Critical Economics in the UK: An Institutional History of Heterodox Economics Education (1960s–1990s) *

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Abstract

Heterodox economics, often characterised as a progressive and critical intellectual community, has gained prominence in recent years, particularly in response to economic crises and political shifts. While its intellectual history is well-documented, particularly in the Global North, its role in supporting an alternative economics education through time remains underexplored. Furthermore, the ways in which higher education structures have supported or constrained critical thinking in economics have been largely absent from historical analyses. This article addresses these gaps by exploring the historical development of heterodox economics education in the UK between the 1960s and 1990s, looking at the case of polytechnics as higher education institutions. It adopts a multi-method approach, analysing archival institutional records (course prospectuses, syllabi, regulatory policy documents) alongside interviews with economics educators using inductive thematic analysis, followed by triangulation. The findings reveal that polytechnics, designed to mainly deliver vocational education, played a central role in developing heterodox content, further supported by relative regulatory tolerance. However, structural reforms in the 1980s – driven by funding constraints, the rise of performance metrics, and increasing alignment with university norms – narrowed the space for pluralist approaches and accelerated the marginalisation of heterodox economics in UK higher education.

Key words: Economics Education; History of Economics; Heterodox Economics; Institutional History; Thematic Analysis; UK Polytechnics.

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1. Introduction

The role of heterodox economics in shaping alternative approaches to economic thought has received increasing attention in recent decades, particularly in the wake of the "polycrisis" and growing dissatisfaction with neoclassical frameworks. While existing scholarship has extensively documented the foundations of heterodox economics (see *inter alia* Lee 2009) based on schools of thought (particularly Marxism, post-Keynesianism, Original Institutionalism) and methodological pluralism, far less attention has been given to the contributions of dissent thought in shaping economics education through time, or the historical role of higher education institutions in fostering or constraining its development.

The United Kingdom provides a compelling case for exploring how such interplay between theoretical dissent, the teaching of economics, and higher education structures can occur. The country's post-war expansion of higher education took place following the recommendations of the Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education 1963) and resulted in the creation of *polytechnics*, higher education institutions primarily designed to provide vocational education with a strong emphasis on applied knowledge and offering employability skills for post-18 education. Unlike universities, which maintained degree-awarding powers and a research-intensive focus, polytechnics operated under the regulation of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), awarding the degrees to those who attended polytechnics.

This article historically examines the development of heterodox economics education in the UK between the 1960s and 1990s, focusing on the institutional factors that enabled or constrained its inclusion in polytechnic curricula. Specifically, it aims at answering the following questions: (1) how has economics education emerged as a field of interest in the UK?; (2) what were the historical and institutional elements that allowed a heterodox approach to economics teaching to emerge and continue in polytechnics?; (3) what were its main characteristics, and in which institutions was it found?; (4) in what ways did the prestige structures in the UK's higher education setting overlap with how economics was taught?; and (6) how has its teaching changed over time, from the late 1960s to early 1990s? Methodologically, I adopt a multi-method strategy by combining archival records – namely, a sample of polytechnics' course prospectuses, syllabi, and CNAA regulatory documents – with interviews with a sample of educators to identify the conditions and structures that facilitated the rise of critical economics in polytechnics, as well as its decline.

A thematic analysis of sampled archives and semi-structured interviews shows how polytechnics in the UK played an important role in integrating heterodox perspectives into economics education, mainly through curricular flexibility and the fostering critical approaches alongside real-life skills, elements which were largely absent from traditional university settings. Unlike elite universities, which sought to maintain "higher" standards via higher learning and scholarly research, polytechnics were teaching-intensive, regional institutions with comparatively less

prestige. Such institutional differentiation created fertile grounds for the inclusion of alternative economic perspectives, mainly Marxist and post-Keynesian within economics curricula. Archival records indicate that polytechnics' relative autonomy and CNAA tolerance facilitated a degree of pluralism in economics education, allowing polytechnics to engage in experimental pedagogies and interdisciplinary approaches. However, from the 1980s, structural shifts – including market-driven reforms, research assessment exercises, and financial constraints – pressured polytechnics to align with universities, reducing curricular diversity and diminishing space for heterodox perspectives.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the early institutional development of economics education as a field in the UK, focusing on the post-war reforms that expanded access to higher education, as well as a brief review on the state of heterodox economics from an educational perspective. Section 3 outlines the article's methodology and sampling strategy. Sections 4 and 5 present the archival and interview findings. Section 6 offers a discussion of the findings, aiming at answering the core questions on institutional facilitators, and how a heterodox education looked like in the context of UK polytechnics. Lastly, Section 7 offers some concluding remarks.

2. Economics Education in the United Kingdom and Heterodox Teaching

2.2 The Emergence of Economics Education in the United Kingdom

The development of economics education in the United Kingdom took a distinct path from that of the United States (Brent, 2025; Giraud and Fleury, 2025), shaped by cross-institutional associations and structural distinctions within Britain's university system. Tribe (2022) highlights how, in the early 20th century, economics in the UK emerged from a "convergence" between commercial education, primarily offered by urban universities (e.g., Birmingham, Bristol, Liverpool, Manchester), and the traditional academic model of ancient universities such as Cambridge and Oxford.

The establishment of the University of London (UoL) in 1828 and the London School of Economics (LSE), with its BSc (Econ) in 1901 were pivotal in shaping the discipline in the 20th century. UoL's outreach was facilitated by its "federal" structure, which adopted a common curriculum and examination system across affiliated institutions. From the 1860s, this model extended beyond London to institutions in the British colonies, ensuring that students pursuing a degree followed a core curriculum and had their exams accredited by the UoL. As UoL's Faculty of Economics, LSE gained significant influence, "enabling its own teaching to become the template for what happened elsewhere" (Tribe 2022, p. 34). Following his 1929 appointment as LSE professor, Lionel Robbins reformed the BSc (Econ), to emphasise a deeper understanding of core economic principles, their formal development, and their application to real-world

circumstances. In contrast to the Cambridge approach, which placed greater emphasis on substantive knowledge, LSE prioritised logical reasoning and analytical rigor (Tribe 2022). Through the outreach facilitated by UoL's federal system, LSE's model of economics education was disseminated across Britain and its territories, shaping curricula and assessments until the late 1960s.

Economics education in the UK was largely driven by academic economists and schoolteachers. Discussions on improving economics teaching emerged in the 1920s, as evidenced by the creation of the Association of University Teachers of Economics (AUTE) and the Economics Association (EA), thought their purposes differed. AUTE's first annual meeting in 1924 at the University of Oxford marked the beginning of its formal activities, and it became a fully established association in 1925 at Cambridge. Its founding committee included William Beveridge and Dennis H. Robertson (Phillips 1925). Its mission, published in the *Economic Journal*, was to "extend the teaching of these [Economics and related] subjects, to study teaching problems and to promote discussion" (Current Topics 1939). Between the late 1960s and early 1980s, AUTE gained prominence, publishing its annual conference proceedings (*inter alia* Artis and Nobay 1975) containing original research and works aimed at teaching fundamental economic concepts.

By contrast, the EA, founded in 1939 by educationists and schoolteachers, focused on promoting economics at the secondary level (Leamer 1975). In 1951, it launched *Economics*, a non-specialist bulletin that published "both 'refresher' articles on the subject matter of economics and articles on curricula, teaching methods, teaching aids (including reviews of new textbooks), problems of assessment, etc." (Szreter 1981, p. 105), and became popularised in schools during the 1950s and 1960s. Unlike AUTE, EA was a non-academic and non-specialist grouping, aimed to engage school students and the general public. With the creation of polytechnics in 1963, a third group emerged, the Association of Polytechnics Teachers in Economics (APTE).

Two post-war developments expanded the teaching of economics in the UK. First, economics entered the post-16 school curriculum in England and Wales during the 1950s, seeking to prepare students for university (Jephcote and Davies 2007). This inclusion[1] sparked important pedagogical and scientific debates over how economics should be taught at this level, the training required for instructors, and the differing statuses of school and university economics teachers. Academic economists were often dismissive of school-level economics, viewing it as insufficiently rigorous (Szreter 1981). For instance, Lionel Robbins, in his 1955 Presidential Address to the Royal Economic Society argued against the idea of economics being offered in schools, claiming that economics is inherently complex, a subject for grown-ups" that often does not have strict

[1] In Szreter's (1981) view, pressure from the Economics Association was one of the main drivers for the inclusion of economics in post-16 education (A-levels) in the early 1950s in Britain.

"correct" answers, and may lead to superficial knowledge or misunderstandings that would need to be untaught once students went to a university (Robbins 1955, p. 580). Rather, he suggested replacing formal economic theory in schools with more practical, descriptive education about economic institutions and current events, which appeared to be the preferred view of most academic economists (Szreter 1981; Jephcote and Davis 2007).

Second, major reforms that expanded UK higher education in 1963 with the creation of new universities[2] and polytechnics, as well as increasing access to higher education with a focus in teaching skills, transmitting citizenship standards, and maintaining a balance between teaching and research (Barr 2014). The reforms, which followed the recommendations of the Robbins Report[3], were beneficial for the social sciences, enabling disciplines like economics to recruit more faculty and students. The new higher education system also created a "binary policy", which involved the creation and coordination of two sectors: an autonomous university sector and a public or "local authority" sector, represented by the polytechnics to meet the needs for increasing vocational, professional, and industry-based knowledge (Parry 2022). This binarism created a hierarchy of prestige between universities and polytechnics within disciplines: whilst universities were seen as the *locus* of traditional theoretical knowledge (in mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, philosophy, languages, history) and were core research hubs, polytechnics were designed to provide practical training and develop skills in less prestigious fields (engineering, technology, design, business), being primarily teaching-focused institutions.

Debates in economics teaching in the UK centred on curricular content, focusing on developing economics curricula, or/and aligning them with learning outcomes and civic aims (Leamer 1975). For instance, AUTE's conference proceedings from 1973, 1975, 1976 and 1980 reveal a dominance of themes related to macroeconomics (ranging from monetary theory to Keynesian models, including an invited paper by Franco Modigliani – see Artis and Nobay 1975), international trade, welfare economics, public economics and labour economics. These themes reflected a balance between theoretical exploration and practical relevance, supporting civic educational goals in economics. However, they also reveal a theoretical "core" of economics curricula in UK higher education during the 1960s-1980s: neoclassical theory and Keynesian macroeconomics (neoclassical synthesis). What deviated from such core, however, is one of the questions of this article.

2.2 Teaching Heterodox Economics: In Search of a History

[2] In the 1960s, British universities could be separated into three main groups: "ancient" universities (Cambridge, Oxford, St. Andrews, Glasgow, Edinburgh); "Red Brick" universities from the 19th century, in major urban cities (Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Sheffield); and new 1960s "plate glass" universities as a result of the Robbins Report (East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Lancaster, Sussex, Warwick, York).

[3] Lionel Robbins was the chair of the Committee on Higher Education, which produced the 1963 Report.

In addition to emerging fields, theories, and methods, the post-war transformations in economics represented a shift from pluralism to neoclassicism (Morgan and Rutherford 1998). Not only did the leading scientific debates become increasingly dominated by one single approach (monism), commonly referred to as neoclassical orthodoxy, but such "mainstream" perspective reflected the views of a selective group of university departments, journals, and experts in leading governments or international organisations, almost exclusively based in the United States and United Kingdom. As a social process, knowledge requires more than ideas to gain acceptance; it depends on institutions with the power to certify and entrench particular views at the expense of others. Also, the prestige economy of higher education thrives on principles of "scarcity" and "tradition": only a select few succeed, typically those already privileged in top departments, leading journal editorial boards, and funding bodies.

Heterodox economics proposes an alternative to neoclassical economics, expressed through theories including Marxism, post-Keynesianism, Original Institutionalism, Feminist Economics, Ecological Economics, and Austrian Economics. As a grouping of schools of thought and approaches that share core principles of power, realisticness, and pluralism in their nature, epistemology, and methodology (Mearman et al. 2023). Historically, heterodoxy can be traced to late 18th century, proposing ideas that favoured state intervention in markets, anti-*laissez faire* policies, tax increases, support for workers' movements, challenges to the capitalist class, and the integration of institutions, history and psychology into economic analysis (Guizzo 2022). Later developments, notably Marxism and Original Institutionalism in the late 19th century, rejected neoclassical tenets – equilibrium, intertemporal optimality, utility maximisation, and methodological individualism. Over the past three decades, a burgeoning literature has explored the foundations of heterodox economics (Colander, Holt, & Rosser Jr. 2004; Lawson 2006; Lee 2009; Mearman et al. 2019), primarily looking into its epistemological, ideological, and methodological dimensions.

Teaching has traditionally been a cornerstone for heterodox economists (Mearman, et al. 2022), characterised by open-mindedness, critical and liberal pedagogies, engagement with history, epistemic-methodological pluralism and theoretical fallibilism. The 2008 Global Financial Crisis sparked discussions on critical thinking, curricular reforms, the importance of pluralism and socio-educational goals, which stimulated a blooming of heterodox scholarship on the teaching and learning of, *inter alia*, feminist political economy (Cantillon et al. 2023); history of economic thought (Deane and Van Waeyenberge 2020); Marxist economics (Basu 2021); macroeconomics (Rochon and Rossi 2018); and microeconomics (Dean et al. 2023).

Nonetheless, significant gaps remain in understanding the foundations and enablers of heterodox economics education. Sociologists of higher education (Clark 1973) emphasise the importance of

structures and *institutions* for the production and transmission of ideas, yet a historical appraisal of these processes has not yet been formalised. Additionally, historians of economics have approached how individual economists or groups developed specific ideas on education and pedagogy (Cook 2004; Giraud 2020; Teixeira 2018), but without addressing the broader historical context to understand how institutional settings in higher education have enabled or constrained certain ideas and pedagogical tools. This article seeks to address these gaps by exploring what constituted critical or heterodox economics education in the UK's post-war context, and how it has developed.

3. Methodology and Data

While previous works have employed historical methodologies to map the institutional evolution of heterodox approaches or communities within UK academia (Lee 2007, 2009; Mearman and Philip 2015), or more broadly to explore how economics became a university discipline within British higher education by identifying key actors and departments (Tribe 2022), no project has yet exclusively formalised a history of how non-traditional approaches to economics were taught in the UK during the 20th century, nor how these approaches were embedded within the country's higher education system. The proposed study employs a multi-method approach that combines traditional archival research of institutional records (university or government-level documents such as course prospectuses, syllabi, institutional reports, and regulatory guidelines) with semi-interviews with pre-identified scholars who were active during the relevant period.

It firstly carries out an *inductive thematic analysis* (Braun and Clarke 2006) of archives and interviews, allowing themes to emerge inductively from the historical materials and participants' experiences, rather than being defined by existing references (sections 4 and 5 of the article). Secondly, *triangulation* will support the cross-verification of findings and the institutional analysis (section 6).

Out of the 33 UK polytechnics that gained university status in 1992, 16 were pre-selected for contact based on existing literature that attested the existence of critical or heterodox faculty (Lee 2007 and 2009; CSE Bulletins). They were approached via email for information on their archival collection, with 8 responding positively they still held course prospectuses, syllabi, internal publications, and committee papers from that period. A summary of the archival records collected can be found below.

Table 1: Summary of Archival Data

Archive/Institution	Years	Consulted Documents
Polytechnics:		
Thames Polytechnic	1970-1992	Course prospectuses, syllabi, administrative reports, research papers

North East London Polytechnic	1970-1992	Course prospectuses, syllabi, administrative reports, research papers
City of London Polytechnic	1970-1992	Course prospectuses, handbooks
City of Birmingham Polytechnic	1968-1980	Syllabi, course structures
Lanchester/Coventry Polytechnic	1971-1988	Course prospectuses, administrative reports
Portsmouth Polytechnic	1971-1974	Regulatory guidelines, course prospectuses
Bristol Polytechnic	1987-1992	Meeting minutes and course prospectuses
Kingston Polytechnic	1970-1992	Course prospectuses, syllabi
Government Bodies:		
Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA)	1967-1985, 1991	Regulatory guidelines, external examiners' reports, reports on economics degrees
Academic Groups:		
Conference for Socialist Economists (CSE)	1971-1976	CSE Bulletin (Quarterly)

To capture the lived experiences of individuals involved in heterodox economics teaching, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 participants to contextualise archival findings, as well as to explore the institutional dynamics, community building, and pedagogical practices of the time. Participants were selected based on their affiliation during the years of 1963 to 1992 in polytechnics and/or involvement in the teaching and research of heterodox approaches or related content, such as Marxist economics, post-Keynesian economics, feminist economics, economic development, economic methodology, monetary economics, and labour relations.

An initial mapping exercise was done using the publicly available archives from the Conference for Socialist Economists (CSE Bulletins), deemed in the literature (Lee 2007) as a core academic and activist grouping in the UK during the 1970s, with members working on topics that overlap with heterodox scholarship (Marxism, socialist planning, gender studies, industrial relations, labour market, policy studies). Following this initial scoping of potential interviewees, with 4 being contacted in a first instance, I then employed a snowballing method to approach subsequent interviewees, with 6 acceptances. The questionnaire can be found in Online Appendix 1. Given the small sample size and group proximity, participants were anonymised and potentially identifiable characteristics such as specific institutional affiliation, seniority, gender, and area of expertise were omitted to ensure they could speak freely and critically in relation to departments, managers, colleagues, and research groups. Selected quotes are referred in the findings with numberings (e.g. "participant 1").

Archival data (images) and audio transcripts were analysed and coded with NVivo 14.

4. Findings from Archives

4.1 The Role of CNAA and Institutional (In)Dependence

Unlike universities, UK polytechnics did not have degree-awarding powers. Instead, their degrees were validated and awarded by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), established in 1964 to oversee and maintain academic standards in non-university institutions. These are referred to in the archives as "CNAA-awarded degrees". However, prior to the establishment of the CNAA and during its first years of existence, some polytechnics offered degrees that were externally validated by the University of London (UoL). In this arrangement, polytechnics delivered the teaching, while the UoL set examinations and awarded degrees, enabling students to earn a UoL degree without attending UoL directly.

Lee (2007) argues that UoL's degree-awarding system restricted alternative thinking in economics education. However, an analysis of the CNAA archives between 1967-1991 suggests that as CNAA-awarded degrees began to replace UoL's, polytechnics gained greater curricular autonomy. In the early 1970s, several polytechnics transitioned from offering UoL external to CNAA-awarded degrees (CNAA Economics Board 1970, 10th meeting, DB3/144), allowing greater flexibility in course content and assessment methods. A list of CNAA degrees in economics in polytechnics can be found in the Online Appendix 2 (CNAA 1991, p. 61).

CNAA disciplinary committees consisted of senior university academics, polytechnic lecturers, and professional economists, overseeing curricular content, syllabi, programme structure and assessment methods to ensure consistency and compliance with national standards. Also, the CNAA appointed external examiners, typically senior university academics who moderated exams, conducted polytechnic visits, and ensured consistency across institutions. The Economics CNAA Board had its first meeting as a standalone committee in May 1968 (CNAA Economics Board 1968, 1st meeting, DB3/142), with renowned economists such as Anthony Atkinson, Mark Blaug, Tadeuz Rybczynski, David E.W. Laidler, and Meghnad Desai in its membership over the years.

A thematic analysis of CNAA board minutes reveals discussions on proposals for establishing or renewing accreditation of economics degrees in polytechnics, including qualitative evaluations. Three core themes stand out from the archives, ranging from 1968-1985, and a specific report in 1991: first, the CNAA Economics Board's concern with defining and differentiating economics as a discipline, rather than focusing on internal economic disputes. Second, an awareness of the institutional differences between polytechnics and universities regarding research duties and resources. Third, the CNAA's tolerance and openness toward degrees that offered critical content. These are explored below.

4.1.1 In Search of a Disciplinary Core

The CNAA's duty was to ensure the quality of degrees offered by polytechnics. However, a key concern from the economics board was precisely "that there is no single model for what constitutes a department of economics, nor for what comprises its teaching" (CNAA Report 1991, p. 3). A thematic analysis of early board meetings (1968) reveals an ongoing effort to distinguish economics courses from other social sciences and define core economics content. The debates emerging from the archives reflect a focus on the discipline's identity rather than disputes within economics itself.

The CNAA Board raised several concerns. First, the lack of integration across different fields in economics, particularly the connection between foundational mathematics and quantitative methods courses with applied and econometrics content in advanced years, as well as the need for economics reading lists to reflect recent developments in the field, rejecting "old-fashioned" content (CNAA Economics Board 1968, 4th meeting, p. 2, DB3/142). From the early 1970s there was increased emphasis on a solid foundation of quantitative courses, seen as essential to the education of an economist (1976, 26th meeting, DB3/810). In 1980, the CNAA Board began to offer a standardised, suggested structure for a full-time Economics degree:

A standard, suggested course structure for a BA/BA (Hons) Economics (full-time)
(CNAA Economics Board 1980, 35th meeting, DB3/1604)

Part I (1st year)
Macroeconomics
Microeconomics
Quantitative Methods
Social Framework of Modern Britain
Contextual Studies

At the end of the first year and on successful completion, students will choose the optional subjects they wish to pursue for the remainder of the course.

Part II (2nd and 3rd years)
Three compulsory subjects:
- Macroeconomics
- Microeconomics
- Economics Statistics (2nd year only)
- General Paper (3rd year only)

In addition, from the following list of optional subjects, candidates for a degree must select TWO, and candidates for a degree with honours must select THREE. The latter must also submit a dissertation.

Optional Subjects in Part II

Group 'A'	Group 'B'
Accounting	Econometrics
Business Law	Economics of Labour
Applied Statistics	Economic Analysis of Business Decisions
Political Science	Environmental and Urban Economics
Behavioural Science	History of Economic Thought
Economic History	Economics of Growth and Development
	Mathematical Economics
	Monetary Economics
	Public Finance

Candidates for a degree may select not more than one from Group 'A'.
Candidates for a degree with honours may select not more than two from Group 'A'.

Second, on the definition and maintenance of a core economics curriculum and the minimum qualifications of an economist (CNAA Economics Board 1976, 26th meeting, DB3/666; DB3/1019, 28th meeting, 1977). The board rejected degrees that incorporated courses in political institutions, history of philosophical ideas, public administration, and geography without a clear connection to economics (CNAA Economics Board 1968, 2nd and 4th meetings, DB3/142). The board emphasised the need for a balance between different fields in economics, particularly economic history, monetary economics, labour economics and applied issues, rather than focusing solely on a "micro-macro-mathematics" core (CNAA Economics Board 1968, 4th meeting, p. 2, DB 3/142). This also shows the board's sympathy to the inclusion of fields related to social economics, industrial relations and political economy (*ibid* p. 3). Some examples approved by CNAA illustrate this, with others available in Online Appendix 3.

Manchester Polytechnic BA Degree in Economics proposal submitted to CNAA (CNAA Economics Board 1969, 4th meeting, DB3/142)

YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3
Economics	ECONOMICS OPTION:	Quantitative Economics
Sociology	Principles of Economics I	Economics of Public Policy
Mathematics and Statistics I	Principles of Economics II	Comparative Economic
And any TWO from:	Mathematics and Statistics II	Development
Accounting I	Financial Policies and Problems	Business History OR Monetary
Elements of Government	Economic Development (with	Economics
Economic and Social History of	special reference to the	FINANCE OPTION:
Britain	International Economy from	Introduction to Operational
Principles of English Law	1870)	Research
	FINANCE OPTION:	Economics of Public Policy

	Principles of Economics I Principles of Economics II Mathematics and Statistics II Accounting II Business Law	Accounting III Business Finance and Investment

Ealing Technical College Labour Economics Syllabus, submitted to CNAA for approval (CNAA Economics Board 1972, 17th meeting, DB3/461)
Full reading list available in Online Appendix 3

BA (Economics) Part II CNAA
Labour Economics
Syllabus

AIM

The course aims to make an analysis of the markets) for the non-homogeneous factor of production - labour, the economic, social and institutional influences on this market and the economic problems which arise concerning the effectiveness of labour's contributions and the 'suitability' of its rewards.

Introduction

Labour in the economy. Nature of Labour economics. Other approaches to industrial relations. Wage theories of the past.

Demand for Labour

Marginal productivity theory and determinants of elasticity of demand. Optimal factor mix and elasticity of substitution. Short-run and long-run. The adding up problem. Imperfect product markets and marginal revenue products. Substitution between labour inputs. On the job training.
The economy of high empirical verification. Monopsony and deliberate (discriminating) and non-deliberate 'exploitation. Employer's associations, public employers including UK institutions. Custom and social attitudes. Labour treated as capital.

Supply of Labour

Secular supply. The income-leisure decision. Participation rates. Piece-work. Overtime. Theory of job choice. Empirical evidence. Transfer earnings and rent. Government intervention in education and training. Obstacles to mobility and government action to alleviate. Unemployment, casual employment and mobility. Non-competing groups.

Trade Unions

Unions as maximising agents e.g. business monopolists. Membership functions. Bi-lateral monopoly. 'Political' determinants of trade union wage policy. Growth and structure of UK trade unions including shop floor organisation. Closed shops. Apprenticeship. Preference functions, preference paths and bargaining. Restrictive practices including UK experience.

Collective Bargaining

Bargaining power. Some theories of the bargaining process. Content and types of bargain. Strikes and the cost of strikes including UK experience.

Wage Differences

Dynamic differentials and resource allocation. Evolution of wage structure. Equilibrium differentials. Unions and differentials including empirical evidence. Employer hiring practices. Custom and social attitudes. Internal and external wage structure. Women's and US negro's wages. UK wage structure. Low wages and minimum wage legislation. Empirical evidence on relative wage movements and changes in employment and reconciliation with theories of the labour market.

Unemployment

Real money wages and the trade cycle. Classical. Keynesian and under-consumptionist views and empirical evidence. Structural unemployment including US debate. Automation: types, impact on employment, relative wages and distributive shares. Inflation Demand and cost inflation. Wage drift. Empirical evidence. Collective bargaining, inflation and incomes policies. Empirical evidence. Labour's Share in National Income Degree of monopoly. Bargaining power and the scope and limits of wage bargaining. Kaldor/Kalecki macroeconomic models. Neo-classical theory. Technical progress. Empirical evidence.

4.1.2 Tolerating Difference

Contrary to Lee's (2007) claim that standardisation hindered pluralism in the economics curriculum, CNAA Board minutes do not indicate outright rejections of content based on approach, topic, or school of thought. Instead, "tolerance" was found in several passages of the board's discussion and external examination reports.

Evidence for such tolerance can be found in comments about certain economics courses being rebranded as "Political Economy" (by Thames Polytechnic, North East London Polytechnic, and Middlesex Polytechnic). For instance, Thames Polytechnic's "choice to rebrand their degree Political Economy [was] 'generally favourable', but some members felt that this might not be the most desirable choice". Following a visit of external examiners in March 1971, the CNAA report was favourable, and "saw no reason to question further" the degree's quality. (1971, 12th meeting, DB 3/145, p. 3-4). Other examples were found throughout, with expressions such as "imaginative" (1973, Leicester Polytechnic, 18th meeting, DB 3/464) and "breaking new ground" (Thames and Kingston Polytechnics, 1976, 26th meeting, DB 3/810). Or, in seeing the value of non-orthodox theories:

> Members of the Visiting Party [at Thames Polytechnic] has an interesting discussion with the course-team on the nature of Political Economy. […] The distinctiveness of the degree was thought to lie in the opportunity which it gave students to consider the variety of theoretical positions within economics, rather than concentrate on the contemporary preoccupations of orthodox economics. This involved an

> examination of different theories of value, distribution, economic development and the role of the state. […] It was felt by the course-team that the degree was vocationally-relevant and offered students a number of pathways, on the basis of a sound grounding in economics and cognate subjects. The Political Economy focus consolidated this knowledge by assisting students to bring a critical, but balanced, analysis to economic theory. The Visiting Party found the course team's analysis of the degree structure valuable and accepted that such an approach to economics offered students a challenging and stimulating undertaking. (CNAA External Report for Thames Polytechnic 1981, DB 3/1399, 40th meeting, annex, p. 2)

In some cases, as in an external visit to Lanchester Polytechnic (1977, 28th meeting, DB3/8/1019), CNAA board members criticised the institution's course proposal for lacking "radical or alternative Economics. Pluralism had been completely excluded, and scepticism did not seem to be encouraged" (1977, 28th meeting, DB3/8/1019, p. 3). When raising this with the Lanchester staff, "some members of staff agreed that the course was conventional and conservative, but felt that this was typical of the approach of Anglo-Saxon Economics as a whole" (1977, 28th meeting, DB3/8/1019, p. 3).

4.2 Economics Degrees in UK Polytechnics

An analysis of selected archives from polytechnics reveals two core themes in the economics curriculum and learning goals, suggesting not only heterodox content but also its connection to broader educational purposes. Firstly, polytechnics' justification for vocational degrees was tied to a "real-life skills" form of education, concerned with wider socioeconomic goals. Secondly, pluralism in curricula and reading lists illustrates how economic education pursued broader intellectual and practical objectives.

4.2.1 Realisticness in Economics Meets Vocational Knowledge

The social function of polytechnics was widely emphasised in course prospectuses and institutional reports. The mission statement of North East London Polytechnic, for instance, advocated education that "goes beyond stereotypes of ingestion and regurgitation of knowledge", rejecting the idea that "knowledge, merely for its own sake, is more valuable than the ability to use knowledge to improve and benefit society of which students will become part", and asserts that "tomorrow's society will be knowledge-based" (NELP Archives 1971-72 Course Catalogue, p. 29). Polytechnics fostered innovative approaches to education and training. In economics, this translated into a more flexible core curriculum emphasising broader skills. A 1991 CNAA Report on the state of economics degrees in polytechnics summarises their intended learning outcomes:

> -to equip students with a grounding in economic analysis and thought, including a *knowledge of alternative paradigms* and an understanding of the scope for the application of economic theories;

> -to equip students with an understanding of the framework of policy analysis within which economists operate and how to adopt a policy-making, decision-making and problem-solving approach in the micro and macro spheres;
> -to equip students with an understanding of the British economy, *institutions and economic processes* which obtain;
> -to equip students to understand the *contribution of other disciplines, to take up non-economic variables as a context and to apply economic analysis to broader social issues*. This aim also occurs where economics can be taken as a strand in a combined studies course alongside, for example, public policy, politics, history or studies of technological change;
> -to equip students with directly applicable (and some transferable) skills in the field of mathematics, statistics, and computing;
> -to equip students with general transferable skills such as an ability to communicate;
> -to prepare students both for postgraduate study and employment. Some courses specify examples of the kind of work envisaged e.g. business or public administration.
> (CNAA Report 1991, p. 15, *my emphasis*).

These goals highlight realisticness, pluralism, multi-disciplinarity, and a commitment to socioeconomic concerns. Several of these not only echo contemporary concerns from heterodox educators on the purpose of economics education (Mearman et al. 2022), but draw connections between vocational education with a broader curricular approach in economics.

Archival findings reveal how these vocational aims supported an economics curriculum allowing space for critical and heterodox content. For instance, economics education was framed as "going beyond the development and refinement of analytical techniques to an examination of the framework and content of decisions whose consequences are analysed," resisting "mere description" and situating "economic abstraction within social action and policy perspectives" (Thames Polytechnic Prospectus 1974-75, p. 75). Similarly, syllabi sought to embed economics within the social sciences, fostering awareness of social and political considerations in economic analysis. This *realisticness* was evident in syllabi, addressing for example "the economic implications of environmental and ecological pressures and the possible clash, especially in developing countries, between the commitment to continued economic growth and the possible impending scarcity of certain natural resources" (City of Birmingham Polytechnic Prospectus 1978-79, p. 6), demonstrating its relevance and tackling the problems of the real world.

Realisticness – the ability of knowledge to reflect the real-world – manifested in two key ways. Firstly, career prospects extended beyond traditional economics degrees, aiming not just to train students for specific jobs but to prepare them "to understand and cope with a world of change" in diverse fields, including academia, administration, and management (Thames Polytechnic Prospectus 1975-76, D17). Secondly, alternative teaching methods, such as student-centred approaches, programmed work, taped lectures, action-methods, and classroom games enabled students to learn in varied ways (City of Birmingham Polytechnic Archives; City of London

Polytechnic Archives; NELP Archives; Portsmouth Polytechnic Archives). For instance, NELP's Economics Degree[4] prospectus illustrates this combination:

> As part of this young department in a young institution staff and students feel that their interests should extend not only into neighbouring academic fields but even into areas not traditionally associated with the study of economics. 'Applied Economics' implies an interest in the problems of the real world, and the department is committed to tackling them. […] Thus an 'applied' economist, if he intends to go beyond the mere identification and description of problems to the point where he can expect to try to solve them, has to face the fact that human consideration cannot be reduced to nice mathematical calculations. Consequently, the department has developed close links with sociologists and psychologists, and with public sector and community projects. As might be expected of a young department its work is strongly student-centred. As well as playing an active part in running their own courses students are encouraged to participate in a research and consultancy programme. Their influence is reflected in a broad range of courses which include short courses for sixth-formers, workshops for teachers of economics, and a number of postgraduate diplomas. (North East London Polytechnic, Full-time and Sandwich Course Prospectus 1974/5, p. 78)

4.2.2 Pluralism in Degrees and Reading Lists

How could the realisticness of economic knowledge and broader socioeconomic goals be met through vocational economics education? Polytechnics' archives suggest this was achieved through diversification of content, or an early form of "pluralism". This included an approach to the study of economics that went beyond theoretical refinements and highlighted the "applications of economic analysis both through an emphasis on process, on policy issues and debates and through discussion of organisations and institutions, including the modelling of these" (CNAA Report 1991, p. 21).

As found in polytechnics' archives, multi-disciplinarity and course options outside economics (e.g. Geography, Sociology, Politics, Policy Studies, History), were seen as integral for the education of the economist (City of Birmingham Polytechnic; City of London Polytechnic, Kingston Polytechnic, Portsmouth Polytechnic; NELP; Thames Polytechnic). For instance:

City of London Polytechnic (1974-75)
(City of London Polytechnic Archives UA/CLP/05, p. 17)

Economics BA (Honours)
For the second and third years, you would deepen your knowledge of economic principles and techniques in four papers. Topics like Keynesian analysis and the modern quantity theorists, the place of the firm, and the statistical methods necessary for the economist would all be covered here. You would also undertake more specialised work in three papers selected from the fields of international development, money, government policy, management accounting, psychology, and sociology […].

[4] The full reproduced archival text can be found in the Online Appendix 4.

Birmingham Polytechnic (1979-1980)
(Birmingham City Archives, Box 4)

Part I (qualifying year)	Part II (second and third years)
Introductory Microeconomics	Intermediate Price Theory with Operations
Introductory Macroeconomics	Analysis
Quantitative Methods	Intermediate Macroeconomics
(Mathematics and Statistics)	Economic Stability and Growth
	Public Policy
Choose TWO from:	Industrial Economics
Accountancy	Financial Statistics OR Econometrics
Law	Accountancy OR Geography
Geography	
Economic History	

Further, there was an emphasis on covering topics beyond conventional economics, with a growing emphasis on "applied topics" (gender, environment, development, labour, regional and urban), but also comparative systems, economic history, philosophy and methodology, history of economic thought. The case of North East London Polytechnic is noteworthy:

Optional Courses in Economics Degrees (North East London Polytechnic, Full-time and Sandwich Course Prospectus 1979/80, pp. 27-29)
Full course description available in Online Appendix 3

Year 2/3 Optional Units	**Year 3 Optional Units**
(i.e. may be taken in either year 2 or year 3)	(i.e. may be taken in year 3 only)
Economic Development and Industrialisation 1760-1850	Advanced Microeconomics
Economic Development in Pre-Industrial England	Comparative Economic Development of the USA and Germany
Economics of Less Developed Countries	Comparative Economic Systems
Economics of Poverty and Income Distribution	Dialectics and Historical Materialism (half-unit)
Economics of the Social Services (half-unit)	Econometrics
Environmental Economics	Economic Aspects of Less Developed Countries
Formation of British Economic and Social Policy	Economic Philosophy (half-unit)
Impact of Urbanisation in Nineteenth Century Britain	Economic Theory and Historical Explanation
International Economy and Empire	Economics of the Family and Sex Discrimination
Labour Studies	Government Industrial Policies
Location in a Space Economy	Growth and Welfare in the UK since 1850
Marxist Economics - 1	Industrial Economics
Mathematical Methods (half-unit)	International Economics

Planning Studies - 1 The Power Factor Statistical Methods (half-unit) Technological Change (half-unit) Trends in the Modern History of British Trade Unionism Western Political Thought Note: The allocation of units to a particular list is subject to amendment.	Introduction to Macroeconomic Models (half-unit) Investment Appraisal (half-unit) Issues in Theoretical Economics Marxist Economics - 2 Nationalised Industries Planning Studies - 2 Project Public Finance Recent Developments in the EEC Regional Issues and Problems Theory of Macroeconomic Policy (half-unit) Transport Economics Urban Economics Student/Staff Seminar

The breadth of heterodox approaches and schools of thought found in courses and reading lists is also noteworthy, in particular Marxist and Radical, post-Keynesian, neo-Ricardian (City of Birmingham Polytechnic; Kingston Polytechnic; Thames Polytechnic; NELP). Institutions with a reported tradition in the development of Marxism and post-Keynesianism, such as Kingston, Thames (now University of Greenwich) and North East London (Lee 2009) integrated heterodox content alongside neoclassical thought and technical courses. In other institutions, such as City of Birmingham, City of London, and Portsmouth, content described as Marxist (courses on Comparative Economic Systems, Political Economy of USSR), post-Keynesian (courses on Economic Analysis and Macroeconomics II), and original institutionalist (course on Political Economy II) were also spotted. Further, heterodox content was not confined to specialist courses but was embedded in core curricula, with post-Keynesian theories covered alongside neoclassical/neoclassical synthesis thought in Principles of Economics and Applied Economics in some cases (City of Birmingham Polytechnic Archives, 1968).

While these archives provide a thematic analysis of heterodox content in curricula rather than general claims about all UK polytechnics, they also suggest a chronological analysis of how alternative content was included in the economics curriculum. Three main periods were identified: (i) *expansion* of economics degrees and inclusion of critical content from the late 1960s until early 1970s; (ii) *consolidation* of heterodox content from mid 1970s to early 1980s, and (iii) *contraction*, with the reduction in the number of courses offering heterodoxy from the early 1980s to early 1990s. These shifts align with broader transformations in UK higher education and socioeconomic conditions, from post-war expansion to funding cuts in the 1980s.

5. Findings from Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews conducted with a sample of 10 heterodox teachers active between the 1960s and 1990s supports the cross-verification of archival findings. Three core themes emerged.

5.1 "Marxists and Leftist Keynesians": Politics before Economics

Several participants did not receive a formal training in heterodox economics in their first degrees. Some were trained in Mathematics, Social Sciences, PPE, or single-honours Economics, and progressively became interested in alternative approaches. This process, however, was not through education, but *politics*. Several participants stated having an interest or an involvement in politics before starting their careers in economics. In some cases, as participant 3 states: "my parents were member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, so politics was part of my family's daily life", and participant 4 describing that they "became interested in politics before becoming interested in economics". Similar backgrounds were mentioned by other interviewees (1, 2, 5, 8 and 10), either through family influence or through their social circles. Participants 2 and 4 linked their early political interest to 1970s UK strikes.

On that, groupings such as the *Conference for Socialist Economists* (CSE) were pivotal in offering a space for discussion, not just for academics, but for political activists and those involved in local policymaking (such as the Great Local Council, as mentioned by participant 4). All participants referred to CSE as a major hub for critical ideas, primarily Marxist, with some referring as the "British version of URPE [Union for Radical Political Economists, based in the United States]" (participants 1 and 6). Participant 8 states that "CSE was not just about studying the labour process, class conflicts, de-skilling, but understanding their wider impact over social life". Other groupings from the mid 1980s-early 1990s were also mentioned, as the *Post-Keynesian Study Group* (PKSG), which emerged from the research efforts of Thames Polytechnic and North East London Polytechnic (participants 2, 3 and 9), as well as the *Malvern Conferences*, organised by John Pheby from 1987 (participant 10).

When asked which approaches constituted economic heterodoxy in the UK at that time, all participants categorically referred to two core groups: *Marxists*, with a variety of those engaging in analytical Marxism, Historical Materialism or Social Studies of Provisioning; and what several referred to as *"leftist" Keynesians* to distinguish those engaging in research and teaching that positioned themselves to the left (both epistemologically and ideologically) to the neoclassical synthesis. Other groupings in the UK, such as the post-Keynesians, feminist political economists and development political economists, later emerged as sub-groups from those two core strands, according to participants 2, 4, 5 and 9.

Also, when asked to describe what was the structure of a traditional economics degree, most participants offered a cohesive response: "a combination of neoclassical synthesis macro

Keynesians and neoclassical general equilibrium if you were taught an Oxford approach, or partial equilibrium if from Cambridge" (participant 3), "the 'mainstream' has a different hegemony […], formal Keynesianism was supreme […], some micro, market imperfections, econometrics, […] Friedman and monetarism were deemed as ridiculous until Thatcher" (participant 2). Participant 10 differentiated "old-fashioned Keynesians" from "formal Keynesians", with the latter "on the rise in most economics degrees", in addition to participant 5's remark of "some microeconomics, industrial economics, labour economics, growth theories and economic history". Teaching and learning innovations were less of a topic of concern or debate, with some referring that structures were "pretty standard at that time" (participant 5), "mostly exams" (participant 3).

5.2 "Cambridge was Irrelevant" to the Dissemination of Heterodox Education

When asked about which leading departments had a role in supporting and disseminating heterodox education within UK degrees, a surprising statement emerged from participant 2 and further supported by others: "Cambridge was irrelevant". Some interviewees themselves attended the University of Cambridge, and were able to differentiate Cambridge's influence in ideas *versus* their role in supporting and expanding a scholarly community as a strategic action field. As participant 2 explains: "Cambridge saw itself as the centre of the world, with its own divine rights. They had John Maynard Keynes, Joan Robinson […], the others were supposed to knee and bow. *That* was their contribution […] They were incapable of organising anything more strategic for the community". Participant 8 echoes that, saying: "Cambridge was very insular […], they were very much to themselves". Similarly, participant 3: "we didn't know anything of what was happening in Cambridge". And participant 10 further adds: "Cambridge was isolated. You have the differences between the Faculty and Colleges, and heterodoxy was purged from Faculty".

How was heterodox economics capable of entering economics degrees and influencing education? For the interviewees, this was the result of two main elements. Firstly, the institutional differentiation between traditional universities, polytechnics, and newer UoL colleges, what participant 10 referred to as a "sharp divisive line". While the former institutions carried out a prestigious reputation, the latter groups were seen as more progressive and permissive spaces, with less pressure to maintain prestige or disciplinary standards, as raised by participants 1 to 6. Participant 3 explains the lack of "tolerance" from universities: a combination of "theoretical disagreements" with an "antagonism against the left" which made most leading university economics departments to become actively hostile to non-neoclassical approaches over the years[5]. In some cases, as in polytechnics and UoL colleges, heads of department or managers did not feed those disagreements and engaged in a "*laissez-faire"* approach (participants 2, 3 and 4). Others

[5] This confirms what has been raised by Saith (2022) in his historical analysis of economics at Cambridge. The name of Partha Dasgupta is also mentioned as an example by participant 3 of someone hostile to heterodoxy.

(participant 6) commented on how external examiners, including those affiliated to prestigious departments, were "willing to encourage dissent opinions at lesser institutions".

Secondly, the historical context in which polytechnics emerged, notably the late 1960s and 1970s. This was, for most participants, a "different moment" that allowed politics to enter the academic debate, citing the 1968 generation, anti-war and civil rights movements, and workers' strikes. In addition to the context was the expansion of UK higher education and how it was attracting substantial public resources, which allowed academics to have more autonomy, resources, and less pressure or expectations to produce research or tangible outputs (participant 1 and 2), and more space to discuss politics.

5.3 Pluralism Disappears with Lack of Resources and the Pursue of Metrics

The context of UK higher education as reported by the interviewees began to change in the mid-1980s, mainly led by scarcity of funding from local governments and the implementation of new forms of accountability to measure academics' performance. Whilst these measures started as broad requirements (e.g., doing any form of scholarly research), participants 2, 3, and 10 clarified the consequences of the neoliberal turn in universities for the maintenance of heterodox economics education. They divided these consequences into two: firstly, how the implementation of research assessments in universities not only affected existing faculty as their publications were in disadvantage, but it was crucial in hiring new staff.

Participant 3, a former head of department in the early 1990s, described: "funding became increasingly linked to research assessment", and "we couldn't shortlist heterodox candidates" due to their publications being ranked lower. Participant 10 adds: "you had to play a game to get people shortlisted and appointed", as it became harder to justify and support unconventional profiles. Secondly, the exodus of critical economists from economics departments, as reported by participant 2, moving primarily to business schools, which had a "mild form of neoliberalism and you could appoint who you wanted as long as there was a business case".

At polytechnics, the situation on research was different, as explained by participant 3: "research had a bad name in polytechnics. Managers only cared about teaching. If they did research, academics were free to choose the topic".

6. Triangulation and Analysis of Findings

Cross-verification of findings (triangulation) sheds further light on themes emerging from archival records and semi-structured interviews, offering key insights into the state, characteristics, and structures of heterodox economics education in the UK.

6.1 What a heterodox economics education looked like in the UK?

A key theme emerging from triangulated sources is the degree of autonomy polytechnics had in designing their economics curricula. Unlike universities, polytechnics had greater freedom to experiment with content and teaching methods. Both archival documents and interview narratives confirm that these institutions accommodated a broader range of economic perspectives, partially due to their vocational remit and lower-ranked status. Economics courses often included discussions on political economy and social structures alongside mathematical and quantitative training. In contrast to standard curricula dominated by neoclassical and Keynesian synthesis, Marxist and post-Keynesian theories were embedded in some core courses rather than confined to optional modules.

The vocational nature of polytechnics and CNAA regulations also created fertile ground for alternative thinking. It required any training in economics to be applicable and relevant, support critical thinking and fostering the ability to propose or evaluate policy rather than focusing solely on instrumental learning. On this, course prospectuses from Thames Polytechnic and North East London Polytechnic – highlighted by interviewees for their heterodox reputation –, explicitly framed their economics degrees as multidisciplinary, real-world driven, and policy oriented. Several interviewees described their teaching approach as politically engaged and pluralist, though they did not explicitly reference socio-educational goals or pedagogical strategies.

Further, course prospectuses and CNAA board minutes show that polytechnics embraced diverse pedagogical approaches, including coursework-based assessments, student projects, and interdisciplinary learning. These hint on alternative teaching methods, reflecting a broader educational philosophy that valued critical thinking over rote learning. However, consistent with existing literature, these discussions predominantly focused on *what* was taught rather than *how* it was taught, as evidenced in CNAA minutes and course prospectuses.

Lastly, and contrary to existing literature on heterodox educators that emphasises individual contribution (for instance, Mearman et al. 2022), the teaching of critical approaches was not solely an individual effort, but a result of historical and institutional facilitators that enabled the inclusion of unconventional content in curricula and, in some cases, the development of research groups in certain institutions. Additionally, the interviews confirmed two key findings: first, that teaching played a major factor in the development of British heterodox hubs and groupings; and second,

that Cambridge was less influential than commonly believed in shaping the heterodox academic community.

6.2 What were the historical and institutional elements that allowed heterodox education to emerge?

Whilst polytechnic economics programmes showed some tolerance and pluralism, the historical and institutional conditions that made this possible are crucial. Triangulated archival and interview data point to three critical factors: institutional differentiation; the political and social context of the late 1960s and late 1980s; and resource allocation.

A defining feature of the UK higher education landscape between the 1960s and early 1990s was the structural divide between universities and polytechnics. Archival documents highlight that polytechnics were explicitly designed to serve regional and vocational needs, allowing them to develop curricula that diverged from the traditional academic model of higher learning. Interviews confirm this, with several participants describing polytechnics as spaces that were less constrained by the intellectual orthodoxies and the pursuit of prestige that dominated universities. According to participants, the relative lack of prestige and little research pressure meant that polytechnics could experiment with heterodox approaches without facing the same institutional resistance in elite universities.

Archival documents suggest that the expansion of higher education with the Robbins Report in the 1960s created opportunities for alternative economic perspectives to gain traction. Nonetheless, institutional differentiation was not the only necessary condition, but rather its combination with a particular historical moment. The emergence of heterodox economics education in polytechnics was historically bounded, linked to broader political and social movements that were taking place in the 1960s and 1970s: *inter alia,* the post-1968 generation, the Cold War and the scholarship revolving political economy and comparative systems studies, the 1970s anti-war and civil rights movements, the UK workers' strikes. Interviewees reinforced this historical context, describing how political activism, particularly among Marxist and "left-Keynesian" economists, shaped curricular decisions. Several participants cited the influence of organisations such as the Conference for Socialist Economists, which provided a forum for radical economic thought and facilitated academic discussions, including between members affiliated to polytechnics.

However, as archival sources indicate, institutional differentiation also came with challenges. CNAA reports from the 1980s show increasing pressure on polytechnics to align their curricula with standardised national frameworks. Several interviewees reflected on this shift, describing how the initial openness to pluralism gradually gave way to greater institutional constraints, particularly as polytechnics transitioned into universities in the early 1990s. Both archival evidence and

interview responses highlight that the space for heterodox education began to shrink in the 1980s. CNAA reports and meeting minutes from this period (1980, 37th meeting, DB 3/1604) emphasise financial constraints, the growing influence of market-driven reforms and accountability measures in higher education. The introduction of research assessments placed increasing pressure on polytechnics to enter the same game of universities, albeit with unequal conditions (1985, 52nd meeting, DB3/2126). Some interviewees echoed these concerns, describing how funding constraints and hiring practices began marginalised heterodox scholars once the "rules of the game" changed. Several participants noted that as research expectations intensified, polytechnic departments were less willing to appoint academics specialising in non-mainstream economics.

7. Concluding Remarks

This article has explored the historical development of heterodox economics education in the UK from the 1960s to the early 1990s, focusing on the institutional conditions that enabled alternative economic perspectives to flourish outside traditional universities, that is, in polytechnics. By triangulating archival records of institutions and regulatory bodies – analysed thematically – with semi-structured interviews, the article points to the critical role of institutional differentiation, political and social contexts, and resource allocation in shaping critical economics education.

A thematic analysis of archival data sheds light on the institutional setting of polytechnics and regulatory requirements, as well as how polytechnics structured and defined their economics degrees to meet vocational goals. One of the key findings relates to greater curricular flexibility in polytechnics compared to traditional universities, allowing for the integration of Marxist, post-Keynesian, and other critical economic theories into core curricula. This was facilitated by the autonomy provided by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), which allowed for relative experimentation in content and pedagogy, being more concerned with a disciplinary core and the differentiation of economics in comparison to other disciplines.

The vocational and applied focus of polytechnics also played a significant role in fostering heterodox education. Course structures emphasised economic realisticness, interdisciplinary approaches, and policy-oriented training, aligning with broader educational goals of equipping students with critical thinking and decision-making skills. As archival records and interviews confirm, this emphasis on applicability allowed for the inclusion of diverse economic theories, particularly those that challenged mainstream economic paradigms.

Semi-structured interviews conducted with economics educators at that time also reveal findings that challenge standard narratives on the rise of heterodox economics. Interviewees categorically pointed out that Cambridge played a limited role in shaping and expanding a heterodox academic

community in the UK, whereas polytechnics and newer universities were central to the development and dissemination of critical economic thought. Complementary to such expansion were the heterodox groupings, as the Conference for Socialist Economists (CSE) and the Post-Keynesian Study Group (PKSG), which further reinforced these intellectual networks outside of traditional university settings.

However, the study also documents the decline of heterodox economics education in polytechnics from the early 1980s onward. Market-driven reforms, financial constraints, and the growing influence of research assessments began to pressure polytechnics to mimic university expectations. Hiring practices increasingly favoured economists with conventional training, and the broader neoliberal restructuring of higher education fuelled the marginalisation of non-mainstream approaches. This shift ultimately contributed to the contraction of heterodox content to a few institutions, which continued with the transformation of polytechnics into universities in 1992. Therefore, the findings help to historically trace the structural and institutional factors that allowed heterodox economics to emerge and persist in the UK, emphasising how disciplinary pluralism was shaped not just by intellectual debates, but also by favourable institutional conditions of higher education.

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Tribe, Keith. 2022. *Constructing Economic Science: The Invention of a Discipline: 1850-1950*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Online Appendix

Appendix 1

The interview questionnaire contained the following questions and themes:

1. Can you describe your academic trajectory (your studies, your academic appointments, and your encounter with critical approaches)?
2. What was the context of economics in the UK during the late 1960s and early 1990s regarding universities and polytechnics, the debates of ideas, the state of teaching and research? Which were the leading departments and research groups?
3. Did economics degrees have a "standard" structure and approach, and if so, what was that?
4. Which courses were you convening or teaching at that time? Can you please explain how they were taught – the content covered, the delivery mode, the assessment methods?
5. How did the non-orthodox groups look like at that time? In which institutions and departments were they located? Were there any specific approaches that stood out?
6. In your view, why some departments offered more space or tolerance to critical approaches in comparison to others? Which elements or structures allowed that to happen?
7. Which academic groups or societies were important at that time? How were they trying to influence the debate and make a difference in the economics discipline?

Appendix 2

CNAA courses in economics offered in September 1990 List (CNAA 1991)

CNAA courses in economics	**Year of first intake**
<u>BA/BA(Hons) Economics</u>	
Birmingham Polytechnic (ft/pt)	1971-72
City of London Polytechnic (ft)	1970-71
Coventry Polytechnic (ft)	1966-67
Ealing College (ft)	1969-70
Kingston Polytechnic (ft/pt)	1971-72
Leicester Polytechnic (ft)	1974-75
Liverpool Polytechnic (ft/pt)	1987-88
Manchester Polytechnic (ft)	1967-68
Middlesex Polytechnic (ft/pt)	1989-90
Newcastle Polytechnic (with named specialisms) (ft)	1974-75
Nottingham Polytechnic (ft)	1970-71
Portsmouth Polytechnic (with named specialisms) (ft)	1973-74
Staffordshire Polytechnic (ft)	1973-74
Sunderland Polytechnic (ft)	1974-75
Thames Polytechnic (ft)	1971-72

Wolverhampton Polytechnic (ft/pt)	1970-71
BA/BA (Hons) Applied Economics	
Coventry Polytechnic (pt)	1977-78
Dundee Institute (ft)	1981-82
East London Polytechnic [BSc/BSc (Hons)] (ft) (with named specialisms)	1971-72
Hatfield Polytechnic (ft)	1990-91
Napier Polytechnic (pt)	1986-87
Polytechnic South West (ft/pt)	1987-88
BA/BA (Hons) Economic Development and Planning	
Coventry Polytechnic (ft/pt)[retitled]	1987-88
BA/BA (Hons) Industrial Economics	1984-85
Coventry Polytechnic (ft)	
BA/BA (Hons) Economics/Public Policy	
Leeds Polytechnic (ft)	1975-76
BA/BA (Hons) Licence European Economics	
Middlesex Polytechnic / University of Nantes (ft)	1986-87
BA/BA (Hons) Maitrise International Economic Studies	1990-91
Manchester Polytechnic / University of Caen (ft)	
BA/BA (Hons) Business Economics	
Paisley College (with named specialisms) (ft/sandwich)	1976-77
Wolverhampton Polytechnic (ft)	1990-91
BA/BA (Hons) Financial Economics	
Coventry Polytechnic (ft)	1990-91
City of London Polytechnic (ft)	1989-90
BA/BA (Hons) Business and Financial Economics	
Staffordshire Polytechnic (ft)	1988-89
BA/BA (Hons) Economic History	
Portsmouth Polytechnic (ft)	1980-81
BA/BA (Hons) Economics and Accounting	
Ealing College (pt)	1988-89

MA Economics Nottingham Polytechnic (pt) City of London Polytechnic (ft/pt)	 1983-83 1990-91
PGDip Analytical and Critical Economics City of London Polytechnic (ft/pt)	 1990-91
PGDip/MSc Econometrics and Forecasting Kingston Polytechnic (pt)	 1987-88
MA Political Economy Middlesex Polytechnic (pt)	 1988-89
PGDip/MSc Fisheries Economics Portsmouth Polytechnic (ft)	 1989-90

Source: CNAA Report Economics in the Polytechnics and Colleges (1991, Appendix 2, pp. 61-62)

Appendix 3

Sampled examples of reading lists and course structures

A.3.1
Ealing Technical College – Labour Economics Syllabus
Submitted to CNAA for approval (CNAA Economics Board 1972, 17th meeting, DB3/461)

BA (Economics) Part II CNAA

Labour Economics

Syllabus

AIM

The course aims to make an analysis of the markets) for the non-homogeneous factor of production - labour, the economic, social and institutional influences on this market and the economic problems which arise concerning the effectiveness of labour's contributions and the 'suitability' of its rewards.

Introduction

Labour in the economy. Nature of Labour economics. Other approaches to industrial relations. Wage theories of the past.

Demand for Labour

Marginal productivity theory and determinants of elasticity of demand. Optimal factor mix and elasticity of substitution. Short-run and long-run. The adding up problem. Imperfect product markets and marginal revenue products. Substitution between labour inputs. On the job training.
The economy of high empirical verification. Monopsony and deliberate (discriminating) and non-deliberate 'exploitation. Employer's associations, public employers including UK institutions. Custom and social attitudes. Labour treated as capital.

Supply of Labour

Secular supply. The income-leisure decision. Participation rates. Piece-work. Overtime. Theory of job choice. Empirical evidence. Transfer earnings and rent. Government intervention in education and training. Obstacles to mobility and government action to alleviate. Unemployment, casual employment and mobility. Non-competing groups.

Trade Unions

Unions as maximising agents e.g. business monopolists. Membership functions. Bi-lateral monopoly. 'Political' determinants of trade union wage policy. Growth and structure of UK trade unions including shop floor organisation. Closed shops. Apprenticeship. Preference functions, preference paths and bargaining. Restrictive practices including UK experience.

Collective Bargaining

Bargaining power. Some theories of the bargaining process. Content and types of bargain. Strikes and the cost of strikes including UK experience.

Wage Differences

Dynamic differentials and resource allocation. Evolution of wage structure. Equilibrium differentials. Unions and differentials including empirical evidence. Employer hiring practices. Custom and social attitudes. Internal and external wage structure. Women's and US negro's wages. UK wage structure. Low wages and minimum wage legislation. Empirical evidence on relative wage movements and changes in employment and reconciliation with theories of the labour market.

Unemployment

Real money wages and the trade cycle. Classical. Keynesian and under-consumptionist views and empirical evidence. Structural unemployment including US debate. Automation: types, impact on employment, relative wages and distributive shares. Inflation Demand and cost inflation. Wage drift. Empirical evidence. Collective bargaining, inflation and incomes policies. Empirical evidence. Labour's Share in National Income Degree of monopoly. Bargaining power and the scope and limits of wage bargaining. Kaldor/Kalecki macroeconomic models. Neo-classical theory. Technical progress. Empirical evidence.

Basic Text Books

The Theory of Wages and Employment	A. Cartter
The Theory of Wages	K. Rothschild
Labour Economics	A. Cartter and F.R. Marshall

Wages	B. McCormick
The Economics of Trade Unions	A. Rees
Economics of Wages and Labour	L. Hunter and D.J. Robertson

Other Reading

Price Theory (Chaps 8-11)	M. Friedman
Euler's Theorem and the Problem of Distribution	J. Robinson
Shortcomings of Marginal Analysis for Wage Employment Problems	R.A. Lester AER March 1946
Marginal Analysis and Empirical Research	F. Malchup AER Sept 1946
Human Capital (Chaps 2 & 3)	G. Becker
The rate of return on Investment in Education	M. Blaug MS Vol. 33 No. 3 1965
Labour force participation and Unemployment	J. Mincer Prosperity and Unemployment ed. RA & MS Gordon
Property and Power in the Theory of Distribution	E. Preiser IEP No.2 1952 P.206-20
Wages and Labour Mobility	OECD 1965
Wage flexibility and the Distribution of Labour	W. Reddaway LBR Vo1.53 1959
Collective Bargaining, Wage Structure and the Labour Market in the UK	J. Crossley 'Wage Structure in Theory and Practice' ed. E.M. Hugh-Jones
Wage Determination under Trade Unions	J. Dunlop
Trade Union Wage Policy	A. Ross
The Theory of Union Wage Policy	M.W. Reder RES Feb 1952
The Theory of Wage Determination (esp. essays by Clark-Kerr, Reynolds, Rothschild, Shackle, Myers, Demaria)	ed. J. Dunlop
Trade Unions, Differentials and the Levelling of Wages	H.A. Turner MS Sept 1952
The Theory of Occupational Wage Differentials	M.W. Reder AER Vol.44 1955
The Effects of Unions on Industrial Wage Differentials	H. Gregg Lewis
The Social Foundations of Wages Policy	B. Wootton
The Evolution of Wage Structure (Chap 13)	L. Reynolds and C. Taft
External Influences on the Determination of Internal Wage Structure	G.M. Hildebrand
Occupation and Pay in Great Britain 1906-60 (Chaps 1 & 2)	G. Routh
Some Effects of the Minimum Wage in the US	H.M. Douty
Nature and Sources of Unemployment in the US	R. Solow (Wicksell lectures 1964)
Automation, Jobs and Manpower: The case for Structural Unemployment	C.C. Killingsworth 'The Manpower Revolution' ed. G.L. Mangum

Efficiency, Equality and the Distribution of Property	J.E. Meade
Employment Policy in Sweden	B. Olsson IIR May 1963
An Essay on Bargaining	T.C. Schelling AER June 1956
Money Wage Rates and Employment	J. Tobin Readings in Macroeconomics ed. M.G. Mueller
The Relation between Unemployment and the Rate of Change in Money Wage Rates in the UK 1862-1957: A Further Analysis	R.G. Lipsey Ed. Feb 1960
The Inter-relationship between Cost and Price Changes 1946-59	L.A. Dicks-Mireaux OEP 1961
Wage Drift	E.H. Phelps Brown Ec. Nov 1962
The Determination of Money Wages in American Industry	O. Eckstein and T.A. Wilson QJE Aug 1962
Workshop Bargaining, Wage Drift and Productivity in the British Engineering Industry	S. Lerner and J. Marquand MS Jan 1962
Trade Unions and Wage Inflation in the United Kingdom 1893-1961	A.G. Hines RES 1961
Incomes Policy: A Re-Appraisal	
Wage Structure and Incomes Policy: On the Stability of Wage Differences and Productivity-based Wage Policies	R.G. Lipsey and I.M. Parkin Ec. May 1970 J. Crossley SJPE 1968 H.A. Turner and D.A. Jackson BJIR March 1969
An Economic Comment on the Donovon Report	
How to Run an Incomes Policy	G.L. Reid BJIR Nov 1968
Collective Bargaining in Sweden	H. Clegg
Donovon Commission Report and Research Papers Nos. 1, 4, 5,7,9	T.L. Johnston
Trade Union Organisation	HMSO
NBPI Report No.27	H.A. Turner PQ Vol.25 1956
Industrial Relations Handbook	HMSO
Pay and Profits	Ministry of Labour HMSO
Alternative Theories of Distribution	E.H. Phelps Brown
Alternative Theories of Labour's Share	N. Kaldor RES 1955-56
Theory of Economic Dynamics (Part I)	M.W. Reder Allocation of Economic Resources, M. Abramoritz et al
Income Distribution (Chaps IV & V)	M. Kalecki J. Pen

A.3.2

List of Optional Courses in Economics Degrees (North East London Polytechnic, Full-time and Sandwich Course Prospectus 1979/80, pp. 27-29)

BSc APPLIED ECONOMICS

Introduction

This is a three-year full-time course leading to a degree or to a degree with Honours classification. A degree course in Applied Economics has been in operation at the Polytechnic since 1971 but it was completely revised in 1976 to give students greater freedom of choice in what is a very wide and problematical area of study. The new scheme introduces students to various aspects of economics from different and sometimes opposing perspectives. From this base they devise their own routes of further study from a list of well over 30 optional units. It is therefore possible to develop your personal interests in specific areas of economics as a preparation for employment and/or postgraduate study.

Aims of the Course

The course is designed for the student who is concerned about the economic and social problems facing the world. It aims to provide a firm grounding in the principles and applications of economics, and at the same time to give an understanding of the relationships between economic ideas and the society within which they develop. By the end of the course students will have a better understanding of both the ability of economics to provide solutions to contemporary issues and of the limitations of those solutions.

Entry Requirements

In order to be considered for entry to the course you should normally be at least 18 years of age and possess, or be about to possess, one of the following qualifications:

1. Five GCE passes including two subjects at Advanced level.
2. Four GCE passes including three subjects at Advanced level.
3. An Ordinary National Diploma or Certificate of a good standard in an appropriate subject.
4. An equivalent qualification, e.g. overseas school certificates recognised as equivalent, International Baccalaureat.

Subjects studied must normally include Mathematics and English Language to at least O-level standard.

While many applicants do have A-level Economics this is not essential: it is more important to have as broad a range of subjects as possible, i.e. some science, some arts and some social science. Mature students (i.e. those over 21) who do not possess these formal entry qualifications but who in the opinion of the Polytechnic have the potential to pursue the course and are likely to benefit from it may also be admitted. Each case is considered on its own merits.

Course Organisation

As you can see from the course diagram overleaf, the structure of the course allows increasing choice as the course progresses, so that by the final year all your studies will reflect your own individual interests, abilities and career plans.

In Part I (the first year) you will study three compulsory subjects which will provide you with a basic framework in the range of opinion currently held in economics, together with a grounding in the necessary mathematical and statistical vocabulary. You will therefore have the opportunity to determine your

individual interests in economics before having to select areas for specialised study in the second and third years.

The aim of Part II is to give students freedom of choice to specialise within one or more areas concerned with the applications of economics. In addition to the two compulsory subjects taken in the second year, you will select a maximum of 9 optional units (from a list of well over 30) for study during the rest of the second year and the entire third year.

Because a number of the optional units may be taken in either year 2 or year 3, there will be an opportunity to change the emphasis of study at the beginning of the final year. You will also, by your selection of final year options, be able to choose whether to study for a degree or a degree with Honours.

Year 2/3 Optional Units (i.e. may be taken in either year 2 or year 3)	**Year 3 Optional Units** (i.e. may be taken in year 3 only)
Economic Development and Industrialisation 1760-1850	Advanced Microeconomics
Economic Development in Pre-Industrial England	Comparative Economic Development of the USA and Germany
Economics of Less Developed Countries	Comparative Economic Systems
Economics of Poverty and Income Distribution	Dialectics and Historical Materialism (half-unit)
Economics of the Social Services (half-unit)	Econometrics
Environmental Economics	Economic Aspects of Less Developed Countries
Formation of British Economic and Social Policy	Economic Philosophy (half-unit)
Impact of Urbanisation in Nineteenth Century Britain	Economic Theory and Historical Explanation
International Economy and Empire	Economics of the Family and Sex Discrimination
Labour Studies	Government Industrial Policies
Location in a Space Economy	Growth and Welfare in the UK since 1850
Marxist Economics - 1	Industrial Economics
Mathematical Methods (half-unit)	International Economics
Planning Studies - 1	Introduction to Macroeconomic Models (half-unit)
The Power Factor	Investment Appraisal (half-unit)
Statistical Methods (half-unit)	Issues in Theoretical Economics
Technological Change (half-unit)	Marxist Economics - 2
Trends in the Modern History of British Trade Unionism	Nationalised Industries
Western Political Thought	Planning Studies - 2
	Project
	Public Finance
	Recent Developments in the EEC
	Regional Issues and Problems
	Theory of Macroeconomic Policy (half-unit)
Note: The allocation of units to a particular list is subject to amendment.	Transport Economics
	Urban Economics

	Student/Staff Seminar

Course Programme

PART I

Year 1

The aim of the first year is to provide an introduction to economic theory, history and techniques and to the social and political sphere in which an economist has to operate. By the end of the year you will be in a good position to choose between the different approaches to and areas of economic study which are contained in the range of optional units available in the second and third years.

The course begins with a three-week integrated topic-based course which will introduce you to the scope and methods of applied economics as well as to the use of library and source material.

The rest of the year is devoted to the study of three compulsory subjects. Economics comprises a survey of economic thought and an examination of the methods of analysis used by the four major schools of Marxism, Neo-Classicism, Keynesianism and Institutionalism. You will therefore learn something of the various approaches to economics as well as of the economic and social background from which different economic ideas have arisen.

Economy and Society complements the teaching of Economics by considering the contribution of fields of knowledge outside economics to the understanding of economic problems. It starts from the premise that an economist works within a physical, social and political environment. Therefore topics you will study extra population problems such as growth and urbanisation, implications for the environment of resource extraction, industrialisation processes and power structures within society.

Quantitative Methods provides a foundation in those concepts and techniques of mathematics and statistics which have wide application and relevance to economics. It also acts as a preparatory course for students intending to study mathematics, statistics and econometrics in the second or third years.

Provision is made in the first few weeks for revision of some basic mathematics for students who have been out of touch with the subject for some years.

PART II

Year 2

In your second year studies you will be presented with two opposed ways of looking at the economy and will begin to work out your own approach by selecting 2-4 optional units from a list of well over a dozen. The two compulsory subjects together reflect some of the primary differences of approach which were introduced in your first year studies. Economic Theory provides a groundwork in standard neo-classical economics, both micro and macro, together with the opportunity to consider the operations of an advanced economy and its current developments through empirical data. In Political Economy, on the other hand, a post-Keynesian theoretical framework will be developed which not only throws a different light on the

performance of the contemporary, mixed capitalist economy but also illuminates certain central problems of socialist as well as underdeveloped economies.

Year 3

The aim of the final year is to enable students to examine a number of economic issues which they themselves have chosen in the light of their interests, abilities and career plans. Your studies may develop from the optional units taken in year 2 or you may prefer to choose new areas of specialisation.

By the third year you will have decided whether to study for a degree or a degree with Honours. Degree students study at least 3 optional units to make a total of 6 units studied in Part II. Honours students study at least 5 units - at least 3 of which must be units which can only be taken in Year 3 - to make a total of 9 units studied in Part II.

Pathways Through The Course

Part Il of the course gives you the opportunity to construct a personal study programme by choosing a maximum of 9 optional units from a possible maximum of 35 whole units and 9 half units. The list of optional units is divided into those which can be taken at any time during Part Il and those which can only be taken in the third year.

Appendix 4

A sample of realisticness in economics meeting vocational pedagogy and student-centred approaches (North East London Polytechnic, Full-time and Sandwich Course Prospectus 1974/5, p. 78)

Department of Applied Economic Studies
HEAD: M J Salmon, BA Med

As part of this young department in a young institution staff and students feel that their interests should extend not only into neighbouring academic fields but even into areas not traditionally associated with the study of economics. 'Applied Economics' implies an interest in the problems of the real world, and the department is committed to tackling them.

But this concern with the real world quickly produces the realisation that there are many problems in economics (the distribution of income and the control of economic power are examples) for which solutions are neither obvious nor welcome to all members of society. In the words of Professor Joan Robinson: 'Those who concern themselves with what goes on in the real world cannot maintain the serene complacency of earlier generations'. Individuals have to make up their own minds about the important issues in the world in which they live and it is the job of a department such as this to encourage appreciation of the sort of things which need to be considered in making that decision – our present understanding of the functioning of society, our estimation of the consequences of our actions for other members of that society for example.

Thus an 'applied' economist, if he intends to go beyond the mere identification and description of problems to the point where he can expect to try to solve them, has to face the fact that human consideration cannot be reduced to nice mathematical calculations. Consequently, the department has developed close links with sociologists and psychologists, and with public sector and community projects.

As might be expected of a young department its work is strongly student-centred. As well as playing an active part in running their own courses students are encouraged to participate in a research and consultancy programme. Their influence is reflected in a broad range of courses which include short courses for sixth-formers, workshops for teachers of economics, and a number of postgraduate diplomas.