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Moving on up?

Social mobility, class and higher education

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As shown in previous chapters, the notion of social mobility has been an important field of study within sociology. Key accounts (Glass [1954^{BIB-122}](#); Goldthorpe 1980; Marshall et al. [1988^{BIB-202}](#)) have demonstrated that mobility is possible in England and Wales, albeit limited by one's initial origin. Goldthorpe's work demonstrated considerable levels of upward mobility though this was largely due to major shifts in the occupational structure with the expansion of the professions and the state bureaucracy opening up new opportunities for suitably qualified people – largely men – from working-class backgrounds. However, Goldthorpe has subsequently argued that levels of relative, as opposed to absolute, mobility of this kind have remained 'fairly' stable: the chances of ending up in the professional and managerial 'service class' remain substantially higher for the children of service-class parents than for children of working-class parents (e.g. Goldthorpe and Mills [2004^{BIB-128}](#); Goldthorpe [2012^{BIB-127}](#)).

The distinction made between absolute and relative mobility is instructive, as it points to what I see as a fault-line in social mobility studies, the confusing of two different social phenomena into a single analytic frame. First, there is the organisation of society into differing occupational and socio-economic strata between which it is possible to move, and the patterns of movement between the strata: structural phenomena. Second, there is the movement of individuals around this structure: an individual phenomenon. Or put another way, as I shall argue in this piece, we do not distinguish clearly enough between two aspects of social mobility:

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1. *Mobility as a societal, structural process: the organisation of society such that people are enabled to move up and down among its changing hierarchies.*
 2. *Individual mobility: people actually achieving upward or downward movement within these hierarchies.*

In this chapter I am exploring the impact of this analytic ambiguity surrounding the concept, first by a brief discussion of the current political and educational discourses around social mobility, and then by looking at some stories of mobility and impediments to it drawn from a current research project gathering data on the career trajectories of a group of graduates.

The politics of social mobility

Over the last few decades, this notion of social mobility has become something of a political football with all existing political parties claiming to support it and highlighting its importance (Payne 2017^{BIB-237}). This has had a powerful impact upon the policy framework enveloping higher education ('HE'), as getting a degree has become seen as the chief mechanism for upward mobility for those from less advantaged backgrounds. Alan Milburn, nominated as 'mobility czar', has enshrined this principle in a series of well-publicised reports, arguing that social elites are using the current organisation of HE to reproduce themselves (e.g. SMCPC 2012^{BIB-283}; 2014^{BIB-284}; 2015^{BIB-285}). Attendance at Oxbridge and other high-status universities is seen as offering a passport into top jobs in politics, the judiciary, the BBC, the civil service, and the traditional professions. The proportion of students from working-class backgrounds attending these elite universities is low and thus it is much more difficult for them to reach the top echelons of UK society and economy. In response to such criticisms, successive governments have set widening participation ('WP') targets for every university, based on their current study body, with financial rewards for those achieving them. However, although all universities now have ambitious WP

programmes, little has changed in terms of patterns of admission. Graduates from Oxbridge and the research-oriented Russell Group universities dominate in all the top jobs mentioned above.

It may seem odd that even right-wing politicians display concern over lack of or even declining mobility (Goldthorpe 2012^{BIB-127}; Payne 2017^{BIB-237}). I argue this is because the second, that is, individual, concept of mobility is central to the idea of *meritocracy*, which itself serves as a powerful legitimating mechanism for neo-liberal capitalism. Massive inequalities of power, wealth and income are seen as merited if ‘opportunities’ are available to all on the basis of ‘talent’ and ‘hard work’. This set of ideas have then developed in the members of elite a sense of ‘entitlement’ to their privileged positions.

The desirability of mobility has thus become a political mantra, used by all parties to justify their own social policies; and the idea of university as an enabling mechanism for upward mobility has become central. But is this true – or just a truism (it is hard to ‘get on’ in modern economies without a degree)? This also raises questions of how we actually assess and recognise mobility in a world where classes are increasingly fragmented: what are its signifiers?

We can distinguish four approaches. The traditional approach of Glass and Goldthorpe hinged around an upward or downward movement between blue- and white-collar jobs. Occupation (and income) were the indicators. The currently popular Bourdieusian approach focuses more broadly on the acquisition of a range of capitals (culture, networks, income) enabling movement up from the dominated class. The political message promulgated by Milburn and others focuses more narrowly on obtaining jobs in the elite. Finally, I suggest an alternative version of social mobility, the upward movement of whole tiers of people currently disadvantaged: a class transformation of society in which people can obtain jobs

which satisfy them and provide a decent living income over their lifetime, by means of redistribution of wealth and income. In the empirical material that follows I touch on all these options.

The research study: Paired Peers Phase 2

Paired Peers, the project from which the following material has been drawn, is a qualitative longitudinal research study funded by the Leverhulme Trust, which seeks to demonstrate the impact of class background on student experience and outcomes. The broader aim is to explore the role of HE in enabling or impeding social mobility. The project has now been running for six years, in two phases. Phase 1, which started in autumn 2010, tracked an initial cohort of ninety students from Bristol's two contrasting universities, the University of the West of England ('UWE') and the University of Bristol ('UoB'). Phase 2 followed a targeted sixty of these students into the labour market after a year gap (during which students on four-year courses in engineering and finance completed their studies). We managed to interview fifty-six of the original cohort in the first year of Phase 2.

The two universities belong to two different educational 'mission groups' and present themselves very differently to the student market. UWE is a teaching-focused university, with a heterogeneous student body, including many BAME students. It takes pride in its local engagement and in the employability of its students. At the time of writing, its Vice-Chancellor is currently the Chair of the Million Plus group of universities. UoB is a traditional research-based 'elite' university, part of the Russell Group. Its students largely come from advantaged middle-class backgrounds, with a high proportion of privately educated entrants. Significantly UoB is based in Cotham and Clifton, affluent parts of the city close to the city centre, and many of its departments are housed in Victorian and Edwardian buildings, while UWE has a large modern campus with a student village on the city outskirts.

Students for the study were recruited at the start of their First Year from eleven disciplines (biology, drama, economics, engineering, English, geography, history, law, politics, psychology, and sociology). The design of the study matched students by class, discipline, and university. Thus we recruited two middle-class and two working-class students in each discipline from each university. Students were classified as broadly working class or broadly middle class and selected on the basis of a short demographic survey of all students in the selected disciplines, using UCAS WP indicators to identify their class.

The participants were interviewed twice-yearly in Phase 1 and are being interviewed four times over the three years of Phase 2. We are currently completing the ninth round of interviews. These semi-structured interviews have been supplemented by other forms of data collection; diaries, time sheets, mind maps, focus groups, photos. A detailed account of our methodological stratagems can be found in our recent text presenting the findings of Phase 1 (Bathmaker et al. 2016^{BIB-027}). This chapter draws on the narratives of the fifty-six graduate participants in Phase 2, to explore the economic, social, and cultural factors which hinder some working-class graduates in their attempts to attain upward mobility and which by contrast enable some middle-class graduates to grasp the most highly rewarded opportunities.

Graduates in the labour market

Two or three years after graduation, most of the graduates from both UWE and UoB are employed, mostly in what could loosely be labelled ‘graduate jobs’, although not always highly financially rewarded. This accords with Higher Education Statistics Agency (2016^{BIB-145}) Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education data which show high levels of employment among graduates. However, the pathways our participants are treading are highly variable and individualised. One obvious factor is the discipline studied: those in vocational areas such as engineering and law tend to be further on in their career ‘journeys’.

There is a marked degree of shifting and churn, especially among Arts graduates. A number of people have pursued masters or doctorates, these being chiefly but not only from middle-class backgrounds. There is a strong ‘London effect’: many have moved there to pursue the best opportunities, but high accommodation and living expenses costs ruled this out for many from working-class backgrounds. There is, as others have noted (Brown et al. 2011^{BIB-072}), a global element to the graduate market, and a small number have been employed overseas, while long-distance travelling figures strongly in the aspirations of many of our students.

Of course, churn and lack of clear direction have long been associated with young workers, and many writers have noticed the lengthening of transitions into final career destinations (e.g. Hollands 1990^{BIB-147}; Bradley and Van Hoof 2005^{BIB-071}; Furlong and Cartmel 2007^{BIB-114}; Bradley and Devadason 2008^{BIB-070}). However, what may be different is the increasing harshness and competitiveness of labour markets within societies managed on neo-liberal economic principles. Thus a further feature of the narratives of our graduate participants is an increasing sense of anxiety and depression, along with confusion about the choices they feel compelled to make.

The graduate game: winning hands and losing cards

At the end of Phase 1 we noted that it was too soon to say whether our working-class students had achieved upward mobility, as few of them had at that stage secured a job and some had not finished their degree courses. However, the evidence from that stage did suggest that students attending UoB, whatever their class, appeared to be further along the road into career achievement. They were more likely to have secured an initial job, be engaging in further study, and have a sense of direction. Working-class students, especially at UWE, were hampered in building up persuasive CVs by the necessity to take term-time jobs which

limited their ability to engage in extracurricular activities and volunteering. They also could not afford to take unpaid internships, and fewer of them had managed to get work placements or vacation schemes, even though UWE puts more emphasis on employability and was at the time more active in encouraging placements than UoB. We argued that they appeared less successful at mobilising the capitals and resources they needed to ‘play the game’ of graduate success (Bathmaker et al. 2013^{BIB-026}; 2016^{BIB-027}).

Three years on, similar processes seem to be still at play. Our graduates’ narratives indicate that certain factors are likely to constitute a winning hand in the graduate game. It certainly helps to have a ‘good degree’ (a First Class or Upper Second Class honours degree), but particularly if it was awarded by a Russell Group university. Our participants repeatedly mentioned the ‘Bristol cachet’ which led to them being preferred as candidates or even actively recruited over internet sites. For example, Harry, a politics student who had found it difficult to find a job he liked and was employed as a temporary rider for Deliveroo, believed his UoB degree had helped secure him a scholarship for a Masters degree at Aberystwyth University:

The academic contacts I’ve made there... you know my dissertation supervisor was quite a well-known name in the particular field and that was great, you know that was a real advantage. And I think having a First Class degree from Bristol University, rightly or wrongly, is seen as a really big achievement because partly just the Bristol University kind of name and the brand has been a big help. And I wonder if I would have got offered a scholarship if my degree was from not a Russell Group university. So yeah, and I know I worked hard and I know I got a good standard education so I am proud of it, but I also think that the name, the Bristol University brand, is an advantage in itself quite apart from anything that I have achieved.

Self-evidently it is easier to negotiate the labour market and make choices if you have taken a degree with vocational implications (for example, engineering or accountancy). But other

factors are at play which have little to do with academic qualifications. A crucial way to access a graduate job is through social capital: relatives or family contacts in top firms or with sectoral knowledge. In terms of where the graduate labour market is based it helps to have a family home in London or the Home Counties to ease the passage into accommodation. Families also assist economically, helping their children to take up postgraduate study, to survive in low-paid starter jobs or internships, or simply assisting with accommodation and living costs: the well-known ‘bank of mum and dad’. One or two of the graduates got started on their paths by being employed in family businesses.

On the other hand, there are certain losing cards which may cause graduates to struggle in their efforts to start a career. Getting a Lower Second or Third Class degree is a handicap to overcome, and degrees from post-92 universities such as UWE do not carry the same weight as the higher-status Bristols and Durhams. Having a degree in a more ‘creative’ discipline – such as English, drama, or history – does not exclude graduates from interesting possibilities, but they are frequently low-paid and insecure. Many students need to live at home for a spell before they can afford independent living, and this may be a handicap if the home is in a deprived region such as South Wales or the North-East. Working-class families are unlikely to have resources to pay for Masters courses or unpaid work experience in London; they lack contacts in top jobs. Without experience of professional work, such families cannot help with career advice or tips for successful applications.

While the disadvantages are thus stacked against graduates of working-class origin, we should stress that class is not the only determinant of labour market success. Personal determination and resilience are also involved, while mental or physical ill health can be a real handicap in a highly competitive environment. Moreover, ethnicity and gender play a role in determining success. At the end of Phase 1 we noted a drift to teaching among the

female students: this may be a sensible career choice, especially for those keen to embark on motherhood, but it often meant abandoning hopes for more glamorous career options. This trend has continued in Phase 2.

A tale of two law students: Zoe and Nathan

We can see these various forces at play in the stories of some of our graduates. A clear example of class disparity can be seen in the cases of two UoB Law graduates, whom we named Zoe and Nathan. Zoe is a working-class girl from South Wales. A strong character, with considerable academic aptitude, she appeared at the start of the project as extremely ambitious to escape her roots and make a success of her life. She saw a law degree at UoB as a passport to economic success, although she also toyed with the idea of an acting or media career, having done some film work as a teenager.

Zoe's parents were poor and though they helped as much as they could it was necessary for her to work as a waitress to carry her through her living expenses at university, where, curiously perhaps, she did not get involved in the university drama scene. Indeed she struggled as an undergraduate to fit in with the middle-class culture of UoB, describing herself as the only state-educated student on her floor in her hall of residence. She also struggled to motivate herself to the study of law and felt isolated from her course fellows, though she ended with a good Upper Second degree.

Zoe was well aware that the best training contracts and job possibilities for lawyers were in London, but she could not afford to live there. After a spell waitressing on a Greek island she returned to Wales to seek work. She secured a job as a paralegal for £14,500 per annum, which was the best she could find in a depressed South Walian economy. Disillusion set in:

There was just like no trajectory for any kind of progression, and I stopped learning and it was just a dead end, and I just knew that the longer I stayed there the harder it would be to leave and to find something else. It just got to the point where I thought I'm going to be stuck here in this horrible fake law firm with an incompetent manager – he was just horrible.

Zoe finally quit, looked for acting work and is currently contracted as a temporary project worker on a legal database which at least offers a respectable salary of £29,000. She works from home on a self-employed basis and enjoys the flexibility it offers. In sum, Zoe could not fully mobilise capitals, even her acquired educational capital, to escape low-paid or insecure work in a depressed region.

Zoe's narratives offered to our interviewers made frequent references to struggle and depression. This contrasts with the confident accounts given by fellow law student Nathan, whose parents were both GPs. From the very start of his degree he was working to maximise his capitals. As an undergraduate he played the game consummately, joining clubs, applying for placements, and ending with a First:

Research the opportunities available (which I did), and summer internships (which I did and got the job off the back of). Join societies and clubs and try and take up leadership positions in those clubs that are relevant to the potential career that you want.

Although Nathan took a law degree because of its high status, from the start he intended to find employment in the City. His strategies took him to a graduate scheme with a merchant bank, earning over £100,000 including his bonus. The job involved gruelling hours and limited his external life but he tolerated this for a while because of his longer-term goals:

My longer-term plan is to go on and start my own company and the original idea had been to do that this summer, but unfortunately the guy I live with that I want to start it with can't go right now, so I'm postponing. In the meantime I got a new job as a hedge fund/asset manager which will hopefully have shorter hours, better pay and also a promotion.

This new job paid much the same but under better conditions, so whether or not his entrepreneurial plans come to fruition, Nathan has sorted out a successful slot for himself:

I used to work somewhere between 80 and 100 hours a week, 6–7 days a week sometimes, and now I work probably half of that and I work Monday to Friday, I never look at my phone on weekends, I don't look at my phone in the evenings, you're not expected to. So in terms of pay it's broadly the same but in terms of money per hour and lifestyle it's completely different, way better.

The same as my parents: cultural immobility?

Does the experience of university open up the prospect of cultural mobility as well as occupational success: does the student experience include cultural acquisitions which can be used to gain access to elite positions, as highlighted in a Bourdieusian approach to class? A recent interview with author Ian McEwan highlighted how this can work. He described his family of origin as working class (his father was in the army and his brother became a bricklayer) and 'unlettered' so that when he took a degree at Sussex University, he pursued cultural opportunities:

My adolescence was all about the things the friends I then got to know at university couldn't bear. Their mum played the harpsichord or their dad was a well-known philosopher. I was running towards these harpsichords. They for me were the light. There are some advantages in not having a book-filled classical music filled home... my rebellion was to go to all these new places where no one in my family had ever trod.

(Ian McEwan interviewed by Decca Aitkenhead for *The Guardian*, 27 August 2016)

McEwan's experience of upward cultural mobility, perhaps typical of working-class undergraduates in the post-war decades, does not seem to be replicated among our participants. Many implied that their cultural practices were very similar to those of their parents. Jade, for example, whose father was a lorry driver and mother held office jobs, told us she did not read newspapers and her main leisure activities were watching TV soaps,

listening to Heart or Kiss popular radio stations, and watching ‘girly films’. She is closely attached to her mother and sees her regularly. Similarly, Sophie, whose father is a storekeeper and mother a ticket clerk told us she and her mother like to go together to musical shows in London:

I like Heart radio... I like just happy songs. I’m not really a music person... At lunch times at work I go on the internet, so the *Daily Mail* for like the funny stories and BBC news and stuff like that at lunch. I like magic kind of books, like Harry Potter and stuff that’s not real.

Tellingly, she stated that her parents and she and her partner live similar lifestyles: ‘they’re doing the same kind of thing as what we do, just come home, cook tea and watch TV and then go to bed’.

By contrast, three middle-class graduates from UWE were drawn to things they themselves described as ‘arty’ or ‘highbrow’. Christopher, whose mother was a university lecturer, told us he read the *Guardian* or *Independent*, listened to Radio 4, and preferred crime series or history on TV. Nicolas, both of whose parents were education professionals, was explicit that his tastes were ‘very similar to his parents’, such as reading the *Guardian* and listening to Radio 4:

Arty rock. Portishead, Radiohead... the National, things like Bob Dylan, Neil Young. Like highbrow rock. Ry Cooder. I kind of read things which are known as like literature style books, I guess books which are meant to be classics. I try and work my way through my big list... I read a Nigerian novel earlier this year called *Things Fall Apart* which was really good. And I’m reading *Crime and Punishment* now... I watched *The Wire* recently... *True Detectives* series 1 was really good, and then some comedy programmes like *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. So I guess kind of like highbrow things, I don’t like watching trashy TV because it is really, really boring.

Like Nicolas, Dylan, whose father came from the business world, was compiling a list of books and stated that he only wanted to read and watch things that ‘have value’. He was

beginning to listen to classical music, like his mother, to ‘help him chill’. There was a sense among these three young men that their developing cultural tastes were a kind of continuation of the ‘cultural enrichment practices’ typical of middle-class parenting (Lareau 2003^{BIB-174}; Devine 2004^{BIB-097}), whereas the two young women from working-class backgrounds, whose choices were incidentally very clearly gendered, saw cultural consumption in terms of pleasure and relaxation, rather than self-improvement.

Fitting in or sticking out

We suggest that there may be subtle ways in which these diverse cultural choices feed into the graduates’ workplace experiences, in terms of fitting in with the work group and getting noticed by those who hold promotion in gift. Many of our middle-class participants used social capital to find internships and placements which in turn led to jobs (see Bathmaker et al. 2016^{BIB-027}, for full details). Once in an organisation, fitting in with the culture may be important in determining how you get on. Again we can draw on the contrasting experience of Nathan and Zoe to illustrate this.

Nathan, confident and ambitious, described how he became known as a ‘good guy’ in his sector:

The job market for people with two to three years of banking experience is ridiculously hot, you know I would typically get maybe an email or two in a week for potential jobs... It’s not a very big industry, there may be a couple of hundred people who do the kind of thing that we do in London, and so once you have a little bit of a reputation or some people have worked with you on a couple of deals, they start thinking ‘oh this guy might be alright, he’s a good guy, and he’s also good at his job’, so you start to get invites from head hunters, generic ones and also ones that people have referred you for.

In contrast, Zoe described how she felt ill at ease in the legal world.

The vast majority of people I've met in Law are smarmy bastards to be quite honest with you, very up themselves. I'm way... I'm like the sort of working class... it's not a problem for me, not a barrier I don't think but even so I still do find it really exclusionary. Even though it might not be obvious and they might not treat me differently or even care or think it, I just find there's this strata of people who want to be solicitors are a bunch of knobs.

For example, she described how difficult she found it to deal with her first experience of an Assessment Centre, lacking the kind of knowledge it is useful to display in this context:

I looked like a tool, I looked so thick. There was a group exercise... well I was just silent and just like 'ooh, everybody's so intelligent', or they're not so intelligent but they come across as so sort of like composed and eloquent and they really know their stuff, and I'm like 'why haven't you got a life?' Like they're all going 'oh this is the TTIP treaty' and I'm like 'why do you care'? And I think that's what separates me, I don't care about the treaty, do you know what I mean, or its implications for all the big player law firms, because I've got a life and interests.

Indicatively, careers staff at UoB told us of the switch in recruitment practices from interviewing based around *competencies* (which may be gained from degree work and other qualifications) to '*strengths*', in which personality and experiences are the 'extras' which put a candidate to the fore. They suggested that such a switch might put working-class people at a disadvantage where they might lack the diversity of experiences and activities acquired by middle-class students. We would agree.

Moving up against the odds: the story of Harvey

However, despite the handicaps faced by working-class students, which may be seen as increasing because of the highly competitive nature of recruitment practices, some still achieve upward mobility in occupational terms. One such was Harvey, who studied economics at UoB. His mother, a lone parent, worked for the police. Harvey was a highly ambitious young man, with an entrepreneurial streak. For example, he had worked as a

market trader in his home town, selling ‘knocked off Ugg boots’, and as an undergraduate he ran a business selling wine brought over from France to students. He told us bluntly that he found economics boring, but had chosen a degree which would bring him a high income.

Although Harvey was initially by his own admission not as clued up as his middle-class peers, he was quickly learning to play the game. He hung out with rich kids, and discovered how to apply for jobs successfully. Academically bright and with remarkable social confidence, he ended up with a well-paid City job as a broker in an investment bank. However, like Nathan, he got tired of the pace required of entrants to the City and fixed a move to a finance company in Australia. He started his time in Australia with a holiday and during it decided to resign from his new job and spend time as an apprentice in the wine business:

I was having a bit too much fun on the holiday, and then we went to some really nice wineries in Queensland and I basically sort of fell in love with this winery place... so I just decided to ditch it altogether and I've been contracted as a winemaker for the last 3 months.

Harvey told us that he believed his track record and contacts would allow him to resume his City career if he wanted. For the time being, he was happy working for less money but enjoying a pleasurable life in the sunshine. There are interesting parallels here with Nathan, and it may be that both will end as successful entrepreneurs. But a difference is that Nathan is more prepared to defer gratification (for example, he is currently single) as he pursues his life plan whereas Harvey may not be able to overcome a cultural inclination to excitement and partying in the future choices he makes.

Conclusions

The example of Ian McEwan was used earlier in this piece because it was very typical of the experience of intellectually able working-class young people in the 1950s and 1960s. Early university expansion, the loss of lives in the war, and the changing nature of the occupational

structure during these decades opened up slots in middle-class employment which people from working-class backgrounds were recruited to fill, especially young men. This period was marked by a good degree of *structural* mobility.

Narratives of our students suggest that *individual upward mobility* is still possible for working-class students, such as Harvey, especially if they chose a degree or a postgraduate course which open access to professional work, from law to school-teaching. However, journalist Ian Jack, another beneficiary of the post-war middle-class expansion, suggests that what he calls ‘the escalator’ may be broken (Jack 2016^{BIB-158}). It is possible he is right. Our research suggests that the changing rules of the game continue to favour middle-class students. The capitals they inherit and acquire bolster them against *individual downward mobility*. Thus we have argued that currently higher education acts both to promote individual social mobility (for many individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds) *and* to maintain the current status quo (with the odds of middle-class graduates obtaining elite jobs being much greater: Bathmaker et al. 2016^{BIB-027}). Therefore, we argue that *structural social mobility* is stalling (see also Chapter 1). If real equality of opportunity is to be achieved, major social changes will be needed: fairer recruitment practices, outlawing of unpaid internships, more funding for postgraduate training, and control over the housing market. Without these changes, the upper-middle control of elite occupations is set to continue.

This is not to decry the positive impact of HE, even for those who struggle to achieve occupational success. As Zoe told us:

I think I had an overwhelming positive experience regardless, like building as a person, you know. Intellectually I’ve developed a lot. I’m a lot more analytical and I understand the world better.

The university experience brings maturity, increased confidence, and a broader and enhanced understanding of the world (Bathmaker et al. 2016^{BIB-027}, chapter 8). Economically, it means

less likelihood of unemployment, more resources to bring to the labour market than those without qualifications, and a continued graduate premium over a lifetime's earnings (although there has been recent speculation that this may start to wane with oversupply of graduates: Scott 2016^{BIB-273}).

But such findings highlight the limits of the neo-liberal meritocratic discourse of social mobility. Put simply, we cannot all be in the top 1 per cent and some people are needed to fill more basic social roles (for example, in cleaning, waste disposal, catering, retail, and assembly work) which cannot be performed by machines. It follows that the third alternative and socialist version of mobility, the upward hike of the lower tiers of society, may be the only way to obtain the greater levels of social equality that even David Cameron and Theresa May claim to support. That means concentrating on income equalisation rather than occupational mobility. A number of our participants work in low-paid jobs which they enjoy and value, but which cannot bring them the income stability they need: jobs in drama, the arts, and the voluntary sector, for example. If such jobs were decently rewarded, the graduates would be happy to stay in them. In the words of an American president of an organisation which sponsors business start-ups:

It is impossible to truly have equality of opportunity without some version of guaranteed income.

(Sam Altman, President of Y Combinator, quoted in *The Guardian*, 14 April 2016)

Our research confirms that sentiment. If we do not address the problem of low wages many young graduates will consider themselves losers in the social mobility stakes.