

CGHE Annual Conference
24-25 May 2022: Session details



What skills do employers associate with degree qualifications?

25 May 2022, 1.50-2.50pm (UK)

Chair: Maia Chankseliani

Speaker: Golo Henseke

The reconfiguration of education-occupation linkages in the wake of the mass expansion of higher education and its potential impact on skills requirements and graduate pay has received scant attention in the research literature.

Using a kaleidoscope of data, including worker-reported job tasks and pay information as well as skills requirements from a large number of job ads, this presentation seeks to provide new evidence on the importance of job upskilling for the rising degree requirements and graduate pay.

Between 1997 and 2017, the proportion of jobs requiring degree-level qualifications almost doubled in the British labour market. While some scholars argue that the increasing demand for university degrees represents job upskilling, others suggest that degree requirements ratchet up through signalling or credentialism without economic or technological justification.

We find that changes in job tasks can fully explain the rise in degree requirements until 2006. However, from 2006 to 2017, the expansion of jobs requiring degree-level qualifications became decoupled from the task content of jobs, with adverse consequences for graduates' pay.

We complement the analysis of worker reports with an assessment of employer reported skills requirements through a study of job adverts.

Golo Henseke is a Research Associate on CGHE Project 4, 'Graduate labour market and equity'.