

Heike Behle, Charikleia Tzanakou

Warwick Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick, UK

Who are the mobile graduates? Similarities and differences between Intra-European mobile graduates and those remaining in the UK after graduation. (0137)

Programme number: J9

Research Domain: Student Experience

Abstract

The UK has often been discussed as destination country for many highly skilled migrants. Some recent reports, however, have placed the migration of British educated people on the agenda. In this context, this paper analyses the social composition of inner-European mobile graduates in the context of the current recession and recent political developments (Bologna-Process, European Higher Education Area). Using data from a longitudinal study of students and graduates and its qualitative SHRE-funded follow-up study, the paper compares the social composition and current activity of mobile graduates to other European countries with those remaining in the UK. Three groups of mobile graduates are separated: UK graduates, European returners, and other mobile graduates. Personal and higher education-related variables together with the current type of employment were significant for the distinction between mobile graduates and those remaining in the UK after their degree. Even though it is an important component of the Bologna Process, some respondents experienced barriers in the recognition of their UK degrees.

Outline

Introduction

The mobility of graduates within Europe is an aim of the Bologna Process, and its realisation is one of the drivers of the newly founded European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and recent reports confirm increasing mobility amongst the highly skilled (see for example Murray et al. 2012). For many students and graduates, mobility is one way to increase their employability (Behle and Atfield 2013) and thus add value to their previous education (Findlay et al. 2006).

The current mobility of graduates to other European countries comprises three substantially different groups. It can be expected that migrants' differences in knowledge with regards to the country of destination has an impact on their activities and chances. These different types of graduate migration are:

- UK migrants with the right to live and work in all EU countries; holding English language skills which are easily understood in many other countries;
- Returning graduates to their home country (i.e. either the country they lived in when applying to UK HEI in 2006 or their country of birth). Presumably, these graduates have the right to live and work in their home country; hold sufficient language skills and knowledge of the labour market or study conditions; and

- Other mobile graduates, i.e. non UK citizens who moved to a different country other than their home country.

This paper aims to shed light on the current mobility of UK educated graduates and focusses on the following research questions:

- What are the similarities and differences between European mobile graduates and those remaining in the UK after graduation?
- What are the similarities and differences within the group of European mobile graduates, especially between UK migrants, returners and other mobile graduates?
- What are the barriers graduates experienced with regards to the transferability of their degrees?

Data Base

The data analysed were drawn from a national longitudinal survey of UK undergraduate students (Futuretrack2006¹) and the qualitative SRHE follow-up study. The Futuretrack2006 project was an online longitudinal survey in which all 2005-6 UCAS applicants for full-time study, including those from the EU and overseas, were invited to take part. Respondents were surveyed all through their higher education and year after graduation. Migration from the UK to a different European country accounts for 7 per cent of all Futuretrack respondents whilst 6 per cent of all graduates have moved to non-European countries. The SRHE qualitative follow-up study took place in May – June 2013. Twelve interviews were realised with 'UK migrants', 'returners', and 'other migrants'. European mobile graduates were interviewed with regards to the role their mobility experience plays for their current activity (further study or employment); barriers they experienced and their future plans.

Empirical results

Similarities and differences between European mobile graduates and those remaining in the UK

In order to shed light on the group of European mobile graduates, a hierarchical logistic regression model was estimated in which the impact of personal, HE-related variables together with variables describing the current situation have been taken into account.

Results refer to

- *Personal characteristics*: Graduates from the youngest and the oldest age group were less likely to have migrated. Compared with female graduates, male graduates were more likely to have migrated once HE-related and activity related variables were controlled for. There was a clear connection between the socio-economic background (based on parental occupations) and migration as those from a higher socio-economic background were more likely to have migrated compared to those from intermediate occupations.

1 More information about the Futuretrack project can be found here <http://go.warwick.ac.uk/glmf/futuretrack>, Purcell *et al.*, (2009b) and Purcell *et al.*, (2013).

- *HE-related impacts:* There was a clear significant impact on the type of HEI as those from highest and high access HEIs and those from general and specific HEIs were more likely to have migrated (compared to those from medium and lower HEIs). The impact of the subjects was consistent over all the models. Interestingly, the class of degree did not show any significant of impact. The class of degree was not significant in the distinction between mobile graduates and those remaining in the UK.
- *Activity related variables:* Compared to those involved in further study, unemployed graduates or those working in non-graduate jobs were significantly less likely to have migrated to a different European country.

Differences and similarities within the group of European mobile graduates

Differences and similarities within European mobile graduates by type ('UK mobile graduate', 'returner', or 'other mobile graduate') were analysed using descriptive methods.

There were no significant age differences in between the diverse groups of migrants; however, differences in the gender composition were apparent. UK migrants were predominantly female (52 per cent) whilst other migrants were predominately male. Returners and other mobile graduates were more likely to come from higher social classes compared with mobile UK citizens.

Differences existed in terms of the subjects studied within the three groups of migrants. Interestingly, the highest proportion of UK migrant graduates had studied interdisciplinary subjects, many of whom hold a language element; Creative Arts and Design or languages. The subjects of 'returners' and 'other migrants' reflect popular choices of international students (Purcell et al. 2009, p.134): The most subjects most frequently studied by 'returners' were interdisciplinary subjects; Business and Administration studies and Social Studies whilst other mobile graduates were most likely to have graduated in interdisciplinary subjects and Business and Administration Studies.

The main countries of destination over all mobile graduates were Germany (15 per cent), followed by France (9 per cent), Sweden (8 per cent), Spain (7 per cent) and the Republic of Ireland (7 per cent). If returning European graduates were excluded, the majority of mobile graduates went to Germany (16 per cent), France (12 per cent) and Spain (11 per cent), followed by the Netherlands (8 per cent) and Switzerland (7 per cent).

The two main activities mobile graduates were engaged in were work (employed and self-employed) with 52 per cent and studying with 32 per cent. The remainders were unemployed (12 per cent) or involved in other activities (including gap years, travelling, unpaid work).

Barriers

The reforms of the Bologna-process were aimed to facilitate movement within the countries of the EHEA. One of the aims of the qualitative follow-up study was to find out whether they had experienced any barriers in the recognition of their UK degrees and their skills gained at a UK HEI. In fact, most of our interviewed graduates did not experience any barriers to mobility. However, some did experience barriers which lead to significant obstacles in their career progression:

One of our interviewees experienced disadvantages in their national labour markets in terms of their UK degree was perceived as failing to accomplish a degree in the national French HE system. Her

mobility as a student from her France to the UK was interpreted as the 'easy way out'. Employers interpreted her mobility as a failure to find entrance to the better regarded French HEIs.

Some of our interviewees reported of problems both from local employers and HEIs to understand the level of skills provided by a UK degree, as this quote from a German returner shows: "... and this was the time, when Germany had just introduced the BA/Masters system. The companies there did not know what the Bachelor's degree is, so I had problems, as the companies said: We don't really know what she actually did in her studies, and in a foreign language as well, so.. we'd rather pick someone who did a degree at a local university. So I thought I'd do a Masters' degree at my local university, and the combination of my UK BA degree and the Masters' degree from the local university should be fine. And then, after I had applied, I got a letter from the local university. The letter stated that the UK university I studied at was not sufficient enough to allow me to study at a higher level at a German university."

A similar case was reported by a Greek returner. After having completed the BA and MA at a UK HEI, she returned to her home country where she learned that she would be regarded as a BA as Greek Bachelor's degrees lasted four years.

Other barriers experienced were with regard to translation of degree documents.

Conclusion

The increasing number of mobile graduates from the UK in recent years which include both UK and non UK citizens indicate that mobility to a different European country is seen as one option open to all kinds of leavers of higher education. Findings are in accordance to previous research in which mobility within Europe is reflected as an experience for the highly skilled who enhance their education through adding mobility value. The barriers some EMGs have experienced, however, do have to be taken seriously and politically addressed in order to facilitate mobility within the European Higher Education Area.

Mobility for many graduates is a continuous process rather than a one-way ticket (Murphy-Lejeune 2002; Recchi and Favell 2009; Ackers and Gill 2008). Mobility of graduates might thus indicate an increase of European values and as one step towards greater acceptance of the chances a joined European labour market has to offer to highly skilled people in the UK.

References:

- Ackers, L. and Gill, B. (2008) Moving People and Knowledge. Scientific Mobility in an Enlarging European Union. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Behle, H. and G. Atfield (2013). Employability, Key Skills and graduate attributes The Global Student Experience: An International and Comparative Analysis. C. Kandiko and M. Weyers. Oxon and New York, Routledge Press: 78-97
- Findlay, A., et al. (2006). "Ever Reluctant Europeans: The Changing Geographies of UK Students Studying and Working Abroad." *European Urban and Regional Studies* 13(4): 291-318.
- Murphy-Lejeune, E. (2002) Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe. *The New Strangers*. Routledge, [Social Science](#) -
- Murray R., Harding D., Angus T., Gillespie R. and H. Arora (2012) Emigration from the UK. Research Report 68 <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/immigration-asylum-research/horr68/horr68-report?view=Binary>

- Purcell K., Elias P., Atfield G., Behle H. et al.(2013) 'Futuretrack Stage 4: transitions into employment, further study and other outcomes',
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/futuretrack/findings/stage_4_report_final_06_03_2013.pdf
- Recchi, E. and A. Favell, Eds. (2009). Pioneers of European Integration. Citizenship and Mobility in the EU. Cheltenham, UK, Northampton, MA, USA, Edward Elgar.