

# We're in Business!

## Sustaining Economic Geography?

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**Workshop: Whatever happened to British  
economic geography? Reassessing its future role**

**Cardiff University, 1 June 2017**

**[www.egrug.rgs.org/business-of-econ-geog/](http://www.egrug.rgs.org/business-of-econ-geog/)**



**Royal  
Geographical  
Society**  
with IBG

# Celebrating the Vibrancy and Relevance of Economic Geography (following Martin 2016)

- Multiple high impact international journals in EG.
- Slew of EG handbooks.
- Diverse array of EG research (empirical, conceptual)
- EG at core of UG teaching: popular courses.
- Large EG research groups (EGRG, ESG) underpin communities of practice (UK and international).
- Policy influence of EG theory in World Bank, OECD, national governments.
- Appeal to other disciplines – economists taking EG seriously.
- Clear appeal to business and management schools (some EG topics lend selves well to especially financialisation, innovation, GPNs).



FIFTH  
GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON  
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COLOGNE GERMANY  
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# Emergent Debate: Sustaining UK Economic Geography?

- Emergent challenges / increasing sense of unease.
- Apparent decline of EG tradition in former major centres of EG in UK universities
- Consolidation within a smaller number of geography departments.
- Growing external competition around ideas to which economic geographers previously laid expert claim (geographical turn in other social sciences, and spatial economics).
  
- Recent years: noticeable migration of economic geographers from Departments of Geography to Business and Management and related research centres (see also Jones 2016).
  
- **Raises concerns: sustaining cadre of scholars at the centre of our discipline who can speak with authority about geographies of economy, at a time when discussions around the economy are pressing (BREXIT, anti-globalisation, economic nationalisms).**

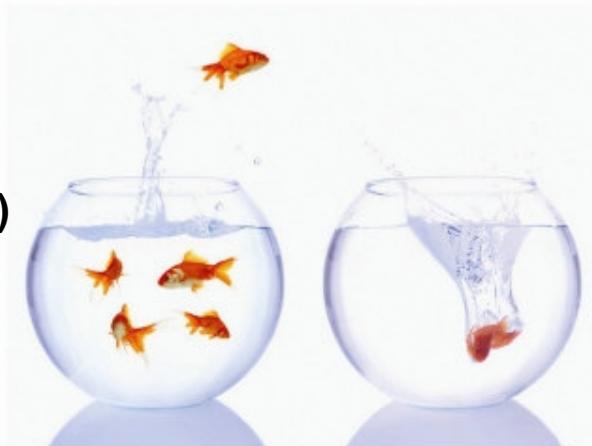
# EGRG Project Overview

- **CONTEXT:** Recent years noticeable migration of EGers from Departments of Geography to Business and Management and related research centres.
- **AIM:** to assess (a) scale of this trend; (b) its broader implications for teaching, research and capacity building in EG; and (c) its consequences for HumGeog in UK.
- **Phase 1: Build database of movers 2000-** (includes RAE2001, RAE2008, REF2014) (via EGRG email list, EGRG membership records, UK Heads of Schools) (autumn 2015) (N=87, 92% of whom moved 2000 onwards)
- **Phase 2: Web-based survey of movers** (N=54, 65% response rate; motivations, consequences, subsequent ‘infill’) (winter 2015, spring 2016)
- **Phase 3: In-depth interviews** (n=25, typically 45-60 mins, purposive sample targeting movers at different career points, across multiple institutions, female and male movers; plus senior commentators) (spring/summer 2016)
- Interview transcription by RGS interns: Marie Gallagher, Emily Brunton, Jemma Hulbert, Patrick Chorley, Douglas Jenkins, Arif Hussein, Isabelle Green. Also Anna Geatrell in Phase 1.



# 1. Size and Scale of this Migration?

- 87 movers identified (92% of whom moved 2000-15). 17 women, 60 men
- Diverse group: new researchers graduating with PhD in EG (2000-15) and mid career and senior researchers with previous job roles with 'EG' in title.
- Significance c.f. benchmark data (see next slide)
- Survey (N=54): movers evidently leaving from all levels of EG career structure:
  - Professors (10%)
  - Reader (6%)
  - Senior Lecturers/Associate Professor (8%)
  - Lecturers (15%, half fixed-term)
  - RA/Research Associate (31%, two thirds fixed-term)
  - Doctoral Researcher (27%) → LACK OF JOBS!
- Survey (N=54): successive waves of movers:
  - 1980s: 1%
  - 1990s: 13%
  - 2000s: 40%
  - 2010s: 44% (steady drip feed of 1-4 EGers every year 2000-15)
- Key institutional clusters of EGers in Bus/Man Schools: Centre for Business in Society (Coventry University); Southampton Business School; Birmingham Business School (City Region Economic and Development Institute)...



## UK

Global Conference in Economic Geography, Oxford 2015	UK contingent <b>171</b> (but not all UK econ geographers attended).
RGS-IBG EGRG paid up members	2016 – <b>236</b> members (99 with an ac.uk email address) 2014 – 244 members (114 with an ac.uk email address) 2008 – 242 members  Annual figures (Nov). RGS-IBG members, and not the total EGRG membership. Not all necessarily academics.

## INTERNATIONAL

Economic Geography 2015 (international):	EGRG listserv: <b>801</b> (extends beyond UK) EGSG listserv: 887 (extends beyond UK)
Sheppard et al. (2004)	'Perhaps a <b>thousand</b> 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 <b>142</b> individuals worldwide'

## **2. Major Motivations for Moving? As identified in Survey and Interviews**

### **PUSH**

- Lack of EG job openings in Geog Depts – lack of permanent positions (n=28)
- EG posts advertised as part of broader HumGeog (increased competition)
- EG retirements not replaced – worrying trend
- Limited promotion prospects in Geography Depts
- ‘Research agenda not taken seriously by colleagues’ / ‘marginalisation of economic geography’ post cultural turn
- More things in common with business school c.f. ‘chaotic alliance’ with phys geog

### **PULL**

- Perceived better pay and conditions
- Research funding makes EGers sought after (some headhunted)
- Better research and conference resources
- Perception of better potential for career progression
- Research valued – topics and publications because of ABS List\*
- More influence: ‘You have to leave geography to play in a bigger sandpit’
- 76% of movers agreed move to Bus / Man has enhanced my career

# Motivations for Moving – EconGeog Labour Market (Example Quotes)

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

‘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’.

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’

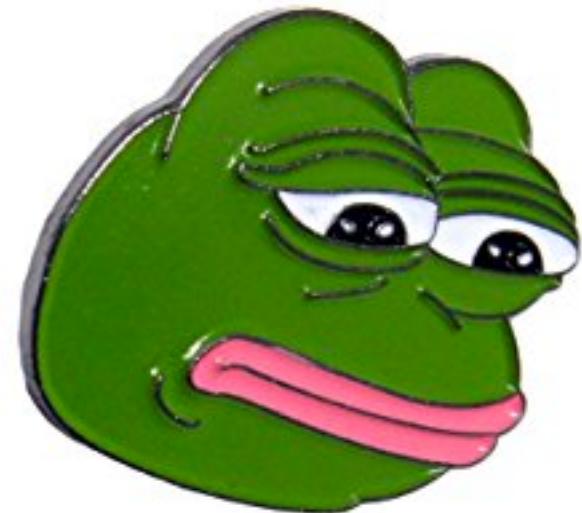
# Motivations for Moving – Feelings of Marginalisation (Example Quotes)

'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'

'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! ... there was a frustration from that that built over time'

# Motivations for Moving – Intellectual Priorities in HumGeog (Example Quote)

‘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 (my current title is professor of urban and regional political economy) is in a business school is that there are more interesting heterodox people to discuss the economy with - and I have had more than [enough] of human geographers who like to discuss the shape of frogs faces in seminars while the world is burning...’



- **OVERALL PATTERN:** more than simply an older cohort who feels somewhat disaffected by changes in human geography and marginalisation within their former Geog departments (as motivations to leave).
- **Also younger cohort:** pursuing job opportunities in business and management which are readily available c.f. significant limits in Geography Depts.
- Primary substantive research interests of those movers (top 3 interests, n=54): Regional Development (18), Clusters, Knowledge and Innovation (17), Local Economic Development (12), Labour Geography (7), Business Geography (7), GPNs / TNCs (6), Retail and Consumption (5), Gender Work and Employment (5).



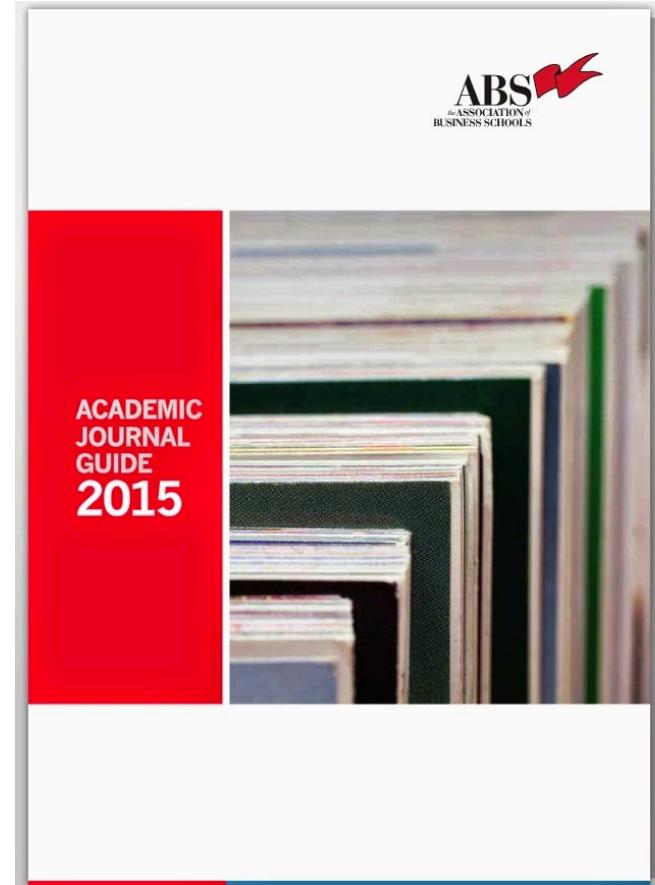
## 2. Facilitating these patterns of mobility As identified in Survey and Interviews

### MEDIATING MECHANISMS

- Colleagues as role models who already moved (18 identified other EGers in same bus / man school)
- Bus schools actively headhunting geographers
- Tendency for inter-disciplinary working makes move relatively easy
- Transferability of EG papers to Bus/Man REF returns (ABS list): 4\* EG, JEG, EPA, EPD, 3\* Antipode, E&S, GlbNet, PiHG, EPC, EURS, RegSt, UrbSt
- ‘Bus/Man Schools are booming’ (higher numbers of UG students mean more posts) – the growing ‘gravitational pull’ of Bus/Man

### OUTCOME

- One way flow – little or no evidence of any return moves; ‘ratchet effect’



\*Chartered Association of Business Schools' Academic Journal Guide  
<https://charteredabs.org/academic-journal-guide-2015/>

# EconGeog Labour Market Mobility (Example Quotes)

'The size of the business field has some unique effects... 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... 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'

### 3. Lived Experiences of Moving

- **Disciplinary Identity**: ‘Economic Geographer’ identity remains strong (64.1% of respondents), but with majority (73%) reduced affinity to Economic Geography
- **Research**: majority (64%) evidence greater research network collaboration with Bus/Man colleagues over EG colleagues; 42% able to apply more frequently for grants c.f. previously in Geography.
- **Publication**: tendency to ‘boundary span’ between EG and Bus/Man journals; but unplanned/unintended ‘creep’ towards more Bus/Man
- **Administration**: “with more people around it’s less easy to point the finger at you”
- **Teaching**: typically no change in load; some EG content but amongst Bus/Man core content
- **Conferences**: Majority (66%) respondents report less frequent attendance at EG conferences (22% no longer attend EG conferences at all)
- **PhD Supervision**: some topics that could be seen as EG, but rarely do students identify with EG (even if they read some literature)
- **REPRODUCTION OF ECON GEOG??**



# **Shifts in Identity / Affinity as Econ Geographers**

**Only 9% of participants described themselves as a ‘former Economic Geographer’).**

**Other terms used to by movers to describe their academic identity subsequent to moving from geography into business / management: ‘undercover economic geographer’, ‘economic migrant’, ‘interdisciplinary scholar’, ‘interdisciplinary social theorist’, ‘economic geographer for research, management academic for teaching’, ‘innovation studies specialist with a spatial focus’, and ‘in a business school but not of a business school’**

### **3. Lived Experiences /Outcomes of Moving: Couple of Interesting Statistics...**

**Research income:** ‘What is the approximate total grant income you have secured (as PI and/or Co-I) since moving into Business / Management?’ (optional question, answered by 34 respondents. Total: £44.1 million in research income).

**Subsequent ‘infill’:** whopping 82% of EG academic posts previously held by movers in Departments of Geography NOT subsequently replaced (excludes EG PhD exits)



# 4. Wider Consequences / Sustaining EG

## (i) EconGeog Alive and Well?

- Healthy cross-disciplinary nexus of research activity stretches beyond Depts of Geography
- EG practiced by a range of ‘near neighbour’ disciplines (Murphy 2016)
- ‘Doesn’t matter where EG research is being done’
- What *would* have happened to EG *without* these opportunities?

## (ii) ‘Hollowing Out’ of EG in Depts of Geography in UK?

- Lack of EG entry posts for new EG PhDs, non replacement of senior EG posts or rehiring to other HumGeog fields, senior EG colleagues moving into university management / retirements
- EG benefits intellectually from *being* in Geog Depts: interfacing with other HumGeog sub-disciplines c.f. loss of interface in Bus/Man?
- Some EG sub-fields more amenable to Bus/Man move (e.g. the firm, GPNs); certain kinds of EG is ‘left behind’?
- Reduction of previous EG powerhouses (Interviews identified: Manchester, Cambridge, QMUL, Bristol)



## (iii) Not a New Phenomenon: Pattern pre-dates 2000; but c.f. positive portrayals of earlier phases of migration ('too many EGers', 'wealth of opportunity')

**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 & Word 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			

**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
<b>GREEN</b>	An explicit economic geography research group	19 ( <b>59.4%</b> )	12 (37.5%)	6 (18.75%)	4 ( <b>12.5%</b> )
<b>YELLOW</b>	A research group that contains some economic geography	4 (12.5%)	7 (21.9 %)	6 (18.75%)	7 (21.9%)
<b>RED</b>	No economic geography research group	9 ( <b>28.1%</b> )	13 (40.6%)	20 (62.5%)	21 ( <b>65.6%</b> )

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

	<b>REF 2014</b>	<b>August 2017 Website</b>
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

## **4. Wider Consequences / Sustaining Economic Geography? – cont.**

### **(iv) UK Specific Phenomenon?**

- ‘It wouldn’t happen in the US!’ (US Bus/Man Schools as less heterodox/‘more picky’)

### **(v) Sustainability of Pipeline?**

- Not an infinite supply of EGers to move – pipeline will dry up
- Limits to reproducing next generation of scholars who identify as ‘Economic Geographers’? PhD training as ‘credentialed practitioners’ in EG c.f. Bus/Man practitioners? (total 49 PhD students to completion since moving to bus /man, n=54).

### **(vi) EconGeog Crisis of Relevance?**

- Inevitable Post-Structuralist Hangover? ‘Mainstream’ EGers isolated in HumGeog? Losing ground to vibrant Urban Geography?
- Need to reclaim ‘uneven devt-firms-territories’ agenda in EG?

### **(vii) Need for RGS-IBG Strategic Intervention?**

- Targeted support to ensure reproduction of EG sub-discipline within Geography Depts.? Institutional collaboration with Bus/Man Schools?



# Expanding the Conversation

## RGS-IBG Panel Aug 2016

**Nick Henry, Jennifer Johns, Ron Martin, Audience (c. 45)**

**Figure of 87 movers is striking (bigger than expected)**

**EG is not some ‘pure knowledge form’ that diffuses out of Geog Depts in simple linear fashion**

**Benchmarking these moves (HumGeog simultaneously expanding?)**

**EG heads of school – concerns about hiring economic geographers and then losing to business school**

## EGRG AGM Aug 2016

**c. 20 members**

**Dangers of self-fulfilling prophecy? / creating an image of ‘EG in crisis’**

**Need for productive engagement with movers as EG colleagues**

**Scope for institutional intervention?**

# Expanding the Conversation

RGS-IBG UK Heads of Geography Meeting (Oct 2016)

Al James with Adrian Smith (Chair) + Audience (c. 45)

Analysis is ‘too labour geography in its approach’ [c.f. 28 or 52% who moved for permanent post / lack of openings in Geog!]

Is a (positive) outcome of shift to interdisciplinarity [c.f. survey data!]

Other human geographers concerned with ‘geographies of economies’ but who do not identify as economic geographers

EG remains popular course choice amongst undergrads

Short term posts are not unique to EG as geog sub-discipline

Highlighted ‘reverse flows’ from business to geography – e.g. Oxford

In short, these EG labour market gatekeepers were not convinced there is anything to worry about...

# Sustaining EconGeog – What Next?

‘Sadly I think it comes down to money and without investment from universities economic geography could thrive or become extinct at least in the UK - because that is the other option. Economic geographers might prefer to move elsewhere or change career’

1. *Developing a vibrant core intellectual agenda in UK EG* – e.g. Brexit, regions, inclusive economic growth? Engage with urban geographers. Filling in Peck’s EG doughnut?
2. *How to intervene in EG labour market?* Need for more Economic Geographers into leadership positions in geography departments? Targeted support to ensure reproduction of EG within Geography Departments?
3. *How to consolidate / integrate EG diaspora / cross disciplinary nexus?*
4. *Comparison with situation in other countries?*