

# Social class still dictates graduate job trends

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Policies that offer sustained support are needed to ensure people from lower socio-economic groups can reap the benefits associated with a degree, researchers say. Adequate grants, mentoring on campus and tailored career advice are among the provisions that would help students make timely and smoother transitions into good graduate jobs. Making

research-intensive universities more accessible to disadvantaged students would also assist the process, according to the study by the University of Edinburgh and University College London. Previous research on graduate job inequalities analyzed outcomes at just one or two points following graduation, providing only snapshots of occupational destinations.

## Long-term perspective

This study examines the career trajectories of degree holders across their life and analyzes how these vary according to students' social origins.

Data was taken from the 1970 British Cohort Study—a multi-disciplinary survey monitoring the development of babies born in the UK during the week of 5–11 April 1970. The results show that graduates originally from lower social classes have more diverse and less stable career paths than the more structured routes of their advantaged counterparts. Graduates from less privileged backgrounds are less likely to enter top-level [jobs](#) in their 20s and more likely to enter, and remain, in lower social classes.

"Employment inequalities among graduates show that not only does the final destination matter, but also the timing and sequencing of different activities within the career paths," says Dr. Adriana Duta.

## Key factor

The relatively late age at which less advantaged students [graduate](#) is key to some of these patterns, researchers say, as older graduates are more likely to be employed in non-graduate jobs. This finding suggests that [young people](#) from disadvantaged backgrounds may have improved occupational outcomes if they go to university sooner rather than later.

The study found that career outcomes for better-off students were helped by the relatively high numbers—compared with disadvantaged students—who attended research-intensive universities.

Graduates from these universities are more likely to enter high professional and managerial jobs early on in their [career](#).

"There are clear social inequalities in labor market outcomes among graduates and this already uneven playing field is likely to get worse because of growing job uncertainty," says Dr. Bozena Wielgoszewska.

## Partial explanation

Educational factors—such as university attended, subjects studied and degree grade—only partly explain why disadvantaged students are more likely than their better-off peers to spend most of their working lives in non-graduate jobs. Researchers say further research is needed to uncover the other family-related factors behind this finding.

The study from the Understanding Inequalities project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, is published online in the journal *Advances of Life Course Research*.

A blog by Dr. Adriana Duta, Dr. Bozena Wielgoszewska and lead researcher Professor Cristina Iannelli, of the University of Edinburgh explores the issues further.

**More information:** Different degrees of career success:  
Understanding inequalities in graduates' employment pathways:  
[www.understanding-inequalities ... es-of-career-success](http://www.understanding-inequalities...es-of-career-success)

Provided by University of Edinburgh

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