The role of education and skills in driving social mobility

Claire Crawford
Social mobility and the role of education

- Social mobility: link between SES of parents and children
- Role of education as a transmission mechanism:
  - Children’s educational attainment is strongly related to parents’ SES
  - There are large wage returns to educational attainment
- Focus on the first today:
  - Evidence on the link between educational attainment and family background in the UK, including over time and relative to other nations
  - What drives these relationships? What types of policies are likely to be effective at reducing SES gaps in educational attainment?
Summary

• Strong relationship between children’s educational attainment and family background in England
  – Differences emerge early and widen as children get older
  – Stronger than elsewhere and strengthening over time (until recently)

• There has been some success at encouraging children from lower SES backgrounds to reach “expected” levels of achievement
  – But children from higher SES backgrounds continue to improve too, highlighting difficulty of targeting relative measure of social mobility

• Large SES gaps persist in HE participation
  – But mainly driven by differences in attainment at 16 and 18, so earlier intervention is key to widening participation
  – Most ethnic minority groups are more likely to go to HE than White British students, although less likely to attend high status institutions

• Some thoughts on which policies are most likely to improve education/skills amongst those from the lowest SES backgrounds
Differences emerge early and widen over time

Socio-economic gaps in cognitive test scores

Stronger relationship between SES and educational attainment in England than elsewhere

Some evidence that this relationship has strengthened over time . . .

### Degree acquisition by age 23 by parental income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Bottom 20%</th>
<th>Middle 60%</th>
<th>Top 20%</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCDS 1982</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14ppts</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCS 1993</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>30ppts</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>37ppts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHPS 1999</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>37ppts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

at least until recently: gap in terms of % getting 5 A*-C grades in GCSEs and equivalents has fallen.

% pupils getting 5 A*-C grades in GCSEs and equivalents

2010-2011 figures based on SFR 03/2012: GCSE and Equivalent Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England.
2004-2005 figures based on authors’ calculations using Key Stage 4 and PLASC data.
But not when focusing on GCSEs including English and Maths: equivalents are key.

% pupils getting 5 A*-C grades including English and Maths

2010-2011 figures based on SFR 03/2012: GCSE and Equivalent Attainment by Pupil Characterisitcs in England.
2004-2005 figures based on authors’ calculations using Key Stage 4 and PLASC data.
Sizeable SES gaps in HE participation remain, including by type of HE institution attended

% students going to university at age 18/19

Source: authors’ calculations based on linked schools and universities administrative data for the cohorts first eligible to start university in 2004-05 and 2005-06 (who sat their GCSEs in 2001-02 and 2002-03)
But these differences are almost entirely explained by differences in prior attainment.

% students going to university at age 18/19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points Range</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Highest SES quintile</th>
<th>Lowest SES quintile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No A-level points</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-180 points (up to DDD)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>181-300 points (DDD-BBB)</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>301+ points (BBB or above)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What about amongst groups of concern? (Poor White men, Black men and Pakistani & Bangladeshi women)

- Ethnic differences in cognitive skills are evident early (Dearden & Sibieta, 2010) but narrow throughout secondary school (Wilson, Burgess & Briggs, 2006)
- Most ethnic minority groups outperform whites in terms of HE participation . . .
What about amongst groups of concern? (Poor White men, Black men and Pakistani & Bangladeshi women)

• But things are not so rosy in terms of HE participation at high status institutions (though most of the difference can be explained by differences in prior attainment)

HE participation at high status institutions by gender and ethnicity

Source: authors’ calculations based on linked schools and universities administrative data for the cohorts first eligible to start university in 2004-05 and 2005-06 (who sat their GCSEs in 2001-02 and 2002-03)
What drives the relationship between family background and educational attainment?

• Decompose the gaps in attainment between rich and poor pupils
• Factors will explain a large proportion of the gap if they:
  – Are highly correlated with socio-economic status
  – Have a large effect on attainment conditional on other characteristics
• Goodman & Gregg (2010) and accompanying studies find that these factors seem to play an important role in perpetuating SES gaps:
  – Early home learning environment
  – Expectations/aspirations for education
  – Locus of control (belief that own actions make a difference)
  – Behaviour
  – Material factors (e.g. access to internet/computer)
• Suggests potentially important role for policy assuming that these relationships are causal and that these factors are malleable
A note of caution: HE expectations amongst young people are high across the board.

Which types of policies are most likely to improve attainment/skills amongst the poorest?

- Early interventions have the potential to be more productive than later interventions
  - Strongest evidence is for high intensity interventions, e.g. Family-Nurse Partnership; mixed evidence on lower intensity interventions
  - But cannot just intervene once and then sit back; early interventions are most productive if followed up: consistency matters

- Basic skills (literacy/numeracy) are highly valued in the UK labour market, suggesting a shortage of such skills
  - Very difficult to improve in adulthood
  - Good evidence on (cost) effective literacy strategies, e.g.
    - The Literacy Hour: structured teaching methods affecting all children
    - Every Child a Reader: intensive 1:1 intervention for very lowest achievers
  - Improve outcomes in short run but uncertain how long benefits last
Which types of policies are most likely to improve attainment/skills amongst the poorest?

• Teachers matter:
  – Recruiting and retaining high quality teachers, and helping them to pass on their skills to other teachers is vital
  – But identifying who will become “good” teachers is difficult; degree class and experience are not good proxies; more evidence needed
  – Also important to remember that schools are only part of the story; parents/families have at least as great an influence on attainment

• Students need to be supported to make the right decisions
  – Choice of GCSE and A-level subjects and what to do at 16

• Later interventions may be better targeted non-cognitive skills (e.g. leadership and time management) than cognitive skills
  – Though evidence remains weak; more is needed

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