The Guardian

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

Level 1: Elementary

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1 Warmer

a. Look at the list of jobs below. Write P (people), A (artificial intelligence) or B (Both).

cashier _____   hair stylist _____

doctor _____   dentist _____

teacher _____   artist _____

restaurant server _____   construction worker _____

delivery person _____   dog walker _____

journalist _____   chef _____

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. benefits   b. consequences   c. boomerang

2. a long essay on one topic, usually part of a university degree

   a. dissertation   b. employers   c. benefits

3. a piece of work someone does at school or in a job

   a. betrayal   b. task   c. accessible

4. questions to find out people's opinions, beliefs or behaviours

   a. survey   b. boomerang   c. dissertation

5. people or organisations that give jobs to other people

   a. consequences   b. betrayal   c. employers

6. something that's a good match to a person's skills or interests

   a. boomerang   b. good fit   c. employers

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7. an act that breaks a promise and makes someone feel hurt or lose trust

    a. task   b. survey   c. betrayal

8. something that is easy for everyone to reach or achieve

    a. dissertation   b. accessible   c. task

9. good or helpful effects, including money or opportunities

    a. benefits   b. boomerang   c. good fit

10. the results of an action or decision, usually something bad or negative

    a. survey   b. accessible   c. consequences

b. **Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity.**

1. Elsa wrote a(n) _____ about a history when she was at university.

2. The café did a(n) _____ about people's favourite types of coffee.

3. My best friend shared all my secrets. It was a terrible _____.

4. The park is _____ to all children in our neighbourhood. It's a great place!

5. There are _____ to studying in another country, like learning a new language.

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Gaby Hinsliff

13 May, 2025

1   It's boomerang season again. It's the time of year when adult children leave university and come home to their parents. It happens earlier every year.

2   Many universities are replacing exams with dissertations or online tasks. Third-year students are going home earlier. In many cases, they're leaving with no job.

3   Young people with good university degrees are working in bars, or they're travelling. Some apply to companies that use AI to read their CVs and do interviews. Imagine sitting alone in front of a webcam. You're trying to get your first real job, and you're meeting with a bot. You can't even shake hands with a real person.

4   A 2024 survey showed 140 applications for every job. One reason is that kids think humans will not see their applications. They use ChatGPT to write and send applications. This means that AI is talking to AI. That's bad for companies, too. Employers receive a very large number of CVs that aren't a good fit for the job.

5   I returned to my old Cambridge college recently. I expected all students to feel confident about their futures. I was surprised that many students still didn't know what they were going to do when they graduate. Many think it will take a very long time to find a job.

6   The betrayal hurts students. We tell students that if they work hard and go to university, then they will have many opportunities. There aren't enough jobs, especially in places outside of London. And London is a very expensive place to live. There's a lot of competition, so a degree is not enough. Now a master's is necessary. Universities can charge any price for postgrad studies – more than 83,000 pounds for an MBA at Oxford's Saïd Business School. This means some jobs are only accessible to very rich people.

7   AI affects entry-level jobs, too. Companies usually give simple tasks to young people. Now, AI can do these tasks. In the past, young lawyers learned by writing long contracts. Now AI can do that in seconds. If companies use AI for these tasks, how can people get good jobs?

8   Most of this year's boomerang kids will find a job in the future. They might take longer, but the economy will get better. Graduate jobs still offer long-term benefits.

9   We can't keep doing this to young people and then be surprised when they're angry. Sooner or later, the consequences will boomerang back on us.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Decide if the statements are True or False.

1. 'Boomerang season' is when students leave home to go to university.   **True / False**

2. Most young people in the UK find a great job after university.   **True / False**

3. Some companies use AI to read CVs and do interviews.   **True / False**

4. A survey showed that there are 40 applications for every job.   **True / False**

5. 'AI is talking to AI' means both applicants and employers use AI.   **True / False**

6. Most Cambridge students think they will find a job very quickly.   **True / False**

7. There are lots of jobs available in London – and it's cheap to live there.   **True / False**

8. Some postgraduate jobs are only accessible to very rich people.   **True / False**

9. AI can do simple job tasks, like writing contracts for lawyers.   **True / False**

10. Things will probably get better for UK job applicants in the future.   **True / False**

4 Key language

a. Read the article again. Complete the sentences with the present continuous verbs.

1. Many universities _____ exams with dissertations or online tasks.

2. Third year students _____ home earlier.

3. Young people with good university degrees _____ in bars, or they _____.

4. You _____ to get your first real job, and you _____ with a bot.

5. AI _____ to AI.

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b. **What else do you know about jobs or universities? Write three sentences in the present continuous.**

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

5 Discussion

a. **Discuss these questions.**

1. What are the good and bad things about returning home after university?

2. How do you feel about applying for jobs? Is it stressful, exciting or both?

6 In your own words

a. **Choose a country. Research online to find out about job opportunities for young people in that country. Make a poster to show your findings. Answer these questions:**

• What are the most popular subjects for students at university?

• How many people graduate from university in the country?

• What types of jobs are most popular with young people?

• What percentage of young people are unemployed in the country?

• Will opportunities get better or worse in future?

b. **Share your poster with your classmates. Did you learn anything interesting about a different country?**