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## Secular Authority: Economists in Irish Public Discourse

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*Secular Authority: Economists in Irish Public Discourse*

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores how the authority of Economics Experts has developed over time in Ireland. The identity of 'expert' serves as a powerful authority device for an individual's discourse (Montgomery 2008). Although the definition of who is considered an expert has become broader and more inclusive (Collins and Evans 2007), the authority derived from the label of expert is usually reserved for Contributory Experts (Collins, Evans, and Weinel 2016). This authority has traditionally allowed such experts to engage with society from a position of authority and prestige that is not afforded to other societal actors. Such authority has been acknowledged of economists, whose discourse appears to have an assumed legitimacy (Maesse 2015). Theoretically, this research draws from a number of areas including work on the identity of experts in general (Montgomery, 2008) on economics experts in particular (Maesse, 2015), professionalization both generally (Macdonald, 1995) and of economics in particular (Fourcade, 2009). The Irish context is of interest more generally it was a prominent crisis, yet speedily recovering country in the Eurozone crisis, is a small peripheral state and is a site of confluence between Anglo-American and European influences. Its close relationships with both the UK and the United States are particularly interesting for an examination of the relationships between national and international influences on economists in a society.

## 1. Introduction

This research seeks to explain, by looking at the longer term development of the economics profession in Ireland, the enduring nature of prominence of economics in public discourse in Ireland. We open with a look at some of the theoretical researches we use to interpret the Irish profession's development. We then use those resources to examine in turn Irish economics and the various Orders, particularly the Academic and Political Orders, involvement in the development of Irish economics. Sources of information used in these sections on the development of the Irish profession include contemporary works by economists, historical scholar of the various periods involved and interviews with a number of Irish economists carried for the purposes of this research. We finish with a short conclusions and discussions section.

## 2. Theoretical Understandings of Economics Expertise in Society

Theoretically, this research draws from a number of areas including work on the identity of experts in general (Collins and Evans, 2007; Montgomery, 2008) and economics experts in particular (Maesse, 2015), professionalization both generally (Macdonald, 1995) and of economics (Fourcade, 2009; Lebaron, 2001; Mirowski, 1991).

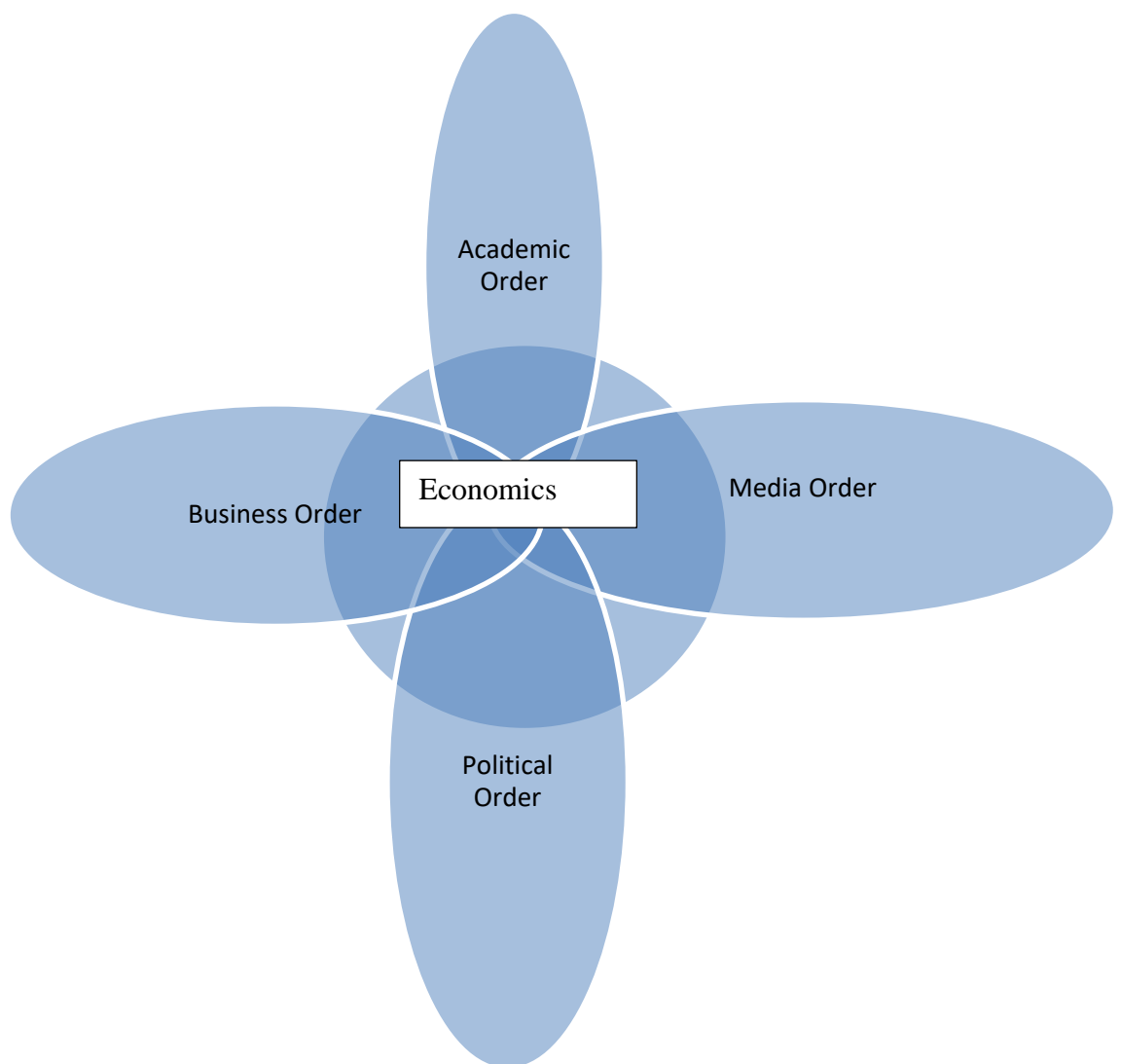
This theoretical framework will facilitate an investigation if how the economics profession has established itself as the expert on the economy, and the nature of this expertise. It will do this through an exploration of the four 'Orders' ('Worlds' in Maesse, 2015) that are outlined as 'Academic Order', 'Media Order', 'Business Order', and 'Political Order'. Although these Orders are distinct, they are highly interconnected, with economists able to use the capital accrued in one Order to support discourse in another Order. The 'Academic Order' focusses on the formalising of economics with academia, and the symbolic capital that the profession has accrued from this. Economics is an academically organised form of knowledge, and thus an understanding of how the academic system of economics is structured is necessary to understand the knowledge production within economics (Fourcade, 2009). The 'Political Order' will focus on the relationship between economics and politics, and how economics has become incorporated into policy making and policy advice. This framework outlines the importance of academic capital to this incorporation, and how the political Order uses

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Please note this is a working paper and corrections and general feedback is most appreciated by the authors

economists. The ‘Business Order’ focusses on the how the development of the profession has been shaped by its relationship with business. The ‘Media Order’ focusses on how the profession can use its accrued capital from the other Orders to support its discourse through such societal engagement. Therefore, this framework provides a useful basis to explore the Irish economics.

**Figure 1: Theoretical Framework**



**Source: Adapted from the literature particularly Maesse (2015) and Fourcade (2009).**



### 3. Economics and the Academic Order, particularized to Ireland.

#### 3.1 The development of economics in Ireland as part of the United Kingdom

Economics began to be seen as distinct when it attained a new level of formality in the generalist learned societies of the mid-eighteenth century (Augello and Guidi 2001:6). At that time, the public perception of political economy was that, although it was thought to be important for understanding the world, it was not considered specialist knowledge in the vein of medicine or the law (Tribe 2001:36). This was also the position held within academia (Fourcade 2009:237), which, at that time, had yet to formalise the study of most social sciences. The generalist societies, important venues for early political economists, were held in high esteem, and recognised them as ‘an important tool for economic progress, above all through the dissemination of knowledge and encouragement of innovations’ (Augello and Guidi 2001:7). In Ireland, there were two early generalist societies. The first was The Dublin Society for Improving Husbandry, Manufactures, and other Useful Arts in 1731 (Augello and Guidi 2001:6), which would later be known as the Royal Dublin Society (RDS), and the second was the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) in 1785 (O’Conor 1949).

More dedicated economics societies began to emerge internationally in the nineteenth century (Augello and Guidi 2001:1). The first societies that explicitly considered political economy as a stated focus, tasked themselves with spreading the tenets of economic policy that the likes of Adam Smith and David Ricardo had expounded (Augello and Guidi 2001:8). Amongst the earliest of these societies internationally was the Political Economy Club (PEC), founded in London in 1821 (Tribe 2001:32), and whose membership was restricted to the British elites (Fourcade 2009:238). Although the Paris Societe d’Economie Politique would go on to become the most influential society for subsequent societies across Europe (Augello and Guidi 2001:8), the PEC would serve as a greater influence in Ireland, due to Ireland forming part of the UK at that time. Amongst the early members of the PEC were the Whately Professor at Trinity College Dublin, and Professors in Political Economy at Queen’s Colleges of Ireland, which were located in Belfast, Cork, and Galway (Fonseca n.d.). In these formative years, the PEC had a general membership that was dominated by the elite class, such as politicians and businessmen. Given that academic institutionalisation of the discipline was still in its infancy when the PEC was founded, the economics training of many of its members was informal at

best (Tribe 2001:33). Although membership was exclusionary, it was exclusionary based on social class rather than on academic credentials (Fourcade 2009:238).

In 1831, the British Association for the Advancement of Science would provide a more dedicated venue for scientific discussion for statistics in 1833, and for political economy in 1856, both of which would facilitate ‘a more public forum for the discussion of practical and theoretical issues connected with political economy’ (Tribe 2001:33). Parallels in Ireland to the formalised political economy position within the British Association were seen in the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland (SSISI), founded in 1847, and soon established itself as a prominent society in Ireland. Although it held a purview broader than political economy, this discipline would be a core focus of SSISI from its establishment. SSISI’s Barrington lectures gave a formalised presence to political economy (Besomi 2008:331) and the details of the lectures governance were testament to the dissemination of an economic discourse that was embedded not in morality but in a political, technical, and practical nature (Augello and Guidi 2001:7; Tribe, 2001:38). These earlier developments were drawing more on the Business Order, than the academic one.

In Ireland, the academic institutionalisation of political economy can be traced back to Trinity College Dublin (TCD), and its establishing of the Whately Chair (Tail, 1982). TCD was originally established in 1592, and the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the only university in Dublin (Walsh 2014). Chairs in political economy began to emerge in the 1820s, with the Drummond Chair of Political Economy at Oxford, established in 1826, being amongst the earliest and most prominent (Oslington 2001:825). The Chair of political economy at TCD was established by Richard Whately, who arrived in Dublin in 1832 after being appointed as Archbishop of Dublin. Whately developed his interest and knowledge of political economy during his occupation of the Drummond Chair in Oxford, which he held immediately prior to arriving in Dublin (Tail 1982:16). The Whately Chair of Political Economy was initially met by opposition within TCD (Rashid 1977:153), given the general ignorance there was of the discipline and a belief that political economy was intrinsically linked to party politics, which the TCD hierarchy would not view as having a place in academia (Boylan and Foley 1992:24). Also, it was perceived that political economy was a practical subject, which was inferior to the elite subjects suitable for universities (Fourcade 2009:236). Although Whately determination proved successful (Black, 1945) in getting the Chair in Political Economy established, the chair did

have certain limitations, which were in keeping with other political economy chairs of the day (Murphy, 1983). The Whately Chair originally had a five-year tenure, adopted from Oxford's Drummond Chair, rather than permanency (Tail 1982:17), and the Whately Chair occupant was required to give a number of public lectures each year (Black 1945:140). Therefore, despite receiving academic formalisation, political economy was not recognised as an equal with other academic disciplines. Rather, it was seen as an extension class that a student could take, a position that seemed to confirm the inferiority of political economy at the time (Fourcade 2009:236).

The eligibility requirements for prospective occupants of the Whately Chair were naturally exclusionary. To be considered, an individual would need at least a Master of Arts qualification, or a Bachelor in Civil Law, and initially it was open to graduates from TCD, Cambridge, and Oxford only, although graduates of the Queen's Colleges, established in 1845 and located in Belfast, Cork, and Galway, were later also granted eligibility (Boylan and Foley 1992:23–25). This restrictive eligibility criteria served to maintain the restrictive nature of the discipline that had been established in the societies. Indicative of the early occupants of the Whately Chair was its first occupant, Mountifort Longfield (Black 1947:69). Longfield was born into the landed gentry class, and like many of his peers, he went to TCD where he took his degree in science (Tail 1982:15), before going on to study law. This legal background would be indicative of many of the early occupants of the Whately chair, and would be influential on their political economy work (Black 1947:73). The selection of Longfield was a somewhat contested affair. The Provost of TCD at the time argued that a person should be selected 'who would be of sound and safe conservative views' (Tail 1982:17). This was at odds with Whately, who was a liberal. Longfield considered himself a Tory, but he was the least dogmatic Tory available of the potential nominees (Tail 1982:18). Longfield is acknowledged as perhaps the most significant figure in the establishment of economic science in Ireland (Black 1945:141), evidenced by the fact that his *Lectures on Political Economy* remained a prescribed reading for students of political economy until 1872, and his founding of SSISI, along with two subsequent Whately Chair occupants - William Hancock and James Lawson. His work appeared to draw heavily from Nassau Senior, the original occupant of the Drummond Chair in Oxford (Moss 2011:111–12).



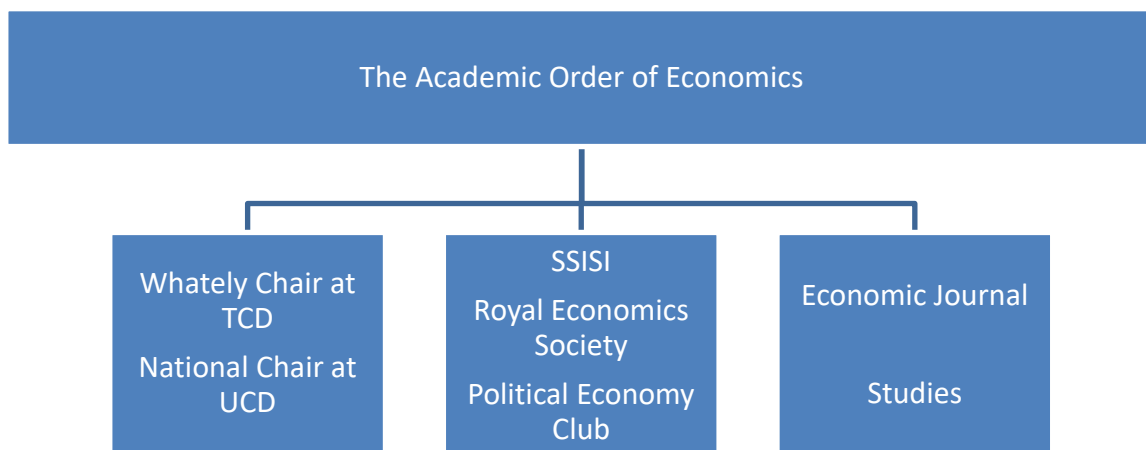
The academic formalisation of political economy at TCD by Richard Whately and the subsequent formation of SSISI by early Whately Chair occupants were instrumental in this early professionalisation of economics in Ireland. However, another core element required for professionalisation, a dedicated scientific journal to ensure requisite standards of scientific quality, would not come until the end of the 1800s. The *Economic Journal*, initially published in 1891 by the British Economic Association, which would become the Royal Economic Society (RES) in 1902, was the first dedicated economics journal in the UK (Tribe 2001:32). This journal would soon become the authoritative publication for political economy in Ireland. Charles Bastable, Whately Chair occupant between 1882-1932 (it was Bastable who removed the five-year tenure), who published regularly in the *Economic Journal*, and was also an original member of the RES (Smith et al. 1945:127). Given that Ireland was part of the UK at this time, the *Economic Journal* would have served as the national journal for prominent Irish political economists during this period.

Despite serving as a national journal, the *Economic Journal* lacked a focus on Ireland and Irish issues. This absence would be filled by a generalist academic journal called *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, which covered social, cultural, political, and economic issues in Ireland and was founded by the Jesuits. The arrival of *Studies* in the early 1900s, and the University College, Dublin (UCD) in 1908, would see a divergence within economics in Ireland. The era of the complete dominance of British institutions on Irish economics was coming to an end by the turn of the century, as the challenge from nationalist institutions began to grow.

This early phase of professionalisation of economics in Ireland followed a somewhat typical, trajectory. Firstly, academic formalisation was achieved through the Whately Chair in TCD. Secondly, the formation of professional bodies or societies was facilitated through SSISI, as a de facto professional body for the discipline in Ireland, along with the London-based PEC. Thirdly, professional journals emerged in the guise of the *Economic Journal*, which for as at least as long as Ireland was part of the UK was regarded as ‘national’ institution for the economics profession in Ireland at the time. As Irish nationalism gained strength the more generalist Irish journal, *Studies*, provided a national publication outlet for economists, as evidenced by the publications by George O’Brien, Chair of National Economics in UCD, throughout the 1900s.

The profession was established in the elite societies of the 1700s and formalised in the elite Irish academic institutes in the 1800s. However, despite this elite characteristic, the profession did not attain a prestigious position within academia during this period. Instead, it was viewed as a practical discipline, which was more suited for popular consumption than academic respect. Further complicating the formalising of economics was the political situation of the day, namely Ireland being under British rule. The turbulent political environment of the early 1900s would have a seismic impact on the profession, and would greatly delay the growth of economists' authority in Ireland.

**Figure 2: The Academic Order of the Economics Profession in Ireland prior to Irish independence**



### 3.2 The development of the Academic Order of economics in independent Ireland

Prior to the establishment of the Irish Free State, many of the dominant elite institutions in Ireland, such as TCD, SSISI, and the RIA, tend to be loyalist to the British state of the United Kingdom (UK), then of Britain and Ireland, rather to any Irish nationalist political tendencies (Bourke 1986; Walsh 2014). This loyalism allowed these institutions to reinforce their influence in Irish society, and so TCD and SSISI dominated the fledgling Irish economics profession. However, after the emergence of the Irish Free State, these loyalist leanings would become highly problematic. Although the Free State was keen to maintain some continuity with the previous British regime, evident in the largely continued employment of civil servants (O'Rourke and Hogan, 2017), it was also decidedly nationalist. This would lead to significant

turmoil on the institutions that helped form the economics profession and an altering of its evolution trajectory.

The dominance of TCD started to be challenged by the emergence of Ireland's own national institutions, and by prominent nationalist figures. For example, Eoin MacNeill<sup>1</sup> argued that TCD maintained an unsympathetic attitude towards nationalistic issues, such as the Irish language, within the field of education (Walsh 2014:135). The founding of UCD in the 1880s (O'Rahilly 1962) was the most direct challenge to TCD's dominance. Although, it was originally considered to affiliate UCD with TCD, the Catholic hierarchy opposed this, given what it saw as the hostile position that TCD had to the Catholic Church, and UCD affiliated with the Royal University instead (Walsh 2014:136). This affiliation with the Royal University rather than with TCD caused a divergence between these two institutions, with TCD representing the Protestant establishment and maintaining strong links with the UK, and UCD representing the nationalist cause. This led to the swift erosion of the dominance that TCD once held within Irish academia, and would lead to its isolation from most parts of contemporary Irish society throughout the 1920s (Brown 2004:103–4).

Although the isolation of TCD may have been initially caused by its loyalist history, it continued because of TCD's persistent affiliation with the Protestant ascendancy (Brown 2004; Ferriter, 2004: 354). Other historically loyalist institutes experienced a similar challenge to their prominent societal position, although their response would typically differ from the persistent loyalism of TCD. The RIA has long held a privileged position within the circles of the Irish intelligentsia, and had long had a close relationship with TCD, with many TCD professors being members of the RIA. Just prior to the founding of the Irish Free State, the council of the RIA was dominated by either graduates or academic staff of TCD. Although there were nationalist members of the RIA council at the time, these were a small minority. The RIA's loyalism was illustrated by its expulsion of Eoin MacNeill for his part in 1916 rebellion against British rule (Bourke, 1986). Its loyalist allegiance was recognised and fostered in London, who provided the Academy with a grant of £1,600 per year up until the end of British rule in Ireland (Bourke 1986:198). These loyalist tendencies had allowed the RIA to

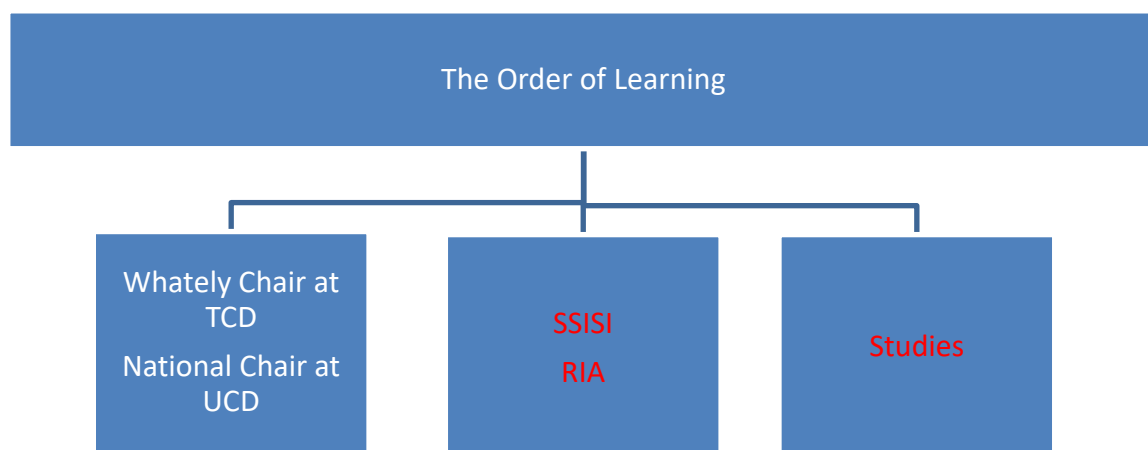
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<sup>1</sup> Eoin MacNeill was a prominent Irish nationalist, who was at the forefront of the Gaelic revival during this period, and was an active member in Ireland's struggle for independence. MacNeill was also a professor of early Irish history in UCD (Martin 1961).

grow in prominence prior to the founding of the Irish Free State. With the establishment of independence and following some turmoil, the RIA changed its attitude towards nationalism, specifically redefining itself as a national institution (Bourke 1986:202). This swift change in embracing the nationalist cause had some immediate effect. In 1922 the new Free State government informed the RIA that it would continue the annual grant that it had previously received from London (Bourke 1986:203). This decision from the Free State government contrasted with its relationship with TCD, to whom it did not provide monetary support. It appears to indicate that the Free State government sought to maintain continuity of the elite institutions in Ireland, on the prerequisite that they embrace the nationalist cause.

The nationalist revolution in Ireland during the 1910s and 1920s significantly changed the Academic Order for the fledgling economics profession. TCD's isolation would also be reflected within the economics profession. Charles Bastable, Whately Chair Professor in TCD and perhaps the preeminent economist in Ireland at the founding of the Free State, was a peripheral figure in the early economic committees set up by the Free State, a position which contrasted sharply with UCD economist George O'Brien, who was very prominent in these committees.

**Figure 3: The Academic Order of the Economics Profession in Ireland after the Nationalist Revolution**



## 4. The Political Order

### 4.1 Economics and the Political Order in newly independent Ireland

Ireland acquired independence and full fiscal autonomy from the UK (UK) in December 1921 (Bielenberg and Ryan 2013:9). The early Free State governments were dominated by Cumann na nGaedhael (CnG), who proudly branded themselves as ‘the most conservative minded revolutionaries that ever put through a successful revolution’ (Lee 1989:105). This conservatism permeated through CnG’s economic policy, and enabled a continuity of economic perspectives from British rule (O’Rourke and Hogan, 2017). They adopted a stringent policy of fiscal rectitude with regards the state finances in an attempt to be considered fiscally competent (Brown 2004:5). The Department of Finance strongly supported this economic policy, which was perhaps not surprising given that its first Secretary, Joseph Brennan, and Assistant Secretary, J. J. McElligott, were both renowned as ardent adherents to fiscal rectitude (Lee 1989:106). This staunch fiscal conservatism within the Irish Political Order lead to a focus on rigorous retrenchment of the Irish state, typified both in the cost of the civil service itself, which fell from a cost of £4.2 million to run in 1922, to £3.9 million in 1932 (this occurred even with an increase in employee numbers from 21,000 to 23,396), and the level of government expenditure, which was reduced from £42 million in 1923-4, to £32 million in 1924-5, to £24 million in 1926-7 (Lee 1989:108-9).

Despite the economic apparatus of the State remaining largely the same after independence, the State still needed to formalise its economic mechanisms as questions regarding policies towards international trade, protection, and a national currency would soon become pressing. Given the relative dearth of economics expertise in the CnG government, the broad sweep of economic policy was determined by commissions of experts - namely, the Fiscal Inquiry Committee (1923), the Tariff Commission (1926), The Banking Commission (1926), and the Currency Commission (1927) (Daly 1992:16). The remit of these commissions was generally to advise on the direction of economic policy and the structure of Ireland’s economic apparatus, and we will examine the Fiscal Inquiry Committee and the Banking Commission in more depth here.

**Figure.4: Original members of the Fiscal Inquiry Committee in 1923**

<b>Fiscal Inquiry Committee</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliated University</b>	<b>Position</b>
Timothy Smiddy (chair)	University College Cork	Professor of Economics and Commerce
R. M. Henry	Queen’s University Belfast	Professor of Latin -Vocal supporter of Irish nationalism and Irish language and culture (Devlin n.d.)
J. G. Smith	University of Birmingham	Professor of Economics
Charles Bastable	Trinity College Dublin	Whately Chair Professor of Political Economy
George O’Brien	University College Dublin	Chair of National Economics

**Sources :** Barry and Daly (2011); Lee (1989)

In one of the government’s first decisions regarding economic policy, it set up a Fiscal Inquiry Committee in 1923 to investigate the existing fiscal system and recommend any changes with regard economic policy (Geary 1951:404). This Committee would influence fiscal policy in its resistance of protectionism and bias in favour of free trade in its economic outlook (O’Brien 1962:14–15).

The Fiscal Inquiry Committee (see Figure 4 above for its members and their affiliations) was dominated by Bastable, who was a keen adherent of the classical liberal position which viewed free trade ‘as a religion rather than a policy’ (Meenan 1980:128). This would serve as a rare instance of TCD personnel gaining authority within the early Free State. Indeed, it would be UCD’s George O’Brien who would become a dominant figure within Irish economics. O’Brien’s influence is something which can perhaps be traced back to his time as a student in UCD, where he shared an economics class with Patrick Hogan, who became Agriculture Minister; Kevin O’Higgins, who became Home Affairs Minister; and Patrick McGilligan, who became Minister for Industry and Commerce (Daly 1992:14). Indeed, the influence of UCD on the early Free State government was so significant it was considered ‘very nearly a College

government’ (Meenan 1974:22). This prominence of UCD in the interaction between the Political and Academic Orders is reflected in Feeney, Hogan and O’Rourke (2017) who found that a great dominance of UCD in Irish cabinets, meant that, at times, Irish cabinets were even more elitist in their higher education formation than the British ones.

Given that Ireland’s external trade was almost completely dominated by the UK, the initial urgency of establishing an independent currency was not seen as pressing (Honohan 1997:43). However, by the mid-1920s, the currency situation was proving to be increasingly problematic (Kavanagh 1997:16). The Coinage Act of 1926 sought to address this by granting powers to the Irish Free State to issue its own currency, but to address the question of whether any changes in law were needed in relation to banking and note issuance, the Irish government set up the Banking Commission (Kelly 2003:91), which was chaired by Henry Parker Willis, Professor of Banking at Columbia University, New York (Kavanagh 1997:16). However, the broader membership of this commission (sse Figure 5) was curious in its absence of Irish economists. This reason for the absence of Irish economists may have been because this was deemed a finance issue rather than an economics issue. However, another reason was that the Free State government was pleasing the banks, by appointing its members rather economists, given the financial assistance they were providing the state during its formative years (Daly 1992:15). This commission recommended the introduction of a new unit of currency that would be fixed at par with the British pound, and the creation of a Currency Commission to administer the introduction of this new currency (Honohan 1997:42–43). Although the issue of creating a Central Bank was within the terms of reference of the Banking Commission, it decided a Central Bank was unnecessary (Kelly 2003:92). Instead, a Currency Commission was recommended, and subsequently created, to control and manage the new currency (Duncan 1928a:267).

**Figure 5: Members of the Banking Commission, 1926**

<b>Banking Commission (1926)</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Professor Henry Parker Willis (chair)	Columbia University
J. J. McElligott	Department of Finance

Senator Andrew Jameson	Bank of Ireland
J. H. O'Connell	National Bank, Dublin
F. J. Lillis	Munster & Leinster Bank
Lionel Smith Gordon	Industrial Trust Company of Ireland
C. A. B. Campion	Commonwealth Bank of Australia (retired)
R. K. L. Galloway	Ulster Bank, Belfast

**Sources: Daly (1992); Honohan (1997); Kavanagh (1997); Kelly (2003)**

It can be seen that the early Irish governments were amenable to using economics experts to help formulate or support economic policy, something that was particularly evident through their inclusion on certain government formed commissions. This afforded economists the ability to influence public policy in a more direct and substantial way. Although the CnG government was disposed to a free market bias, O'Brien (1962: 13-4) argues that recommendations of the Fiscal Inquiry Committee, which were largely followed by the government, ensured that protectionism was less than what would have otherwise been the case. However, CnG recognised that a value in having economists on these commissions was their perceived impartiality in their decision-making, but it may also be the case that CnG knew of the predisposition that the economists had, and selected them to legitimise an outcome they had already desired. It would be facetious to suggest that these commissions had no influence on government policy, and they did clearly allow economists to become more involved in the broader economic discourse, but it would appear that their influence was still somewhat limited.

#### 4.2 Hibernation: Economics and the Irish Political Order in 1930-1950s

The rise in unemployment in the early 1930s put pressure on the new Irish state's free trade policy. The earliest protectionist policies from the CnG government were generally perceived as reactionary, rather than from any ideological persuasion (Barry and Daly 2011:1). The Secretary of the Department of Industry and Commerce, Gordon Campbell, did advocate a protectionist policy to encourage industrial development (Bielenberg and Ryan 2013:10).



Campbell was initially fiscally conservative in his economic outlook, but later embraced a more interventionist outlook with much more vigour than other prominent civil servants, such as Brennan or McElligott (Lee 1989:121). However, Campbell would remain an isolated voice in the civil service, and it would not be until Fianna Fáil (FF) were elected to government in 1932 that protectionism would gain significant traction in government policy (Bielenberg and Ryan 2013:10).

The arrival of (FF) to government office would result in a seismic shift in Irish economic policy as they brought with them, at least from 1932-1948, an ideological commitment to protectionism and a preference for economic self-sufficiency as the goal of policy (Barry and Daly 2011).. FF's commitment to protectionism was evident almost immediately, with Ireland's average tariff level rising from 9 percent in 1931 to 45 percent in 1936 (Cullen 1987:178).The Irish Free State moved from 'one of the least to one of the most protected economies ' (Bielenberg and Ryan 2013:14). The first budget of this FF government has been described as 'unashamedly redistributive' (Barry and Daly 2011:11) with expansionary fiscal policy at its core (Bielenberg and Ryan 2013:14). Seán MacEntee, then Minister for Finance, would later describe it as the first 'Keynesian budget in this island' (Barry and Daly 2011:11). This budget imposed 43 new duties and stoked the 'economic war' that was erupting between the UK due to a dispute over the payment of land annuities (Cullen 1987:178). Alongside these new tariffs, MacEntee also advocated for the development of protected industries to create jobs and reduce the persistent unemployment (Barry and Daly 2011:11). Hence, the economic nationalism of FF would comprise of both protectionism and the establishment of semi-state bodies, the latter of which would see the establishment of further state owned companies, such as The Irish Sugar Company, Aer Lingus, the Irish Tourist Board, Irish Life Assurance Board, Chemici Teo (producing industrial alcohol) and the Irish Turf Board all being set up in the 1930s (Bielenberg and Ryan 2013:14).

In 1934, another Banking Commission was set up with a broad mandate to consider 'every aspect of the Irish economic system' (O'Brien 1962:15). Amongst the members of this commission was Per Jacobsson, a Swedish economist who was an economic advisor for the Bank of International Settlements. The attractiveness in including a prominent international economist appears to have been that they were looked upon with reverence by the government (Fanning 1983:150), a stark contrast to how Irish economists were perceived at the time. A key

recommendation the commission would make was that a national Central Bank was needed, which the FF government then established in 1942 (Bielenberg and Ryan 2013:9). Given their interventionist and authoritative economic policy, it may seem curious that the government would create an independent Central Bank. However, the reason for it may lie in its economic nationalism, as prior to its inception, the Bank of England served as a quasi-Central Bank for Ireland; the Irish pound was linked to sterling and the Gold Standard at the time, even though Ireland held no reserves of gold. The Irish currency was instead backed by sterling assets (Bielenberg and Ryan 2013:10). An Irish Central Bank would at least break this reliance on the Bank of England. However, any suggestions that the Irish Central Bank would be overly influenced by the government were quickly dismissed as the Central Bank would immediately demonstrate its independence by being, openly critical of the economic policy of the government (Bielenberg and Ryan 2013:16). Both academic economists and senior economic figures in the civil service shared this disapproval of the new policy direction (Barry and Daly 2011:2).

Irish academic economists, such as George Duncan (Murphy 2006:73), who became occupant of the Whately Chair in 1934, and George O'Brien, Chair of National Economics in UCD (Barry and Daly 2011:4) opposed protectionism (Fanning 1983:141). Duncan was a keen student of the Austrian school of economics (Barry and Daly 2011:2), and became an early member of the Mont Pelerin Society (Murphy 2006:71). O'Brien spoke favourably about free enterprise and scorned interference from government in his review of a book on the Great Depression (Barry and Daly 2011:4), and demonstrated his liberal credentials with his paper on 'Monetary policy and the depression', which argued that government intervention or 'easy money' were not a panacea for economic ills (Fanning 1983:141). He was also critical of rising public expenditure during the 1940s, and its impact on Ireland's balance of payments. As a member of Ireland's Upper House of Parliament at this time, O'Brien spoke of the seriousness of the growing deficit in Ireland's balance of payments, and how it required immediate public attention (O'Grada 1997:68). Another prominent economist of the day, Joseph Johnston of TCD, spoke of the frailties of government policy in the aftermath of the Great Depression and how governments needed to let the price mechanism operate unhindered (Barry and Daly 2011:5). Johnson would fully voice his hostility towards protectionism in his 1934 book 'The nemesis of economic nationalism' (Fanning 1983:141).

Despite this vocal opposition from Irish economists to the policies being adopted by FF, their concerns were largely ignored by the political establishment in their economic policy making (Brownlow 2010:313). Some have laid at least part of the blame for this treatment at the profession itself, suggesting that university economists were 'sulking in their tents' and still grasping to pre-Keynesian ideas which had been replaced by Keynesianism as the orthodox economics ideas internationally (Fanning 1983:154–55). It would appear that that divergence between Irish policy makers and Irish economists would the delay in the formalisation of the profession in Ireland. Even when the state sought to involve the profession in some economic policy making, such as through various commissions, it tended to load the members with individuals disposed to the nationalistic preference, and curtailed the input of the native economists in the economic institutions that were being formed, such as the Irish Central Bank.

### 3.3 Awakenings: Irish Economics and the Irish Political Order from 1955

In the 1950s, the Irish economy struggled and growth became elusive. Emigration was stubbornly high and persistent, and subsistence agriculture still accounted for a large majority of its economic activity (Honohan and Walsh 2002:3). Coupled with this was the persistence of government policy with protectionist ideals. However, the watershed moment for protectionism would arrive in 1955. The UK government increased interest rates in an attempt to quell inflationary pressures in its economy. In response, the Minister for Finance, Gerard Sweetman, decided to break the interest link between Ireland and the UK, a link that had been maintained since independence. What ensued was capital flight from Ireland to the UK to avail of the higher interest rate (Bielenberg and Ryan 2013:19). A swift reversal of this experiment followed but the damage had been done. By 1956, this defining event had a significant impact on the Irish economy, evident in a deflationary budget, import levies, and emigration (Honohan and O'Gráda 1998), and highlighted the limitations of protectionism and a realisation that the home market was too small to expand the industrial base beyond meagre limits (Cullen 1987:183). This crisis also appears to have been the catalyst for the reorientation of Irish economic policy that was soon to come (Bielenberg and Ryan 2013:19).

In 1956, Sweetman was tasked with finding a replacement for Owen Redmond as Secretary at the Department of Finance. Redmond had replaced the long serving J. J. McElligott in 1953, and tradition suggested that a senior civil servant, with substantial experience in the service

should replace Redmond. However, Sweetman opted instead to appoint a relatively young civil servant, T K Whitaker as Secretary (O'Grada 1997:69). This change in personnel would usher in a seismic shift of Irish economic policy, moving away from the protectionism, which had dominated for the previous two decades, and replacing this with a policy that would advocate economic planning and orientate the Irish economy towards exports. Whilst Whitaker would demonstrate a less severe devotion to fiscal rectitude (O'Grada 1997:69), he would also argue that policy making at the department should be informed by expert research. The arrival of Whitaker as Secretary of the department would have far reaching consequences for the economics profession in Ireland.

Whitaker was a keen student of economics, and attained a master's degree in economics, while working at the department. He published in academic journals (e.g. Whitaker 1974) regularly presented papers at SSISI (Research Interviews, 2017). This also allowed him to become familiar with prominent economists in Ireland of the day, given how SSISI functioned as a proxy for an economics association at this time (Research Interviews, 2017).

Whitaker's was not an uncritical supporter of Irish economics as his choice of the University of London, rather than an Irish university, to do his Masters indicates. He pushed for a more statistics to be integrated into economics in the universities and even went as far to forward his own suggested syllabus (Chambers, 2015: 65-66). Yet despite this critical approach Whitaker engaged the Irish economics profession. Indeed, Whitaker would acquire such standing in economics in Ireland that he would be referred to as an economist as well as a public servant in Irish societal discourse (RTÉ, 2017).

In 1956, Whitaker formed the Capital Investment Advisory Committee, which had three economic advisors appointed to it, Professors Loudon Ryan, Charles Carter and Paddy Lynch. Loudon Ryan was Professor of Industrial Economics in TCD at this time, and he would become Whately Chair Professor. Charles Carter had been Professor of Applied Economics at Queen's University, Belfast from 1952-1959, during which time he had developed a lasting interest in Ireland. Carter would go on to hold the Stanley Jevons chair of Political Economy at Manchester University, before becoming the founding vice chancellor of the University of Lancaster (McClintock 2002). Paddy Lynch was Professor of Political Economy at UCD, and would become a well renowned economist both nationally and internationally (De Buitlear 2003:13-14)

The growing influence of the profession on public policy can be seen through its growing influence on the different *Economic Development* plans or programs. The first Programme was largely driven by Whitaker, and senior officials in the civil service. The second Programme would be for all intents and purposes the work of TCD's Professor Loudon Ryan and was also the main figure in the 'neo-corporatist National Economic and Social Council' (O'Grada 1997:76). *Economic Development* would serve as an exemplar of how government policy and the orthodox thinking of the economics profession were beginning to coalesce, and how, through their advice to Whitaker, the profession was growing in influence on policy formation.

The necessity for high class economic research in Irish public policy was further crystalised during the development of *Economic Development*. Although good data was available from the Central Statistics Office (CSO), there was a need for cutting edge, advanced econometrics analysis to inform policy. This led Whitaker to establish the ERI, which would later become the Economics and Social Research Institute ESRI, in 1960. With funding from the Ford Foundation, which Whitaker was able to secure, the ERI was given a mandate to provide research which could support economic policy making in Ireland. The ERI would facilitate the high quality, economic analysis that Whitaker saw as an essential element of the policies he wanted to develop at the department. This heightened demand for high quality economics in Ireland was complemented by an evident trend in the supply of economists.

The 1960s saw a trend of young Irish graduates of economics going abroad to complete their PhD studies (Research Interviews, 2017). A number of these individuals would come back, fully trained in the frontiers of economic analysis, such as econometrics, and take up prominent positions in academia and public policy. These developments would further the legitimacy of the profession as its leading figures possessed the credentials and training from some of leading academic institutions. This international experience also reinforced the orthodox thinking of the profession towards the Whitaker approach of pro foreign investment, pro free trade, and critical of government intervention (Research Interviews, 2017).

This period can be viewed as the watershed moment for the profession, as the change in economic policy and direction evident in the 1950s and 1960s in Ireland coincided as the emergence of the profession to a position of authority and legitimacy within society. However, this coronation of the economics profession by the Political Order does not mean that

governmental institutions necessarily followed the advice of the profession in all instances or without question. After the 1976 election, not only did an economics academic become the Minister of Economic Planning and Development but much of the critique of that Minister's fiscal expansion policy was provided by the Irish economics profession.

## 5. The Irish Economics Profession growth in strength from the 1980s

Although SSISI had long served as a quasi-professional association, the lack of a dedicated economics association prior to the late 1970s, meant that the profession was still, in many ways, a collection of individuals, rather than a coherent group. Its meagre size had perhaps negated the urgency for a formalised professional body. From the 1970s, the profession would change from being a small, academic grouping, to being a larger grouping, with economists being employed in other public sector institutions, such as the Central Bank, and private sector institutions, such as stockbrokers and banks. This led to a need for some grouping to allow for a cohesive discussion amongst the profession and to reflect its growing diversity. The Dublin Economic Workshop, formed in 1977, would initially facilitate this, but it would not be until the formation of the Irish Economics Association (IEA) in 1986 that a fully dedicated professional body was established. However, like other economics professional bodies internationally, the IEA does not represent the profession in the same way that professional bodies in other disciplinary areas do. For example, the IEA, as an institution, would not release press statements on behalf of the profession. This has meant that although there is greater cohesion within the profession, and perhaps an increasing consensus around its orthodox position on economic policy, the profession is dominated by a small grouping of its most prominent members. These prominent members tend to have senior positions in elite academic institutes or senior positions in state institutes. These elites tend to act as the voice of the profession in the absence of a more traditional professional body.

The international orientation of the economics profession in Ireland, from their disposition towards free trade to the training many had received internationally, lead it 'to borrow heavily from contemporary thinking in the United States and the United Kingdom' (O'Malley 1986:479), which in 1980s were becoming less Keynesian and more neoliberal (Centeno and Cohen, 2012). O'Rourke and Hogan (2017) argue that the preservation of elements of pre-Keynesian economic orthodoxy in Irish society from the days of British rule also meant that

Ireland was particularly fertile ground for neoliberalism as was the openness of the economy itself.

1987 appears to be a pivotal moment in Ireland's economic history, with the turnaround in economic performance being referred to as a 'miracle' (Honohan and Walsh 2002:1). Given the dire state of Ireland's economy in the early 1980s (Honohan 1992), inflation was more than 20%, the current account deficit was 15% of GNP, and unemployment was 16% by 1986 (Honohan and Walsh 2002:8), economists were increasingly in demand from Irish media and society to help explain the economic performance and, implicitly, to offer some direction for future economic policy (Pratschke 1985:145). This led to a steady increase in influence of economists in Irish public discourse as the profession continued to broaden and reinforce its social closure. Economists used this influence largely to criticise government policy (Pratschke 1985:145). In keeping with the changing orthodoxy within the profession internationally towards fiscal retrenchment 'to correct swollen budgets and external deficits', the profession in Ireland were advocating similar remedies to ease the fiscal woes (Honohan 1992).

In 1987, the incoming government recognised the dire condition of the economy, and implemented a severe fiscal contraction in the public finances to rectify the fiscal position of the economy (Barry 1991), a policy that the profession had been advocating, and one which was facilitated through political consensus between the government and the main opposition party (MacSharry, White, and Kennedy 2000). Further facilitating this fiscal rectitude was the social partnership agreement agreed between government and trade unions, which allowed for wage moderation in return for promises of future tax reductions (Barry and FitzGerald 2001). Economists were advocating similar fiscal rectitude policies on the media frequently during this period (e.g. Barrett 1985), though the adopted government policy may also have occurred in the absence of the profession given the severity of the economic situation (Research Interviews, 2017).

However, given the regular commentary from the profession on the media it would seem difficult to argue that the profession had no impact on the economic policy that came as a result of the Tallaght Strategy.

## 6 The Business Order in a Celtic Tiger 1987-2007

The economic growth that the Irish economy experienced from 1987 to 2007 was remarkable. It transformed the Irish economy, with the number of people in employment rising from 1.1 million to 1.9 million in the 15 years until 2005, and its population increasing by 15 percent from 1996 to 2005 (Dorgan 2006). Although there were some cautionary notes about how long the ‘Celtic Tiger’ period could last, this period of rapid economic development was broadly lauded (Breathnach 1998).

However, by 2000, Ireland’s economic growth was being driven by domestic demand, particularly the property market, and not exports. This led to some concerns being voiced about the government’s economic policy, because it was expansionary and pro-cyclical (European Commission 2001:141–44; IMF 2001:19–20). Also raising concern among Irish academic and research economists (including, Duffy, 2002; Roche, 1999) was the rapid appreciation of asset prices being witnessed in the Irish property market, which not escape international attention either (IMF 2003, 2004; European Commission, 2006; 269). Such reservations about expansionary policies and house prices were echoed by many members of the economics profession in Ireland, particularly those in academic and research institutions (including Barry & FitzGerald, 2001; Central Bank of Ireland 2004, 2005, 2006; Honohan, 2006), if not those working for commercial organizations. However, such concerns from the profession were largely ignored by government, as they were similarly ignored in the early 1980s. The question of how explicit any warnings from economists should be is difficult to be definitive about, given that different audiences may have consumed its contents in different ways. For example, the profession may have understood its recognition of issues in the housing market as an alert, given their level of technical expertise and shared discourse (Maesse 2015), but the media or broader society may not have been able to recognise such subtleties.

Warnings from the economics profession were often met with derision from the political order. Charlie McCreevy, Minister for Finance from 1997-2004, mocked economists who warned against the government’s fiscal policies (O’Rourke and Hogan 2013:218), claiming ‘when I have money I spend it; when I don’t, I don’t’ (Barry 2010:38). Bertie Ahearn, who was Taoiseach<sup>2</sup> from 1997-2008, made perhaps the most memorable such derision, when he wondered how those who criticise the economy did not ‘commit suicide’ (RTÉ 2007). Such

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<sup>2</sup> Irish Prime Minister



comments can be seen as indicative of a broader marginalising of any criticism of the economy (Fahy, O'Brien, and Poti 2010:16). However, given their widespread reception, they may have also allowed the Irish Economists to escape the stern criticism that the global profession experienced for a perceived lack of forewarning about the Great Recession (Colander et al. 2009).

## 7. Discussion and Conclusions

This paper has explored how the authority of Economics Expertise in Ireland was formed through 'Orders', outlined in the theoretical framework. The initial Academic Order was strongly influenced by British institutions, something that was most clearly identifiable with the Whately Chair in TCD. The emergence of the Irish Free State would begin to alter this dominance within the Order of Learning, and would see the Political Order become a pivotal influence on the Academic Order, ushering in a more national orientation on the work of the profession. TCD would lose its dominant position within the Academic Order of economics in Ireland, and be replaced by UCD as the dominant academic institute. By the 1960s, the Academic Order was again beginning to change, this time towards an international orientation. This was initiated by the decision of a number of prominent, Irish economics graduates to go abroad to complete their PhD studies. Upon their return, many of these would occupy prominent positions within Irish academia and would be trained in the frontiers of the profession. The majority of those who went abroad, opted for either the UK or the USA as their preferred destination, with an emphasis on the latter. This would see a gradual shift away from economic planning as a dominant ideology, and back towards a free-market ideological preference. As regard the Political Order, from the early 1930s to the mid-1950s, barring some fleeting exceptions the profession was largely kept out of public policy. This would change significantly in the 1950s with the appointment of T. K. Whitaker as Secretary of the Department of Finance, and his advocacy of research and in particular economics informed policy. Whitaker would swiftly appoint prominent members of the profession as policy advisors and would allow the profession to have significant influence on policy.

The level of authority that the profession possesses has not been constant since its formalisation. The profession appears to be at the height of its authority during periods of economic malaise or crisis. It is unclear as to whether the adoption of either *Economic*

*Development* or the Tallaght Strategy were as a direct result of the profession, but in both cases the position of the profession was certainly known. Once the orthodox policies were adopted in both instances, the Irish economy experienced a significant and prolonged period of economic expansion. This appears to have led to these two policies as being singled out as pivotal in the economic development of Ireland. However, what can also be seen from this historical account is that as the period of malaise or crisis wanes, the authority of the profession also wanes. This is not to suggest that they lose their authority, but to say that the authority is less than it was during the height of the crisis period. The ignoring of criticism from the profession in both the early 1980s and the early 2000s of economic policy is indicative of this. This pattern is once again observable in the Great Recession. As the global economic situation started to deteriorate, followed by the Irish economic situation in late 2008, the authority of the profession was once again heightened.

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