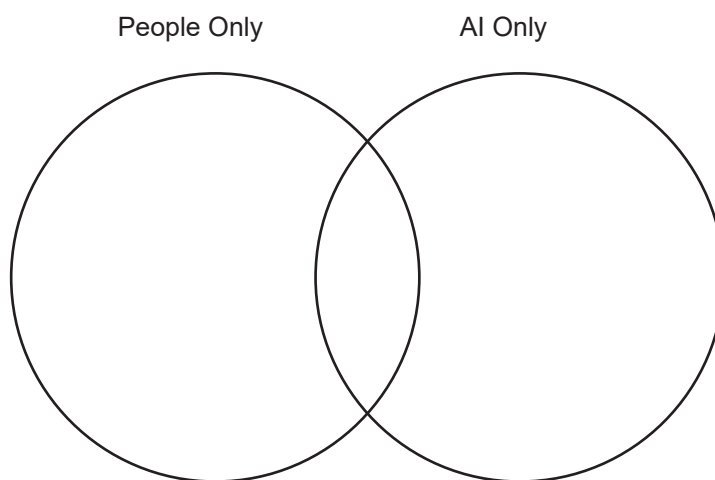


We told young people that degrees were their ticket to a better life. It's become a great betrayal

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

- a. Today, Artificial Intelligence (AI) can do many different jobs. Think about the jobs in your community. Which can be done only by people? Which can be done by people or by AI? Can any jobs be done by AI only?



2 Key words

- a. Choose the correct word or expression to match each definition. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

1. a curved piece of wood or plastic that comes back to you when you throw it

- a. circuitous b. rungs c. boomerang

2. a place where birds go to sleep or rest

- a. golden ticket b. roost c. long haul

3. to look carefully at something to find something specific within it

- a. sift b. fire off c. swamped

4. to bring about strong feelings, emotions or ideas

- a. arms race b. kindle c. green

5. an amount that's very large and difficult to manage, flood-like

- a. deluge b. glut c. winnow down

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Level 3: Advanced

6. to write and send something quickly
 - a. boomerang
 - b. roost
 - c. fire off
7. when a person receives way too much of something at the same time
 - a. sift
 - b. swamped
 - c. circuitous
8. something that offers a very valuable opportunity or privilege
 - a. golden ticket
 - b. rungs
 - c. kindle
9. something that takes a lot of effort over a very long period of time
 - a. winnow down
 - b. fire off
 - c. long haul
10. a supply of something that is much larger than what's needed or wanted
 - a. glut
 - b. sift
 - c. boomerang
11. to reduce the number of things in a group by choosing only the best ones
 - a. kindle
 - b. winnow down
 - c. deluge
12. a hostile, intensive competition between two or more people or groups
 - a. swamped
 - b. golden ticket
 - c. arms race
13. the state of being inexperienced, untrained or new to something
 - a. green
 - b. roost
 - c. glut
14. the steps of a ladder, or the positions at different levels of an organisation
 - a. arms race
 - b. long haul
 - c. rungs
15. something that is indirect, roundabout or not straight-forward
 - a. deluge
 - b. circuitous
 - c. green

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Level 3: Advanced

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. Remember to change the verb endings if necessary.

1. I _____ through a huge pile of papers to find the article I was looking for.
2. Nadine was angry after the meeting – she _____ several email complaints to her boss.
3. Professors are always _____ at the end of the term – they have to mark exams.
4. Tae thought a degree from a British university was his _____ to a successful career.
5. The interviewers _____ the list of job candidates to their top three choices.

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Level 3: Advanced

With the labour market declining and AI a threat to entry-level jobs, graduates have been sold a lie. It's no wonder they're angry.

Gaby Hinsliff

13 May, 2025

- 1 It's boomerang season again. Or to put it another way, the time of year when adult children you imagined might be flying the nest come home instead to roost, a ritual that seems to happen earlier every year.
- 2 So many institutions are dumping end-of-year written exams in favour of dissertations or online assessments (cheaper to run, apparently) that third years have started cutting their losses and their food bills by heading home not long after Easter. In a worrying number of cases, they're leaving with no job to go to.
- 3 Young people in line for good degrees from good Russell Group universities, who have for years obediently jumped through every hoop provided, are working in bars, going travelling, or despondently applying to companies that they know use AI not only to sift their CVs, but sometimes to conduct first interviews. Imagine sitting alone in front of a webcam, trying to land your first proper job and being evaluated by a bot with whom you can't even shake hands, let alone kindle memories of how hard it was getting a foot in the door when they were young. Rejection is tough enough when it comes with an encouraging letter about how you were just pipped to the post, never mind being found wanting by an algorithm.
- 4 A 2024 survey recorded a ratio of 140 applications for every graduate job. Part of the reason for that deluge of applicants is perhaps because kids who suspect their forms won't be read by humans anyway are using ChatGPT to fill in and fire them off en masse, to the point where AI is in effect talking to AI. That's not making recruitment more efficient but the opposite, leaving employers swamped with poorly targeted CVs and jobseekers unsurprisingly resentful. And the hunger games may well be tougher this year, with the labour market slowing down amid national insurance rises and trade war-fuelled uncertainty.
- 5 Returning to my old Cambridge college recently, a place where you'd imagine students would feel they've won the golden ticket, I was struck by the number who still didn't know what they would be doing when they graduated and by the sense that they had resigned themselves to a very long haul.
- 6 It's the betrayal that hurts. We drilled it into them that if they worked hard at school and made it into university then the world could be their oyster, but our stagnant economy just hasn't generated enough graduate-level jobs to match – especially outside London, where we have simultaneously managed to ensure most of them can't actually afford to live. That translates into a glut of applicants, winnowed down to manageable levels by employers continually raising the bar: even a degree is no longer enough for the most coveted graduate schemes, with a master's fast becoming the new expectation. But since universities can charge whatever fees they want for postgrad studies – more than 83,000 pounds for an MBA at Oxford's swanky Saïd Business School, to take one extreme example – this risks making certain professions ever more the preserve of the wealthy, pricing everyone else's children out of an educational arms race.
- 7 And all the time, AI is stealthily creeping up on the entry-level jobs they're chasing. The tasks companies tend to give to young, green trainees – the routine grunt work they can't easily mess up, which can be swiftly checked by someone more senior – are most vulnerable to automation precisely because they're routine. Baby lawyers learn the ropes by drawing up endless contracts, but AI can do that in seconds. It's probably capable of many things young journalists start out by doing too, like turning a simple press release into a story (or more depressingly, scraping clickbait content off rival websites). But if companies automate away the bottom rung of the ladder, how do you reach the next rung up?
- 8 If it's any comfort to their anxious parents, most of this year's boomerang kids will find their feet eventually. They might take longer to get where they want, and via more circuitous routes than in the past, but the current economic uncertainty can't last forever, and the jobs they're qualified to do – if they can only get a foot in the door – still carry a lifetime premium. The ones to worry about are the kids who can't, or won't, go back home while they wait for something to turn up.

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Level 3: Advanced

- 9 We can't keep doing this to young people and then be surprised when they're angry. If we keep whipping them through the education system on the promise their efforts will be rewarded, and then fail to deliver, sooner or later, the consequences will boomerang back on us.

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Level 3: Advanced

3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What does boomerang season mean in the context of this article?
2. Name two reasons students are leaving their university campuses earlier than usual.
3. Name two ways companies use AI to evaluate applicants.
4. What does the expression *AI is in effect talking to AI* mean in the context of this article?
5. Why do you think the author compares the labour market to the hunger games?
6. Why do you think the author assumed the students at Cambridge would feel like they'd won a golden ticket?
7. How do postgraduate fees affect students' opportunities to apply for competitive jobs?
8. Name two examples of AI impacting young workers in skilled jobs.
9. How does AI impact young workers' ability to move up the 'rungs' of the corporate ladder?
10. Does the author think the situation will get better in the future? Why or why not?

4 Key language

a. Find the idiomatic expressions below in the article. Read the expressions in the context of the article. Then match the idioms to the meanings.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. fly the nest | a. to gain the special knowledge and skills for a specific task |
| 2. jump through every hoop | b. to make the standards for qualification much higher |
| 3. get a foot in the door | c. to become familiar and confident in a new situation |
| 4. pipped to the post | d. to have the opportunity to start a new job or join an organisation |
| 5. the world is your oyster | e. to leave your parents' home to live and work independently |
| 6. raise the bar | f. you have the potential to do anything or go anywhere in life |
| 7. learn the ropes | g. to be narrowly defeated at the end of a competition |
| 8. find (their) feet | h. to do several difficult or complex tasks to achieve something |

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Level 3: Advanced

b. Choose four idioms from the previous activity. Make your own sentences.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

1. What the advantages and disadvantages of returning home after university?
2. How do you feel about applying for jobs? Is it stressful, exciting or both?
3. Would you want AI or a bot to read your CV or interview you? Why or why not?
4. Do you think it was easier or more difficult for your parents and grandparents to find jobs compared to today? Why?

6 In your own words

a. Research online to find out which jobs are most likely to be replaced by AI or bots in the near future. Write a pros and cons essay to analyse how AI and bots impact society. Consider the following points:

- Which types of jobs are most at risk? Why?
- How will AI and bots affect people who are already working in these jobs?
- How will AI and bots affect students who are studying for these jobs?
- In what other ways will society be impacted if AI and bots take over jobs?

b. Share your essay with your classmates. Were your ideas the same or different?