Higher Education and Social Mobility in Scotland

Cristina Iannelli
Outline

• What do we know about social mobility?
• The role of HE in social mobility
• Differentiation in HE: inclusion or diversion?
• School subjects, HE and occupational destinations
• Social inequalities in labour market outcomes
• Education policy and social mobility
What do we know about social mobility?

- One measure of (in)equality is a society’s level of social mobility

- Evidence from international research shows:
  - In absolute terms: In many countries there has been a lot of mobility mostly due to changes in the labour market structure and Scotland is not an exception.
  - In relative terms: some societies are more equal than others and a few countries have experienced an increase in social fluidity (e.g. France and the Netherlands). In the last fifty years in Scotland social fluidity has remained constant.
The role of HE in social mobility

• In many countries, including Scotland, education mediates part but not all origin-destination (OD) association

• In some countries (e.g. USA, France and Scotland) the OD association has been found weaker at higher levels of education

• Can continuing to expand the HE system lead to higher social mobility?
The role of HE in social mobility

• Two reasons for doubting the efficacy of HE expansion:
  – Differentiation within the HE system may perpetuate class differences in education and the labour market outcomes
  – The labour market does not operate only on meritocratic basis and the signalling power of degree qualifications may tend to reduce with the expansion
Expansion and Stratification in Higher Education

• What does expansion imply for inequality?
  – Inclusion: more opportunities for persons from disadvantaged backgrounds
  – Or diversion: elite positions are preserved for people from more advantaged social classes
Findings for Scotland

• Expansion has favoured the disadvantaged
• However, most of the expansion favouring the disadvantaged has occurred in the lower status institutions
• Inequalities across the extremes of the socioeconomic distribution are staggering
## HE expansion and differentiation in Scotland
(Iannelli, Gamoran and Paterson, 2011a)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent SES/Year</th>
<th>Ancient</th>
<th>Old</th>
<th>Poly/New</th>
<th>FE</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prof &amp; hi ed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987/89/91</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999/01</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermed &amp; mid ed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987/89/91</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>86.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>77.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999/01</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>72.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working &amp; low ed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987/89/91</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>95.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999/01</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>79.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Scottish School Leavers Surveys
HE expansion and differentiation in Scotland (Iannelli, Paterson and Gamoran, 2011b)

• The choice of field of study is less stratified by social class
• Persons of lower social origins enter fields with greater labour market returns (occupational status and earnings) in lower-status institutional sectors
• Persons of lower social origins are less likely to enter more academically selective fields of study
School subjects, HE and occupational destinations

• Selectivity in HE entry depends not only on prior educational achievement but also subject choice at secondary level

• Subject choices are crucial for gaining access to prestigious universities and for entering professional jobs
School subjects, HE and occupational destinations (Iannelli, 2013)

Indirect effect

Social class of origin and parental education

School type attended and curriculum studied

Social class of destination

Direct effect
School subjects, HE and occupational destinations (Iannelli, 2013)

Percentages of direct and indirect effects of social class of origin and parental education on the chances of entering professional and managerial occupations (Class I-II)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social class of origin (ref. Class VI-VII)</th>
<th>Via school type</th>
<th>Via school curriculum</th>
<th>Via school type and curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class I-II</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct effect</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect effect</td>
<td>8*</td>
<td>23*</td>
<td>25*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parental education
(ref. left at 15 or younger)

| Left at 18 or later                      |                 |                        |                               |
| Direct effect                            | 84              | 71                     | 67                            |
| Indirect effect                          | 16*             | 29*                    | 33*                           |

Source: 1958 National Child Development Study
Social inequalities in labour market outcomes

• The effect of social class origin on individuals’ labour market outcomes is still strong and only partly mediated by education

• Even though to a lesser extent than for low educated people, social origin also matters for HE graduates
Parental education and graduates’ chances of acquiring a professional occupation (Iannelli and Klein, 2013)

Source: REFLEX 2005 (UK data); all models control for gender, ethnic origin and age; M1= gross effect of parental education; M2= model 1 + attainment prior to higher education; M3= model 2 + field of study; M4 = model 3 + final grade and postgraduate enrolment.
Education policy and social mobility

• Education policies have contributed relatively little to reducing social inequalities
• Education policy, on its own, cannot eradicate social inequalities, wider social reforms are needed
• After the referendum, is the Scottish Government going to have the power and the willingness to engage in wider social reforms leading to an equalisation of life conditions?
References


• Iannelli, C., Paterson, L. and Gamoran, A. (2011b) ‘Effectively maintained inequality through field of study differentiation: The case of Scottish Higher Education’, Social Stratification Research Seminar: Modelling Patterns of Social Stratification, University of Stirling
