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# Curriculum reform in UK economics: a critique

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# Curriculum reform in UK economics: a critique<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This paper offers a multi-dimensional critique of recent reforms to UK Economics curricular frameworks. The paper assesses the reforms in terms of their extent and the positions taken within them on their approach to economics, treatment of politics, and, crucially, educational philosophy. Despite claims of innovation and new epistemological caution in the wake of the global financial crisis, the reforms are found to be minor and superficial. The CORE programme and the revised Subject Benchmark Statement document for Economics still ignore educational philosophy; yet they are implicitly educationally instrumental and remain limitedly pluralist. Our conclusions are buttressed by contrasts made between UK reforms and the curriculum architecture found in the Brazilian system.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper offers a multi-dimensional critique of reforms to Economics curricular frameworks, which followed the global economic crisis beginning in 2007/8. That crisis triggered calls for fundamental changes in the Economics discipline (Harcourt, 2010), which received multi-faceted criticism. Economists largely failed to predict or explain the crisis despite their adherence to methodological predictivism, mathematical rigour, and claims to scientificity. Whilst analyses of the crisis focused on the hubris and ethics of the financial sector, others, including the film *Inside Job* (2010), DeMartino (2011) and Epstein and Carrick-Hagenbarth (2012) laid identical charges against economists. Contrary to Keynes' aspiration that they be "as humble as dentists" (CW IX, 2013a, p. 332), Fourcade et al. (2015) discuss ironically the 'superiority of economists'. These criticisms augmented charges against economics of methodological dogmatic (Lawson, *passim*); of a slavish imitation of the natural sciences (Mirowski, 2002, 2013); or as

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merely a reflection of ideology (Fine, 1980). Overall, whilst meaningful change seemed necessary, it appeared unlikely.

Nonetheless, particularly in policy arenas, some change has occurred. Economics, accelerating changes which began much earlier (see Colander, et al., 2004), has sought out other sources of data, and insights from other disciplines, principally biology, network theory, information and complexity sciences (Ormerod, *passim*; Bank of England, 2015). Some economists recognised that they must heed history, and perhaps history of thought; because those lessons appear forgotten (James, 2012). The Bank of England Chief Economist Andrew Haldane (see Haldane, 2015 and Gai, Haldane and Kapadia, 2011) has made several provocative engagements with non-standard thinking, emphasising issues such as uncertainty, complexity and collective psychology. The Head of the Government Economic Service, Ramsden (2015), also argued for multiple theoretical approaches.

A crucial battleground has been the Economics curriculum. Whilst some label the subject vocational (Coyle and Wren-Lewis, 2015a,b), surveys of employers of Economics graduates demur. They report regularly that, whereas graduates are extremely proficient in strands of high theory or applied mathematics, they show little facility in core employability skills, even in the application of economic theory. Commentators asked whether university curricula were fit for purpose. Some agitated for deep reform of curricula. Students amplified these latter calls, and demanded more relevant syllabuses (Stockhammer and Yilmaz, 2015). One prominent book asked 'what's the use of economics?' (Coyle, 2012).

Again, some reform is evident. One significant initiative is the Curriculum Open-access Resources in Economics (CORE) project. Better known now by its potent acronym, this venture developed new curriculum resources, which have been deployed in a number of universities and continents. Some claim that CORE represents a shift in Economics teaching (Birdi, 2014); however, detractors argue that these reforms are inadequate (Post-Crash Economics Society (PCES), 2014; Morgan, 2014; Stockhammer and Yilmaz, 2015; Earle et al, 2016). Indeed, CORE's funder is now supporting a group led by Robert Skidelsky to produce a set of theoretically and methodologically pluralist resources.

At the same time, the UK official Subject Benchmark Statement for Economics (SBSE) has been re-written (QAAHE, 2015). Some might view this new formulation as quite different from its predecessor. It may be claimed to have a more cautious tone, embrace criticality, history and other elements of context; and it makes explicit reference to the neglected area of banking and finance. However, others see it as essentially conservative. Morgan (2015) offers an unfavourable assessment of the SBSE and its treatment of pluralism.

This paper presents a multi-dimensional evaluation of the extent and nature of the recent reforms to curricular frameworks in UK Economics. We argue that despite considerable investment and activity, relatively little has changed. Neither CORE nor the SBSE deliver greater pluralism. Although some claim economists have learned from earlier hubris, we find only limited evidence of greater epistemological caution in either reform framework. Further, the paper provides a systematic critique of the educational goals present within CORE and the SBSE. We find that both pay little explicit heed to

educational philosophy. This is a serious flaw given the centrality of educational philosophy to effective teaching. Moreover, both frameworks promote instrumental rather than 'liberal' education.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section outlines our multi-dimensional evaluative framework. It combines three aspects of curricular reform: their approach taken on economics, including the 'epistemological caution' with which those positions are held; their educational philosophy; and their treatment of politics. The framework is then applied to CORE (section 3) and the SBSE (section 4). Our findings are then re-evaluated (section 5) by contrast with the curriculum architecture in Brazil, which illustrates the feasibility and potential of a more pluralist system. Conclusions are drawn in section 6.

## 2. Evaluative Framework

This paper offers a multi-dimensional framework for evaluating curricular reforms. The framework combines criteria from three key strands of recent literature on economics education. One strand examines the approach to economics embodied within curricula. In particular it considers pluralism in economics, specifically how curricular frameworks reflect degrees of openness to heterodoxy and uncertainty of knowledge (Freeman, 2009; Dow, 2009; Morgan, 2015). A second strand borrows from a heritage of critical political economy (Lee et al. 2013; Morgan, 2014): it scrutinises treatments of politics within economics curricula. The final strand – essential in the context of curricular reform but often neglected – builds on Clarke and Mearman's (2001, 2003) work on Economics curricula as embodying educational goals and philosophy. This framework encompasses several other possible evaluative criteria. For example, the ability to meet business needs, research performance and employability are all contained within educational philosophy. It also encapsulates the main suggestions for Economics post-Crash reforms. Nonetheless, one caveat is acknowledged: whilst our focus is on curriculum frameworks, whose effects are contingent; we appreciate that an alternative methodology would be to examine the content of individual courses as they are delivered (cf. Zuidhof, 2014; Birks, 2015). Earle et al (2016)'s analysis of exam papers at seven leading UK universities suggest that their teaching is neither pluralist nor aimed at critical evaluation.

Our first analytical category addresses the approach to economics espoused by curricular reforms. We distinguish between monist and pluralist approaches. Monism here means that there is one way (perhaps broadly defined) to gain insight into the economy<sup>2</sup>. So, one might be a mainstream monist (insisting on, for instance, marginalist pricing), or a 'heterodox' monist (insisting on, say, class analysis). Several authors show economics to be unusually dominated by a neoclassical mainstream (see inter alia Fourcade et al., 2015). Pluralism means that it is necessary to draw on possibly quite different ways of thinking about the economy in order to understand it. Pluralism can reflect a number of positions: for example that it is impossible to explain the complex, open nature of the economy via one paradigm (Dow, 1997, 2009).

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<sup>2</sup> An alternative term might be 'unitary', suggesting that some economists see the discipline as a unified whole (Haeckel, 1892). 'Monism' is established in this literature so will be retained.

Another rationale for pluralism might be epistemological caution, which has been a live issue in Economics since the crisis, because of the frequent claim that it was driven partly by the hubris of economists. Caballero (2010) has posited the 'pretence of knowledge syndrome' and argued for greater humility. Indeed, a possible defence of both CORE and the SBSE is that both exhibit greater caution.

The second analytical category assesses the political positions, understanding of the nature of society, ethical positions, etc. taken by curricula. There are two dimensions to this aspect: first, what political position is taken by curricula (for instance, explicitly non-committal, conservative or progressive). Second, and more importantly, is the question of whether a political aspect is acknowledged. In economics this is controversial because of the discipline's retention of the fact/value distinction. According to this positive economic position, economists *qua* economists and educators ought not integrate their political views in their practice. This principle is a staple of introductory economics courses. However, it is highly contentious and hard to defend. Veblen (1919) and Myrdal (1929) show that economics is littered with ethical principles and culturally determined concepts. Given its normative nature it seems unavoidable that Economics educators have to reconcile these norms with their own politics.

Our final analytical category concerns educational philosophy and practice; which are central here, because this paper is concerned with curriculum. We deploy three broad strands of educational goals in the literature: liberal, instrumental and critical. Arguably, economists arguably have neglected educational goals (Clarke and Mearman, 2001). This constitutes a significant neglect because, as elaborated below, a lack of clarity about what one is trying to achieve may hinder one's ability to teach effectively. Moreover, educational philosophy could offset the positions taken by economists on economics and politics, if they are appropriate. For example, a commitment to liberal education may encourage one to teach more critically or pluralistically than one acts in research, or in considering the economy.

The central feature of *liberal* education is "to equip people to make their own free, autonomous choices about the life they will lead" (Bridges, 1992, p. 92). That implies the achievement of the intellectual capacities of critical and evaluative thinking; comparative thinking; and intellectual open-mindedness. These aims mean that curriculum content is only relevant in achieving outcomes that are (thought) processual; content should be assessed according to its ability to achieve these outcomes; and 'facts' and 'knowledge' are de-emphasised. Arguably these desired capacities are achieved better in a pluralist curriculum than in a monist one (Mearman et al., 2011).

*Instrumental* aims are that students are trained in concrete, identifiable skills, such as the ability to solve certain types of problem, know formulae or techniques, remember and perhaps apply theory, or possess 'knowledge' of a topic. All education will involve instrumental outcomes, even if they are not intended or explicitly stated. However, an education geared towards such instrumental goals may be regarded as '*instrumentalist*'. An example of instrumentalist education is one in which a student is indoctrinated into a particular view or behaviour. More broadly, though, any educational process can be

regarded as indoctrinatory if its content is delivered uncritically: contrary to the tenets of 'liberal' education discussed above.

*Critical pedagogy* has been championed by, for example the Brazilian Freire (1970) and hooks (1994). Critical pedagogy has Marxist roots, particularly in critical theory. It is characterised as a rejection of modernist (Enlightenment) education, therefore including liberal education. A critical pedagogy claims that modern education system seeks to reproduce itself for the benefit of white globally Northern middle-class males (Schroeder and Chester, 2014, p. 47) Thus, it aims to liberate those whom the system excludes and oppresses. In practice it emphasises a student-centred approach stressing the critical evaluation and re-evaluation of common concepts via a process of conscientisation. It presupposes students' abilities to think critically about their own situations. In addition, the content of the curriculum should change its emphasis to stress the contributions of oppressed groups. If much of this seems to resonate with liberal goals, this is partly true. However, critical pedagogues would argue that liberal education still views the learner as an empty vessel to be filled, whereas for them, the student must fill themselves (see Hicks, 2004, p. 18).

We now apply these criteria to two recent attempts at UK curriculum reform: CORE<sup>3</sup>, and the Economics benchmark statement.

### 3. CORE

The first reform to explore is the CORE Project. CORE stands for Curriculum Open-access Resources in Economics, although the acronym has been reified. Arguably the acronym was chosen partly to imply centrality, to define a core of the discipline; and thus to replace the existing undergraduate curriculum, starting at year one. CORE is a large undergraduate year one course called 'The Economy', which itself comprises nineteen modules on a range of topics. CORE is neither a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) nor a course in the traditional sense, but an online resource, a frame to be elaborated. In fact, it describes itself as an e-book course<sup>4</sup>. Its actual delivery is contingent on local circumstances at the eight places at which it runs, for instance the universities of Bristol, and Sydney. Thus, it can be described as a curricular framework. However, from its base material, certain conclusions may be drawn.

CORE has been led by a leading New Keynesian economist Wendy Carlin. Other notable authors of the project are Samuel Bowles, an economist with a Marxist background now working in complexity theory; Diane Coyle, who has been prominent in leading debates about curriculum reform, albeit in a mainly conservative direction; and Begum Ozkaynak, an ecological economist. Other named contributors include Alvin Birdi (Economics Network) and Andy Ross (ex-Government Economic Service), both of whom were on the SBSE review panel; 'Nobel' Prize winners Joseph Stiglitz and Robert Solow; IMF macroeconomist Olivier Blanchard; critical economists Juliet Schor, Alan Kirman and Bob Rowthorn; and even critics of CORE such as Maeve Cohen (PCES). The composition of the group is worth highlighting because it may point to the likely

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<sup>3</sup> Strictly, CORE is a global project running in several continents. However, we refer to it as a UK reform because the UK is its base and home to key pilot schemes.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.core-econ.org/> (Accessed 13 December 2016, 20:33)

character of its product. Indeed, notionally it suggests a relatively open group, with scope for pluralism.

CORE's main objectives appear to have been to update the curriculum and enliven teaching. On the former, it aimed to address the concern that teaching materials were lagging considerably the mainstream research frontier. Thus CORE includes, for example, game theory, which has become an important strand in economic theory. On the latter, CORE also aims to engage students by exploring relevant topics and deploying much more real world data. Even its critics admit that it does so (PCES, 2014). In some of the implementations of CORE, there is evidence that students enjoy it. At University College, London, for example, first year students are asked to create a three-minute media piece on the theme of capitalism, growth and inequality<sup>5</sup>.

CORE makes extensive use of evidence (FT, 2014) as demanded by many (Joffe, 2014). It employs historical (and experimental) data and draws on the history of economics, again meeting the demand of a number of commentators (see contributions in Coyle, 2012). For example, its first module is 'The Capitalist revolution'. This is significant for several reasons: typically economics courses and texts begin with supply and demand analysis (which in CORE is not addressed until module 8); and it uses the term 'capitalism', albeit discussed only limitedly.

CORE also aims to offer greater breadth of topics than is typically provided (Carlin, in FT 2014); and indeed, again it seems to do so. Of particular note is its consideration of inequality. In module 1, it is stated that: "There is great variation across countries in their success in raising incomes, and in the degree of inequality in living standards within them". There is further acknowledgement that "differences in wealth, education, ethnic group and gender *as well as luck* are major sources of inequality" (emphasis added); and that "...inequalities may provide incentives for hard work and risk-taking, they may also incur costs that impair economic performance". Perhaps most significantly, the material states that "Economic disparities are mostly a matter of where you are born and who your parents are", a message which is controversial; and it admits to a number of explanations of inequality. All of this supports the view that CORE represents a shift, in pedagogy and in epistemology: the topics deliberately create doubt and express uncertainty on the part of economists. Such an impression is bolstered by other key statements, such as "Economic actors as both self-interested and ethical", which appears a departure from standard treatments, not least in admitting a normative element.

Thus far, CORE appears to answer the call for a revamped Economics curriculum: its materials embody recent research activity, and are designed and presented in ways which *prima facie* encourage engagement. However, CORE has attracted criticism, to which we add.

Many assessments of CORE claim it eschews pluralism. As PCES (2015, p. 17) puts it: "Whilst there is some discussion of whether or not *homo œconomicus* is plausible and some short and underdeveloped references and insights from other thinkers, CORE still

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.core-econ.org/putting-core-to-work-ucls-first-year-challenge/> (Accessed 13 December 2016, 20:33)

only teaches students one way of doing economics.” This perspective is bolstered by criticisms of CORE’s treatment of history: it seems to take a Whiggish view, in which past mistakes have been corrected in arriving at the current state of Economics, and in which great past economists are put ‘in boxes’ (Yang, 2015) and treated as ‘intellectual fossils’ (Chang, 2015). The live research programmes emanating from *inter alia* Marx and Veblen are not acknowledged. The critical perspectives, such as feminist economics, which CORE appeared to embrace, instead have been ignored. Indeed Carlin admits CORE lacks pluralism, which she associates with history of economic thought (Financial Times, 2014).

Also, doubt is cast on CORE’s alleged greater epistemological caution and vaunted use of evidence. First: as does the QAAHE (2000, 2007a, 2015), CORE seeks to define economics; specifically as “the study of how people interact with each other, and with the natural environment, in producing their livelihoods” (Module 1). Further it makes bold claims such as that “Firms do not pay the lowest wages possible” (Module 6). Second, if evidence is so important, it begs the question why so many concepts unsupported (or refuted) by evidence remain so prominent in CORE. Exogenous money supply, utility maximisation (PCES, 2015) and the U-shaped average cost curve (Joffe, 2014) all lack empirical support and yet remain key elements in CORE. In the latter two cases, their retention is predictable, given their prominence in the mainstream canon; yet an approach genuinely driven by evidence would at least suggest that all of them are at least questioned; it would discuss seriously whether they be ditched as convenient fictions. More fundamentally, the foci of CORE seem to be data handling skills, data analysis, and modeling techniques. We find limited meaningful engagement with evidence as a source of open-ended enquiry.

These criticisms suggest significant limitations of CORE educationally. The emphasis on learning a single perspective, and a limited engagement with open, critical enquiry are hallmarks of instrumental education: one which stresses facts, knowledge and skills. Arguably, as Morgan (2014) note, its approach to learning is that of ‘point, click, confirm’. CORE reveals snapshots or anecdotes, without engaging with underlying disagreements and insights. CORE suggests that new issues are being addressed, but there is little evidence that this is done meaningfully. Recognising something is not equivalent to engaging with it. That in turn reflects a fundamental lack of concern for critical engagement or debate. Whilst CORE juxtaposes some alternatives, it does not appear to recognise that juxtaposing material does not render it commensurable. Furthermore, the lack of commensurability of approaches or insights is never mentioned in any meaningful way.

Using the term ‘capitalism’ may be better than eschewing it, but how this is done is crucial. There appears no attempt within CORE to examine capitalism, which might lead students into a critical discussion of it. That may reflect a particular socio-political position of CORE. Whilst it acknowledges the existence of institutions, power and conflicts in society (cf. CORE, 2015, Module 5) it maintains Pareto efficiency and market solutions as the standard, which implies the adoption of the normative biases of liberal economics (Myrdal, 1930). Social interactions and dilemmas are seen as a closed, binary system of self-interests in which game theory embodies all the necessary information (CORE, 2015, Module 4). Indeed, CORE fails to fully acknowledge the diversity of political, ethical or normative options open to economists.



Overall, given that in teaching, educational goals are crucial, it is important to understand the objectives CORE has. Unfortunately these are opaque: we can find no explicit statement of educational purpose in the main CORE materials. The limited evidence available suggests a mainly instrumental approach. For example, it is stated that “CORE is empirically motivated and illustrated: students *learn models* motivated by *facts* from history, experiments and data”, such as DSGE Models (CORE, 2014<sup>6</sup>; emphasis added). We can infer more from critics of CORE, such as PCES (2015), which contrasts it to liberal education.

Such concerns reinforce the criticisms from an educational perspective that CORE is primarily aimed at training economists according to specific paradigmatic principles, rather than being directed towards genuinely open-ended educational outcomes. CORE may represent an improvement in some respects, but also seems a missed opportunity. It is these concerns that may motivate criticism from Rethinking Economics, and the Young Scholars Initiative, student groups set up and funded by INET, which have become critical of CORE and have supported efforts to implement more fundamental changes.

#### 4. The Subject Benchmark Statement in Economics

The QAAHE for the UK has a remit to assure quality in higher education institutions, which it carries out in a number of ways. One such way is via Subject Benchmark Statements, which provide a context and a set of guidelines for the delivery of degree programmes. There is a set of SBSs, which share similarities but also exhibit variation. These variations are sometimes significant, as will be shown below. Our present task is to analyse the SBS for Economics (SBSE). We will assess the most recent draft of the SBSE (published July 2015) in terms of our evaluative criteria.

The SBSE is written by a panel. Significantly, the composition of the 2015 panel was broader than in previous incarnations. Notably, the panel resembles the CORE group in many aspects. Alongside mainstream academic economists were various other constituencies, including specific educational expertise (Alvin Birdi, Economics Network director) and non-mainstream experts in finance, Daniela Gabor (UWE, Bristol) and Neil Lancaster (De Montfort). The impact of the latter two is evident through greater emphasis on finance and money; and critical thinking. Lancaster also linked formally to several students from the critical *Rethinking Economics* group who were present. Bringing the perspective of the UK's largest employer of economists was the former deputy director of the Government Economic Service, Andy Ross. His impact is evident via a new paragraph on employers' needs. Overall, this new panel brought the potential for a radically different document. In particular, they augured greater pluralism and an epistemological shift.

##### 4.1 Approach to economics

There is no agreement about how dogmatic the SBSE is, or has been. In many respects it appears quite benign. Even the arch-critic of economic orthodoxy, Frederic Lee,

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<sup>6</sup> CORE: [www.core-econ.org/about-our-ebook/](http://www.core-econ.org/about-our-ebook/) (Accessed at 16:57 on 18 January 2016)

commenting on a draft of QAAHE (2000), recognized this. He described the document as “somewhat neutral--but not entirely”. He noted that the document stresses scarcity. As Lee pointed out, “[i]n heterodox economics based on the surplus approach, scarce resources do not exist. In addition, the aim of economics from a heterodox perspective is far broader than the neoclassical view--it can include class conflict, power, institutions, gender, social provisioning as well as many others” (Lee, 2000). Admittedly, in the 2015 incarnation the word ‘scarcity’ has been removed in an early section (from section 1.1 in QAAHE 2000). However, the stress on scarcity remains: 5.5i places ‘opportunity cost and scarcity’ first in a list of transferable concepts.

Whilst the stress on scarcity is an example of how the SBSE is based on the perspective of one specific paradigm, this claim is demonstrated best by examining its attempt to outline the nature of economics. The SBSE claims that economics has a “distinctive nature” (1.1, p. 05). Further, it states (2.1, p. 05):

“Economics is the study of the factors that influence income, wealth and well-being. From this it seeks to inform the design and implementation of economic policy. Its aim is to analyse and understand the allocation, distribution and utilisation of resources and the consequences for economic and social well-being. Economics is concerned with such phenomena in the past and present and how they may evolve in the future”.

This could be regarded as relatively benign. Most economists might agree that economics concerns those factors and topics, notwithstanding disagreement about the importance of allocation (to some economists) and distribution (to others). An element of dogmatism in Economics is revealed when comparing it to other disciplines. For example, Freeman (2009) juxtaposes the SBSE with its counterpart for Theology and Religious Studies (TRS), which one might expect to be more prone to dogma. In fact, TRS appears much less certain about its purpose and identity:

“TRS as a subject discipline *may be* characterised as a *family of methods, disciplines and fields* of study, clustered around the investigation both of the phenomena of religions and belief systems in general, and of particular religious traditions, texts, practices, societies, art and archaeology. *Most would identify* within this the unifying principle of addressing questions raised about, within or between religions through a range of different academic disciplines. *Some would emphasise* the unifying focus that comes from studying particular religious traditions and/or texts as coherent systems with their own integrity. *Some would affirm* as a core the intention of raising questions of meaning and truth, beauty and value.” (QAAHE, 2007b, p. 05, emphasis added)

Burawoy (2015, p. 11) provides a good example of how economists often tend to explore only one dimension of complex socio-economic issues, such as inequality. For instance, Thomas Piketty’s analysis on inequality only accounts for data drawn from taxation records, concerns with the endogenous effects of the market and the focus on mainly rich countries<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> For a constructively critical assessment of Piketty’s work, see Pressman (2015).

Piketty (...) offers solutions that revolve around taxing the rich and super-rich but from where will the political will for such taxation come? He has no theory of politics, no theory of the state, no theory of social movements, no theory of culture and above all, no theory of capitalism. He has a formula for increasing inequality but the factors behind the variables (rates of return on capital and economic growth) are left unexplained. (Burawoy 2015, p. 12)

Taking the case of inequality as our example, whilst sociology focuses on the complexity of marketization processes and the possibilities and consequences of exclusion, conventional economics provides theories and analyses that are determined to ignore the tendencies of systems towards crises, marginality and insecurity. On the contrary, it actually reinforces a one-sided belief in the virtues of markets by abstracting the concrete role of social elements, such as capital<sup>4</sup>.

Even against this apparently monist backdrop, though, the SBSE always contained seeds of change for more pluralist economics, both in terms of theory and method; however, this potential was weak and contradicted by other elements of the same document. Indeed, the SBSEs in 2000 and 2007 both made explicit reference to a 'core' of principles. Lee (2000) highlighted scarcity (see above), opportunity cost, equilibrium, and marginal considerations as concepts which were strongly important to mainstream economics, but not necessarily relevant to (strands of) heterodox economics. Lee extends this to method, in which deduction is prioritised over induction. As Clarke and Mearman (2003) noted, there was some pluralism of method in the guideline that students should be able to use "quantitative and qualitative data", to reason "both deductively and inductively" (section 1.3), to "appreciate the existence of different [not necessarily model-based] methodological approaches" (section 3.1) and to recognise "the differing methods of analysis that have been and are used by economists" (section 3.3). However, use of data is not equivalent to exploring evidence genuinely openly.

Nonetheless, we might have predicted that the 2015 SBSE would be radically different from its predecessors, particularly given the presence of employers, students and radical economists on the panel. Largely, though, this prediction was confounded. The most striking thing about the *original* draft of the document was how similar it was to its predecessor. It reads as though there had been no recent recognised problems with economics. (Indeed, arguably the SBSE fails even to capture developments in mainstream research). Despite its role as one of the contributing factors to the economic crisis, finance remained largely ignored. Further, the ecological crisis was still essentially omitted. Despite considerable noise about history there was relatively little about it. As Lancaster (2015) notes "Students are asked to 'appreciate history (of economic thought)' but not to understand it".

Subsequent debate within the group led to the inclusion of more pluralist material. The document now refers to what students would *usually*, rather than *normally* learn (section 4.1). This may reflect an implicit objective to describe rather than prescribe economics. Of further significance was the removal of the term "a coherent core of economic principles" (2007a) (p. 7) in favour of "Economic concepts, principles and tools" (section 4.1i). Reflecting the status of behavioural economics as acceptable heresy, section 5.5ii explicitly notes 'psychological biases' as a key concept. Connected to 'bias', section 5.5vii refers to conflicts of interest; but there is no mention of

economists' potential (and actual) conflicts of interest (cf. Epstein and Carrick-Hagenbarth, 2013).

Section 2.2 contains perhaps the most pluralist injunction within QAAHE (2015): "Various interpretations of commonly observed economic phenomena exist, and hence explanations may be contested. It is therefore important that economic phenomena are studied in their relevant historical, political, institutional, international, social and environmental contexts, including business, and that theories are evidence-based, using quantitative and qualitative data analysis" (p. 5). A previous appeal to 'observational equivalence' was removed, but nonetheless the statement is significant for its openness<sup>8</sup>.

The document takes away as it gives, though. For instance, there remains without justification a relative prominence given to mathematics and computing techniques (section 4.1iii). Arguably, too, the new SBSE implies an adding-up aggregation to the macro level (section 2.2), which again suggests a particular set of ontological presuppositions.

Overall, though, the document appears more pluralist, via small subtle inclusions and removals of content. However, acknowledging pluralism in some circumstances and in minimal ways is not the same as encouraging or facilitating pluralism or stating it as fundamental to free and open enquiry in order to prevent monism from becoming fundamentalism or ideology that is antithetical to science. Next we will discuss how this pluralism might reflect an epistemological shift at least as much as it reflects pluralism *per se*.

#### *4.1.1 An epistemological shift?*

An alternative perspective on the earlier SBSEs was that their main problem was not monism, but overconfidence. The bold definitive claim about the nature, scope and purpose of economics (2007a, section 1.1) discussed above – particularly when contrasted with the TRS benchmark – reflects a particular epistemological stance. Given the weight attributed to the hubris of economists (and their employers in finance) in many explanations of the crisis, some humility was warranted and perhaps expected. One of the effects of the *threat* to credibility suffered by economists might be that this confidence was eroded. For example, as discussed above, it is *claimed* that in CORE uncertainty is introduced partly by confronting students with controversial issues and some unsettled questions. Let us investigate whether the SBSE supports this thesis.

Some support can be found for the hypothesis of an epistemological shift in SBSE. The document now contains many references to the importance of historical context. Recall (from 2.2) that it is "important that economic phenomena are studied in their relevant historical, political, institutional, international, social and environmental contexts" (SBSE p. 5). This is significant because it suggests results are less likely to be universal. Similarly the document's new references to criticality – including in its summary of changes – might be interpreted as representative of greater epistemological caution. Specifically, section 3.1 refers to being critical about the specific assumptions being

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<sup>8</sup> Morgan (2015) is critical of the use of this term in the draft document but his analysis does not extend to the final version, since it was not available at the time of writing.

made in economic modelling. Section 4.1ii now acknowledges that different methods have strengths and weaknesses. Section 5.4iii includes an additional clause emphasising the need for caution about data sources.

Further, "...economists learn not to be misled by numbers or the selective use of data. They question whether the numbers represent what they claim, they understand statistical significance and they are aware of at least some of the difficulties in sampling a population. In addition, with some understanding of econometrics, they recognise that conclusions drawn from data might be ambiguous" (section 5.5, p. 6). This again suggests an epistemological shift. However, as critics of the SBSE have consistently argued, the statement is guilty of important omission and of smuggling in priorities. For instance, it retains a stress on *statistical* significance and makes no acknowledgement of substantive *economic* significance (cf. Ziliak and McCloskey, 2009). Second, while recognition that 'conclusions drawn from data might be ambiguous' is commendable, there is an implicit presumption that data analysis is equated with econometrics. There is no reference in the document to other types of data analysis, even though these are increasingly employed and recognised as useful by economists. As Lancaster (2015<sup>9</sup>) notes, proposed re-wording to encompass qualitative and mixed-methods research were rejected by the SBSE committee.

The SBSE also stresses a dominant role for deductive method. There is some evidence of a shift: whereas in 2007, it was stated that 'economics *is* highly deductive', now the document says the subject "*can be* deductive" (2007a, section 5.3, p. 04). What this means is not clear. Is it an injunction or a description? It is clear, indeed, that economics is often highly deductive. What passes for the best published work is often classified as highly abstract, mathematical deductive theorising. Admittedly, the document does then say that economics is also inductive. There is no sense in which these two interact, or that there are other forms of logic such as intuition or retroduction which some economists practice. The changes to the SBSE appear to be a compromise without any particular underlying rationale.

Other statements undermine further the sense of an epistemological shift. While there is greater awareness that economics is under external scrutiny – for instance its opening statements refer to its audience – humility is limited. As already discussed there is still a very clear sense of what economics is (section 2.1), and that it has a "distinctive nature" – its boundaries are still clear enough to make this claim – or at least, economists' abilities remain sufficient to identify correctly the boundaries. This allows one to continue to delineate strictly what is economic (and what is not). Further, the continued (false) claim that skills like abstraction are specific to economics (section 2.5) buttresses this point. This reflects an age-old concern about economists from the perspective of other disciplines: that economists presume to know best. The claim that "economics is a major social science..." (section 2.3, p. 05) might reinforce that image. Talk of working in an interdisciplinary way is therefore undermined.

Overall, as with CORE, proponents of the SBSE might claim the new document represents a gradual epistemological shift, in which older claims are presented more

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<sup>9</sup> <http://lancaster.blogspot.co.uk/2015/01/its-out-proposals-to-revise-uk.html>  
(Accessed at 10:11 on 20 November 2015).

cautiously. Indeed, there is some evidence for this. The committee which drew up the document looks rather different than earlier incarnations, and this may have had some effect. They argue (in private) that a gradualist approach was necessary so as not to alienate members of the discipline. However, the changes of language may be so subtle as to be lost; and indeed other bolder statements contradict them, such as to undermine the epistemological shift they might convey.

#### *4.2 Underlying educational philosophy*

A criticism of economics educators is that they have shown insufficient concern for, and certainly little explicit recognition of, educational philosophy (Clarke and Mearman, 2001, *et passim*). We have already argued that CORE avoids explicit discussion of educational goals whilst implicitly adopting an instrumentalist stance. Overall, we would argue that 1) educational goals appear secondary to a concern for economics-specific goals; 2) the document's explicit discussion of educational goals, where it can be found, is confused; and 3) there is an implicit instrumentalism underlying the SBSE.

The educationalist Peters (1970, p. 28) argues that an examination of educational aims must precede any discussion of curriculum content, as "a way of getting people to get clear about and focus their attention on what is worth while achieving". In contrast, in the SBSE, the aims section (section 3) *follows* a discussion of the nature of economics. To paraphrase Keynes on Tinbergen's use of statistical correlation (cf. Keynes, CW XIV, 2013b, p. 299-300), the QAA committee was too keen to get on with the job of curriculum design without asking what job they were trying to do, and whether it was worth doing.

Second, whilst there seems to be a commitment to the development of students' skills, there is misunderstanding about these skills. Specifically, there appears to be confusion between subject-specific and transferable skills. The SBSE identifies four key subject-specific skills: abstraction, framing, reasoning and quantification. It is clear that none of these is either specific to economics, or derived from it. Also, the particular treatments of abstraction and framing suggest a narrowing of the subject; specifically, economics degrees aim to furnish students with the skill "to place the economic problem in its broader social and political context" (p. 9) as if they are separable.

The impression of confusion is reinforced by the SBSE's use of the notion of 'transferable skills'. At this point (section x.x), the document identifies *inter alia* opportunity cost, incentives, expectations, equilibrium and marginal analysis as transferable. On the contrary, these are clearly subject-specific – and indeed draw on one economic paradigm – which the document partly recognizes by using the phrase 'transferable application of economic concepts' (section 5.5). The document claims that "[s]tudents in economics are exposed to these issues and this enhances their potential effectiveness as decision-makers" (p. 9). Section 5.5 repeatedly asserts that the economist's ability to apply these concepts is essential to his/her value. The muddle is further evident by the fact that while quantification is regarded as a subject-specific skill, section 5.6 identifies 'numeracy' as a transferable facet.

Beyond this, it seems clear that the *implicit* educational philosophy of the document is instrumental. This can be inferred from statements within the document, and omissions

from it. Let us examine the stated aims of the SBSE. These aims are mainly instrumental. Section 3.1 begins with a statement that economics degrees are about “education and training in economic concepts, theories, ideas and tools, and their application” (p. 6). However, this is the only use of the word ‘education’ in the document, whereas training appears four times. Indeed, the word education was absent in 2000, 2007 and the first draft of the 2015 document, only being inserted after critical discussion within the group. This reinforces the impression that the SBSE – and hence economics curricula – aims merely at training students in economics.

The remainder of the aims section is concerned with “stimulat[ing] students intellectually” (p. 6), then about ‘knowledge’, ‘skills’, ‘tools’, understanding and the ability of students to apply these. Clarke and Mearman’s (2003, pp. 5-6) earlier analysis suggested that the 2000 SBSE reflected a combination of liberal and instrumental approaches because the aims to stimulate students and “provide students with analytical skills” (p. 6) seemed to echo the liberal goal of developing ‘analytical’ capacities. On reflection, though, their assessment may have been generous, since the implicit presupposition of the SBSE is that economics education is about learning economic concepts and tools of analysis (see section 3.1 in particular) rather than the development of the whole person, the citizen, or the critical thinker.

As discussed in the preceding sections, the SBSE retains a relative dogmatism about the nature and content of economics (cf. QAAHE, 2007a). They appear relatively prone to defining problems and ways of considering them in narrow ways (cf. Burawoy’s (2015) critique above). A stress remains on assessing particular types of evidence using particular tools, and these are geared towards proficiency in data handling rather than genuine deep, critical engagement with evidence. All of this is underpinned by a lack of genuine uncertainty in knowledge about economies. The SBSE (as does CORE) makes gestures towards a different vision, but does so in tokenistic and superficial ways. Hence, the possibilities for pluralist critical thinking are lost. All of this runs contrary to liberal and critical education and buttresses the impression of instrumentalism.

The instrumentalism of the document is reinforced in its increased focus on employability. Employability has always been present. As Clarke and Mearman (2003) note, section 1.2 of the 2000 document stressed it. The addition of section 5.2 to the 2015 document, largely introduced by Andy Ross, is significant. The section stresses many prosaic skills such as report writing and communication; but also “knowledge of economic history and its context...pluralistic perspectives and interdisciplinary synthesis, to inform an application of critical judgement” (p. 9). This section again contains the potential for a pluralist, liberal approach to economics education – but one which also has instrumental benefits to employers and society at large. However, the section exemplifies the document’s confusion about goals because it unknowingly conflates ‘liberal’ and ‘instrumental’ objectives.

## **5. Discussion**

The main goal of this paper is to offer a critique of recent attempts at curriculum reform in Economics. These are summarised in Table 1 below. Overall: both CORE and QAAHE (2015) reflect and inculcate modes of thought that are monistic and cement the mainstream. This mainstream does, of course, contain some diversity; but this diversity

essentially excludes the 'heterodox', where these perspectives might enter, for example, through the history of economic thought. In both cases, critics are co-opted, but there is no injunction to engage meaningfully with them. Rather than send a strong signal that "we are all pluralists now" (Lancastle, 2015), both CORE and QAA fail to offer firm grounds for being so.

Both frameworks even seem to be dogmatic in different ways. CORE's very name appears an attempt to redefine a core of economics, albeit one which is somewhat broader than before. Moreover, CORE constructs a set of materials which are designed to be adopted easily and relatively costlessly. This in itself creates disincentives to innovate. Meanwhile, the SBSE acts otherwise. It appears to represent a shift towards a more descriptive tone instead of having a prescriptive purpose. Rather than making claims about what economics should do, it merely describes the discipline. It presents a core, or "mainstream", which fits the majority of the discipline; but it also allows some room for heretics or blasphemers.

However, of course one can use description to be dogmatic. By defining what is 'normal' one can attempt to exclude. Insults against heterodoxers that their work is not economics, or worse, *mere sociology*, serve to confer status on some and opprobrium on others. Whereas prescription works via fiat, description works via norms, conventions, and other subtle forms of power. Lee's (2011) categorisation of dissenting economics into heretics and blasphemers is pertinent here. More broadly, Foucault's (1978, 1989, 1995) work on sexuality, mental illness and criminality demonstrate how other forms of social knowledge act as instruments to normalise specific behaviours and conducts.

Another rationale for descriptivism is if the fiat effect is weak. In the case of the SBSE, its power is limited by a number of factors. Its preamble stresses that it has advisory and informative purposes and is not intended as a dogmatic framework akin to a national curriculum (which is explicitly proscribed). The document is clear that decision-making power on curricula resides at the local level. Specifically, SBSs are "*reference points* in the design, delivery and review of academic programmes...[which] provide *general guidance* for articulating the learning outcomes associated with the programme...[and] *allow* for flexibility and innovation in programme design within a framework *agreed by the subject community*" (p. 2, emphasis added). This begins to suggest that the power of the SBSE is small.

The SBSE provides a permissive framework but essentially what gets taught in departments will reflect to some extent the desires of the staff within them (see Clarke and Mearman, 2003). However, the composition of staffing is driven mainly not by teaching but by research. Lee et al. (2013, p. 714) show that research assessment has biased hires in UK departments towards mainstream mathematical modelling and thereby narrowed theoretical pluralism therein. Thus, it is less likely that intellectual history, methodology or a pluralist approach to those things will take root. So there are institutional constraints (and enablements) on the governmental, legislative, disciplinary and local levels acting on academics who construct curricula or courses. Not least there are promotion routes and criteria which also have effects. Against this backdrop, the SBSE document remains a "toothless old dog" (QAA panel member, private) likely to be overridden.



We have also examined whether there has been an epistemological shift in Economics curricula. Our conclusion is that there has been no appreciable change. There seems to be no reduced confidence in economists to make claims about how the economy works, or how one would know this. This inertia reinforces the theoretical and methodological monism within the discipline.

In terms of curriculum design, this monism about economics is not necessarily a barrier to pluralist curricula. It is perfectly possible to be strongly committed to a particular approach to doing economics but teach in an open, pluralist way. However, this shift requires a change in mindset. That change could be inspired by engagement with educational philosophy and the recognition of its importance to teaching. As Bertrand Russell states: “Before considering how to educate, it is well to be clear as to the sort of result which we wish to achieve” (1992, p. 413). So, for example, a commitment to liberal educational philosophy could militate against teaching Economics in a monist way.

Unfortunately, overall in CORE and the SBSE educational philosophy is merely implicit and is essentially explicitly ignored. Further, to the extent that an educational philosophy is present, it seems in both cases to be driven by instrumental concerns of learning specific content, training and preparation for employment. This approach to philosophy serves to bolster the monism of Economics education. The apparent reform initiatives are concerned with training students and the development of specific skills rather than creating well-informed and socio-politically aware economists.

### **Table 1: Summary**

-----PLACE TABLE 1 HERE-----

#### *5.1 The Brazilian system*

The critique of these UK curriculum (non-)reforms is reinforced when considered in brief comparison with a more pluralist, liberal and progressive Economics curriculum as exists in Brazil. The Brazilian system is underpinned by a commitment to pluralist economics; a clear approach to educational goals, specifically a liberal/critical perspective; and a recognition of the socio-political dimension of economics and education. Another crucial difference is that from relatively early in the history of the subject there, Brazil has had a formal mandated structure for Economics degree programmes from its Ministry of Education. This framework does not capture the entire diet of Brazilian programmes, as there are some private Brazilian institutions which lay outside this framework. However it captures the great majority. It is likely therefore to have greater practical impact than either CORE or the SBSE.

The most recent benchmark statement was implemented in July, 2007<sup>10</sup> after ten years of discussion between the Ministry of Education, the National Association of Economics

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<sup>10</sup> The Brazilian Ministry of Education instituted the 04/2007 Resolution on 13 July, 2007, based on the previous discussions and definitions established in the Educational Guidelines n.95/2007 by the National Council of Education (“Parecer CNE/CES n. 95/2007”).

Graduate Courses (ANGE) and other associations involved in teaching and regulating the economist profession: the Society of Political Economy (SEP); the National Association of Centres for Postgraduate Economics (ANPEC); and the professional regional councils (COFECONs/CORECONs). The Ministry of Education instituted Resolution 04/2007, updating the pedagogical project of Economics undergraduate degrees and focusing on the peculiarities that higher education institutions – private and public – should follow. The Resolution addresses six main curricular guidelines: (1) *basic educational principles*; (2) *desired profile of the Bachelor*; (3) *political-pedagogical project*; (4) *assessments system*; (5) *total course load* and (6) *curricular content* (cf. MEC, Resolução 04/2007, pp. 01-03). These are much wider-ranging than either CORE or SBSE and address explicitly educational and political philosophy.

It is worth stating in full the basic educational principles of Resolution 04/2007, which were previously established in the 1984 version (cf. Resolução 11/84):

I – A commitment to the study of the Brazilian reality without impairing a solid theoretical, historical and instrumental education;

II – Methodological pluralism in coherence with the plural character of economic science, which is constituted by different schools of thought and paradigms;

III – Emphasis on the interrelations between the economic phenomena and society;

IV – Emphasis on fostering ethical attitudes and reasoning, which are crucial to professionalism and social responsibility. (Resolução 04/2007, p. 02, our translation)

These principles identify several key themes, most strikingly including a commitment to realism (I) and pluralism (II). Clause II recognizes the theoretical complexity of Economics and its plural character, emphasising that universities must follow a pluralist approach in their curricula. Further, clause III suggests an inherently interdisciplinary approach to Economics. Clause IV recognises an ethical dimension largely absent from (CORE or) the SBSE. Indeed, the demands for pluralism and realism heard from UK (and other) students would be unnecessary if the Brazilian guidelines for Economics curricula were implemented.

Clause I explicitly considers educational goals in a way that the UK frameworks do not. Moreover, Item 2 of the 2007 Resolution outlined the desired profile of Economics graduates, referring to “a capacity [of the Economics graduate] to assimilate and comprehend new information, intellectual flexibility and adaptability, as well as a solid social conscience” and “a broad cultural base that allows the understanding of economic issues in its historical-social context” (Resolução 04/2007, p. 02, our translation). This statement suggests an orientation towards both a *liberal* and a *critical* perspective of education, mainly influenced by Freire’s (1970, pp. 96-97) pedagogical project of the awakening of critical consciousness through investigation. It acknowledges the socio-political dimension of economics, including ethics, culture and a social conscience as characteristics of a critical and free economist.

Consequently, there is a key difference in the type of student these three systems produce. As Morgan (2014, p. 16) correctly observes, there is a crucial difference between being *trained* and being *informed*. Whilst a *trained* student brings relevant skills to the workplace and demonstrates technical proficiency – which seems to be both CORE and QAA’s objectives – an *informed* student is one who is empowered to understand the wider spectrum of economics discourse and its relevance to politics, enabling him/her as citizen of a democracy. The Brazilian system goes in this second direction once it acknowledges its critical educational goals.

Collectively these principles also point to the explicit recognition of a political dimension. This is largely absent from CORE or the SBSE. Therein, consistent with the mainstream maintenance of ‘positive economics’, the fact/value distinction is maintained; however, at least in CORE there is some acknowledgement that the moral-political dimension is present. Overall, in contrast to the Brazilian system, both UK frameworks continue the longstanding tradition of the economics profession to disguise its political norms as science.

Overall, Brazil’s pluralist and progressive system appears in stark contrast with the UK architectures. The Brazilian schema provides tighter guidelines for the provision of Economics, and hence the outcomes of the Resolution are less contingent. For instance, the Resolution stipulates time allocated for different activities within the teaching programme. At least thirty per cent of the minimum module requirements involve historical, philosophical or social training. There is relatively greater opportunity within this framework for students to take scientific methodology and research methods courses before doing their own research. Moreover, only twenty per cent of the minimum module requirements are explicitly set aside for ‘theoretical-quantitative training’, which includes advanced topics in *inter alia* mathematics, statistics, and econometrics, but also political economy and socio-economic development.

Nevertheless, the Brazilian system has been criticized for exhibiting weaknesses in the area of technical knowledge. In an attempt to respond to the pressures from business, marketing and financial sectors to make students more employable and economically literate, some Economics curricula focus more on technical and mathematical skills and market-centered theory. For instance, private universities such as the FGV/São Paulo School of Economics offer an Economic Sciences curriculum in which economists should be as prepared as accountants and engineers. “(...) the professional who is a bachelor in Economics shall substantially master the concepts and analytical tools in Economics, have as much quantitative formation as an engineer, know how to ‘do accounts’, have a humanistic and ethical formation to figure out the global context and know how to relate to people.” (FGV/EESP Undergraduate in Economics: Target Audience, 2015). Needless to say, concerns for their future employability result in students’ demands for more applied and technical forms of teaching Economics, including business and financial analysis.

Moreover, Brazil’s institutional efforts to produce high-quality economic knowledge and research led to structural differences between undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Highly ranked universities, such as the University of São Paulo (USP) and the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-RJ) have a strictly mainstream

curriculum in their Masters and PhD levels<sup>11</sup> (Mathematics, Econometrics, Neoclassical Micro- and Macroeconomics). Just like in the UK this is a system of knowledge production aimed at highly ranked journals dedicated to orthodox economic modelling and neoclassical axiomatic assumptions.

This system is reinforced by the necessity of funding, which mainly relies on the quantity and quality of academic publications. The Capes Research Foundation and the Brazilian Ministry of Education use their own journal ranking procedure, *Qualis Capes* (similar to UK's ABS Guide) to measure the quality of academic publications. Paradoxically, the *Qualis* lends more weight into mainstream-guided journals with Anglo-Saxon origins instead of prioritizing more plural and regional-oriented academic publications (Carneiro, 2011, p. 01). The Brazilian framework actually suggests that those universities that accomplish "mainstream" publications will receive more research funding, which goes against its main principle of a liberal, critical and progressive teaching.

## 6. Conclusions

The 2007/8 economic crisis was also one for the economics profession. It presented a moment of opportunity for the discipline to institute significant changes to its practice, including its approach to teaching. Here we have explored two curriculum reform initiatives within the UK, which were opportunities for significant change. However, we have shown that the CORE framework and the new regulatory document QAAHE (2015) both represent a failure in this regard. In the perspective of our multi-criteria evaluative framework they appear as cases of "business-as-usual" because they continue to exhibit limited pluralism, either in terms of openness to fundamentally different alternatives, or to the possibility that they might be wrong. In the sphere of research this may not be a problem; however, in teaching it is a significant deficiency as it limits the development of core cognitive faculties and achievement of key educational goals. Nonetheless the deficiency could be mitigated if CORE and the SBSE paid explicit attention to educational philosophy. Unfortunately, our analysis suggests that they pay scant *explicit* attention to the educational purpose. This is a fundamental problem: "Instructors simply function in a fog of their own making unless they know what they want their students to accomplish as a result of their instruction" (Mager quoted by Curzon, 1990, p. 131). These are serious failures, particularly given the economic events that inspired calls for action on the curriculum.

The case of Brazil shows that there is an effective alternative to these UK approaches that is thoroughly founded on pluralist principles and critical pedagogy. Therefore, we propose that the UK system adopt the foundational facets of the Brazilian system outlined above. Instead, however, the Brazilian approach is being undermined by the same forces which dog the UK, such as the stress on mainstream content, which is relatively emphasised in graduate qualification assessment; and research assessment,

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<sup>11</sup> The list of Postgraduate course requirements from these universities can be accessed at: <http://www.portalfea.fea.usp.br/economia/pos-graduacao/disciplinas?area=12138> (University of São Paulo's Postgraduate Programme in Economic Theory) and <http://www.econ.puc-rio.br/index.php/categoria/posgraduacao> (Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro's Postgraduate Programme in Economics).

which emphasises mainstream Anglo-US journals (Carneiro, 2011, p. 1). These structures jeopardise the pluralist nature of the Brazilian structure, particularly at postgraduate level. Such pressures are being increased in the light of political change in Brazil, which is threatening their liberal, critical approach further.

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**Table 1: Summary**

	<b>Approach to economics</b>	<b>Educational philosophy</b>	<b>Political dimension</b>
CORE	Monist mainstream	Secondary to economic; and Instrumentalist	Cursorily acknowledged
SBSE	Monist mainstream	Secondary to economic; and Instrumentalist	Not admitted
Brazilian system	Pluralist	Liberal; Critical	Progressive and Integral



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