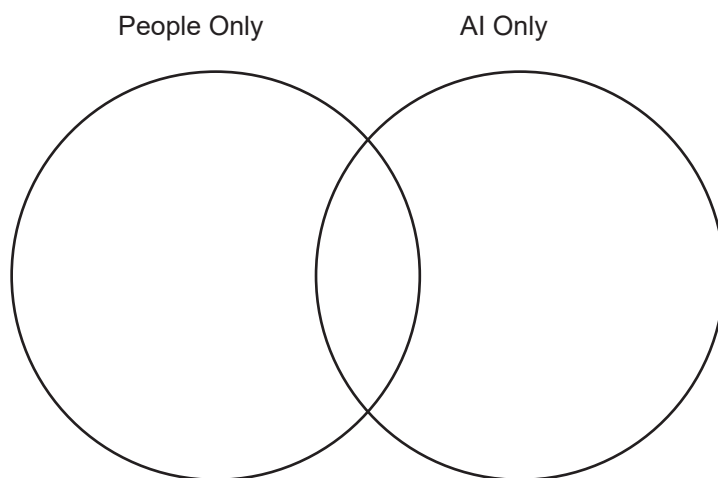


We told young people that degrees were their ticket to a better life. It's become a great betrayal

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

- a. Today, Artificial Intelligence (AI) can do many different jobs. Think about the jobs in your community. Which can be done by people only? 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. applicants b. consequences c. boomerang

2. a place where birds go to sleep or rest

- a. targeted b. roost c. golden ticket

3. a formal process for testing skills or knowledge

- a. assessment b. accessible c. trainees

4. to judge the value or quality of a person or thing

- a. betrayal b. evaluate c. boomerang

5. the process of finding the right people to work for a company

- a. roost b. assessment c. recruitment

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Level 2: Intermediate

6. something that is directed at a particular group, organisation or activity

- a. targeted b. applicants c. evaluate

7. something that offers a very valuable opportunity or privilege

- a. golden ticket b. trainees c. consequences

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

- a. recruitment b. roost c. betrayal

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

- a. boomerang b. accessible c. targeted

10. people who are learning or practicing important skills for a job

- a. trainees b. golden ticket c. accessible

11. people who officially apply to a job, a training programme or a university

- a. assessment b. betrayal c. applicants

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

- a. recruitment b. consequences c. roost

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

1. The students did an English language _____ before their first day of classes.
2. My mum works in Human Resources at a bank. She's in charge of _____.
3. Tae thought a degree from a British university was his _____ to a great career.
4. My best friend shared all my secrets with her family. It was a terrible _____.
5. The university has _____ from many different countries around the world.

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Level 2: Intermediate

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. It's the time of year when the adult children you imagined might be flying the nest come home instead to roost, a ritual that seems to happen earlier every year.
- 2 Many institutions are replacing end-of-year written exams with dissertations or online assessments, so third-year students are going home earlier. In many cases, they're leaving with no job to go to.
- 3 Young people with good degrees from Russell Group universities are working in bars, going travelling, or applying to companies that they know use AI not only to read their CVs, but sometimes to conduct first interviews. Imagine sitting alone in front of a webcam, trying to get your first real job and being evaluated by a bot. You can't shake hands or share memories about how difficult it is to get a foot in the door.
- 4 A 2024 survey found 140 applications for every graduate job. Part of the reason there are so many applications is that kids think their forms won't be read by humans. They use ChatGPT to fill in and send lots of applications, to the point where AI is in effect talking to AI. That's not making recruitment more efficient, but the opposite. Now, employers receive a very large number of poorly targeted CVs.
- 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 surprised by the number of students who still didn't know what they would be doing when they graduated. Many thought it would take a very long time to find a job.
- 6 It's the betrayal that hurts. We told students that if they worked hard at school and made it into university, then they would have many opportunities. Our economy just hasn't generated enough graduate-level jobs. This is especially true outside London, which is difficult because most graduates can't afford to live in London. There's a lot of competition, so a degree is no longer enough for the most popular jobs. Now, a master's is 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 Saïd Business School. This can make certain professions only accessible to the wealthy, removing opportunities for everyone else's children.

- 7 And all the time, AI is playing a larger role in entry-level jobs. The tasks companies tend to give to young trainees – simple work they can't easily mess up – are most likely to be replaced by automation. Young lawyers learn the ropes by writing long contracts, but AI can do that in seconds. AI can do many things young journalists do too, like turning a simple press release into a story. But if companies use AI for low-level tasks, how can job applicants make progress?
- 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, but the current economic uncertainty can't last forever. The jobs they're qualified to do – if they can get the opportunity – still offer long-term benefits. 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.
- 9 We can't keep doing this to young people and then be surprised when they're angry. We put them in the education system and promise their efforts will be rewarded. Then we fail to meet that promise. Sooner or later, the consequences will boomerang back on us.

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First published in *The Guardian*, 13/05/2025

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What does *boomerang season* mean?
2. Why are students 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?
5. Why do you think the author assumed the students at Cambridge would feel like they'd won a golden ticket?
6. How do postgraduate fees affect students' opportunities to apply for competitive jobs?
7. Name two examples of AI impacting young workers in skilled jobs.
8. Does the author think the situation will get better in the future? Why or why not?

4 Key language

a. Find the idioms below in the article. Read the expressions in context in 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. get a foot in the door | b. to become familiar and confident in a new situation |
| 3. learn the ropes | c. to have the opportunity to start a new job or join an organisation |
| 4. find (their) feet | d. to leave your parents' home to live and work independently |

b. Choose the correct idiom to complete the sentences.

1. I had to **learn the ropes** / **get a foot in the door** very quickly when I started working at the café.
2. After years of living alone in New York City, Nora was finally able to **fly the nest** / **find her feet**.

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3. In some cultures, young people don't **learn the ropes** / **fly the nest** until they get married.
4. Antonio's uncle was the CEO, so he helped him **get his foot in the door** / **find his feet** at the company.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

1. What are 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?

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. Make a pros and cons poster 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 poster with your classmates. Were your ideas the same or different?