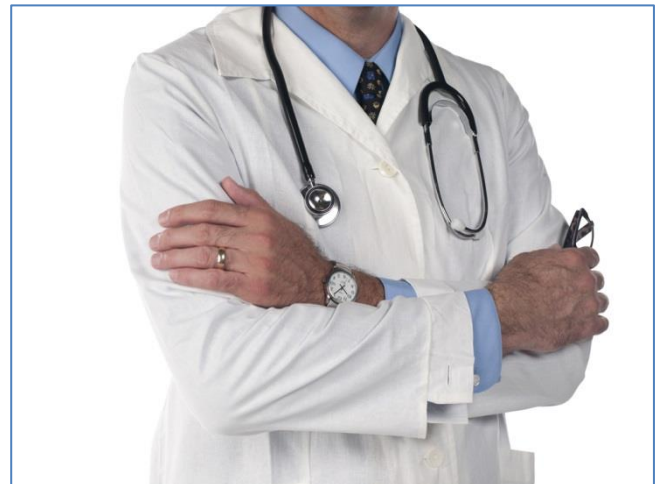


Research Briefing N° 89

Who gets the top jobs?

Our research focuses on the extent to which family background is related to being employed in a top job – comparing those with similar levels of educational achievement – for a recent cohort of graduates.

Key words: social mobility; socio-economic status; top jobs

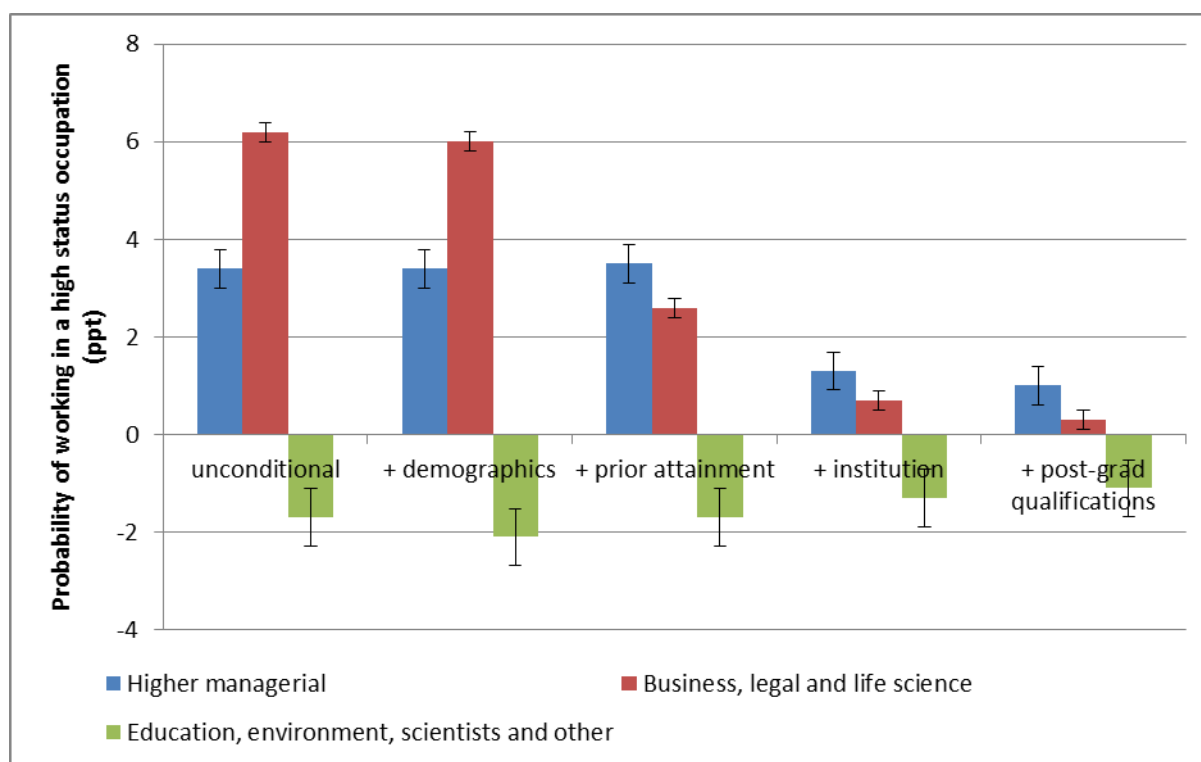


Key findings

Findings are of interest to policy makers and the general public.

- Privately educated graduates are a third more likely to enter into high status occupations than state educated graduates from similarly affluent families and neighbourhoods.
- A modest part of this difference is driven by educational attainment (A-levels and degree subject and classification) while a larger part of the story is what university the graduates attend.
- A privately educated graduate is still 8% more likely to enter into a top job than a state school graduate from a similar family and neighbourhood, with the same educational qualifications, who went to the same university.
- This effect varies across different types of top occupations (see Figure 1).
- Privately educated graduates are much more likely to work in higher managerial jobs and business, legal and life-science professions than state school graduates.
- For those entering into higher managerial occupations, this is not related to their educational attainment, although where they went to university does account for a large part of the story.
- For those entering into business, legal and life science professions, most of this relationship can be accounted for by the attainment of the graduates at school and university and the institution that they attended, although there remains a statistically significant private school advantage after accounting for these factors.
- Similar graduates working in the other top professions (headteachers, scientists, engineers) were more likely to be state school educated.

Figure 1: Relationship between private school attendance and working in a high status occupation



What we did

We used a large-scale data resource to analyse how access to elite occupations vary by family background for a recent sample of graduates in Britain who left university in 2006/07. Entrance into these top occupations after university is associated with higher earnings later in life and greater longer term income stability. In addition, graduates who are entering into these jobs now will hold the greatest influence and power in years to come. We used advanced statistical methods to compare the chances of working in a top job for a private and state school educated graduate with similar attainment in education and similar backgrounds that went to the same university. This work was partly funded by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission and an earlier version formed part of the 2013 'State of the Nation' report by the Commission.

How we did it

We used data from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) longitudinal surveys carried out by the UK Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) to analyse the association between family background and access to high status occupations. Information is available on the family background of around 25,000 graduates, including their parents' social class, the average participation in higher education in their neighbourhood and whether they were state or privately educated in secondary school. We can also see the occupation of the graduate three and a half years after graduation. We define high status

occupations as a top NS-SEC (National Statistics Socio-economic Classification)¹ occupation and also consider differences in occupations within the top NS-SEC, grouping together higher managerial jobs (NS-SEC 1.1), those entering into business, legal or life-science professions and those working in other professions including scientists, educational occupations and built environment jobs (architecture, surveyors).

Further information

Recent working paper version:

[Macmillan, L. Tyler, C. & Vignoles, A \(2013\). Who gets the Top Jobs? The role of family background and networks in recent graduates' access to high status professions. DoQSS Working Paper No 13-15, Institute of Education \(pdf 0.8mb\)](#)

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¹ The NS-SEC was developed from the Goldthorpe Class Schema, measuring employment relations and conditions of occupations. See <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/classifications/current-standard-classifications/soc2010/soc2010-volume-3-ns-sec--rebased-on-soc2010--user-manual/index.html>