**Paper 3.**

**Abstract:**

Young people in England today spend more time in education and gain higher qualifications than their parents. Twice as many continue in upper secondary education and training and fifty percent more gain degrees than did so the 1980s. Whilst for several decades, from the 1960s to the late 1980s, the UK lagged far behind most OECD states in educational participation after lower secondary school (Green, 1990; IMS, 1984), over the past generation the gap has closed substantially. However, the gains in educational opportunities for young people are to some extent illusory. Improvements in the skills we can measure, like literacy and numeracy, have not kept pace with increasing qualifications rates, and inequalities in skills have reduced much less than those in qualifications, if at all. This suggests that much of rise in qualifications is indeed a question of credential inflation and yields few benefits to young people today in terms of future life prospects. This paper uses data from interviews with young people, as well as trend data on skills and labour market outcomes, to examine how the opportunities of today’s youth compare with those of their parents’ generation.