

## **Research Selectivity, Managerialism, and the Academic Labor Process: The Future of Nonmainstream Economics in U.K. Universities**

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This paper reports the results of empirical research designed to explore the impact of research selectivity on the work and employment of academic economists in U.K. universities. Research selectivity is seen as part of the general trend toward "managerialism" in higher education in both the U.K. and abroad. Managerialism based on performance indicators and hierarchical control has been contrasted with collegiate control-based or informal peer review. However, analysis of the academic labor process has idealized collegiate relations at the expense of professional hierarchies and intellectual authority relations. We argue that in the U.K., there has evolved a mainstream economics which is located within a well-defined neoclassical core. We find that the existence of lists of core mainstream journals which are believed to count most in the periodic ranking exercise poses a serious threat to academic freedom and diversity within the profession, institutionalizing the control which representatives of the mainstream exercise over both the academic labor process and job market. In this way, managerialism combines with peer review to outflank resistance to new forms of controlling academic labor at the same time as reinforcing disciplinary boundaries through centralized systems of bureaucratic standardization and control.

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**KEY WORDS:** managerialism; academic; labor process; economics.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the early eighties, universities in the United Kingdom, as elsewhere, fell victim to heavy cuts in public expenditure, and selectivity in the public funding of research was seriously considered for the first time. Hitherto, research monies from the funding councils had been made available ac-

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ording to what had become known as the “equity principle,” built into funds per student on the assumption that all academics were engaged in research and scholarship by virtue of their role as academics. Additional funds for specific projects were made available upon successful application to the Research Councils. This system was known as the principle of “dual funding” (Halsey, 1992). With the cuts in funding, however, it was argued that “excellence” in research could not be sustained without applying some principle of selectivity, and the first Research Selectivity Exercise (later to become the Research Assessment Exercise) was carried out in 1986 whereby research funds were to be distributed to different departments according to the funding body’s assessment of their degree of excellence.

This first exercise was an *ad hoc* affair with the University Grants Committee (the then funding body for higher education) hurriedly appointing its assessors and only a small proportion of research monies dependent on their ratings. The second exercise was carried out in 1989 with a larger proportion of research funding dependent on the ratings of duly constituted subject panels based on the principle of peer review. In 1992, virtually all of funding council research monies was distributed according to the ratings of the research assessment committee panels and the old universities had to compete for that money with the ex-polytechnics, now designated universities and entitled to their share. Both the new and the old universities then prepared their submission for 1996 in an even tighter financial climate brought about by an average 5% reduction in funding in real terms across the sector for 1996/97.

It is argued that over a period of only 10 years, the Research Assessment Exercise has come to dominate research activity in U.K. universities. Significant sums of money are involved with plus or minus 1 ratings for some departments running into hundreds of thousands of pounds. As institutions compete for a bigger slice of an ever-diminishing cake, stories abound of a transfer market growing up for academics in higher education not unlike that in the Premier Football League and of legitimate and not so legitimate ways of boosting ratings. Academics on the ground, however, have worried that the Research Assessment Exercise is having a negative effect not only on the attention given to teaching but on any type of research which does not fit in with what they feel to be their subject panel’s often narrow definition of excellence.<sup>3</sup>

## MANAGERIALISM AND THE ACADEMIC LABOR PROCESS

Within this climate, academics have been increasingly concerned to examine the nature of their own work from a critical point of view (see

<sup>3</sup>For a more detailed account of the operation of the Research Assessment Exercise as a funding mechanism see Higher Education Funding Council (1993, 1994, 1995). For a powerful critique of its operation see Griffith (1995).

Miller, 1991; Puxty, Sikka, & Willmott, 1994; Parker & Jary, 1995; Willmott, 1995). Writing within the tradition of labor process theory, these studies have tended to concentrate on a political economy of the academic labor process at the level of structure rather than agency, and there has been much debate about the "commodification of academic labor" (Willmott, 1995) as academics are increasingly constrained to produce and disseminate that knowledge which has immediate exchange-value in terms of increasing funding for research or for attracting increasingly vocationally-oriented students now reconstituted as "customers." The consequence is a developing, if still partial, proletarianization of academic labor with academics losing not only strategic but also operational control of their work (Halsey, 1992; Wilson, 1991; Willmott, 1995).

The influence of the Research Assessment Exercise over funding is seen as central to this commodification of academic labor as well as to the growth of "managerialism" in what is argued to be a potentially much debased system of mass higher education in the U.K. (conceptualized by Parker and Jary as the "New Higher Education" or NHE). The dynamic behind this growth of managerialism in higher education in the U.K., as elsewhere (Smyth, 1995), is a government-led push for tighter monetary control over public services at a time of severe resource constraint: the mechanism, increased competition among institutional providers in quasi-markets and the introduction of performance indicators to judge "quality" and determine funding (Pollitt, 1993; Farnham & Horton, 1993; Miller, 1994; Duncan, 1992; Peeke, 1994). The Research Assessment Exercise achieves both these objectives under cover of peer review.

Research productivity and quality judged by peer review has always been central to the academic labor process in the old universities in the U.K., and is beginning to become so in the new. What has changed is the context in which research is produced and the hierarchical managerial controls to which it is now subjected. What is new is that the self-referring quality of the academic labor process has been harnessed to managerial ends through a centrally organized and bureaucratically-controlled research selectivity exercise. Informal peer review within a collegiate system of control is very different from institutionalized peer review linked to a ranking system designed for funding purposes. As such, its potential impact on the work and conditions of employment of academics is without doubt. Halsey, for example, describes its effect as a "dramatic moment in the decline of donnish dominion" and reports an increase in research output between 1976 and 1989 (the date of the second Research Assessment Exercise) despite the fact that less time was available in the face of other demands (Halsey, 1992). The resulting "intensification" of academic labor may very

well have a negative effect on academic standards independent of any thrust toward greater managerial control (Willmott, 1995).

Moreover, the potential impact of the Research Assessment Exercise on the way academics think about themselves and their work has been well-described by Parker and Jary who fear that the very identity of the new academic, like the NHE, may come to be reconstituted in terms of what is needed to gain a high rating, rather than in terms of independence and creativity of thought. Knowing the appropriate response to gain reward, the new academic will calculate what needs to be done and do it (Parker & Jary, 1995). Miller similarly laments the lack of academic resistance to managerialist trends in his comparison of changes in higher education in Canada, Australia, and the U.K. He argues that as academics become constrained, monitored, and documented via various performance indicators, they at the same time collude in the construction of their own fate. Personal goals of scholarship and enquiry are displaced by values of "economic rationalism" or in the case of research productivity "whatever it takes to get published" (Miller, 1995).

At the same time, there has been doubt about the extent to which any external mechanism of surveillance and control can be imposed on U.K. academics. Some would stress the (regrettable?) difficulties of bringing order into the chaos of collegial control (Dearlove, 1995) while others would point to the resistant subject, the (heroic?) individual academic whose identity has traditionally been constituted through the twin discourse of academic freedom and professional autonomy (Pritchard, 1995). The debate is about the nature of power, control, and resistance in the workplace. Here, new developments in labor process theory have tried to restore "the missing subject" into what was originally a rather one-sided and mechanical search for and elaboration of different managerial control strategies or patterns of resistance to them (Knights & Willmott, 1990; Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1995). Burawoy broke the mold with his analysis of the ways in which shopfloor workers accommodate management controls in the "games" which they play at work and as such become party to their own subordination (Burawoy, 1979). Since then, there has been a new concern to avoid the imposition of meaning derived from totalizing assumptions of collective consciousness in favor of an emphasis on the role which subjective understanding of power has for any act which might meaningfully constitute resistance (Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1995; Clegg, 1995). In the end, it is argued, whichever way the balance of forces between control and resistance is theorized, there is no substitute for detailed empirical investigation which accesses the subjectivity of the actors involved. This we attempt to do in our study of the response of academic economists in U.K. universities to the management-led Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).

## MAINSTREAM AND NONMAINSTREAM ECONOMISTS<sup>4</sup>

The central hypothesis of the research was that the existence of lists of core journals which are believed to count most in the ranking exercise poses a serious risk to academic diversity within the economics profession. These core journals have tended to select for publication predominantly work which might be defined as mainstream economics because it is located within a well-defined neoclassical core.<sup>5</sup> There is, therefore, considerable pressure on departments which want to maintain or improve their research rankings to appoint main-

<sup>4</sup>The starting point of the research was that as an academic discipline economics can be divided into a mainstream, called neoclassical economics, and a nonmainstream, which broadly consists of Marxian, Post-Keynesian, Institutional, and Sraffian economics. The distinction between neoclassical and nonmainstream economics can be broadly conceived in terms of theoretical and methodological concepts such as relative scarcity, rationality, atomistic individualism, equilibrium, and ergodicity which are central to the former but are mostly ignored by the latter. This difference is succinctly expressed in their definitions of economics. Neoclassical economists define economics broadly as the study of how people and societies deal with scarcity whereas the nonmainstream economists support various combinations of the following definitions: economics is the investigation of the nature and causes of the wealth of nations; of the laws of motion of capitalism and/or of the behavior, institutions, and culture which underlies evolving capitalist economies.

The fact that neoclassical economics has splintered into various quasi-competing research programs, such as public choice economics, experimental economics, game theory, transaction cost economics, and new classical economics in the last 20 years does not negate the reality that a common basic theory, method of approaching economic issues and language exists among neoclassical economists. Recognition of this broad division between mainstream and nonmainstream has been acknowledged in the Royal Economic Society Newsletter (Culyer, 1994). Furthermore, this division is reflected in the journals in which economists publish. Citation analysis of economics journals shows that core mainstream journals form a closed self-referencing system vis-à-vis core nonmainstream journals, by which we mean that core mainstream journals are cited by many of the other core mainstream journals, while nonmainstream journals are not. Nonmainstream journals also form a self-referencing system. However, it is a relatively more open system in that core nonmainstream journals tend to cite both mainstream and nonmainstream journals. Evidence for this is found in the citation data in the *Journal Citation Reports* of the *Social Science Citation Index* in conjunction with a list of core mainstream and nonmainstream journals (Lee & Harley, 1996).

<sup>5</sup>One such list, the "Diamond List" of 27 economics journals, was compiled by Professor Arthur J. Diamond, Jr. in the States in 1988 predominantly on the basis of citation frequency, a criterion which has itself been the subject of considerable controversy as has the names of journals which should or should not be included in such a list (Johnes & Johnes, 1993; Burton & Phemister, 1994; Hodgson, 1994). The list comprised entirely mainstream journals. In 1994, a list of journals was circulating among U.K. economics departments which consisted of the 27 "Diamond List" journals plus 13 more proposed by a member of the economics subject panel as additions to the Diamond List together with seven specialist or interdisciplinary journals. This list was based on a bibliographical study undertaken for the Royal Economic Society and was meant to reflect the journals in which British economists actually publish. However, this selection process was itself selective in that it excluded a number of nonmainstream journals even though they had more publications by British economists than some of the selected ones (Lee & Harley, 1996). Despite denials on the part of the economics panel that any formal list was used in either the 1989 or the 1992 assessment exercise, the results would confirm the widely-shared, if tacit, convention as to what constitutes the list of high ranking journals.

stream rather than nonmainstream economists and upon individuals within those departments to publish more where it is believed to count most.

A questionnaire was sent to all those economists who could be identified as having an interest in nonmainstream economics from attendance at nonmainstream conferences and study groups, contributions and subscriptions to nonmainstream journals, and membership in nonmainstream economic associations.<sup>6</sup> The questionnaire was designed to explore the impact they felt the RAE was having on the recruitment and selection of nonmainstream economists generally and in their own institutions. Questions were also asked about the impact the RAE was having on both the work of their departments and on their own work. At every opportunity, respondents were given space to elaborate their answers and additional comments on the central hypothesis of the project were invited at the end.

Questionnaires were then sent to all other economists who could be identified as working in those departments from which we had nonmainstream replies, 63 institutions in all. In this way, we hoped to gather a broad enough view of both the profession as a whole and the dynamics of control in particular institutions independent of the interests and perceptions of any one particular individual or group. The mainstream economists we reached in the second mailing were intended to act as a control group as well as a measure of the degree to which subjective perceptions might be structured by objective interest. Since mainstream economists as a group had done well out of the ranking exercise, we expected them to be more committed to it.<sup>7</sup> Finally, since our mailings excluded some large, internationally-known mainstream departments, we surveyed these as well so that total potential coverage of universities covered by the 1992 RAE might be achieved. In all, some 382 questionnaires were returned from 79 institutions, 96 of which came from the first mailing which targeted the nonmainstream.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>The sample did not include the economics department at De Montfort University, England, which was the source of many of our original concerns and insights.

<sup>7</sup>Pommerehne et al. examined the opinions of economists from different countries on a range of policy issues and concluded that their data "provided evidence that the selfish model used in economics is well able to explain the answers given by economists according to their occupational self-interest" (Pommerehne, Gilbert, Schneider, & Frey, 1984, p. 259). While we would substitute the word sociological for selfish, it should not come as a surprise that, say, economists working in the public sector support greater government intervention over a range of economic policy issues while those in the private sector tend to support competition and reject government constraints on their own activities. As Whitley has argued in his study of economics as a scientific field, researchers making scientific judgments and choices "do so as social creatures rather than as epistemological rationalists following some universally valid set of truth-generating rules . . . the highly technical and esoteric nature of many debates should not obscure their human construction and origin" (Whitley, 1986, p. 183).

<sup>8</sup>The questionnaires were sent out in the Summer and Autumn of 1994 while our mailing lists were devised from predominantly 1992 listings in the Universities Commonwealth Yearbook. We estimate that about 1000 of the questionnaires sent out ought to have reached

Despite our attempts to cover as broad a range of economists and institutions as possible, no claim is made for the representativeness of our sample in any strict statistical sense. Quite apart from the difficulty in establishing by name who the economists were in any given institution (some had no easily identifiable economics departments and others no lists of relevant staff), by the very nature of our research, the response would inevitably overrepresent the nonmainstream. It was to be expected that those economists with a special interest in the research would be most likely to respond and, not surprisingly, this tended to be first and foremost non-mainstream economists who felt their interests threatened and who welcomed the opportunity to say so.<sup>9</sup> Some 43% of our economists considered themselves to be working outside the mainstream and a further 8% liked to think of themselves as having a foot in both camps.

We ourselves were surprised by the relatively high number of non-mainstream economists in our sample. For the purposes of our research, we had defined a nonmainstream economist as someone who rejects the conceptual and ideological content of the neoclassical paradigm in favor of alternative economic theories and research topics. We included in our definition those working within a Marxist, Post-Keynesian, Institutional, or Sraffian framework and indicated as much in a covering letter which also stated our research interest. While the original mailing consisted almost exclusively of such economists, the general mailing caught many others who considered themselves marginalized in relation to the dominant neoclassical core and who wanted to be included in our nonmainstream category. These were generally economists working within a specialist branch of economics or at the boundaries of other disciplines and, as such, many of them (though by no means all) were to be found in the former polytechnics whose original mission was to provide vocationally relevant knowledge to the "real" world.

their target. 382 responses would therefore seem to represent quite a respectable response rate for a postal questionnaire. Some 1000 economists participated in the 1992 RAE.

<sup>9</sup>Recognition of the fact that subjective perception is influenced by objective interest does not therefore mean that our data can be dismissed as the unreliable response of disgruntled individuals with a personal axe to grind. Many of our nonmainstream economists had in the past done quite well for themselves. Even in the old universities where it might be argued there has been the most discrimination against the nonmainstream, 24% of our non-mainstream respondents held chairs and a further 39% held a promoted post. Furthermore, almost half of our respondents put themselves firmly in the mainstream and a significant proportion of them agreed that research selectivity was having a negative effect on the non-mainstream. When we find a significant number of mainstream economists, many occupying senior positions in traditional U.K. universities, agreeing with nonmainstream economists (many of whom also occupy senior positions), we feel justified in arguing that we have identified an issue which is a matter of concern to more than just one sectional interest and which has implications for the economics professions as a whole.

## THE PRODUCTION AND EVALUATION OF ECONOMIC KNOWLEDGE

The number of economists in our sample who would wish to be considered nonmainstream reflects a general awareness of the stratification of different types of knowledge within the discipline and the mode of its reproduction. It has been argued by writers in the history of economic thought that economics has come to resemble the characteristics of a Kuhnian paradigm-bound normal science in the extent to which it is dominated by its well-defined neoclassical core (Whitley, 1986, 1991; Wray, 1994). Kuhn tells us that paradigms are “the source of the methods, problem field and standards of solution accepted by any mature scientific community at any given time” (Kuhn 1970, p. 103) and because of this, “normal science” can impose a deadening uniformity on its field of endeavor. This is because those within the community have a vested interest in the dominant paradigm and by their very adherence to it, do not see the evidence which would support an alternative view.<sup>10</sup>

It is not that new knowledge is not rewarded within such a scientific community. Indeed all academic labor processes by their very nature demand intellectual innovation and reward it in the reputations which are achieved by individuals among their peers. The knowledge which is produced, however, has to “fit in” with that which is already established. In a paradigm-bound scientific field, what is defined as knowledge at all has to conform to the paradigm, otherwise it is regarded at best as irrelevant, at worst as incompetent and unscientific (Whitley, 1986; Wray, 1994; McCutchen, 1991). “To desert the paradigm is to cease practicing the science it defines” (Kuhn, 1970, p. 34).

It is this kind of orthodoxy which has been achieved by the neoclassical tradition within the economics profession and in relation to which almost half of our sample would describe themselves as in some way or another nonmainstream. While our sample clearly overrepresents the nonmainstream within the economics profession as a whole, it needs to be emphasized that orthodoxy is not about numerical predominance but social power. Whitley, for example, argues that the continued dominance of a central analytical core in economics can be explained by the degree to which its

<sup>10</sup>Wray argues in his critique of the “disease-paradigm” which dominates research into the relationship between the HIV virus and aids, practitioners of normal science “attempt to force nature into conceptual boxes supplied by the “scientific community,” a small number of practitioners with similar training, shared professional societies, and shared theories, values, and experience with examples used in their education to ensure that each draws the “correct” conclusion from the facts” (Wray, 1994, p. 2).



leadership has maintained control over the “reputational system” which he believes to be central to the organization of academic work:

Because the dominant intellectual structure of modern economics is relatively monolithic and the criteria for assessing the significance of research results is so remarkably standardized, major innovations can easily be dismissed as being outside economics and/or the result of incompetence . . . . The reputational system is still dominated by the ideals and standards of formal theorists who elaborate and refine the basic intellectual framework that constitutes the core of the field so that the highest reputations are reserved for those economists who contribute the most abstract and formal models of equilibrium conditions. (Whitley, 1986, p. 192)

The elite within the economics profession, Whitley argues, has achieved this high degree of mutual dependence and task predictability in the analytical core at least in part because it has managed to “partition off” the ambiguities and uncertainties about research outcomes and priorities characteristic of the more applied subfields:

Research involving statistical data and empirical indicators seems to be separated from theoretical model-building activities in economics and have a lower intellectual prestige . . . . Thus theoreticians can obtain high reputations by producing highly abstract and general models of ideal worlds without considering how they are related to economic phenomena in real worlds: their work is partitioned from empirical economic studies, and they do not need to demonstrate any systematic connection between them. (Whitley, 1986, p. 192)

In a similar vein, an earlier critique of the increasingly abstract and technicist approach to the definition and solution of economic problems (which was then and still is equated with the “Americanization” of the discipline), Sargent wrote that economists had not only ceased talking to each other: “they hanker for rigour, they yearn for disciplined inquiry, they strive to be scientific in their methods. But they are so enamoured of these virtues as to be insensitive to the real value of contributions which lack them.” He warned that the discipline had become impoverished by the split between its theoretical core and applied periphery (Sargent, 1963).

Not only did the “partitioning off” of applied economics insulate the core from the lack of mutual dependence and task certainty in the periphery (characteristics more typical of other social sciences), it also provided alternative employment opportunities for those who might challenge its intellectual supremacy, not only in, for example, government departments and the media, but also in the ex-polytechnics (for a development of this argument, see Bell, 1981). While applied economists in specialist subdisciplines may well have proliferated in recent years, like those who have challenged the paradigm, they have never supplanted the core, especially in the elite academic departments of the old universities where it remains quite clear what has to be done to

attain a high reputation within the discipline.<sup>11</sup> This has been evident in the strong, if tacit, hierarchy of journals, in the informal ranking of departments, and in its professional institutions, in what Bordieu, for example, would call the “agencies of reproduction” within the profession. According to Bordieu, academic power “is obtained and maintained by holding a position enabling domination of other positions and their holders, such as all the institutions entrusted with controlling access to the corps.” Power within the university, he argues, is semi-institutionalized power deriving from the positions of power which are held; it is, therefore, “a function-related attribute which is much more linked to hierarchical position than to any extraordinary properties of the work or the person” (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 84). Those who hold these positions can exercise an immense power of censorship in the reproduction and dissemination of academic knowledge. In the case of economics, research selectivity linked to funding reconstitutes itself as a powerful agent of reproduction adding even greater “weight” to the mainstream in their control of the academic labor process and labor market.

## THE DATA

### Perceptions of Change in Recruitment Policies

Having been told the purpose of our research in a covering letter, the economists in our sample were first asked whether they had noticed any changes in recruitment policies in their own institutions where economists

<sup>11</sup>In this respect, Whitley argues that economics differs from other social sciences in its work organization. Post-1960s sociology and business and management studies, for example, are characterized by a lack of mutual dependence and a high degree of task uncertainty. This denies power to any one group and brings about a proliferation of alternative sources of authority: “. . . relatively low degrees of academic control over the reputational system in post-1960s sociology and business studies are linked to a proliferation of competing intellectual objectives and approaches often expressed through different journals and there is little apparent consensus on theoretical goals or strategies which could order these into a clear hierarchy of intellectual merit” (Whitley, 1991, p. 10). In the case of economics on the other hand, a strong hierarchy of journals reproduces the intellectual and authority relations inherent in the core. For example, in an article in the Royal Economic Society Newsletter, July 1994, Burton and Phimister argue that “it is self-evident from talking to people that individuals rank journals, and make assessments of unread articles on the basis of the journal it is published in, but for assessment purposes one needs a system that is both transparent and deemed acceptable by those being assessed.” Quite clearly this is not at present the case for large numbers of non-mainstream economists. At the best of times, peer review “is fraught with biasing influences” (McCutchen, 1991, p. 30) but when there is paradigm-conflict the difficulties are so much greater. They were well-expressed by one respondent who said that “regrettably too much of the mainstream does not know anything about the nonmainstream but since it is in a pole position it does not have to!” This is contrary to the received wisdom on the part of senior mainstreamers who lament the “woeful ignorance” about the mainstream on the part of nonmainstreamers (see comments by the Managing Editor of the *Economic Journal*, Royal Economic Society Newsletter, January 1995).

**Table I.** Changes in Recruitment Policy in Relation to Economists in Own Institution (Q-4)

	Old universities		New universities	
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
More on publications	35	21.7	15	22.4
More on research	21	13.0	26	38.8
Change to mainstream explicit	32	19.9	4	6.0
Greater technical skills	24	14.9	4	6.0
Emphasis core journals	21	13.0	2	3.0
Short-termism	6	3.7	0	0.0
Other	22	13.7	16	23.9
Total	161	100.0	67	100.0

were concerned (Table I). Fifty-three percent of economists who had been working in the old universities for 3 or more years and 64% of those in the new believed that there had been changes. In the old universities, the most commonly stated single category of change was the greater emphasis placed on publications (22%); "... emphasis is on 'about to publish' rather than feel for economic problems or teaching skill," and a further 13% of responses mentioned greater emphasis on research without specifying that either of these activities necessarily had anything to do with a shift toward the mainstream. However, the second largest category of response (17%) mentioned explicitly a greater emphasis on mainstream research or publications; 15% said there was a greater emphasis on mathematical and technical skills, and a further 13% said recruitment policy specifically targeted those with a record of publishing in core journals, categories which were taken together to imply a paradigm shift. Add to this the 4% who thought there had been some shift toward the mainstream, but not exclusively so, and a total of 48% of those in the old universities believing that there had been a change in recruitment policies stated explicitly that change had in some way favored the mainstream:

... we only recruit those likely to get into core journals, not especially interested in teaching or admin. skills of applicants (or even English proficiency).

... a narrower focus, more technical emphasis, less knowledge of political economy.

... narrower definition of "economist." Less open criteria, i.e., not the number of publications but *type* of publications.

... more emphasis on those working in core areas.

... research rating potential a prime consideration. Idea of looking for nonmainstream people now inconceivable.

... the authorities are looking for mainstream economists to bolster their credit rating in the Research exercise.

... they are almost all econometricians and forecasters.

**Table II.** Recruitment Policies Always Applied (Q-4)

	Old universities		New universities	
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
Always publications	15	11.3	4	8.5
Always research	28	21.1	12	25.5
Always quality	42	31.6	7	14.9
Teaching/subj driven	23	17.3	18	38.3
Always mainstream/core	23	17.3	1	2.1
Other	2	1.5	5	10.6
Total	133	100.0	47	100.0

... there has been a growing emphasis on publication in mainstream orthodox journals at the expense of originality and ability to teach.

... the emphasis is on publication in "A" journals. Before it was just publications.

... recently, main criterion seems to have been ability to publish in mainstream journals—in the past, judging from the composition of the department, things were different.

In the new universities, on the other hand, there was much less explicit reference to a shift in emphasis toward the mainstream, with a total of only 15% of responses falling into the combined mainstream category. Here, change was perceived primarily in terms of a greater emphasis on research potential and publications record with the three mainstream categories combined coming a poor third.

In addition, those who perceived *no change* in recruitment policies (Table II) were asked to describe the recruitment policies which generally applied. In the new universities, the single most recurring criterion related to the need to fill gaps in teaching (38%) with the belief that there had always been some emphasis on research coming a not very close second (26%) and publications record featuring hardly at all. Only one response made any reference to always having been a mainstream department, and then not exclusively so, compared with the 17% of responses from the old universities which stated that there had been no change in recruitment policies because their departments had always recruited mainstream economists and/or targeted those with core journal publications:

... most promising in terms of publication in top journals. Always has been.

... we look for strong technical training in economic theory/econometrics plus publication record.

... they must be of the highest quality with the potential to contribute to mainstream economics.

In all, therefore, a substantial number of respondents in the old pre-1992 universities made some reference to the importance of research and publication within the mainstream in the context of overall recruitment policies

compared with the once less prestigious ex-polytechnics where change was largely perceived in terms of the ostensibly paradigm-neutral importance of research and publications record in general.

What is of further interest in the old universities is the large number of responses (32%) to emphasize “excellence” or “quality” as always having informed recruitment policies with such comments as “we go for quality and aim to get the best candidate for the job” being typical of this category. However, in a discipline where quality is defined by many in terms of orthodox approaches, it is difficult to conclude that this necessarily means the open-mindedness it implies. As several senior mainstream economists from the highest ranking departments candidly put it:

... the department's direction has not changed. We appoint people we think are “good.” (Our notion of “goodness” no doubt favors the mainstream. That is what mainstream means of course.)

... research excellence judged by publication record or potential in Diamond set of journals.

... we only employ competent economists who can teach macro and micro and do proper research. I regard “non-mainstream” economics as irrelevant to modern economics. When posts are limited it is important to fill them with people who can do research in central areas of the subject. There are no economics of scale in having unrelated non-mainstream people on one's staff.

... we are not interested in employing non-mainstream economists.

... we look for the best. Those outside the mainstream (as you put it) are generally inferior.

It seemed to us likely, therefore, that at least some of the respondents referring to “quality” as a criterion for appointment might implicitly mean mainstream. This taken-for-grantedness could explain the more general lack of consciousness of change among the mainstream in the old universities. For example, fewer mainstream than nonmainstream economists thought there had been any change in recruitment in recent years (42% compared with 69%), and when they did perceive change, they were more likely to see it in terms of a greater emphasis on research and publications in general (54% compared with 26%) while nonmainstream economists were more likely to perceive it in terms of the hypothesized paradigm shift (53% and 35%, respectively).

### **RAE Impact on Departmental Work**

Almost three-quarters of respondents in both the old and the new universities stated that the RAE had had an impact on the work which their own department was doing. However, the nature of its impact seems to have differed quite considerably between the two types of institutions.

**Table III.** Impact of RAE on Departmental Work (Q-6)

More pressure to:	Old universities		New universities	
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
Publish	34	13.1	16	17.2
Publish Diamond/core/mainstream	67	25.8	4	4.3
Publish more (unspecified)	42	16.2	2	2.2
Publish in refereed journals	26	10.0	9	9.7
Do more technical/mainstream work	35	13.5	8	8.6
Greater division of labor	3	1.2	18	19.4
Target/research areas	31	11.9	31	33.3
Neglect teaching	18	6.9	3	3.2
Other	4	1.5	2	2.2
Total	260	100.0	93	100.0

Again, in the old universities, there was much greater consciousness of paradigm shift with explicit mention of a movement toward the mainstream and/or the need to publish in core journals in some 40% of the responses specifying change in departmental work (Table III).

. . . awareness of (supposed!) criteria for RAE permeates all research and publication activities.

. . . there is a growing emphasis on publication in top X journals as *the* criterion of research performance, though personally I am not too pressured because economic history is accepted as a "reputable" alternative to economics and the prof in this dept says work of dept now emphasizes top 20 journals.

. . . the whole concept of "core journals" has got a firmer grip on the profession than say 10 years ago. What counts about an article now is where it's published rather than what it says. Wholly anti-intellectual and damaging to economics.

. . . more pressure applied to everyone to be active in research and those that already are active to focus publication on kudos journals.

. . . we got a 3. We need a 4+. The view is that not enough (mainstream) research is being done.

. . . our dept has a very strong views about what "journals" count and applies this vigorously.

. . . greater emphasis on quantitative methods and publishing strategy for core journals.

Others within this category were concerned that the pressure to publish, even in top journals, might be responsible for a decline in academic standards and scholarship, and these fears were by no means confined to the nonmainstream:

. . . publication of books discouraged, only top journals valued. Teaching performance ignored.

. . . emphasis on speed and quantity of research output therefore less general, less philosophical.

. . . pressure to publish regardless of intrinsic worth. The more articles the better, the more mathematical the better.

. . . focus is now upon statistically competent, young, cheap personnel with the potential to churn out ephemeral research findings. No concern with originality and long term potential. It has become frenetic and trivialised.

. . . more mainstream and "safe" research. Also a more short term viewpoint—less emphasis on scholarship.

A further 13% of responses pointed to the increased pressure to publish and another 16% again mentioned the pressure to publish more. Ten per cent cited increased pressure to publish in refereed journals without specifying that they need necessarily be core. While ostensibly paradigm-neutral, many of these economists also pointed out the negative impact this was having on long-term scholarship and research as well as on the publication of monographs and books, styles of communication preferred by the non-mainstream because of the more discursive nature of their subject matter.

Finally, both mainstream and nonmainstream economists in the old universities were conscious of potentially conflicting interests consequent upon research assessment and institutional pressures to conform to its (imputed?) demands:

. . . reinforces the apparent belief that only certain kinds of people are real economists.

. . . it encourages mainstream economics at the expense of nonmainstream.

. . . it has taken resources (staff and computers, etc.) away from teaching and towards individual—sometimes unrelated—econometric research.

. . . places less mainstream personnel at a disadvantage.

. . . the RAE is having pernicious effects on the position and morale of staff who are seen as non-mainstream and therefore a liability to the work of the department.

. . . pressure to publish in core journals. This has caused considerable controversy in the department (over promotions policy).

The discourse of paradigm conflict seemed to be much less prominent in the new universities than in the old where impact on departmental work was concerned. Here only eight responses in total explicitly identified a movement toward the mainstream in their department's work and four more talked about core journals. Instead, the impact of the RAE on new university departments was verbalized primarily in terms of targeting more research (33%) and the greater need to publish (17%), and with the exception of perhaps two new university departments, the overwhelming impression was that, for the moment at least, any research or any publication would do!

Of more significance for a potential conflict of interest between different members of staff in the new universities was the 19% of responses

which indicated a greater division of labor into research-active and nonactive staff.

. . . we now give substantial teaching relief to “fellows” of a new research center who are accountable via published output. Other lecturers take on extra teaching to balance this. I have been granted a fellowship although the output is not constrained to “top journal” publication.

. . . research has a higher profile. Increased division of labor in the dept (exclusive research or teaching), fewer who do both.

For many research-oriented staff in the new universities, including those working within an alternative paradigm, one gets the impression that the monies received consequent upon the RAE have had something of a liberating effect, especially when submissions had been made under headings other than economics where the criteria of the neoclassical orthodoxy do not apply.<sup>12</sup>

Given we entered the RAE with Business, we are not under pressure to conform.

Economics went into the RAE with Business Studies (because much of our work is interdisciplinary). Business Studies got a two therefore much more money now available for research than previously.

. . . there are now timetable allowances to undertake research therefore started research again.

. . . since research brings in money (through the RAE) it is actively supported. Previously only lip service was given to the importance of research. But teaching is still the main function.

Though quite clearly you need to be on the right side of the research active/inactive divide to benefit:

. . . some staff have been designated researchers. Consequently the workload of others has increased so little time for study, updating etc.

. . . teaching remission is granted on the “promise” of publications or other “measurable outputs” but only for research in a limited field of European economics. They seek a ranking and there may be an A and a B team evolving for research and pure teaching tasks and administration.

<sup>12</sup>Several respondents spent some time delineating the benefits of being in a Business School from this point of view as well explaining to us the distinction between their own position as applied economists in a specialist subfield and those who would challenge the mainstream philosophically. Ironically we came across several Marxists in the new university Business Schools who extolled their virtues for the freedom they were allowed to develop their own interests in contrast to what they felt would have been the constraints in a mainstream department in an old university. Others, however, pointed to the greater vocational orientation of students and staff both in these schools and more generally as a significant constraint on academic diversity independent of the RAE: “I sympathize fully with your concern for nonmainstream perspectives but our battle here is even more fundamental. “Economics” itself as a definable discipline is under threat from “the Business School Culture.” We are in the parlous position of defending a single honors Economics degree incorporating six compulsory modules of History and Methodology in an environment where even the neoclassical paradigm is a mystery to most colleagues.” Quite clearly, there are business schools and business schools!



**Table IV.** No Departmental Change Consequent Upon The RAE (Q-6)

	Old universities		New universities	
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
Staff continue with own interests				
Submit to diverse committees	1	1.8	3	14.3
Mainly a teaching institution	0	0.0	5	23.8
Always mainstream	9	15.8	2	9.5
Always output driven	24	42.1	1	4.8
Always core journals	3	5.3	0	0.0
Any research valued	5	8.8	7	33.3
Total	57	100.0	21	100.0

... the main change in our recruitment policy in recent years has been the emphasis on research and publication potential. This has been accompanied by a 3-fold increase in student numbers but we are no longer appointing people who can communicate with students. Result—severe stress to staff and students alike.

Not surprisingly, given the longstanding contractual obligation to engage in research, the idea of a division of labor between active and non-active researchers was mentioned on only three occasions in the responses from the old universities. The potential consequences of failing to contribute to departmental research ratings, were, however, well understood:

... more emphasis on targeted journals with the “stick” of extra teaching if you don’t get 2 articles over the RAE period.

... I perceive a need to publish sufficient papers to avoid being overloaded with teaching.

... the threat of “teaching-only” contracts (= an invitation to resign or a brutal way of clearing dead wood?)

... the bias is shifting inexorably towards mainstream work—“fringe” interests lead to additional teaching/admin, denial of funds to attend conferences ... the pressure is continuous and detrimental to academic freedom.<sup>13</sup>

It is at the point where the power relations inherent in the employment relationship meet with the demands of the RAE that the discourse of peer review becomes inextricably linked with that of the original managerial intent behind the research assessment exercise. Those favored by the process were not afraid to deal in both and indeed seemed to see no distinction between the two. Two-thirds of those who said the RAE had had *no impact* on their department (Table IV) stated that it had always been “output driven” or worked to “the highest standards of excellence” or targeted

<sup>13</sup>In describing the support that the economics department gave to scholarship and research, one institution from which the writers received details of advertised posts offered full costs to staff attending mainstream conferences but only 50% of costs to those who wished to attend nonmainstream!

“publication in the Diamond set of journals.” Not surprisingly, it was from these departments that support for the RAE primarily came:

. . . the RAE reflects an international consensus on what is important so it has not changed the type of work but has made us more research conscious.

I think that people are still doing the same kind of research, they are just more conscious that they should actually produce it, and that it should be of a quality to stand up to outside review.

It has focused publication into key journal articles—made staff think more clearly about *how* to disseminate rather than *what* they do.

as did a lack of sympathy with those who did not meet these demands.

It has focused on the need to fulfil contractual obligation to be involved in research and to encourage staff to consider journal submission rather than avoid the refereeing process by merely contributing to books.

I think the RAE is here to stay and in any case the principle—that people whose employment contract includes time to research and publish should publish, and not just take long holidays, is a good one.

Finally, as with perceptions of change in recruitment policies overall, nonmainstream economists were again more likely to perceive a change in departmental work consequent upon the RAE than mainstream economists (85% and 61%, respectively). And again, in the old universities where there was a greater consciousness of paradigm conflict, more nonmainstream than mainstream perceived that impact in terms of a shift toward the mainstream (48% as compared with 31%), though perhaps here it is equally important to note the significant number of mainstream economists perceiving change in those terms as well.

### **Self-Subordination or “Playing the Game?”**

On the whole, the research uncovered a stream of hostility to the RAE the extent of which surprised even the researchers. This hostility was expressed most frequently by nonmainstream economists who believed that the RAE, whether wittingly or unwittingly, had strengthened the hegemony of the mainstream. But it was by no means confined to them, nor to that one issue. It stemmed from what was perceived to be interference in the academics’ traditional freedom to set their own research agenda, to produce the knowledge they considered to be important, and to disseminate it in the way that they saw fit. Sometimes this hostility was verbalized in terms of academic freedom and the traditional ideals of the university for independent and critical thought, at others in terms of its perceived negative impact on quality research and scholarship. It was also expressed in terms of the threat the RAE was believed to pose to policy-oriented and interdisciplinary research:

Table V. Ways in Which Own Work Affected by RAE (Q-7)

	Old universities		New universities	
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
I publish more	24	13.2	17	23.0
I target/do more research	12	6.6	18	24.3
I've gone short-term	31	17.0	7	9.5
I've switched to refereed	19	10.4	10	13.5
I've gone more mainstream	35	19.2	9	12.2
I'm targetting core	45	24.7	1	1.4
I neglect teaching	7	3.8	1	1.4
I do more teaching	3	1.6	3	4.1
I'm leaving/going for Unit 46	6	3.3	6	8.1
Other	0	0	2	2.6
Total	182	100.0	74	100.0

To say that academic diversity is at risk is an understatement. Forcing academics to publish in core journals is a form of censorship—it conditions what you say and how you say it, as well as determining areas of research and research methodologies.

The RAE is a dubious exercise. In a subject such as economics, where the UK profession is conservative and weak on innovation, the consequences are very bad indeed. My department suffers from its inter-disciplinary and applied orientation: the effect on our work and culture is negative and demoralizing. The problem with the RAE is not just methodological bias. Arguably more significant is the associated pro-theoretical/anti-empirical and thus socially irrelevant bias. I support evaluation of research output as part of the consequence of the need to be socially accountable, not as the product of the hegemony of the orthodoxy, insulated from society's scrutiny.

... overall I am against the way the RAE is conducted. I think it discriminates against non-mainstream economists. This strategy is against progress in any subject—we'll all end up as neo-classical economists talking only to ourselves ... the policy implications of much of our work will become less and less relevant.

I would like to see some attention paid in the RAE not only to “non-mainstream” research but economic research which is of a more applied nature; more policy-oriented. Otherwise the “new” universities will never obtain a fair share of an ever-shrinking research cake.

The RAE has a much wider impact on people's careers and in some instances their health. It is not only academic diversity which is at risk. Many of the cherished ideals of the Universities are at risk. I foresee little policy-oriented useful research coming out in the future.

In many instances, however, this knowledge of the negative impact of the RAE did not feed the consciousness to actively resist. No less than 50% of respondents in the new universities and 41% in the old reported that they had changed the direction of their work in some way to fit in with the demands of the RAE. Not surprisingly, given our central hypothesis, the number of nonmainstream economists who felt their work had been affected was greater than those working within the mainstream with 51% of nonmainstream economists reporting an impact on their work compared with 36% of mainstream. So great has been the impact of the RAE (Table V) on all aca-

democratic economists, however, that a further 28% of nonmainstream economists and 19% of mainstream reported feeling under pressure to change. In total, therefore, a massive 79% of nonmainstream and 55% of mainstream economists felt themselves directly affected by what one mainstream professor referred to as the RAE's "narrow definition of excellence":

... pressure to do the sort of work (publishing in core journals) which will assist the department in the ratings.

... I'm certainly considering status of the publication before proceeding with the article.

... felt it necessary to publish in a mainstream journal, which I have, but there has been an opportunity cost in some useful research I then did not have time for.

... the changes have made academic life far more competitive and less enjoyable. It is made clear, indirectly and sometimes directly, that only "good" journals count. Much of the work which interests me is not of interest to "good" journals, so in some sense you find yourself working much harder to keep a foot in both camps.

I have been distracted from writing a second book to churning out papers for journals.

... plans for further editions of books dropped. Plan for a book based on major research project split into series of articles for submission.

... discouraged research in historical political economy & methodology. Encouraged econometric work . . . .

... teaching has been devalued. Everyone is under pressure to publish more, hence "salami-slicing." Journal articles are gaining weight compared to books/chapters in books. Resistant though I am to all these trends, I find myself going in the direction of all of them.

... publications in women's studies are not even neutral but negative because of the opportunity cost of the time spent and because of the "image" which is not in line with that of eg SL, Reader or Professor of Economics. This has always been the case but has been accentuated by the RAE.

Others were careful to point out that direct pressure was not that strong but that a sense of self-interest or self-preservation was:

... now set objective of publishing in the mainstream for benefit of departmental rating and my promotion prospects.

... more journals, less books but not major pressure. Promotion ambitions lead to more pressure than the RAE.

... not (pressure) from the department but one is aware of the potential opportunity cost to the Department's research rating on time spent in writing textbooks, for example.

... although one tries to resist, one has to consider the impact on the department and pressure from colleagues.

... no promotion/extra increments for those other than in the narrow field.

... talking to younger colleagues there is a good appreciation of the weaknesses of conventional economics and an interest in non-standard approaches (though not

universally so) but a feeling that they must play the game if they are to succeed in gaining tenure.

And those who have been rewarded for working within the mainstream were quite conscious as to why: "my promotion has been directly linked to top journal publication." In this way, research assessment directly linked to individual career prospects and departmental funding "fixes the interests" of younger academics (Clegg, 1994, p. 317) making offers not easily refused.

But again there was a difference in the pattern of response between the old and the new universities. The two largest single categories for describing change in own work in the old universities referred to either targeting core journals (24.7%) or going more mainstream (19.2%) while in the new there was much greater emphasis on research (24.3%) and publishing (23.0%) in general, further evidence that it was in the old universities competing for the highest rankings where there was the greatest institutional pressure to go mainstream.

Of some interest also is the small, but it would seem growing, number of researchers who had decided not to submit to the economic's panel in the next Assessment Exercise but to submit instead under the general Business & Management category, Unit 46. This was an option especially for the more applied economists in the new university Business Schools, but at least one department with a high reputation for nonmainstream work in an old university had decided to follow this strategy for its 1996 RAE submission.

## Resistance

This is not to say that there was no resistance through persistence in individual research agendas (Collinson, 1994).<sup>14</sup> That would be very sur-

<sup>14</sup>Collinson (1994) makes a useful distinction between "resistance through distance" where "subordinates try to escape or avoid the demands of authority and to 'distance' themselves, either physically and/or symbolically, from the organization and its prevailing power structure" (in this context an example would be to go for Unit 46 or leave the department for a more comfortable home elsewhere) and "resistance through persistence" whereby the knowledge of formal organizational rules or cultures is utilized as a resource "to render management more accountable by extracting information, monitoring practices and challenging decision-making processes" (p. 25). In the case of dissident economists this often took the form of drawing on the discourse of academic freedom and professional autonomy to continue with their own research agendas but there were examples of more extensive resistance through persistence: "I belong to an internet network of feminist economists. Last month there was a debate on the problem of the major journals only publishing orthodox economics papers and the effect this had on appointments/tenure/promotion. I think there is work being done on analyzing the content of the major journals and letters are being sent to those journals highlighting the problems of marginalizing nonmainstream economics." Interestingly enough the example of successful resistance through persistence which Collinson gives was also constituted in large part through consciousness of gender identity.

prising indeed given the belief in academic freedom and professional autonomy that has long constituted the identity of the British academic. On a simple head count, some 28% of our nonmainstream economists felt pressure to change the direction of their work but had resisted and 21% had continued working as they always had. Twelve percent of our mainstreamers had felt pressure but resisted. Furthermore, a small but nonetheless significant number of reasons for there being no change in own or departmental work made reference to the fact that staff continued with their own interests or that own work was sufficiently established to withstand the pressures. Add to this the disquiet expressed by many of those who had changed the direction of their work, and there might very well be limits to which any external review body could persuade academics to compromise their individual research agendas in exchange for institutional favors:

. . . one's mobility is constrained if you don't operate within the "Diamond" category. But at present I refuse to play the game.

. . . this is a university, not a private research laboratory or consultancy.

. . . those who do the sort of work which gets good ratings are doing it anyway. Those who don't are unwilling/too old too change.

. . . no direct pressure. Perhaps indirect pressure due to the changing environment. If I were at the start of my working life as an academic I would, I am sure, feel under great pressure.

. . . annoyance at the hassle on others; smug at being fireproof as retirement approaches . . . .

. . . in my view, the RAE will influence younger scholars and thus its affects, benign or otherwise, will become more obvious in the longer term. Established scholars who have been recruited/promoted on the basis of existing work are less likely to be affected when planning their own research agendas.

Much is invested in the academic's identity as autonomous subject free to pursue truth as they define it and within this discourse overt disciplinary practices are hard to justify, even by their would-be perpetrators. This could explain why some mainstream economists found our hypothesis personally offensive and sought to deny its validity by imputing negative motives to those who might seek to resist:

. . . most nonmainstream aren't concerned with advancing knowledge in the subject but with either:

- (i) re-working old ideas which should have been left for dead long ago
- (ii) whining about how badly they've been treated
- (iii) trying to find conspiracies against them

and others refused to believe that the problem exists:

I have seen no bias in the leading journals against nonmainstream economists. Publishing rather poor stuff in specifically nonmainstream journals does not help diversity.

I do not believe there is a conspiracy against the nonmainstream, but by definition these represent approaches which most members of the profession believe are misguided. Nevertheless it does seem to me to be quite possible to get into the best journals with different ideas. Most mainstream journals take nonmainstream if it is good.

There is indeed the very real consideration that many nonmainstream economists have not the necessary technical skills to participate in the mainstream. Even if they were willing to “recycle” themselves, they may not be able to do it quickly enough to impact on RAE rankings. Given the tenure which the older academics enjoy, and notwithstanding any reluctance on the part of colleagues to turn the screw, their institutional managements are, in the short term at least and in an equally real sense, stuck with them.<sup>15</sup>

These conflicting pressures for and against change were graphically illustrated in the responses from a formerly heterodox department in an old university which had done badly (in its terms) in the last research assessment exercise. The problem was defined as one of too little mainstream research output and there was a great deal of institutional pressure on existing staff to fulfill the perceived requirements of the RAE:

All the department, mainstream and nonmainstream, acknowledge we must play the mainstream game. Did so at a special meeting.

Be that as it may, many within the department were far from happy:

I do not regard it as desirable that academics should be required to publish—only that they should be constantly examining their subjects with a view to rejecting and exposing falsity, and publishing only when they have something to say and they are reasonably certain they are right. Mass publication leads to chaos and disorder in the state of knowledge.

I am seriously considering moving out of an economics dept. into a more hospitable environment in another part of the university. I shall not change the content of my work.

My own department, having got a 3 in the last HEFC RAE is in headlong pursuit of a 5 by buying in people with publications in core journals. What a colleague calls the “mathematical fascists” are in charge. The diversity and pluralism for which my department was known is threatened. The strategy is totally backward looking—to produce the kind of research profile which people think was important for a 5 in the last RAE. Fortunately, I personally have the opportunity of transferring to more congenial surroundings—but the profession as a whole is going in a direction which I much regret. Innovation and interdisciplinary work are becoming impossible to sustain if these trends continue.

Others within the department were not quite so pessimistic, however, and doubted that the intention to emphasize the mainstream would succeed given the degree of resistance among the nonmainstream economists and

<sup>15</sup>Many of our respondents had been working in higher education for quite a long time with 57% having worked in higher education since before 1979 and 79% since before 1986, the date of the first RAE in the old universities.

the degree of support, tacit or otherwise, from mainstream colleagues and/or well-placed nonmainstream Heads:

. . . an intention to emphasize mainstream but I don't know whether it will be effective in practice. (Pressure) yes, but my Dean recently said, in effect, to hell with it, do your own thing.

Similarly extensive opposition was evident in at least three other heterodox departments in the old university sector where reference was made to the support of colleagues, mainstream or otherwise, and/or the strength of the Head of Department's views as a resource which made resistance possible.

### **Recruitment and Selection as Managerial Control Strategy**

Given the above resistance, institutional managements concerned to retain or improve institutional ranking must turn to more insidious forms of control to achieve their objectives. Selective recruitment is an obvious choice:

(RAE) shifts recruitment to mainstream while those in post left to follow their own interest.

And some of the younger respondents had the experience to corroborate this:

I personally have been interviewed at other universities where it has been clear that publishing in core journals is the criteria.

. . . in my inquiries regarding other posts at older universities I have been asked about research interests and the RAE and journals have been signalled. At a selection committee of a large older university I was recently asked directly which journals I aim to publish in over the coming 2 years.

. . . my strategy to obtain a lectureship was to trade off completion of my PHD against the "4 good papers" criteria. It worked but . . .

. . . I am a Marxist, but since I am on probation until Jan. I have been forced to do mostly mainstream research or else I know I wouldn't be made permanent.

. . . on advice from a present colleague, when I applied for my current post, I stressed my ability to teach mainstream micro. I also told them that my research interest was general equilibrium. Subsequently I "came out" and pointed out my research as Marxist equilibrium. I doubt I would have got my present post had I not pursued this little deception.

In this way, selection interviews themselves can be seen as a site of individual resistance. But at one and the same time, these "little deceptions" might also be interpreted as constituting the sort of cooptation Burawoy (1979) argued to be inherent in "playing the game," serving merely to reinforce the hegemonic status quo rather than challenging it.

Forty-two percent of respondents from the old universities believed that the RAE had had an impact on recruitment as did 34% in the new. Again, nonmainstream economists were significantly more likely to perceive change than mainstream (66% compared with 29% in the old universities;



43% compared with 26% in the new). By far the largest single category of response in both the old and the new universities indicated that the evidence for its impact on recruitment in their department were the criteria which pertained when making appointments:

. . . (real or perceived) bias of “top journals” to ms. work; possibility of achieving greater output with “safer” theoretical or econometric work; discouragement of work outside the established paradigm which is of a larger gestation . . . .

Nonmainstream would fit comfortably into (our) system, but the risk is how their output would be perceived in terms of the RAE. I don’t know whether this has influenced selection committees I haven’t been involved in, but it certainly influences me.

. . . formerly head-hunted nonmainstream economists. Now no longer sought by my dept. . . . I was appointed professor in 1989. I would probably not even be included in an interview short list now.

. . . in a recent chair appointment, a well-published and senior nonmainstream female economist was not short-listed.

. . . unwillingness to hire those who may not publish in core journals . . . .

. . . just need to look at memos we receive from HOD or discussions we have before appointing somebody . . . .

. . . the appointments made, the goals set by HOD for next research exercise . . . .

. . . applications vs. short lists . . . .

. . . more emphasis on those working in core areas. Am partly responsible for this myself as we have to follow RAE signals. I don’t set the rules. None of us like them. But was a chairman of the dept myself. No real options but to play by the rules.

Others within the profession, however, might more accurately be construed as making the rules rather than playing the game:

I don’t think there is any intentional bias but, in general, senior staff find it easier to evaluate job candidates and research areas which they are familiar with. Since most of the profs here are ms, this does lead to an advantage for ms candidates.

. . . those who reach senior positions define quality by what they do.

The irony is that this equation of excellence with mainstream on the part of those who make the rules rather than play the game renders them less aware of their existence. This could explain the seemingly genuine surprise at our central hypothesis on the part of a professor in the same high-ranking department as the junior mainstreamer above conscious of “unintentional bias” on the part of those in senior positions:

. . . the issue you have raised did not even occur to me, or for all I know, to anyone of my colleagues. There are many faults with the RAE, but this doesn’t appear to be one of them at my institution.

This “unconsciousness” may also explain the apparently genuine belief on the part of regulators more favorably disposed toward heterodoxy than no

harm would come to dissenters as a result of research assessment.<sup>16</sup> While consciousness may indeed be a prerequisite of resistance (Clegg, 1994, p. 295) there is no doubt that power can be exercised without it. In an important sense, that is what the concept of hegemony means.

Denial notwithstanding, the data presents a gloomy picture where the recruitment and selection of nonmainstream economists is concerned. So, too, do job advertisements which appeared in the academic press at the time of the research. One advertisement for posts in the "low-ranking" formerly heterodox department described in detail above, announced that it was in the market for nine economists who would raise their research profile in mainstream economics (The Guardian, March 29, 1994). A further advertisement noted that the appointee to the Chair in Economic Theory must be an active researcher contributing at the leading edge of mainstream economic theory (The Guardian, June 14, 1994) and yet another stated that the appointee must be an active researcher, contributing to the leading edge of mainstream macroeconomics, either theoretical or applied (The Guardian, Nov. 8, 1994). Adverts for posts in other institutions similarly specify that applicants must be working within the mainstream and link this explicitly to either maintaining or improving their ranking in the assessment exercise:

The college welcomes applications for Lectureships in Economics in any field of mainstream Economics. Successful candidates will have demonstrated outstanding potential in both research and teaching. Although candidates new to the profession need not have current publications, they must display the ability and intention to publish in leading international and U.K. journals. (Lectureships in Economics, Royal Holloway, University of London, 1995)

The Department is seeking to build on its significant improvement at the last Research Assessment Exercise. The new appointments will be expected to demonstrate the strong research commitment that results in significant publications. (Lectureships in Economics and/or Marketing/Corporate Strategy, University of Dundee, 1995)

The Department is particularly seeking to appoint someone with interests in a mainstream area of the subject to complement the research interests of the other Professors and to provide research leadership in the Department. (Chair in Economics, University of Kent at Canterbury, 1995)

The Department of Economics has expanded rapidly over recent years and is enjoying a growing reputation for its research. Bibliometric surveys have placed it among the leading U.K. universities in terms of the volume of its research output

<sup>16</sup>At the Royal Economic Society Annual Conference, 1994, a special session was called to discuss the 1992 RAE at which the Chair of the economics panel gave his view of what the panel did and also received questions from the floor. One question asked was how did the panel regard economic research which fell outside the domain of mainstream economics. The answer was, in part, that the assessors did not discriminate against the nonmainstream. The Chair went on to add that he did not believe that British economists would actively discriminate against nonmainstream economists and their research.

**Table VI.** Change in Own Work (Q.7) by Departmental Ranking in Old Universities

Change in own work	Ranking in the 1992 Research Assessment Exercise			
	2	3	4	5
Yes	59.1	47.8	34.8	29.5
No	22.7	32.2	37.7	52.6
Felt pressure to change	18.2	20.0	27.6	18.0
	<i>n</i> = 22	<i>n</i> = 90	<i>n</i> = 69	<i>n</i> = 78

and it is successfully increasing the number of its publications in core journals. (Posts in Economics, University of Surrey, 1995)

Out of some 20 job specifications which the researchers obtained, only three did not specify an area of interest within the mainstream or make reference to ranking in the last research assessment exercise.

The evidence would suggest that reputations are being defined in terms of research rankings and high rankings equated with ability to publish within the mainstream. It is in this very real sense that any resistance on the part of individual lecturers in post will be self-defeating if it remains at the level of individual resistance. The profession is an ageing one with two-thirds of the nonmainstream economists in the old universities in our sample having worked as academics in higher education since before 1979. Only 15 of the 63 institutions from which our original nonmainstream economists came taught nonmainstream economists as a compulsory subject within the undergraduate curriculum and much of this was in the History of Economic Thought (more acceptable to the mainstream) as opposed to, for example, Post-Keynesian Price Theory. Where there was teaching within an alternative paradigm it was more often than not felt to be under threat:

... we still have compulsory undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the history of economic thought. This patch can be difficult to protect, but we succeed.

... we had senior member of staff who was a Marxist—but it would be unthinkable to replace him with a Marxist economist on retirement. Hence his course in Marxist political economy was dropped.

This is not to say that the impact of the RAE has been uniform across the whole spectrum of economics departments even within the old university sector. One of the most interesting features of the research, indeed one of the most persuasive in terms of support for its central hypothesis, was the fact that those “low-scoring” departments in the last research assessment exercise within the old university sector (that is ranking 2 or 3) were those where academics, both main and nonmainstream felt under most pressure to conform to its perceived demands (Table VI).

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Our findings would indicate that academic economists in the U.K. are aware of both the control function of the RAE and of "its numerous contradictions and paradoxical consequences" (Puxty, Sikka, & Willmott, 1994). If they are not concerned about its threat to academic diversity because they themselves define economics in terms of the mainstream, then they are aware of its potential negative impact on the quality if not the quantity of research in their discipline. They also believe that specialist subjects within the mainstream are being marginalized if they are not seen to be contributing to mainstream economic theory. Nevertheless many are willing to accommodate the exercise by submitting to institutional, departmental, and/or peer pressure to publish more short term and publish it in what are considered to be the journals which count most in the ranking exercise. In this way, mainstream economists become (not so unwittingly) locked into practices that reinforce their subordination and in this instance, through the RAE's negative impact on their work, almost certainly their degradation as well (Knights & Willmott, 1989).

But it is nonmainstream economists who as a group are the most conscious of the RAE as a system of surveillance and control as it is upon their interests that the ranking exercise impacts most. They fear that the RAE with its putative lists of core journals which are thought to count most in any departmental ranking may very well come to establish the sole definition of what constitutes the discipline of economics as an academic pursuit. The irony is that this could be happening independently of any conscious project on the part of the regulators of the profession and in spite of the ostensible values of the majority of its practitioners whose identity hitherto has been constituted, at least in part and to a greater or lesser extent, through the twin discourse of professional autonomy and academic freedom. Despite denials on the part of the regulators of the profession who would respect heterodoxy and dismissals on the part of hard-line mainstreamers who would prefer to see their demise, institutional managements are not prepared to take the risk. Academic economists, both mainstream and nonmainstream, report changes in recruitment policies which emphasize the mainstream and look to track records in publication in core journals. They observe that the RAE has had an impact on the work of their department and that in many cases it has reinforced the tendencies toward the mainstream which already existed by definition. Most interesting of all, many admit that their own reaction to the RAE has been one of compliance, to neglect research which has no immediate payoff in terms of publication and perhaps to go (even more) mainstream where they were not already. Where this does happen discipline becomes internalized and individual academics do what is necessary "to get on." The consciousness of

surveillance and control necessary for resistance is outweighed by the knowledge that individual resistance will impact little on the hegemony of the mainstream and much on individual careers. This would explain the different degrees of resistance according to age, rank and the extent to which one's work is established in the field. One would expect that the recently-appointed and yet-to-be appointed young are most at risk.

An institutional analysis of the conditions under which active resistance is likely to occur would indicate that the existence of a well-established group of nonmainstream researchers, the respect of mainstream colleagues and the support of immediate superiors are important resources on which a resistant subject might draw. Dissent is not uncommon and there are certainly individual instances of resistance which seem to have taken the form of distancing behavior; either to leave mainstream economics departments for more comfortable homes elsewhere or to publish under other categories where the same criteria are thought not to apply. The result may be greater fragmentation and specialization of academic labor with high status mainstream knowledge concentrated in the elite departments of the old universities and nonmainstream research and experimentation at cross-disciplinary boundaries in the new. This is because the avenues of resistance open to resisters in present circumstances seem to be limited and self-defeating if the project is to change any definition of what economics is. Only in well-established heterodox departments where the possibilities for social support are high does the RAE seem to have had little impact on an individual economist's work and identity and even here there are pressures toward the short-term. In circumstances where economists cannot or will not change direction despite pressure, implicit or otherwise, institutional managements believe that they have no alternative but to turn to recruitment policies which emphasize publication in core journals if they are to improve their ratings.

"Hard-nosed" managerialism based on performance indicators and hierarchical control has been counterposed to the delights of a past collegiality within an academic community of knowledge (Parker & Jary, 1995; Willmott, 1995). It is certainly true that academic communities were once more or less self-referring with a high degree of professional control over research priorities and goals as well as the reputations which were achieved through them. But this idealized view of collegiate relations assumes consensus within a discipline at the same time as it neglects professional hierarchies and intellectual authority relations. In a paradigm-bound scientific field the marketplace for ideas is no more free than any other but for as long as alternative sources of support were available, the nonmainstream economist could live and even flourish on the periphery in nonmainstream or heterodox departments where their work was valued. But informal peer review within a collegiate system is very different from institutionalized peer

review linked to a ranking system designed for funding purposes. The consequences for academic economists has been that all of them, whether mainstream or nonmainstream, theoretical or applied, working in the old or the new universities, have come under the single professional gaze of a more or less orthodox review body and that not only their academic reputations but also the funding of their institutions depend upon assessment by that body.

Where there is no consensus on "quality," peer review becomes a fallacy: a more or less mainstream review body has neither the knowledge nor authority to judge the nonmainstream on equal terms. In coopting peer review for managerial ends, the RAE has at one and the same time succeeded in making more transparent the power relations which already existed within the profession and in cutting off alternative sources of support for potential dissidents. This has contradictory implications for resistance. On the one hand it has increased the dependence of the periphery on the neoclassical core and they have therefore more interest in resisting its hegemony if they are to survive. The potential for resistance is therefore greater, especially given the possibility of new alliances between nonmainstream and applied on the periphery and dissident mainstreamers in the core. Should the transition be made to more solidaristic forms of organization, then it could be that demands to reform the review process to reflect the interests of the profession as a whole will succeed.

On the other hand, objective conditions would seem to be more conducive to isolation and division than collective resistance. The academic pursuit of knowledge within a reputationally-based work organization (Whitley, 1986) is itself sufficiently individualizing to have left academics ill-prepared for the onslaught of managerialism and the increasing commodification of academic labor (Willmott, 1995; Parker & Jary, 1995). Individual acts of resistance may well be dissipated in the face of the institutional search for rankings and managerial control over recruitment policies. As more dissenters retire (and it is an aging profession), fewer will find work and less nonmainstream economics will be taught. The knock-on effect will be students ignorant of alternative knowledge and a lack of the necessary training to mount an effective intellectual challenge.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Several respondents pointed to the fact that almost all postgraduates in the profession are trained within the neoclassical tradition and that this would have a knock-on effect on the future teaching of economics in the universities. For example, one Scottish nonmainstream professor wrote: "I suggest you contact the organizers of the Scottish doctoral programme. All the old universities in Scotland have agreed to accept PhD candidates only through this programme which has a highly neoclassical masters component. Thus, no Scottish economist can, as far as I can see, avoid being trained as a purely neoclassical economist. I have no knowledge of any attempts by the organizers to extend recognition of any schools beyond the mainstream ones."

If what resistance does exist at present does not result in a direct challenge to the effects of the RAE while there is still some institutional support to sustain it, then it could be only a matter of time before resistance of whatever kind simply ceases to exist; there may literally be no economists around who are even able, never mind willing, to challenge the dominant paradigm when the present group come to retire in the not so distant future. If this happens, then dissidents within the profession will have been well and truly “outflanked” (Clegg, 1994) by the combined forces of managerialism and peer review and economics as an academic discipline may come to be seen as even more irrelevant to solving the real-world problems affecting people’s lives.

## APPENDIX. QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How long have you been working as an academic in British Higher Education?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. In what type of institution do you presently work?  
New University [ ] Old University [ ]  
Other (please specify)  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How long have you been in post at your present institution? \_\_\_\_\_ years
4. If **3 years or more**, have you noticed any change in recruitment policy, where economists have been concerned? Yes [ ] No [ ]  
If **yes**, what sort of changes exactly?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
If **no**, what recruitment policies are generally applied  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. If you have been employed less than 3 years, what is your impression of the criteria applied when appointing new economists to your institutions?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. In your view, has the RAE had any influence on the type of work, your department is engaged in overall? Yes [ ] No [ ]  
If **yes**, what kind of influence?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
If **no**, why not?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Has the RAE had any influence on the work which you yourself will be doing? Yes [ ] No [ ]  
If **yes**, in what ways?  
\_\_\_\_\_

If **no**, have you felt any pressure to change the direction of your work in any way?

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8. Are you an economist? Yes [ ] No [ ]

If yes, what type of economist do you consider yourself to be: Mainstream [ ] Nonmainstream [ ]

If nonmainstream, what type of nonmainstream economist would you describe yourself as?

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9. Has your department appointed any new economists over the last 3 years? Yes [ ] No [ ]

If **yes**, how many?

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10. In your opinion, has the **RAE** had any impact on the recruitment and selection of nonmainstream economists? Yes [ ] No [ ]

If **yes**, what sort of evidence is there to support your view?

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11. Does your department/institution offer any compulsory nonmainstream economics courses/modules? Yes [ ] No [ ]

Do you foresee any change in this provision in the future?

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12. In which journals have you published over the last **5** years?

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13. In which journals do you intend publishing over the next **3** years?

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14. What is your present grade?

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15. Have you any other comments which you would like to add?

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