



The unbearable triteness of employability: a view from the South

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Insights from other parts of post-school education in poor countries

- The limits of employer engagement
- Weakening institutions through micro-credentials
- Triteness and damage of a frantic stream of 'add ons' in skills programmes and vocational programmes in poor countries

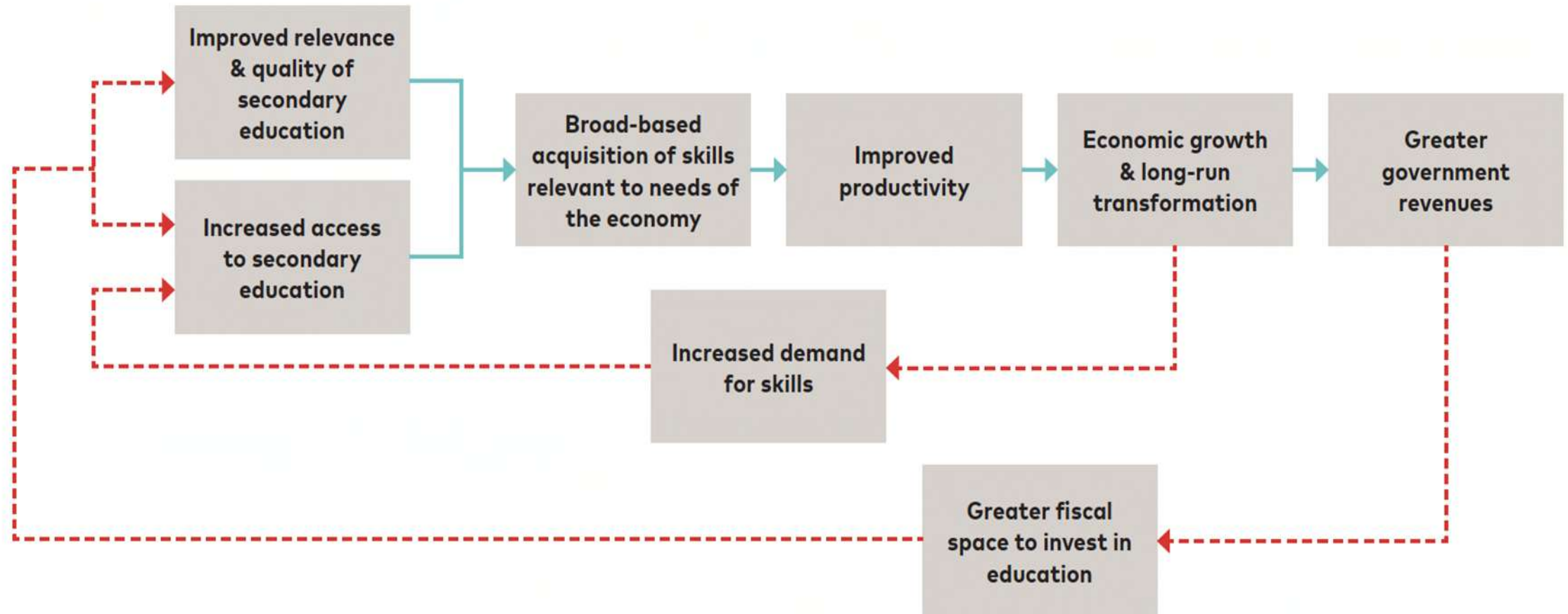
Paradox of 'employability'

- On the one side: education pays off in labour markets because employers are prepared to pay for knowledge, skills, and expertise that lead to productivity (human capital theory)
- But also: education needs to *change* to meet employer needs; education is getting it wrong.
- Can this make sense?
 - Education both could or should lead to improved productivity and therefore better wages, but also, it is not doing this adequately?
 - Education could be, and used to be, leading to improved productivity, but has stopped doing so because it has not kept up with the changing world of work?
 - Employers are no longer willing or able to train, so education institutions must take the role on, in the interests of their students and their economies, even though they are not the best place to learn about actual workplaces?

Employability as angst of massification

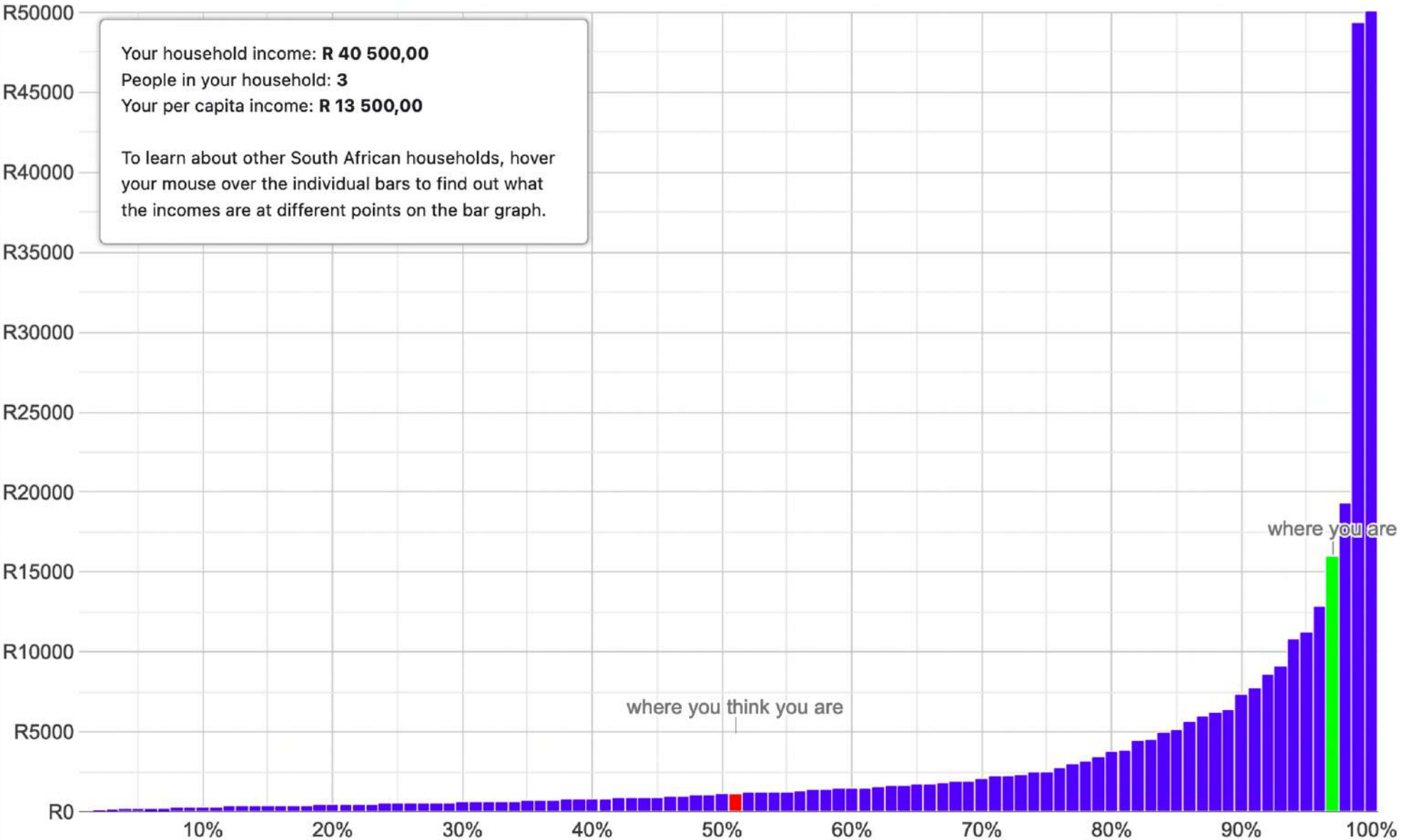
- Hope and disappointment in educational expansion: Allais, S. and Shalem, Y. (2021). Power relations and the shifting powers of educational knowledge: sociology and economics of education on educational inequality. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*: 53(2): 197-211

FIGURE 1.2
LINKING SECONDARY EDUCATION WITH
ECONOMIC GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION



Source: Authors

Per capita income in South African households



Rising education levels, declining reward to credentials

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**DIGITAL FUTURES
OF WORK**

Comments On ‘More Than Employability: Critical Views of Higher Education and the Economy’

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**Online: Global Higher Education Conference, 25 May
2022.**

WHAT IS THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION?

- **Driven by Advances Across Interconnecting Tech...AI, Robotics, Blockchain, Internet of Things, Additive Manufacturing (3D printing), etc.**
- **New Products and Services + Innovative Ways of Doing Existing Things (General Purpose Technologies).**
- **Early Stages - How We Define It Is 'Real In Its Consequences'.**



First Industrial Revolution

From end of the 18th Century to late 19th Century

Mechanisation and the development of steam power, production mainly focused on agriculture, textiles, etc.



Second Industrial Revolution

From Late 19th Century to mid-20th Century

Advanced mechanisation based on factory mass production power by electricity. It also gave rise to increasing white-collar employment to support the growth of mass consumer markets and public services.



Third Industrial Revolution

Mid-20th Century to beginning of 21st Century

Growth of electronics, computing and the internet, fuelled by an exponential increase in computing power. It gave rise to a new wave of economic globalisation and the integration of corporate value chains, extended from manufacturing to service industries.



Fourth Industrial Revolution

From the early 21st Century and remains in the early stages of development

Digital transformation of business, public services, and the wider society, driven by rapid advances in Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, Data Analytics, Internet of Things (IoT), etc. It is challenging existing models of work organisation with major implications for the economy and the future of education, jobs and the labour market.



WHAT IS THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION?

- **Age Of Recombination (Unravelling, Unbundling And Recombining) Not Unique Age Of Invention.**
- **'Industrial' Revolutions Are Social, Including Institutional Restructuring: Education-Work Relationship.**
- **Technology Is Not Destiny...**
- **Future of Work:**
 - **Labour Scarcity v Job Scarcity → Different Views of Education and Employability.**

'LABOUR SCARCITY' IN THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

- Consistent With Longstanding View → The More Technologically Advanced An Economy, The Greater Demand for Skilled People:

- Skill Biased Technological Change.

- Race Between Education and Technology → Expansion of HE → Knowledge Economy.

- Stay Ahead of the Robots...

- Orthodox Human Capital Theory: People Invest In/Acquire/Possess:

'a bundle of valuable "human capital" that, due to its scarcity, generates a flow of income over the career path' (David Autor).

- But Graduate Under-Employment, etc.:

- Skills Deficit → Education for Employability

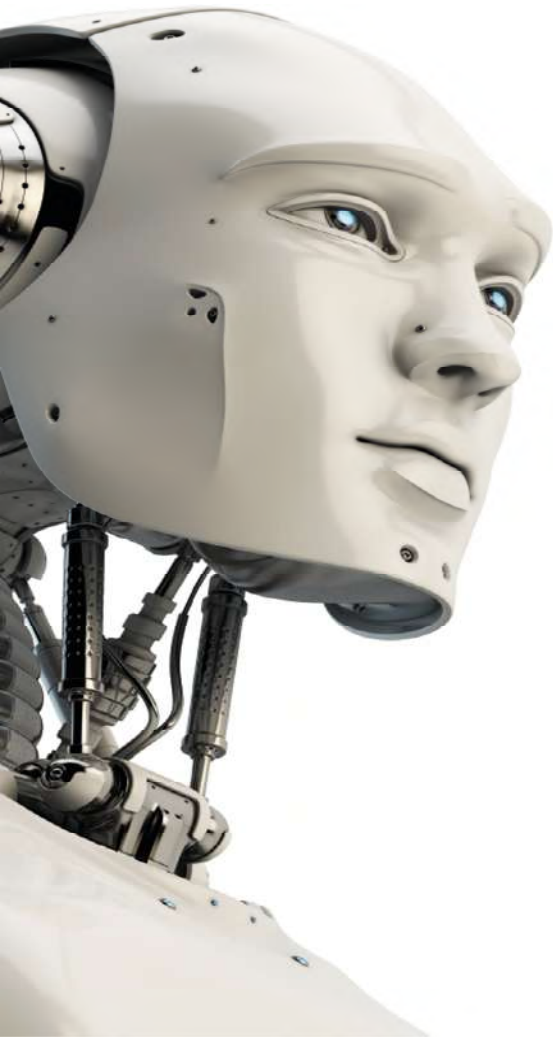


JOB SCARCITY – ALTERNATIVE VIEW OF AI, AUTOMATION, AND FUTURE OF WORK

- **Not the ‘End of Work’ But There Are Not Going To Be Enough Jobs Of The Kind That People Are Qualified For/Expect.**
- **Capacity/Structural Problem Not Alignment Problem...But ‘Supply Side’ Still Important.**
- **Key Challenge To Move The Economy In Ways That Are Labour Enhancing + Productive → Machine Centred v Human Centred.**



Job Scarcity



- **‘Cognitive Challenge’ - Robotic Process Automation → Cognitive Process Automation?:**
 - **Not Direct Labour Substitution**
‘Robots for Teachers’, etc.
 - ***Knowledge Work into Working Knowledge* → Extended Through Platformisation (Digital Taylorism). .**
 - **(Re)Stratify Managerial, Professional and Technical Jobs.**

Some Issues We Need To Think About?



- **‘Duality of Employability’ (Mismanagement of Talent, Brown & Hesketh 2004):**

What It Takes To Do The Job (Absolute) and What It Takes To Get The Job (Relative/Positional).
- **Increasing Positional Competition and Social Congestion...**
- **Pandemic Highlights The Scale Of Educational Inequalities...**
- **Rise of Digital Labour Market?**

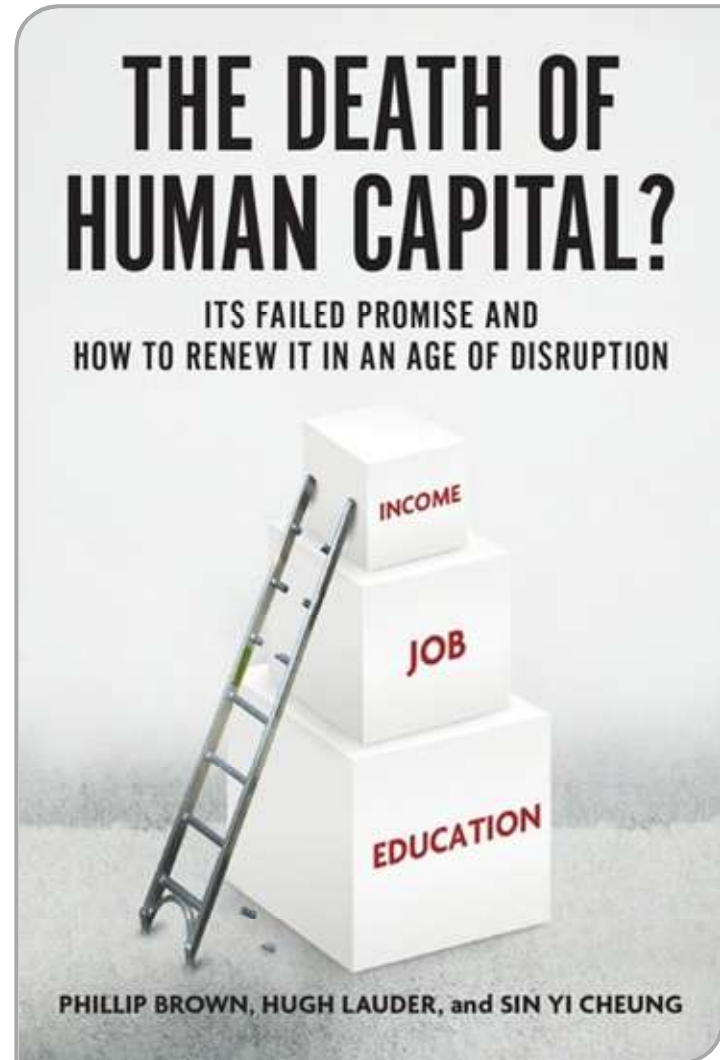
Some Issues We Need To Think About?



- **Labour Scarcity v's Job Scarcity – Contesting Future of Education, Work and Society.**
- **Whose 'Needs' of Industry?**
 - **The 'Race To HE' Is Being Re-Evaluated → Greater Focus On 'Applied' Education/Employability Skills:**
 - **But Old Problems Of 'Parity Of Esteem', Inequalities of Opportunity, and Social Exclusion.**
- **Digital Literacy → *What Will It Mean To Be Human?***
 - **Relationship Between Human and Artificial Cognition → Dumbing Down v Collective Intelligence?**

**Digital Futures of Work Research
Programme:**

<https://digitalfuturesofwork.com/>



**IT'S MORE THAN
EMPLOYABILITY: CRITICAL
VIEWS OF HIGHER
EDUCATION AND THE
ECONOMY**

PROFESSOR NICOLA INGRAM

**DIRECTOR OF THE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL RESEARCH
INSTITUTE AT MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**

MAIN POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- Metrics and the narrow construction of graduate success
- Diminishing class returns to Higher Education
- Broken links
- Cruel Optimism and Broken Dreams

METRICS AND THE NARROW CONSTRUCTION OF GRADUATE SUCCESS

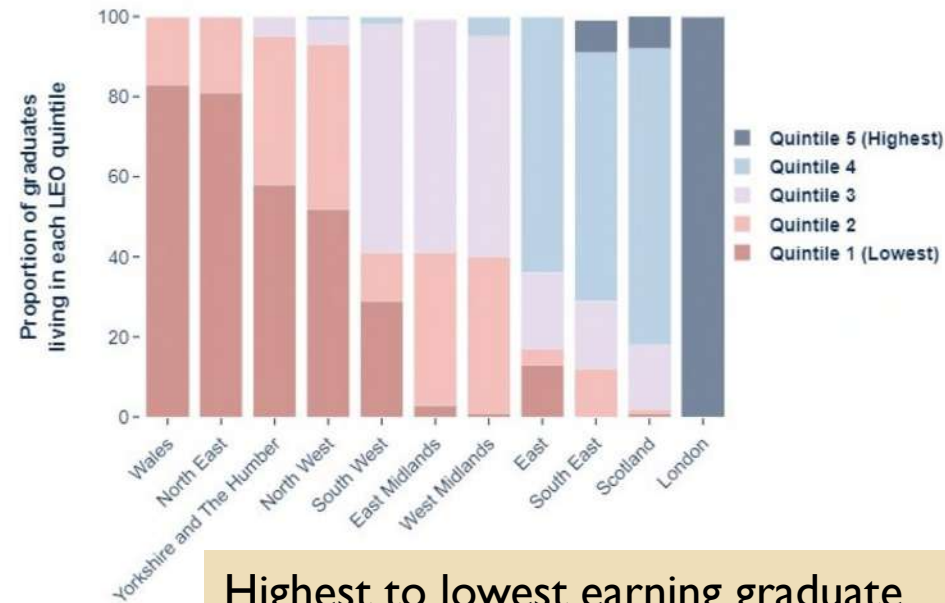
Six in 10 graduates must get professional jobs, universities told

Latest stage of English plan to tackle 'poor quality' via absolute baselines for student outcomes brings threat of punishment for institutions that fall short

January 20, 2022

John Morgan

Figure 3: Summary of LEO quintiles by region



Highest to lowest earning graduate groupings by region (source: OfS 2021)

Results from the Graduate Outcomes Survey show that in 2018/2019 69% of graduates were in high skilled jobs (HESA).

This means that 31% were in work that is not highly regarded by university policy makers.

The discourse of 'low value degrees' has entered the HE policy landscape

News story

Education Secretary calls for an end to low value degrees

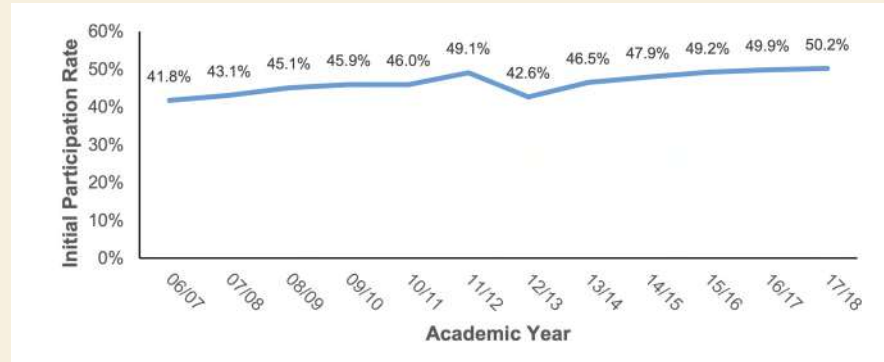
New analysis identifies courses where students aren't earning enough five years after graduating to repay student loans.

From: [Department for Education and The Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP](#)
Published 26 May 2019



Universities and higher education providers offering poor value degrees are letting down thousands of students and costing the taxpayer millions, the Education Secretary has warned today (26 May).

DIMINISHING CLASS RETURNS TO HIGHER EDUCATION



Parallel increase in university participation and decrease in the rate of expansion in professional and managerial level jobs.

Social class of origin is less likely to determine educational attainment level than in previous decades but the link between class of origin and class of destination remains intact.

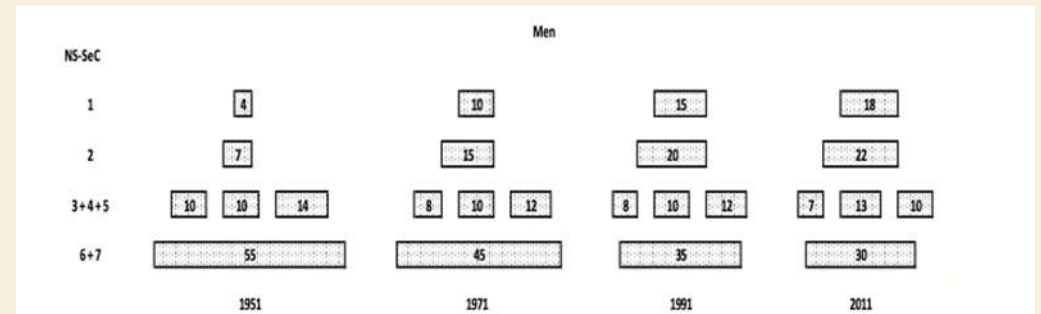


Figure 1. Class distribution (per cent) of economically active male population, 1951–2011. Source: Census and Labour Force Survey statistics; Routh (1981; 1987); Gallie (2000).

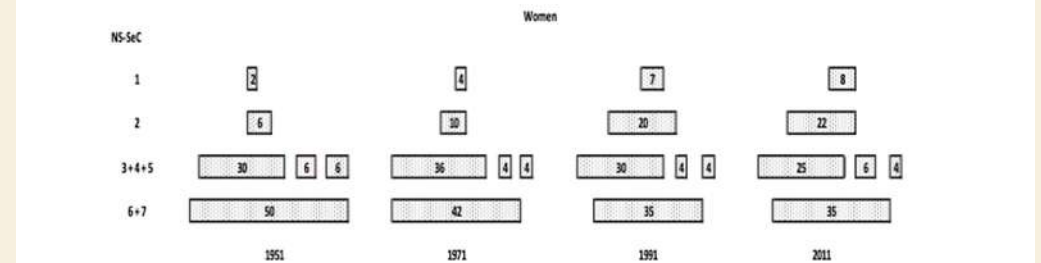


Figure 2. Class distribution (per cent) of economically active female population, 1951–2011. Source: Census and Labour Force Survey statistics; Routh (1981; 1987); Gallie (2000).

Goldthorpe (2016) shows that the link between origins and destination has largely remained the same over successive decades despite a weakening of the link between class of origin and educational attainment.

BROKEN LINKS

- Goldthorpe argues that ‘any equalisation in educational attainment that may have been obtained in relation to class origins is being offset by a decline in the “class returns” that education brings’ (p. 102).
- Social Mobility Commission (2018) analysis of the Labour Force Survey shows that 60 percent of people from a professional/managerial background are employed in professional/managerial jobs whereas only 34 percent of people from working-class backgrounds are employed in the professional/managerial occupational group.
- Higher education is not the social mobility panacea that popular discourse believes it to be.
- Despite an increased understanding amongst young people about the congested nature of the graduate labour market, they continue to invest in higher education.
- Unanswered questions about generational expectations of higher education and the perceived value of a degree (Gen Z see the struggles of millennial graduates)
- It’s more than employability #IDontDreamofLabor – the death of the dream job discourse?

CRUEL OPTIMISM AND BROKEN DREAMS

“Cruel optimism” names a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility. What is cruel about these attachments, and not merely inconvenient or tragic, is that the subjects who have *x* in their lives might not well endure the loss of their object or scene of desire, even though its presence threatens their well-being, because whatever the *content* of the attachment, the continuity of the form of it provides something of the continuity of the subject’s sense of what it means to keep on living and to look forward to being in the world (Berlant 2006, p.21).

- Higher education is at a precipice in the UK where instead of considering the conditions leading to the broken links between HE participation and graduate employment, between education and social mobility HE policy is focussed on decimating education and removing certain courses, universities and people from the system in order to make the metrics more appealing.
- There is a need to redirect the system towards equity so that the conditions of possibility are no longer compromised.