At the same time, there are fewer economic geographers and associated PhD students in Geography Departments, meaning that in time the conveyor belt of intellectual talent moving to B & M schools may also dry up. In the most pessimistic reading, the last 15 years may represent a one-off movement of academics to a well-resourced and expanding business school sector that

¹⁵ Our research to date has not documented any of that cohort of 50 PhD students in B & M subsequently moving into faculty positions in UK Geography Departments.

will not significantly realign intellectual agendas there but may have a profound effect on Geography Departments.¹⁶ Overall, it is the production of the next generation of economic geographers that is our gravest concern. Our sense is that if the effects of the migration trend have not yet been fully felt, they will play out over the next 10-20 years. We know that EG is a relatively small field, and a handful of iconic and inspirational individuals can make a huge difference. It is increasingly hard, however, to see where the next generations will come from.

So what next?

How one responds to the second big question will depend on where one stands in relation to the arguments just set out. Collectively, our stance leans more towards a pessimistic reading, and as such, we are in favour of at least considering possible interventions. Moreover, trying to energise and provoke debate within UK EG circles has intrinsic merit even if one is generally unconcerned about the 'movers' phenomenon. This EGRG report represents a first step in terms of drawing attention to the trend, naming it, and attempting to map out its key parameters. But what else can be done? A first simple observation is that we need to continue to monitor this trend and its impacts, moving forward. Although there is a longitudinal element to our study, we must try and assess the extent to which, and in what ways, the 'reproduction' issues we identify above start to bite. A related endeavour is to open out this debate from its current UK focus to gauge to what extent it is UK-specific. For instance, respondents suggested to us that the trend is not replicated in the USA, where quantitative-leaning and less heterodox business schools are not interested in hiring economic geographers – despite the ABS list. This may, however, mean that there are even less job opportunities for EG PhD graduates than in the UK context.

Beyond direct research, however, there are perhaps two sets of (inevitably interrelated) interventions that we might seek to make and which we can broadly term intellectual and institutional. With regards the former, the time would appear ripe for developing and (re)asserting a vibrant core intellectual agenda in UK EG that has the potential both to spark the imagination of students and young researchers and to make major contributions to intellectual debates around Brexit, region development, inclusive economic growth and the like. Building upon Jamie Peck's (2007) metaphor of contemporary EG being a (ring) donut, with lots of divergent subfields working at various disciplinary interfaces but lacking a clear centre, perhaps it is time to debate, redefine and subsequently mobilise the core of our discipline. Even if one looks across the handful of UK departments that retain critical mass in EG, there are significant

¹⁶ Indeed, one participant pointed to a similar negative outcome in UK sociology departments, as a result of the movement of economic sociologists into B & M.

differences in foci and approach. It is hard to discern a core intellectual project that integrates across those departments, with an implicit lack of consensus about what the core identity of EG is.

Clearly it is not for us to steer such a debate. But to provoke discussion, what seems to us to have been lost (and not just in the UK, it has to be said) is a core focus on explaining systematic patterns of uneven development, which now must be an increasingly global project that necessarily engages with the global South (cf. Peck, 2016). Tendencies to focus on individual places, regions and case studies (and largely on western formal economies) has seemingly weakened the wider analytical purchase of EG (cf. global debates on comparative urbanisms in urban geography that eschew western urban 'norms')¹⁷. For instance, inequality and how it is produced has become a big topic in intellectual and political/popular circles and yet with some notable exceptions (e.g. Danny Dorling) economic geographers are not seemingly contributing to the understanding of what are fundamentally geographical processes. Economic geography has also witnessed some retreat from 'big picture', systemic accounts, underpinned by analytically strong geographical political economy – or what Peck (2016) terms 'macroeconomic geographies'. The powerful tools offered by previous generations of scholars – such as Massey's spatial divisions of labour and Dicken's conceptualisation of globalization dynamics – would still seem to offer so much and yet are under-utilised by contemporary economic geographers.

To put it even more bluntly, and whilst not denying the major advances of the labour geographies agenda, does EG also need a return to researching firms and their activities and how they drive patterns of uneven regional development both within and across countries? Such concerns are critical to understanding contemporary economic debates (e.g. crisis of globalisation, unbalanced growth and inequality, uneven regional development, corporate power, trade disputes etc.). Surely something is lost if we cede this ground entirely to business and management schools? The corollary of these arguments is that we need to reassert the core principles and distinctiveness of an EG approach to show how we can add value to other disciplines. That is currently hard to do in a world of fragmented plurality, and may mean raising our sights intellectually to make some programmatic statements about what we do, why it is distinctive, and why it matters in the UK context. Without some measure of coherence, it is hard to 'sell' the project both to future researchers but also to department and institutional leaders in

¹⁷ Such exclusionary tendencies are also apparent beyond Economic Geography: a major failing of much Business and Management scholarship is that it is based on a mythical US market economy.

charge of hiring decisions¹⁸. In turn, this may mean re-tooling geographical political economy for today's world of rapid environmental change, accelerating global shifts of production and consumption, continued financialization, rising economic nationalism/austerity in some contexts, and new forms of regionalism in others (e.g. China's One Belt, One Road initiative). The notion of putting the jam back into the centre of the donut may seem a rather flippant metaphor in this context, but that is exactly what we are proposing!

Institutional interventions are perhaps hard to conceptualise and to our mind are only likely to succeed in combination with the intellectual initiatives just described. In supporting this research, the RGS-IBG has already signalled its interest and concern in what is going on. Indeed the RGS-IBG would seem to have a vested interest in retaining the integrity of Geography as a rounded discipline and one that is able to offer critical commentary on a range of pressing societal issues. Within the RGS-IBG the Economic Geography Research Group (EGRG) is the obvious starting point for initiatives, but while relatively stable and strong in terms of membership numbers (236 in 2017), for well over a decade now AGMs and organised events have struggled for attendees, indeed even populating the EGRG committee has itself been problematic (observations which themselves are reflective of the trends highlighted in this report). Nonetheless, EGRG events may be an important forum for identifying key issues and forging collective statements, also to include economic geographers now working in B & M schools, several of whom articulated:

'A desire for economic geographers to feel more connected to each other. There is a kind of vacuum. Let each other know what we're doing, what grants are being got, what publications are coming out, just so there's awareness - if we've got this diaspora, keeping people connected... we need an economic geography network that goes beyond geography in some senses. To keep people plugged in'.

One concrete suggestion is for the few remaining departments with critical mass in EG – Cardiff, LSE, Newcastle, Nottingham and QMUL – to form a network-within-the EGRG-network and initiate some such activities. Clearly these are places where there is departmental and presumably wider institutional backing for EG research and what it offers. This could be extended to include certain B & M schools such as Birmingham, Coventry and Southampton

¹⁸ To be very clear, we are not suggesting that economic geography should *only* be about such a core. Continued plurality and inter-disciplinary exchanges will continue to be vital to the health of the discipline. Our argument, however, is that without a distinct core project, it may be hard to defend UK economic geography, both intellectually and institutionally, in the context of the threats it currently faces.

where there are discernible clusters of self-identified economic geographers. A coordinated funding application for a rotating seminar series, for instance, might allow an extended conversation on the issues we raise here, and in time possibly building to a large research programme application that brings together a network of researchers, not all UK-based, but with UK at the core on a big picture topic (e.g. inequality, uneven regional development, or links to Southern economies). And given that the patterns of cross-disciplinary labour mobility identified in this report include a sizeable cohort of female colleagues moving out of already male-dominated disciplines, our conversations, networking and capacity building efforts also need to address this, in the first instance through new engagements with the RGS-IBG Gender and Feminist Research Group. These may be small steps, but might provide somewhere to start.

Connecting up the hotspots of UK EG will already necessitate forging connections across Geography Departments and business and management schools. According to some of our research participants, these are reasons to be positive here, with connections within universities getting off the ground in some instances:

‘I think there is a recognition in business schools, that Geographers have got a lot to bring, so we’re constantly talking to the Geography department about how we might work together, how we can share modules, and how we can get students on different degree courses talking to each other, interacting a bit more, and doing sessions on each other’s courses’.

Whether such links are being initiated more from the business and management school end, possibly with a view to future recruitment is less clear, however. The overarching labour market dynamic is never far beneath the surface, and it is hard to see how to intervene to try and slow it. More economic geographers in leadership positions might steady the ship, but there is an ever-smaller pool to draw on. Overall, it seems likely that the battle of ideas will have to be won before broader institutional conditions can be reworked.

6. Conclusions

In this EGRG report, we have deliberately stopped short of diagnosing a full-blown crisis in UK EG. It is not our intention to be prophets of doom, or to create a self-fulfilling prophecy in which suitably alarmed economic geographers jump ship, thereby exacerbating the trends we describe.

We are fully aware that the trends are not brand new, and that for some colleagues, UK EG has never been a very big or influential discipline in terms of academia and society writ large. However, we do think it is fair to say that EG in the UK context was demonstrably larger, more vibrant, more coherent, and more relevant in previous eras, most notably in the 1980s and 1990s. More than some idealist ‘exercise in nostalgia’ (as one reviewer put it!), our empirical research points to a step-change in the migration of economic geographers to B & M schools since 2000, that there are new driving forces in play, and there will be – and arguably already have been – consequences for EG as it is practised within Geography Departments. This in turn, inevitably, has potential consequences for the more broadly-defined economic geography project as a whole, which, without a clear disciplinary heartland (‘proper noun’ EG), may start to wither – reinforced by the increasing incorporation of economic geographers into broader cross-cutting research groupings in UK Departments of Geography.

Against this multidisciplinary backdrop, this report is intended to start a conversation about EG in the UK and beyond (we fully appreciate that the notion of a ‘bounded’ national academic enterprise we have largely portrayed it here is some way from the networked, transnational nature of much EG research). What kind of EG do we want, and how do we get there? What is the position of sub-disciplines within an multidisciplinary research environment, and does it necessarily mean the demise of disciplines? How can economic geographers undertake transformational research around big societal challenges? What kind of distinctive perspective can we bring to such endeavours? And how far should we strive for coherence among the plurality of concepts and ideas that characterise the contemporary field? Whilst not new concerns, at the very least, these are questions that seem worth reopening and debating amongst economic geographers in the current context.

6. References

- ABS 2015. Academic Journal Guide 2015. London: Association of Business Schools. Available at: <https://www.dit.ie/media/library/journals/ABS%20Journal%20Ranking.pdf>
- Barnes T.J. and Christophers B. 2018. *Economic Geography: A Critical Introduction*. London: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Barnes T.J. and Sheppard E. 2010. ‘Nothing includes everything’: Towards engaged pluralism in Anglophone economic geography. *Progress in Human Geography* 34(2): 193-214.
- Barnes T.J., Peck J., Sheppard E. and Tickell A. (eds) 2010. *Reading Economic Geography*. Oxford: Blackwell.

- Bodman A.R. 2009. Measuring the influentialness of economic geographers during the 'great half century': an approach using the h index. *Journal of Economic Geography* 10(1): 141-156.
- Boschma R. and Martin R.L. 2012. *The Handbook of Evolutionary Economic Geography*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Coe N.M., Kelly P.F. and Yeung H.W.C. 2013. *Economic Geography: A Contemporary Introduction* (2nd edition). Oxford: Blackwell.
- ESRC / AHRC / RGS-IBG 2013. *International Benchmarking Review of UK Human Geography*. Swindon: Economic and Social Research Council. Available at: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/files/research/research-and-impact-evaluation/international-benchmarking-review-of-uk-human-geography/>
- Foster, J., Muellerleile C., Olds K. and Peck J 2007. Circulating economic geographies: citation patterns and citation behaviour in economic geography, 1982-2006. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32: 295-312.
- Henry N. 2016. Critical comments on 'In the Business of Economic Geography'. Presentation to the RGS-IBG 2016 annual conference, 1 September London.
- HM Government 2013. *What is the Impact of Transport Schemes on Economic Geography?* London: HM Government, Department for Transport.
- Hudson R. 2006. On what's right and keeping left: or why geography still needs Marxian political economy. *Antipode* 38(2): 374-395.
- Hudson R. 2016. *Approaches to Economic Geography*. London: Routledge.
- Jones A. 2016. Geographies of production III: economic geographies of management and international business. *Progress in Human Geography* 23(2): 271-284.
- Leyshon A., Lee R., McDowell L.M. and Sunley P. (eds.) 2011. *The SAGE Handbook of Economic Geography*. London: SAGE Publications.
- MacKinnon D. and Cumbers A. 2011. *An Introduction to Economic Geography*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Martin R.L. 1999. Critical survey. The new 'geographical turn' in economics: some critical reflections. *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 23(1): 65-91.
- McDowell L. 2016. Reflections on feminist economic geography: talking to ourselves?. *Environment and Planning A* 48(10): 2093-2099.
- Murphy J. 2016. Welcome to Economic Geography, Volume 92. *Economic Geography* 92(1): 1-3.
- Nicholson J., Gimmon E. and Felzensztein C., 2017. Economic geography and business networks: creating a dialogue between disciplines. *Industrial Marketing Management* 61: 4-9.
- OECD 2008. *The Contribution of Economic Geography to GDP Per Capita*. Paris: OECD Journal.

- Peck J. 2015. *Navigating Economic Geographies*. Opening plenary, Fourth Global Conference on Economic Geography, Oxford, 19-22 August 2015. Available at: <http://blogs.ubc.ca/peck/files/2016/03/Navigating-economic-geographies3.0.pdf>
- Peck, J. and Olds, K. (2007) Report: The Summer Institute in Economic Geography, *Economic Geography* 83(3): 309–318.
- Peck, J. (2016) Macroeconomic geographies, *Area Development and Policy* 1(3): 305-322.
- Sheppard E. and Barnes T.J. 2008. *A Companion to Economic Geography*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sheppard E., Barnes T.J., Peck J. and Tickell A. 2004. Introduction: reading economic geography, In Barnes T.J., Peck J., Sheppard E. and Tickell A. (eds). *Reading Economic Geography*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 1010.
- Tickell A., Sheppard E., Peck J. and Barnes T.J. 2007. *Politics and Practice in Economic Geography*. London: Sage.
- Watts, D. 2006. 'Manufacturing, corporate dynamics and regional economic change' in Bagchi-Sen S and Lawton Smith H, *Economic Geography: Past Present and Future*. London: Routledge (see p. 197-207 and especially pp 203-4).
- World Bank 2009. *World Development Report 2009: Reshaping Economic Geography*. Washington DC: World Bank.
- World Bank 2016. *Revisiting Economic Geography*. Washington DC: World Bank, Workshop 19 December.

--

Appendix

Evidencing the Changing Status of UK Economic Geography: RAE/REF Statements 2001-14

Sampling Frame

The initial sampling frame was all Units of Assessment in RAE 2001 that were 4 or better. This was 35, three were subsequently removed: Lancaster because it only submitted to the Geography Panel in 2001, Middlesex because its submissions only related to its flood research and the Open University because none of its submissions identified specific research groups. The omission of the Open University is unfortunate because it has been home to several scholars who have been very influential on the field of economic geography.

In each case the relevant environment statement was analysed to identify whether there was an economic geography research group or cluster. In 2001, this was a relatively straightforward exercise as many groups/clusters explicitly described themselves as economic geography. However, as the analysis progressed there was a clear ‘dilution’ of economic geography into groups or clusters that had a broader interest in development, political economy, globalisation and governance. These groups were classified as containing economic geography research as part of a wider range of research activities. Clearly, this is a subjective distinction, but it in many instances this ‘dilution’ was the result of a declining number of economic geographers in the U of A, with the economic geography component being linked to one or two individuals. The analysis was not concerned with what kinds of research groups/clusters now predominate in geography submissions, but our results show that it is clearly not economic geography!

Table A1: Changing Status of EG in UK RAE / REF (2001-14) - Summary of Results

EG Cluster Presence		RAE 2001	RAE 2008	REF 2014	August 2014
GREEN	An explicit economic geography research group	19 (59.4%)	12 (37.5%)	6 (18.75%)	4 (12.5%)
YELLOW	A research group that contains some economic geography	4 (12.5%)	7 (21.9 %)	6 (18.75%)	7 (21.9%)
RED	No economic geography research group	9 (28.1%)	13 (40.6%)	20 (62.5%)	21 (65.6%)

Table A2: Changing Status of EG in UK RAE / REF (2001-14) - Results for all UoAs 4 or better

U of A	RAE 2001	RAE 2008	REF 2014
Birmingham	Developed Market Economies	Economy & Enterprise	Society, Economy & Environment
Bristol	Money & Consumption	Geographies of Political Economy	Geographies of Political Economy
Cambridge	Regional Political Economy	Spaces, Economy and Society	Contested Political Economies
Durham	Political Economies of Geographical Change	Culture & Social Economy	Human Geography
Exeter	Services, Development and Society		
Hull	Knowledges, Economy & Exclusion	Environment & Spaces of Governance	
KCL			
Leeds			
Leicester	Restructuring Economies & Society	Governance, Postcolonialism & Transformation	
Liverpool	Urban & Regional Development Studies	Globalisation, Development & Place	
LSE	Economic Geography & Regional Science	Economic Geography & Regional Science	Economic Geography
Loughborough	Globalisation & World Cities	Globalisation & World Cities	
Manchester	Political Economy	Geographical Political Economy	Geographical Political Economy
Newcastle	Urban & Regional Development Studies	New Economic Geographies	Economic Geographies
Nottingham	New Economic Geographies	New Economic Geographies	Economic Worlds
Oxford	Economic Geography Group	Economy, Society & Place	Economy, Society & Place
Plymouth	European Economic & Social Change		
Queen Mary	Social & Economic Justice	Economic, Development & Social Justice	Economy, Development & Social Justice
Reading	Urban & Regional Development	Geographies of Development	
Royal Holloway			
Sheffield	Political & Economic Geographies		
Southampton	Economy, Culture & Space	Economy, Culture & Space	Economy, Society and Space
Sussex	European Urban & Regional Development	Economic Geographies of Globalisation...	Geographies of Globalisation...
UCL	Economic & Social Restructuring		
Aberdeen			
Dundee			
Edinburgh			
Glasgow	Globalisation & Local Transformation	Spaces of political-economic restructuring	
St Andrew			
Swansea			
Aberystwyth	Regional Development & Change	New Political Geographies	
Queens			

Findings

In RAE 2001, economic geography in the UK was in rude health with almost 60% of U of A's having a research group or cluster that could be clearly identified as economic geography (Table A2, green entries). The various titles used to describe these groups or clusters made explicit reference to 'economic geography' and to 'regional economic change'. By RAE 2008 things were starting to change as the number of U of A's with explicit economic geography groups or cluster (green) had fallen to below 40%, there was an increase in the number of groups or cluster that contained some economic geography (yellow), but just over 40% of U of A's had no economic geography research groups or clusters (red). Furthermore, themes such as globalisation and political economy were gaining prevalence and economic geography was also being associated with development. It is between RAE 2008 and REF 2014 that the significant decline occurs. By REF 2014 only six U of A's or just under 19% has explicit economic geography research groups or clusters and the same number has groups containing some economic geography. However, there has been a complete reversal of fortune with over 60% of U of A's having no research group or cluster that could be identified as economic geography. The only caveat is that the nature of the environment statement in REF 2014 was quite different than the previous two RAEs and many submission downplayed the significance of research groups/clusters, but this issue does not undermine the overall trend of a major reduction in the significance of economic geography. In REF 2014 only 6 U of A's had a significant critical mass in economic geography to identify it as a research group or cluster and a further 6 has groups or clusters that contained some economic geography. As our interview research shows, this reduction in the status of economic geography in many Departments was a key reason for economic geographers leaving for elsewhere.

That was the situation back in REF 2014, but a reading of the environment statements and a knowledge of staff movements since then suggests that the situation may have deteriorated further. Therefore, an analysis of the websites of the 12 U of A's with economic geography research groups or clusters and with some economic geography in broader research groups and clusters was conducted, and the results are shown below in Table A3.

Table A3 – Shifting fortunes of EG in UK geography departments since REF2014?

	REF 2014	August 2017 Website
Birmingham	Society Economy & Environment	Urban and Regional Studies
Bristol	Geographies of Political Economy	Geographies of Political Economy
Cambridge	Contested Political Economies	Societies, Markets, States
Durham	Human Geography	Culture, Economy, Life
LSE	Economic Geography	Economic Geography
Manchester	Geographical Political Economy	Human Geography (GPN & Labour)
Newcastle	Economic Geographies	Economic Geographies
Nottingham	Economic Worlds	Economic Worlds
Oxford	Economy, Society & Space	Economy, Society & Space
Queen Mary	Economy, Development & Social Justice	Economy, Development & Social Justice
Southampton	Economy, Society & Space	Economy, Governance & Culture
Sussex	Geographies of Globalisation....	Politics, Governance & Development

There has been further erosion of EG since 2014. In the case of Birmingham this is due to retirement of key staff and the movement of staff from Geography to the Birmingham Business School. The Business School has recently established the City Region and Economic Development Institute, which includes economic geography researchers. In the case of Sussex, the retirement of a key individual has removed the last remnants of economic geography. The REF 2014 environment statements and a review of the websites above, which is far from representative, seems to suggest an reduced specificity in the way that research in organised in UK geography departments with large groups being created where everyone works with everyone. This may be a result of the more metric based REF with its emphasis on outputs, impact case studies, research income and postgraduate numbers. Thus, it is the output of individual researchers that matters more than the coherence of the research environment or sub-disciplinary identity. This might suggest that relative demise of economic geography is the result of a more general demise of sub-disciplines in UK Geography and that may be a reason for those wanting to work in a more clearly identified ‘economic geography’ research group have left the discipline. Whatever the reasons, it is now the case that only four Departments that submitted under Geography in the 2014 REF have a research group or research cluster that is explicitly identified as Economic Geography (Table A3) – this figure includes Queen Mary University of London whose identifiable cluster of economic geographers sit within a broader research group. This is a dramatic change in fortune that has accelerated post 2008.

--